

3-5 November
St. Louis Union Station Hotel
St. Louis, Missouri

REA Annual Meeting 2017 Proceedings learning in encounter

**Crossroads
Connections
Collaborations**

<http://religiouseducation.net/rea2017>

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





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Learning in Encounter: Crossroads, Connections, Collaborations



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Abstract - The 52 Project

This paper presents a visual art journal made as part of a year long program at a local museum. The goals of the program were to gather together a group of creative people in order to find inspiration and motivation from one another during the self-directed journaling project. It also sought to move participants deeper into all that art and culture have to offer through their journaling and encounters with each other. A primary locus of encounter was a closed group Facebook page that acted as a digital gathering place where hospitality and reverent listening took place. Hospitality and reverent listening acted as catalysts for growth in this environment. This paper argues that the participants entered into the program as strangers, sharing only a limited, common language of art and familiarity with the creative process. From that place, participants were able to come together, learn about each other and form relationships through their encounters on a closed group Facebook page and at monthly art workshop meetings. Equally important, however, will be the issue of attentive or reverent listening. The hospitable actions of the program participants will be explored in depth for what they have to say about encounters and hospitality. Furthermore, the author will examine the closed group Facebook page as a substitute for “fellowship at the table,” which is usually part of the action of hospitality. The author will also use Genesis 18, Abraham’s encounter with the three strangers/angels at Mamre as a means of exploring the issue of hospitality. Literary resources will include authors who have addressed recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition and the movement of hospitality in spirituality. It will also include work done by a renown artist who considers the need for all to care for culture and souls if we are to thrive. This artist/author’s framework of culture care will be used to examine the work and relationships of the program participants. Culture care starts with safe space for truth telling, as well as moving them towards beauty, wholeness and healing. In the process, people are encouraged to move deeper into creating contexts for deeper conversations. As he puts it, our time, this time is like a genesis moment for people to build bridges to each other in order to remind us that we are neighbors first and Christ calls for us to love our neighbor.

The 52 Project

This paper presents an art journal made as part of a year long program at the Riverside Art Museum in California called the 52 Project. The 52 Project program was about getting a group of creative people together to find inspiration and motivation from one another while working on a 52-week, self-directed art journaling project. The goals were to help develop the habit of capturing ideas and being more artful on a regular basis. In doing so, the participants would be encouraged to move deeper into all that art and culture have to offer - making members look, think and feel. It was about “beauty, wholeness and healing.”¹ 54 people participated in the

program, which began in February 2017, ending in January 2018. Participants were free to choose any medium they wanted for journaling - printmaking, painting, drawing, collage, poetry, photography, etc. The program also offered monthly workshops where people could learn new art forms and listen to artist talks.² A second, crucial component to the Project was a closed group Facebook page where members could post pictures of their work, make observations, comment on each others' work, ask questions and engage in conversations. The Director of Museum Education administered the page, in effect "hosting" it. Participants were not required to post on the Facebook page, but most members did. The third component of the 52 Project program that motivated the members to participate was a juried exhibit at the end of the year, to be held in the Museum.³ Applying to participate in the juried art exhibit was not required. However, in July, approximately half the participants came to the exhibit orientation meeting.

The author's art journal is under discussion in this paper, along with the closed group Facebook page. My art journalling and visual interpretations were done in an 1890 large format Bible.⁴ I purchased it on eBay.⁵ My plan was to select approximately 30 Bible passages and visually interpret them on the actual pages of the Bible, using various media. I used pencil, pen & ink, collage techniques, origami, mixed media, gold ink and colored pencil. I did the visuals on one page and on the facing page, wrote about the passage and my artistic process. I posted each visual on the Project 52 Facebook page with a brief explanation of the selected passage. I also wrote and posted about my process. Additionally, I posted questions about issues the passage raised. Sometimes, I posted comments and questions during my journaling process, without visuals. I made sure to respond to other's posts about their work and process. One of my primary goals was to be a faithful presence on the Facebook page environment. I also intended to practice hospitality and attentive or reverent listening in my encounters with the members of the 52 Project group. Hospitality was a theme I dealt with both on a macro and micro level. By that I mean I believe the closed group Facebook page demonstrated hospitality in practices and my journal dealt with hospitality through several of the passages I selected to visually interpret.

In the past, the crucial components of hospitality were generally understood to be a "welcoming of strangers into a home and offering them food, shelter and protection."⁶ In ancient societies, especially the ancient near East, hospitality was foundational for all morality. For ancient Israelites, there was a responsibility to care for vulnerable strangers and this responsibility was linked to what it meant to be the people of God. Through the time of Christ and up to the Middle Ages, the practice of hospitality was understood to "encompass physical, social and spiritual dimensions of human existence and relationships."⁷ With the coming of the Reformation and changes in the church and society, hospitality became institutionalized to the point that it no longer was a vibrant practice of the church. Over the subsequent centuries, hospitality became a large, independent institution that stood on its own with its own culture, rules and specialists. It became an industry that provided a service.⁸ For many, hospitality grew to mean having people over for a meal. It lacked the bite of need for shelter and protection, thus losing even the need for attentive listening. But, there has been a movement in recent decades to recover the practice of hospitality within the church, remembering it is key to the meaning of the gospel.⁹ Henri Nouwen, in Reaching Out, believed that the second movement of a spiritual life was the

movement from hostility to hospitality, where “our changing relationship to ourself can be brought to fruition in an ever- changing relationship to our fellow human beings.”¹⁰ We need to understand that hospitality welcomes strangers into a place that has meaning and value to us, whether it is our home, church, community, nation or other institutions. This welcome “involves attentive listening and mutual sharing of lives and life stories.”¹¹

Reverent listening is a form of attentive listening. Like attentive listening, it is a special way of reflecting back what someone has expressed so that the speaker knows they are being heard and understood. But it also entails paying regard and conveying awe to the speaker. We “need to be open, empty and prepared for the holy act of reverent listening.”¹² Listening is one of the first rules of hospitality. Nouwen points out that listening with attention and care in an open and caring space can change people.¹³ Listening embodies hospitality.¹⁴ When a hospitable space is created and reverence exists, shared ideas make it possible for human potential to be realized in the encounter. Growth is stymied when there is little concern about the relational dimension of hospitality. Nouwen states that creating an open and hospitable space must include room for the guest to feel free to express themselves.¹⁵ I believe that hospitality and reverent listening worked together in the closed group Facebook page to create a space for meaningful encounters to take place through art. I also believe that by looking at the 52 Project Facebook page, religious educators can see how artists deal with difference, questions of spirituality and faith, as well as belief in their encounters with each other through the practices of hospitality and reverent listening. “I identify with the longing [to make art] for sure.... The beauty I feel I can see, but I want to make it visible to those who cannot see itshowing that God is the author of our creativity and gives us the ability to showcase His creativity to those partially blind to the wonder of His work and world.” (Responses April 15). “I make art because I can’t not make art.” and “Me too. It’s become an addiction.” and “Yes! It’s like that sense of wanting to share what I see with others that I see which is part of what drives me to make art.”¹⁶

We must be willing to empty ourselves to be able to hear and listen.¹⁷ In her article on “Process Drama: A Medium for Creating a Hospitable Space for Learning Through Reverent Listening,” Kim Anthony observes that “dialoguing and listening are the keys to enacting reverence.”¹⁸ She goes on to point out that as co-creators, we are dependent on each other for meaning making.¹⁹ It is important to remember that meaning making is a process, as well. And, it is a life long activity that people go through, which involves tension between how people are connected and how they are independent.²⁰ Our sense of belonging and not belonging is crucial to our sense of community, practice of hospitality and reverent listening.

Hospitality almost always includes table fellowship. Beginning with the story of Abraham entertaining the three angels at Mamre and continuing through the New Testament on to current times, despite the changes in the institution of hospitality, table fellowship is nearly constant as a component. For my purposes here, however, table fellowship is replaced by gathering in the closed group Facebook page. I suggest that the relational dimension of table fellowship in hospitality is met by the 52 Project participants repeatedly coming together on the Facebook page, which is always there, day or night. It is open and available for them to go to and post their

images, comments or questions. It is there for them just to look at and review, a constantly available gathering place.²¹ The physicality of table fellowship and shelter has its equivalent in the digital space of the 52 Project Facebook page. First, there is the familiarity of Facebook as a digital space and format. Then, to the participants, there is an ever growing familiarity of the 52 Project's Facebook page with its images of the participant's artwork and their conversations. It is similar to an open studio event where an artist's work can be viewed; work that is finished or in progress. It fosters hospitality and creativity through encounter.²² Creative people come together in social acts of collaboration.²³ This fits with Nouwen's notion of hospitality as creating an open and welcoming space "where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become fellow human beings."²⁴

The image I created in my Bible journal for Genesis 18 - Abraham entertaining the three angels at Mamre - focused on encounter through hospitality and reverent listening. One of the ways I tried to depict Abraham's hospitality was by having the symbol of the table on the page.²⁵ The table was at the center of the three angel figures. As an origami form, it opened up to reveal an expanding table with the Scripture passage and designs written on the inside. It used the origami accordion book fold pattern with multiple units, a relatively simple pattern to fold, but one that worked well for the concept I wanted to express - an ever enlarging table.²⁶ Then I drew patterns on it and wrote the Scripture passages on it having to do with hospitality. The angel figures were done according to two different origami patterns. Two represented angels of the Lord and one represented the Lord. Abraham and Sarah were created according to a pattern for Japanese bookmark dolls, called *shiori ningyo*. I did the background in black pen & ink, as well as gold ink pen. The background pattern drawn was my original design. I wanted to include the traditional element of the table, yet make it suggestive of leading the viewer into a deeper space.

I chose the Japanese art forms in part because I wanted something three dimensional for this visual. Three dimensionality gave a strong sense of the images coming off the page toward the viewer, yet pulling them in. But, I also wanted to convey the notion of hospitality through Japanese culture by using origami and *shiori ningyo*. Hospitality in Japanese is *omotenashi*. It is a layered concept where a welcoming spirit is blended with understanding and respect. The concept is all encompassing. Practicing *omotenashi* means the host pays close attention to detail and anticipation of the needs of the guest. It is a one on one relationship, distinct to each person. Strikingly, gratitude from the host is a crucial part of *omotenashi*.²⁷ It certainly recalls the biblical virtue of hospitality that was complex and a necessary part of ancient society. I wanted to convey that complexity by using the Japanese art forms and the background I drew, as well as the overall composition.

I posted about this image several times, since it took me some time to make it. In effect, I was giving progress updates to the 52 Project participants. When I finished the visual, I posted about using origami and explained about *omotenashi* and *shiori ningyo* and why I used those art forms. I also explained that I thought we artists had our own traditions of hospitality, which mirror various religious tradition's practices. I suggested that artists are naturally generous because generosity enlivens our overall practices.²⁸ In Culture Care, Fujimura argues that artists have a

deep capacity to develop and share generously, as well as being empathetic, as they try to communicate with audiences. This is part of their practice as they try to communicate with audiences or help people express what they cannot otherwise articulate. For example, we engage in the practice of open studios on a regular basis.²⁹ I asked if they agreed. I also asked for their general thoughts on what I wrote. I received a few neutral responses. For the most part I got responses that agreed with me and thought the work was beautiful. Several people commented that they enjoyed reading my reflections and thoughts about my process, including the connections between my “creative/spiritual exploration and the 52 Project”³⁰ But, no one entered into a dialogue about hospitality that I tried to spark.

The reader may well ask what kind of environment is this closed group Facebook page? I believe that the 52 Project is an example of what Makoto Fujimura calls a “nurturing habitat,”³¹ where meaningful encounters between diverse people take place. I believe that those encounters lead to deep understanding of others through the practices common to artists, but also common to faith communities - practices like hospitality and reverent listening, in the way that Nouwen and Anthony suggest. That “nurturing habitat” is nested within a cultural estuary or the larger environment of the Riverside Art Museum. Fujimura defines cultural estuaries as connected heterogeneous habitats in a river of culture. Like actual waterway estuaries, cultural estuaries are complex systems “with a multiplicity of dynamic influences and tributaries.”³² They are a “key model for culture care.”³³ Care of our culture needs to take place just as care for our environment needs to occur. Culture is an environment where people and creativity thrive. But, culture care is no easy task. Within culture and cultures, there are divides with legitimate things dividing us. We need reminding that we are neighbors and proximity brings responsibility. Clearly, Jesus calls us to love our neighbors.³⁴ Care of culture creates safe spaces for “telling the truth,” as well as inviting us on towards beauty, wholeness and healing.³⁵

The Riverside Art Museum acted as a larger home base or estuary for the 52 Project. It offered 52 Project members classes and workshops at discounted prices because they had signed up for the Project. The Museum Education Director made herself available through the Facebook page and in person for any problems that the participants encountered. She kept a close eye on the Facebook page, looking for problem issues or questions. She also made frequent suggestions, anticipating the needs of members. She connected the group to the larger life of the Museum. She was a good “hostess” for this environment. In those ways and others, the 52 Project was nested within the cultural estuary of the life of the Riverside Art Museum, like a habitat within an actual estuary.³⁶

I would also argue that the closed group Facebook page was what psychologist D.W. Winnicott termed a “holding environment.”³⁷ That is a psychological space which is both safe and challenging enough to elicit real change. Within that space, meaningful encounters were possible because certain conditions existed. Conditions for those encounters, in this case were both self-imposed - by the artists themselves - and from outside sources - other artists and the program requirements. Furthermore, several practices took place as the artists encountered each other within this holding environment. The two most important practices were hospitality and reverent

listening. But, there also has to be a sense of “confrontation” in the encounter. Nouwen describes confrontation as the other side of the coin to receptivity in hospitality.³⁸ It is not an aggressive movement, but one of setting boundaries, held in balance with receptivity. In wanting to be truly hospitable, we must receive strangers, but also “confront them by an unambiguous presence, not hiding ourselves behind neutrality but showing our ideas, opinions and life style clearly and distinctly.”³⁹ Only then can we enter in to true communication and hoped for change. For the 52 Project members, the conditions that existed which contributed to personal change were a commitment to complete the journal, interest in participating in a culminating exhibit and the desire to become more artful or creative. These were in sync with the goals of the Project: “to develop the habit of capturing one’s ideas and being more artful on a regular basis.”⁴⁰

For many, the Facebook page became a holding environment where adaptive change could take place. The goals of the 52 Project, stated above, are something which requires a lifestyle change. This is especially true when it entails journalling on a weekly or monthly basis. It goes beyond a technical solution of scheduling hours on the calendar for making art. It goes to the core of who and what an artist is. In Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils of Art-making, the authors discuss the difference between certain professions like carpenters and plumbers, who know what they will be called upon to do, as opposed to artists, who “have to spin the work out of themselves, discover its laws and then present themselves turned inside out to the public gaze.”⁴¹ A technical solution - one that is solvable with a “combination of money, time and expertise” - would not do.⁴² That is what needed to happen for those in the 52 Project who wanted to achieve the goals laid out for them by the program.

To be clear, the Riverside Art Museum acted like a cultural estuary or a large river of culture where many smaller habitats of culture existed. Some of those were clubs like the print making club, an ongoing group. Then there was the 52 Project, which was formed for a year only. These habitats were nested within the cultural estuary of the Museum. The 52 Project had its own set of 54 members and guidelines, along with monthly meetings and a closed group Facebook page. That is all the habitat, according to Fujimura’s definition. Then, within that, is the Facebook page, which I believe is a holding environment. A holding environment is a psychological space where change takes place. Change takes place because a person in a holding environment feels both safe enough and challenged to make change.⁴³ The participants felt safe because there was an atmosphere of hospitality and reverent listening. But they were also challenged by the goals of the program.

The artists were engaged in difficult psychological and physical work. They needed a safe, hospitable space because many of them were either new to the medium they were working in or had not been making art for a long time. Many were unsure of their skill level. That made them vulnerable. Take one Facebook exchange from the beginning of the Project, for an example. A person posted that she was excited to be part of the Project, but felt overwhelmed and didn’t even know where to start. However, she knew she needed a creative outlet.⁴⁴ Someone responded “You can do it! Start small.” Another person suggested coming to an art journaling class at the Museum to help her get going. The original poster said that would be a good start for her. Being

vulnerable is risky and risk gives rise to change. It also entails failure. But for those things to take place, a safe enough environment needed to exist - the holding environment.⁴⁵

In the 52 Project holding environment, the participants also have to experience failure at a rate they can stand. I experienced this with the origami artist-in-residence. I was able to talk with him about origami as a concept and how I wanted to use it in my Bible. However, I also needed someone to actually show me how to fold certain patterns that were above my skill level. He was not willing to do that. So, the suggestion to go to him was good, but not a complete solution for me. I eventually had to search ... and search diligently for someone to help me fold the pattern. I tried YouTube, but that didn't work for me. Eventually, I found an origami club within driving distance. In the end, that was a better solution because I found a community where I could go time and again, which was itself hospitable. The members did not fold the patterns for me, but showed me how to fold them for myself, after teaching me to do basic origami folding. I had wanted someone to walk me through folding the pattern - a technical solution. What I really needed was an adaptive change. I needed to learn for myself how to fold basic origami patterns before moving on to the more advanced ones. It took understanding concepts of origami. If I didn't, the art in my Bible wouldn't have been truly mine. That would have been unacceptable to me as an artist.

Although the participants were diverse, they shared a common language - the language of art. They also shared the desire to be creative. We were all engaging in this year long process together and it was, to a degree, overwhelming to get started. But the orientation meeting gave a foundation for everyone and explained clearly that the Facebook page was "our" space to use as we wished. Many of the early picture postings were accompanied by tentative comments about being excited to start the Project, but not knowing where to start were typical.⁴⁶ They showed up again and again when people got to certain points in their journals where they were trying something new. But right from the beginning participants responded quickly with words of support, thus creating a zone of safety and extending the first tendrils of hospitality and understanding. But, not only was it a zone of safety, it was a zone for change. Change came because the artists were invested in growth. They were working to finish their journals. It was a voluntary choice, to be sure, and one that they clearly made when they signed up at the orientation meeting. Also, for many, it was simply that artists are driven to create, something common to artists. In terms of hospitality, the more hospitable the responses were the more willing people were to open up regarding their experiences. For example, one artist posted that she had learned to let doing what she loved be more of a priority in her life. "Though I can't always attend the scheduled sessions, when I do, I enjoy the comfort of being with good friends from [the 52 Project] and the art museum feels alive with their great energy [and being] part of the exhibit helps me to keep faithful to myself with my art."⁴⁷

No post on the Facebook page went without comment or multiple hits of the "like" button. Participants were diligent about responding to all posts and questions. It was a rich environment for commentary. When a workshop in fabric painting was given, multiple photos were posted by the teacher and students, along with workshop participants, saying "what a great class! Thank

you” “It was so much fun” “Thank you all for making it a great class. You made it worth all the hard work.” and so on. That was typical of the kind of commentary that existed. It was an example of the attentive listening that took place. They could have chosen not to post, of course. And, some did not. It is hard to know why those who didn’t, did not. But the numbers showed that approximately 45 of the 54 participants watched what was going on in the Facebook page counter. Approximately 10 to 15 participants went a step further and would click the “like” button at certain posts. Usually 2 to 5 participants at any given time responded verbally to posts.

When I posted a question about an artist’s sense of calling, I received many responses. One person said that “I’m driven to it [doing something creative] from the inside.”⁴⁸ Another said she identified with the longing to create and doesn’t remember a time when she didn’t feel the desire to create. “The hint of what’s inside and not the easily visible part - showing that God is the author of our creativity and gives us the ability to showcase His creativity to those partially blind to the wonder of His work and world. We can never come close, but we keep trying”⁴⁹ Clearly, this person felt the calling to make art. In *Art & Fear*, Bayles and Orland raise the “darker issue” of “Why do so many who start [making art] quit?”⁵⁰ There are those who have that sense of calling; who feel the constant and compelling force drawing them into a creative mode. For some, that has to do with the divine. For others, not. Either way, artists come together from time to time to speak of these things then, eventually retreat to “their studio and practice their art alone.”⁵¹ This is one of the bonds we shared and discussed on the Facebook page.

In response to my posting about the visuals I did for Moses and the burning bush, one woman said that she liked the idea I presented about socially engaged art practices and calling. We had listened to an artist talk from one of the exhibits at the Museum about social practice art. The exhibit was “The American Qur’an”.⁵² I posed the questions about socially engaged practices and a sense of calling. My image was of Moses before the burning bush, and the interior of Moses’ body was filled with small lines and shapes that highlighted the words “I am the God of Abraham, etc.” in a blackout poetry style.⁵³ The woman responded that she also felt she did socially based art but wasn’t sure. She said she put a lot of thought into her work and her hope was for people to thoughtfully look at it. She also said that although she didn’t know if she was in “my camp”, what I said touched her. By “camp,” she meant my faith tradition, she clarified, acknowledging that “camp” was probably a poor choice of words.⁵⁴ I believe that our exchange was an example of reverent listening within the holding environment of the 52 Project. Each of us were careful to attend to the other, even quoting each other’s words back to the other for clarity’s sake. She also sent me a sample of her work to further clarify.

One artist posted about being in a slump. She said she didn’t “really art journal because my thinking is I’m wasting time on journaling when I should be focusing on my ‘real’ art. Well, I’m not doing much of that either!”⁵⁵ Another participant suggested she do something with one of her sketches from a life drawing class they were both taking. From that starting point, she remarked that she enjoyed her time in the art journal. Ten members “liked” the visual and post. Two made positive comments. The artist who pushed her to use the life drawing sketch responded that it feels good to make a little art each day and just keep going as you are inspired.

“One thing does lead to another.”⁵⁶ This was clearly a case of reverent listening, where one member knew a little about the other’s circumstances and used it to urge the other on to be creative; to help with an idea. Within the hospitable environment of the 52 Project, reverent listening acted as a catalyst for hospitable actions and that in turn led to the final comment on the original poster’s latest action: “ ‘Barb’ suggested I do something with one of my sketches from figure drawing as a starting point. I have to admit, I enjoyed my time in the art journal.” Response from ‘Barb’: “Glad I could inspire you to get started.” Listening and response led to action and growth in keeping with the Project 52 goals.

I first encountered the 52 Project participants just as they encountered me - strangers from diverse backgrounds. Yet, with a little bit of reflection, we clearly had things in common. We all self identified as creative individuals. We were all motivated to join a demanding program that asked us to journal on a regular basis for a year. We “gathered” together on the closed group Facebook page to share our images, observations, comments, questions and struggles with the process of a year of journaling. We learned about each other through the process of reverent listening. We exercised hospitality within the Facebook page toward each other. We learned that some of us were Christians and others were not. We learned about each other’s vulnerabilities and strengths through our postings in a sheltered environment. Individuals frequently took on the role of host when someone was in a vulnerable position by listening attentively and offering aid through advice on resources or other types of guidance. Yet, hospitality is a two way street. Those who were offering hospitality one week, often found themselves in need of it the next. As Christine Pohl stresses, “true hospitality involves face to face, gracious relationships of encouragement and respect.”⁵⁷ In our encounters, the line between being a guest and a host was often blurred. Practitioners quickly discovered this on the Facebook page as they engaged in hospitable actions - guests always bring certain gifts and hosts themselves are frequently needy.

The nested environments of cultural estuary, cultural habitat, hospitable space and holding environment provided space for adaptive learning for the participants of the 52 Project. The participants had as their goals developing a habit of capturing creative ideas and artful making on a regular basis for a year. That motivated them to engage in adaptive learning in those environments, aided in large part by the hospitality and reverent listening of the other members. Their encounters with a diverse group of strangers was tempered by that same hospitality and reverent listening. What can we learn from this? We can learn that shared goals, the practice of hospitality and reverent listening along with a sense of creative generosity can support positive encounters that lead to personal and communal growth among diverse people.

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¹ Makoto Fujimura, Culture Care 46.

² Those artist talks ranged from artists-in-residence to artists exhibiting in the Museum. The workshops ranged from fabric painting to print making and art journaling.

³ A juried exhibit is a competition where the participants' work is judged by a panel according to a set of criteria for inclusion in a show. In this case, inclusion would be showing in RAM's 52 Project Show in March 2018, lasting 6 weeks.

⁴ <http://rebekahart.com/the-52-project-an-1890-bible/>

⁵ The Bible measured 10" x 12" x 4" and had a heavy leather cover. The Bible also included a commentary and B & W illustrations. It was in good condition. No history on the Bible was given by the eBay seller.

⁶ Christine Pohl, Making Room, 4.

⁷ Pohl, 6.

⁸ Pohl, 57.

⁹ Pohl, 8; Nouwen, Reaching Out, 66, "At first the word "hospitality" might evoke the image of soft sweet kindness, tea parties, bland conversations and a general atmosphere of coziness."

¹⁰ Nouwen, 65. Nouwen's work on hospitality is best covered in Reaching Out, but SOH Hui Leng Davina's The Motif of Hospitality in Theological Education has an excellent chapter on his other work on hospitality.

¹¹ Pohl, 13.

¹² Kim Anthony, Process Drama, 14.

¹³ Nouwen, 76.

¹⁴ Anthony, 39.

¹⁵ Nouwen, 72.

¹⁶ post April 15.

¹⁷ Anthony 14. Nouwen, 95. "...healing means, first of all, the creation of an empty but friendly space where those who suffer can tell their story to someone who can listen with real attention."

¹⁸ Anthony, 15.

¹⁹ Anthony, 40.

²⁰ Kegan, Evolving Self 30ff.

²¹ Nouwen explores a similar notion in his section on creating a free and friendly space in Reaching Out, 71ff. "Hospitality is not to change people, but to create a space where they can change themselves." 71.

²² It is also similar to the open studio concept of collaborative creative work, where an atmosphere of exchange and collaboration on a work of art takes place. In the 21st century, open studios frequently are virtual or digital. Creative people come together in social acts of collaboration. (<http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/08/19/online.collaborative.art/index.html>)

²³ <http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/08/19/online.collaborative.art/index.html>

²⁴ Nouwen, 65.

²⁵ http://rebekahart.com/the-52-project-an-1890-bible/?_gallery=gg-7-61

²⁶ http://rebekahart.com/the-52-project-an-1890-bible/?_gallery=gg-7-62

²⁷ <http://www.kanebo.com/beautyadvice/omotenashi/omotenashi.html>

²⁸ Fujimura, 19.

²⁹ Open studios are places where artistic or creative work can be viewed and created collaboratively. It fosters creativity and encourages experimentation in an atmosphere of cultural exchange, conversation and encouragement. It is also when an artist opens their personal studio to guests and their work is on view, much like an open house.

³⁰ post June 22.

³¹ Makoto Fujimura is an artist who is a Christian and heads the Brehm Center at Fuller Theological Seminary. I draw upon his book Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for our Common Life [2017] for a framework on the concepts of culture care and cultural estuaries.

³² Fujimura, 103.

³³ Fujimura, 103.

³⁴ Fujimura, 65.

³⁵ Fujimura, 46.

³⁶ Fujimura, 104.

³⁷ Winnicott, Winnicott On The Child, 238.

³⁸ Nouwen, 98.

³⁹ Nouwen, 95.

⁴⁰ 52 Project guidelines, <http://www.riversideartmuseum.org/education/adult/52-project/>

⁴¹ Orland and Bayles, 95, Though not all artists choose to do this. Many stick to a routine challenge offering clear goals and measurable feedback “which is to say, technical challenges. The underlying problem with this is not that the pursuit of technical excellence is wrong, but simply that making it the primary goal puts the cart before the horse. We do not long remember those artists who followed the rules more diligently than anyone else. We remember those who made the art from which the rules inevitable follow.”

⁴² http://leadership.fuller.edu/Leadership/Resources/Part_4-Leading_for_Transformative_Change/I_Technical_and_Adaptive_Change.aspx) Adaptive challenges occur when people are asked to adopt new beliefs, new values “or when we help people see that the ways that they have been doing things in the past will not work for them.” (http://leadership.fuller.edu/Leadership/Resources/Part_4-Leading_for_Transformative_Change/I_Technical_and_Adaptive_Change.aspx)

⁴³ Winnicott, 238 . Nouwen, 65. On the safety of hospitable places, 71.

⁴⁴ March 4 post.

⁴⁵ Winnicott's holding environment of a child and a mother, the mother is not a perfect parent, but a "good enough mother". In other words, she fails her child's expectations at a rate he can stand. A perfect parent would be a bad thing because the child would never grow to a mature adult.

⁴⁶ March 4 2017 post.

⁴⁷ September 13 post.

⁴⁸ April 13 post.

⁴⁹ April 15 post.

⁵⁰ Bayles and Orland, 114.

⁵¹ Bayles and Orland, 115.

⁵² The artist was Sandow Birk. He created a hand transcribed Qur'an according to historic Islamic traditions and illuminated the text with relevant scenes from contemporary American life. <http://sandowbirk.com>.

⁵³ Black out poetry is where the author uses a permanent marker to cross out or eliminate the words she sees as unnecessary on a page of text for the effect she is trying to create. It focuses on rearranging the words left to create a different meaning. Examples of blackout poetry are found on [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

⁵⁴ posts July 6 & 7.

⁵⁵ post May 3.

⁵⁶ post May 3.

⁵⁷ Pohl, 70.



Visual Art in Christian Religious Education
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Abstract

Through an engaging interaction between the theories presented here, the *art/y/fact.Xn* mobile app, and four artistic representations of the Hospitality of Abraham in Genesis 18, the theories undergirding how art can be used in Christian religious education contexts will come to life. The theories point toward four learning encounters: one with the content and teachings of the Christian tradition, the viewer's autobiographical encounter that feeds their own discipleship, an encounter with the artist's community and the communities that have seen the work since it was created, and a spiritually rich encounter with God. Yet, for all of these, another encounter seems still possible.

I encountered some modern Christian artworks at the Vatican Museums in May 1987 that dramatically altered my worldview. Until that day, religion was a field of inquiry like any other; it was a two-dimensional thing outside of myself that I could study. That day, Christianity became a three-dimensional world I could (had to) inhabit.

A decade later I began a doctoral program to try to show religious educators how to facilitate such an encounter with art for others. The dissertation highlighted four learning outcomes art could mediate. In hindsight though, none of these four intended learning outcomes actually gets at the religious (or perhaps simply, sacred) experience I know to be possible in the encounter with an artwork. The four learning outcomes/processes serve as good reasons to include visual art in a religious education program. This would at least insure that some art is being put before people thus offering at least the potential for the kind of encounter I will try to describe at the end.

In the language of education, the learning outcomes can be articulated as follows:

- understanding the elements of the (Christian) tradition reflected in the artwork based on reading/encountering the artwork as a visual text
- applying the artwork to one's own life as a mirror through which to question and encounter oneself
- questioning (analyzing) the artwork to encounter the community behind the artist/image
- synthesizing the potential divine elements/moments of the art into an encounter with God through the artwork.

The initiating impetus for this paper was an invitation by two colleagues to participate a panel on art and religious education for an REA Annual Meeting. We agreed that we would present our various approaches to or perspectives on art, encounter, and religious education in dialogue with the story/artworks of the hospitality of Abraham from Genesis 18:1-15. It is an apt story for exploring the religious potential of the encounter with art.¹

When the three men are near Abraham, he sees them, runs toward them, greets them reverently, invites them to dwell a while, refreshes them with water, and prepares and serves them the best he and Sarah have. The men receive his offerings and if they were ordinary men, it seems that the event could end there. Opinions differ as to whether the guests were the Trinity, God and two of God's attending angels, or simply messengers but it is agreed that they were at least messengers (angels) from God. As such, they eventually offer the divine gift of a child to Abraham and Sarah. At first, Abraham and Sarah are not open to the possibility of the gift of the visitors, Sarah even laughs. But in time, the gift of the visitors emerges fully into their lives.

I am going to use the structure of this story to loosely frame the four learning outcomes articulated above as a hospitality practice that can be undertaken in response to the work of art. In other words, I am going to argue that the four learning outcomes are hospitable ways to encounter a work of art. Poor art education in recent decades has left many religious educators without the confidence to read visual images or facilitate any encounter between a viewer and a piece of visual art. This is the root of my claim that artworks are "strangers" to most Western viewers today. I will also argue at the end that some artworks offer encounters/gifts that the viewer may not initially recognize, accept, or understand.

To keep the presentation from being too abstract I will demonstrate the four learning outcomes with four artworks that depict the story of Abraham's hospitality as interpreted at four times and places.

¹ The Quran also recounts the story but with far less detail (Quran 51:24-27) and because there is so little figurative art in Islamic art history, the artistic examples here will be drawn from Christian and Jewish artists.



2017 Rebekah Bane above with table closed; below with table open. Bible, ink, paper dolls, origami.



A 14th century Greek icon by an unknown iconographer. Tempera and gold on wood.



1610-1612 Ludovico Carracci. Oil on canvas.



1954-1967 Marc Chagall, [Medium]

Seeing and Approaching (Strange) Art

Genesis tells of Abraham's moment of first recognition of someone or something strange followed by an eagerness to run toward and encounter the stranger. While I wish this were the common phenomenon upon seeing strange artworks, it is not. I once assumed that viewers would be eager to approach and get to know artworks but I discovered that many people do not know how to approach strange art or sometimes any art.

Seeing an artwork is a process of taking in color, shape, form, texture, line, space, and tone. Such visual elements are the "grammar and syntax" of art. Design elements of perspective, proportion, composition, rhythm, light, and time are the more sophisticated elements of style that are akin to paragraph and essay structure. Small children in the West learn to make some sense of these through picture books but for the most part, Western education has not included this grammar in its basic curriculum. The language and formalism of art has largely been left to experts in recent decades so the average educated person assumes that he or she lacks the skills to interpret an artwork. This self-understanding interferes with any potential eagerness to meet the stranger.

While these could be considered the basic elements of visual reading, to suggest that one must start there is akin to saying that poetry and drama can be understood only

by the verbally literate and history belies this belief. Appreciation of spoken poetry doesn't require the ability to read. If it did, the Bible wouldn't be full of poetry.

On the assumption that viewers could bypass visual grammar, syntax, and style and eagerly approach religious art because of their (basic) familiarity with the stories of a religious tradition, I created a mobile app called *art/y/fact.Xn* that could be carried into a museum or church on one's phone. The app is no longer available on the Apple platform (only on Android) but its basic approach to reading, interpreting, applying, and analyzing artworks of the story of Abraham's hospitality will be used in this paper to demonstrate the art as a tool for religious education.

The *art/y/fact.Xn* app offers a ramp to help the viewer run toward strange art. In the case of artworks depicting the hospitality of Abraham, it suggests that viewers look at each such artwork for these details:

- Abraham's respect for or treatment of the three visitors
- Sarah's attitude toward the visitors
- Whether Sarah was hidden from the visitors but they heard the laughter anyway
- Whether the visitors looked alike or different
- The physical appearance of the visitors (wings, age, authority, etc.)

In the four works we are considering here, the details are as follows:

Table 1: Details of the Four Depictions of Abraham's Hospitality

	Bane	Icon	Carracci	Chagall
Abraham's respect for or treatment of the three visitors	Reserved; apart; facing the viewer, not the visitors; disconnected except by gold pattern;	Bowing; offering a dish to the center visitor; engaged;	Engaged with one visitor; hands/arms crossed in front of solar plexus; expression of astonishment and doubt?	Apart; facing the viewer, not the visitors; head cocked away from visitors and toward Sarah; hands near each other in front of lower torso;
Sarah's attitude toward the visitors	Apart (further away than Abraham); reserved; disconnected except by thinner gold	Engaged; offering a bowl of something; hands covered; same size/distance	Distant; looking from the tent in the background; not part of the action;	Only half of Sarah visible in the scene; handing bowl to Abraham; engaged with him, not

	pattern.	as Abraham		visitors;
Whether Sarah was hidden from the visitors but they heard the laughter anyway	Not hidden; close enough to be heard.	Not hidden; close enough to be heard; positioned slightly higher than the visitors and Abraham.	Partially hidden; behind the three visitors so not in sight line; maybe close enough to be heard.	Like half a person so in that sense hidden; close enough to be heard.
Whether the visitors looked alike or different	Different. One all white with one origami design; two have some similarities and differences in color and pattern and with an origami design different from the first, but alike each other.	Alike in hair, clothes, halos, age; all extending a hand over the table in blessing;	Alike in age; different in clothing, hair; center and left engaged with each other, right with Abraham;	Alike in age, hair; different in clothes; different in wing colors; another set of angels in a bubble off to the upper right;
The physical appearance of the visitors (wings, age, authority, etc.)	The visitors are winged; the white one seems to be more authoritative than the others in position (higher/center) and color; facing viewers; engagement can't be read;	Wings and halos; red garments; the center one seems to be most authoritative because of position; bodies are turned toward viewers; engagement is with the table more than A. S, or viewers;	No wings or halos; different clothes, hair styles; beautiful young men; bodies in open postures toward viewers but not facing viewers; two engaged with each other, one with Abraham.;	Wings and at least hints of halos; engaged with things more than with each other or Abraham; two have their backs to us; two have white wings, one has gold ones;

So it is easy to see that while these four artworks depict the same story and the same characters, their details clearly distinguish them from each other. But so far, we have only a list of details that doesn't help one make sense of the images, their

similarities, or their differences. After running toward the strangers, Abraham offers respect. What does that mean with regard to an artwork?

Reverence for the Strange Artwork

Abraham doesn't yet know who his strange visitors are when he bows down in reverence. I include this moment in an approach to strange (new, unknown) religious art because I assume that a religious artwork contains some of the riches of the religious tradition and is thus deserving of respect for that fact alone. Abraham offers respect to his visitors immediately, trusting that they deserve reverence, but viewers may need scaffolding that helps them find the religious content that merits their respect.

First one has to ask, in an image-ridden age, which artworks are worthy of reverence? All of them? Only the religious ones? And if one is willing to offer reverence to religious artworks only, how does one know which are religious? Eight elements of an image or artwork can be identified to which the adjective 'religious' might apply: the content or subject matter, the religious commitments of the artist/maker, the intent of the artist/maker regarding the particular work, the instructions of the patron or commissioner of the artwork, the viewer's or community's response to the piece, the technique or process of making or creating the image (e.g., some monks utter a prayer with each brush stroke), the context in which the image was/is presented or used (e.g., liturgical, museum, private), the title or caption of the image/object. For our purposes, we will take it as given that these four artworks depict a scripture story of significance to Judaism, Christianity and Islam and thus qualify as religious images and are thus deserving of some reverence.

But let us take a moment to discern some of the religious meaning of these works. Toward this end, the *art/y/fact.Xn* app poses several Christianity-centric questions designed to help the viewer gather the details (as itemized in Table 1) into some coherent meaning.

- Do the three visitors seem to be symbols of the Trinity or the Trinity itself?
- Is Abraham's example of hospitality meant to be a model for how Christians ought to treat strangers, wanderers in the desert?
- In the artwork, does Abraham seem to know that the visitors are from God?

While I argue that the basic visual reading of the visual and design elements aren't necessary to gleaning a religious meaning from an artwork, these intermediate elements are, at least for a meaning related to the goal of teaching the content of the religious tradition. These questions are a version of looking for content, form, process and mood (Taylor 1992, 67-88). At a general level, the four artworks all have the same content; they are all depictions of the story of the Hospitality of Abraham from

Genesis 18:1-8. At a more specific level, each contains content, forms, processes, and moods that the others do not.

The Three Visitors and the Trinity. None of the four artworks shared above seems to depict the three visitors as the Trinity itself. While Bane, the iconographer, and Chagall each does something to single out one of the visitors, none does anything with the ages of the visitors to indicate that there might be a father/son relationship between any two of them. (Of course as a Jew Chagall wouldn't be likely to indicate the Christian Trinity anyway.) The wings are traditional symbols of angels so these three works are at least obvious about the visitors being messengers from God. The fact that Bane presents one all white angel, the iconographer places one in the center and above the other two, and Chagall gives one gold wings at least raises the question about why. Did they want to make one more important? Is one meant to symbolize God? Carracci makes the three visitors beautiful in an innocent-youth sort of way, and beauty was often used to indicate the divine, but that is as close as he comes to indicating the angelic or divine nature of the visitors.

Abraham as a Model of Hospitality. In the Bane piece, Abraham is removed and not visibly engaged with the visitors. This seems to be a statement of reserve. The question is whether that is a reaction to the sacredness of the visitors or their strangeness. The iconographer's Abraham and Sarah are engaged with one of the visitors: they are looking at the visitor and handing him dishes, albeit with deference as indicated by the bowing. Carracci's Abraham is speaking with one of the visitors but his hands are crossing in front of him raising a question about whether it is okay to protect oneself from the stranger. Chagall's Abraham is slightly removed from the visitors as if he has stepped aside to let Sarah pass bringing a dish to the table. This raises a question about delegating one's hospitality to the stranger.

Abraham's Knowledge of the Visitors' Identity. Taking as a given that the visitors symbolize the sacred in some way, we can explore when he knew that and whether his hospitable actions were toward strangers or toward the sacred. Commentators on Genesis disagree about when Abraham becomes aware of the identity of his guests. Artists sometimes play with time in their depiction of a story so the Biblical when might become even more obscure in an artwork. Neither Bane, the iconographer, nor Chagall are clear about whether Abraham knows, even though they are making that sacredness obvious to the viewer. That ambiguity seems to bring the question to life for the viewers. The awareness of the visitors' sacredness and a concomitant awe do seem to be dawning on Carracci's Abraham but it doesn't make him more open to their strangeness, at least not at first.

These questions and explorations can then lead to more. Questions about Sarah in each of these scenes abound. While these reflections offer an example of this intermediate (content, form, process and mood) version of visual reading, we could go on for pages digging deeper into these questions about religious meaning as well as diving deeper into an advanced reading of these images. An advanced reading would have us pay more attention to visual interpretation with questions into the

art worlds in which each artist was working, the artistic influences on each artist, the formal elements of their works, etc. (see e.g., Berger 2000 and Davey 1998). We could pay more attention to a scriptural hermeneutics and compare the artworks to various commentaries on the passage, from various Christian and Jewish traditions. We could dig into the hermeneutics of religious education (Groome 1991) (Where do we bring critical consciousness to the idea of welcoming all strangers? What is the risk of such open welcoming?) and how that relates to art (Illman and Smith 2013). In other words, we could place these artworks in deeper dialogue with scriptural interpretation, theologies, ethics, traditions, doctrines, creeds, ethics, liturgies, rituals, and histories thereby making the abstractions of such texts concrete.

Inviting the (Strange) Artwork to Dwell a While

After greeting the visitors with reverence, Abraham invites the strangers to dwell a while. With an artwork, this means looking a while. I've watched many people in art museums look at a painting for 5-8 seconds, spend 30 seconds reading the informational plaque next to the painting, then glance back at the painting before moving on to the next artwork. I have also watched far fewer people take up a position before an artwork and stay there for 20 minutes or more. These latter museum-goers are inviting the artwork to dwell with them.

This idea of dwelling with an artwork (or artworks) is a way of teaching Christian discipleship. One way to approach discipleship is to dwell with Jesus Christ, as the scriptures have described him (and his forebears), through prayer, and as countless artists, poets, theologians, musicians, and preachers have interpreted those scriptures and prayers throughout history. Music and art are the easiest ways to integrate these interpretations into daily life as reading theology, poetry, or sermons takes time. Here we will confine our consideration to the use of visual art for dwelling with Christ and such saints as Abraham.

Margaret Miles (1985) encouraged viewers to surround themselves with images that delight them. Similarly, in the late 16th century, a Bolognese bishop claimed that the experience of delight in an artwork is a tool for Christian growth. (Paleotti 1582). Paleotti identifies sensual, rational, and spiritual delight as all being possible in response to an artwork but encourages especially attention to spiritual delight. Other emotions are also possible as responses to artworks; attention to any emotional response can lead the viewer to self-awareness.

Another approach to discipleship is the imitation of Christ. Mimesis or imitation is another basic human response to what is seen. The idea of imitation or mimesis is ancient. In the last century or so, it is not without problems and detractors but human beings still imitate what they see. Schweiker (1990) digests the philosophical debates and reconstructs mimesis in such a way that he hopes will

encompass three trajectories so that mimesis will "serve us in understanding world, our experience of time, and the ambiguity of selfhood" (35).

In a more secular vein, Pinar's (1995) autobiographical curriculum approach dovetails well with the self-reflection recommended by most of the foundational voices in practical theology. Putting one's lived experience in dialogue with the theological tradition as reflected in the artworks is the basic practice.

The *art/y/fact.Xn* app offers reflective questions that call upon the autobiographical approach to self awareness.

- What does it take to have the inner wherewithal to welcome strangers? What is it about Abraham in this artwork that indicates that he has what it takes to welcome the stranger in faith rather than turn the stranger away out of fear?
- Sarah laughed in disbelief at the words of the stranger. Does the artwork's depiction of Sarah offer any wisdom for remaining open to the message the stranger brings?

Dwelling with the artworks above invites a different discipleship pathway for every viewer. This is where some of the subjectivity in response to an artwork is most evident. Delight and other emotional responses may emerge from the whole or any part of the artworks above. What delights me in Chagall's surrealism may irritate someone else while the beautiful maleness of Carracci's visitors may be a source of delight to my neighbor and irritate me. Exploring my delight and irritation uncovers those elements of my past formation that may need to be enhanced or overcome.

The practice of imitation of a particular image of Jesus Christ or a saintly figure like Abraham is a choice but the motivation to undertake such a practice is as subjective as delight.

By offering concrete questions for self-reflection, Pinar's (1995) autobiographical curriculum may offer the most useful approach for formal religious education contexts. Using the app questions designed for this purpose, we can explore the process.

What Does It Take to Welcome the Stranger? Bane suggests that Abraham and Sarah are maintaining some sort of serenity while also keeping some distance from these strangers. The iconographer on the other hand has Abraham and Sarah in very close proximity to the strangers, fully open to whatever the strangers might offer, good or bad. Carracci's Abraham has been fully open but is now putting up some kind of barrier apparently as the visitor is telling Abraham that Sarah will bear a child. This is more than Abraham was prepared for. Chagall's Abraham seems to be ambivalent yet. Sarah is walking toward the visitors but Abraham is at some remove and seems still to be exercising some caution, as if he will act quickly to protect Sarah if trouble should arise. Each viewer committed to discipleship has to ask him or herself these

questions. The artworks suggest that throughout history the story has been interpreted different ways. Practical theological reflection would encourage the viewers to try different practices until they find the one that works best in their context.

Openness to the Stranger's Message? Genesis says that Sarah laughed when she heard that she would bear a child. Bane's Sarah seems demure, almost as if she would be polite to the strangers on hearing such a statement whether or not she believed them but might laugh in private. The iconographer's Sarah is close enough to hear and be heard but would probably take such a statement as gentle ribbing from these guys she is serving and not treat it seriously. Carracci's Sarah is peeking out from the flap of the tent. If he has depicted the moment where the stranger is telling Abraham about the child, she might be looking out because she has heard, but this woman is quite removed, far away from any message they might share. That distance would have her laughing about the silliness of men. Chagall's Sarah is in a giving mode, not a receiving mode. She would be taken aback by hearing such a thing, then like the iconographer's Sarah would likely take it as gentle ribbing and shift back into service mode.

Refreshing the Strange Artwork

This is probably the biggest stretch in the metaphor linking Abraham's treatment of the visitors with the religious reception of artworks. Abraham offered his guests water to cleanse their feet, to soothe their road-weariness. The art of an era reveals the perspectives, priorities, and actions of the people of that era. Not surprisingly, parallels can be drawn between paradigm changes in art and paradigm changes in philosophy and theology; artistic approaches to symbols and styles in Christian art can be seen to change as theological understandings of Christianity change; and the political, social, and economic life circumstances of the people are reflected in their sacred art.² The idea of refreshing the artwork is about rinsing the dust off that

² A fuller attention to these concepts would include attention to Richard Viladesau's (2000) combining the work of Jose Ortega y Gasset on the changes in art since Giotto (1300's) and the work of Hans Kung on paradigm changes in theology and philosophy; Jaroslav Pelikan's (1997) identification of eighteen understandings of Jesus that have waxed and waned through time (vii); Finaldi's (2000) seven models, some of which overlap with Pelikan's (5); and Helen de Borchgrave's (2000) accounting for the social, political, and economic lives of Christian communities as they inform and are revealed in the art and theology. Recent theologies arising out of the Hispanic American Christian community have acknowledged not only the unique character of that community but also that that character is reflected in the aesthetic of the community (Garcia-Rivera 1999; Goizueta 1995). And it would include examination of the artworks that have been powerful interlocutors in such community struggles as overcoming Apartheid in South Africa (DeGruchy 2001) and feeding the Arab Spring in North Africa (Jamshidi 2013).

artwork, reviving both the artist's community and the people that have received the artwork so that the present viewer and that viewer's community can engage in broader encounter (Jensen and Vrudney 2009).

Abraham already knew something about his stranger visitors in the sense that he knew what would refresh those walking through the wilderness. It is a bit harder for us. We might know something about an artwork based on when and where it was created but we might have to ask questions to learn more.

An active viewer is going to engage in dialogue with the community through the visual art. The overarching question through which this process unfolds is addressed to the community through the artwork, "Please, tell me, who are you?" Since that question can be a bit overbroad and intrusive, a hierarchy of sub-questions can be asked. The simplest questions are the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions that we learn to ask in grammar school. Next, the viewer might ask questions that emerge from the most obvious features of the painting, followed by questions based on the knowledge the viewer brings to the encounter. Finally, religious questions should be asked. These are the questions that touch the ultimate questions any community faces: sin, suffering, death, salvation, creation, and love. That hierarchy being noted, it doesn't have to be systematically followed. There is a wealth of information about community in any painting.

In looking for the answers to these questions, two sets of 'lenses,' artistic lenses such as content (Perkins 1994; Kreitler & Kreitler 1972), symbol (Gardner 1994), and style (Gombrich 1995) and cultural lenses such as politics, economics, and society (Viladesau 2000) help focus the examination.

Details of how these lenses are relevant will have to await another forum. The *art/y/fact.Xn* app subsumes many of these lenses into two questions related to this scripture story.

- Welcoming the stranger is a spiritual practice that goes in and out of favor from place to place and generation to generation. What was the local attitude toward strangers (migrants, refugees, settlers, etc.) in the artist's place and time? Might the artwork offer a response to, or affirmation of, that practice?
- Does the artwork depict the three visitors as being so obviously related to God that they would be recognizable, or does it make the question of whether the visitors are important more ambiguous?

Some examples will help.

Local Attitude to Strangers in the Artist's Time and Place? Artist's response? The oldest of these works is the icon from 14th century Byzantium. It continues a several-hundred year adherence to the traditional iconographic form of the area. Is that an example of maintaining the old ways in spite of the Western European

invasion of Byzantium during the Crusades, which saw Christian fighting Christian? Carracci's Bologna was rebuilding after the plague had taken a sixth of the population in the late 1500s. Attractive young men, who could contribute to the economy and the marriageable population, would certainly be seen as having been sent from God. Notice the contrast between the healthy fresh young men and the more scarred Abraham. Chagall's work was done as Europe rebuilt in the wake of the Second World War (and its refugee crises) and as the Soviets made trusting the stranger very dangerous for Eastern Europeans. While I might see the fiery red color as a foreshadowing of Moses and the Burning Bush, Chagall may have meant something different by the red. Might he have been saying welcome the stranger regardless of the risk? It is harder from our current perspective to bring critical consciousness to 2017 Los Angeles and Bane's piece. She uses a traditional Japanese art form, in a city with a century-old history of immigration from Japan, at a time when immigration into the United States from the South is being challenged.

Are the Visitors Obviously from God? Or Are their Origins Ambiguous? One's first response to this question might be that if the visitors are from God, then of course one would welcome them but notice the shift in Carracci's Abraham when the visitor seems to be telling him that Sarah will have a child. This seems to be when Abraham sees their Godliness and his arms go up across his chest. But his hospitality was unrestrained previously when they were simply men. Bologna needs new men; men are welcome. The new awesome-ness of Godly messengers raises the kind of fear that others in scripture demonstrate in God's presence. If these guys are from God, did we do enough? Is there trouble on the horizon? The wings on the visitors in the other three works are obvious signs that they are messengers from God and theoretically, if we can see the wings, Abraham and Sarah could see the wings. That said, we could look at the details of the visitors and see whether they look like the economic migrants, refugees, or invaders common to the artists' times and discern who the artists equates the visitors with the popular people or the unpopular people.

Offering One's Best to the Sacred Stranger

The final movement of Abraham's welcoming these visitors is his offering his best to them. This is the deepest faith statement in the story. He gives them the best of what he has regardless of when Abraham recognizes that the visitors are of God. What does that mean to the viewer encountering a work of religious art? What can the viewer offer when they see the sacred in an artwork? Throughout most of Christian history, two threads have consistently been presented about at least recognizing divine inspiration in an artwork: the notion of the icon and Beauty as a transcendental quality of God. The response suggested has consistently been surrender and prayer.

The 8th and 9th century icon controversies provoked a number of theological interpretations on the ontology of an icon, including its sharing a "form" with its

prototype: Jesus or the saint depicted (e.g., Schoenborn 1994). Because they share the same form, the icon serves as a doorway or window to the eternal presence of Jesus Christ or the saint. Here though the idea is that, at that door or window, viewers are presenting themselves to Jesus Christ or the saint. It is less about any notion that viewers can see into the Eternal Realm. At that window, the viewer is visible to God, naked before God, so prayer is the only reasonable response in the moment.

In the Western Church, a different understanding of the ontology of the work of art developed. Because of how the conciliar icon decrees were translated in the West and because of the illiteracy of the Christian population in the Western Church, art was understood as being about education and decoration. In this context, Beauty as a transcendental quality of God is another way of understanding that God can be encountered in the interaction with an artwork. For centuries in the West, Beauty was Godly. But as the art world's self-understanding changed after the Baroque era, as the Enlightenment developed, and into the 20th century, Beauty became problematic. Today the word "beauty" is often applied in quite shallow or superficial contexts. Arguments about Beauty are deep and ongoing. But even before the contemporary arguments, the appropriate human response to Beauty as Godly has been unclear. Protestant Reformers in the 16th century saw Catholic devotions to artworks as idolatrous, directed at the object, not at the Eternal God.

These ideas present a more challenging problem for religious education. The learners are to be invited to honest and open prayer but depending on the age level, this may not occur. What is genuine prayer today? The *art/y/fact.Xn* app dealt with this by offering users audio meditations to choose from based on their initial impression of an artwork. One was about opening oneself to the message, another was about beauty, a third was about imagining oneself as a character in the story, etc.

On the one hand, if one accepts as true that an icon is a window to the Eternal Realm, then one will automatically pray before an icon but this is not a commonly held belief outside of Eastern Church traditions. And where does icon practice lead to idolatrous practice?

On the other hand, if there is a hint of God somewhere in the world, an inspiration, a flash of beauty, in an artwork or otherwise, what response is there but to praise God? But even saying this suggests that even if a piece of art is lame, or uninspiring, if it has religious content, then it should be honored with the best of one's prayerful heart and that seems forced or false.

Look at the artworks above, do any move you to authentic prayer?

The Potential Gift in the Artwork

Nothing that Abraham and Sarah did for the guests could have prepared them for the announcement that Sarah was going to have a child. It is both unrelated to anything they did and out of proportion to anything Abraham and Sarah gave the visitors. It was absurd. Sarah laughed it was so absurd.

Thirty years after my moving encounter in the Vatican Museums, I still struggle to describe what happened to me that day in 1987, what a collection of 20th century religious art did to me. I could go on for pages and pages about the religious education potential of all of the hospitable processes identified above. I could cite researchers and authors diving deeper into all of the concepts I introduced above. And I would argue that there is good religious learning in the above analyses of all four depictions of Abraham's three visitors. But none of the research, none of the writing touches the power of the experiences I have had encountering art.

A Rothko painting in Chicago provokes unspeakable joy in me and I don't do any of the analyses described above. I don't do anything. I just stand there and joy occurs. One bronze Pentecost at the Vatican causes me an irreconcilable combination of hope for the potential of the Church and grief at the reality of the Church. This too occurs without any of the analysis or interpretation that I described above.

And this has happened to me with other artworks in other places. I want to make this experience accessible to others but because I don't do anything to provoke it, I don't know how. All of the research and writing might support religious educators putting art in front of people, but is that enough? I feel called to do more but still powerless compared to the power of the art.

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 Collaborative Session (Bane, Daily, and Hess)

Deliberately structured conversation as a way to “see through” popular media

Abstract:

In cultures permeated by digital images religious educators need to develop the capacity to “see through images” in ways that support healthy religious practice and belief. Within Christian contexts where the confession of God requires a Trinitarian acknowledgement of God’s creative power, Incarnation, and ongoing revelation, it is helpful to think in terms of a spirituality of displacement which prepares the ground for entering into reconciliation. Such a spirituality can be developed in part through theological reflection which promotes encounter with the deeper layers of popular culture – even that most commodifying form of popular culture, the television commercial.

Paper:

In the summer of 2016, in the heat of the US presidential campaign, the president of Union Seminary published an essay in *Time Magazine* entitled “How to heal the spiritual pain of America” (Jones, 2016). Her essay was focused on the stories we tell in the United States about ourselves as a nation, and asked us to remember that:

There is no religious or spiritual tradition, at least any worth their salt, that does not begin with a serious account of both the good and bad that people can do. There are many names for the negative side of human existence, such as sin, evil, illusion, moral absence, iniquity, transgression and negative karma. All recognize that human beings, alone and collectively, can do really bad things. This doesn’t mean we don’t have a good side. But these stories insist that if we do not existentially reckon with the ugly side of our beliefs and actions, we will not have healthy communities. Egregious harms will continue to unfold and profound despair and alienation inevitably set in. Why? Because deep down, we are living a spiritual lie.

I have a hunch that this spiritual lie is something that many people who are leaving religious institutions have sensed and cannot endure. What is heart breaking, however, is precisely Jones’ point: that religious institutions have profound convictions about human brokenness, and vital ways of engaging in reconciliation and healing.

In multiple papers over the years I have shared stories, not simply stories told by individuals, but stories which give us frames for thinking about stories, stories which offer us paths towards healing. Whether it’s Kegan’s “deconstructive propositions” (Hess, 2008), Shweder’s “ways of thinking through others” (Hess, forthcoming), Cannon’s “dance of redemption” (Hess, 1998), Stevenson’s “four elements” (Hess, 2016) – all of these are frames for engaging our stories, for finding ways to think more wisely about what it means to have and to hold faith in the midst of

digital cultures.¹ In particular I have argued for a Trinitarian stance as envisioned in a “create, share, believe” circle of knowing and engagement (Hess, 2014).

What I propose to do in this paper is to return to that circle and to think carefully about the “share” element, and to ask what role sharing might play in hospitality. On a basic level it’s clear that when people create something they care about, something of which they are proud, they generally feel compelled to share it. But what does it mean to share out our sense of brokenness? What does it mean, to build on Jennings’ invitation to imagine Christian faith in orthopractical, rather than orthodox, terms? (Jennings, 2010).

As we are exploring in this collaborative REA session, structured around the story of hospitality in Genesis 18, Abraham shared food with three visitors. But what does the community of truth model contribute to understanding how this sharing proceeds in a world suffused with digital media (Hess, 2005)? Is there any way in which we can imagine the potential of strangers we might encounter through digital media as transformative, potentially even connected to transcendence? How do we develop the kind of wide, deep, and genuine hospitality which is so often described in scripture? Particularly hospitality to those whom we have named as “other”?

Beginning from an epistemological conviction that a community of truth can be observed when we remember that we are interdependent and intimately interconnected persons, Christians confess a God who is Trinity (LaCugna, 1993; Johnson, 1992). This confession requires us to recognize the wholehearted and whole person way in which dialogue has to unfold, and in which ordinary everyday experience brings forth glimpses of God’s revelation (Scharer and Hilberath, 2008). As Heim notes, “the divine nature is communion-in-difference,” and “communion is the substance of salvation, but also the path that leads to it” (Heim in Ross, 2015, 138).

In the world we are inhabiting in 2017 we have to struggle with context, and with the challenges of context collapse. Both of these are bound up with digital media. Our contexts are thoroughly suffused with digital media – dialogue with context requires dialogue with digital media. But that same media floats fragments of meaning on a vast sea, uprooting them from context, and in the process collapsing that context (Wesch, 2009).

Further, as Bevans and Schroeder write: “we do not so much *see images* as we *see through images*. Images, we believe, especially a constellation of images, help us to move beyond the conceptual and the abstract to the level of emotions and the imagination, where we can be motivated to think in a way that leads more immediately to action” (2011, 31).

Are we seeing through the images of digital media? Focus for a moment just on “what” we might be seeing there. For some of us at least, much of what we are seeing is division, polarization, brokenness, absence of the transcendent. The “database,” if you will, of popular culture leaves much to be desired when it comes to religious education. Building bridges from our database – the database of scripture, of tradition, of prayer and practice, for instance – to the database of

¹ Please note that I write this paper from a very specific social location: as a white woman, as a Roman Catholic professor of education at an ELCA Lutheran seminary, as a mother of young adults in the upper Midwest of the United States. I intend that my argument here be evocative, rather than prescriptive.

popular meaning-making, the databases of film, tv, YouTube, Spotify, and so on, is not a simple or an easy task.

We need an API – an “application programming interface” -- that piece of code which creates access points between two software programs, that gives us access in either direction. It is an API, for example, that allows for my tweets to automatically become status updates in Facebook. It’s an API that reaches into the database of membership in an organization and constructs a directory for that organization on the web. We need an API that bridges popular meaning-making to the bones and flesh of our tradition, and does so in ways that are helpful for religious education.

Bevans notes that “Christian tradition sees human being arising at the intersection of three types of relation: our relation with God, with other persons, and with the rest of creation” (Ross and Bevans, 145). If this is so, then two of these three relationships *are* represented in popular meaning-making, perhaps no more so than in the brief effervescent world of commercials. But how do we connect that world to our relationship with God, to religious meaning-making? What are the APIs that we can use to do this for religious education?

Retrieving mission, and reconciliation at its heart

To begin with, we can retrieve theological ideas, and patterns of practice, from the long tradition of mission within Christian community. It might seem quixotic to draw on ideas from within the church’s long engagement with mission, since for far too many people that term either signals “missionary” – a label with a legitimately problematic history – or “mission statement” – a label which causes most people to sigh and their eyes to glaze over in boredom.

Given a community of truth model for knowing, however, and given the potentially global way in which digital media surround and permeate and carry our communication, there are actually glimpses of meaning and insight from practice within what is termed “missiology” in academic terms that hold resonance and power, that can help us to create this API for which we are searching.

Bevans and Ross argue that:

...mission is best understood as prophetic dialogue. “Prophetic” because it is both word and deed, a “speaking forth” and a “speaking out.” And dialogue, because “the divine nature is a communion-in-difference, and creation is an overflowing of the divine nature,” hence our constitutive need to be hospitable, open, humble, vulnerable, and joyful (xvi).

This is a definition that is very far removed from much of what people have understood about the church and mission. Yet this is a definition profoundly rooted in the community of truth model with which most of my writing has been engaged. In order for this prophetic dialogue to work, however, we need a grounding which both recognizes this fundamental conviction about knowing and which embodies it deeply. Indeed, Bevans and Ross suggest that perhaps it is a spirituality we need, rather than a pedagogy. (I might quibble a bit with a claim that separates

those two, because I think that there is not so much a difference or dichotomy between pedagogy and spirituality, but rather they both contain elements rooted in an underlying conviction about the community of truth.) What is important to remember is that at the heart of Christian understanding is a conviction about grace which is rooted in the Incarnation.

As Bevans reminds us:

Jesus modeled powerlessness and vulnerability by being a guest in our world, by letting go and being among us in our place and space. ...

The three major festivals of the Church — Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost — all have to do with the advent of a divine stranger. In each case this stranger — a baby, a resurrected Christ, and the wind of the Holy Spirit — all meet us as mysterious or strange visitors, breaking into our world, challenging our worldviews and systems and welcoming us to new worlds (2015, 70).

This strangeness, this stranger, breaking into our established world-views, our “taken-for-granted” ways of knowing, continues as the Holy Spirit breathes amongst us. I am convinced that God continues to reveal Godself in our midst, and perhaps more and more in the midst of the strangeness and strangers which digital media place in front of us.

Day after day, moment to moment, people experience in digital media a connection, a relationship of shared meaning, of shared resonance, even (for many) a community. But are we finding ways to invite the stranger into our relationships, into our communities? Are we open to seeing how estranged we have become from much of who we really are (in the deep sense of shared communion)? Are we open to the wisdom of our tradition that might actually be found there, or least connected to, in the midst of digital media?

I fear that far too many of us have experienced ourselves as strangers in church communities, and instead of being welcomed as such, have been pushed out, have been resisted, have been shamed and mocked, have been judged and found wanting. This personal experience extends into digital media practices which create enclaves of similar meaning-making, which build bubbles which do not touch each other, rather than shared streams of living water. Further, instead of being open to the deep wisdom of religious traditions, we have accepted the narrow definitions these experiences push us towards, and we have rightly rejected them – but rejected the tradition as well in that process.

Contemporary missiologists – those theologians seeking to explicate what the tradition, what the Gospel, tells us about mission – strongly assert that relationship is at the heart of the “communion in difference” which is God. Further, the story they seek to share, the over-arching narrative, is one of reconciliation.

For many of us that term – reconciliation – has very little meaning. What little meaning does exist is often captured in economic terms, the “reconciliation of accounts” that occurs in a bookkeeper’s office, or that entails ensuring consistency across spreadsheets. But that very

narrow definition is far from being the primary meaning of the word. Even dictionaries list several others first – the “restoration of friendly relations,” or “the action of making one view or belief compatible with another” (MacOS dictionary).

And in Christian terms, reconciliation is the very heart of the Gospel, the very heart of all that the Incarnation accomplishes. Recall Jones’ plea: to heal America’s spiritual pain we must acknowledge our brokenness and seek healing. This path is what Christianity is all about, no matter how warped or deformed it has become in the intervening two millennia since Jesus gathered a community committed to reconciliation.

Schreiter (in Ross, 2015) summarizes reconciliation in theological terms as follows. It is:

- the work of God (126)
- God begins the reconciling process with the healing of the victim (127)
- the healing process in reconciliation makes of the victim (and the healed wrongdoer) a ‘new creation’ (127)
- a path towards reconciliation requires finding a way to cope with suffering (128)
- reconciliation will only be complete when God has reconciled the whole universe in Christ (128)

Schreiter continues by suggesting that the principle practices of reconciliation understood as mission, are:

- healing (of memories, of victims, of wrongdoers) (129)
- truth-telling (130)
- the pursuit of justice (punitive, restorative, structural) (131), and
- forgiveness (132)

The hypocrisy which young people consistently name in polls as the reason they want nothing to do with religious institutions rests here, in the heart of how we embody the Gospel. Are we living into reconciliation? Or are we retreating from it into narrow silos of closed-in meaning-making?

Bevans again:

salvation is a particular Christian aim distinguished from others. Yet its nature draws us towards others (religious others and social others) and their witness and experience. We cannot seek salvation apart from healing the broken relations and structures that connect persons. The Trinitarian communion which is source and end for the Christian path is not an identity of isolation or contradiction, but of reconciliation (Ross, 148).

This means that reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel, and by implication, then, at the heart of mission and knowing and meaning and practice.

Until we acknowledge pain, we cannot begin healing. Christ on the cross is the very heart of Christian community, but how often have we averted our eyes – not only from the cross, but from the deep pain in our midst? There is significant evidence that young people are not only open to the pain of the world, but energized by engaging it and seeking healing (Hutt, 2016). There is also significant evidence that they are motivated and encouraged by the social media they consume – including even the video games they play (McGonigal, 2011).

What might be an API that we can use to begin to connect our experiences in digital media to reconciliation rooted in religious community? What are the practices that invite us beyond our self-enclosed circles and into a hospitality for, a recognition and engagement with, the pain within, among, around, between and in front of us?

Bevans suggests that we need a “spirituality of displacement” that invites us into listening:

A spirituality of displacement allows those of different cultures to listen and learn from one another and permit appreciation of diverse comprehensions of God’s relations with humanity. Exploring the idea that we are strangers together in the world, however short or long we may have lived in a particular nation, may allow us to think beyond the categories of migrant, native, guest, host with which we live” (in Ross, 64).

This is an unfamiliar stance for many of us, however, and like any spirituality requires disciplines we can practice, emotional and cognitive muscles we can strengthen, to move into this kind of listening.

Building structures for listening that can lead to reconciliation

There are more and more communities who are finding their way into practices of conversation that build structures that can lead to reconciliation. Perhaps the more famous of such are the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions of South Africa, and of Canada. But there are also smaller, more local kinds of conversational structures which are emerging. The practices used in the Respectful Conversations Project of the Minnesota Council of Churches, for instance, are simple but profound, and applicable to just about any difficult conversation. They offer a structure for conversations – guidelines and practices – that grow out of appreciative inquiry, rather than out of analytic frameworks.

Appreciative inquiry is a research methodology oriented towards finding what is working in a setting, and from there, what the underlying commitments and effective practices of that setting are. To use Peter Elbow’s turn of phrase, it is a stance that first practices “believing, rather than doubting” (1986). We are immersed in media who do the opposite – we practice doubting, first, we even practice a kind of angry engagement that some have come to call “angertainment” (Garvis, 2012).

What can it look like to begin in “believing”? It looks like hospitality, it looks like learning a way of attending, or practicing attention, which invites room for deep listening. So few of us have any practice with this kind of listening that it takes support and structure to invite us into

such a process. The good news is that dozens of organizations have woken up to this challenge, and are offering support and tools for doing so.

Kegan and Lahey have written about “language for transformation,” because of their understanding of how language structures meaning and practice. In particular they have identified a shift they recommend from “rules and policies” to “public agreements” (Kegan and Lahey, 2001, 103ff). A public agreement is a set of commitments that a group agrees to at the beginning of engagement. As such it becomes a covenant which any member of the group can use to call the group back to the center when it veers away from the agreement.

The Forum for Theological Exploration has a lovely agreement they use in their vocation discernment weekends (see Appendix 2). The Respectful Conversations Project also has an excellent agreement (see Appendix 2). Considered together you can immediately see the similarities. These agreements form the groundwork for shaping attention in ways that invite hospitality rather than confrontation. The Respectful Conversations Project, for instance, notes that they seek to “soften hearts rather than to change minds.” This is an invitation to respect, to honoring of difference, to deep listening – to real hospitality.

Moving from these initial agreements, there are dozens of examples of ways to structure exercises to support practicing this kind of listening. Consider the Art of Hosting/Liberating Structures frameworks. These are two groups of practices which form an umbrella of sorts for a whole host of ways to structure conversation. More information about both of these frameworks is readily available online.²

One of my favorite such exercises is the four person story circle. You begin this practice by dividing people into groups of four, and then explaining that each person in the group will have a particular role, and these roles will rotate until every person in the group has had the opportunity to try each role. The exercise then moves to asking one person to tell a story – keeping it short, timed to no more than three minutes. While the storyteller is sharing their story, the other three people in the group listen carefully in three ways: one listens for any feelings expressed in the story, one listens for any actions expressed in the story, and one listens for any values expressed in the story. Once the storyteller is finished, the other three listeners share what they have heard. After a short pause, the roles rotate one person over (so the storyteller now becomes a story listener, the person listening for feelings now listens for actions, and so on). Once all four people have had a chance to experience each role, the small group joins other small groups to process the experience in a large group.

This is an example of a structure, a set of “rules,” if you will, that creates a space in which people are focused on listening carefully.

Another example is what I call a “story titling” exercise. Much like the previous example, this is geared towards a small group and towards listening to a story. In this case it’s important to ensure that you have someone who can time what is going on – most people use a phone alarm

² Cf. The Art of Hosting (<http://www.artofhosting.org>), and Liberating Structures (<http://www.liberatingstructures.com>)

set to three minutes. Here one person tells a story, and then turns around so that they are not facing the other three people. At that point the listeners offer possible titles for the story. The storyteller listens to these possible titles, all the while *not* looking at the listeners. Then the storyteller turns around and chooses one of the titles, or offers one which she has made up and prefers herself. The group writes down the title, and then the next person tells a story, and the process is repeated. When all have experienced each of these roles, the list of titles becomes a “table of contents” for the group, and can be shared in a larger plenary setting.

In this exercise both the timing (no story longer than three minutes), and the process of not watching the faces of people offering titles, are important. And for both of these exercises – the story circle and the story titling, I’ve found that it helps to remind people that stories come or not, and that it’s fine for a person to “pass” on telling a story. It’s also important to remind people that these are stories for the telling, not for the fixing (and here you can refer back to the public agreement set at the beginning of the exercise).

In my experience with both of these processes, rich and interesting conversations emerge, even in groups which are very similar in background and commitment. But it is in groups which are quite different that the real depth of these simple practices takes important shape. The Minnesota Respectful Conversations Project is a good example here. That project began in 2012 at the beginning of a statewide public campaign for a constitutional amendment declaring marriage to be between one man and one woman. This definition was already the law in Minnesota, but there were fears on the part of many religious communities that that law would not be upheld in higher courts. Having watched campaigns for similar issues unfold in other states – complete with accompanying public rancor – the MN Council of Churches sought to find a different path through the thorny brambles of public opinion. The churches which make up the Council do not agree on the issue, and it was incumbent on the Council to find ways to be present in the state-wide discussion that supported open dialogue and deep listening without taking a specific position.

The MN Respectful Conversations Project has a simple shape, which unfolds largely in two separate sessions – both of which are roughly three hours long. The first is a session for volunteers from a given setting who have volunteered to be table hosts during the actual conversation event. These volunteers are trained in the art of supporting deep listening, which includes helping groups to follow the agreements they make as well as finding genuinely respectful ways to intervene if a conversation breaks that agreement in some way.

The second session always begins with a shared meal in which participants are invited into conversation that is explicitly *not* about the controversial topic to be engaged later in the evening. This simple table fellowship embodies a gentle hospitality which can crack open any defensive postures participants might have been tempted to retreat into. After the meal the entire group is shown a short – and humorous – video about the conversational agreement they are being invited to make, and then they are split into smaller groups which convene around a table with a table host.

The conversation then proceeds through three rounds of carefully structured questions. The questions begin with a general invitation to state why they have come – for instance, “Tell us

about why you decided to come to this conversation today. You could be doing many other things, but you chose to come here. What was the “pull” of this event?” Each participant is given two minutes to answer this question, with participants timing each other. Rather like a “talking stick,” a phone set to a two-minute alarm is passed around the group, so that one person times while another person speaks, then the phone is passed to the person who has just spoken and s/he times the next person until each person at the table (with the exception of the table host, who remains a facilitator/observer rather than a participant) has spoken. The second question is generally one which invites reflection on how one’s background experiences contribute to one’s position. For instance, in a conversation on criminal justice and local policing the question was “What in your own background or core commitments shapes your experience of the criminal justice system at the level of local policing?” Again, each person has the opportunity to answer the question in a limited amount of time, and the task of timing the responses is given to each person one at a time. The third question invites participants to reflect on what is messy or unresolved in their position. For instance, in the marriage debate the question was “within your own perspective, what questions do you still wrestle with?”

During these three rounds of questions, there is no opportunity or invitation for follow-up, instead, people are asked simply to listen, and to jot down any questions they might like to ask of other circle participants on pads of paper which are provided. Finally, after all three rounds have been completed, the group is invited into a “popcorn” round of questions. This is the time when real dialogue begins to occur, because participants have had the chance to practice with the guidelines in a tightly structured way, and now can use that experience to invite open reflection with each other.

The key in each of these structured conversations, whether it is the story circle, the story titling exercise, or the larger respectful conversation project – is that participants are invited into a space that “holds them” in ways that create room for deeper listening, for more respectful engagement, indeed, that create room for practicing a kind of “spirituality of displacement” (to use Bevan’s term) that can open us up, that can become deeper hospitality for those of us schooled in cultures which have not practiced such hospitality for far too long.

Keeping in mind this need to create such structures of participation, the final example I want to use offers a clear API with which to connect the bones and flesh of our religious beliefs with the fluid and rapidly changing stories of digital media. This example draws on the classic work of Patricia O’Connell Killen, who along with John de Beer, articulated a practice for theological reflection back in the early 90’s which has proven remarkably fruitful even as our contexts have shifted and changed (1994). Her process invites participants to walk through a series of reflective prompts, and in doing so to perceive resonances between their own experiences and those of scripture and tradition. I commend the book to you, as she goes into much greater depth than I can here, and she offers many permutations of the process.

I have found that this is a process which works best in a setting in which there are at least a few participants who have some degree of familiarity with scripture and tradition. A retreat setting, for instance, led by someone with that knowledge. Or in a classroom or other formal learning space. I have taken Killen’s process and tweaked it just a bit so that the experience participants are reflecting upon is centered on a television commercial. There are myriad commercials that

are rich sources of such reflection (see *Storyingfaith.org* for more), but here where I have been reflecting upon hospitality, and where this collaborative session has focused on the hospitality Abraham showed to three visitors as told in Genesis 18, it seems most appropriate to use a commercial that centers around food and hospitality.

My practice is to show a television commercial three times – that is, to invite participants to view it once without doing anything other than experiencing it. The second and third times I ask them to attend to their physical and emotional responses to the commercial. From there I walk them through Killen’s process (see Appendix One of this paper for the specific questions I use). Here I will use the 2017 President’s Choice commercial as my example. This commercial was produced in 2017 for the brand President’s Choice, which is a private label/store brand of Loblaw Companies Limited, a grocery chain of more than 2000 stores in Canada.

The commercial is a short narrative which portrays people caught up in their phones and isolated from each other. One young woman notes this isolation and sets up a potluck dinner in the hallway of her condominium. Soon many diverse residents join in and there is a clear sense of shared, public enjoyment. The commercial ends with a small child inviting one last person from the floor to join the potluck.

There are myriad ways in which to connect to this commercial, and all of the people to whom I have shown it – mostly through this exercise – have found deep meaning in it. The commercial both invites reflection upon a perception of isolation caused by digital phones, and “solves” that problem through inviting table fellowship. Readers of this essay who are steeped in religious traditions are likely already imagining potential connections to stories and practices from their tradition.

I have mostly invited participation in this exercise in predominately Christian communities, so the stories that emerge include all four gospels’ telling of the so-called “Last Supper,” the Isaiah 11 text about “letting a little child lead them,” and the Matthew 18 text about “become like children.” In discussion I have also heard the Genesis 18 text emerge, as the conversation widens to talk about hospitality more generally, and the ways in which our current practices do or do not ignite such hospitality.

Television commercials – at least the ones with which I practice this exercise – are beautifully produced short form narratives. They are very effective at eliciting some form of desire, some kind of yearning, which their audience might reasonably expect to exhibit. I find what is necessary is to help people to name the yearning, and then to identify a deeper response than whatever “product” the commercial is attempting to salve that yearning through. I use the word “salve” quite intentionally, because it has been my experience that commercial forms of digital media quite often promise a certain kind of “salvation” through purchase. I would like to support a different form of agency all together: both personal agency through creative reflection, as well as reflection upon God’s agency.

I wrote near the beginning of this paper about the need to find an “API” – or application programming interface – that can connect our experiences within digital media with the flesh and bones of our religious imagination and practices. Killen’s process is one such API. My

colleagues in this collaborative session have offered two other very rich processes. My hope is that our work here will ignite your own imagination for sharing practices which can open us up to deep hospitality to strangers, and those from whom we are estranged.

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Appendix One: An exercise in theological imagination

1. Watch a tv commercial, three times in a row. (cf. <http://www.storyingfaith.org/archives/780> for examples)
2. Begin by attending to your physical and emotional responses to this piece. What adjectives come to mind to describe how you are feeling right now? Try not to judge yourself, simply write the words down quickly. Regardless of what the producer of the commercial might have intended, how did you experience it? Is there a word or a symbol or a theme that emerges from your listening to your feelings in relation to this commercial?
3. Pause for a moment, and sit with that word or symbol. How might God be present and calling to you? What is existence like within this symbol? What is life-giving and joy-filled about it? What is broken or sorrowing about it? What possibilities for healing and newness exist within it? Write down your thoughts as they occur to you, in brainstorming mode.
4. Take that theme/symbol/word to scripture. Brainstorm a list of places/stories/passages in scripture where this theme/symbol/word emerges for you or resonates with you. Avoid asking why a passage or passages emerged for you. Simply trust that a possible connection exists.
5. Pick one of these passages and find it in the bible (a google search can often help you find it). Read the passage a couple of times, think about what surrounds it in the text. Ask the same questions you asked initially of your theme/symbol/word, now in relation to this passage: what is existence like here? what is full of joy? what is broken or sorrowing about this passage? are there possibilities for newness and healing within it?
6. Give yourself some space to think about what has emerged for you as asked these questions. What resonances and explorations accompanied this process? Have any insights emerged for you from this conversation between a piece of pop culture and the structures of faith? Have any pressing questions emerged for you? Are you being called in any way to direct or concrete action?
7. Finally, how will you take whatever you might have learned from this process into your daily living? Write down at least one intentional step you will take. When will you begin? Who will support you?

(based on *The Art of Theological Reflection*, Patricia O'Connell Killen, John deBeer; New York: Crossroad Press, 1996; p. 88-89)

Appendix Two: Public Agreements

The Forum for Theological Exploration's "vocation care agreement"

Covenant of Presence

1. *Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome.* Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Welcome others into this story space and presume you are welcome as well.

2. *Listen Generously.* Listen intently to what is said; listen to the feelings beneath the words. As Quaker Douglas Steere writes, "To listen another's soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest gift we can offer to another."

3. *Author Your Story.* We all have a story. Some might say, "I don't have a story" or "a story worth telling," but you do and the world is in need of hearing it. You must claim authorship of your own story and learn to tell it to others so they might understand you, be inspired by you and discover what calls you to be who you are, to do what you do or to love what you love.

4. *We come as equals.* We don't have the same gifts, limits or experiences, but no person's gifts, limits or experiences are more or less important than another's.

5. *It is never "share or die."* You will be invited to share stories in pairs and in a large group. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate.

6. *No fixing.* We are not here to set someone else straight, right a wrong, or provide therapy. We are here to witness God's presence and movement in the sacred stories we share.

7. *Suspend judgment.* Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgments and reactions, we can listen to another person, and to ourselves, more fully.

8. *Turn to wonder.* If you find yourself becoming judgmental or cynical, try turning to wonder: "I wonder why she shared that story or made those choices?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me?" "I wonder what he's feeling right now?"

(This agreement can be found in the Fund for Theological Education's Guide to Vocation Care, and is based on a set of touchstones first written by the Center for Courage and Renewal).

The MN Respectful Conversations Agreement

- a. **Speak for oneself;** Use “I statements.” Own and offer your thoughts and feelings honestly; avoid grand pronouncements or stating positions of others
- b. **Practice respect** in speaking and listening; accept that others may have different views, without needing to debate or set them straight.
- c. **Be brief** in comments; honor timeframes and refrain from interrupting
- d. **Listen carefully**, especially when something is hard to accept; suspend judgment
- e. **Respect confidentiality:** After the conversation, do not attach names to comments made without permission
- f. **Allow people to pass**, or pass for now, if they are not ready or willing to respond to a question

(<http://www.mnchurches.org/respectfulcommunities/respectfulconversations.html>)

Title: The classroom – place and space of interfaith encounters

An exploration of the complexity and the interrelatedness between theoretical concepts and practical situations of interfaith education in a secular(ized/izing) age¹

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Introduction

Religious Education is under pressure in a secular/secularizing age. Efforts are made to include in Religious Education non-religious and secular worldviews. Other scholars defend the inclusion of religious and other worldviews in citizenship education. In our presentation we start with revisiting the concept of faith as an encompassing concept for the different ways people commit themselves to particular value- and life-orientations. In the second section we present the disturbing quantity of different concepts used for the inter-aspect of education including and elaborating upon peoples' different commitments. In the third section we take a look at two promising theoretical perspectives regarding classroom practices of 'inter'-education. The fourth section is dedicated to the evaluation of 'best practices'. We end our presentation with some preliminary conclusions and recommendations for further research.

1. The concept of 'faith' revisited

Our revisit of the concept of 'faith' starts with the exploration of the way James Fowler in his publication 'Faith Development', opening up new horizons. Fowler describes the concept of 'faith', and the distinction between faith, religion and belief. For Fowler faith is a verb. 'Faith is a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose (Fowler 1981, 4). Fowler follows Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his definition of religion as a 'cumulative tradition' that in its many forms addresses "the mundane cause" that awakens present faith' (ibid., 9). Belief – in line with Smith - for Fowler is 'the holding of certain ideas'(ibid., 11). In the course of the 'awakening of present faith' Bob Jackson (2002) distinguishes the just representation of religion(s), the interpretation thereof and reflection thereupon by the pupil, resulting in what he calls edification, which comes close to what Fowler means by 'faith development'. Faith development seems to be a relational process, and as such, interfaith education seems to be a *pleonasm*, since the 'inter'-aspect is already included in the concept of 'faith' and its developmental processes.

The concept of 'interfaith education' is articulated in comparing it with 'intercultural education', 'interreligious education' and 'inter-worldview education'. This theoretical investigation discloses the close relation between context and understanding. Within the English-speaking world, the concept 'interfaith education' is explicitly used instead of other neighboring terms, despite their overlapping consensus, i.e. in promoting mutual understanding and reciprocal respect among pupils, thus contributing to solidarity and peace. Contrary to the English-speaking world, European countries seem to favor the concepts of religion and worldview in relation to intercultural education (Jackson, 2014; Miedema, 2017).

¹ This presentation is based on our research, initiated at the United Religions Initiative (URI) Europe meeting in 2015 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. The results of this research are extensively described in 'Interfaith Education for All: Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action' (Eds. Wielzen & Ter Avest 2017).

However, 'worldview' encompasses both religious and non-religious, i.e. secular systems of 'faith', such as, individualism, atheism, consumerism, and capitalism. (Smart, 1984; Valk, 2007, 2010, 2017). Worldview is a view or vision of life and on life. It is something each person has, and something s/he develops in greater or lesser degrees of complexity as s/he journeys through life. (Naugle, 2002; Sunshine, 2009). With the concept of 'faith' the emotional commitment to a value- or life-orientation is articulated.

Interfaith education in our view is a way of introducing pupils in the world they belong to because of their birth and upbringing. In this world the child is exposed to ever present signals inviting/challenging processes of meaning giving/-finding – a construction of meaning that is imbued with the language of plausibility in the child's world (Taylor, 2007; Groot, 2017). It is the invitation to developmental processes that is stimulated in interfaith education. Interfaith education in our view should be part and parcel of all children's education, independent of the worldview or life orientation that inspires their parents in raising their children by way of their non-professional and implicit pedagogical activities at home. The 'inter'- aspect points to the radical dialogical approach in interfaith education (see Wielzen & Ter Avest, 2017, 273 ff).

2. Different scholars, different practitioners, different concepts of 'inter'-education

The different theoretical definitions of interfaith education and its neighboring concepts, as well as the variety of concrete classroom practices, challenge what is called a 'conversational analysis' (Genç, Ter Avest, Miedema 2011) of the definitions and their practices in different contexts. Whereas one scholar uses the concept of interreligious education in the sense of the mere presence of pupils with different ethnic, cultural and (religious or secular worldview) backgrounds in their classes, another scholar points to conversation and dialogue as the core of the very same concept. A different interpretation can be read in between the lines in one of the 'examples of good practice', that is the openness for information about different religious and secular worldviews. In the unruly practice of a classroom situation this concept seems to be interpreted as clarification of each pupil's point of view and a mere exchange of each other's background.

2.a Interrelatedness of theoretical concepts and every day's practice

In the exploration of practical situations of what is called by teachers themselves as 'interfaith education' the complexity of the classroom situation is presented; the complexity of flexibly balancing between the teacher's own faith commitment and doing justice to the pupils in the context of the school with its mission and vision on (inter)religious education (Kunneman 2013), as well as the complexity of balancing between tradition and innovation. 'No shining without grinding'. Or, stated in another way: the tangible tension between what is transmitted in stories and narrations of different (religious) worldview traditions and the need for transformation in a secular(ized/izing) age. This is experienced in different contexts (from Finland to Turkey, from the Netherlands to Malaysia), and approached from different theological and pedagogical perspectives.

However different various authors' approaches are, the trend is to present what is given in traditions and adapt it in such a way that pupils recognize their own everyday experiential knowledge and acknowledge the difference with 'the other'. This facilitates the developmental process as Jackson (1997) describes this in his 'interpretive approach' - facilitating transformation and at the same time caring for the vulnerability of pupils who are challenged to leave their comfort zone and be open for the intended transformational processes.

The theoretical concepts related to religious and non-religious faith and worldviews connect increasingly to classroom settings in plural societies. These purveys to ‘the classroom as a space for interfaith encounters.’

There are several theoretical models underlying interfaith education and tested in research that can enhance the educability of pupils and students in light of the various intentions of interfaith education (De Jong, 2017). We will limit ourselves to two of these.

3. Promising theoretical perspectives

In this section we present two models for ‘inter’-faith education – both of them crossing boundaries of academic domains. The first one is a transformative model for Islamic RE from a psychological developmental perspective based on Islamic pedagogical principles which, however, is in our view a workable method in other than Islamic contexts. The other model takes the perspective of citizenship education in an plural linguistic context.

3a. Transformative model for Islamic RE

One of the models for transformative teaching and learning is described by Abdullah Sahin (2014). This transformative model (Sahin 2014), combines critical education with contemporary reflective pedagogies. Sahin discusses the formation of rigid religiosities – what is called by Taylor (2007) ‘fanatism’ a way to combat post-modern life and face the doubts accompanying the post-modern era. In order to practice such a transformative pedagogy in classrooms, it’s urgently needed to implement in teacher training a subject called ‘religious literacy’, in the first place in its literal sense of language needed to express experiences regarding one’s own positionality-in-context. It is the language that is available (‘literacy’) that enables us to name our experiences, communicate them and articulate them (Groot, 2017). But included in ‘religious literacy’ is also knowledge about the history of the development of different worldview traditions, their historical encounters and the way they are influenced by these encounters – whether in peace or in religious conflicts (Taylor, 2007). In combination with the development of teachers’ religious literacy, the training of intercultural and interreligious communication is urgently needed (De Jong, 2017). Knowing about and practicing communication strategies that enable partners in the dialogue (teacher and pupils, classmates among each other) to express their worldview position and learn from and with each other is preconditional for interfaith education. Included in teacher training this comes close to *Bildung*, and will enable (novice) teachers to make interfaith education an integral part of the general education of all children in primary school.

3b. Citizenship education in a plural linguistic context

An other challenging model is presented by Hussien et al. (2017), elaborated upon by Lafrarchi (2017). Hikmah pedagogy (Hikmah is originally an Arabic word, which literally means wisdom) is based on the Philosophy for Children program (P4C), introduced by Matthew Lipman in the early 1970s as a form of philosophy based education in the classroom (Hussien et al. 2017). Lipman believed that philosophy was the appropriate tool to trigger and develop children’s natural curiosity through the teaching and learning process. One of the aims of P4C is to develop and establish a Community of Inquiry (CoI) in the classroom. Lipman introduced a philosophical thinking programme for primary students through a series of novels.

Hikmah pedagogy, according to Hussien et al. (2017) can help to create a Community of Inquiry as a safe space in the classroom (Community of Inquiry; CoI). Such a safe classroom context facilitates pupils to learn to inquire and question ordinary and everyday subjects with the purpose of engaging in deep thinking and arriving at a better understanding of an issue collaboratively. The CoI encourages students to independently think and consider different

answers to the questions raised, doing so at the end of the day arriving at on own and authentic positionality regarding the subject at stake. Furthermore, students/pupils learn not to hastily assume that there is only one right answer to an issue. Instead, students learn that it is quite impossible to arrive at one final answer, since some answers can be considered as better than others based on their evidences or argument. Following Lipman's approach, and considering the plural (regarding language and ethnicity) context of classrooms these days P4C can be transformed and include religious novels and ethical values relevant to the plural society in Malaysia (Hussien et al. 2017), and as Lafrarchi convincingly argues also in the Belgian/Flandres' context characterized by diversity, *if* the right conditions are met, such as the proper training of teachers to implement such pedagogical strategies. (Lafrarchi 2017).

4. The classroom – place of interfaith encounters

Preliminary results of the analysis of the examples of classroom conversations show that the classroom as a safe space is a 'must' for interfaith education. Safe for each and every participant in the dialogue. Dialogue is a skill to be learnt by all. Each of the participants should feel free and be encouraged to express her/his thoughts – be it a adhering to the majority or representing a minority's position. Preconditional for entering into a dialogue is the ability to structure one's thoughts and express them in a language understood by the partners in dialogue. Additionally, each participant should be able to evaluate and value an other's opinion or contribution; empathy is a basic quality to be developed in each partner in dialogue. Last but not least is the will to listen to the other – not only to the words spoken but even more so to the intentions included in the language-in-context (Ter Avest 2011; see also the 'dialogue hand'-method (Bouva and Wielzen, 2017, pp. 208-209; Searle's speech act theory as discussed by De Jong, 2017). A good relationship between the teacher and the pupils, and the pupils among themselves, paired with the teacher's qualities of critical thinking and openness for a child centered approach, and the competency for dialogue seem to be preconditional to learn to talk to each other, to celebrate the richness and stand the complexity of diversity, and learn from each other the benefit of intercultural and interreligious exchange. "Encounter is the key term for formation of the self" (Beyza Bilgin). Moreover, in order to turn conflicts in a constructive pedagogical strategy the teacher must be able to take her/his responsibility 'on the spot', and decide for the best way of responding to the conflictuous situation (Kelchterman 2012; Todd 2007). Each participant should be able to evaluate their classmates' contributions as if they were 'stepping into someone else's shoes'; empathy is a basic quality to be developed in each partner in dialogue. Last but not least is the will to listen to the other – not only to the words spoken but even more so to the intentions included in the language-in-context (Ter Avest 2011).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

A good relationship between the teacher and the pupils, and the pupils among themselves, paired with the teacher's qualities of critical thinking and openness for a child centered approach, next to mastering the competency for dialogue are preconditional to learn to talk to each other, to embrace the richness and stand the complexity of diversity, and learn from each other the benefit of intercultural and interreligious exchange. Next to that, in order to turn conflicts in a constructive pedagogical strategy the teacher should be able to take her/his responsibility 'on the spot', and decide for the best way of responding to the conflictuous situation (Kelchterman 2012; Todd 2007). It's all about the teacher – being at the centre of the educational process. It's all about the teacher – as a pedagogue being at the center and the first responsible person in the service of the teaching and learning process of the child (Brown Wright, 2011, pp.93-94). As a child of one's time, it is the personal biographical and

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professional development, and the competency to respond in a way that makes sense to the challenges of encounter in a diverse classroom (Ter Avest & Bakker 2016; Sahin 2014) that turns the classroom into a safe place - a place of interfaith encounter. As is shown in some of the 'best practices' a narrative approach - doing justice to the narrations of worldviews as well as recognizing the value orientation in the personal stories of children - in particular seems to be a constructive way to explore and embrace differences, and respond to the ongoing process of interfaith education in the classroom.

We recommend teacher training, focusing on the complexity of (hybrid) religious/secular identity development of primary school pupils, socialized in a secular age (Taylor 2007), an age of transformation of cultural and religious traditions - ongoing work-in-progress. "When children and their teachers encounter the religion of other people it is like meeting another world. The same is true of the situation in which one meets a disabled person" (John Hull). Preconditional is teachers' awareness of possible discrepancies between 'theory in use' and 'espoused theory', and their own positionality as constituent part of the development of their normative professionalism (Gardner et al. 2017; Gardner 2017). This way of including teachers' *Bildung* in teacher training will open up a space for radical dialogical faith education for all.

For interfaith education to be transformative, 'safe spaces' are required where dialogue is learnt by practice and interaction, encounter and conversation, trial and error. It not only requires a physical place, but even more so an intellectual and affectionate space for the child to be heard and seen entirely as an interdependent person. In such a context, the child learns to embrace diversity as an intrinsic part of his/her social life, and stand it in case of insurmountable differences.

It is our contention that such a safe space is conducive to communicating about self and others and move beyond tolerating differences to accepting and appreciating diversity in whatever form it manifests itself.

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“2017 REA Annual Meeting, Nov 3-5, St. Louis”

The Contribution of the Religious Culture and Ethics Course on the Integration of Children of Syrian Refugees—Example of City of Adana/Turkey”

ABSTRACT

This study looks into the contribution of the Religious Culture and Ethics Course to the integration of children from Syria. It is a required course for grades 4 through 12 and it aims to facilitate their integration into the larger society they are currently living in by developing their literacy in religion. The research question is how much this course affected their adaptation and adjustment to the society considering the fact that their cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds are different from those around them. To this end, interviews were held with a group of teachers who teach this class in Adana, Turkey. The results showed us how this course functioned within the context of the Syrian children and their education in Turkey, identified the kinds of problems that cropped up along the way, and suggested some solutions.

Introduction

Migration is a global problem which almost every country has to deal with in 21 century. The main reasons for the migration are war, economic and social problems, famine, and so on. According to UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2016), there are 65.6 million people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes (22.5 million refugees, 2.8 million asylum-seekers, and 40.3 million internally displaced persons) by the end of 2016.

Turkey is one of the main countries that have done an admirable job to handle migration problem. Because it is geographically situated at such crossroads between Asia and Europe, she has hosted many immigrants and refugees throughout her history. The war in Syria that has been going on since 2011 has thus far forced about 6 million refugees to cross the border into Turkey. It started with small groups in the beginning and it reached 500 thousand people in 2013. This number increased gradually, culminating in approximately 3 million in 2016. Turkey introduced new laws and regulations to control and handle the flow of refugees trying her best to meet their basic needs. Under the international law for children's rights, Turkey has provided refugee children with opportunities to continue their education. In 2014 the Ministry of Education issued a statement that all refugees will be legally able to attend schools either in temporary education centers /accommodation centers or in regular government public schools.

The Syrian children in the accommodation centers and temporary education were instructed in Arabic while the others at regular schools have education in Turkish. It is not hard to guess that these children are experiencing a lot of hardships throughout their educational endeavors in Turkey, the main one of which is integration and adaptation into the cultural environment they

find themselves in. The language barrier and the psychological trauma they experience are also among the conditions they need to tackle.

In this sense, our argument is that The Religious Culture and Ethics Course can be considered to be a good venue where such efforts are realized. It is possible to say that this course can function in such a way to facilitate the adjustment and adaptation of the said students within the new community they now live in, where they are faced with having to get to know the cultural values of that community.

General information about Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Although Turkish authorities have called them as “guests”, the protection which is provided for Syrians in Turkey is called “Temporary Protection.” This protection has three main components. While the first component of it is to accept people with open-border policy, the second one is to have the non-refoulment¹ policy and the third one is to provide the basic and immediate needs of people who are under the temporary protection (Kaya& Eren, 2014:p. 32)². Turkey organizes the said temporary protection under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection which was approved by the President on 10.04.2013 and published in the Official Gazette No. 28615 dated 11.04.2013 (GOM, 2017). Under the protection of this law, Syrian People get the Temporary Protection ID card for achieving health and educational services.

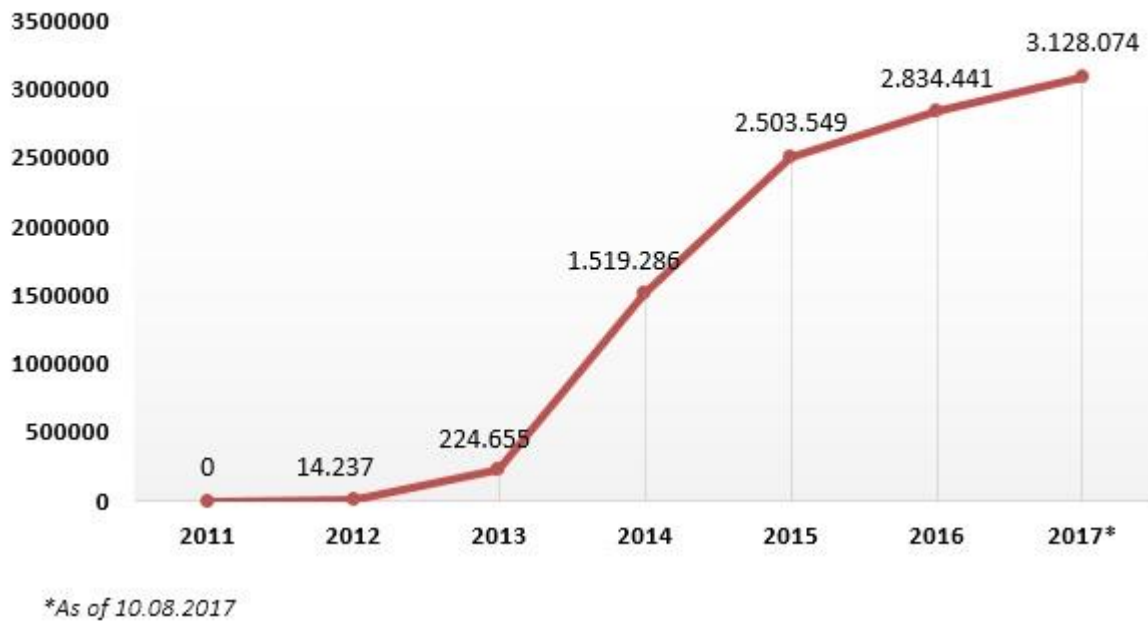
According to the ministry of interior directorate general of migration management, the population of Syrians in Turkey is more than 3 million which 1.675.331 of that population is man and 1.452.743 of that are the woman by 2017. On the other hand, almost half of the population (1.441.387) is between 0-18 years old by 2017(GOM, 2017).

¹ non-Refoulment policy means that “No Contracting State shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” Note on Non-Refoulement (Submitted by the High Commissioner), <http://www.unhcr.org/excom/scip/3ae68ccd10/note-non-refoulement-submitted-high-commissioner.html>

² Even though “refugee” is the most common word for people who are displaced, Syrians who are forced to leave their countries are not defined as “refugees” because of the 1951 Geneva Convention which is the first international convention that defines “the statutes of refugees.” See. Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, by UNCHR <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf> The term which is used by Turkish authorities for Syrians is “the Syrians Under Temporary Protection.”

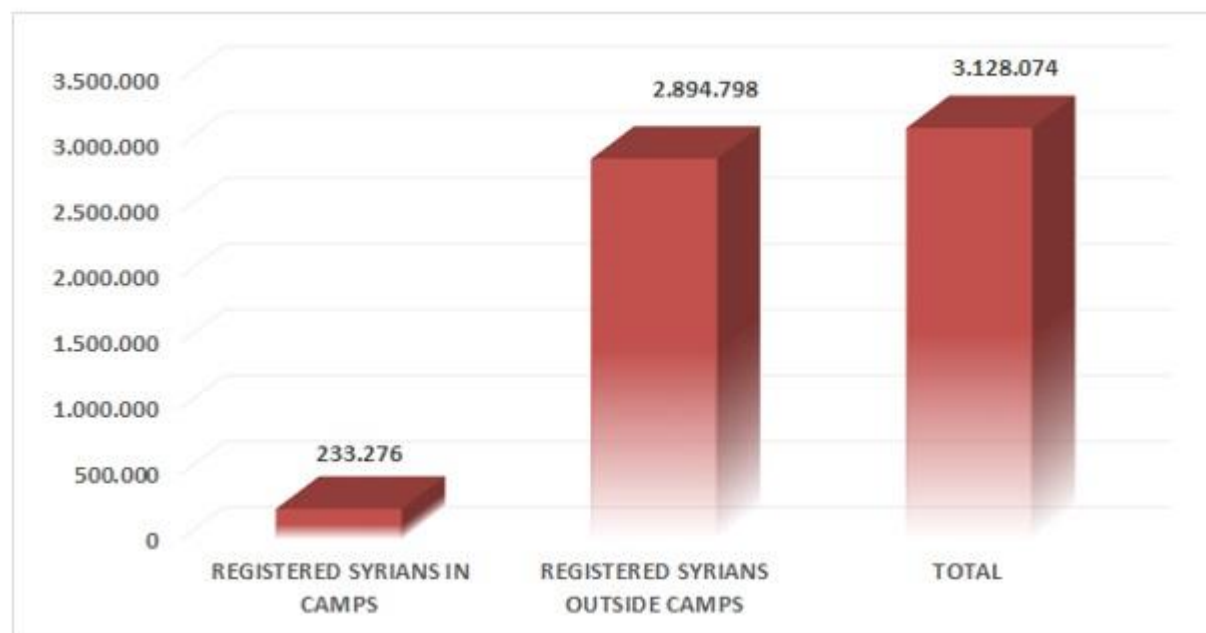
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NUMBER OF SYRIANS UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION PER YEAR



There are many accommodation centers (camps) for Syrian Refugees which settled by Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency. Although there are many accommodation centers (camps) for Syrians, many of them live outside of the accommodation centers. The following chart shows the number of the Syrian in and outside of the accommodation centers (GOM, 2017).

SYRIANS UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION STAYING IN AND OUTSIDE OF ACCOMMODATION CENTERS



As we can see on the chart, most of the population of Syrians under the temporary protection live outside of the accommodation centers. Syrians who live outside of the accommodation centers live in almost every province of Turkey. Istanbul which had 500.084 Syrians by August 2017 is the number one city which Syrian refugees choose to live in. Adana, the city we conducted our research in, was the fifth city chosen by 166.205 Syrians by August 2017(GOM, 2017).

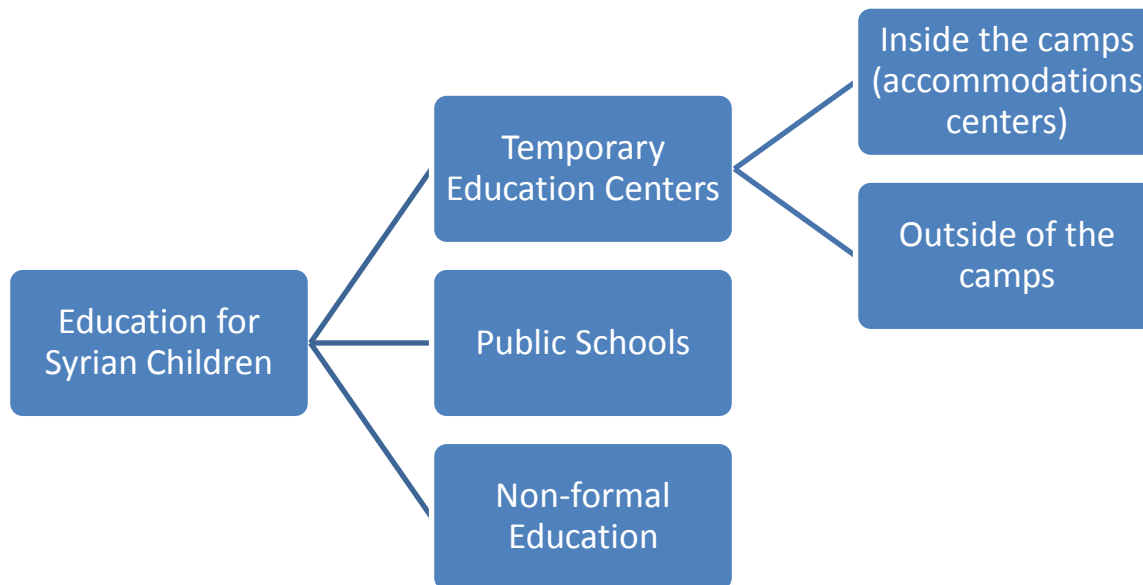
Education for Syrians under Temporary Protection

Even though the official procedure for Syrian's Education in Turkey started in 2012, the main work was accomplished in 2014. On 23 September 2014, The most comprehensive convention was declared for protecting the educational rights of Syrians who are under the temporary protection in Turkey (Emin, 2016:p.14). According to this convention, children who fled from their countries are accepted to public schools without residence permit except for higher (college) education and the online education system was installed for their educational data separate from Turkish student (MEB, 2014/21).

Almost half the Syrians in Turkey are children who are 0-18 years old. Although Turkey has made a tremendous effort to provide education for Syrian children, according to the Ministry of National Education, while there are 294.112 Syrian children attend the schools in temporary education centers, there are 169.010 Syrian children who continue their education in regular public schools in 2017 (ERG, 2017). It seems that enrollment rate among Syrians is increasing in parallel with the Turkish Government efforts. The reason for the high enrollment rate of Syrian Children in temporary education centers rather in Turkish government run public schools is mainly the language barrier. Families have chosen temporary education centers more because of the language of education which is Arabic. On the other hand, school enrollment rate changes according to

educational level and grades. For instance, while elementary grades have the highest enrollment rates for Syrian children, eleventh and twelve grades have the lowest ones. While girls are subject to early marriage during secondary /high school education, male students work outside of the schools to help their families financially. This reality is the main reason for decreasing the school attendance (Coskun&Emin, 2016, p.10).

There are some alternatives for Syrian children in Turkey. Those are as follows:



Temporary Education Centers: In total there are 425 temporary education centers in 21 cities in Turkey. While 36 of these centers are located in accommodation centers (inside the camps), 389 of them are situated outside of the camps. There are currently 10 provinces which have accommodation centers (Coskun&Emin, 2016, p.18). According to Ministry of National Education, the number of the temporary education centers is increasing in parallel with the number of school age children from Syria.

The curriculum in temporary education centers was mainly Turkish curriculum with Arabic interpretation in the 2011-2012 academic year, but in the 2012-2013 academic year, Turkey tacitly decided to adopt reviewed Syrian curriculum by Syrian Educational Commission and use it alongside the weekly Turkish Language Education.

Educational materials have been prepared and also revised by the same commission for each grade. The language of education is Arabic in these centers and the Turkish Government recruits Syrian teachers as volunteers for teaching and facilitating the process. There were 3650 volunteer teachers who work at the accommodation centers by 2015 (UNICEF, 2015, p.10-11).

The reason for providing education in Arabic to Syrian Children is declared that Turkish Government authorities accept Syrians as “guests” who will return to their countries and try to not leave any child left behind their education in the host community (Seydi, 2014:p.275).

Those centers are mainly public schools which are used for native children in the morning and for Syrian children in the afternoon. There are also some separate schools under the control of municipalities for Syrian children, especially in certain cities like Gaziantep and Kilis which have much more Syrian population because they are just across the border of Syria.

Public Schools: Syrian Children who have been educated in public schools have regular Turkish Education in Turkish. This Education which requires 1-12 compulsory year period is under the control of the Ministry of National Education. Although enrollment of the public school has been possible for Syrian children from onset of the war, some official requirements like residence permit, language barrier, and economic challenges remained among the main factors of the low rate of the enrollment in public schools until the Turkish Ministry of National Education lifted the residence permit requirement to attend the public schools for Syrian Children in 2014 (UNICEF, 2015:6).

Non-Formal Education: Non-formal education is mostly pre-school for children and vocational, life skills and literacy education for adolescents and adults. There are also some Koranic schools in accommodation centers for Syrian people in Turkey. Approximately 5,338 children participated in non-formal and informal education opportunities by 2016 (3R, 2016).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology. The data collection was done through interviews. Semi structured interview questions sought answers to these questions:

- What are the similarities and the differences between Syrian refugee students and their Turkish counterparts?
- How did the Religion and Ethics course contribute to the integration of refugee students into the Turkish culture and community?
- What did the students find the most and the least interesting topics within the course?
- What are the most frequently asked question by the refugee students in these classes?
- What are the most common problems encountered in terms of the refugee children's adjustment?

Collecting and Analyzing the Data

Through snowball sampling, 11 teachers who taught the said course were interviewed and the data was analyzed with the help of NVivo 8 data analysis software. The study was limited within the city of Adana to 2017 and the reason for the choice of this city was because it is the one of the major cities that received many refugees from Syria.

FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

PARICIPANTS	SEX	AGE	EMPLOYEM ENT	SCHOOL OF EMPLOYE MENT	UNDERGRADUA TE INSTITUTION	GRADUATE DEGREE
p1	Femal e	28	1 year	Elementary	Theology	No
P2	Femal e	33	11 years	Elementary	RAE	No
P3	Male	25	2 years	High School	Theology	No
P4	Femal e	29	8 years	Middle School	RAE	No
P5	Femal e	42	17 years	Middle School	Theology	No
P6	Male	42	13 years	Middle School	Theology	No
P7	Femal e	24	2 years	Elementary	RAE	No
P8	Femal e	29	5 years	Middle School	RAE	No
P9	Femal e	27	5 years	Elementary	RAE	No
P10	Male	32	6 years	Middle School	RAE	Yes
P11	Male	23	1 year	Middle School	RAE	No

As can be seen in the table above, 7 out of 11 participating teachers in our research were female and 5 male. The participants were aged between 23 and 42 and their experience in teaching ranged from 1 year to 17. 4 of the these teachers were teaching at elementary schools, 6 middle school and 1 at high school. 4 participants had their bachelor's degrees in the School of Theology and 6 completed the RAE (Religion and Ethic Studies) program at the School of Theology while only one teacher had their master's degree in the related field.

Similarities and Differences (I and other)

Similarities and differences between the students from Syria, who are under temporary protection and their Turkish counterparts will play a role in their integration into the culture of the host country. It is expected that the more similarities exist, the easier the integration is going to be. Within the scope of this study, the topics emphasized under the similarities between these two groups were religious beliefs and cultural practices. Some concepts within these topics were belief system, worshipping practices, respect for the parents, the perceived importance of religious holidays and sacred nights within the Islamic belief, the use of prophet names and their companions in daily language. For instance, here is what P7 said in relation to this topic, “ *Since the refugee*

students that I teach are Turkmens and are of Hanafi/Sunni conviction, we did not have problems in religious matters. Their religious beliefs and practices are almost the same as ours.”

On the other hand, because all the Syrians are not affiliated with same sects and denominations, it was determined that differences between the two cultures were religious practices/different schools of jurisprudence called sects, their cultural and educational readiness, the different levels of habits of asking questions. P8 commented on this topic as, *“While Syrian students emphasized the worshipping practices of the religion, the Turkish counterparts deemed the dimension of belief more important. Furthermore, Syrian girls and boys will differ in their choice of clothing and religious covering.”* Similarly, P2 stated, *“We are having problems regarding the daily prayers and sectoral differences.”*

It is possible to deduce from the teachers’ statements that although having same religion is an advantage for integration, denominational differences can define as differences.

The Contributions of the Religion and Ethics Course in the Integration (I exist with my differences and I am valuable)

The Religion and Ethics course aims, in its vision and content, to achieve the acceptance of the other while respecting their differences. Therefore, one of the objectives is to make people realize the presence of differences is not a reason for split and estrangement but on the contrary a source of richness and diversity. Most of the differences apparent in religion stem from cultural customs and schools of madhabs; therefore the religion and ethics course with its overarching themes is the perfect candidate for this purpose. Almost all participants emphasized on the accommodating nature of the RAE course and that they felt the course contributed to their efforts to better understand the differences among people.

For example, P10 said, *“The Religion course has a very uniting feature. This is what we teach the kids. Our Turkish students used to exclude the Syrian children. Then we told them that our religion teaches us we were brothers and sisters in Islam. When we explained to them that we should open our doors when they are in need, their reactions changed and they became more friendly.”*

Correspondingly, (P4) it was evident that the RAE course helped the students make connections to their daily lives and enabled them to better communicate with those who had different religious and cultural backgrounds as well as (P2 and P10) bringing them closer to each other with love and understanding. (P1)

P11: *“I would make sure that I point it out when a Syrian student was absent. I always tell them we should respect all outsiders and lend our helping hands when they need it. I tell them that maybe they are not in a position to be understanding the circumstances they are in. I ask them to be respectful realizing that they came from a different country and that their language is different than ours. Since the course is called Ethics, the students readily understand these.”* This quote shows what method the RAE course follows in making students understand the differences.

The Interest Syrian Shows in the RAE Course (I wonder)

Since the Religion and Ethics course includes the content that is already familiar to students, it is not surprising that there is much interest in it. That's why, the RAE course can be considered to be a favorite class within the educational curriculum and in which the students feel the need to express themselves. Although the majority of the students from Syria come from the same religious background, they still have different cultural convictions and thus they are in a position having to learn the culture of the host country and the way religion is practiced within that particular culture. This can be considered from one angle to be an enriching factor in their mutual efforts in communication. We should however note that the language barrier plays an important role in asking questions. The fact that the students do not have a good grasp of the Turkish language results in failures in communication and cause the questions to be very basic in nature or it all together stops their attempts to even ask. In this concept, the questions Syrian students ask in the RAE course the most are centered around the sins versus good deeds, what is allowed and what is forbidden in religion, the vocabulary and topics that they do not understand, abstract concepts and the questions that are usually asked in the high school entrance exams. For example, while P8 says *"Apart from the main content of the class, they ask about what is allowed and what is forbidden in religion."* P6, on the other hand, maintains that such questions are frequently voiced, *'What does look like? Is God in the mosque?.'* "

Where the Students fail or achieve in the RAE Course

While the RAE course interests the students in some areas, yet in some others, it does feel like a distant endeavor to students. This can be explained by stating the fact that the guest students come from similar religious backgrounds and yet they can be different interpretations and practices within the same area. This further causes the students to be successful in some areas and not so successful in others.

Therefore, the topics Syrian students are mostly interested in most and consequently are more successful at are memorization of Quranic chapters and prayers, narrating of prophetic stories, the madhabs/sects, learning to read Quran, hygiene practices, family and love and brotherhood. It is thus not surprising that the guest students, whose mother tongue is Arabic, are successful in learning how to read Quran, the memorization of Quranic chapters. For instance, P10 suggests that Syrian students *"do participate in narrating the prophetic stories and excitedly share their own versions."* And P5 adds *"Arabic prayers and stories are the most favorite topics."* The results of the research indicate that the other topics that are different from their own culture interested them for the reason that they were different than what they were used to. For instance, topics such as the differences in family structure and differences in hygiene practices turned out to be different and therefore interesting areas for them.

On the other hand, Syrian children were not very successful and therefore did not enjoy the topics that are centered around the ethics, the interpretation of some concepts, the national and native areas of interest, secularism and patriotic areas, which can be seen in what P9 says, *"They are having difficulties in areas where interpretation is needed due to the lack of language skills."* Similarly P6 says *"I realize that students feel bored in topics that are specifically concentrating on us as a nation since they do not quite understand them."*

Most Frequent Problems in the Class and Suggestions for Solutions

The most basic problem that we see in the RAE classes pertains to the language proficiency of the students. This also dovetails with the results from different studies in the field. The deficiency in language skills brings forward the communication problems, which furthermore leads to other problems where the students find themselves unable to contribute to the class discussions and creates obstacles in their socialization process. P8 exemplifies this by saying, *“The most common problem we face is the language deficiency in our students. It causes them problems in areas where they need to be able to understand the class content and when they need to express themselves in class. They tend to be not so eager to speak up their minds during class discussions and the reason for this is that they fear the reactions they might get from their classmates.”*

On the other hand, due to the humanitarian crises in their home country, Syrian students, who had to flee from their homeland, have serious psychological problems. Therefore, it is not unexpected that these kids, who escaped their own country that is torn apart with war and unrest, would have severe psychological problems especially when one realizes that many of them witnessed their family members murdered in front of their eyes. This psychological trauma causes them problems when they are to have basic human communication with friends in class, which impedes their integration process. The possibility of rejection by their classmates would further expand this already difficult situation for them. P5 says, *“Their classmates normally approach Syrian students in a not so friendly manner. They sarcastically call each other Syrians when they want to belittle them.”* Outside the class, it is common that they would not include Syrian students into their plays and games addressing them with mocking remarks. (P2) Still some other problems would be cited as the sectoral differences, the religious viewpoints of different interpretations, their daily life practices and cultural differences. For instance, P5 says, *“In the RAE classes, Syrian students tell us that they think we are not religious enough.”* We also see one of the main problems with these students is that of poor attendance, which is also confirmed by some other studies. The primary reason for this is that especially male students feel that they need to work to provide for their families as well as the fact that families sometimes just cannot afford financially to send their kids to school; also there are instances where families just keep moving from one place to another.

The solutions offered to these problems can be classified as those within school limits, off school limits and those that are both. The ones that are to be done within school boundaries are the activities that will enhance the tolerance and empathy among students and those that raise awareness about differences and equality. P11 says, *“The kids had prejudices. I searched as to what I can do about it. I found a relevant movie and story. After using them in class, I saw that prejudice is lessened.”*

In order to overcome the language deficiency in students, it might be suggested to offer extra complimentary language classes. Some teachers also suggested that students might be engaged in some activities where students may have some time together with their classmates. One of the teachers, P10, proposed, *“They should have sessions of games and play during the free range sessions.”*

Counselling sessions can be arranged to deal with their psychological issues especially in their native language, which should help them recover from the traumas they suffer from resulting in healthier behavioral patterns. The most important element in this endeavor would be teacher training. Ideally all teachers, but within the scopes of this research the teachers of RAE class,

should be offered in-service training. P10 explains, *“There should be an orientation session as they did to us for about two weeks, which was not enough.”*

Outside the scope of the school system, there should be cooperation with the families, where they are trained in this regard, which is thought to help them become aware of the issues lessening the prejudices against the refugees. Additionally, in order to help the students with their orientation some activities both in and also out of the school can be arranged. P1 says, *“In and out of the school, they should spend more time together, which should help with their orientation, as in educational, social, art and sport related contexts.”* P7 adds, *“I believe teachers should put more effort in order to achieve better integration by organizing activities that can be done with the whole group. Also to help the Syrian families socially mingle with their Turkish counterparts, some dinner events can be organized.”*

Although it is obvious that the RAE classes do play an important role in the integration of the Syrian families helping them adapt to their new environments, it is still necessary to come up with a long term strategy. In this regard, some new topics may be added as content into the current RAE course as well as new methods can be utilized to get a better result in dealing with the psychological problems of these students and their adaptation to the culture they now live in.

It is one of the themes that came up in our research that the RAE course seems to have the potential to contribute to dealing with the current cultural crises at hand especially when the content that would lend itself to integration issues is to be increased. With its content beyond the limitations of madhabs, our research demonstrated that the RAE course would suggest the sectoral differences is nothing but a richness in itself. P11 summarizes this idea as *“ We should add content where respect for different cultures is valued. We already do this although it is not specified in the curriculum. We should emphasize it more. Maybe some elective classes could be offered for those groups where such students exist.”*

Results and Suggestions

The RAE course is one of those classes that could contribute to the integration of the Syrian students who are under temporary protection into the Turkish culture with its content that emphasizes awareness in cultural issues, sharing, tolerance and religious literacy as well as teachings in belief systems, worshipping practices and Quranic studies. The similarities between the two cultures do prove to be helpful in this matter. The results of our study can be stated as:

- The RAE class helps enable the Syrian students integrate into the host culture.
- Syrian students have a big interest in this class since they happen to have the same religious background. The RAE classes can be thought of a good candidate in this integration since the religion shared by the two cultures provide a common ground to work on. Taking this class would hasten within the student the idea of belonging and being part of the culture they are in.
- The content that exists within the scope of this class such as the topics of helping others, respecting what is different, tolerance, responsibility taking and empathy should help the Syrian students who are prone to suffer from problems in these areas. It would

be beneficial even more if this class is enriched with various methods making it a ground for real life learning, which would result serving the integration better.

- Although many studies (Kaya and Kirac, 2016), (Emin, 2016) suggest that the main obstacle for the Syrian students seems to be the language deficiency, it is still easier to overcome this issue at the state schools where the language of instruction is in Turkish. The Syrian students have a better chance of socialization at the state schools where they receive their education rather than at the temporary assistance centers. This should be seen as an advantage for the RAE classes. It should be furthermore noted that more activities should be planned to help these students with their language skills as well as their overall success. To this end, we advise that more opportunities should be created for them to be engaged in the areas they are mostly interested in, which is expected to contribute positively to their integration.
- Some other studies conducted so far suggest that the individuals under the temporary assistance tell us that the most trusted institutions for them is of those that are religious in nature. (Kaya and Kirac, 2016) This brings along the fact that the readiness level they are at in terms of the RAE classes is already high. Since these classes have the related content of religion and ethics practices they are already familiar with, they should be seen as a venue which will reinforce the readiness they bring from their family backgrounds.
- One of the most important results of this study that is parallel to the others (Kanat and Ustun, 2015) is that Turkey needs to have long terms plans and policies developed for the Syrian students who are under temporary assistance. Although the temporary assistance centers do offer a great help in this regard, in the long run it is not clearly predictable how effective they will be in providing help in the integration process. For this reason, it should be noted that under different programs, Syrian students should be encouraged to attend the state schools.
- Another outstanding results that came out of this study is that teacher training is very essential. It is deemed very important that Syrian students should be considered a sensitive target audience in terms of the fact that teachers dealing with them should be trained with prolonged periods in creating educational opportunities for the kids both in and outside of the school system (Eres, 2015)
- In parallel to other related research, this study finds that Syrian students are in need of psychological support in regard to their experiences in the war zones where they lost family members, experienced dire financial hardships and mental toll of being away from their homeland, which necessitates the support system in schools should be improved a great deal. Within this notion of support, rehabilitation services should be enriched to the point that not only students but also the parents should be in a position to benefit from them so that there is no generation that is lost under these problems.
- The process of developing long term policies regarding this issue should involve consciousness raising activities for the hosting culture, which should help ease the prejudices against them. For instance, although 2015 data (Ozpinar and et al., 2016) suggests the crime rate in the Syrian population to be 1.3%, the common perception among the host population for it to be a lot higher. Informative and scientific reality checking should be made available to the public, which should result in better communication between the families and the school system.

- Another result of the study, again that goes in parallel to other studies in the relevant literature (Coskun and Emin, 2016) is that for various reasons the attendance rate of the Syrian students is comparatively low. One possible solution that can be offered for this issue is to increase the economic and social assistance provided to them when such funds are made available either from national or international sources.
- Although such international organizations as UNICEF, UNHCR and WHO do provide support for the Syrians who live under the temporary assistance in Turkey (3RP, 2015-2016), the amount of such help and also the domains they are applied to should still be increased and diversified in order for the Syrian refugees to reach a certain level of welfare.
- Moreover economic and financial burdens are the other problems that Syrians have to handle in Turkey. Even though Syrians who are registered have been able to get a work permit since 15.01.2016 (CSGB, 2016), unemployment is still one of the big challenges among Syrians in Turkey. It is estimated that 95% of Syrians do not have the skills that the Turkish labor force needs (Grisgraber&Hollingsworth, 2016, p.6).

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- Note: This article includes the main idea and several paragraphs of my doctoral dissertation, “Theopoetic Education: Interreligious Learning and Multiplicity.” (Claremont School of Theology, 2017).

Embodying “Living Together”: An Exploration of Interreligious Education with Relationalism

Abstract

This essay examines theoretical aspects of interreligious education. One of the problems found is that the effects of and rationale for that kind of education are often explained with an essentialist approach that highlights the fixed essence of the religion and underlines the utter differences among and separations between religions and identities. This approach invisibilizes individuals, excludes idiosyncrasy of individuals’ religious identities, and uninvites non-conventional religious populations. Moreover, it generates a discrepancy between the aim of the education (“living together”) and its achievement (“a separate identity”). A relational approach based on the logic of multiplicity, however, provides alternate ways to overcome these problems and reframe interreligious education. In this approach, the education values idiosyncratic individual religious identity and invites all religious and non-religious people. It also facilitates the experience of embodying “living together” internally and externally.

Introduction

A relational approach to interreligious education helps us envision an education that invites all and facilitates them to embody “living together.” I emphasize this point in contrast to an essentialist approach whose core value is *standalone*. This essentialist approach does not offer an adequate philosophical framework for “living together.” In this approach, “living together” may be politically correct, but an optional way of being that applies to limited groups only. However, for relationalists whose core value is *togetherness*, “living together” is normative and imperative for being, and creates room for everyone to embody “living together.”

This paper attempts to analyze the problems of an essentialist approach to interreligious education and tries to reframe it with a relational approach. To do so, I first introduce the context within which I discuss interreligious education. In this part, I speak from the perspective of the field of religious education and deal with this subject matter in relation to the works of scholars such as Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, and Eboo Patel. Following that, I provide an explanation for how an essentialist approach is at play in the discourse and what problems are entailed in that approach. In this part, I focus mostly on the

“safety/danger” mentality that appears when people encounter the proposal of interreligious education. I analyze that embedded in that mentality is an essentialist mind, which invisibilizes religious subjectivity of individuals, excludes people with non-conventional religious identities, and contains self-contradiction regarding the goal of the education (“living together”). After this analysis, I propose a relational approach that is based on a philosophy of multiplicity. This approach views both religious identity and religion as multiplicity which is a composite of many things and constantly moves with their internal and external interactions. Also, it accepts “living together” as a natural mode of being and living. Finally, I project that a relational approach can make the education humanizing, all-inviting, and self-consistent.

I embark on this work with a strong conviction that this research would benefit a large audience of people who are living in the middle of religious diversity and their leaders who are responsible for providing an effective education for them. This paper will help them understand how the educator’s philosophical view—in this case, a metaphysical and epistemological view—makes the education different. My hope is that the readers find a better way to serve people with a relational approach.

Learning in the Presence of the Other: A Brief Sketch of Interreligious Education

To explore interreligious education from a relational approach, the first task needed is to clarify the meaning of interreligious education in the context we are discussing. Here, what I focus on is not interreligious learning, which dates to ancient times. My discussion is centered on interreligious education as an intentional educational activity, which has been discussed in the field of religious education roughly since the 1990s.

One of the key characteristics of this educational model is that participants are invited to come with their own religious identities and are explicitly encouraged to engage with those who have other religious identities. In this education, participants are generally expected to do two things: to learn *from* the other and to learn *with* the other. The other here usually means the one whose religion is different from mine, but it also includes atheists, “nones” (those who do not identify with any religion), and SBNR (spiritual but not religious).

Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee describe this educational model as “learning in the presence of the other.” In 1996, Boys and Lee first published their groundbreaking article in the *Journal of Religious Education*, reporting what they discovered as a result of their two-year-and-eight-month project of interreligious education with Catholic and Jewish people. Their finding was clear: it is interreligious education that can help people overcome “an intolerant fundamentalism” and “a religious indifference” which they thought the unhealthiest responses to religious diversity in America.¹ After ten years, they co-authored a book, *Christians and Jews in Dialogue* (2006), and described interreligious learning as “a form of interreligious dialogue emphasizing study in the presence of the other and an encounter with the tradition that the other embodies.”²

¹ Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, “The Catholic-Jewish Colloquium: An Experiment in Interreligious Learning,” *Religious Education* 91, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 422.

² Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, *Christians and Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2006), 94.

Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook articulates the purpose of interreligious education as “[acquiring] the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to interact, understand, and communicate with persons from diverse religious traditions; to function effectively in the midst of religious pluralism; and to create pluralistic democratic communities that work for the common good.”³ In other words, the purpose of interreligious education is to learn in the presence of the other how to live together. In this respect, the educational content is not limited to the doctrines and histories of the other religion. Interreligious education enables participants to meet and learn the whole self of the other. Participants are encouraged to come into this education with their own religious identities as well as their many other identities in relation to culture, gender, class, history, etc. This is a clear difference from monoreligious education in that one religion is central and other religions are objectified to be learned, and multireligious education in that each distantiates oneself from one’s own identity and attempts to gain an objective knowledge of other religions from a neutral perspective. In interreligious education, all are invited to come as whole selves and become both teachers to and learners from others.

The research history of interreligious education is not too long, although the history of (unintended and unconscious) interreligious learning is much longer. It was only during the 1930s and 1940s that scholars, such as Adelaide Teague Case and Norma H. Thompson, began to focus on religious education in a religiously and socially pluralistic society.⁴ The earliest modern researcher I found who studied interreligious education is Henry E. Kagan. He, as a Jewish Rabbi and psychologist, conducted interreligious education with Christian youth in the 1950s. Along with the rise of religious pluralism, European scholars such as Karl E. Nipkow (Germany) and Marius C. Felderhof (England) have conducted research on religious education in relation to religious pluralism, and envisioned interreligious education as a future model.⁵

Nipkow’s sketch about the beginning of interreligious education provides a helpful guide to understand how it started in a global context:

Under the influence of the ecumenical movement and in particular since the 5th Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1975 in Nairobi, Kenya, the concept of ‘*ecumenical education*’ has been brought to the fore. In addition to this, both the slow, but steady changes towards multi-cultural societies and influences from Eastern religious traditions have led to the educational goal of promoting ‘*inter-religious education*’ and ‘*inter-religious dialogue*’.⁶

³ Sheryl A Kujawa-Holbrook, *God beyond Borders: Interreligious Learning among Faith Communities* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵ Karl Ernst Nipkow, “Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Education: Observations and Reflections from a West German Perspective,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 3, no. 2 (1990): 5–22; Marius C. Felderhof, ed., *Religious Education in a Pluralistic Society: Papers from a Consultation on Theology and Education Held at Westhill College, Selly Oak* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985).

⁶ Nipkow, “Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Education,” 6.

It is not surprising that interreligious education grew with interreligious dialogue, for both were also affected by the Second Vatican Council. Moreover, they are inseparable by nature. Leonard Swidler claims that the general goal of interreligious dialogue is “to learn and to change,”⁷ which is so educational! Interreligious dialogue is, as Boys and Lee mention, a kind of interreligious education, and also vice versa.

In 2000’s first decade and after, scholars including Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, Judith Berling, Eboo Patel, as well as Boys and Lee have published articles and books particularly on interreligious education. Their questions were all similar to this: “In a world that is increasingly religiously diverse, and increasingly fraught with a ‘clash of civilizations’ narrative, what is the imperative on Religious Education to tell a different story?”⁸ Their answer in common is interreligious education. It is to learn from genuine relationship and real experience of the real other, rather than to gain simple information or objectified knowledge of the other. It is to promote learning by having the presence of the other in me and being present in the other.

Is it Safe?: An Essentialist Mind Lurking Under the Surface

When interreligious education is proposed to a community, one of the most frequently asked questions is “Is it safe?” People ask whether this educational model would be something “safe” to apply to their community. With this question they are not asking about physical safety, although that is sometimes an important matter. What they are asking is whether their present religious identity would be properly protected or not.

At the root of this “safety-danger” mentality is essentialist thinking. Essentialism is a view that all things have their own essences; all things must seek their “natural kinds,” to be themselves.⁹ Stephen Fuchs, a sociologist, articulates that essentialism views these essences as “independent of relationships, context, time, or observer.”¹⁰ With the essences, things can be what they are regardless of time, location, and relation with neighboring objects. From this perspective, metaphysically, things do not need others to be themselves, and epistemologically, things do not need others to be known. Things are what they are because of what they have in themselves, and things are knowable only through what they have in themselves. The energy of essentialism is, therefore, inward, for knowing the intrinsic essences most correctly. That is the best way to know things most correctly. In this regard, Fuchs contends that the mode of essentialism is “closure” because in that way things can safely “isolate and shelter...basic certainties and natural kinds” from external factors.¹¹

In essentialism, if essences are missing or changed, things are considered impaired or corrupted – therefore, in danger. Activities such as interaction or engagement is neither preferred nor necessitated. Such activities are considered as potential threats that may make any

⁷ Leonard Swidler, “Understanding Dialogue,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43, no. 2 (March 1, 2008): 13.

⁸ Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer, “Religious Education for Interfaith Leadership,” *Religious Education* 105, no. 1 (January 2010): 17.

⁹ Stephan Fuchs, *Against Essentialism: A Theory of Culture and Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

impact on the essences of things. In this respect, it is a fearful action for essentialist-minded people to interact with religious others, because this action may influence their religious identity. If any influence shakes the status quo of their religious identity, they see it as “dangerous” for it puts things in danger of losing their identities.

In the minds of those who ask for the “safety” of interreligious education, this essentialist thinking is at work. Their answers may be different, as in *yes*, *no*, or *I’m not sure*, but their internal, normative question is the same. *Is this a “safe” education? Does this education properly protect the essence of the self and the religion or harm them?* Those who decide to support and advocate interreligious education with an essentialist mind would say, “Yes, this education is safe. This education will actually deepen your particularity and enhance your understanding of the other.” Those who decide to disagree with an essentialist approach would say, “No, this education is dangerous. This education will tear your identity into pieces and remake you into a syncretic self! You will lose you.” Those who fail to make a decision with an essentialist approach are the ones who are not sure whether their identity will be strengthened or distorted.

A problem of this essentialist perspective is invisibilization of individuals. This perspective presupposes interreligious education as *an education between religions* rather than an education between religious people. For them, the essence of Christianity, for example, is fixed, invariable, and shared with all other Christians. Likewise, the essence of Buddhism is regarded as fixed, invariable, and shared with all other Buddhists. Thus, with this view, interreligious education for Christians and Buddhists is interpreted as an education between *the* Christianity and *the* Buddhism, which is a hollow illusion. This is a problem because human beings precede religion. Religion is an abstract, while people are concrete. The function of religious education is expected to reproduce sameness. The goal of Christian education is then to grow as many people as possible who have the same identity, and so is the essentialist goal of Buddhist education, Jewish education, and so forth.

An essentialist approach also assumes one’s religious identity as categorical. By this assumption, the participants of the education are categorized into one of the participating religions. Interreligious education that presupposes an education between religions and invites the participants as subordinate members of a particular religion comes to emphasize the nature of interreligious education as informative and dialectical, because what the participant gains will be correct knowledge about the representative ideas of the other religion and the ability to respond to that knowledge by representing one’s own religion. If this essentially minded education speaks about transformation, it means correction to the essence. Such an interreligious education also justifies the rationale of interreligious education as ethical and politically correct, for it believes that past massive violence related to religion was caused by misinformation about the other religion, including misunderstanding, prejudice, and indifference.

It is partly right that misunderstanding, prejudice, and indifference were the basis in many cases for religion-related violence. However, it is questionable whether interreligious education that helps the participants gain the “correct knowledge” of the other religion will reduce such violence. What if that “correctly understood” knowledge of Islam, for example, is accepted as “incorrect” by Hinduism? Will such an effort of interreligious education be a solution to violence? One can also ask what would be next, once participants gain the full “correct knowledge” of the other religion? Will there be any more reason to meet, interact, and learn? Will the religions accomplish “living together” after all? If so, how? What will sustain

that “living together”? Furthermore, if interreligious education assumes the participants as subcategories of religion, is it just to categorize Coptic Christians as separate from Egyptian and Christian Universalists from the United States into one group that shares the same essence for their religious identity? How about those who are “in-between” or have “religious hybridity”? Even if two people come from the same religious tradition, are they the same in terms of their religious experiences and identities? Also, I raise a question whether interreligious education can be truly an education between religions. What is the essence of Christianity? What is the essence of Hinduism? Is an essence truly an essence?

More importantly, if interreligious education is an activity that helps each religion correct itself to the essence of itself, will this education truly be able to accomplish “living together” after all? Furthermore, how can the philosophy whose core idea is *standalone* be used to support “living together” which refers not merely to co-living but also to interdependent and interrelated living?

The tendency of essentialism in theories and practices of interreligious education is such an important and urgent issue that it cannot be overlooked. Without correctly answering those questions raised above, the practitioners (the “yes” group) will be unclear at some point of the education, the hesitant (the “not sure” group) will be still hesitant, and the opponents (the “no” group) will continue to oppose. It is time that we need a new paradigm that assists the practitioners to rest assured, the hesitant to move forward to the beauty of interreligious learning, and the opponents to question what they have been believing “right” for a long time.

Philosophy of Multiplicity: A Relational Approach

As a strong proponent of interreligious education, I urge a different paradigm to interpret and reconstruct interreligious education. That is relationalism. With this approach, we can assist the current practitioners to rest assured, the hesitant to move forward to the beauty of interreligious learning, and the opponents to question what they have been believing “right” for a long time.

It is not a surprise that we have countless definitions of relationalism, but we can start from some of the general assumptions shared in relational theories. First of all, relationalism assumes that things are necessarily related to other things. Stephen Fuchs, a sociologist, articulates the metaphysics of relationalism as follows: “Things are what they are because of their location and movement in a network or system of forces.”¹² According to this assumption, things are always in between particular spaces and times, having their own particular space and time. The realness of things comes from this “in-between” nature. Therefore, things are never the “shadows of Ideas” but univocal and real events.

Second, relationalism implies that things are by nature dialogical and fluid. Things are neither static nor closed, but engage with others with openness and changeability. They influence and are influenced by others. This point presupposes that things are basically outcomes of the dialogical relationship among previous beings and become sources for coming beings. Thus, nothing exists alone nor can be perceived alone. Rigid categorization and classification do not work. Things are discussable and knowable only when it is known how things are related to others.

¹² Ibid., 16.

The concept of multiplicity, based on process philosophy and poststructuralism, provides a helpful explanation about relationalism. First, Laurel Schneider articulates multiplicity as follows:

It bears repeating here that “multiplicity” is not the same as “the many.” It does not refer to a pile of many separable units, many “ones,” and so it is not opposed to the One or to ones. “The multiple” (it is ironic how the English language seems to want to make it into a singularity), or “multiplicity,” results when things—ones—so constitute each another that they come to exist (in part, of course) *because* of one another.”¹³

Multiplicity is different from mere manyness. The concept of multiplicity highlights the interrelated and interdependent nature of things. This means that others are necessary for things to come into existence and to be perceived.

Alfred North Whitehead explains this nature of multiplicity with this famous quote: “The many become one, and are increased by one.”¹⁴ According to this quote, first, the one (a thing) consists of the many. This means that its essence is not original and intrinsic. Second, the one that is a set of the many becomes a part of the many again by adding the self to the existing many. In this worldview, things have emerged and are still influencing and being influenced in this interrelated and interdependent relationship. Nothing is disconnected from and independent of the other. Nor has a thing a good rationale to advocate the need of complete closure of the system to keep its identity safe and sustainable. For it is their reciprocal relationships with others that have formed, sustained, and rejuvenated things.

This relational approach based on the concept of multiplicity provides a new framework. First, in this approach, a religious identity is a multiplicity. In an essentialist view, a religious identity is considered as a particularity that is defined in conjunction with universality. In other words, if someone is Presbyterian, his or her religious identity belongs to the Presbyterian identity which belongs to the Christian identity. His or her religious identity would be understood as a subset of a greater category. However, a multiplicity never fully belongs to any upper category. One’s religious identity is asymmetric, rhizomatic, and irreducible, which cannot be explained with an overarching “shape” or “story.” Any categorization of one’s religious identity entails a certain extent of reduction and removal, which is injustice to the person. According to the philosophy of multiplicity, one’s religious identity consists of various elements and experiences, which makes it unique and univocal.

Second, the same principle is applied to a religion: A religion is a multiplicity. In this case, a religion is a gathering of many religious identities, which is, therefore, a multiplicity of multiplicities. Doctrines and confessions need to be understood inductively rather than deductively. This means that they – doctrines and confessions – need to be understood as outcomes of people’s religious identities, which inevitably cuts here and there to generalize, rather than the pre-given standard that measures and judges people’s religious identities. In

¹³ Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 143.

¹⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 21.

multiplicity, religion is, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith maintains, the “cumulative tradition.”¹⁵ In Korean Catholic tradition, for example, the religious identities of those who fought the government, were martyred by the Japanese imperial military, condemned by local superstitions, and took care of orphans and widows during the war are all cumulated. Not only Christian teachings but also social contexts, experiences, events, and many others constitute what can be called a Korean Catholic tradition. This tradition is also located in between other traditions side by side, inseparably, where they mutually and constantly interact with one another.

Lastly, this approach affirms “living together” as a natural mode of being and living, while essentialism claims “standalone” as a default mode of being and living. In multiplicity, there are three types of “living together”: *internal togetherness*, *external togetherness*, and *mutual immanence*. First, it is internal togetherness that the many are in one. Second, it is external togetherness that the one becomes one of the many. Third, it is mutual immanence that one is in the other and the other is in one. In this approach, “living together” is neither an abstract slogan nor political correctness. We, all creatures, live together literally and metaphysically. We, all creatures, live together internally, externally, and mutually. It is the default mode of living that you are in me, and I am in you. Any effort to defy this natural rule entails violence.

Toward Education for Living Together

A relational approach based on multiplicity provides a helpful guidance to interreligious education, so it can overcome essentialist problems and move forward to embodying its ultimate vision of “living together.”

First, a relational approach creates a humanizing education. This approach objects interreligious education to be an education between religions, because, from a perspective of multiplicity, no religious identities are the same even though they claim to belong to the same religion. This perspective rather alerts one to the fact that it is an illusion if someone claims an education in which five Christians and five Muslims learn together as an education between Christianity and Islam. Such an education is simply an education for ten religious people, of which five people claim to be Christian and five claim to be Muslim. A relational approach would reveal that it is not learning *the* story of Islam but learning five different stories of Islamic faith that five people who claim to be Christian learn from five people who claim to be Muslim. A relational approach would also encourage five people who claim to be Christian to learn from one another, for their stories would surprise one another as well with strangeness and unfamiliarity.

Second, a relational approach creates room for all who want to join interreligious education and promote “living together.” Especially with the theory of external togetherness, the boundary of a religion is blurred. Dualism that distinguishes the “in” and the “out” has no place to stand. The theory of multiplicity, especially the theory of internal togetherness, ontologically opens up a space for multiple religious belongings and those who are syncretized

¹⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 154–68.

“in-between” two or more religions. They are the ones who have no space in an essentialist approach. They are those who have been ignored, uninvited, and ill-portrayed by the assertions such as “Interreligious education is an education between religions,” or “the first and most important *prerequisite of interfaith is faith*.”¹⁶ However, a relational approach affirms their existence and invites them as equally as it does to those who adhere to traditionally identified religions.

Third, a relational approach enables interreligious education to envision embodying “living together.” The point is that the education seeks the embodiment of “living together” by participants during the education and among themselves. In this approach, interreligious education is not a preparatory education, but an experiential education. Participants learn “living together” not by knowledge but by experience. This education would consider the gathering of participants as a community, not simply as a gathering of multiple individuals or an encounter between two or more religions. Their interacting with one another is a process of increasing their interconnectedness and mutual immanence, which is a way of an embodiment of “living together.” This approach enables interreligious education to see and affirm that the process of the education consists of the experiences of “living together.” This approach makes interreligious education focus on the process of learning within individuals as well. After the interactions, participants are filled with otherness provided by other participants. The sources of otherness include the texts, cultures, confessions, and others. In the relational approach, the process of the participants dialoging with this otherness inside them is an internal “living together,” which interreligious education would highlight and encourage.

Boys and Lee emphasize that “process is the key element in all interreligious learning.”¹⁷ They continue, “Interreligious learning aims to go deeper by fostering relationship *among* participants, and *with* key texts, practice, and beliefs of the other’s tradition.”¹⁸ They do not add a philosophical examination to this statement. However, they point to the important aspects of interreligious education discussed above. As Boys and Lee point out, a relational approach to interreligious education affirms that process is the key element in interreligious education in terms of which the process *is* “living together.” This approach encourages participants to have a relationship with other participants and other texts, practices, and beliefs during the education, because that is the way we go into the other, and the other comes into us, embodying “living together” within and between us.

Conclusion

We have examined so far how a relational approach helps interreligious education overcome the problems of an essentialist approach and envision an embodiment of “living together.” The problems of the essentialist approach include invisibilization of human beings over religions, exclusion of idiosyncrasy of religious identities and spiritualities, and incompatibility between its theory (separation) and practice (togetherness). A relational approach helps us overcome those problems by drawing attention to concreteness (people) from concept (religion). In this

¹⁶ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion Is an Island,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 21, no. 2 (January 1966): 123.

¹⁷ Boys and Lee, *Christians and Jews in Dialogue*, 96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

way, interreligious education welcomes all people regardless of their religions. Moreover, this approach provides theoretical affirmation and interpretation on “living together.” In this approach, “living together” is lived, not only externally but also internally.

Some may question how this theoretical “living together” can affect our “living together” in real life. One way to answer these questions is to reexamine the meaning of “living together.” “Living together” is certainly not mere coexistence in that many exist without dialogue or connectedness. That is “living concurrently.” Nor “living together” mean simply having events of encounter. No matter how many and how often those events happen, that amounts to no more than “meeting together.” “Living together” means to share life. There are two ways to share life. One is to bring the other into myself. The other is to send myself into the other. In doing so, the other becomes, as Raimon Panikkar articulates, “the counterpart of the I” and “belonging to the I (and not as not-I).”¹⁹ “Living together” is to be part of the other and to invite the other to be part of myself. “Living together” means to become the We, in which the other and I are different but not separate. The We is a community with a common destiny. If one dies, then the other dies. If one lives, then the other lives. The key of the relational approach to interreligious education is to assist participants to form and experience this sense of the We. Once this education is successfully done, one would not harm the other; because one knows that to harm the other is to harm oneself.

¹⁹ Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 38.

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Learning Compassion Through Practices of Encounter in L'Arche

Abstract

This essay highlights how the relational practices of compassionate care and the welcoming of vulnerability, learned by newcomers to l'Arche communities through encounter with long-term members of the communities, especially those with developmental disabilities, can deepen identities of compassion in the non-disabled caregiver assistants. The example of l'Arche, articulated by Vanier, Reimer, and others, is viewed in a more robust and extrapolative manner via overlay of the conceptual frameworks of Situated Learning and Communities of Practice as articulated by Lave and Wenger.

Introduction

Encounter across (initially) perceived difference is the very way of life in the communities of l'Arche. In the 149 l'Arche communities worldwide, people with and without disabilities come together to share their lives in family-like homes and relationships. Caregiver assistants may come to l'Arche, in the estimation of Jean Vanier, the founder of l'Arche, "because they want to serve the poor," but they stay on and remain in relationships with the *core members* of the community, those with physical and intellectual disabilities, only "once they have discovered that they themselves are the poor."¹ It is this dynamic, prompted and animated by profound encounter within the dailiness of shared life across differing physical or intellectual capacities, that forms an important element of the mission of l'Arche, to "make known the gifts of people who have intellectual disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships."² These mutually transforming relationships of l'Arche are marked by a sense of encounter that is more than "just a question of performing good deeds for those who are excluded," and becomes about "being open and vulnerable to them in order to receive the life that they can offer; it is to become their friends."³

Encounter, when viewed this way, is the opening of a door to these transformational relationships whereby the caregiver assistants learn from the core members the key lesson of l'Arche: the recognition of disability not as something to be avoided, but rather as something fundamentally inherent to the self."⁴ Disability, and the interdependency that develops within the relationships of l'Arche, become construed anew by the caregiver assistants as "ontological characteristics of our lives."⁵

Recent scholarship (much of it carried out by Warren S. Brown and Kevin Reimer) emphasizing the development of compassion and virtue in l'Arche caregiver assistants shines a light on the fact that the encounters between those with and without disabilities can have a profound impact on the lives of all involved in those encounters.⁶ As initial encounters in l'Arche develop into authentic relationships, wherein the gifts of the core members with disabilities impact their non-disabled caregiver assistants over extended time, a marked increase in compassionate traits can be traced from the novice to the expert caregiver assistants.⁷ And, while Brown and Reimer confined their study to the caregiver assistants, it is clear in their work, and will be highlighted below, that compassion is learned in l'Arche from relationships with the

¹ Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness To Community* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 20.

² "Identity and Mission Statement," International Federation of L'Arche Communities, accessed September 12, 2017, <https://www.larcheusa.org/who-we-are/charter/>.

³ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), 84.

⁴ Warren S. Brown, Scott R. Garrels & Kevin S. Reimer, "Mimesis and Compassion in Care For People with Disabilities," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15, no. 4 (November 2011): 390.

⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 156.

⁶ Both qualitative and quantitative research projects in recent years have addressed the impact of l'Arche on the lives of the caregiver assistants. They form a backdrop to this essay and include the following which have not been explicitly cited elsewhere in this essay:

Kevin Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press) (2009).

Kevin Reimer, Christina Young, Brandon Birath, Michael L. Spezio, Gregory Peterson, James van Slyke & Warren S. Brown, "Maturity Is Explicit: Self-Importance of Traits in Humanitarian Moral Identity," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 7, no. 1 (January 2012): 36-44.

⁷ Kevin Reimer, "Unexpected Communion: Purpose, Vocation, and Developmental Disability," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 65, no. 3 (September 2013): 200-201.

core members with disabilities, who are esteemed within l'Arche as exemplars of compassion and virtue.

This essay attempts to help articulate this transformative potential of encounter by discussing the deepening development of compassionate identity in the long-term caregiver assistants in l'Arche through the organizing framework of *situated learning* as articulated by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave. Within that framework, the particular characterization of identity as formed in and through practices and context provides a concept to view and amplify the process of transformation that Vanier, Reimer, Brown, and others have traced in the relational practices and context of l'Arche in recent years. As Wenger and Lave write, "learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice," and so this essay hopes to describe the deepening compassionate identity learned through the social practices of l'Arche as an example with broader implication for religious educators concerned with identity development through encounter.⁸

Learning the Craft of Compassion in L'Arche

The communities of l'Arche form a worldwide network where people with and without disabilities come together to share their lives in family-like relationships. At present, there are 149 l'Arche communities scattered across 37 different countries (International Federation of L'Arche Communities). L'Arche was founded in 1964 when Vanier invited Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux, who had been living in an institution for men with developmental disabilities, to leave that institution and move with him to a small home in the village of Trosly-Breuil, on the edge of the Compiègne Forest in France. Vanier's invitation was a response to what he had seen as unjust and dehumanizing conditions in the institutions he had begun visiting in France. He describes the place where Simi and Seux had been living: "huge concrete walls surrounded the buildings made of cement block; eighty men lived in dormitories with no work. All day long they just walked around in circles. From 2 to 4pm there was a compulsory siesta, then time for a walk all together. There I was struck by the screams and the atmosphere of sadness."⁹ While not necessarily attempting to begin the worldwide movement that l'Arche has become, Vanier simply wanted to offer an alternative to those institutional conditions. While such institutions are largely a thing of the past (thanks in no small part to the witness of Vanier, Simi, and Seux), the lives of people with developmental disabilities are marked to this day by a number of negative societal responses, including congregation and segregation from the general public amongst the most common, as described by pioneering disabilities rights advocate Wolf Wolfensberger.¹⁰

Within l'Arche today, the caregiver assistants live and work alongside the core members of the community, who have a range of physical and intellectual disabilities. Perhaps what most distinguishes l'Arche from other organizations providing care is the emphasis on developing authentic relationships and friendships across perceived physical and intellectual difference, as well as a marked reversal of the typical care-provider/care-receiver paradigm. Within the communities of l'Arche, compassion and lessons of relationship and the heart are learned by the non-disabled assistants from the exemplars of the core members with disabilities. As Vanier stated in his acceptance of the 2015 Templeton Prize, people with disabilities are "able to help

⁸ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 31.

⁹ Jean Vanier, *An Ark For The Poor: The Story of L'Arche* (Toronto: Novalis, 1995), 16.

¹⁰ Wolf Wolfensberger, *Leadership and Change in Human Services: Selected Writings from Wolf Wolfensberger*, ed. David G. Race (New York: Routledge, 2003), 29-35.

many so called ‘normal’ people imprisoned by our cultures orientated towards power, winning, and individual success, to discover what it means to be human.”¹¹ As Brown and Reimer found in their study of l’Arche, “genuine compassion emerges in long-term caregivers through significant personal transformation which comes about in sustained contact with, and care for, core members.”¹² This portion of the essay aims to articulate some of the features of this transformation, which will also be construed as an instance of situated learning below.

It is Vanier’s sense of discovering what it means to be human that invites an examination of the importance of encounter between people with and without disabilities in l’Arche. The practices of l’Arche are mundane and bodily, “rooted in simple, material things: cooking meals, spending time together at table, washing the dishes, doing the laundry and housework [...] looking after the needs of the weaker people: giving them baths, cutting their nails, helping them buy clothes.”¹³ These gestures, however simple, are the very heart of encounter in l’Arche, for when they are carried out with love, they become gestures wherein “the communion of hearts can grow.”¹⁴ It is in these practices and gestures of love that the caregiver assistants can begin to truly learn from the core members of community about being human in ever increasingly interpersonal or even interdependent ways. As the communion of hearts grows in these practices of l’Arche, a “kind of Christian *habitus*” forms which works to provide a “counter cultural matrix of meaning as well as bodily forming its members in its philosophic anthropology through its shared life together.”¹⁵ One could say that the highly relational anthropology of l’Arche can only be accessed via the gateway of encounter.

As these gestures and practices of l’Arche provide a space for the core members to enact their gifts of relationship and compassion, those gifts begin to be learned and internalized by the caregiver assistants walking alongside them. In Brown and Reimer’s study, they named a sense of embodied cognition, involving deeply formed, habituated behaviors” of compassion and care.¹⁶ Further, Brown and Reimer conclude that this deeply embodied compassion and care is primarily “framed by social cues associated with bodies *in situ*,” whereby the core members can influence the caregiver assistants, and it only “emerges in long-term caregivers through significant personal transformation which comes about in sustained contact with, and care for, core members.”¹⁷ This echoes Jason Reimer Greig’s notion, named above, of a Christian *habitus* at work on the caregiver assistants of l’Arche and makes a strong case for situated learning as a helpful conceptual framework for understanding the transformation that can occur in the caregiver assistants in l’Arche.

Situatedness is a key element of Brown and Reimer’s sense of embodied cognition as it forms compassionate identities in l’Arche caregiver assistants. Brown and Reimer note that the long-term development of compassionate character “would suggest that virtue exists as a form of interaction tendency with respect to specific sorts of situations [...] a form of action regularly

¹¹ Jean Vanier, “Jean Vanier Templeton Talk,” (presented at the Templeton Award Ceremony, St Martin in the Fields, London, May 18, 2015).

¹² Warren S. Brown and Kevin S. Reimer, “Religion and Embodied Cognition,” *Zygon* 48, no. 3 (September 2013): 835-836.

¹³ Jean Vanier, *The Heart of L’Arche: A Spirituality for Everyday* (Toronto: Novalis, 2012), 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

¹⁵ Jason Reimer Greig, *Reconsidering Intellectual Disability: L’Arche Medical Ethics, and Christian Friendship* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 221.

¹⁶ Brown and Reimer, “Religion and Embodied Cognition,” 835.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 835-836.

taken in certain social, interpersonal contexts, often without conscious deliberation.”¹⁸ Within the specific context of l’Arche, the core members “serve as models and exemplars in the community,” from whom the caregiver assistants learn “openness and the craft of compassion [and] an interpersonal posture lacking competition and exclusion.”¹⁹ This learning occurs in navigating together the shared practices of relationship and “communion of hearts” as outlined by Vanier above. The paradigm-shifting recognition of disability as a fundamental aspect of humanity, to be embraced and not avoided, only arises in the long-term caregiver assistants as they “remain in the position of daily exposure to human weakness and vulnerability.”²⁰ The caregiver assistants need to remain in the practices long enough to begin to truly grasp and embody these crucial lessons from the core members, for “it is then, as we grow gradually into the acceptance of our wounds and fragility, that we grow into wholeness.”²¹

Situated Learning Within l’Arche

Lave and Wenger’s *situated learning* concept provides a helpful means to build upon and amplify the research into the development of compassion in l’Arche done by Brown, Reimer, and others. Central to Brown and Reimer’s sense of embodied cognition is an assertion that “our cognitive processes are, at their core, sensorimotor, situated, and action-relevant.”²² Lave and Wenger offer a framework within which to lift up and view this situated element as they posit that learning is “an aspect of social practice [and] implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities.”²³ For Lave and Wenger, these social communities are articulated as *Communities of Practice (CoP)*, and one could find ample evidence that l’Arche is indeed a constellation of these communities of practice. This essay, while borrowing from the construct of *CoP*, and highlighting points of resonance between *CoP* and l’Arche, primarily focuses below on the unique situational aspects of learning and practicing compassion within l’Arche, and does not provide a full treatment of *CoP*.

In their review of ethnographic studies of apprenticeship across several cultural and historical settings, Lave and Wenger find “the indivisible character of learning and work practices.”²⁴ As learning and practice cannot be separated from one another, neither can learning and practice be separated from context. Rather than setting learning and practice into a typical teacher-learner paradigm, situated learning emphasizes the “historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do.”²⁵ With Lave and Wenger’s sense of situated learning as an inseparable bond of learning/practice/context in mind, the potential inherent in the practices of relationship fully embedded with the specific lived-in context of l’Arche becomes more evident. Situated learning is the primary way that caregiver assistants learn from the core members with disabilities both the contours of the craft of compassion and how to be a person whose identity is marked by that compassion and the welcome of vulnerability, as noted in the research cited above.

¹⁸ Ibid, 836.

¹⁹ Brown et al, “Mimesis and Compassion in Care For People With Disabilities,” 383.

²⁰ Ibid, 390.

²¹ Jean Vanier, *Befriending the Stranger* (Toronto: Novalis, 2005), 61.

²² Brown and Reimer, “Religion and Embodied Cognition,” 833.

²³ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, 53.

²⁴ Ibid, 61.

²⁵ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 47.

As new caregiver assistants enter l'Arche, they begin to practice from a peripheral position within the community. According to Lave and Wenger, "rather than learning by replicating the performances of others or by acquiring knowledge transmitted in instruction [...] learning occurs through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community."²⁶ Thus, new members of the community must be granted access to *legitimate peripheral participation* to begin on their learning trajectory towards the central practices of a community, which are already more fully embodied by the *old-timers* of the community.²⁷ Reflecting on the practices of apprenticeship they studied, Lave and Wenger found that identity development is a crucial aspect of this process of moving from peripherality to full participation in the practices of a given context. They write, "moving toward full participation in practice involves not just a greater commitment of time, intensified effort, more and broader responsibilities with the community, and more difficult and risky tasks, but, more significantly, an increasing sense of identity as a master practitioner."²⁸ In l'Arche, transformed identities result from moving along the trajectory from being a newcomer to the practices of compassion to becoming an old-timer in the craft; learning how to become a person of greater compassion from both practice and other old-timers.

Identity Development Through the Practices of L'Arche

Part of practice, and thus learning, for Lave and Wenger is how people "negotiate the ways of being a person" within their particular context and set of practices.²⁹ Within l'Arche, being a person means profoundly practicing compassion and welcome of vulnerability. The anthropology of l'Arche is one that recognizes that "weakness and vulnerability in a person, far from being an obstacle to union with god, can foster it."³⁰ Such an anthropological conviction becomes even more robust alongside the Identity Statement of l'Arche that "we celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need of one another."³¹ Taken together, these statements point to the fact that being a person in the eyes of l'Arche is about interdependence and welcoming weakness and vulnerability in one another and within ourselves. This anthropology is extended in an equalizing manner across any potential barrier between the caregiver assistant and the core members with disabilities. This welcome of vulnerability is more than a thought exercise or language deployed to describe the situation, and it is not just a new self-image that is developed within l'Arche, but it is rather a much deeper sense that "who we are lies in the way we live day to day."³²

Thinking again of Brown and Reimer's sense of embodied cognition at play in the development of compassionate identities in l'Arche caregiver assistants, we can begin to see how this embodied cognition occurs within the relational context of l'Arche. Brown and Reimer turn away from abstract ideas as being primarily formative of identity and conclude that "formation

²⁶ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, 100.

²⁷ Ibid, 29. Again, this essay does not provide a full explanation of the concept of *CoP*. Terminology such as *legitimate peripheral participation* and *old-timers* receive full treatment in Lave and Wenger, 1991 and Wenger, 1998.

²⁸ Ibid, 111.

²⁹ Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 149.

³⁰ "Charter of L'Arche," International Federation of L'Arche Communities, accessed September 12, 2017, <https://www.larcheusa.org/who-we-are/charter/>.

³¹ Identity and Mission Statement," International Federation of L'Arche Communities, accessed September 12, 2017, <https://www.larcheusa.org/who-we-are/charter/>.

³² Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 151.

occurs in relations to action and feedback [...] in the domain of action schemas and habits.”³³ An action schema central to situated learning is found in Wenger’s framework of *CoP*, wherein members must navigate the dimensions of *mutual engagement*, the *joint enterprise*, and the *shared repertoire* of any given *CoP*. It is competence within these three dimensions that mark the identities of old-timers versus newcomers. The practices of a specific community of practice occurs not in an abstract sense, but rather exist “because people are engaged in actions whose meaning they negotiate with one another.”³⁴ Thinking here of the daily practices of compassion in l’Arche, identity development of individuals within l’Arche is rooted in building competence in the practices of Wenger’s three dimensions- in embodying them.

Identity development occurs as mutuality of engagement draws one into “certain ways of engaging in action with other people” and can define individuality against the backdrop of the community of practice.³⁵ In l’Arche, then, the deepening development of relationships between core members and caregiver assistants that marks the very heart of the community’s shared practices, can set newcomers onto the trajectory towards acting with ever greater compassion. As new caregiver assistants begin to set themselves into this backdrop of mutual engagement in the community, they learn to *embody* the ways of compassionate care with the core members and one another in a milieu marked by such practices of mutual care.

The joint enterprise that provides coherence and purpose to a community is another powerful agent in identity formation. Again, practice and context cohere around a particular joint enterprise that is “defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it,” and is more than simply stating goals, but “creates among participants relations of mutual accountability.”³⁶ Accountability to the joint enterprise of a *CoP* also brings with it a shifting of perspective and an identity that “manifests as a tendency to come up with certain choices, to value certain experiences-all by virtue of participating in certain enterprises.”³⁷ Embodying the practices of the joint enterprise can lead to developing identity along the same lines as a Brown and Reimer’s *interaction tendency* or Grieg’s *Christian habitus*, both noted above. Compassionate choices and values are learned by the caregiver assistants from the core members and embodied over time.

The relationships of mutual engagement and the essential practices of a community’s joint enterprise occur alongside the shared repertoire of a community of practice. This repertoire “includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts” that have been developed in common within the community.³⁸ Identity development occurs as “a personal set of events, references, memories, and experiences that create individual relations of negotiability with respect to the repertoire of a practice” arise.³⁹ Within l’Arche, the repertoire of compassionate practices has room for improvisation and personalization, and yet is always forming caregiver assistants within the matrix of their deepening relationships with core members. The shared repertoire of l’Arche is relationship itself.

Learning through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire is developing competency beyond “just acquiring skills and information; it is becoming a certain

³³ Brown and Reimer, “Religion and Embodied Cognition,” 841.

³⁴ Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 73.

³⁵ Ibid, 152.

³⁶ Ibid, 77-78.

³⁷ Ibid, 153.

³⁸ Ibid, 83.

³⁹ Ibid, 153.

person.”⁴⁰ New caregiver assistants have the real possibility of becoming a person modeled after and mentored by the core members, the compassionate old-timers of l’Arche. In a real way, they can become the poor, welcoming their own weakness and vulnerability in the manner Vanier suggests when he states that caregiver assistants will only stay in l’Arche “once they have discovered that they themselves are the poor.”⁴¹

Implications Beyond L’Arche

With encounter holding such transformative potential as outlined above, as religious educators, it would serve our goals well to consider how best to structure platforms for encounter across perceived difference. The situated learning and *CoP* frameworks of Lave and Wenger seem to provide helpful concepts for this endeavor. Particularly promising seem to be the embedding of identity development within practice and context. With Brown and Reimer’s contention that “situatedness would suggest that virtue exists as a form of interaction tendency with respect to specific sorts of situations,” religious educators might ask what sorts of situations foster more virtuous interaction tendencies.⁴² Further, how might these best be incorporated into pedagogical planning that aims towards identity development? Religious educators might also wonder about what other interaction tendencies within the Christian witness, besides compassionate welcome of weakness and vulnerability, might be most needed for our times. Relatedly, what practices already exist within the given situations of religious educators that could be brought to the fore in new and transformational ways?

L’Arche provides an example of one powerful situation and set of practices wherein encounter across perceived difference leads to profound and transformational relationships. Other examples most certainly exist and would be well suited for religious educators to turn their eye towards. Indeed, as Greig writes, “l’Arche points to a broader vision of the human telos and is not limited to relationships between people both with and without intellectual disabilities. Thus, these discoveries [...] have the potential to renew the church and the whole social order.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Etienne Wenger, “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems: The Career of a Concept,” in *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*, ed. C. Blackmore (London: Springer, 2010), 181.

⁴¹ Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, 20.

⁴² Brown and Reimer, “Religion and Embodied Cognition,” 836.

⁴³ Greig, *Reconsidering Intellectual Disability: L’Arche Medical Ethics, and Christian Friendship*, 226.

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Learning, Living, and Sexing: Three Crucial Encounters in Religious Sexuality Education

Abstract

This essay explores three encounters that young adult women identified as crucial to understanding how their religious sexuality education succeeded or failed in helping them connect sexual decision-making to their values and religious beliefs. Based on qualitative interviews with 15 young adult women who were raised Catholic, this paper privileges the voices of participants in describing the environment that shaped their lived theologies of sexuality; that is, whether they understood sexuality as life-giving and positive, or frightening and risky.

Much conversation around sexuality education in Christian spaces has to do with the “rightest” theology, or the theology that best critiques official theologies in our church spheres. These conversations are valuable, and I believe can be even more so when put into context with what people actually believe and how they make decisions as regards their sexuality. This is where pastoral theologian Carrie Doehring’s concept of lived theology is especially helpful; she draws from the theologians who talk about the distinction between embedded theologies (those that we learn when we are young, which maintain a sense of “feeling right” even when someone has overtly rejected them)¹ and deliberated theologies (the theologies that a person chooses and comes to believe as an adult, which are affected by embedded theologies).² Those two types of theologies together help create what she calls “lived theologies,” which are theologies that are *embodied*³ and lived out.⁴ These theologies may or may not coincide in obvious ways with a person’s espoused, deliberated theologies; to use an example in the world of sexual morality, a person might claim that their religious commitments forbid them from premarital sex but might engage in such sex when they are inebriated at a party where such hooking up is considered normative; that person’s deliberated theology is one of disapproval for such behavior, but their lived theology puts that disapproval in a cultural and social context that affects it to the point where the person’s decision is that they are really against such sexual encounters, but that they aren’t really harmful every once in awhile or if they don’t mean anything. Such equivocating is *not* understood as hypocrisy when using the lived theology framework; rather, it is expected that one’s religious values or beliefs will dynamically interact with one’s broader context and

¹ Stone, Howard W., and James O. Duke. *How to Think Theologically*. 3rd edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013, 15.

² Ibid., 18.

³ Doehring, Carrie. “Resilience as the Relational Ability to Spiritually Integrate Moral Stress.” *Pastoral Psychology*, April 16, 2015, 1–15. doi:10.1007/s11089-015-0643-7, 8.

⁴ Doehring, Carrie. “Emotions and Change in Spiritual Care.” *Pastoral Psychology* 63, no. 5–6 (May 23, 2014): 583–96. doi:10.1007/s11089-014-0607-3, 585.

produce choices that do not always easily align. This framework allows for a person to be “figuring out” what they really believe even while they espouse specific beliefs, and expects that values with beliefs will shift with experience, choices, joys, regrets, and the general process of growing and learning.

Using this framework of lived theology, I bring the analyzed data from a small-scale qualitative research study of young adult women regarding their sexuality education. I interviewed fifteen women, aged 18-25, about their Roman Catholic upbringing, education about sex and sexuality, and how they believed the religious context and lessons of their youth about sex affected their decisions and choices as young adults. Of the fifteen, six had stopped affiliating with the Roman Catholic tradition (some converting to other forms of Christianity, others affiliating with no religion or choosing labels such as “agnostic”); twelve of the women were Caucasian/white, two were Asian, and one identified as Tejano/Mexican; and two identified non-heterosexual orientations, one calling herself queer and the other using both the terms queer and bisexual. These women came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and from rural, suburban, and urban contexts, but all were in higher education at the time of the interview. Interviews lasted between one and two hours and were audiorecorded, fully transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes.

From this data, I pull three crucial educational encounters that were experienced by a majority of participants that had long-lasting impacts on how they understood Catholic theologies of sexuality and how they decided to integrate or segregate their own values and choices about sex and sexuality – their lived theologies – from that Catholic contextual upbringing. These encounters were recursive, and sometimes happened several times in a single individual’s life and had a new impact on them each time. However, these three encounters are arranged in a timeline format to help draw the line from childhood through young adulthood as I trace the development of lived theologies. I label these three moments as 1. Scanty Information, 2. Secret Lessons, and 3. The Comfort Standard.

In order to better situate the reader in the dominant narratives of this study, it will be helpful to explain upfront that a majority of participants could not recall more than one or two experiences that they identified as sexuality education. Parents often provided information on certain biological realities, but not always. Participants who had been in parochial school often had a unit about sexual morality in religion class in either middle or high school, and sometimes a “health science” unit on reproduction. Some had memories of retreat talks or homilies on the subject, but most had a difficult time recalling exactly where or how they had “figured it all out.” When asked to articulate what they knew of Roman Catholic theologies of sexuality, participants were quick to rattle off a list of rules; “no premarital sex,” “no contraception,” “no homosexual sex,” and so on. Sexuality education, in this context, refers less to formal courses on reproduction and safe sex and more to a constellation of encounters with peers, teachers, parents, and media that shaped the participants’ concept of what sex is and whether it is good and worthwhile or scary and risky. The ramifications of these educational encounters – and the takeaways that Christian religious educators might consider as they examine sexuality education of young people in their own context – are ultimately the focus of this essay.

Scanty Information

We begin our chain by recognizing that for a majority of our participants, information about sex and sexuality was scant from their earliest memories until a specific age, usually just

before puberty. Nora, a 21-year-old senior who identified as agnostic after separating herself from her parent's highly traditional Catholic culture, spoke about needing to look up the word "sex" in the dictionary. Their schools did not directly address physical, biological differences between boys and girls until about 4th or 5th grade, and this was typically in context of "the talk" that delivers information on menstruation, at least to the girls, and may not include anything more detailed on sex and reproduction. Rose, a 19-year-old who had turned Evangelical in her teenage years, related that she learned what sex was in middle school, when a classmate called her a slut and she asked her mother what the word meant. While houses with mixed-gender siblings had some natural education about sex differences, most authority figures seemed in silent agreement that sex and sexuality were topics that should not be broached until absolutely necessary—that is, at puberty or immediately before.

This context of scanty information runs up against the very concept of sexuality as defined in the Catholic catechism. That definition describes sexuality as the core part of every human person that calls us into relationship with one another, the inborn drive we have to connect, create community, and intimately know others in many senses.⁵ With this in mind, one would expect sexuality to be addressed early and often with children as they form friendships, learn to share, and are taught how to treat others with affection, respect, and boundaries. Indeed, these topics are ubiquitous in raising children, except that they are typically not classified as sexuality education. These lessons would ideally become the bedrock for explaining reproductive function, desire, and romantic relationships, especially as children become adolescents and experience their sexuality taking on a new and more noticeable form. When these participants relayed their experiences of sexuality education, few could connect sexuality to friendship, or "the talk" to bodily respect. Because of the lack of information, sex and sexuality were taught as isolated subjects, not in the wider context of human relationships.

Religious education expert Thomas Groome dedicates much time to exploring the type of environment that is conducive to formative religious education, and explicitly states that "an environment of *intellectual* hospitality is free of ossified positions or knowledge control."⁶ The sheer dearth of natural information about sex and sexuality available to the participants as they grew up suggests that careful knowledge control—that is, an active prevention of availability—was at work. This explains why the drama of "the talk" around puberty was so immediately recalled and well-remembered by participants. Educational theorist Elliott Eisner is also relevant here due to his exploration of the "null curriculum," that which is taught by explicitly not being taught.⁷ From this exclusion, learners absorb the idea that this information is not as important to learn as that which is directly taught in schools, or that this information is hidden or made unavailable for other reasons. Eisner highlights that what is not taught also limits how the learner will learn in the future: "It has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation

⁵ Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd Revised & Enlarged Edition. Vatican City: Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000, 560.

⁶ Groome, Thomas H. *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry The Way of Shared Praxis*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Pub, 1998, 168.

⁷ Eisner, Elliot W. *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*. 3rd Edition. Prentice Hall, 2002, 97.

or problems.”⁸ When information and values around sexuality are introduced later in adolescence, learners lose out on years of curiosity and the chance to practice critical thinking around the subject.

Because of this context of scanty information, participants’ lived theologies tended to understand sexuality as a subject set apart from everything else they knew about values and morality. They could not easily articulate the connections between sexual morality and friendship, or even romantic relationships, for example. This scanty information also provided the groundwork for later discomfort with the topic of sex that leads into our next encounter: Secret Lessons.

Secret Lessons

When these young women had, as children, sought out more information about sex and sexuality, they were often met with the uncomfortable reactions of adults who communicated (mostly nonverbally) that it was inappropriate for these young girls to be wondering about sexual topics. Valerie, a 20-year-old, related a story of an anonymous question box at school where she and her classmates were encouraged to ask any questions about sex that they were uncomfortable asking aloud:

They wanted us to ask questions, but wouldn't necessarily answer them. They would have this kind of open forum like, if you didn't want to ask it out loud you could write it down on a piece of paper kind of thing and hand it in so it was anonymous, but some of the questions they wouldn't answer.

When pressed for more details, Valerie admitted that what she remembers is a teacher pulling a piece of paper from the anonymous question box, opening it, stating that she would not answer the question, and putting it aside. She remarked during the interview, seemingly surprised by her own insight, that she did not know if it contained an actual question, a rude remark, or some personal inquiry that the teacher declined to comment upon—the possibility had not occurred to her before. The significant detail about this encounter is that Valerie *perceived* that her teachers were hiding information from her and her peers, failing to be as open and honest as they had claimed they would be. This suggests a serious lack of trust between herself and the authority figures that she looked to for guidance.

Similarly, Jessica, a 22-year-old senior in college, explained that questions were often met with pat answers:

I remember that was always the question that would always get asked, like, 'How far is too far?' And then the answer would be, 'Well if you have to ask, then it's probably too far!' That was always the question response... it was basically saying if a kiss goes beyond anything, like, all those things that we say no to, you're asking because you want to do all those things that we're saying no to.

She had gotten the distinct impression that to ask questions was taken as a sign by her educators that she was planning to engage in some immoral sexual activity; this realization was enough to keep her from consulting adults when she wondered about sexual topics.

With this response from educators, a majority of these women began to keep their own counsel about their curiosities, sometimes turning to friends for information, but largely trying to learn what they wanted or needed to learn about sex and sexuality by themselves and secretly. Secret learning about sexuality became many of these women’s only recourse when information

⁸ Ibid.

was limited and untrustworthy. Valerie spoke about looking up information on the internet while also needing to hide her internet searches from her mother—she needed further insight, but asking a trusted adult was not an option, and could have gotten her shamed or punished for her curiosity. A minority of participants sought new information by becoming sexually active in high school, leading to a pregnancy scare for one and a herpes diagnosis for another – their method of learning was effective in certain ways, but they also had not learned basic information they would have needed to keep their exploration from having difficult consequences.

Their lived theologies, then, were formed by the embodied reality that sex was not a topic that could be safely, openly discussed. This effect was obvious to me as several participants who had claimed they were excited to talk to me ended up seeming recalcitrant in person; after several repetitions, it became clear that they were trying to speak openly, but lacked practice talking about sex and sexuality (especially with an authority figure) and in some cases, simply did not have the vocabulary to express what they wanted to say. A majority of participants talked about the importance of honest communication in romantic relationships, for example, but few of those could offer examples of difficult conversations they had with their romantic partners; their deliberated theology or value supported communication, but when combined with the embedded value that sex should not be openly spoken about, their “lived theology” was one of very limited, awkward communication.

The Comfort Standard.

Regardless of their educational background (or lack thereof), sexual values were not theoretical concepts for these women. Of fifteen interviewed, only one participant said she was single and not actively dating, though she expected to in the future. The other fourteen were actively involved in relationships running the gamut from casual hook-ups and consensual non-monogamy to long-term relationships and engagement. Whether or not these women felt prepared to make decisions about their sexual values, they were actively doing so.

To get at their decision-making process, all participants were asked some variation of the question “How do you decide if it’s right or wrong to do a particular sexual act with a particular person?” Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of them had never attempted to articulate this process. What is more surprising is how similar the answers were among diverse participants.

Allison, for example, was a highly traditional Catholic who spoke at length about how her faith informed her sexual boundaries, but responded thusly:

Well, I feel like I would decide just by my comfort level. I like move on instinct a lot, so if I get a gut feeling where like, okay, that's not okay, that experience I had, in the past like I had a really bad gut feeling... So I think that whole comfort level thing...if I feel okay in my heart about it, then sure.

Samantha, by contrast, was a more casual Catholic, but echoed many of the same sentiments: “Definitely a gut feeling where I'm okay with, I'm ready for, like, it's something that I know I'm ready for.” Rose, an ex-Catholic with loose Evangelical affiliations, speaks similarly: “If this is what I want to do, it's what I want to do. And I think now, when I'm thinking of things, I try to keep things within the context of a relationship where I feel comfortable, everything's good.”

These statements are representative in the participant pool—the above participants all expressed particular boundaries that they had decided beforehand (aside from Allison, the hard line was typically sexual intercourse), but when it came to making choices in the moment, “gut feelings” and “comfort level” dominated their reasoning. Several participants explained how sophisticated thinking around sexual behavior is complicated by a college culture in which

drinking and hooking up often intertwine. Esther, a practicing Catholic who actively enjoyed hook-ups and friends-with-benefits arrangements on her Catholic university campus, admitted that she had not been sober for her last few sexual encounters and summarized one of the difficulties of relying on gut feelings:

I guess, I feel like in any type of intimacy situation, you're not thinking so much as you are just doing. Until it comes to actually having sex, I think a lot of times you're not really thinking "Oh, is this something I want to do?" until it becomes something you don't want to do.

Her statement conveys a defensive posture when it comes to sexual behavior—acts may not be reflectively considered until a boundary is crossed. Again, it is curious to note that participants who had strong religious convictions and those who had minimal convictions appeared to be equipped with the same tools when it came to on-the-ground decision-making. Their lived theologies did not draw upon distinct wisdom, some based on a religious tradition and some not, but on a fairly non-reflective internal sense of rightness or wrongness. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt calls this “moral intuition,” a near-automatic moral judgment that occurs without the agent consciously weighing evidence or reasoning their way to a conclusion.⁹

Discussion

The above three encounters strongly suggest that for as much import as the Roman Catholic tradition puts on sexual morality, the formative theologies of that tradition are not being taught to youth in such a way that equips them with a uniquely Catholic or Christian method of discernment. Because these young adults were taught to view sex as a subject set apart at an early age and were left to learn information and values on their own and from an assortment of sources, decision-making takes on a distinctly non-religious method.

For religious educators, each of these encounters may provide “food for thought” regarding how sexuality education is addressed in Christian homes and Christian places of worship. Is all discussion of sexuality entirely off the table, for example, or are parents and educators able to respond to inquiries about relationships and reproduction calmly and directly when they arise? Especially around adolescence, are questions about sexual topics welcome and answered, or do they elicit alarm and anxiety among educators because they fear adolescents only ask questions about sexual activities they intend to experiment with? Finally, are youth and young adults given the safe, non-judgmental opportunities they need to talk openly about sex, come to grips with their own values, and make plans for now they intend to live as sexual people and Christians?

While this is the case for the fifteen participants in this study, it is helpful to recall that qualitative research is meant to be indicative instead of generalizable; other Catholic communities might encourage and elicit very different lived values among their youth and young adults. However, this study should offer insight to a variety of religious communities who are unsure of how their approach to sex ed might have longer-term effects. Additional qualitative research in this area with young adults could contribute greater comprehension to why theologies of sexuality seem to be so far removed from lived values in this population. Research among young adults with other religious upbringings could help clarify whether this disconnect is more

⁹ Haidt, Jonathan. “The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment.” *Psychological Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2001): 814–34. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814, 818.

present among American women raised Catholic than American women raised in other traditions.

While the results of this study are not especially encouraging for parents and religious educators who have a stake in passing along their religiously-based values to future generations, it does suggest several concrete possibilities for improving the chance that those values will be formative. Talking about sex and sexuality with children in age-appropriate ways from an early age might help them integrate this part of their embodied lives with the morals and values of friendship, touch, and bodiliness that they are learning on a daily basis. Consistent and sincere assurance that one is willing to hear and answer questions that a young person may have – and, crucially, the follow-through of non-judgmental listening and responding – might help young people trust the adult authority figures more with this topic. Finally, young adults were eager for the chance to talk to someone about sex and sexuality when presented with the opportunity, and several of my participants appeared to gain new insight about their own values simply from the process of trying to articulate them to me; this suggests that safe, open forums for discussions about sex and sexuality with young adults could scaffold their ability to connect their deeply held values, religious or not, with their behavior as they explore and created their lived values.

The mere topic of sexuality in religious forums often sparks concern, both from those who maintain precise standards for appropriate sexual behavior and from those who take a more individualistic approach to sexual decision-making. It is my hope that hearing from those who are most affected by Catholic and Christian sexuality education can produce conversation that is compassionate, engaged, and ready to take the full complexity of lived theologies into account.

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Conflicting Identities: A History of Christian Affiliated Colleges and Universities Changing Views on LGBT Students

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Changing Views on LGBT Students

Introduction

In our culture, often the relationship of Queer students to Christian colleges and universities is often portrayed within our society as one of conflict. If anything, a random survey of LGBTQ students might produce negative results and feedback about these institutions. Flashbacks of the Soulforce Equality Ride might come to mind for many.¹ That was a group that drove around to many Evangelical schools across the country to give voice to Queer students at those institution. Many times they were banned from the campuses or even arrested for trespassing for just being a voice of support for Queer students. In this paper, we will examine the complex history and relationship of LGBT students with Christian colleges and universities. We will see how various institutions have responded to the organizing of LGBT students and what motivation informed their decisions. Next, there will be an examination of the current landscape of research for Queer students in the student personnel field and how the professionals in the field view religious schools. Finally, we will talk about LGBT Student Identity Development and how we might think of that within a Christian framework for paths forward.

Rising Out of Protest

Stonewall has become the defining moment for the modern Gay Rights Movement and awareness around LGBT concerns in our country. This protest was a revolt against the repressive police polices that Queer persons faced on a daily bases on the streets of New York City at the end of the 1960s. This event has been transformed into a mythical icon for the fight and liberation for Queer communities and issues. Despite the fact that this event has come to define a whole movement, it was but one of many actions during this moment of growing awareness and activity for Queer persons. It is in this era of change that the field of diversity studies in Higher Education began with the formation of student groups, offices, and policy changes around race, gender, and sexuality. Particularly, the development of LGBT support services and programing rose out of this moment of protest. In a study of 30 campus LGBT centers, it was shown that over two-thirds of them were developed in the aftermath of student protest with half of those protest forming after students faced a discriminatory event.² Therefore, the unique aspect of LGBTQ centers is that they have been defined since its beginning as an office that has been focused on advocacy and challenging the institutional norms of both public and private colleges.

One of the conflicts of having an icon like Stonewall in Queer history is the fact that often movements have a history and progression before the event that defines a movement. In the same light, that has happened in the evaluation of Queer history within the academy. There were many student movements and homophile groups that developed during the 60s that began to demand official recognition from their institutions. The difficult part of this history is that no major research or attempt at developing a meta-narrative to these student groups has been written. Instead, we have various LGBT student affairs professionals that have written small sections about this history with conflicting views on where to credit the beginning of the movement toward official recognition of an LGBT group.

¹ Soulforce. (2016). *History*. (Website: <http://www.soulforce.org/#!/timeline/c12gg>) Accessed 5/5/2016.

² Sanlo, Ronni, Sue Rankin, et all. (2002). *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 13-17.

One theory is to claim that the first institution to create an office should be the one recognized. This distinction belongs to the University of Michigan, when in 1971, they established the Lesbian-Gay Male Programs Office.³ Another theory is to accept the institution that first dedicated funding or space to LGBT students. In this case, it is the University of Minnesota that first gave space to FREE (“Fighting Repression of Exotic Expressions”) student group that was later renamed the Queer Student Cultural Center in 1969.⁴ In my own research on the area, I believe that we need to develop more information about the formation of homophile student groups across campuses in our country during this decade. We need to understand that LGBT centers did not start with space, funding, or faculty, but started in the pursuit of students for a more just society. One example of this struggle and one that predates the establishment of the centers above happened at Columbia University in April of 1968.⁵ Most know this protest as the most prominent examples of student protest movements changing university policy. Students for a Democratic Society came together to protest the university policy around the Vietnam War but also contained coalitions of other student groups that closed down their campus for ten days. One of the lesser known stories from that movement was the recognition of the demands of the Student Homophile Committee in shutting down the psychology department until they placed in their policy as a department to fight against the DSM classification at the time. They were able to accomplish this in the coalition of change that brought together pacifist, black power, and feminist for changing the landscape of Columbia University. This just exposes how we need to further study our past in this regard as it shed light on how we might need to view our future in bringing together multi-cause diversity initiatives and understanding modern student movements such as Black Lives Black in more complex intersectional terms.

In the Christian Context

For our own understanding, it might be helpful to look at some examples from Christian colleges and universities. We can begin to understand the status of where Christian higher educational institutions are in regard to the advancement and support of Queer students. We will take note of four schools in this section that will show a balance of views. Two of these institutions have taken the stance of supporting LGBT organizations and the two others have maintained a position of faith against such developments. By exploring this, we will be able to see how each of these schools has viewed diversity and faith with their actions toward LGBT students. I will be using typology descriptions of Christian colleges and universities that were produced by Robert Benne in his book, *Quality with Soul*, as a means of comparison between these institutions. This helps give us a framework as each of these schools come from a different Christian denomination which has a different ethos around their formation of students.

Our first two institutions will show examples of “critical-mass” institutions.⁶ These schools view their Christian tradition as the primary or privileged perspective when looking at education and student formation. They tend to be composed of communities where a majority of the students are from the

³ Sanlo, Ronni, Sue Rankin, et al. (2002). *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 17-18.

⁴ Marine, Susan. (2011). *Stonewall's Legacy: Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Students in Higher Education*. ASHE Higher Education Report, Vol 37, Number 4. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Periodicals. 22.

⁵ D'Emilio, John. (1998) *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 227.

⁶ Benne, Robert. (2001). *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 49.

school's confessional background but allow for students of other perspectives to attend. Baylor University, a Baptist institution in Waco, Texas, is an example of this model on the conservative side. This means that they are an institution that is affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas (allied with the Southern Baptist Convention), the majority of faculty, students, and trustees are all members of the denomination and must abide by a statement of faith that defines student life. Baptist have an interesting context when it comes to their history of administration of colleges.⁷ Despite their strong support of congregational freedom, Baptist have traditionally had strong control over their institutions with state conventions being authoritative bodies in the support of schools. Therefore, the social culture of the Baptist tradition within an area had large influence on the piety of the schools they founded. Therefore, Baylor University is very influenced by the social conservative nature of the Southern Baptist Convention and the greater Texas region. For many years, Queer students have organized outside the official recognition of the university for mutual support.⁸ As stated about critical-mass schools, most of the students and faculty are of the confessional tradition of the sponsoring denomination. Therefore, supporting LGBT students would be against their statements of faith and their stance against pre-marital sex. Recently, there has been a break between students and faculty. The students have tried to maintain their strong ties to these social policies, even with the Student Senate voting against passing a resolution that would have removed "homosexuality" from the discipline code.⁹ Therefore, the student body has preserved the social contract of the community whereas the faculty have moved toward another view on the matter. The faculty on the other hand have been trying to appeal to a large audience in the bid to becoming the top national Christian school. Therefore, they have removed this clear statement against it in favor of one that would allow for more diversity of students to be able to live within the ethos of the school. In the pursuit of becoming a national research university, they are in the process of shedding their religious social standards such as not allowing dancing or alcohol, whose policy has changed also in recent years. This shows how the pressures of the national attention at Baylor has produced two movements with students wanting to preserve their cultural milieu and faculty seeking to provide a more challenging environments when it comes to diversity.

Another institution that falls into the critical-mass category is that of Wheaton College, an Evangelical liberal arts college outside of Chicago, Illinois. Evangelical colleges such as Wheaton have their own unique call when it comes to how formation should be viewed.¹⁰ Instead of being unified around one confession or denominational tradition, evangelical institutions have often found themselves defined with high regards to Biblical studies, conservative ethics, and cautious of popular culture. They have a high regard for believing collegiate formation depends on the strong Christian character of the institution for them to be sent out into the world solid in their faith. Due to the lack of denominational ties, alumni have come to form an important base of administration for these colleges.

⁷ Burtchaell, James. (1998). *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 357-360.

⁸ Wiggins, Mark. (2011). *Baylor Students, Faculty Clash Over Proposed Gay Student Group*. ABC News KXXV. (Website: <http://www.kxxv.com/story/14183742/baylor-students-faculty-clash-over-proposed-gay-student-group>). Accessed 5/5/2016.

⁹ Ohlhieser, Abby. (2015). *Why Baylor University's Sexual Conduct Policy No Longer Calls Out "Homosexual Acts"*. Washington Post (Website: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/07/08/why-baylor-universitys-sexual-conduct-policy-no-longer-calls-out-homosexual-acts/>). Accessed 5/5/2016.

¹⁰ Burtchaell, James. (1998). *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 743-746.

Wheaton, just like Baylor, has a student organization that has not been recognized by the college.¹¹ Yet, in 2015, the administration decided to hire a chaplain and organizer for LGBT students on campus as a way to think about how these students can be brought into the religious ethos of the school.¹² The administrators faced a conflict in this decision. As stated before, the support structure for this type of university depends on alumni that supports and expects the college to create a Christian environment for the formation of students to spread the Gospel. Therefore, for many of these supporters, the thought of providing LGBT students with support staff members was undermining the whole goal of the educational experience. Wheaton can never claim independence from its public persona because they depend on it for alumni funding and students that are drawn to that ethos. So even in moments when they are trying to expand the circle, they too like Baylor, find themselves in troubled water with their base of support. As we have seen with these two examples, institutional change is difficult for various reasons at critical-mass schools. There are expectations from alumni, denominations, students, and trustees for the status quo. We have also seen how diversity is commodified by both of these institutions as Baylor wants it for national reputation and Wheaton wants it for greater clarity of bringing LGBT students into their form of faith (evangelizing). Neither of these views fully accept nor support current LGBTQ students that are members of their communities or the value they bring to the learning process. For this reason, promoting diversity can be a difficult task for those in the minority will always be a secondary concern or will not have the support of the institution for the special needs of their communities.

The next institution we will cover is the University of Notre Dame, a Roman Catholic research university in South Bend, Indiana. This institution would be called “Intentional Pluralist.”¹³ This means that it normally has a higher percentage of students not from its faith tradition and there is a greater focus on a classical liberal education. This often means that the ethos of the tradition takes place as a dominate voice but allows for the sharing of space with others. For Norte Dame and many other Catholics institutions, the assumption would be for a hierarchy of power from Rome to the colleges. In fact, the in American experience, it has been quite the opposite.¹⁴ Only sixteen out of over a hundred institutions that are Catholic affiliated have trustees from Rome or local diocese. Instead, the religious orders have been the primary actors in the field of Catholic Higher Education and the ethos they create gives most of the character to their institutions. In the example of Notre Dame, the Congregation of the Holy Cross has always had a deep culture and respect for the diversity of knowledge that could be brought together within a Catholic framework.¹⁵ Therefore, diversity for their model can only mean the advancement of the world and the church when given a Catholic character. This is demonstrated in their Mission Statement, “As a Catholic university one of its distinctive goals is to provide a forum where through free inquiry and open discussion can various lines of Catholic thought interest with all forms of knowledge found in the arts, sciences, professions, and every other area of human scholarship and

¹¹ OneWheaton. (2015). *Our Mission* (Website: <http://www.onewheaton.com/index.html>) Accessed 5/5/2016.

¹² Rodgers, Julie. (2016). *How a Leading Christian College Turned Against its Gay Leader*. Time Magazine (Website: <http://time.com/4233666/wheaton-college-gay-leader/>) Accessed 5/5/2016.

¹³ Benne, Robert. (2001). *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 49.

¹⁴ Burtchaell, James. (1998). *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 561-563.

¹⁵ Benne, Robert. (2001). *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 85-87.

creativity.”¹⁶ LGBT student affairs at Notre Dame are housed in the Gender Relations Center founded in 2004.¹⁷ What separates Norte Dame from some of our previous examples is that the initiative to support LGBT students came from the university administration. Noting the increasing number of Queer students using the service of the GRC, there was the decision to hire a full time staff member to work as an LGBT advisor and form programing for them. This process also produced a pastoral plan from the Congregation about the matter.¹⁸ In not hiding from their support of the Catholic tradition of chastity, at the same time, they acknowledge that the main goals of their university are the production of the religious virtues of charity and justice. For them, they know that the formation of an LGBT student group might upset some parts of their church or alumni, but they have the ability to resist push back for the sake of their values. Therefore, in the model of the intentional pluralist, there is always room for conversations between the dominant voice of the institution with those that seem to be contrary. Particularly, in this case, Notre Dame saw that they needed to help give resources and a voice to a community that they thought would benefit their discussions in promoting charity and justice in our world about gender related issues encountered on campus.

Our final case study will be that of Oberlin College, a liberal arts college in Oberlin, Ohio. This college was founded under the support of Congregationalists with assistance of a Presbyterian minister. This dual ministry of the Congregationalist and the Presbyterians founded many colleges and universities before the Civil War in the Midwest and Rocky Mountain regions.¹⁹ During this time period, there was strong relationship between both denominations and their schools, but that would shift in the breakdown of their joint ministries. In many ways, the Congregationalists once forced to manage their own schools looked much like how we previously saw with Baptist conferences taking over the supporting roles. The unique thing that happened in the Congregational schools was the fact that instead of being influenced by alumni or state conventions, it was the faculty in many of these institutions that took over the daily operations and appointed their own trustees. This would diffuse the affiliation with the church overtime. This is what we would call the development of “accidental pluralism.”²⁰ These are schools that are loosely or no longer affiliated with their religious tradition and they often have religious life staff that continue a supporting role but often promote a secular atmosphere across campus. This leads into our example of how Oberlin College developed their LGBT programs which is one of the earliest examples of LGBTQ programing. It was in the mid-60s when the campus was facing increasing “interference” of the county police in the affairs of the college.²¹ Several students and faculty members had been arrested for socializing together in town and in Cleveland. The President and Dean of Students saw this as interference of the local police into the authority of the

¹⁶ Norte Dame. (2016). *Mission Statement* (Website: <https://www.nd.edu/about/mission-statement/>) Accessed 5/5/2016.

¹⁷ Norte Dame. (2016). *About Us*. Gender Relations Center. (Website: <http://www.grc.nd.edu/aboutgrc/#about4>) Accessed 5/5/2016.

¹⁸ Norte Dame. (2016). *Beloved Friends and Allies: A Pastoral Plan for the Support and Holistic Development of GLBTQ and Heterosexual Students at the University of Notre Dame*. Congregation of the Holy Cross. (Website: <http://friendsandallies.nd.edu/>). Accessed 5/5/2016.

¹⁹ Burtchaeil, James. (1998). *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1-8.

²⁰ Benne, Robert. (2001). *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 49.

²¹ Oberlin College. (2006). *Behind the Mask*. Oberlin College LGBT Community History Project. (Website: <http://www.oberlinlgbt.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BehindtheMasks.pdf>) Accessed 5/5/2016. 66-68.

campus to enforce law and the formation that the college should be providing these students discipline. This is the watermark of the independence in which Congregational colleges took in the administration of their institutions; that they were even immune to standards of conduct of the surrounding community. The administration wanted to keep the students and faculty on campus and under their power, so this started the process of forming concepts of how to proceed. The President required that these LGBTQ students and faculty quit attending local bars and be secluded to their own room on campus for socializing. This was the offer of physical space to a minority group of students, yet it was still formed in the pretense that homosexual persons had psychological issues. In a twist of irony, the students and faculty never got on board with this concept and formed their own advocacy group called the Oberlin Gay Liberation in 1971.²² In the time span of three years, they would transform into one of the first LGBT centers at a Christian college. Therefore, as we see in this example, there was not a conflict with faith that has been encountered as in the other institutions we have profiled. The separation of church authority from the institution and deference to administration in managing the college environment at Oberlin gave the President the authority to provide a space for LGBT students without having to address faith at all. One of the positive benefits of accidental pluralism is that they are able to take on change and diversity easily without having challenges from outside authority either in the forms of alumni or church authorities. This can be a benefit I do acknowledge to allowing multiple voices but the problem with these models is that they often do not give a means for integration of these students into the faith traditions that maintain these colleges.

Reflections on Christian Institutions from LGBT Professional Student Resources

In our previous section, we examined how Christian colleges and universities have responded differently to the call for diversity particularly with LGBT students. We saw how the ethos and religious tradition of an institution had varying effects on the responses and actions of administrators, alumni, denominations, faculty, students and trustees. In my presentation of these effects, I gave two examples of negative developments in relationship to Queer students and two examples of positive progression for Queer students. The landscape of responses from Christian colleges are complex and need more study to fully understand how those institutions have responded to the needs of Queer students on their campuses. Despite this lack of information on the matter, when looking at the literature of LGBT Student Affairs, we find a black and white picture on the matter for the most part. The picture that has been cast in the field has been that religious institutions have primarily been sites of oppression for Queer students and to avoid the dialogs on religion.

The American College Personnel Association in 2000 published a collection of articles on the state of LGBT centers and student personnel called *Toward Acceptance*.²³ There are two article within this body that are of keen interest to our study. One is an article from Valsin DuMontier on methods of dealing with religion and particularly how to address issues of reading the Bible in light of homosexuality.²⁴ This article is rather basic on helping students navigate Biblical interpretation around

²² Oberlin College. (2006). Behind the Mask. Oberlin College LGBT Community History Project. (Website: <http://www.oberlinlgbt.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BehindtheMasks.pdf>) Accessed 5/5/2016. 77-81.

²³ Wall, Vernon and Nancy Evans. (2000). *Toward Acceptance: Sexual Orientation Issues on Campus*. American College Personnel Association. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

²⁴ DuMontier, Valsin. (2000). *Faith, the Bible, and Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals*. *Toward Acceptance: Sexual Orientation Issues on Campus*. American College Personnel Association. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. 321-341.

the “clobber passages” and provides some helpful tips on ways to have discussions with church resources mentioned in the final section. The irony of this piece is that it is the most quoted when referencing Queer students and religion. This has also been the only article in my research that despite acknowledging negative history towards LGBT students from Bible study, that understanding and engaging your faith in new ways is something that should be encouraged on our campuses particularly for Queer students. On the flip side, the other article around religious institutions in this book listed in the “Institutional Issues” section. Heidi Levine and Patrick Love write a chapter that is dedicated to warning future administrators and LGBT student personnel of the overall negative atmosphere at religiously affiliated institutions.²⁵ There are several factors of this section that I find need to be exposed in order to understand the negative views of these scholars toward Christian colleges and institutions. In the first place, there needs to be noted that neither of these writers worked in a religious institution nor have they since this publication worked within such an institution. When examining both their examples and sources for information, we find that they have a really limited scope. They only looked at sources from Roman Catholic viewpoints, which we have acknowledged previously how the local character of the religious order can change dynamics greatly. Therefore, one can assume that not only did they compare all religious institutions as the same from the look at one faith tradition, but they also only looked at a rather conservative section of that population. Their final warning to those entering into religious colleges is to “Be Realistic.” In this, they speak of being satisfied with small steps of progression for the assumption is that Christian colleges and universities are such a negative environments for Queer students that one should not expect much from them.

After this publication, there was a concerted effort to bring together LGBT student personnel for the formation of their own professional association that has started forming in 1997.²⁶ This publication was the first major effort of the National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Campus Resources (now named Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Professionals).²⁷ It is often referenced as the guidebook to any LGBT student personnel and is still promoted by the organization as the standard barrier. Once again, there are conflicts in the narratives that are told about Christian colleges and universities. In the section on case studies of eight institutions that are positive examples in the field, not one of those are religiously affiliated institutions.²⁸ Then later in that same section, they are giving demographics of the field and state that it is “not surprising that few religiously affiliated institutions have established such centers/offices, only Emory University and DePauw University, both associated with the Methodist Church, have done so.”²⁹ We have seen in our own example of Oberlin, who at the time not only was Congregational but had a seminary, was one of the

²⁵ Levine, Heidi and Patrick Love. (2000). *Religiously Affiliated Institutions and Sexual Orientation*. Toward Acceptance: Sexual Orientation Issues on Campus. American College Personnel Association. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. 89-108.

²⁶ Sanlo, Ronni, Sue Rankin, and Robert Schoenberg. (2002). *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education*. Greenwood Educator’s Reference Collection. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 11.

²⁷ Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Professionals. (2016). *History* (Website: <https://lgbtcampus.memberclicks.net/assets/consortiumhistory.pdf>). Accessed 5/5/2016.

²⁸ Sanlo, Ronni, Sue Rankin, and Robert Schoenberg. (2002). *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education*. Greenwood Educator’s Reference Collection. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 17-23.

²⁹ Ibid. 26-27.

first in 1973. Also, Duke University founded their LGBT Center in 1994.³⁰ We just find the lack of care in sourcing examples of LGBT student movements in Christian colleges and universities. Finally, in the last section of the book, there is an appendix for resources in various areas of books, movies, programs for LGBT student personnel.³¹ It is interesting to note that the only mentions of religious groups falls in the “Anti-LGBT Websites” which it list the likes of American Family Association, Death Penalty for Homosexuals in the Bible, and Westboro Baptist Church.

Kerry Poynter, former LGBT Center Director for Duke University, comes to reply to these developing trends that he notices in the field.³² He begins with a description of gay culture at the time looking at Ellen Degeneres, Will and Grace, and Queer as Folk. In all of these cultural media connections with the Queer community, they only show one kind of community. They only reflect a community that is white and not religious. He proceeds to give examples of how this dichotomy has harmed his students that he worked with at Duke. African American students felt they could only be loyal to being Black or Gay; a seminarian felt like Christianity didn’t accept him nor did the gay community for being religious. In this, Poynter opens us up to intersections of identity that I believe will be important for how we think about understanding Queer students in Christian colleges and universities. In conclusion, within the field of LGBT student personnel, we need to support a community of scholars that are dedicated to opening up dialog with religious institutions without dismissing their contribution to the formation of Queer students.

Understanding Formation

One of the major areas that needs Christian scholars is in developing literature for LGBT Student Identity Development. Student Development Theory has been one of the cornerstones of administrators and program directors in student affairs in higher educational institutions. These are systematic philosophical underpinnings of how to think about student formation and what programs would be a benefit to their development. In many regards, these systems often have a degree of universality around how humans function and also tend to limit themselves to certain periods of life. Just like the advent of changing cultural standards around homosexuality in the 1970s, the same is true for this field as we see scholars begin to propose systems of development geared toward LGBT students.

One of the first theorists to propose a formation model for LGBT students is Australian psychologist Vivienne Cass. In 1978, she took part in a study detailing the life journey of 178 Queer persons with a majority of them being gay men.³³ She lays out six stages in the progression of understanding one’s identity for a Queer person. The first stage is confusion, which is like a moment of epiphany that there is something different about yourself from others. Comparison is the second stage when the person chooses a life between being straight or gay. Tolerance is the next stage where

³⁰ Duke University. (2016). *Timeline of Duke’s LGBTQ History*. Duke Student Affairs Office (Website: <https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/csgd/about-us/history-lgbtq-life-duke/timeline-dukes-lgbtq-history>) Accessed 5/5/2016.

³¹ Sanlo, Ronni, Sue Rankin, and Robert Schoenberg. (2002). *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education*. Greenwood Educator’s Reference Collection. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 229-247.

^{32,33} Poynter, Kerry. (2005). *Multiple Identities: Creating Community on Campus for LGBT Students*. New Directions for Student Services, no 111. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Periodicals. 41-47.

³³ Cass, Vivienne. (1984). *Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model*. Journal of Sex Research, Vol 20, No 2, 143-167.

someone starts to experiment with life within the Queer community but is not dedicated to the identity. If the person affirms their experience in the Queer community, they might progress to Acceptance where the person is open about their life to all persons in their life. This might be called the “coming out” moment. Pride results from positive experiences with the added personal connection to fighting for one’s identity in society. The final stage is Synthesis where the person is content with all aspects of their life and sexuality. For scholars that follow in Cass’s footsteps, they often use the term of life stages and progressive steps in their formation. In giving credit for being the first in the field, we can see various conflicts in our modern day. One of the major conflicts is that it reduces everyone to the same pattern of development and only allows for forward movement. It does not account for the complexity of how persons might move in and out of various stages of these developments. Are we ever fully formed as persons as this progression tends to insinuate? Another area that it does not take into account the intersection of identities that are at play in a person’s life. If there is anything we have gained knowledge about is that not all Queer persons affirm the same experience. From this, Cass’s model also assumes societies that press negative impressions on the person and as we move forward, we might see that this model will no longer be valid as children are raised in accepting cultures. Finally, unless one reaches the final stage in their life, it proposes that a person will never be content with their sexuality or who they are as a person. Therefore, this early model was a great start to thinking about LGBT student development but may not speak fully to our modern context.

The other major scholar in this dialog is Anthony D’Augelli, a professor of Clinical Psychology at Pennsylvania State. He is the proponent of the “life span” model.³⁴ For D’Augelli, the development of identity is always in context to the person’s life and the influences around them. Therefore, the situations of one’s life will always change with the movement of context and conditions that one finds themselves in. So instead of stages, D’Augelli focuses on the concept of six dynamics that are constantly in fluid movement during life. The first is affirmation of identity when one feels same-sex attraction with action and affirmation. Next, the idea of making contentions with aspect of the Queer community from society or history where one has a personal identity within their sexuality. The third dynamic is formation of a social identity, which are the relationships that are maintained between allies and other Queer persons. Out of these relationship, the next development should be the creation of alternative family. As a result of this, one might have the opportunity for greater personal intimacy with a person and exploration of their sexuality. Investing in personal risk is the last dynamic where after having all these dynamics, a person is willing not only willing to listen but also to be formed by the community that is invested in them. In D’Augelli study, it is noted that he allowed for the development of persons to define their own dynamics of growth. From this, his work has become popular in the advent of intersectionality and future scholars using this model have been able to adapt to their specific communities of focus.

A Christian Context for LGBT Student Identity Development

Stanley Hauerwas in *The State of the University* gives us his final glimpse into what the purpose of higher education could be.³⁵ He gives examples of how the Church Fathers used their office as a

³⁴ D’Augelli, Anthony. (1994). *Identity Development and Sexual Orientation: Toward a Model of LGB Identity Development*. Human Diversity: Perspectives on People in Context. San Francisco: CA: Jossey-Bass. 312-333.

³⁵ Hauerwas, Stanley. (2007). *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers. 192-201.

means to elevate poverty. In the act of education, Hauerwas ask if the purpose cannot be that the university is not only a place where we learn of charity for the poor but it could also become a site where students are taught by the poor. This is a total reversal of what one might think when we place Hauerwas within the ivy walls of Duke University. In this hope for the university, I share many common concerns for the goals of our pursuit of knowledge in the university. I would expand the breadth from Hauerwas's concern of poverty and state that the Christian university should be a place where all forms of injustice can be discussed and action taken towards reconciliation. The university should be able to be the testing field for how to effect change in our world and further the Great Commandment to "Love God and Neighbors." In order to carry out this vision, there has to be some fundamental changes to how we practice education. We will have to turn away from the idea that the university is just pursuit of knowledge for itself. For the Christian context, knowledge must always be oriented toward love and reconciliation. Therefore, knowledge can never just be about the collection of facts but must include the virtues of how that knowledge is used for the good of humankind. The university will have to be made into a community of praxis. We will have to think of the university as an extension of the church, where an incarnational view of ecclesiology argues that Christ's mission for liberation of the oppressed is carried out here and now by communities of faith.

In turning our institution into Christian communities of praxis, I believe we can turn to two scholars to give us insight into what this looks like. Paulo Freire, the father of Critical Pedagogy, developed the idea that educational communities must be communities that are not dedicated to a storehouse of knowledge, in the banking system, but must be dedicated to forming communities of praxis where the oppressed may find their voice, propose solutions, and enact those changes for the good of society. For Paulo, "Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it."³⁶ In this, Paulo has us understand that the educational model must be one where reflection and action go hand in hand for the transformation of society. He also states that in the right educational environment that we partake as co-creators to reimagine and recreate just societies where all persons can flourish together in love and care for one another. Therefore, educational communities must be places where relationships can be formed and nurtured. "Authentic education is not carried on by "A for B" or by "A about B" but rather has to be "A with B."³⁷ One scholar of Christian education that I believe can help us on this path is that of Thomas Groome. Groome is the founder of a model of Christian education called "Shared Christian Praxis" that shares many characteristics with Paulo's beliefs about education. Groome states that Christian praxis is "a participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical agency in time and place and on their sociocultural reality, have access together to the Christian Story/Vision, and personally appropriate in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith towards God's reign for all creation."³⁸ For Groome, the three main points of a community of praxis are active (all persons participating), reflective (all voices being heard and discussed), and creative (new ways of living formed). Groome is specific that in our formation, we have to use the stories of our current context and place them along with Biblical or Christian tradition as stories that are in conversation with each other.

³⁶ Freire, Paulo. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York City, NY: Bloomsbury Academic Press. 79.

³⁷ Ibid. 93.

³⁸ Groome, Thomas. (1991). *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. 135-138.

Therefore, I believe that the place for Christian scholars in LGBT Student Development is for us to engage in forming communities of praxis where those that are oppressed in our society may find their voice, raise awareness and critical reflection of their status, and work toward actions that will not only change the university or the church, but change the world. Therefore, the principle I hold for the formation of students are that we have communities of praxis that participate in dialogical construction and movements toward change. In this, the result should produce communities where relationships are formed for the reconciliation of the world. I believe for communities of oppression in Christian colleges, we have to be supportive of forming communities where students are able to learn about their particular contextual identity, compare and analyze their identity as a community with the Christian tradition or story, realize the paths forward where both speak to one another, and create communities of action around those sites of understanding. I believe that this practice could be taken on by all students and faculty to reform our institutions.

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Encounter with the Other. A Theory of Otherness (Alteritätstheorie) as a Perspective for Interreligious Learning

abstract

Apart from the pluralization of religion, hardly a phenomenon is currently as challenging for religious education as the presence of foreign religions. As a result of globalization, migration and refugee movements, our present has become multicultural and multireligious. Religious education in particular must be concerned with this. In this context, interreligious learning becomes a central task of religious education. A key element here is the concept of encountering people. Children and young people should learn tolerance and openness to dialogue in the encounter with other people and at the same time being able to understand themselves better. The present reflections pursue the thesis that the encountering in interreligious dialogue is not without its problems. Often the others are constructed according to one's own ideas, and thus they are not acknowledged as being themselves. On the other hand, I am attempting to assert a theory of otherness. It relies on dialogue, but preserves the otherness of the other in the encounter, acknowledges its freedom, and in this way can prevent a "confusing recognition" (Verkennende Anerkennung) in the process of encounter. Thus the basis for a real heterogeneity of the religious pedagogy is laid

In addition to the pluralization of religion, probably no other phenomenon is currently as challenging for religious education as the presence of foreign religions. In each classroom, in the parishes, in our circles of acquaintances, the presence of people from other cultural backgrounds and other religions has become an everyday experience. Due to globalization and the migration and refugee movement, our present has become multicultural, as well as multireligious. Religious educational science in particular must be concerned with this development. However, this cannot take place through generalizing patterns. The environments and the traditions which are lived by the subjects themselves, are too plural for this. Neither Christianity, neither Judaism, nor the Islam are monolithic unities. And for all that socio-religious studies say, these already plural religions appear in a diverse spread-apart. Children and young people make use of religious traditions in different ways.¹

In addition to that, there is a further differentiation, especially on a socio-economic level. Religious traditions serve self-assurance, whether it be in adaption or distinction. Religious educator Dörthe Vieregge has impressively worked out with marginalized adolescents that the conception of God is utilized subject-constructing, identity-shaping, but also delimiting towards other social, religious and cultural milieus, other peer groups and other environments at an intensity that is outright unexpected from the perspective of the secularization theorem.

¹ Cf. Hans-Georg Ziebertz, et al., *Religiöse Signaturen heute. Ein religionspädagogischer Beitrag zur empirischen Jugendforschung*, Gütersloh/Freiburg i. Br. 2003.

The Shell-study has pointed out similar results.² What is challenging is that, in addition to the categories of religious plurality and cultural diversity, categories of social discrepancy take action and that these seem to penetrate in a meaningful way.

Now, considering the multi-religiosity, the approach of interreligious learning has emerged, which claims to account for this from a subject-oriented perspective.

In the light of the intensified multi-religiosity, religious education currently records a downright “boom” of this religious educational field of research.³ In doing so, not only the term is controversial.⁴ It is said to be “blatantly obvious that the container-term ‘interreligious learning’ demands an internal differentiation, which de facto takes place constantly, but which is scarcely characterized on the surface”.⁵ This extends to the apparent danger of an “interreligious diffusion of religion, or even to an interreligious culinaryism”,⁶ which threatens to dissolve the complex claim for religious traditions to the benefit of one-dimensional processes of appropriation. Traditionally, the term of “interreligious learning” is maintained. It is said to be more open, broader, more comprehensive than the term of “interreligious education”. What is to object is that a religious concept of education highlights interreligious education’s normative determination in a greater way than the concept of upbringing and especially learning, instead of merely depicting these processes with pragmatic drift. Such a concept of interreligious education can rather incorporate upbringing and learning and align them normatively.⁷

However, due to the interdependencies of multiculturalism, multi-religiosity and socio-economic discrepancy, the outlined challenges raise the question of to what extent the understanding of interreligious education, which is widely established in the field of religious education, is still appropriate. According to Monika Tautz, what is meant by ‘interreligious education’ is “mostly the rehearsal into a change of perspective which esteems the other, the rehearsal into a tolerance which perceives differences and respects them as such, the acquisition of knowledge about foreign religion(s), the maturation of one’s own faith in and through the encounter with the non-Christian religion(s) [...] whereby the ‘inter’ in terms of a ‘dialogical learning through encounter should take place as it were”.⁸ Oriented on individuation and identity formation in a social context, such an interreligious education aims at, as Friedrich Schweitzer points out, an “ability to pluralism” which is aligned in an interreligious way.⁹ But how are the addressed socio-economic differences taken into account here? Should cultural differences and social divergences not already be strictly related to each other categorially in the design of interreligious education? Should, to put it more precisely, differences and disparities not be correlated, as it currently happens in the discourse of heterogeneity? Obvious-

² Cf. Dörthe Vieregge, *Religiosität in der Lebenswelt sozial benachteiligter Jugendlicher. Eine empirische Studie*, Münster/New York/München/Berlin 2013.

³ Claudia Gärtner, *Vom interreligiösen Lernen zu einer lernort- und altersspezifischen interreligiösen und interkulturellen Kompetenzorientierung. Einblicke in aktuelle Entwicklungen im Forschungsfeld „Interreligiöse Bildung“*; in: PThI, 35. Jahrgang, 2015-1, 281–298; here: 281.

⁴ Cf. Martin Jäggle, *Interreligiöses Lernen – römisch-katholisch*; in: VF 52 (1/2007) 19-31; here: 20.

⁵ Georg Langenhorst, *Trialogische Religionspädagogik. Interreligiöses Lernen zwischen Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, Freiburg i. Br. 2016, 17.

⁶ Friedrich Schweitzer, *Die Religion des interreligiösen Lernens. Neue Antinomien einer religionspädagogisch-wissenschaftstheoretischen Grundfrage*; in: Stefan Altmeyer et al. (ed.), *Religiöse Bildung: Optionen – Diskurse – Ziele*, Stuttgart 2013, 269-278; here: 269.

⁷ Bernhard Grümme, *Öffentliche Religionspädagogik. Bildung in pluralen religiösen Lebenswelten*, Stuttgart 2015, 50ff.

⁸ Monika Tautz, *Welche Rolle spielt die Theologie im interreligiösen Lernen?*; in: Stefan Altmeyer et al. (ed.), *Religiöse Bildung – Optionen, Diskurse, Ziele*, Stuttgart 2013, 279-288; here: 279.

⁹ Friedrich Schweitzer, *Interreligiöse Bildung. Religiöse Vielfalt als religionspädagogische Herausforderung und Chance*, Gütersloh 2014, 133.

ly, the category of the ability to pluralism is not enough here. And should not, in addition, the field be reflected critically and discourse-analytically regarding its own mechanism of construction so to speak? After all, religious education obviously already acts in the notion of a learning “among”, an “inter”, with subordinations which must still be designated reflexively. This aspect seems to be the one which represents the obstacle of interreligious education that is ignored the most. Here, this aspect is again only hinted at so far.

At this point my thesis comes into play: In this complex problematic situation, the theory of otherness und the concept of the “enlightened heterogeneity” (Katharina Walgenbach) could help along.¹⁰ Thus, I try to combine the debate on pluralism with the discourse on heterogeneity constructively-critical in light of the theory of otherness and make this fruitful for religious education. Such an enlightened heterogeneity is based on illuminating the mechanisms of one’s own concept-constructions self-reflectively, which is always concerned with discourse-authority and hegemonic ambition, and to then relate it to the normative objectives and alignments by means of the Christian tradition. Authority and normativity are correlated. Thus, perspectives of righteousness and acknowledgement, of cultural-religious difference and equity, of disparity and discrepancy become critically correlatable. The ability to heterogeneity is interreligious education if it targets the ability to religious perception, to religious speech, to judgement and to action, considering a contextually enrooted otherness-theoretical form of thought, and in doing so takes into account one’s own mechanisms of construction in their dialectic self-reflectively critical.

In order to elucidate and establish this greatly shortened formulated thesis, I will proceed in three steps: Firstly, I fathom religio-theological foundations; secondly, I examine the field of interreligious education for a cultuarlistic shortage, in order to thirdly suggest perspectives of an enlightened heterogeneity.

1. Truth in dialogue? Theological initiation

From a theological perspective, this increasing awareness and appreciation of the non-Christian religions was facilitated by a revelation-theological burst of the ecclesiological and Christological exclusivism which has shaped the religio-theological assessments categorially over the centuries. Although the individual has all along been acknowledged the possibility to salvation, given God’s universal saving will (1 Tim 2,4) by means of theological constructs such as the Votum, the baptism of desire, as well as the figure of the anonymous Christianity, it was initially the Second Vatican Council, which became serious about this universal salvation and certified other religions as a collective at least rays of truth. In accordance with Jesus Christ, all other religions are acknowledged to be ways of salvation, depending on the extent to which they are sacred. While exclusivism amounts to the other’s conversion and mission, only such an inclusivism provides the necessary basis for interreligious education. This inclusivism appreciates the non-Christian believers as characters loved by God and dialogical counterparts, which even the Christians – irrespective of their christologically justified universal claim of truth – would have something to learn from.¹¹

But is this supposed to be a genuine dialogue, a reciprocal relationship between the religions before God? Anyhow, representatives of a pluralist theology of religion claim that a basis for

¹⁰ Katharina Walgenbach, *Heterogenität – Intersektionalität – Diversity in der Erziehungswissenschaft*, Opladen Toronto 2014, 23.

¹¹ Cf. as an insight Reinhold Boschki, Josef Wohlmuth (ed.), *Nostra Aetate 4. Wendepunkt im Verhältnis von Kirche und Judentum bleibende Herausforderung für die Theologie*, Paderborn 2015.

the dialogue, which is not only necessary but also sufficient, requires a genuine reciprocity, or at least an equally-ranking standing before God, respectively the Absolute. Certainly, one must not follow the ecclesiocentric constriction of “Dominus Jesus” in order to spot this pluralist theory of religion’s inadequacy. Utterly deconstructing claims of truth run counter to the religions’ entitlement, in particular to Christianity’s claim of truth. Instead, regarding the spirit of a mutual refraction of universal salvation and apophatic theology, could not be asked whether a final theocentricism could not help to avoid a relativism in the same way as avoiding an inclusivism, which tendentially subverts a dialogue? Such a theocentric Pluralism, which has been incorporated by Georg Langenhorst in the interests of its profiling of the trialogic religious education, is in terms of religious education questionable to that extent that it provides the basis for a “presuppositionlessly open, dialogical oriented interreligious learning” as a “genuine and open search process for ultimate truths, actual insights, deepest recognitions”.¹² But can interreligious learning actually remain presuppositionlessly? Does such a version of the claim of truth’s theocentricism not run contrary to its own intention of an impairment of the Christian, but also of the respectively otherwise justified and outlined Muslim and Jewish claims of truth for its part?¹³ Instead, the concept of truth could be grasped categorially different. This is attempted by the Comparative Theology, which has become more important for the interreligious dialogue, and in whose slipstream interreligious learning has also gained importance. Claims of truth are definitely of importance here. But they are developed in the dialogue itself, without an assumption of truth that runs ahead. The “Epistemic Humbleness”, which has been articulated by Klaus von Stosch, does not per se imply the other’s acknowledgement in his or her truth, but surely his or her “*ability to truth*”.¹⁴ Claims of truth thus become relevant “in view of certain religious believes within specific language-game-contexts”.¹⁵ He does not turn to a religion’s complex entity as a whole, but to the miniscule individual cases, which he then condenses comparatively in terms of a criteriology of interreligious judgement, which has immanently been developed out of religious believes.¹⁶ By renouncing a landmark decision about the question which religion casts the most adequate light upon the ultimate substantiality that has been met once and for all, it is supposed to result from the process which religion is actually profitable beyond “inclusivistic taming”.¹⁷ In terms of religious education, this is momentous as it is, because by voting for the religions’ authentic representation in their elements, a vote in favor of an essential point of view of the participants, and hence in favor of a denominational approach in the broadest sense become justifiable.¹⁸ A sheer outside view in terms of religious studies is not sufficient for a degree of religious believes which is life-determining and lifeworldly rooted. Nevertheless, here too, it must be asked whether the claim of truth which has been downsized to distinct language-game’s claim of validity suffices the Christian claim of truth in itself? But could the truth not be maintained as a universal truth in that it is viewed as valid by God and its truth is to be verified historically precisely in its theocentricism? It would then be a truth of testimony, which practically tries to implement under historical-contingent conditions, which it feeds on awaitingly and by which it knows itself to be endowed and challenged in advance.¹⁹ An otherness-theoretical concept of truth, which assumes a truth that is established by otherness, would not relativize its own claim of truth, but would put it into a relation with others that is

¹² Langenhorst, *Trialogische Religionspädagogik* 2016, 74.

¹³ Cf. Langenhorst, *Trialogische Religionspädagogik* 2016, 75-88.

¹⁴ Klaus von Stosch, *Komparative Theologie als Wegweiser in der Welt der Religionen*, Paderborn 2012, 168.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 293-317.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 330ff. In addition Rita Burrichter, Georg Langenhorst (ed.), *Komparative Theologie: Herausforderung für die Religionspädagogik. Perspektiven zukunfts-fähigen interreligiösen Lernens*, Paderborn 2015.

¹⁹ Cf. Jürgen Werbick, *Den Glauben verantworten. Eine Fundamentaltheologie*, Freiburg i. Br. 2005.

dialogical and willing to learn, because the own truth is precisely not understood to be self-constituted. This would unbolt the inclusivism truth-theoretically, and simultaneously thwart pluralism's relativistic drift.²⁰ This could be a religio-theological basis for interreligious learning.²¹ But at the same time, what I term interreligious learning's culturalistic drift should be thwarted.

2. Culturalism in religious education? A discourse-analytical contemplation

Evidences can be designated for this culturalistic constriction. It is regarded as imperative to analyze them in greater detail.

2.1 Intra-pluralism in interreligious learning

Interreligious learning assumes implicitly that not only religious individuals encounter each other within it, but individuals as members of religions. This assumes a religious homogeneity, and what might be termed representation-logic. Christians encounter Muslims and learn understanding, dialogue, acknowledgement by experience-saturated and knowledge-based change of perspective. In doing to, a representation is presumed that is not given according to every socio-religious study. Christian students are supposed to bring in the Christian faith within this learning through encounter, Jewish students the Jewish faith, Muslim students the Muslim faith. However, the studies clearly show that for most students in religious education classes, only a fractional identification with the Christian faith is given, which in itself is already highly plural. For a vast majority of adolescents, the Christian religion with its semantics has become a foreign religion, which they first and foremost experience from an external perspective.²² Lived faith and handed down faith, every-day-live religiosity and handed down religiosity diverge increasingly. Internal perspective and external perspective are difficult to distinguish and therefore also to sustain the strict distinction between religion-savvy and denominationally oriented interreligious learning, between intra- and interreligious learning consistently.²³

2.2 Cultural, developmental and social heterogeneity

If interreligious learning's representation-logic disregard interreligious pluralisms, further vacancies become identifiable. These particularly reside in two aspects:

a. Can interreligious learning presume a similar culture of argumentation, of rationality and discourse from all participants? If, perhaps, Christian students which have been socialized in Catholic or Protestant religious education classes, enter into a dialogue with Muslim students, also divergent methods of dealings encounter the handling of religious traditions and Holy Scriptures: here, a learning culture that is coined rather by enlightenment, there a learning

²⁰ Cf. Bernhard Grümme, "Er hat dir gesagt, o Mensch, was gut ist": Aspekte einer messianischen Erkenntnistheorie bei Franz Rosenzweig; in: *Orientierung* 60 (1996) 78-84.; Bernhard Grümme, *Vom Anderen eröffnete Erfahrung. Zur Neubestimmung des Erfahrungsbegriffs in der Religionsdidaktik* (Religionspädagogik in pluraler Gesellschaft 10), Gütersloh Freiburg i. Br. 2007.

²¹ Cf. Karlo Meyer, Monika Tautz, Art.: *Interreligiöses Lernen*; in: *Wirelex* 2015.

²² Burkard Porzelt, *Jugendliche Intensiverfahrungen. Qualitativ-empirischer Zugang und religionspädagogische Relevanz*, Graz 1999.

²³ Cf. Claudia Gärtner, *Religionsunterricht – ein Auslaufmodell? Begründungen und Grundlagen religiöser Bildung in der Schule*, Paderborn 2015, 217f.; Joachim Willems, *Interreligiöse Kompetenz. Theoretische Grundlagen – Konzeptualisierungen – Unterrichtsmethoden*, Wiesbaden 2011, 216ff.

culture that is primarily oriented on the scripture text. Learning through encounter here insinuates a symmetry of discursive and action-theoretical premises, which does not plainly exist.²⁴

b. Social heterogeneity

For interreligious learning, socioeconomic requirement's sensitivity and categorial consideration should be elementarily. Not only, that a justice-problem exists in denominational religious education classes anyhow, because discrimination's distinctly domestic and social conditions are relevant.²⁵ This would then carry weight for interreligious learning processes, if perhaps Muslim children from socially deprived migrant families would learn together with Catholic acolytes from established households.²⁶ Nevertheless, the issue becomes more meticulous and heterogeneous due to the interdependency of the individual factors. The sociology of education has proved the inconsideration among migrant status, discrimination and lacking educational commitment. Indeed, a correlation between success in school and migration is undeniable: the higher the degree, the lower the grade of students with a migrant background. However, while students with Turkish or Arabic migration contexts reveal rather inferior performances, it is reverse with students from Asia. Besides, the involvement in peer groups, as well as gender carry a significant weight.²⁷

This conflict situation indicates the interdependency and partially intensifying impact of the various dimensions of culture, religion, social status, gender, and thus shows the heterogeneity concept's validity for interreligious learning. Not considering this interdependency would lead interreligious learning to walk right into culturalism's trap, which locates interreligious learning within the field of culture and differences, but in doing so neglects the mechanisms and their intrinsic fixations. These already become apparent by the specific teaching structure of the teachers and their expectations and habitual attitudes. Undeniably, they contribute to discrimination and educational injustice due to their – thoroughly well-intentioned – attitudes, expectations and suppositions. If students with migrant backgrounds from socially deprived families are denied the recommendation for an academic high school (*Gymnasium*) despite good grades, because they are not given credit for the necessary domestic support, then this is an issue of “institutional discrimination”,²⁸ from which religious education classes, and thus also interreligious learning cannot be exonerated.

2.3 Essentialist attribution and didactic mechanisms of constructing

Such fixations and suppositions can for instance already be found in the expectations which are affiliated to the representation-logic. They manifest themselves there, where for instance Islamic children should bring in the Muslim prayer tradition into religious education classes. These common didactics require the attribution of religious practices (“Being a Muslim, you believe, after all...”).²⁹ A student is identified religiously from the group of his/her classmates and is removed from his/her peer group. Starkly, this denotes the heterogeneity-discourse's dialectics which has already been worked out, and which, encouraging participation, acknowledgement, and individualization, has a disposition to attribution, to essentializing

²⁴ Cf. Gärtner, Auslaufmodell 2015, 216f.

²⁵ Cf. Bernhard Grümme, Bildungsgerechtigkeit. Eine religionspädagogische Herausforderung, Stuttgart 2014.

²⁶ Cf. Gärtner, Auslaufmodell 2015, 216.

²⁷ Cf. Anna Brake, Peter Büchner, Bildung und soziale Ungleichheit. Eine Einführung, Stuttgart 2012, 50ff.

²⁸ Ibid., 113.

²⁹ Friedrich Schweitzer, Die Religion des interreligiösen Lernens. Neue Antinomien einer religionspädagogisch-wissenschaftstheoretischen Grundfrage; in: Stefan Altmeyer u.a. (ed.), Religiöse Bildung: Optionen – Diskurse – Ziele, Stuttgart 2013, 269-278; here: 276.

fixations, to reifications und thus to the development of stereotypes. Intentionally aimed at the acknowledgement of differences, this is produced at the same time. This logic, from which processes of acknowledgement express themselves as “misjudging acknowledgement”,³⁰ is discernible in interreligious learning. Two phenomena shall be singled out illustratingly:

In an oppressive, as well as almost caricaturing way, this becomes manifest by way of example on the level of materials and schoolbooks, insofar as Judaism is for instance represented as a devout orthodox Judaism in schoolbooks, which is embodied by a Jewish boy who is wearing a kippah and dons the phylactery. Something that targets schoolbook pedagogical empathy for the peers which is appropriate to the student’s age, and that also targets a change of perspective, is, however, highly problematic on several levels: on the macro level, Judaism is perceived as a religion, which was able to evade the processes of diversification, individualization and secularization in a very opaque way. On the micro level of Judaism itself, it is displayed as a coherent construct, without even mentioning Judaism’s inner differentiations. Finally, on the micro level, it is suggested that a Jew is a devout, orthodox Jew, which is disregarded by the accelerating processes of Judaism’s inner differentiation globally, as well as in Germany. In nuce, the logic of the misjudging acknowledgement becomes blatantly visible by this example. It seeks to motivate acknowledgement, but amounts to folklorization and stereotyping.

In addition, this logic becomes apparent in the didactics of encounter. Striving for the foreign religion’s authenticity in religious education classes, because a mere cognitive, knowledge-based approach is already constricted on a learning-psychological level and does not at all correspond to the religion’s complex dimensions, it draws on the representation-logic, when it profiles “the authentic encounter, in which each religion can say and claim what is its own” to be a prominent place of interreligious education.³¹ But, is the gap between every-day-religiosity, individual religiosity and religion not embezzled here? Is didactic structure’s intrinsic logic of religious-educational practice, as can be said in Bernhard Dressler’s words, not negated and a “myth of authenticity” cultivated here?³² How are foreign-religious students supposed to represent their own religion? What can be contributed here, according to which criteria are they chosen among their classmates?

These analytical perspectives on interreligious learning’s, respectively interreligious education’s discourse make two things obvious in an impressive way:

a. The hermeneutic category of pluralisation does not go far enough. Using her as singular hermeneutic-analytical reference point, moves religious education on this field in a cultural-istic drift, which enables her to perceive differences, but not inequalities and which enables her to work on them reflexively and, therefore, through which she risks to undermine her own postulates of subject orientation in the broad sense.

b. At the same time, the violation of the difference theorem, which is, as a basis of adequate perception of the otherness, elementary for the moments of change of perspectives and dialogues, becomes clear. The other is not appreciated as different, which makes one think, which irritates and enriches one’s faith. He (the other) is constructed in the mechanisms of

³⁰ Thomas Bedorf, *Verkennende Anerkennung. Über Identität und Politik*, Berlin 2010.

³¹ Folkert Rickers, *Interreligiöses Lernen: Die religionspädagogische Herausforderung unserer Zeit*; in: id., Eckart Gottwald (ed.), *Vom religiösen zum interreligiösen Lernen. Wie Angehörige verschiedener Religionen und Konfessionen lernen. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen interreligiöser Verständigung*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1998, 119-138; here: 126. Cf. Monika Tautz, *Interreligiöses Lernen im Religionsunterricht. Menschen und Ethos im Islam und Christentum*, Stuttgart 2007, 160.

³² Bernhard Dressler, *Interreligiöses Lernen – Alter Wein in neuen Schläuchen? Entwürfe in einer stagnierenden Debatte*; in: ZPT 666 (2003) 113-124; here: 121.

practice and hermeneutics instead, which are qualified as mechanisms of power. Hence, according to Joachim Willems, should come into view in terms of Christian education “how – in everyday live, in the media, but also through offers for interreligious learning – categories of the ‘interreligious appropriate’ and, above all, of the religious different are constructed and practices of attribution are conducted, which, contrary to the agents’ intention, *create* the religious different in the first place and subsequently it is described in a stereotyped way and stigmatised. Also, the question, how the other is *created* in different dimensions (gender, ethnicity, social class etc.) at the same time, must be raised”.³³

What interreligious education therefore misses is a self-reflexive examination of discourses for its immanent mechanisms of identification, misjudging acknowledgement, exclusion and power.³⁴ Its approaches, however, want to acknowledge more or less the otherness of the other as precondition of respect, tolerance and dialogue.³⁵ But this discourse-immanent aporia is overlooked – also in the approaches that we discussed yesterday. Regardless their grave divergences and in different intensity I see also with them this desideratum – beside other open flanks we have discussed and which we can again deal with in the discussion.

3. Enlightened heterogeneity. Perspectives

The religious educational approach of the enlightened heterogeneity, in contrast, tries to handle this desideratum constructively. Finally, I will concentrate on a few aspects at the level of form of thought and religious educational practice.

3.1. Form of thought

Par excellence in interreligious education the dialectic of universality and particularity is affected. How is the other supposed to be acknowledged as the other, how is an educational process supposed to be thought of and carried out, how is tolerance supposed to be initiated, if no resistance, no positionality, which ever already transcend the subject’s comprehension and experience horizon? On the other hand: How is education supposed to happen, how is experience supposed to happen, if otherness cannot be perceived hermeneutically and cannot be presented at least to some extent in one’s own categories of comprehension? This requires an intercommunicative concept of subject as well as a reason that allows to combine both, otherness and subject. An otherness-theoretical form of thought demands to protect the other’s ability to truth and communicability through recourse to the subject’s rationality, and anchors in principle in a reason that lets itself be irritated, liberated and opened by preceding otherness. This otherness-theoretical form of thought wants to be theory by reflecting the constitutional conditions of the subjective consciousness drawing on the traditions of transcendental thoughts in a transformational way. The language theoretical and the action theoretical foundation in intersubjective, language structured liberty allows to think the theory of otherness in categories of history and society and to adhere to a concept of universal reason. Correspondingly, the concept represented here firmly adheres to the reciprocity of subject and object. Particularly the reciprocity ensures the independence of I and You, of subject and object, of relative identity and difference.

³³ Willems, Joachim, Art.: Interreligiöse Kompetenz; in Wirelex 2015.

³⁴ Burrichter, Rita, Umgang mit Heterogenität im konfessorischen Religionsunterricht? Anmerkungen zu Optionen und Herausforderungen in einem schulischen Praxisfeld; in: Burrichter, Langenhorst, Komparative Theologie 2015, 141-158; here: 155.

³⁵ Summing Gärtner, Vom interreligiösen Lernen 2015, 290.

On the other hand, alterity cannot be wrapped up in dialogics in the light of the critically challenging, corrective force of the other's unassailable strangeness. Experience is antecedently created by otherness, as much as she must be experienced and internalized by the I. Dialogics, therefore, has to be based on asymmetry. The priority of the other in dialogue breaks the dialogics' strict reciprocity. The dialogics bursts into an interminability, into something unfathomable. The dialogics' reciprocity is undermined by an antecedent alterity that expands the dialogics into the open. With it, it gets a drift, a downgrade. In that way, any presence is questioned again. The dialogics' get a direction that cannot be reversed nor played down, which guarantees the authority and – in spite of all the presence – yet unassailable distance of the other in dialogue. In as much this opening can be therefore comprehend as a gift, it reveals the connectivity of the otherness-theoretical form of thought to the reflexive consideration of religious and Christian experiences.³⁶

Challenging this dialectic theory of otherness profiled by following subject and the other, a difference theorem and thus a difference competence can be established, which enables a sound attitude towards other religions. Thereby, this attitude is self-reflexive enough because it allows to reflect on the immanent tendencies of the discourse of heterogeneity to misjudging acknowledgement, to essentializing and exclusion. This does not relieve her of this dialectic but it enables her to clarify and to treat her in a way critical of ideology.³⁷

3.2. Practice

Concerning the consideration of the heterogenic starting point, analyses of the field of discourse are not very euphoric. Obviously interreligious learning does not have those instruments yet in order to appositely satisfy the socially, religiously and culturally highly different pupils. As well as a concept of interreligious learning for lower secondary school (*Hauptschule*) as well as for special-needs-school (*Förderschule*) and vocational school (*Berufsschule*) has not been developed beyond first outlines.³⁸ Thereby, especially the challenges of people with educational needs in their intellectual development are serious because these people have difficulties with changing their perspectives which is necessary for interreligious learning. Esthetic didactics of a receptive, concretely acting, vividly model-like as well conceptual approach should be differentiated with regard to the group of learners and to the subjects. Transformations in simple language, like it is meanwhile Bible didactically done in the educational science of inclusion, could be useful.³⁹

The latest didactic research inculcates impressively how closely the didactic mechanisms of discrimination in religious education and the didactic-methodical arrangements for an interreligious education with the ability to heterogeneity are connected. Accordingly, interreligious settings need theological and religious educational expertise in an intercommunicative learning process that gets teacher and student in interaction in a discriminating way. Open learning situations in self-organized learning arrangements of a religious plural class opens up “hardly

³⁶ Cf. Bernhard Grümme, *Öffentliche Religionspädagogik*, Stuttgart 2015, 5-100.

³⁷ Grümme, *Vom Anderen eröffnete Erfahrung* 2007, 250ff.

³⁸ Cf. Clauß-Peter Sajak, *Interreligiöses Lernen als schulformspezifische Herausforderung? Eine kritische Relektur religionsdidaktischer Konzeptionen*, in: Bernd Schröder, Michael Wermke (ed.), *Religionsdidaktik zwischen Schulformspezifität und Inklusion. Bestandsaufnahmen und Herausforderungen*, Leipzig 2013 329-350. Albert Biesinger, Friedrich Schweitzer, Matthias Gronover, Joachim Ruopp (ed.), *Integration durch religiöse Bildung. Perspektiven zwischen beruflicher Bildung und Berufspädagogik*, Münster 2012; Albert Biesinger, Klaus Kießling, Josef Jakobi, Joachim Schmidt (ed.), *Interreligiöse Kompetenz in der beruflichen Bildung. Pilotstudie zur Unterrichtsforschung*, Münster 2011.

³⁹ Cf. Monika Tautz, *Art.: Interreligiöses Lernen – Förderschule*, in: Wirelex 2015.

learning opportunities” and “fizzle out in questions of the interreligious dialogue”.⁴⁰ This is interesting because the educational research prefers a very tight learning setting likewise for disadvantaged students. Through open, constructivistically taught learning arrangements they are increasingly discriminated compared to the stronger classmates.⁴¹

What form this interreligious education in public school will take, and this is my final point, is by no means amenable to a religious education with ability to heterogeneity. Religious education demands – for the above mentioned education theoretical reasons – a participating internal perspective of the subjects, an experience-based, practical, different approach to religions. This by no means denies religion-savvy arrangements but incorporates them in an encompassing integral frame of denominational settings. In so far as positionality in religious educational terms is an integral part of religious education, it argues, regardless of the contextual requirements, rather against dialogical arrangements in class – apart from canonical conditions of the established state church.⁴² The denominational-cooperative religious education classes’ results in diverse evaluations, being profitable in many respects, make the initiatives to a profiling of religious-cooperative religious education classes within the subject group look very promising.

⁴⁰ Gärtner, Vom interreligiösen Lernen 2015, 294.

⁴¹ Cf. Grümme, Bernhard, Ein Desiderat der Lehrerforschung; in: KatBl 2 (2016), 136-142.

⁴² Cf. Miriam Schambeck, Interreligiöse Kompetenz. Basiswissen für Studium, Ausbildung und Beruf, Göttingen 2013, 35ff.

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From Pan-Protestantism to Pluralism: Herman Wornom and the REA's Journey toward Ecumenical and Interreligious Encounter, 1952-1970

Dennis Gunn

On September 14, 1970 as he was completing his tenure as general secretary of the REA, Herman Wornom found time to send a congratulatory note to Sr. Katherine Hargrove, RSCJ of Manhattanville College for receiving the Torch of Liberty Award from the Congregation Emanu-El in Rye, New York, adding, "I am winding up my official duties with REA today. This is probably the last letter I shall dictate as general secretary" (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 20, File 271). Perhaps, it is fitting that Wornom's last official correspondence was written to a Catholic sister to congratulate her on an award she received from a Jewish congregation for promoting interreligious dialogue. Eighteen years earlier, when Wornom first took office, he promised to promote

Herman Wornom was borne in Dare, Virginia in 1902. He went to Randolph Macon College where he graduated from in 1923. He then went to Columbia University, where he studied religious education with George Albert Coe, graduating with his MA in 1924. In his early career as a religious educator, he served as minister of education for three parishes: Central Church in Worchester, MA, Congregational Church in Glen Ridge, NJ, and Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church, outside Washington, DC. In the 1930s he returned to New York to pursue further graduate studies in religious education at Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University, where he studied with Harrison Elliot (Kathan 1992, 492). Although he never completed his doctorate, Wornom maintained a life-long interest in higher education and its contribution to the field of religious education (Schmidt 1983, 151). Wornom was ordained in 1940, and served as Assistant Field Work Director at Union and later Assistant Professor and Director of Field Work at Pacific School of Religion in Berkley. He again returned to New York in 1946 and became Executive



Secretary of the Department of Christian Education for the Protestant Council of New York City. While there, he became involved with the National Council of Churches, as a member of the Board of Directors of the Geneva Point Center in New Hampshire (Kathan 1992).

“Though there is an abundance of data of primary records kept carefully by Herman Wornom during this period, there is hardly any evidence regarding the selection of the new general secretary after the death of Harrison Elliott. One small set of minutes labeled “confidential” included the names of several men who might be considered for the vacancy, but among the thirteen names suggested there is no mention of Herman Wornom. . . No other records indicate the remainder of the process, how or why Wornom came to be selected,” but the announcement of his election appears in the 1952 May-June issue of Religious Education (Schmidt 1983, 148-149).

Those who knew him described him as “tenacious, persistent, hard-working,” a “superb organizer” and having the gifts of “communication and persuasion” (Kathan 1992, 495). “His endless correspondence betrays a personal thoroughness rare in even intimate private communication. This quality of administrative thoroughness is most notable in Wornom’s care of budgetary detail” (Schmidt 1983, 149).

REA’s Pre-Wornom Efforts at Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue

Willaim Rainey Harper’s founding vision for the REA was rooted in a broad, democratic vision of America as a Judeo-Christian nation. In practice, however, the REA

Personally, Harper retained some of the prejudices of his Protestant brethren toward Catholics, confiding in a letter to Henry Wade Rogers concerning representation of presidents of denominational colleges and universities, “For once I agree with the Catholics” (William Rainey Harper Papers, Box 4, Folder 14) or offering a qualified response to Father John Cavanagh of the University of Notre Dame, “I

think I appreciate the objectionable character of the word 'Romish'" (William Rainey Harper Papers, Box 5, Folder 29).

As John Elias notes, "Evangelical Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Jews were not a prominent part of the early history of this association because of its stated aims and leadership." However, "as time went on the religious education movement broadened its base by attempting to attract members who were other than liberal Protestants" (Elias 2003).

"The first meeting of the association was held in Chicago in 1903. In the official Bulletin of 1903 there is mention of Catholics and 'Hebrew' members, though they are not named. In Bulletin No. 4 there is mention of a Council of Religious Education of which the Roman Catholic Bishop John Lancaster Spalding of Peoria was among the elected members" (Elias 2003). "The first Roman Catholic addressed the third meeting in Boston in 1905. A second Catholic speaker did not address the convention until 1916. From 1906 to 1926 there were only two articles in the journal by Roman Catholics. Most articles by Catholics began to appear in the 1930s and 1940s" (Elias 2003).

A 1926 article by Laird Hites mentions that Catholics, Jews, and Evangelical Protestants are welcome in the REA since there is no theological position required for membership (1926).

"A survey of the association done in 1925-1926 by Professor H.N. Shelton and Hugh Harrie for the Institute of Social and Religious Research reported that though the association did not note denomination of membership, it was determined that in the membership there were 130 Methodists, 96 Presbyterians, 95 Congregationalists, 75 Baptists, 56 Unitarians, 3 Catholics, and 18 Jews along with 1719 members who had unknown denominational affiliations" (Elias 2003).

Despite efforts by the association to get Catholics to join throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Catholic participation was limited in large part because of the Catholic hierarchy's ongoing suspicion of the REA's

“decidedly liberal theology and a commitment to progressive education, which Catholics largely rejected” (Elias 2003).

In an analysis of the journal *Religious Education*, Elizabeth Glick Reiman observes that Catholics received less attention in the journal than did Judaism from its beginning in 1903 to 1953 (Reiman 1953).

A 1912 article on “The Jewish Child and the American Public” by Abram Simon offers an apologetic for American Jews as Americans: “What rights of the Jewish child in the American public school? There is only one answer to this question. He has no more rights and should have none less than any other child there. He would be guilty of an unpatriotic act were he, in the excess of zeal, to request any preferential treatment. There is no greater friend of the American public school system than the Jew” (Simon 1912, 527). Other early articles with specifically Jewish themes include “The Cultivation of the Social Spirit in Jewish Sunday School” also by Rabbi Abram Simon (1914) and “Jewish Religious Education” by Rabbi Louis Grossman (1911).

One article on “Hindu Religious Education” appeared in the journal in 1908 (Row 1908).

Letter from chair of Central Planning Committee dated Jan 6, 1950 to Dr. Samuel Freehof of Rodef Shalom Temple in Pittsburg inviting him to speak at a meeting of the local chapter of the REA on “some crucial issues in current religious education” (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 16, File 228).

Letter to Emmanuel Gamoran of the Commission on Jewish Education inviting him to become chair of the Cincinnati REA chapter, Jan 30, 1950 (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 16, File 228).

One of the most prominent Jews in the REA prior to Wornom’s time as general secretary was Leo Honor who joined the REA in the early 1920s when he was registrar of the Teachers’ Institute at Jewish Theological Seminary. As Judah Pilch notes, “He saw in the REA an excellent means to bring together men and women engaged in religious education for an exchange of views and opinions” (1957, 49). He

later joined the REA board in the late 1930s and continued to be an active member up until his death in 1956. His presence helped raise awareness of ecumenical and interreligious concerns within REA. The minutes for the first meeting of the Committee on Relations to Other Organizations of which Leo Honor was a participant, for example, indicates “how a better cooperative relationship could be established with Catholic groups was discussed at length.” It was further suggested “to have the meetings of the REA, Jewish Educational Society, and International Council of Religious Education about the same time to make it possible for more of the leaders of each organization to meet and work out some of their common issues. . . Dr. Honor agreed to bring this matter before the next meeting of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Council of Education (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 14, File 182). And, the minutes for the Committee on Relations in 1940 mentions “Dr. Israel Chipkin of the Jewish Education Association suggested the desirability of REA membership to the Board of Directors of his organization, and as a result of his efforts and those of Dr. Leo Honor, 17 new members were enrolled” (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 14, File 187).

50th Anniversary Convention

Members of the Planning Committee for the Observance of the 50th Anniversary of the Religious Education Association intentionally included several representatives from the Jewish and Catholic faiths. These included Dr. Israel Chipkin, editor of *Jewish Education* and Vice-President for research for the Jewish Education Committee of New York, Dr. Emanuel Gamoran, Director of Jewish Education for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Dr. Simon Greenberg, Vice Chancellor of Jewish Theological Seminary, Professor Leo Honor of Drepais College for Hebrew, Dr. Abraham Millgram, Director of the United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, Dr. William Genley, Vice-President of Seton Hall, Dr. Francis Crowley, Dean of the School of Education at Fordham University, Fr. Cyril Meyer, Vice-President of St. John’s University, and Fr. George Ford, pastor of Corpus Christi Church in Manhattan (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 14, File 192).

An address on “The Crisis of Religion in Education” by Abba Hillel Silver, Rabbi of Congregation Tifereth Israel in Cleveland, Ohio as part of the opening assembly of the 50th anniversary convention echoes the broadly inclusive theme of a common faith in an American way of life, “A new religious orientation is required for the preservation of the American way of life and for the preservation of our civilization. Much of our thought in recent years has centered overseas. We have been concerned with world reconstruction, with relief of the peoples abroad, with saving mankind from Communism. We have considered many ways of how to strengthen democracy abroad, but it is well to take stock of conditions at home. How sound is the American way of life? A critical barometer of the American way of life is the American home” (Silver 1954, 67). Note, Silver does not mention anything explicitly Jewish in his talk but appeals to a broader audience.

In 1953 Wornom corresponded with Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, President of the University of Notre Dame, who, though unable to attend, sent an endorsement of the work of the association. Wornom also sent an invitation to Bishop Edwin O’Hara of Kansas City, who accepted the invitation to present a paper at the meeting on “Roman Catholic approaches to providing religious education for its children and young people” (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 34, File 433).

Wornom describes the convention in these terms in a letter dated July 31, 1953 to the Pitcairn-Crabbs Foundation: “I know of no other convention in recent times dealing with religious education

Wornom’s Efforts with Catholics

“Before he talked to Catholics he talked to Cardinals. He received what other ecumenical efforts had been unable to achieve” Chicago Catholics could not attend the 1954 gathering of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, Illinois. However, they could attend the REA with the hierarchy’s blessing (Schmidt 1992, 498).

In 1954 Wornom contacted Fr. Gerard Sloyan of Catholic University of America and requested he attend the first meeting of the REA's newly formed Committee on Research as a temporary replacement for Fr. John Kelly, Director of the National Center of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Sloyan was already of member of the REA's Editorial Committee and Wornom hastened to add "We had thought of asking you to serve as a regular member, but we felt it would be imposing on you" (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 90, File 1062). Wornom also invited several Jews to join the Committee, including Rabbi Sylvan Swartzman of Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati whom he saw as "the person for Reformed Judaism to be on the committee." Wornom was concerned about finding a day to meet that would be acceptable to all members. He pointed out that "Some persons say we should not meet again on Sundays, others object to Saturdays. We are wondering if Saturday afternoon and evening would be feasible. If neither Saturday nor Sunday are any good then we will have to select some other day during the week. Please, therefore, let us know what days during the week are impossible for you, as well as about Saturday and Sunday." Wornom ended by reassuring Rabbi Schwartzman, "You will be interested to know that other Jewish members of the committee are Dr. Leo Honor of Philadelphia, Dr. Jacob Hartstein, Dean of the Graduate School, Long Island University, and Professor Oscar Janowsky of City College," adding "There will probably be yet other Jewish members" (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 90, File 1062).

He was able to utilize REA' "historical genius," namely that the REA is a collection of individuals not church bodies (Schmidt 1992, 498).

In a letter to Sophia Lyon Fahs in 1957, Wornom notes that although the association had attempted to become more inclusive between 1930 and 1952, there were only 6 Catholic members in 1952. However, by 1957 the REA had 200 Catholic members out of 2500, adding, "the Catholics who have joined are not of the reactionary type, but persons who are eager for a broader intellectual fellowship" (REA Archives, Record Group 74).

In a 1962 letter to Bishop John Wright of Pittsburgh, Wornom writes, "I am pleased to enclose a program of the National Convention of the Religious Education Association to be held in Chicago, November 18-20. I know how busy you must be getting ready for the Vatican Council, but I trust you may have a few moments to see the program . . . There are several persons who have been added to the personnel since [its printing], including Father Dunne of NCEA in the seminar on "The College," and Professor Dickinson of Loyola University in the seminar on "Art, Drama, and Literature. . . I would hope that several of the priests and laity of the Diocese of Pittsburgh will attend the Convention. . . It is our hope that the Convention will result in stimulating the efforts of all religious and character education agencies to improve the moral climate of America, in line with ethical standards and sanctions which stem from the Judaic and Christian faiths" (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 22, File 301).

Wornom granted wide editorial freedom to the editor of the REA's official journal, *Religious Education*. However, he did make a special effort to encourage the inclusion of Catholic and Jewish authors. For example, in a letter to acting editor Paul Vieth, Wornom mentions "Thanks for sending me the reviews of *Research in Religious Education* by Campbell Wycoff and Albert Broaderick . . . I am wondering if we should not get some other Catholics to write a review such as Fr. Neil McCluskey. Also, we should get a Jewish reviewer" (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 22, File 300).

In a 1967 letter to the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Wornom requests copies of a booklet, *Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations* "for all members of the Board of the Religious Education Association" (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 22, File 305).

Wornom's Efforts with Jews

In a letter from John Hardon, SJ to Wornom dated October 31, 1967, Hardon writes: "Dear Herman and Mary, I just read Milton Himmelfarb's 'Secular Society? A Jewish Perspective' in the Winter, 1967

Daedalus. At the end I was reminded of a remark you made several years ago, 'I can understand Protestants and I can understand Catholics, but I cannot make head or tails of the Jews'" (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 20, File 271). Hardon goes on to explain that he thinks "Christianity is very adaptable outside the purely religious sphere. Judaism is not. The only way to transform a culture, for Jews, is to convert the population to Judaism."

"When Will Herberg published *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* in 1955 he chronicled the maturation of the pluralist interpretation of American life" (Marty 1986, 246).

A 1969 list of "Jewish Groups to Receive Programs" of the REA's National Convention included the Commission on Jewish Education of the National Association of Temple Educators, the National Council for Jewish Education, and the National Association of Hebrew Day Schools (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 49, File 555).

1969 Convention

In December 1969, Wornom corresponded with Donald Landon, Director of the Department of Religious Education for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. In November of that year the REA held its annual convention in Chicago. Landon indicated "ten staff members from our World Headquarters attended the sessions and all spoke appreciatively of the benefits gained from the conference" (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 49, File 555). In March of the following year, Wornom wrote to the Director of Curriculum Development of the Mennonite Publishing House: "Mennonites were well represented at our convention in Chicago in November. Our tally seems to show there were 10 Mennonites. . . You may be interested in attendance from other denominations: Episcopalians-39, United Church of Christ-67, Presbyterian USA-58, United Methodist-62, Disciples of Christ-22. The overall attendance at the convention was approximately 1500. Of this number there were 900 Roman Catholics. As you suggested, it is good to have so many Catholics, but in the future we should certainly

try to get a larger Protestant attendance. Roman Catholic professional religious educators do well outnumber Protestants, but when the Catholic attendance reaches 900, we should certainly have 700 or 800 Protestants to maintain a good balance” (REA Archives, Record Group 74, Box 49, File 555).

Conclusion

After retirement as general secretary of the REA, Wornom served as visiting member of the faculty of Andover Newton Seminary and traveled extensively including trips to Mexico, India, and Iran (Kathan 1992, 495).

At the bottom of the last page of Barney Kathan’s 1992 memorial to Herman Wornom in the journal Religious Education there is an advertisement for a 1993 conference sponsored by Auburn Theological Seminary. The title of the conference is “Multi-faith Dialogue in a Multicultural Society” which promised “to deepen awareness of one’s own cultural and religious heritage, to understand other cultures and religious traditions, and to use enhanced understanding in becoming a better citizen of the world” (1992, 495).

Kathan describes Wornom as a “second founder” of REA (1992, 491).

In his 1992 memorial, speaking of Wornom’s ecumenical and interreligious efforts on behalf of the REA, Stephen Schmidt asks, “Could we rekindle that fervor? With Muslims, Eastern religions, Buddhists, Hindus, Evangelical sectarianism, and every other form of contemporary religious experience?” He adds, “Herman’s story and style serve as motivation and critique for our current ecumenical apathy” (1992, 499).

Under Wornom’s tenure, the REA grew to its largest number in its history. “At the end of the period, Herman Wornom would end his career as leader of the REA with the most appropriate public success,

the largest convention [1969] in the recent history of the REA, attended by more than 1500 members” (Schmidt 1983, 148).

“What is less visible but equally true was another reality, that somewhere during these successful years the association strayed from its larger ideal—that of public pedagogy and a significant commitment to the solution of social ills. The public democratic ideal of the founders became a strategy for internal affairs, a way to organize conventions and workshops” and “a way to pursue ecumenical goals and not alienate anyone in the process” (Schmidt 1983, 148).

“While he

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Learning for life. Developing and implementing a dialogical hermeneutical-communicative approach at nine primary schools in the Netherlands.

1. Abstract
2. The urgency of a dialogical hermeneutical-communicative approach for RWE education
3. The societal and educational context for this new approach: The Dutch situation
4. A description of the aims and key aspects of the HC model
5. RWE faculties of students and dimensions of religions and worldviews
6. The requirements of the model for the improvement of teaching RWE for primary school teachers
7. Three examples of the carry-over of the HC model in practices of RWE in different primary schools
8. The promises of the model for future designs of RWE worldwide in the 21 century
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1

1. Abstract

We present in this paper the results of two government funded research projects in religious and worldview education (RWE) in the Netherlands: the development of a concept and model of dialogical hermeneutical-communicative education (HC model), and the implementation of this concept and model at nine primary schools.

Our dialogical hermeneutical-communicative approach is inspired by the model of the Flemish pedagogue and theologian Didier Pollefeyt (2008, 2011) who suggests that in pluralized European societies religious education should mediate between traditions and the life world of the student. This mediation ought to facilitate the process of attributing meaning to life. Tradition is a concept referring to all kinds of meaning systems, philosophies of life and religions. Starting from plural and conflicting interpretations of reality in the classroom the teacher addresses these hermeneutical nodes and creates encounter and dialogue. He guides students to underlying themes that are connected to traditions. Confronted with these sources students are invited to make choices with regard to their own life story, and also to communicate these choices to themselves and to each other in words, signs and symbols.

In our contextualization of Pollefeyt we stress two aspects: 1. life questions of students should be the starting point of a didactical trajectory in religious education (voicing

students; cf. Stern, 2007); 2. students should be invited to answer to the wisdom of traditions and co-students in a creative way, using their imagination. Therefore we suggest as a supplement to the three didactical roles described by Pollefeyt (guide/*cultural guide*, moderator/*coach*, and witness /*role-model*) the role of the *imaginator* (Van den Berg, 2014; Mulder, 2015).

During a two years action research project (2014-2016) we implemented this dialogical hermeneutical-communicative model at nine primary schools. This project, *Learning for life*, is unique because of the cooperation between secular (public) schools, Christian schools and cooperation schools. It is also unique because public schools are deliberately willing to integrate their teaching of religion and citizenship or philosophy in a way of dialogical education in which religious traditions play a major part as sources of wisdom. With this attitude they go beyond a position – held for years – as a so-called neutral school and they construe a practice in which plurality and encounter is explored. The results are promising: it appears that the revised model, originally developed in the Belgian context with a dominant position of Roman-Catholic education (Derroitte, Meyer, Pollefeyt & Roebben, 2014), can be appropriated in the pluralized and secularized Dutch educational context (Geurts, Ter Avest & Bakker, 2014) in a fruitful way. Therefore, we developed new terms for the key-roles teachers play in guiding the learning process of the pupils in plural classroom.

2. *The urgency of a dialogical hermeneutical-communicative approach for RWE education*

2

The need for a new approach to religious and worldview education (RWE) gains urgency. In many cases the existing practice does not take the views and abilities of students into account. We demonstrate this by presenting two examples of primary schools.

De Polsstok [The Leaping Pole] in Amsterdam (South-East) is a school that wants to take all the worldviews and cultural sources and backgrounds of the students into account. The school wants to offer good education to all children, education that is tailored to the talents and abilities of the children.¹ Every class consists of children from different religious traditions (Christian, Muslim, Hindu) and also from different cultures (Latin-American, African, Dutch). Teachers underline the equality between these traditions and cultures, which should result in respect for every child and for every teacher.

De Wonderboom [The Miracle Tree] in Amersfoort (North) is a Christian primary school stemming from the Protestant tradition. All children are, in the view of the school, good and complete as they are, for all are created in the image of God. The children are raised in different religious and non-religious worldviews and also the school team is a mix of Christian and non-Christian teachers. The school acknowledges tensions between these orientations, but chooses to stick to Christian sources and feasts in religious education. Respect is one of the most important values that are cherished by the school.

¹ <http://www.polsstok.nl/>.

Despite the great differences in population and context teachers of both schools report that it is difficult to make the students subject of their own religious and worldview development. They experience a lack of vision regarding perspective and aims of RWE and also they need more knowledge about possible forms and methods. This experience, due to major transitions in the Dutch society like secularization, individualization and multi-culturalization, is shared by schools all over the country. School documents from schools in middle and southern parts of the Netherlands show ambitions that seem quite difficult to put into practice. Children should be educated to 'world citizens', curious and receptive to all kinds of cultural and religious traditions. Practices show to be rather poor.

Literature research unfolds that until the nineties in the last century little information and materials were available on child centred RWE. And even today we know just bits and pieces about the religious and worldview development of children. With the schools we addressed initial questions like: How can a powerful learning environment be constructed in which the religious and worldview development from every child is fostered? What abilities and skills need to be stimulated to contribute to RWE?

We discovered that we need more knowledge about symbolising, dialogising and philosophising with children to be able to improve practices which create encounters with religious and worldview sources that will be fruitful to learning processes in which the questions of children are starting points.

The two schools participated in a research program for a doctoral thesis (Van den Berg, 2014) that addressed two questions, aimed at a transformation of RWE. These exemplary questions reflect the situation of many schools in the Netherlands and our research from 2008 until today point to an increasing urgency in the need to answer these questions. The questions are: How does a learning environment look like that fosters the religious and worldview development of all students interacting with a religious and worldview question, phenomenon or source? How can we introduce all students to a manifold of cultural and religious stories in an inviting way?

In both questions the word *all* is of central importance. Both schools want to respect the enormous diversity with which a teacher is confronted. They want to create dialogical learning environments that are playgrounds for imagination and for appropriation of religious and worldview sources.

We discovered that teachers have a lot of experience in reading or telling religious and other stories, for instance at the start of the school day, but that they have few skills and materials that contribute to practices in which students discover and explore these narratives themselves. There is a need for pedagogical and didactical frame works that foster an autonomous search of the students with regard to attributing meaning to existential questions. In our model we try to address these challenges, based on our research at nine primary schools. The life questions of students are a starting point for the construction of a learning environments in this research. Sources of wisdom from various traditions and modes of cultural expression (film, theatre, art, literature, music) are made disposable for the students in such a way that they can explore, discuss and appropriate

them in a creative way. In that process they use a variety of abilities. Teachers need to reflect on different roles to guide students in these learning process.

3. The societal and educational context for this new approach: The Dutch situation.

Our project Learning for life meaning is a project that has the characteristics of the culture and society in which it was designed and executed, it is a Dutch affair. We shall explore the Dutch educational system and religious context briefly. But being a Dutch project it could not have become what it was without the influence of the wider context of Europe. Although every country has its own political and religious history in Europe, our project bears the traces of the culture and the religious climate of the surrounding countries. In almost all European Countries a debate has started about content and aim of RWE. Not only because of 9/11 and its subsequent debates about the position of Islam, but also because of secularization, and the individualization of religion. The European questions are how Europe can create safe and stable societies in which there is room for different religious and non-religious belief systems, and what roles education in general and religious education in particular must play to prepare children for a peaceful multi-cultural and multi-religious society. These questions are also Dutch questions. Handling religious diversity seems to be a long-lasting challenge for schools and governments.

The Dutch educational system has government and non-government schools. The latter are most of the time private schools based on religion, world view or a distinct pedagogical perspective. Until two decades non-government schools were divided into various types of Protestant, Roman-catholic and Pedagogy oriented schools (Dalton, Montessori, Anthroposophical Schools). Religious schools used the subject of religious education to introduce students into the views, rituals and habits of their particular denomination.

Parents sent their children to the school of their religious orientation.

Religious pluralisation, secularization and multiculturalization challenged this separation into affiliations. Next to this a third variety appeared in the Dutch system, the cooperation school, which is a merger of government and non-government schools, and this complicates the picture.

Government schools offer religious or worldview education when parents request this.

Their children can take classes in Christian, Islamic or Humanistic tradition. These classes are optional. Also, since 1985 government schools and non-government schools all are obliged to offer 'objective information' to the children about Ideological and Spiritual Movements.

In 2002 only 34% of the parents enlisted their children in the school of their own religious affiliation. Today this number is even lower. The reasons from affiliated and non-affiliated parents to send children to a religious school differ to a certain extent, but are no longer or foremost religiously motivated : sometimes the proximity of the school is a reason, sometimes the quality of the school or the influence parents can have at the school policy. But religious reasons do count: especially when religious schools present themselves as open to all worldviews and respectful to religions, they have a strong attraction even to non-believers.

At the beginning of the 21st century Dutch Educational Policy is focussed at the role of knowledge development in a late modern society. Social constructionism has gained enormous popularity and knowledge is therefore viewed as result of a process of construction. Knowledge arises in a dynamic process of interaction between acting students, confrontation with content and within an ever changing context. In various school subjects teachers seek personalised and creative learning environments and processes. This social-constructionist perspective is in RWE being combined with a hermeneutical and phenomenological approach to religions and worldviews. Experiences of students, their existential questions, their views and attitudes are points of engagement for the exploration of RWE content. Many schools search a new perspective, new source books, new methods and new didactical roles to adapt not only to social constructionism but also to adopt to new functions of RWE. These functions are sought for not in proclamation or initiation but in guiding students into a safe space of autonomous and dialogical identity development. A new approach can be a powerful answer to new and ongoing interest in religion and life philosophy in the Netherlands. At a transformed and individually appropriated way religion and spirituality are still of meaning to a lot of Dutch people, young and old. There is manifold devotion to the Higher, as Van den Brink puts it, but the form has changed from God to vitality, health, citizenship and nature (Van den Brink 2011).

People construct patchwork identities made out of various sources and traditions. RWE has to deal with this undogmatic plurality.

Religious schools can no longer only eat the fruits from one tree, when they want to connect to all students and help them prepare for a pluralized and multi-cultural society. Government schools have the same challenge, and reflect on the role of RWE in these so called 'neutral' schools. How can they give form to active plurality respecting the roots of all students and preparing to good citizenship for a save and colourful society.

4. A description of the aims and key aspects of the model

The model we developed in our project Learning for Life draws heavily on the work of Didier Pollefeyt (Pollefeyt, 2008, 2011). It is our answer to the religious and educational challenges of the situation in the Netherlands. In this section we shall present the four key aspects of the hermeneutical-communicative model: the goals, the didactical roles, the faculties of students and the dimensions of religion.

In shorthand we can describe the hermeneutical-communicative approach in a few movements:

- *From instruction to interpretation.*

The teacher is not the all-knowing and all-wise instructor about life's goals and ethical prescriptions. Religious education is a full-fledged collective hermeneutical enterprise. Teacher and students go down a discovery lane.

- *From texts to threefold hermeneutics.*

Teachers are juggling with the hermeneutics of religious sources, hermeneutics of context and personal existence. In the classroom religious education tries to offer a safe place where existential questions can be formulated and discussed and where the socio-cultural and political dimensions of the context of the students are analysed.

- *From mono-religious to interreligious education.*

The task of the school is to prepare the pupils for the religiously plural society and to provide a powerful learning environment in which students can develop their personal religious identity. The best preparation for such a society is to encounter the multiple religions present today.

- *From teaching into to teaching about and from religion.*

To the goal of formation of a religious /worldview identity can only be contributed in education when students are able to receive information and to experience religious rituals or artefacts and may respond to it. Religions, life philosophies and wisdom in popular culture are all seen as important sources. Education must be more than transfer of concepts: it must also be a critical examination of phenomena and a personal appropriation of these phenomena.

- *From convincing to witnessing.*

In a plural classroom, with children who are in many cases not sent to this school for religious reasons but for reasons of convenience or quality standards, teachers cannot – if they could ever – have the aim of proselytizing. They have to change focus to witnessing and role-modelling. The same is true for an atheist or agnostic teacher at a public school

- *From teacher centeredness or tradition centeredness to student centeredness.* In a hermeneutical approach questions of students and their interpretive responses to material from sources of wisdom – be it traditional or drawn from popular culture – take centre stage. The activities of the teacher and the encounter with religious materials are both in function of the development of a religious identity of the student.

Short description of the key aspects

Our hermeneutical-communicative model has four aspects: 1. Starting from the life questions of the student we formulate three learning objectives; 2. We keep the learning faculties of the students in mind (section 6); 3. We offer a multiplicity of religious sources following Ninian Smart; 4. We present four didactical roles (section 7). Teaching RWE is a dynamic interplay between these four aspects (see model below).

World view faculties	Didactical roles of the teacher				Dimensions of world view
	Guide	Coach	Role Model	Imaginator	
Observing	Didactical field of dynamic interplay of the four roles				Doctrinal and Philosophical dimension
Wondering					Narrative and mythic dimension
Imagining					
Valuing					
Telling					
Reflecting					
Performing a dialog					
Acting					
Aims of religious education	Personal clarification of existential questions				Aims of religious education
	Dialogical handling of plurality				
	Religious literacy				

Aims of hermeneutical-communicative religious education

Education is responsible for the coming into presence of unique human beings as Biesta puts it.² Existential questions of students about world, future, the other, God, the Self, nature are

² Biesta, *Good Education*, 91.

starting points for learning processes. From this heart of education we formulate three aims of our model which are closely connected:

1. *Personal clarification of existential questions*: Students learn to articulate their questions and to formulate their view on living in this world, to develop an own way of life, to explore existential questions and life issues. They reflect on them and explore sources of meaning in dialog with others to construct and reconstruct their own personal religious presence in the world.

2. *Dialogical handling of plurality*: Students develop a receptive and critical attitude in order to manage differences in life view, in interpretation of religious sources and in the choices people make related to their world view. Students have the ability to converse about these differences in a respectful way in order to be prepared to contribute constructively and peacefully to debates in a plural and diverse society.

3. *Religious literacy*: Students gain valuable insights and wisdom from the confrontation with world view traditions as expressed and handed over in stories, rituals, symbols, views, laws, architecture, music, art as well from history as from today. They acquire basic knowledge about religious traditions and know to relate to the information in a critical way and to formulate an own answer to solutions to life issues offered in it.

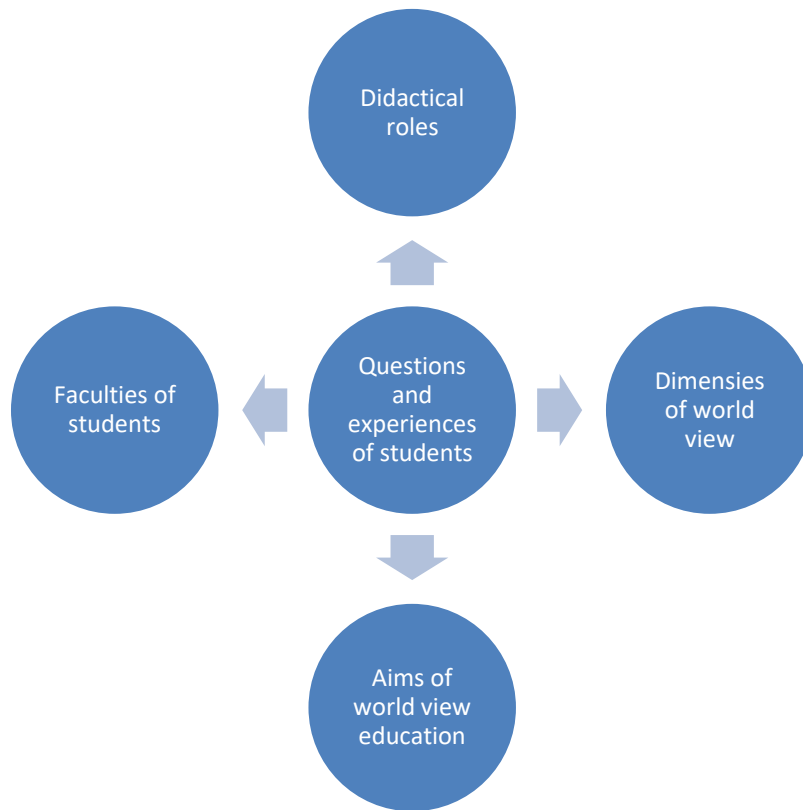
The religious educator chooses for every learning moment or lesson which generic purpose is pursued (lowest bar in the diagram).

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Thereafter a hermeneutic-communicative learning process can be arranged via several possible trajectories:

- The teacher can start with an experience, question or story of a pupil and think of what world view faculty he would like to stimulate (first column). Then he can think about the content and turn to the dimensions of world view and choose one of them which serves the subject best (last column). And then he decides which didactic role he would like to take to stimulate adequate learning (middle columns)
- Another trajectory may go like this: starting point is again an experience, question or story of a student; then there may be a philosophical or religious dimension that fits very well to this starting point column); next the teacher chooses which faculty could be stimulated to grow and suits best to the chosen source (first column). Then the teacher decides which role to take (middle columns).

Of course there can be reasons to start with a religious dimension, for example because a religious festival or feast comes up in the next few days or weeks, maybe Easter. The teacher wants to explore the Biblical narratives of Easter to work on the generic purpose of religious literacy. He will then think about the life experiences of the students who are, or may be associated with, for example, experiences of new life in the nature, in the family or in the rabbit cage at home. He then chooses a religious faculty, for example telling and finally the didactical role, for example the guide. To picture the process:



5. RWE faculties of students and dimensions of religions and worldviews

Teaching can simply be described as nothing more than stimulating faculties of students to let them grow. In RWE we should like to see that students will have religious competency when leaving the educational system. This means that they have a more or less coherent frame of reference of convictions, views and images about man and world; that they can use this meaning system to interpret life experiences; that they can arrange and plan their life within and from this frame work; that they can communicate about their meaning system with others.

Which faculties are especially on the agenda in RWE? De Schepper presents six skills:

- To observe
- To handle traditions
- To imagine
- To reason
- To communicate
- To act

These are basic faculties for all schools, public and private to work on in religious education. School identity can trigger an expansion of this sixpack. A religious school might add

‘sensitizing for transcendence’ or ‘development of a hope oriented attitude’ to embody their identity.

No list of skills is perfectly covering the wealth of faculties that can be stimulated in education. We developed our own variant, which has some hermeneutical-communicative accents.

- Observing (looking, listening, feeling, smelling, touching)
- Wondering (to be open, to be curious)
- Imagining (empathizing, creating pictures, expressing, connecting to form and color)
- Telling (arranging experience in language, attributing meaning, narrating)
- Valuing (handling dilemma’s, ethics, recognizing good and bad, judging, choosing)
- Reflecting (philosophizing, debating, reasoning)
- Performing a dialogue (changing perspective, listening, reacting authentically, ask questions)
- Acting (initiating or partaking in rituals, community programs, social action)

Teachers constructing learning programs and single lessons will consciously stimulate a combination of faculties in their didactics by choosing different assignments and working methods. We find it important to consider all faculties and not act one-sidedly. There is a multiplicity in intelligence to be addressed in world view formation. RWE is a holistic activity which touches upon head, heart and hands. Discovering and attribution of meaning takes place by all these faculties. Meaning can be found in an impressive thought or line of reasoning, in participating in the Eucharist, but just as good in the experience of dark and light in Chartres Cathedral or a walk through the Rocky Mountains. Self-awareness takes place in imagining and in expression of what lives within students and in the conversation about these expressions with fellow students. That conversation addresses the content of the subject of religious education namely the dimensions of religions and world views.

Dimensions of religions and world views

The third aspect of our hermeneutic-communicative model, next to the aims of RWE and the faculties of the students is the content of the subject of religious education. The student learns to understand himself and the world in which he lives with the aid of all kinds of sources from world views. There is a plurality in forms of appearance as it comes to religion. We often observe a focus on dogma’s, doctrines and views in religious education. This is a too limited approach if we keep in mind that practices are very significant in religions, i.e. in Judaism or Islam. In our view students get to know the vivid reality of world views in encounters in city or village, at religious feasts or processions, in broadcasting of news networks, in documentaries, in vlogs, in reading narratives. It is advisable to start the confrontation with religious content in the lessons by concentrating on the lived religion, as experienced and communicated by believers themselves. Lived religion is visible and recognizable for students. Next to doctrines and philosophies the multi-coloured and multi-facetted practice comes to the fore. To arrange this complex learning material we use the grouping of

dimensions of religion from the religious scientist Ninian Smart.³ We presume that this grouping also suits non-religious world views very well.

The seven dimensions (or aspects) are:

- The doctrinal and philosophical dimension (formulated ideas and concepts about man, gods world, creation, liberation)
- The narrative and mythic dimension (narratives, parables and legends about gods, saints, prophets, priests and sages, saviours, heroes, good and bad spirits, key moments in history)
- The ethical and legal dimension (universal principles about a good life, laws, regulations, prescriptions, norms, values)
- The experiential and emotional dimension (emotions as awe and wonder; guilt, shame, visions, conversion, delight, ecstasy, music)
- The practical and ritual dimension (forms of expression in behaviour, rituals and ceremonies, role regulation, contemplation, discipline, practicing, dance)
- The social and institutional dimension (forms of organization, communities, groups, movements, institutions, leadership)
- The material dimension (architecture, art, movies, ritual objects, clothing, jewelry, holy places)

When students get acquainted with these seven aspects of religion they will be stimulated in all kinds of faculties and they will grow in their religious development.

To teach religion as a differentiated and complex process the teacher has to take on four didactical roles.

6. The requirements of the model for the improvement of teaching for primary school teachers

The fourth aspect of the hermeneutical-communicative model is the didactical role. Teachers should master four didactical roles to work fruitfully within our model. We define a didactical role as a coherent set of actions which contribute to a specific educational purpose. Pollefeyt is very brief about this subject.⁴ He distinguishes three roles for religious education teachers: the witness, the specialist and the moderator. We use a slightly different terminology better applicable to the plural and multi-religious situation in Netherlands and also better suited both for public and private schools. We take *guide* for specialist, *coach* for moderator and *role model* for witness.

In the role of the witness /role-model the teacher demonstrates his involvement with a certain religious tradition or world view. Teaching religion within a hermeneutical frame work is not

³ Smart, *The World's Religions*, 13-21.

⁴ See Pollefeyt, *Course Book*, 2011.

a neutral activity in which objective information is passed on. On the contrary it is preferred that a teacher shares his views in an engaged manner, in critical dialogue with other perspectives. In this way a teacher can function as a role model how inhabiting a religious identity is done.

The moderator /coach initiates and coaches the dialogical conversations about the relationships between experiences and opinions of students and the colourful world of sources of wisdom. In this collective search for meaning he leaves respectfully room for all kinds of identifications. The students are encouraged to construct their own religious identity and communicate that to fellow students in an open manner.

The third role of the religious educator is the specialist / cultural guide. While students search for meaning hermeneutically relating to sources and in a communicative way, the specialist assures that the discussed information about the different religions and world views is correct in view of up to date scientific knowledge. As an expert he can not only help student to debate with proper arguments but he can also critically evaluate truth claims of the religious traditions and world views at hand. He shows them the way in the colourful world of world view and religion in the seven dimensions.

In order to reach the three goals of our model teachers has to be able to take these roles. We add to Pollefeyt's set a fourth one: that of the *stimulator of imagination* which is crucial for fostering appropriation of religious content in the construction of identity.

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A fourth role: stimulator of imagination (the imaginator)

In our view experiencing imagination and exercising imagination, are conditions for religious /worldview learning. First of all this is given with the nature of the subject itself. Religions are systems of an imaginative approach to reality using narratives, mythic language, symbols and rituals. Imagination can be seen as the power to turn absence into presence; to turn the actuality into the possible; to convert what is in something-other –than-what is.⁵ Imagination is abundantly available in religious sources. And secondly: in the learning process imagination plays a different register than the cognitive. It serves a different type of rationality. Roebben asserts that imagination deepens the cognitive process of seeking sense in life by penetrating spiritually into the heart and soul of the student.⁶ To understand religion students need to develop:⁷

Metaphoric sensitivity: student's ability to recognize the figurative language of the narrative in words, sentences, key words and motifs, to recognize the figurative language of the narrative in existential or spiritual events and themes and to recognize the figurative language of the narrative in the portrayal of experiences, values and insights.

Inventive imagination: student's ability: To make mental depictions of character's actions and speech and of situations and themes; to emotionally conceive the otherness of characters,

⁵ Kearney, *Poetics of imagining*, 4 ff.

⁶ Roebben, *Inclusieve godsdienstpiedagogiek*, 44.

⁷ Van den Berg, *Speelruimte voor dialoog en verbeelding*, 77-118.

situations and themes, and to create new connections between the actions and speech of characters, situations and themes in the narrative world, and their own perceived reality.

Creative interpretation: student's ability: To express in their own words and images the meaning of the acts and speech performed by characters in the narrative, as well as the situations and themes found in the narrative; to fill the gaps between the words and images in the narrative with their own words and images, and to find meaning and purpose in the 'in-between' between the situation, themes and character's acts and speech found in a narrative and the student's own perceived reality.

The imaginator stimulates religious imagination and critical thinking by inviting students to respond creatively, reflexively and interactively to symbolic/metaphorical language in stories, rituals, objects of arts, architecture and practices from religious traditions.

RWE is a dynamic interplay of threefold hermeneutics and fourfold didactics. Depending on the subject and on the purpose of a lesson one or the other role will be on the front.

7. Three Examples of the carry-over of the HC model in practices of RWE in different primary schools

9 schools developed new practices in our action-research Learning for Life. They worked two years in Practice Development Groups (PDG).

We demonstrate some of the outcomes of the application of our model of hermeneutical-communication from the examples of three schools.

a. De Zevensprong [Song of Seven] in Dronten

The Protestant Christian School for primary education De Zevensprong is located in Dronten. Two Teachers, Cindy and Rosanne, are strongly involved in our project. They put a lot of energy and effort in motivating their team for a new approach to RWE. They want to work thematically with Bible narratives in connection to life questions of children.

Cindy has 14 years of experience at this school. Until now she would read a Bible story every day and ask the children reproductive knowledge: 'What happened to Moses?' One or two students would respond. After that time was up and math class could start. In herself the question grew how to explain the Bible to children. Whenever a child asked about the historical reliability of the creation narrative she would always respond positively. During the sessions in the PDG Cindy discovers what really matters to her and what she wants to share with the children: "I cannot say God created the world in seven days. I can say how special it is for me that there is a sun, that we have a moon. That there is light after darkness. And that that must be something from God for me." Also her personal motives are something she wants to share with the children. She tells passionately about the dinners she and her family share with an Afghan refugee family; how curious her children are about the turban a father of Sikh family wears. And her discovery that people of another religion share the same values with her as a Christian: love, forgiveness, sharing, peacefulness.

b. *De Horn [The Corner] in Wijk bij Duurstede*

De Horn is a government school in Wijk bij Duurstede. The school wants to contribute to the formation of independent, competent and social people in all her pedagogical actions. The selfhood and individuality of every child is to be respected. Diversity is not a problem but a wealth. The school says to offer a broad development by stimulating cognitive, affective and creative growth and maturation. The school works on skills and transfer of knowledge in a balanced way.

Within this context the teachers of De Horn realized that their result oriented approach of education left little room for mutual encounter in the classroom, with which they meant that students see, hear and value each other.

There appeared to be almost no attention to the slower, existential questions in life. This was in contradiction with the school's vision and mission. Thanks to the project Learning for Life the school team found opportunities to adapt their practice to one more in line with the school goals.

An example of a lesson might illustrate the new direction.

In a lesson about actual news the discovery of a new planet was subject of a discussion. In the next lesson the teacher takes the students back to that discussion and introduces the central question for that lesson: What do you think what we are going to discover in space and how do you think it shall be there in 30 years? The students receive reflection time and they are stimulated to write down their thoughts on a piece of paper. In duo's they share their views. The students have to practice to keep their attention with their peer who is sharing and they practice to stick to the subject.

After the moment of sharing the teacher initiates a group discussion. She alternates between open and closed questions, the latter in case of a response to an answer, for instance: 'Would that be a life comparable to the life we have here, on earth?' The attitude of the teacher is rather reticent in order to give room to the dialog between the students. This more philosophical approach can indeed address slow questions.

c. *Samenwerkingsschool De Magdalon [The Magdalon]⁸, Veere*

Veere is the location of a cooperation school, De Magdalon. A working group has been formed to rebuild a program of RWE. Three teachers and the principal participate in this innovation team. The example of a lesson can give a glimpse of the results of the work in Learning for Life.

Teacher Virginia starts a lesson with the subject of 'independence'. After a short introduction she gives room for a moment of brainstorming about the word 'independence'. She asks what the children can do themselves. A real flood of responses follows: preparing sandwiches, walking to school, tying shoelaces are just a few examples. After that the children may interview each other about the same question. They could talk about it a lot, and they liked this question. Virginia connects the theme of independency to the Biblical narrative of

⁸ Magdalon is referring to the name of the wife of Floris IV, Count of Holland, who named a castle after this lady. The school is built in the vicinity of original location of this castle.

Ascension. The majority of the children were familiar with this story, but when reading the story the teacher underlines all the things the disciples had to do on their own, because Jesus has gone away. So a well-known story receive new meaning and a new perspective for them. When the reading was finished the teacher asks: Do you think the friends of Jesus can continue on their own? Most of the children think this is the case and with that conclusion Virginia closes her lesson.

8. *The promises of the model for future designs of RWE worldwide in the 21 century*

The effects of the presented HC model are promising: it appears that the revised model, originally developed in the Belgian context with a dominant position of Roman-Catholic education (Derroitte, Meyer, Pollefeyt & Roebben, 2014), can be appropriated in the pluralized and secularized Dutch educational context (Geurts, Ter Avest & Bakker, 2014) in a fruitful way. The model can be adopted by Christian, non-Christian and cooperation schools in their own local (rural or urban) and religious context. The model inspires to renew religious education and ritual activities challenging students to confront themselves with sources of wisdom of several religions and life philosophies and with the questions, experiences and opinions of co-students in a dialogical way. The model can be integrated in several perspectives of RWE: biblical storytelling, philosophizing with children, or phenomenology of religion. In our research we found results like a curriculum plan for 8 years primary school that combines goals for religious education with social emotional development and citizenship and lessons with activating didactics, which were developed during our research project.

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Raising a child is madness: learning in encounter and foundations of education

Abstract

This paper presentation will elaborate on two important foundations of education: (a) Education is directed towards freedom and righteousness: education is aiming at letting children become free persons who contribute to a righteous world; and (b) One cannot be an individual without the other: by education a child becomes him/herself only by letting the life of others be part of his/her own life. These two foundations are taken to the foreground, as a particular choice out of 11 foundations of education presented in my just published book: *Opvoeden is gekkenwerk – 11 uitgangspunten*. The paper shows the theological and pedagogical/educational consequences of these foundations in the light of *Learning in Encounter* and aims at a fruitful discussion on basic interests and ideals for nowadays education worldwide.



1. Introduction

Under the heading of the main theme *Learning in Encounter*, two of the main questions of this year's conference are: (a) how do we deal with differences, and (b) which theological, educational, and philosophical foundations should our learning be based on? Learning in encounter and to learn from differences are at the very heart of my just published (in Dutch) book: *Opvoeden is gekkenwerk – 11 uitgangspunten*. In English, this reads: *Raising a child is madness – 11 foundations*.¹ On the basis of 11 foundations, the book, from my academic, professional and personal point of view, reflects on important ideals and interests for bringing up a new generation nowadays and in the near future. These 11 foundations have both theological, educational and philosophical underpinnings and, as said, learning in encounter and learning from differences are more than once at the very heart of it. *Opvoeden is gekkenwerk* was written for parents, teachers, pedagogues, social workers and anyone else who is (professionally or personally) involved in upbringing a next generation.

The book is to be considered as a valorisation project of insights derived from three sources of reflection. In the first place a reflection on outcomes of my practical theological research on religious education and youth ministry practices. In the second place a reflection on what I as a religious educator at the Protestant Theological University in The Netherlands, implicitly or explicitly communicate when it comes to foundations of 'good' (religious) education. In the third place a reflection on my own practices as father in my own family and being a foster family for children and teenagers in vulnerable situations. I am convinced that all these reflections also borrow from insights derived from debates, interactions and research within international networks in my work, among which the Religious Education Association is an important one. Given the main theme of the 2017 REA conference, I would like to focus in this paper on two particular foundations: (a) Education is directed towards freedom and righteousness: education is aiming at letting children become free persons who contribute to a righteous world; (b) One cannot be an individual without the other: by education a child becomes him/herself only by letting the life of others be part of his/her own life. These are respectively the second and third foundation in the row of 11 foundations in the book; the total list of 11 foundations is included in the Appendix.

With this paper I would like to bring back the content of the book (the book is in fact to be considered as a valorisation project) into the academic and professional debate among religious educators, by focusing on learning in encounter with the other who is different. Section 2 summarizes the foundation *Education is directed towards freedom and right*: two important ideals (freedom and right(eousness)) in this very encounter with the other who is different. Section 3 discusses the foundation *One cannot be an individual without the other*. Section 4 focuses on four theological and educational/pedagogical consequences springing from these two foundations in the context of *learning in encounter*. This paper ends up in section 5 with a conclusion. The intended contribution of the paper as a whole is an initiation of a fruitful discussion on foundations of education in the nowadays context worldwide and showing chances for further reflection and research.

¹ De Kock, A. (2017). *Opvoeden is gekkenwerk. 11 uitgangspunten*. [Raising a Child is Madness. 11 foundations]. Heerenveen (The Netherlands): Royal Jongbloed.

2. Education is directed towards freedom and right(eousness)

Education is directed towards freedom and righteousness: two important ideals, not only in education but also in the encounter with the other who is different. To be short: for me, freedom is related to leave things behind, to disconnect with what binds you, to go for the unknown, the unexpected. Right is related to be known, to be safe, to live without fear.

At first sight, the words freedom and right sound quite judicial. And sometimes the upbringing of children is judicial: full of rules and legislations: you must eat your vegetables first; you shouldn't hit your little brother; you may request the teacher for help but not before you gave it a try yourself; etcetera. Educators are good legislators and connect their do's and don'ts with a variety of penalties. Sometimes parents and teachers give praise for following the rules. But most often they punish if expectations are not met.

But... when it comes to the words freedom and right I do not hint on a state of being which is ruled by legislations, rules and restrictions from outside. I connect these words in the first place with a state of being which comes from inside: a result out of the own heart of the child, a result of its own sense of purpose. The ideal of freedom, thus, means: to support children towards living a life lived from the own heart and not just from expectations from others.

The ideal of right means then: to support children towards living a life in which the other's safety and security is of as much as worth as your own safety and security. The combined ideal of freedom and right asks for the development of the will: the will to not play off the heart of the other against your own heart.

The ideal of a righteous world is in fact the compass for the development of the child towards a free person. The ideal of freedom is not directed towards the "I", neither is it unfocused. It is directed towards the "we". Freedom also means obligations and responsibilities. Freedom has nothing to do with limitlessness. It has to do, instead, with not being locked up; with not bound to the expectations of others. Education is an attempt to support the child's development in such a way that the child is not raising the heart of others against its own heart.

At the same time, education defies right(eousness). There is a simple reason for this: without righteousness, freedom becomes banal. And the other way around: without freedom, justice becomes cold.

Righteousness, justice is in a way connected with mercy. Righteousness does not only mean to apply rules in a sufficient way. It has also to do with *not* applying the rules: to give a new chance to someone. This is mercy. You do justice to something or to someone. To trigger this awareness of doing justice to the situation is part of the strive for righteousness in education. It results in relativizing yourself and showing mercy towards others.

And for freedom is true: it has to do both with not be bound and with to let you bind. To disconnect with what binds you results in new connections with other possibilities, persons or expectations. To be free does not mean to be strictly unbound. To be free means to commit yourself to an ideal you confront or challenge yourself with, a purpose you show yourself or a responsibility you yourself takes.

Educators who direct their upbringing towards freedom, also in a way are focussed on liberation of the child. To liberate a child from negative feelings or thoughts about itself. To liberate children from evil powers forcing them: unrealistic expectations from friends, bad habits or addictions. Thus, education is directed towards freedom and righteousness: education is aiming at letting children become free persons who contribute to a righteous world.

3. One cannot be an individual without the other

If someone looks in the photo album of her child she will observe a lot of others near the boy or girl who play a significant role in the development and the identity of the child. Who is the child who has been left if all these others would leave from the pictures? Raising the child, parents wish the child will develop itself as an individual. But precisely this, to be an individual, cannot be without others. In other words: Without others you cannot become yourself and be yourself. Who you are as an individual depends on others with whom you are in a relationship. Not only relationships with others in the present but also relationships with others in the past make who you are: your roots, so to say, your forefathers/mothers, the locality and subculture in which they lived, their friends and connections, etcetera.

It is difficult to speak about yourself without speaking about others. Though, in how is written and spoken about upbringing nowadays we observe more than once “the individual without the others”: “*To grow up means to discover who you are as a unique human being*”; “*In the end, education’s aim is the child being able to be authentic*”. The message under the surface of these kinds of posts is that the child brought up should not be dependent on others or even be influenced by others. Not seldom, this slips into high rates of individualism in educational ideals. As a counterreaction, numbers of pedagogues, teachers and politicians are pleading for a more relational approach of the individual and, as a consequence, a more relational approach in education, whether in schools or in the home. The most important prerequisite for such an approach is education giving space, also in a literal sense, to share life with others; to provide opportunities to the child to let the lives of others be part of the life of itself. In a practical sense, this has two consequences for education: (1) educators should support children to meet other children; (2) The development of the individual as human being goes beyond parents’ power: “it takes a village to raise a child”.

To let others’ life be part of your own life is not a passive thing but something active: it demands a conscious choice. A conscious choice to share life with e.g. children who are overlooked, or are at the edge of communities or society. Through these encounters, the child becomes more human and the other becomes more human.

It works both ways. As a father or mother, you wish your child will blossom, but at the same time, you do not want to nip in the bud the blossoming of other children, because of your own child. You want to give chances to your own child, and at the same time, not to prevent chances for other children. This brings us to the second consequence: *It takes a village to raise a child*. The education of children is not restricted to the influence of parents and some teachers. There are a lot of actors and factors surrounding them that impact the life of children. The best parent can do is to make use of this simple fact in a constructive way: to allow the life of others be present in that of your child is an enrichment of the upbringing. It increases chances for development and correction.

At the same time, sharing your life with others is not without risk. A child might lose itself in the contact with others: a child can pull out all the stops in order to belong to some group, without being really comfortable with it. The teenager plays her role strictly according to the expectations of peers. The boy plays the game but at the same time he is a lost man.

The risk in education is not only in terms of young people turning over to group pressure or idealistic images in popular adverts. Also when it comes to the relationship between educator and child there is a risk of children losing themselves, e.g. the child who is totally focussed on meeting the expectations of parents in all kind of ways; In the end, this might lead to grown up

adults who are not able to speak out freely about their own inner voices, own ideals and own ideas.

4. Theological and educational/pedagogical consequences

Now I will focus on some theological and educational/pedagogical consequences springing from these two foundations of education in the context of *learning in encounter*. I cluster these into four main themes of reflection for educators involved in *Learning in Encounter*: (A) Goals, (B) Identity, (C) Authority, and (D) Safety.

A. Goals

The ideals of freedom and right(eousness) are steering, consciously or more implicit, the goals educational environments are striving for: at home, in the classroom or anywhere else. To develop the will of the child not to play off the heart of the other against your own can also function as a goal. The same is true for ‘liberating the child’ or to teach children the ability and the motivation to share their lives with others. All these kinds of goals are or at least can be both pedagogical/educational loaded and theological loaded. What is the goal, from a theological and/or from a pedagogical perspective of *learning in encounter*?

Thus, a main question for education which deals with *learning in encounter with the other who is different* is: is there any important goal involved which steers the educational learning process or the process of upbringing the child? And if so, what is that goal? Is the goal “just” to be in contact, or is it the child to be liberated or to become free, is it to develop the will and motivation, etcetera. Or in more conceptual terms: is the goal cognitive or more affective oriented, is it social oriented, or is the goal more directed towards experiences and emotions?²

B. Identity

The next main theme of reflection is the theme of identity. Here are some examples from the description of the two foundations above that illustrate this theme: “freedom is to disconnect with what binds you; “the child should not be bound to expectations from outside”; “the child should develop an authentic self”. But the following ones are also examples: “without others the child cannot become himself” “we should have a relational perspective on the self”.

Who is the child? Who/what is the ‘self’? How should we perceive the individual in its relationships? These are questions about identity and how educators perceive identity. In educational settings one is involved in identity forming processes. And in these settings a view on or an idea of identity is functioning, consciously or more implicit. Is the child to be conceived as part of a group, a community and is education, as a consequence, directed towards socializing the child into an existing community? Or, in contrast, is the child to be conceived as an individual who should develop a unique, authentic self with independent outlooks and is education, as a consequence, directed towards supporting the child’s individualisation? And the concept of *learning in encounter* opens at least one more view on the theme of identity: is education directed towards supporting encounters with others so that new communities develop with new, creative stances in life and thus creating new kinds of identities?

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

Thus, a second main question for education which deals with *learning in encounter with the other who is different* is: from what conception of identity do we arrange the educational context?³ Different views of identity can, again, be both pedagogical/educational loaded and theological loaded. Who is the child, from a theological and/or from a pedagogical perspective and what does that mean for why and how we are *learning in encounter*?

C. Authority

In the description of the two foundations of education the theme of authority is hinted on: what or who is authoritative when it comes to your decisions in life: the rules that are given in a society or in a local community, coming ‘from outside’; or the inner voice coming ‘from within’ from the own heart, so to say. And how fixed is authority? Are there moments to relativize yourself or the rule to make way to show mercy? Authority is a third main theme of reflection in educational settings directed towards *learning in encounter with the other who is different*. Authority is also an important theological and pedagogical/educational loaded factor in contexts of religious education.⁴

The encounter with the one who is different might challenge authority structures that the child is used to. The conscious choice to share life with the other who is different is a conscious choice to open possibilities, by way of authority located in the other, to critique the own voice and own views, to correct the own opinion and to develop the own identity further.

D. Safety

Learning in encounter with the other who is different is not without risk. A child might lose itself in the contact with others: a child can pull out all the stops in order to belong to some group, without being really comfortable with it. And also in the relationship between educator and child there is a risk of children losing themselves, being totally focussed on meeting the expectations of educators in all kind of ways. The encounter with the other who is different, whether it is a peer or an educator, thus asks for a safe atmosphere in which the child’s integrity is safeguarded and where the child is not forced to lose itself unwanted. Education directed towards the encounter with the other who is different should reflect on the issue of integrity: how do we safeguard it, where do we define limits (if at all / if needed) in challenging children to “lose” parts of themselves.

5. Conclusion

With this paper I brought back the content of *Opvoeden is gekkenwerk – 11 uitgangspunten* into the academic and professional debate among religious educators, by focusing on learning in encounter with the other who is different. The intended contribution is an initiation of a fruitful discussion on foundations of education in the nowadays context worldwide and showing chances for further reflection and research. I found out that there are at least four main themes of reflection for educators involved in *Learning in Encounter*: (A) Goals, (B) Identity, (C) Authority, and (D) Safety

³ Ibid. In the article three conceptions of identity are discussed: an intra- , inter- , and suprapersonal conception,

⁴ See again De Kock, A. (2015). What about *learning* in practical theological studies? Toward more conceptual clarity. *SAGE Open*, 5(2), DOI: 10.1177/2158244015592682: a division is discussed between external, internal and distributed forms of authority.

Answers to the question how do we deal with differences in classrooms, in families, in (religious) communities, etc., should be searched for in reflecting on each of these themes: what is the main goal in the learning situation, what kind of identity do we strive for, who or what has authority and what are the limits when it comes to a safe atmosphere. These four themes, goals – identity – authority – and safety – should be at the core of the process of the development of learning environments by educators who wish to promote the encounter with the other who is different. This development process is both a theological, and pedagogical/educational endeavour: it asks from educators to be theologically and pedagogically sensitive, listening carefully to children, to themselves and to the respective communities in which they are rooted.

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Appendix: 11 foundations of (good) education⁵

1. Upbringing is a lot of hassle; we just go with the flow.
2. Education is directed towards freedom and righteousness: education is aiming at letting children become free persons who contribute to a righteous world.
3. One cannot be an individual without the other: by education a child becomes him/herself only by letting the life of others be part of his/her own life.
4. Education is not 'screaming on the sidelines'. An educator shows what is true, worth, and what gives meaning in life in the midst of the playing field.
5. Education is a playground. Children and educators are playing together in a reality which is bigger than they themselves are.
6. Education is not endless, if was it a river without banks. To let life flow you need the bank of the given community (your roots) on the one side and the bank of new adventures (your longings) on the other.
7. Love before anything else: a safe nest is not the endpoint of education; to enter the world with love is the next station.
8. Education shakes things loose. Children are not growing by knowledge of the status quo but by possibilities to make something good in life
9. Raising a child takes your life. The child is not helped with an educator who stays close to himself but, instead, is helped by an educator who offers himself to the child's life.
10. Education is directed towards teaching a good walk of life: to be peaceful, benevolent, and to be reasoned with. The usefulness of knowledge and skills stands or falls with this walk.
11. Upbringing is a lot of mercy; we just start all over again and again and again.

⁵ Translated from the original Dutch list on pages 9-10 in De Kock, A. (2017). *Opvoeden is gekkenwerk. 11 uitgangspunten*. [Raising a Child is Madness. 11 foundations]. Heerenveen (The Netherlands): Royal Jongbloed.



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Cultivating Care: Developmentally Reframing the Religious Nurture of Young Children

Abstract

Decety et al. (2015) posited that family religiosity has a negative effect on children's altruism. However, a constructive reading of developmental psychologists suggests that religious nurture can enhance young children's moral development. Bloom (2013) and Harris (2012) offer evidence that infants and toddlers exhibit moral sensibilities and preschoolers engage the world through charitable epistemologies primed toward consensus and care. Engel (2015) provides insight into the role of curiosity in exploring difference in the world. Taken together, their findings suggest new ways that religious nurture might promote prosocial behaviors congruent with religious and social tolerance.

Introduction

In November 2015, a group of developmental psychologists published a report in the journal *Current Biology* that purported to show that family religiousness has a negative effect on children's morality. Jean Decety and his colleagues had studied 1,170 children ages five to 12 in six countries: the United States, Canada, Jordan, Turkey, South Africa and China. The researchers also had interviewed the parents of these children. Among the families in the study, 72 percent identified as religious (24 percent as Christian, 43 percent as Muslim, 2.5 percent as Jewish, 1.5 percent as Buddhist, .5 percent as Hindu, and .5 percent as other religious) and 28 percent as not religious.

The researchers hypothesized that children raised in religious households would have higher rates of altruism because religion has been assumed to promote prosocial behavior. However, using a resource allocation game, the study found that "religiousness was inversely predictive of children's altruism and positively correlated with their punitive tendencies", even though religious parents were more likely than non-religious parents to report that their children exhibit high levels of empathy and strong orientations to justice (Decety et al. 2015, p. 1). Comparisons among the three largest study groups, i.e. Christians, Muslims, and non-religious children, clearly demonstrated that "children from households identifying as either of the two major world religions (Christianity and Islam) were less altruistic than children from non-religious households" and "children with longer experience of religion in the household exhibit[ed] the greatest negative relations" (Decety et al. 2015, p. 2). A religious upbringing also correlated with higher levels of judgmentalism and condemnation of perceived asocial behaviors such as refusing to share or causing minor physical harm, e.g. pushing or bumping another child (Decety et al. 2014, p. 3).

Decety et al.'s research is provocative because it appears to undercut the value of religion for promoting strong prosocial development in children. While the study makes correlative rather than causal claims, its publication at a time when religious discord and violence are almost daily images worldwide means that its findings are raising serious questions about the ability of religions to contribute positively to society. In the rest of this paper, I propose to reflect on the work of three other developmental psychologists – Paul Bloom, Paul Harris and Susan Engel – and how their research might help religious leaders and families rethink the role that religious beliefs and practices might play in developing more prosocial forms of moral sense and moral action in young children.

Paul Bloom

Yale psychologist Paul Bloom has studied infants' and toddlers' moral sensibilities for decades. Analyzing videotapes of babies watching animated and puppet scenarios involving helpful and hindering behavior, he has noted that babies as young as three months have the ability to distinguish between kind and cruel behavior, preferring animated or puppet figures who act helpfully over those who hinder another figure's actions. Infants also demonstrate greater and earlier sensitivity to negative behavior, i.e. they are more upset by hindering behavior than pleased by helping behavior (Bloom 2013, p. 29). They appear to have "the capacity to make certain types of judgments – to distinguish between good and bad, kindness and cruelty" – which is what philosophers have termed "moral sense" (Bloom 2013, p. 31). Bloom is careful to say that babies are not demonstrating moral understanding in terms of making reasoned determinations about right and wrong or moral behavior by willfully choosing to act for good over evil. But their preference for helpers over hinderers shows signs of "disinterested judgments" and aligns with the same categories more mature human beings would use for what constitutes goodness and badness (Bloom 2013, p. 30).

As they grow into toddlers, Bloom's research suggests that young children become "natural-born egalitarians" with a bias toward an "equality of outcome", particularly if they would be the one who gets less in an unequal sharing situation (Bloom 2013, pp. 65, 80). However, he finds that children younger than four are reluctant to share with strangers, and they also express a keen desire for adults to punish those who transgress their intuited rules of helpfulness and fairness (Bloom 2013, pp. 54, 78). In addition, as noted above, young children pay earlier and greater attention to what others do wrong than to good behavior, which feeds into moralizing activities focused on retribution and punishment. Bloom observes that children as young as two are accurate tattlers, reporting bad behavior to teachers and caregivers far more often than sharing about good actions. He contends that tattling is both an attempt by the child to receive recognition from the adult for moral sensitivity (Bloom 2013, p. 96) and to exact "third-party punishment" out of revenge (Bloom 2013, p. 90).

Bloom's work suggests a couple of potential reasons for Decety et al.'s finding of a negative association between religiosity and altruism in 5-to-12 year olds. One would be the possible

correlation between young children's bias toward punishing moral transgressors and the sin and judgment narratives strongly associated with some forms of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and transmitted as part of children's religious formation. For instance, consider the cautionary tale of the sheep and the goats told to children from the Christian scriptures (Matthew 25), the Jewish ritual description of four types of children described in the Haggadah (Shire 2006, p. 51), and the uncomfortable disciplinary practices of the Qur'anic school in some Islamic cultures (Khan 2006, p. 139). Particularly in segments of the Abrahamic traditions that encourage childhood conversion, stories of moral failings and divine retribution reinforce the development of moral condemnation. Even in strands of these traditions that downplay concepts of damnation or eternal punishment, persistent scriptural and liturgical references to uncleanness, sinfulness, and accountability before God – as well as doctrines such as Christian beliefs in predestination and substitutionary atonement – teach children that their religious traditions divides people, places, things, and actions into categories of good and evil. Armed with such categories, through what Mai-Anh Le Tran has termed a “sacralized pedagogy of oppression” (Tran 2017, p. 48), young children are then implicitly encouraged to exercise their early moral inclination toward punishing transgressors with the tacit blessing of their religious communities.

A second possibility is that these many religious perspectives also construct a religious kinship group that may narrow or even supersede other constructions of in-groups and out-groups. For instance, in a conversionist perspective, those who ‘repent’ and are ‘saved’ become part of the ‘in’ group and all others are outsiders (Lawson 2006, p. 112). In a liberal Protestant perspective, those who embrace progressive social values are insiders and those who challenge such values are dismissed as ignorant outsiders in need of reeducation. For some Jewish communities, keeping or not keeping kosher (and the strictness with which one adheres to the laws of *kashrut*) denotes insider or outsider status. Observing Islamic dietary laws (*halal*) and dress codes may play a similar delineating role for Muslims. While Decety et al. controlled for kinship bias in their study by designating the target for sharing as a member of the same school and ethnic group as the study subject, it is unclear whether they considered matched religious fervor (either conservative or liberal) as a kinship factor. Yet religious identity could stand alongside school and ethnic identity as a potential kinship concern for children, particularly among children whose families self-identify as religious.

If heightened religious attention to moral judgment and religious kinship could be significant factors in the negative association of religiousness and children's altruism, then religious leaders and families can choose to respond differently to the moral sensibilities Bloom identifies in infants and toddlers. Rather than accentuate narratives and practices of religious punishment, caregivers can create play scenarios that contrast helping and hindering behaviors, encourage children to practice choosing good (helping), and also playact compassion and redirection for children or play figures that chose badly (hindering). Caregivers can also affirm children's preference for helping behaviors performed by unrelated (non-kin) figures, which reinforces the early inclination to make disinterested moral judgments, even if such judgments are uncritical

from a cognitive perspective. Such encouragement is particularly important given Bloom's finding that compassion is primarily limited to family and friends before the age of four years.

Bloom's research also suggests that there is value in blurring the distinctions among kin, in-group members, and strangers such that young children remain unclear as to just who they should prefer in the exercise of compassion. This means that caregivers need to moderate their rhetoric of 'the other', which reinforces a lack of compassion toward 'outsiders' and practice renaming others as fictive kin who should receive compassionate care. Bloom notes that it is not just the fact of familial relationship that matters. He observes, "The metaphor of kinship is powerful as well: if one wants to strengthen the bonds of a group, one way to do so is describe it as a family or brotherhood or sisterhood" (Bloom 2013, p. 179). Young children who hear people outside their close family categorized as brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, parents, and/or grandparents incorporate these outsiders into preferential systems of compassion. They are no longer viewed as strangers to be feared, but as kin to be cared for. If an adult refers to a woman who is homeless as "our sister who doesn't have a house", preschoolers are more likely to exercise compassion toward that person – to look for a way to help. Thus, the adult propensity to shield children from strangers reinforces their lack of compassion toward the other, whereas mediated introductions that rename strangers as family creates a porous boundary that children can cross to extend compassion to "fictive kin" now interpreted as appropriate receivers of compassionate care.

Paul Harris

Harvard psychologist Paul Harris's research has focused on children's imagination and, more recently, on how social testimony activates imagination and tempers empirical data assessment. He identifies two highly significant ways in which young children gather information that might frame imaginative reassessments of direct experience: they ask questions and they observe other people's actions. Questioning often arises in response to a child's awareness of an anomaly in her or his environment. Children notice anomalies before their first birthdays and, by 30 months, they "increasingly and persistently probe the how and why of things" (Harris 2012, pp. 26, 31). They also return to puzzling observations repeatedly and over time, seeking new information through questions, incorporating that information into their mental understanding, and developing new questions based on new or persistent anomalies.

In addition, young children view other people as "cultural mentor[s]" and observe them to discern cultural norms related to behavior (Harris 2012, p. 55). Harris discovered that young children appear to take into account social niceties when invited to undertake a demonstrated task. Children as young as two will imitate adult actions that the child recognizes are empirically unnecessary to accomplish a task on the assumption that the adult holds some "cultural knowledge" invisible to the child that justifies the action (Harris 2012, p. 60). By the age of three, children who receive instruction from adults that encourages them to imagine a possibility that defies their assumptions about how something should work are much more likely to

overcome their bias toward a preconceived outcome than if they simply witness a different outcome or are told what the correct outcome is (Harris 2012, p. 74). It seems that “instruction helps to generate a kind of mental proxy or stand-in for” actually viewing a hidden process (Harris 2012, p. 74). Researchers remain unsure whether this “thought experiment” activates “latent knowledge” or “latent imagination,” but it seems clear that instruction from an adult helps children overcome errors that otherwise occur because of children’s naïve beliefs and overreliance on empirical evidence (Harris 2012, p. 75).

Who children trust as reliable advisers is predicated on familiarity, the quality of attachment, and the accuracy of the adviser’s information in the past. Harris has found that younger children place significant trust in the advice of adults they know (such as family members and other regular caregivers) regardless of the accuracy of that advice, whereas older preschoolers “look at the person’s track record and prefer to learn from someone who has been accurate, no matter what their relationship with the person” (Harris 2012, p. 93). Securely attached children balance trust and skepticism better than children who are avoidant or ambivalent (Harris 2012, p. 86). In addition, young children are swayed by consensus opinions, which they use to help them determine conventional norms and “act in accord with the proprieties of their culture” (Harris 2012, p. 106).

Harris’s findings suggest some additional potential reasons for the negative association of religiosity and altruism in 5-to-12 year olds. One possibility is that children are not receiving answers that evoke altruism when they question why they should share or treat others with care. Some religious traditions emphasize teaching unquestioning obedience to adult mandates as an important aspect of childrearing, particularly when scriptural admonishments to “honor father and mother” hold a place of prominence (Shire 2006, p. 46). This can result in responses of “because I say so” or “because God says you should do as you are told” when children challenge prosocial expectations. While perhaps effective in eliciting conformity in the moment, such responses do not encourage the process of serial questions and answers that Harris contends children need to help them construct strong mental understandings of social mores.

A second possibility is that the religious cultural mentors children are observing in their communities are modeling sharing and interpersonal care behaviors that are circumscribed by unarticulated in-group norms despite explicit instruction in prosocial expectations. A version of “do as I say, not as I do”, this implicit enculturation process may be tied to power dynamics within a religious body that practices hierarchical valuation of individuals or exhibits suspicion of outsiders in its interactions with its larger community. These models may act as a kind of “moral licensing” that Decety, et al. suggest can “disinhibit[s] selfish behavior and reduce[s] prosocial behavior” (Decety, et al. 2015, p. 3).

Third, some religious communities are suspicious of the imagination, viewing it as a dangerous space open to spiritual attack that must be subjugated to an empirical mindset. Such traditions rarely encourage ‘thought experiments’ that might reframe social biases, preferring to provide

didactic instruction in moral behavior that conforms to their religious beliefs. Tran suggests that Christian communities too often cultivate spaces of “disimagination” that reinforce “the safety net of societal and institutional values, habits, inheritances, and infrastructures” around them (Tran 2017, p. 67). Quoting Eric Weiner, she defines imagination as “the capacity to ‘give credence to alternative realities’” (Tran 2017, p. 136), which is precisely what renders imagination frightful for religious communities wedded to particular, pre-determined or universalized understandings of reality.

If a reluctance to encourage moral questioning, problematic invisible norms, and suspicion of the imagination could be significant factors in the negative association of religiosity and children’s altruism, then religious leaders and families can choose to reconsider their religious formation processes in light of Harris’s findings. Instead of deflecting children’s questions, caregivers can embrace questions as opportunities to testify to the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of religious norms and practices. They can also choose to demonstrate altruistic behavior frequently in children’s presence, inviting children to imitate adult actions as part of a campaign to develop “habit memories” (Foster 2013, p. 79) tied to sharing and interpersonal care. These habits, or embodied understandings of what religious people do and say, need not be efficient, but they do need to be consistent. Harris found that “children can be sticklers for convention – even when convention dictates a relatively arbitrary way of doing things” (Harris 2012, p. 59). Young children are quick to trust the norming actions of adults with whom they have a trusting relationship and equally quick to insist that others should perform religious actions in the same way. They are motivated to interpret religious practices within the boundaries of what they have witnessed as orthopraxis even when they do not understand the relationship between practice and orthodox belief. Greater attention to modeling religious altruism, then, might generate more prosocial behaviors of the sort sought by Decety’s team among children raised in religious households.

Given the importance of the imagination in conceiving the existence of an invisible God, caregivers can invite children to employ their imaginations in reframing the world as God might altruistically want it to be. This idea picks up on the dual or proleptic reality concepts of various religious traditions, which hold that what persons experience of the world is ultimately not what is real or binding. Tran points to the power of a “reinvigorated imagination...to expose...the ‘hegemony of realism’ – the mind-set that ‘things will never change’” (Tran 2017, p. 136). Religious practices of *zakat* (mandatory giving) and *sadaqa* (voluntary charity) in Islam and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) in Judaism depend similarly on reimagining reality. Thus, young children in religious households can use their imaginations to conceive of a more altruistic divine reality that transcends their experiences and then employ social testimony, conveyed in demonstrated actions and series of questions and answers, that supports that imagined reality.

Susan Engel

Susan Engel, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Williams College, studies the role of curiosity in children's learning. Most of her work focuses on the culpability of educational systems in the diminishment of curiosity during the primary years (Engel 2015, p. 6), but she describes very young children's development of curiosity as a foundation for her assessment. Like Harris, she is intrigued by "epistemic curiosity", i.e. wondering about the how and why of things in addition to their utilitarian function (Engel 2015, p. 9, 28). She contends that "babies and toddlers are alert to meaningful novelty, novelty that guides them to understand the world around them in ever more powerful ways" (Engel 2015, p. 26). However, their interest in novelty is counterbalanced by anxiety and fear of the unknown (Engel 2015, p. 32). Young children need a secure "base camp" of emotional attachment from which to explore the world and human relationships (Engel 2015, p. 38).

Children also depend on adults to explain how others mediate, i.e. view and make sense of, the world (Engel 2015, p. 50), and they often gain knowledge about this mediated world via family storytelling (Engel 2015, p. 54). Adults serve as 'docents' of children's experiences, steering children's attention toward some ideas or activities and away from others (Engel 2015, p. 67). If children do not hear other people wondering and attempting to describe and explain situations, things, or actions, they do not easily learn that "people exchange knowledge through talk" (Engel 2015, p. 57). Engel notes that "one of the things children learn from adults is what kind of intellectual stance to take – contemplative or not, interested or not, detached or not. It seems that adults mold the stance children take toward events around them, but also model a stance as well" (2015, p. 81).

Engel's findings suggest yet more possible reasons for the negative association of religiosity and altruism in 5-to-12 year olds. Some religious traditions characterize curiosity, like imagination, as dangerous, particularly if a child's object of inquiry is religiously taboo. If a young child is regularly restricted to familiar spaces and warned against venturing outside those limits, she or he learns to repress interest in the world beyond their community. If a toddler is repeatedly chastised for exploring her or his body or asking questions about 'inappropriate' topics, the child learns to limit his or her curiosity to socially acceptable arenas or face censure. Such children are less likely to express curiosity about other children's needs and interests and be more anxious and fearful that engaging an unknown will threaten their well-being. Without a trusted caregiver nearby to dictate proper behavior, they will err on the side of self-preservation.

A second possibility is that children raised in some religious environments bring a set of family stories about human relationships that devalue indiscriminate altruistic behavior. Spiritual narratives that promote ideas of moral worthiness, divine initiative, and human entrepreneurial spirit may teach a child that sharing and interpersonal care should be restricted 1) to those worthy of moral concern, or 2) is dependent on the providence of God, or 3) is a by-product of self-initiated actions (i.e. God helps those who help themselves). Thus, the way religious parents mediate the world for their children may encourage them to direct altruistic concern in less than universal ways.

If a suspicion of curiosity, heightened anxiety when facing the unknown, and problematic family narratives could be significant factors in the negative association of religiousness and children's altruism, then religious leaders and families can choose to reconsider the relationship between curiosity and altruism in light of Engel's findings. Caregivers might explicitly encourage exploration of new objects, spaces and people, managing concerns for young children's physical and moral safety more dynamically rather than through excessive social circumscription and deprivation. In order to ease young children's anxiety in new social situations, adults might intentionally expand their own social networks and adopt indiscriminate kinship language for everyone they and their children meet. This approach combines Bloom's finding that children prefer to share with kin with Engel's observation that children need a safe base camp of parental support from which to venture curiously into new situations and relationships. Sharing is a new situation for young children; expecting them to share with an unknown child potentially multiplies the anxiety of the interaction, but past experiences mediated by the presence of a parent may excite their curiosity rather than invoke concern for self-preservation.

In addition, families (immediate, extended, and congregational) might deliberately develop narratives that model indiscriminate altruistic behavior and encourage children to explore practicing such behavior themselves. These stories might include tales of family altruism that include a participant's surprise at the positive feelings generated and social goods witnessed by altruistic actions, as well as fictional accounts of unexpected altruistic behavior that transgresses assumed social boundaries or religious taboos, e.g. the stories of the good Samaritan (Luke 10), the reuniting of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 32), and Joseph's welcome of his traitorous brothers when they come to Egypt for food (Genesis 43-45).

Concluding Thoughts

Paul Harris concludes his book *Trusting What You're Told* (2012) with the assertion that young children are more like anthropologists than scientists, learning about the culture into which they have been born through immersion in their local language, participant observation, and reliance on trusted informants (p. 210). We might extend this assertion to include the idea that children are religious reflectors (i.e. theologians and orthopractitioners) in a similar fashion. They learn about religious beliefs and practices by listening to the words and tones others use to talk about God, observing how religious people act, and asking questions of those with whom they have secure relationships and who have proven to be reliable informants. Their theological ideas are thus expressed in the language of their family's faith and negotiated in relation to – but generally do not replace – empirical data. While they are able to make autonomous judgments about what they believe, they remain open to and highly influenced by the verbal and enacted testimonies of others, particularly when they perceive that there is consensus about certain beliefs and practices among family and friends. Thus, if their religious faith communities and households do not mold and model altruistic generosity, they are unlikely to adopt such altruism in their social relationships.

The preceding reflections are not meant to refute the findings of Decety and his colleagues as presented in their *Current Biology* article. Nor are they meant to depict all religions or religious practices as culpable for lower levels of childhood altruism. Instead, I have tried to suggest several ways that other recent discoveries in developmental psychology could help religious education scholars and practitioners understand why negative associations between family religiousness and children's altruism might occur and how some religious formation strategies and practices might be altered to better encourage children's altruistic behavior. I welcome your response to these brief reflections and your additional thoughts on how we might interpret the implications of the Decety et al. study findings for children's spirituality and religious education.

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Relational Encounter in Family Systems A Dialectic of Connections and Collaborations, Influencing Adolescents' Life Values and Faith Posture

Abstract: At the core of human ecology¹ are individuals living together in microsystems of collaborative relationships. Families systems are significant entities at the microsystems level impacting all other systems in society. They are places where people learn through relational encounter. The relational encounter in family is undergirded by complex dialectical connections which influence individuals socially and emotionally, contributing to their learning and development. From a metatheoretical framework, this study used quantitative secondary data analysis to explore potential correlations between relational encounter in family systems and adolescents' life values and faith posture. Understanding the connections between relational encounter in family systems and adolescents learning and developmental outcomes have potentials for best practices in religious education.

Overview

Relational encounter in family systems are configurations of unceasing dialectical interplay which occur directly or indirectly, consciously or subconsciously. These encounters affect the group's functioning, as well as individuals' learning, and developmental outcomes. The process of learning is dynamic, transcending the label of schooling.² Martin (2011) proposes that education [learning] happens through encounter³ and that learning through encounter is not limited to individuals' acquisition of knowledge in a formal setting. Learning through encounter also encompasses cultural [and by proxy, relational] phenomena. Likewise, the issue of development is broad, encapsulating psycho-socio-cultural elements of individuals' encounter and outgrowth. Studies regarding human development provide different lenses for assessing a person's capacity to function.⁴ With ongoing studies on family systems, various frameworks⁵ are

¹ An ecological model of human development proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) consists of microsystem (i.e., family, school, church, etc.), mesosystem (relationships among microsystems), exosystem (public policy, political structures), macrosystem (social norms, gender roles, cultural values,). See McWhirter et al., (2007, pp. 17-18).

² Sometimes education and schooling are used synonymously or interchangeably, but studies have shown that there are differences between schooling and education. Learning happens through education but education is not limited to schooling. Learning happens through "experience" [encounter] (see Kolb, 2015, p. 49).

³ According to Martin (2011) "education involves an encounter between an individual and something external and that [it is] this encounter [that] brings about change" (p.7).

⁴ A significant aspect of the psycho-socio developmental process is an individual's level of differentiation of self. Differentiation of self is determined by one's capacity to simultaneously balance an autonomous self and maintain healthy attachment in interdependent relationships with others. See Kerr and Bowen (1988, pp. 97-106).

⁵ Various methods (i.e., Bowen's [1961, 1985] Family Theory, Olson's (2000) Circumplex Model, and McMaster's Model of Family Functioning [Epstein et al., 2003]), are used to explain some dynamics of relational encounter in family systems.

used in observing certain functions and outcomes of the relational encounter between individuals. The relational encounter in family is one factor through which individuals' learning and developmental outcomes are assessed.⁶ Based on research, one may assume that relational encounter in family systems influences a person's perception, attitudes, concept of reality, and how he or she acts or responds to life encounters.

Although studies have been conducted regarding the psycho-socio-cultural connections between family relationship and individuals' learning and developmental outcomes, few studies explore any direct connection between family systems relational encounter, and adolescents' life values and faith posture. In this discussion, it is presumed that because family systems encounter has far-reaching psycho-socio-cultural impacts on individuals' learning and developmental outcomes, there are also likely effects for certain religious outcomes. Consequently, it is assumed that the parent-child relational encounter potentially influences the child's values and attitudes regarding faith during the stage of adolescence.

In exploring the impact of parent-child relational encounter on adolescents' faith posture and life values, it is necessary to establish briefly a biblical foundation, discuss faith as a developmental encounter which happens in relationship with another, and outline the theoretical framework of this study. Some elements of family systems theory and tenets of relational dialectics theory form the major theoretical construct (i.e., Family Systems Dialectics [FSD]⁷) from which certain parent-adolescent relational encounter is explored. A brief summary of the research methodology, data analysis procedures, research findings, and implications is also presented.

A Biblical Framework for Family Relational Encounter

Family relational encounter is at the foundation of biblical history. The Bible is replete with manifestations of family relational encounter. Beginning with the creation narrative, family relationships are intertwined with the divine-human encounter and continue with myriads of interpersonal encounters between kinfolks.⁸ Deuteronomy outlines a pattern for learning through relational encounter in family:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! And these words which I commanded you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and

⁶ Individuals' developmental outcomes, are often linked to relational encounters in families. (Fosco et al., 2016; Grossmann et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2014; McBride et al., 2013; McWhirter, 2007; Raby et al., 2015; Sroufe et al., 2010; Stevenson-Hinde, 1990). Family relationships are also associated with influencing individuals' values and faith identity formation (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Choi, 2012; Martin et al., 2003).

⁷ The concept of Family Systems Dialectics (FSD) is a metatheoretical approach adapted in this study as a framework for exploring relational encounters in family systems. FSD is a synthesis of concepts extracted from family systems and relational dialectics theories, and used to conceptualize the outcomes of complex relational encounter in family. This complexity is evident in contradictions—defined as “the dynamic interplay between unified opposition” evident in interdependent relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8). The relational encounter in family is predicated in inevitable tensions based on individuals' contradicting needs. The capacity to negotiate meaning in relational encounter, and to embrace a both/and (instead of either/or) approach creates a platform for collaborative initiatives. FSD is also based on assumptions drawn from Bowen's (1985), and Olson's (2000) concepts of family functionality. Elements of Bowen's concepts, along with Olson's family dimensions, undergird the systemic context of FSD.

⁸ See Gen 1:28-30; 3:9-19; 4:6-7; 13:8-9; 25:29-34; 29:15-29. Ps. 78:1-4; 2 Tim 1:1, 2.

when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. 6:4-9 (NKJV).⁹

Symbols in this passage encapsulate different levels of encounter. Encounter is depicted as a vertical reality (happening through divine-human experience) as well as a horizontal connection (relational interchange between parent-child) in which individuals learn and develop. The call to “love” is the basis of encounter. The encounter of love begins with “a heart focused and centered on God” as the Ultimate. Love as an encounter is predicated in the heart, “the sense of reason and cognitive functions” Carpenter (2009, p. 457). In essence, parents are challenged to first experience love as an encounter with God, and then employ distinct ways (i.e., teach diligently, in different conversations, writing, memorizing) of helping their children encounter God’s love in personal and meaningful ways. Concerning this need, Slaughter (1996) stated:

If parents are to teach their children the truth about a relationship [an encounter] with God, they themselves must have hearts burning with passion for Him. They must love God with all their heart, soul, and strength; in other words, with every aspect of their being. . . .Before parents will be able to teach their children about God in an effective way, they must have hearts filled with passion for the Lord and must be attentive to His commands. (pp. 26-27)

Further, Carpenter (2009) stated that “the heart is paired with the tongue. . . .The tongue repeats what the heart formulates, while the heart gathers information from all the senses” (p. 457), implying that no dissonance should exist between the message and the messenger. Evidently, parents’ encounter with God should be practical illustrations of what they are attempting to teach children. Maston and Tillman (1983) remarked that: “Parents cannot teach their children effectively unless the truths they would teach have become vital parts of their own lives. . . . Parents will determine more than anyone else the direction of the lives of their children” (p. 235). It is important to note further in Deut 6:6-7, that the statement “these words which I have commanded you today . . . you shall teach . . . diligently to your children” underscores God’s expectation of parents regarding their children. Essentially, parents are not only challenged to foster love encounters with God, but to be intentional in sharing them with their children¹⁰. Westerhoff (2012) remarked on the effect of a parent’s practical connection with God on a child’s encounter, stating that “the responsibility of Christian parents is to endeavor to be Christian with their children” (p. 93). Furthermore, Gangel (1977) stated that “the way parents relate to their children and to others in the extended family or the society around, and the way parents [encounter] God all have a profound influence on the value systems and ethical standards of their children” (p. 64).

Ultimately, a biblical perspective on relational encounter in family calls attention to the “the minuscule events of daily life. . . . How children are developing physically, mentally, emotionally and in their sense of self affects their process of faith development” (May et al., 2005, p. 152). A biblical perspective highlights the need for parents to model what they expect of their children, and to foster an environment in which children will encounter life values that serves as scaffolds for faith development.

⁹ NKJV is used for biblical citations unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰ See Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4; 2 Tim 3:15.

Faith: A Complex, Developmental Encounter

Differing perspectives connote the complexity of faith. According to Dykstra (2005) “faith is a complex reality.” Faith is sometimes described broadly as “general human phenomena” (p. 17) (believing, trusting, committing and orienting life), or, expressed as confidence in something or someone. Here, faith denotes active and passive encounters. Further discussions on the complexity of faith has theological and philosophical underpinnings, suggesting that “faith is often used as a synonym for religion” (as doctrinal beliefs) or as a contrast to reason (Nelson, 1989 p. 127). Still, other studies¹¹ imply that the dynamic encounter of faith is much more than exclusive concepts or theories of theology or philosophy.

Fowler’s (1986) remark that, “Faith has to do with the making, maintenance, and transformation of human meaning, [and with] knowing and being” (p. 15), underscores the complexity of faith. Embracing a developmental perspective, Fowler discussed aspects of faith as embodying attachment in the context of relationships in which virtues such as trust, commitment, and loyalty are mutually expressed. Faith embodies a comprehensive, ongoing relational encounter of knowing and acting:

Faith in the structural-developmental sense is never a static, completed formula. Faith exists in activity, in the ways we use religious symbols, in the ways we express our loyalties and commitment, in the ways we form our human relationships. To understand faith as a structure is to think of it as a verb, as a way of doing, of knowing, a way of committing and thus being. (Fowler & Lovin, 1980, p. 20)

Faith examined through a structural development lens indicates that the encounter is dynamic. As faith is passed on through encounter it “gains fresh vitality” for each person (Fowler, 1981, p. 10). Faith entails commitment and loyalty, and is expressed through activities and the use of symbols in a relational context. Fowler (1981) remarked that “there is always *another* in faith. I trust *in* and am loyal *to*” (p. 16), an indication that faith is relational, happening horizontally and vertically¹² in connection with another. Fowler’s (1981) concept of faith¹³ being a developmental

¹¹ Embracing a relational approach to faith, Westerhoff (2012) proposed four styles of faith: *experienced faith*, which are based on initiated acts and responses to certain basic needs; *Affiliative faith*, centered on identifying and acting with others in an accepting community; *searching faith*, the process of establishing one’s own identity through critical thought and reflection; and *owned faith*, the conversion which results from experience, affiliation, and personal searching (pp. 89-98). Westerhoff’s relational approach is practical, and relevant in understanding faith. Faith is “a way of behaving which involves knowing, being, and willing. . . . [Faith] results from our actions with others, it changes and expands through our actions with others, and it expresses itself daily in our actions with others” (p. 89). Each dimension of Westerhoff’s styles of faith represents a chronological period, but the experience of faith is not bound to a linear sequence base on individuals’ chronological age/stages of development.

¹² See Gillespie et al., (2004), pp. 97-103; Kozlowski et al., (2014) pp. 427-428; Roehlkepartain (1990) p. 497 for discussions on dimensions (vertical, horizontal, undeveloped, integrated) of faith. Faith is based on one’s relationship with God (vertical) and with others (horizontal). (Gillespie et al., 2004) proposed that people with undeveloped faith are “low on both the vertical and horizontal scales, while those having integrated faith measure “high on both vertical and horizontal faith scales” (p. 102). In-between are vertical faith (individuals are deemed strong in their relationship with God, but low in their relationship with others) and horizontal faith (individuals are high in their relationship with others, but low in their relationship with God).

¹³ Fowler (1981) described seven possible stages of faith development (six of which are measurable) during an individual’s lifespan: Undifferentiated (unmeasurable), Intuitive-Projective, Mythic-Literal, Synthetic-Conventional, Individuative-Reflective, Conjunctive, and Universalizing (pp. 117-199). Though each stage is linked chronologically to a developmental time frame, the progression from one stage not necessarily sequential.

encounter is compared with other structural-developmental approaches¹⁴ on how a person's cognitive, psycho-socio, and moral experiences emerge over a lifetime.

A structural developmental approach to understanding the complexity of faith is not a measure of the quality of an individual's religious practices or a means of determining the validity or sincerity of one's faith. However, it is a viable means of describing "patterns of knowing and relating through assessing cognitive, moral, and other forms of development that constitute a person's relationship to the transcendent or the Higher Being . . . and with other humans, both inside and outside a person's particular faith community" (Fowler & Dell, 2006, p. 40). In this context, a structural developmental perspective validates the assumption that faith is relational. It supports the metatheoretical approach used to explore the potential impacts of the relational encounter in family on adolescents' faith posture and life values.

A Metatheoretical Approach to Family Relational Encounter

Interpersonal relationships are dynamic, and no one theory completely describes the intricacies of the relational encounter within family systems. Hence, the attempt to use a metatheoretical approach to conceptualize the connections between family systems relational encounter, and individuals' learning and developmental processes. This method combines elements of family systems theory (Bowen [1985]; Olson [2000]) and relational dialectics theory (Baxter and Montgomery [1996]) as a synthesis¹⁵ for explaining complex family relational encounters. The concept of family systems¹⁶ is based on the principle of nonsummativity which suggests that individuals are best understood in connection with other members of their family unit. Essentially, what affects one part of the system impacts the whole system. Emerging from the perspective of systems theory,¹⁷ family systems theory is a practical way of explaining complex layers of the relational encounter. Broderick (1993) describes family systems as being open and ongoing¹⁸ hinting at their complex structure and function. Implicitly, every relational encounter evolves on the heels of previous encounters and creates segues to future encounters.

Relational encounter in family systems seems even more complex as one explores the intricacies and possible outcomes of parent-child interpersonal encounter across generations. Bowen (1985) uses eight concepts¹⁹ to discuss the likely effects of such encounters on individual

¹⁴ See Piaget and Gabain (1932) on cognitive development, Erikson (1963) on psycho-socio development, and Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) on moral development.

¹⁵ Select concepts are adopted to create a metatheoretical framework for this discussion. However, empirical instrumentations connected to Bowen's (1985), Olson's (2000), theory of family systems, and Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) discourse on relational dialectics are not used as methodological tools in the study.

¹⁶ Bowen (1961), in observing and administering psychotherapy to patients, unearthed a web of emotional entanglement between family members, creating the need for a shift in "theoretical orientation," that is, a shift from focusing on the isolated, ill individual and instead, focusing on "the family as the unit of illness" as well as "the family as the unit of treatment" (p. 44). These concepts underscore a general assumption that "the individual is best understood as part of a larger social context," particularly that of family (Segal & Bavelas, 1983, p. 63).

¹⁷ Discussions in *General System Theory*, Bertalanffy, (1993, 3-9, 192-194) provide an overview of the emergence of systems theory within the industrial/technological context, and also its re-orientation in the study of human relationships. Systems theory provides a viable explanation of the way components within a system connect and interact with each other.

¹⁸ Broderick's (1993) discussion regarding the open, ongoing nature characterizing family systems implies that there is an internal and external encounter between the system and its environment, and that the encounter is modified by time and change.

¹⁹ In studying human behavior Bowen (1961, 1985) employed the use of systems thinking in which he described the family as an emotional system where individuals are intricately connected with one another. He proposed that

members and across generations. Four of these concepts (i.e., differentiation of self, emotional cutoff, multigenerational transmission process, societal emotional process) are adopted in the FSD framework proposed in this study.

The idea of *differentiation* encompasses the emotional self; being able to be a distinct self while remaining emotionally connected to others. Levels of differentiation of self, determine whether an individual will engage in *emotional cutoff*—a process through which individuals attempt to cope by reducing or severing emotional contact with family members whenever there are unresolved issues. Levels of differentiation of self, are transferable biologically and socially across generations, and the issue of emotional cutoff potentially becomes a trend in family systems. The transfer of emotional behavior patterns across generations is referred to as *multigenerational transmission process*. Family systems are not only impacted by individuals' and generational emotional patterns; they are also impacted by the interplay between other systems in society. Bowen (1985) refers to this encounter between family and society as *societal emotional process*. Similar to Bowen's (1985) perspective are Olson's (1979, 2000) dimensions²⁰ (cohesion, adaptability, and communication) on family relational encounter, which focus on the system's emotional climate. Olson's dimensions explore levels of emotional connectedness within the system and the capacity of family members to adapt to changes in the system.

Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics theory is another component in the FSD framework. It assumes that relational encounter is undergirded by the dialectical principles²¹ of "unified oppositions" built around the notion of contradictions, change, praxis, and totality. From a dialectical perspective *contradictions* "are the basic drivers of change" in a web of relational encounters, and is best understood as a "both/and" way of fostering growth and stability simultaneously (pp. 6-8). *Change* occurs in relational encounter as individuals act and react to others, and is necessary in sustaining healthy interdependent relationships. The concept

individuals are emotionally interdependent, and what affects one person impacts another as well as the family unit in general. He used eight concepts (triangles, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, sibling position, differentiation of self, emotional cutoff, multigenerational transmission process, and societal transmission process) to explain relational encounters and outcomes in family systems.

²⁰ Cohesion, adaptability and communication are dimensions used in Olson's (2000) model to assess individuals' capacity to balance "separateness" and "togetherness", and how changes in relationships are managed. Family *cohesion* describes "the emotional bonding that family members have toward each other," and how the system balances its members' "separateness" and "togetherness" (p. 145). Four levels of cohesion (disengaged, separated, connected, and enmeshed) measured on a "low to high" continuum are used to identify the ranges of family cohesion (p. 145). Family *adaptability* describes "the amount of change in [family] leadership, role relationships, and relationship rules", and how the system manages such changes. Levels of adaptability (rigid, structured, flexible, and chaotic) are also measured on a "low to high" continuum (p. 147). The inclusion of a communication dimension is "critical for facilitating" the dynamic interplay of cohesion and adaptability in family systems (p. 149). Patterns of family communication are "measured by focusing on the family as a group" assessing their capacity to engage one another in interpersonal communication (p. 149). Family communication outcomes are labeled as positive or negative, based on the system's levels of cohesion, and adaptability.

²¹ The essence of the dialectical principle is embedded in simultaneous expression of unity and differences. It is a way of understanding "the ongoing contradictory tensions between consistency and inconsistency and between stability and instability" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998, p. 2). Griffin (2012) describes relational dialectics as "a dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies" (p.154). Baxter (1990) states that "a contradiction is present whenever two tendencies or forces are interdependent (the dialectical principle of unity) yet mutually negate one another (the dialectical principle of negation). . . .The presence of paired opposites, or contradictions is essential to change and growth; [and] the struggle of opposites thus is not evaluated negatively by dialectical thinkers" (p.70). In essence, the dialectical encounter creates a need for negotiation, and the capacity to find balance in the process.

of *praxis* encompasses individuals' conscious or subconscious engagement in relational encounter as coders/decoders and senders/receivers illustrating both proactive and reactive roles in relational interplay. *Totality*²² in a dialectical contexts connotes that "phenomena can be understood only in relation to other phenomena" (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, p.14). Interestingly, there are overlaps between components of family systems theory and relational dialectical theory, and it is necessary to note that these components are not sequential, but are manifested concurrently in the relational encounter. Consequently, it is assumed that relational encounter in family systems can be understood from the framework of family systems dialectics as influencing the overall learning and development of individuals. Figure 1 in the Appendix is a synthesis of elements of family systems theory and relational dialectical theory creating the FSD model.

Methodology

A quantitative nonexperimental research design utilizing secondary data analysis was used to test the FSD model which assumes that there are significant connections between family systems relational encounter and adolescents' life values and faith posture. Quantitative research methods "emphasize objectivity in measuring and describing a phenomena . . . by using numbers, statistics, structure and control" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 21). The research process involves analysis of data extracted from Valuegenesis² dataset. Valuegenesis (1, 2 & 3) research were conducted over a period of three decades (1990, 2000, and 2010), examining the faith and values of adolescents attending high schools affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. Initially, data purging reduced the sample size from 16,000 to 11,481. Further elimination of missing cases increased reliability while reducing the sample size to 4,675. Forty-one (41) items (out of 396) were selected based on adolescents' perceived relational encounter with parents. Through factor analysis and mean score calculation fourteen observed variables were created. Six observed variables contribute to the construct, family climate²³, and five are indicators of the FSD construct²⁴. It is assumed that FSD is a predictor of outcome variables: adolescents' life values (LV), and faith posture (FP).

The Valuegenesis² study demographic characteristics include gender, ethnicity, age, and family structure. A greater percentage of the sample were females (51.2%) with males comprising 48.8% ($N = 4,675$), and the population sample was predominantly White (53%). Other ethnic characteristics are of mixed racial background (14%), Latino/Hispanic (11%),

²² Totality, a concept similar in meaning to Bowen's concept of systems, denotes that "phenomena can be understood only in relation to other phenomena" (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, p. 14). Further, in discussing totality Benson (1977) remarked "that social phenomena should be studied relationally . . . with attention to their multiple interactions" (pp. 3-4). Essentially, "dialectical attention is directed away from the individual as the unit of analysis and toward the dilemmas and tensions that inhere in relating" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 15).

²³ The construct family climate is indicated by six measured variables: family life happiness (FC1), level of love in family (FC2), parent-child relationship (FC3), parents' support of child (FC4), verbal expression of love (FC5), and response to family rules (FC6). Conceptually, family climate represents adolescents' perception of their family as a place where they experience love and happiness, get along with, and feel supported by parents. Research suggests that the general family climate is a reflection of several aspects of family level functioning (Fosco et al., p.1140). Based on the systemic perspective adopted in this study it is assumed that family climate creates the atmosphere for all relational encounter even as it is affected by the relational encounter between family members.

²⁴ The FSD construct is indicated by family worship (FW), parents' religious posture (PRP), frequent conversation with parents about faith (FCPF), comfort with faith talk (CFT), and frequent good conversation with parents (FGCP).

Asian/Pacific Islanders (11%), Black/American (10%), and American Indian (1%). Participants' age varied from 11 to 20, with a greater percentage (78.7%) being in the 15–18 age range. Participants' family structure is characterized by two criteria: (a) Living, or not living in a two-parent home (85% and 15% respectively), and (b) Parents' marital status: Not divorced/not separated 79%, divorced or separated 19%, never married 2%.

Analysis Procedures

Analysis of data was carried out using the International Business Machine (IBM) Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS 24) and, Analysis of a Moment Structures (AMOS 24) used to perform structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM design is able to analyze both observed and latent variables (Kline, 2011, p. 9) and is adequate to test model-fitting theories since the process “takes a confirmatory (i.e., hypothesis testing) approach” in analyzing a theory (Byrne, 2010, p. 3). SEM infers that causal effects in a study are represented by “structural equations” and that the “structural relations can be modeled pictorially” to enhance the underlying concepts of a proposed theory (Byrne, 2010, p. 3). Basic composites of SEM include a measurement model which “defines the relations between observed and unobserved variables” and a structural model which “defines the relations among unobserved variables” (Byrne, 2010, pp. 12-13).

The following criteria were used to examine model “fit measures” (Arbuckle, 2016; Blunch, 2008, pp. 98, 110-116): The chi-square (χ^2) likelihood ratio statistic, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the normed fit index (NFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of estimation (RMSEA). Based on statistical reports, the χ^2 likelihood ratio statistics is the most significant absolute fit index, testing the difference between the theoretical model and the empirical model (Arbuckle, 2016; Blunch, 2008; Meyers et al., 2013). A significant χ^2 indicates that the theoretical model does not fit the empirical data, whereas a good model fit is indicated by a non-significant χ^2 , but there are exceptions when using large sample size. The GFI is similar to the “coefficient determination” (R^2) in multiple regression, measuring the model variance and covariance. GFI index values equaling .90 or greater imply a good model fit (Blunch, 2008, pp. 110, 114). The NFI analyzes the difference between the χ^2 values of the hypothesized model, and the independent model (Blunch, 2008, p. 114). Ideally, NFI index values are .90 or greater. The CFI analyzes differences between the empirical model and the theoretical model. A CFI index value of .90 or more indicates a good model fit. The RMSEA measures approximation error between observed covariance and the covariance of the hypothesized model, and in a general sense, an approximation of 0.10 indicates an acceptable fit. Blunch (2008) suggested that an approximation of “0.05 is considered a sign of good fits and models” (p. 116). In essence, the multiple model fit indices available through structural equation modeling provide adequate means of testing and explaining the proposed hypothesized model.

Findings and Discussions

The variance covariance matrix indicates significant positive correlations between observed variables.²⁵ These results reflect adolescents' perception of the relational encounter (particularly with their parents) in their family systems. The strongest correlations ($r = .70$, $p < .001$) were found between family life happiness ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.22$) and level of love in family ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.14$); family life happiness ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.22$) and verbal expression of love ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.25$); level of love in family ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.14$) and verbal expression of love ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.25$); and parent-child relationship ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.15$) and verbal expression of love ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.25$). These results indicate that level of love, and parents' increased verbal expression of love contribute to adolescents' relationships with their parents, and to family life happiness. The weakest correlation ($r = .10$, $p < .001$) existed between response to family rules ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.32$) and frequent good conversation with parents ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.28$). Moderate correlation ($r = .60$, $p < .001$) was also found between outcome variables faith posture ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .69$) and life values ($M = 2.98$, $SD = .49$). Criteria for normal distribution of variables was met based on the absolute value index for skewness and kurtosis: $SI \leq 3.0$ and $KI \leq 10$ (see Appendix, Table 2) which is acceptable with the use of large sample size (Kline, 2011, p. 63).

The study reveals that the hypothesized model of FSD, which is a synthesis of family relational encounters influencing adolescents' life values and faith posture, was supported by the empirical data. The research hypothesis proposed that the theoretical covariance matrix is similar or identical to the empirical covariance matrix, and further suggest that the construct FSD is a significant predictor of adolescents' life values and faith posture. Evaluation of the structural model based on likelihood ratio statistic: χ^2 (61, $N = 4,675$) = 1372.07, $p = .000$ indicate a misfit between the theoretical model and the data. However the misfit reflected in the χ^2 is potentially due to the large sample size. Four other criteria were used to evaluate the structural model, all of which yielded acceptable fit indices: GFI = .96, NFI = .94, CFI = .94, and RMSEA = .068 (see Appendix, Table 3).

The fit indices indicated similarities between the covariance matrices, providing empirical support for the theoretical model (see Appendix, Figure 2, Tables 3, 4, 5, and Model Fit Summary). Significant correlation was found between the latent variables family systems dialectics (FSD) and family climate (FC) $r = .60$, $p = .000$. Family systems dialectics is a significant predictor of adolescents' faith posture (effect size .40) and life values (.10). There is significant correlation between family climate and faith posture (.12), but no statistical significance between family climate and life values. Faith posture and life values are highly correlated with a path coefficient of .54. Twenty three percent (23%) of the variance in faith posture was influenced by the direct effect of family systems dialectics, and 35% of the variance in life values was influenced by family climate.

In testing the assumption that family relational encounter significantly influences adolescents' life values and faith posture, the theoretical model was supported by the empirical data. The theoretical model assumed bivariate correlations between the latent constructs family systems dialectics (FSD) and family climate (FC), and direct causal relationship between latent variables and outcome variables faith posture (FP), and life values (LV). The observed model

²⁵ LV = life values, FP = faith posture, FC1 = family life happiness, FC2 = level of love in family, FC3 = verbal expression of love, FC4 = parent-child relationship, FC5 = parents' support of child, FC6 = response to family rules. Figure 2 in the Appendix outlines the hypothesized model which indicates causal relationships between variables.

consisted of six parameters five of which were statistically significant (see Appendix, Tables 4 and 5), indicating that the model is a good fit.

Conclusion and Implication for Religious Education Best Practice

This study indicates that there are significant connections between adolescents' relational encounter in family systems and their development of values and faith. This means that certain relational encounters (i.e., frequent good conversations with parents, frequent conversations with parents on the issue of faith, comfort level with faith talks, parents' support, level of love experienced in family, and parents' verbal expression of love), contribute to meaningful parent-child relational encounter, which tend to influence the development of life values and faith in adolescents. Results also indicate that adolescents' perceptions of their parents' personal faith encounter are likely to influence their own life values and faith posture.

At a time when ongoing studies on the issue of faith reveal that youth and young adults' interest in faith and faith communities is on the decline, faith communities are at a crossroad attempting to navigate a path that will rekindle faith in young people. Referring to reports that family systems relational encounter influences individuals' psycho-socio-cultural learning and development, this study suggests a family-inclusive approach to discipleship can create opportunities for collaborative efforts between faith communities and families. Understanding the significant impact of parent-child relational encounter, ministry leaders and mentors are encouraged to partner with parents, first by helping them assume the primary responsibility of modeling faith for their children. Additionally, faith communities may foster ongoing collaboration with parents by planning and implementing more intergenerational curricula²⁶ that encourage parents-child encounter beyond the environment of the faith community.

²⁶ Anthony (2012) proposed that faith communities need "family-empowered ministries not only to raise up a generation of faith followers, but to raise up a generation of spiritually minded parents as well. Parents today need the church to inspire them, equip them, and support them in this incredible endeavor" (p. 37).

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APPENDIX

Figure 1

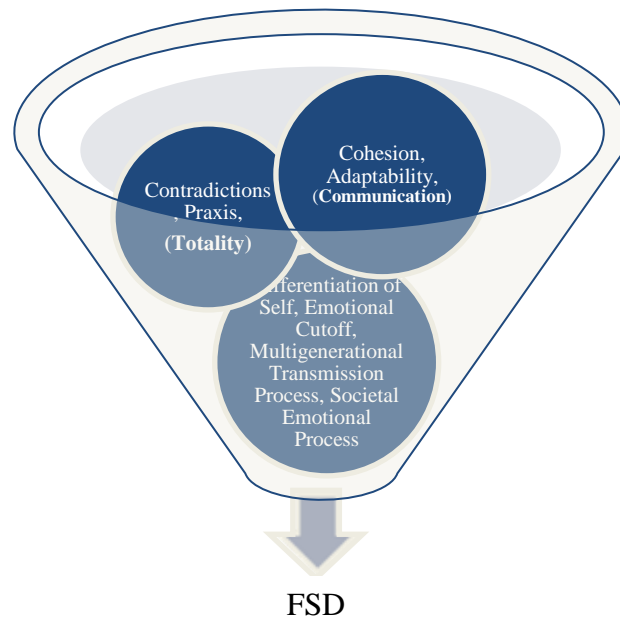


Figure 1. Family systems dialectics (FSD) model: A synthesis of tenets family systems theory, and relational dialectics theories illustrating how relational encounter in family systems merge together potentially impacting adolescents life values and faith posture.

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation among Measured Variables (N=4,675)

	FGCP	PRP	FCPF	CFT	FW	FP	LV	FC1	FC2	FC3	FC4	FC5	FC6
FGCP	--												
PRP	.214**	--											
FCPF	.352**	.425**	--										
CFT	.279**	.391**	.447**	--									
FW	.150**	.260**	.380**	.219**	--								
FP	.296**	.181**	.324**	.334**	.191**	--							
LV	.188**	.117**	.243**	.284**	.184**	.587**	--						
FC1	.377**	.262**	.281**	.300**	.168**	.269**	.186**	--					
FC2	.380**	.266**	.280**	.317**	.169**	.295**	.224**	.697**	--				
FC3	.419**	.228**	.270**	.294**	.135**	.293**	.218**	.699**	.657**	--			
FC4	.405**	.237**	.277**	.314**	.171**	.299**	.232**	.611**	.642**	.683**	--		
FC5	.387**	.220**	.281**	.290**	.157**	.253**	.198**	.528**	.591**	.552**	.626**	--	
FC6	.099**	.153**	.157**	.149**	.122**	.106**	.127**	.169**	.200**	.134**	.184**	.214**	--
Mean	4.083	5.240	4.622	3.197	1.385	3.484	2.984	4.834	5.165	4.892	5.214	5.238	4.720
SD	1.277	.999	1.659	.576	.524	.693	.486	1.224	1.143	1.246	1.150	1.185	1.315
Skew	-1.118	-2.023	.325	-.716	-.177	-.511	-.448	-1.282	-1.735	-1.309	-1.821	-1.852	-1.145
Kurt	-.091	4.936	-.398	.998	-1.046	.079	.078	1.213	2.905	1.147	3.109	2.971	.701

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Standard error of skewness = .036, and Kurtosis =.072

Table 3

Summary of Fit Indices of the Hypothesized Model (N = 4,675)

Fit Index	Model Fit	Recommended levels	References
χ^2	1372.07, $p = .000$	$p. > .05$	Kline, 2011
DF	61		
GFI	.96	$\geq .90$	Meyers et al., 2013
NFI	.94	$\geq .90$	Bryne, 2010
CFI	.94	$\geq .90$	Bryne, 2010
RMSEA	.068	$\leq .08$	Meyers et al., 2013

Figure 2

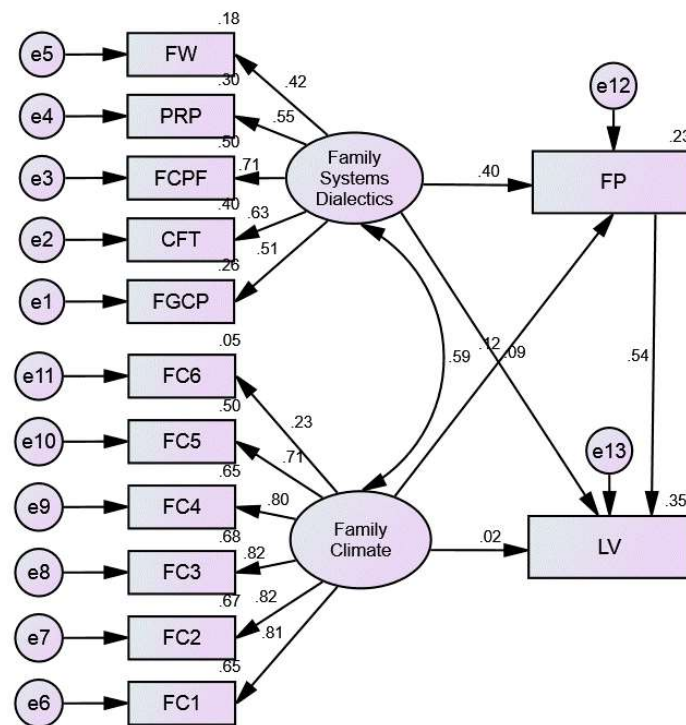


Figure 2. Hypothesized theoretical model illustrating causal relationships of indicator variables on the latent constructs family systems dialectics (FSD), family climate (FC) and the mediated effects of FSD on adolescents' life values and faith posture.

Table 4

Correlation between the Latent Variables in the Structural Model

Relationships	<i>r</i>	S.E.	<i>p</i>
Family Climate => Family Systems Dialectics	.60	.017	.000

Table 5

Path Coefficients for the Structural Model

Relationships	β	R ²	S.E.	<i>p</i>
<i>Faith Posture</i>		.23		
Family Systems Dialectics => Faith Posture	.40		.025	.000
Family Climate => Faith Posture	.12		.014	.000
<i>Life Value</i>		.35		
Family Climate => Life Values	.02		.008	.206
Family Systems Dialectics => Life Values	.10		.015	.000
Faith Posture => Life Values	.54		.010	.000

Model Fit Summary

CMIN

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	30	1372.070	61	.000	22.493
Saturated model	91	.000	0		
Independence model	13	22326.193	78	.000	286.233

RMR, GFI

Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default model	.071	.955	.934	.640
Saturated model	.000	1.000		
Independence model	.404	.421	.324	.361

Baseline Comparisons

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	.939	.921	.941	.925	.941
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Parsimony-Adjusted Measures

Model	PRATIO	PNFI	PCFI
Default model	.782	.734	.736
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	1.000	.000	.000

NCP

Model	NCP	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	1311.070	1194.230	1435.301
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	22248.193	21760.223	22742.445

FMIN

Model	FMIN	F0	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	.294	.281	.256	.307
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	4.777	4.760	4.656	4.866

RMSEA

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	.068	.065	.071	.000
Independence model	.247	.244	.250	.000

AIC

Model	AIC	BCC	BIC	CAIC
Default model	1432.070	1432.250	1625.569	1655.569
Saturated model	182.000	182.547	768.949	859.949
Independence model	22352.193	22352.271	22436.043	22449.043

ECVI

Model	ECVI	LO 90	HI 90	MECVI
Default model	.306	.281	.333	.306
Saturated model	.039	.039	.039	.039
Independence model	4.782	4.678	4.888	4.782

HOELTER

Model	HOELTER .05	HOELTER .01
Default model	274	306
Independence model	21	24

Scalar Estimates (Group number 1 - Default model)

Maximum Likelihood Estimates

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
FP <--- Family_Climate	.085	.014	6.220	***	
FP <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.419	.025	16.653	***	
FGCP <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	1.000				
CFT <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.556	.020	27.858	***	
FCPF <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	1.791	.061	29.206	***	
PRP <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.837	.032	25.791	***	
FW <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.338	.016	21.700	***	
FC1 <--- Family_Climate	1.000				
FC2 <--- Family_Climate	.948	.015	62.400	***	
FC3 <--- Family_Climate	1.037	.017	62.700	***	
FC4 <--- Family_Climate	.934	.015	60.750	***	
FC5 <--- Family_Climate	.848	.016	51.623	***	
FC6 <--- Family_Climate	.302	.020	14.950	***	
LV <--- Family_Climate	.011	.008	1.264	.206	
LV <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.070	.015	4.632	***	
LV <--- FP	.375	.010	38.355	***	

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate
FP <--- Family_Climate	.121
FP <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.397
FGCP <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.515
CFT <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.634
FCPF <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.710
PRP <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.551
FW <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.424
FC1 <--- Family_Climate	.809
FC2 <--- Family_Climate	.821
FC3 <--- Family_Climate	.824
FC4 <--- Family_Climate	.804
FC5 <--- Family_Climate	.708
FC6 <--- Family_Climate	.228
LV <--- Family_Climate	.022
LV <--- Family_Systems_Dialectics	.094
LV <--- FP	.535

Covariances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Family_Sys_Dialectics <--> Family_Climate	.384	.017	22.509	***	

Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate
Family_Systems_Dialectics <--> Family_Climate	.590

Variances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Family_Systems_Dialectics	.432	.026	16.554	***	
Family_Climate	.980	.030	32.412	***	
e12	.370	.008	44.802	***	
e1	1.199	.028	43.113	***	
e2	.199	.005	38.434	***	
e3	1.367	.041	33.405	***	
e4	.696	.017	42.011	***	
e5	.225	.005	45.185	***	
e6	.519	.014	38.332	***	
e7	.425	.011	37.364	***	
e8	.498	.013	37.105	***	
e9	.467	.012	38.644	***	
e10	.701	.016	43.076	***	
e11	1.639	.034	48.060	***	
e13	.153	.003	48.093	***	

Squared Multiple Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate
FP	.229
LV	.354
FC6	.052
FC5	.501
FC4	.647
FC3	.679
FC2	.674
FC1	.654
FW	.180
PRP	.303
FCPF	.504
CFT	.402
FGCP	.265



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Making it Out Da Hood: Spiritual Retreat Encounters, which promote Resilience and Spirituality among African American Adolescents and Young Adults

Abstract:

Mainstream media portrays African American adolescents and young adults as “other” because they come from broken homes, incarcerated parents, drug- or gang-infested communities as misfits, dropouts, hopeless causes, “thugs” to be feared, and so much more. I want to break that stereotype and bring to light African American young adults who have graduated from high school, matriculated to college, traveled abroad, received advanced degrees, and undertaken successful professional careers. Therefore, according to social scientists, these adolescents would be considered “resilient” against the deleterious conditions in which they lived. This study highlights the lived experiences of African American young adults who through an ethnographic research study shared their lived experience of growing up in the inner city and attended annual spiritual retreats all four years of high school while participating in a college readiness scholarship program in the Chicagoland area.

Introduction

Most college readiness programs provide services designed to counter negative school and community influences by helping students seek, prepare for, and obtain college degrees. These programs offer a series of interventions that emphasize academic preparedness, help students develop college aspirations, and assist them in setting realistic college expectations.¹ Many qualitative and quantitative studies have examined college readiness of first-generation, low-income students. But, most studies focus on the personal characteristics of the students rather than learned behaviors.² There is a lack of literature that reports the effectiveness of spiritual formation in conjunction with college readiness for low-income, inner-city African American adolescents. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to discuss research conducted on one college readiness program in the Chicagoland area, which incorporated spiritual development for low to middle income, African American students who attended a Catholic High School.

¹ Yvette Gullatt and Wendy Jan, “How Do Pre-Collegiate Academic Outreach Programs Impact College Readiness among Underrepresented Students,” (unpublished manuscript, January 2017), Building School Capacity Committee of the Pathways to College Network (PCN), http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/webarticles/pdf/gullatt_precollegiate.pdf.

² Jennifer Engle and Vincent Tinto, “Moving beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income First-Generation Students,” The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Council for Opportunity in Education (Washington, DC: 2008).

From 1995 through 2008, I was the spiritual retreat facilitator for Agape Scholars Program³ (ASP) where I conducted the one day and weekend long spiritual retreats. This study highlights how spirituality impacted the lived experiences of thirty-nine African American young adults who, as teenagers, had participated in ASP's spiritual retreats across all four years of high school. As a Christian educator, the focus of this study was to answer the following question: How does a college readiness scholarship program's spiritual development component assist in developing the resilience of urban African American high school students? I explored the effectiveness of the ASP's spiritual retreats through an ethnographic research project that included social media (a secret Facebook page), structured interviews (face to face or Skype), pilot/focus groups, and a Google Form survey. Therefore, this study can assist Christian educators, community and church leaders gain an understanding of how to promote resilience with low income African American youth and young adults through the sacred space of spiritual retreats.

Context and Background

This study examined, Agape Scholars Program (ASP), a college readiness scholarship program for low to middle income African American high school students living in the inner city of Chicago. ASP required all students (called Scholars) to attend a spiritual retreat all four years of high school. My experience with the Scholars, was marked by highs and lows. My heart holds dearly four alumni who, because of tragic events, are no longer here and did not become the successful adults that they desired to be. Two young men were killed on the streets of Chicago. One was killed two weeks before heading to a top-ten college with a full-ride pre-medicine scholarship. He was shot after bad communication between him and a group of other young men. The other was a junior in college who came home for a family visit, but was shot due to gang violence. Another young man was a senior at an Ivy League college and preparing for graduation, but the stress overcame him and he committed suicide. One young woman was diagnosed with cancer while in high school; her battle ended a few years later. I remember them constantly and think about how their lives were gone too soon and wonder the impact they would have made on this world. However, I have had the pleasure to stay in contact with many other Scholars who are now young adults.

These scholars, similar to many African American youth and adolescents in the inner city of Chicago live in adverse environments within their neighborhoods. Poverty, neglect, abandonment, parental stress, neighborhood violence, poor education, discord, and abuse are commonplace for too many children. Despite this reality, however, many overcome the odds to experience academic success, personal well-being, and healthy social relationships, therefore, being considered resilient. However, their participation with ASP provided for them a safe and sacred place through spiritual development, college preparedness initiatives, tutoring, and mentorship, which assisted them to have a successful transition into adulthood.

The term *resilience* implies a history of successful adaptation and positive development, or the demonstration of competence in an individual who has experienced adverse experiences or stressful life events.⁴ Resilience as a phenomenon is associated in the literature with protective factors, protective processes, and competence. Protective factors insulate one from harm, while protective processes are tools and resources that one draws upon to overcome risk or avoid risk all

³ Names of research participants and organization have been changed for confidentiality.

⁴ Werner and Smith, *Overcoming the Odds*.

together.⁵ I believe that religion and spirituality can have a significant role to play in resilience. Therefore, exploring how Agape Scholars Program (ASP) provided spiritual development through annual spiritual retreats allowed me to begin to examine the role of religious and spiritual development in resilience for the “Scholars.”

Spirituality and Resilience

African American adolescents have identified that spirituality and religion are important factors in their lives. Religious and spiritual involvement have been found to be buffers or resiliency factors for African American children at a high risk for poor adjustment. Resilience is determined by an individual’s sense of meaning and purpose about his or her life and a sense of hope for his or her future, which from a theological perspective is a form of spirituality. Spirituality is formed by one’s sense of connection with God, others (family, friends, mentors, etc.), and nature. It is through relationships with others—whether individual or collective—that there is a sense of safety, peace, support, validation, and identity development.

This study highlights the lived experiences of 39 African American young adults between twenty-two and thirty-five years of age for whom I facilitated annual spiritual retreats during all four years of high school. All these young adults attended Catholic high schools and were academic scholars in Agape Scholars Program. For over twenty years, I had the opportunity to spend twenty-four to forty-eight hours with predominantly African American adolescents and young adults, many of whom lived in or came from inner-city impoverished communities. These few hours away from their home life, community, peers, and school seemingly provided a safe, sacred space for spiritual and identity development. Despite living in communities that lacked resources, many of them filled with poverty, crime, drugs, gangs, violence, low performing public schools, teen pregnancy, single-parent homes, incarcerated parents, and substance abuse, I was able to witness within these adolescents and young adults a sense of tenacity, resistance, empowerment, strength, hope, and perseverance to break out from what they experienced on a daily basis.

The presence of religion in one’s life has been found to be a significant protective resource against maladaptive adjustment outcomes among various adolescent samples. For instance, research in this area has documented that there is an association between church attendance or self-defined religiosity and lower levels of distress and worry, lower rates and later onset of sexual intercourse, and better adjustment and life satisfaction.⁶ Studies that have investigated religiosity as a protective mechanism for at-risk adolescent samples found that religion fostered resilient outcomes.⁷

Researchers working with African American adults have concluded that religious beliefs and practices provide a meaningful context within which these individuals interpret and respond

⁵ Michael Rutter, “Resilience in the Face of Adversity: Protective Factors and Resistance to Psychiatric Disorders,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 147 (1985): 598–611.

⁶ See: Peter Benson, Michael Donahue, and Joseph Erikson, “Adolescence and Religion: Review of the Literature from 1970–1986,” *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 1 (1989): 153–81; Michael J. Donahue and Peter L. Benson, “Religion and the Well-Being of Adolescents,” *Journal of Social Issues* 51 (1995): 145–60; and T. David Evans et al., “Religion and Crime Reexamined: The Impact of Religion, Secular Controls, and Social Ecology on Adult Criminality,” *Criminology* 33, no. 2 (1995): 195–224.

⁷ Pat Clark, “Risk and Resilience in Adolescence: The Current Status of Research on Gender Differences,” *Equity Issues* 1, no. 1 (1995): 1–13.

to both life's hardships and its joys.⁸ This research has indicated that Black Americans are typically very involved in religion and religious activities, and that religion has historically been important in the lives of Black Americans.⁹

More research has been conducted into the relationship between religiosity and adolescent functioning in three areas: sexual behavior, self-esteem, and general psychological functioning. Previous studies have demonstrated that greater religious attendance and beliefs, as well as involvement in community church groups, were associated with later onset of sexual intercourse or a decreased likelihood to engage in sexual intercourse.¹⁰ Specifically, a review of research in this area conducted by Bernard Spika, Ralph Hood, and Richard Gorsuch indicates that religiosity may decrease the likelihood of intercourse in adolescents by as much as 50%.¹¹ Fewer studies have been conducted that specifically studied religiosity among African American adolescents. Those that exist, however, have found mixed results. Some have found that low religiosity, defined as low religious community affiliation and overall low religious feeling, is a significant risk factor for early sexual debut among African American adolescents,¹² particularly among females.¹³ Conversely, others, including Leo Hendricks, Diane Robinson-Brown, and Lawrence Gary,¹⁴ failed to find a significant relationship between religiosity—defined as a general sense of religiousness—and sexual attitudes or behaviors in Black adolescents. Once again, however, the extent of generalizability of the findings from many of these studies is not yet known due to several factors such as the utilization of small sample sizes of African American participants, samples from rural areas, and/or participants primarily from middle class families.¹⁵

⁸ Robert Joseph Taylor and Jacqueline Mattis, "Subjective Religiosity among African Americans: A Synthesis of Findings from Five National Samples," *Journal of Black Psychology* 25 (1999): 524–44.

⁹ See: E. Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America: The Black Church since Frazier* (New York: Schocken, 1974); Thorn Moore, "The African American Church: A Source of Empowerment, Mutual Help, and Social Change," *Prevention in Human Services* 10 (1991): 147–67; and Edmund W. Gordon and Lauren D. Song, "Variations in the Experience of Resilience," in *Educational Resilience in Inner-City America: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Margaret C. Wang and Edmund W. Gordon (New York: Erlbaum, 1994), 27–44.

¹⁰ See: Benson, Donahue, and Erikson, "Adolescence and religion," 153–81; Donahue and Benson, "Religion and the Well-Being of Adolescents," 145–60; and Perkins et al., "An Ecological, Risk-Factor Examination," 660–73.

¹¹ Bernard Spika, Ralph Hood, and Richard Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1985).

¹² See: Billy, Brewster, and Grady, "Contextual Effects," 387–404; and Cristina Lammers et al., "Influences of Adolescents' Decision to Postpone Sexual Intercourse: A Survival Analysis of Virginity among Youth 13 to 18 Years," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 26, no. 1 (2000): 42–48.

¹³ See: Billy, Brewster, and Grady, "Contextual Effects," 387–404; [Geoffrey K. Leigh](#) and [Karen D. Weddle](#), "Analysis of the Timing of Transition to Sexual Intercourse for Black Adolescent Females," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 3, no. 3–4 (1988): 333–44; and Perkins et al., "An Ecological, Risk-Factor Examination," 660–73.

¹⁴ Leo E. Hendricks, Diane P. Robinson-Brown, and Lawrence E. Gary, "Religiosity and Unmarried Black Adolescent Fatherhood," *Adolescence* 19, no. 74 (1984): 417–24.

¹⁵ Joanna Ball, Lisa Armistead, and Barbara-Jeanne Austin, "The Relationship between Religiosity and Adjustment among African American, Female, Urban Adolescents," *Journal of Adolescents* 26 (2003): 431–46.

Research Methodology

The research methodology consisted of ethnographic qualitative research through semi-structured interviews either face to face or via Skype, focus/pilot groups, and creation of a secret Facebook page and Google Form survey. As well as an interdisciplinary literature review of social scientist, Christian Educators, and theologians whose research focused on the topic(s) of resilience, African American spirituality, and/or the role of the Black Church in the community. There is a lack of literature that reports the effectiveness of spiritual formation in conjunction with college readiness for low-income, inner-city African American adolescents. To join the secret Facebook page, individuals had to be added by the administrator (myself as the researcher) or invited by a member with the permission of the administrator. Only those who are current or former members of the Facebook page can see its name, description, and tags, or find it through a search. Only current members of the page can see who is in the group, read member posts, and view stories about the group on Facebook (e.g., in the news feed or through a search). Facebook was a viable means of recruitment for this qualitative research study because I had maintained a social media relationship with many of the ASP alumni after they graduated from high school. Therefore, sampling and recruitment was not a challenge. Kapp, Peters, and Oliver describe social media (Facebook) as an innovative and convenient means to recruit participants.¹⁶ Other researchers have described social media as a useful tool for recruitment of a small sample.¹⁷

Retreats – Spiritual Foundation

One of the most unique components of Agape Scholars Program (ASP) is its spiritual foundation. The program was started by a Catholic priest and has a Catholic foundation. Scholars who are accepted into this four-year college readiness program are not required to be Catholic, but they must attend a Catholic or private high school within the Chicagoland area. To fulfill the spiritual formation requirements, scholars attend teen masses and annual spiritual retreats all four years of high school. While the teen masses were important, my focus for this research project was only on the impact of the spiritual retreats.

As the retreat facilitator from 1995 through 2008, I was responsible (along with my colleagues) for planning and facilitating the spiritual retreats. ASP class size averaged eighty students, beyond the capacity of the local retreat center. Therefore, freshmen, sophomore, and junior year retreats involved only half the students at a time. However, senior year, all students came together for their final retreat as a class at a retreat center that was approximately two and a half hours away from Chicago.

Each spiritual retreat had a theme and a Scriptural reference. Below, I have listed the themes by class.

Freshman Retreat (Friday and Saturday)— Who Am I? (Jeremiah 29:11)—The purpose of this retreat was to help freshmen gain an understanding of who they were in Christ and to know that God had a purpose and plan for their lives as they transitioned into adolescents. Each student was given a personalized name card with their name, the

¹⁶ Julie M. Kapp, Colleen Peters, and Debra Parker Oliver, “Research Recruitment Using Facebook Advertising: Big Potential, Big Challenges,” *Journal of Cancer Education* 28, no. 1 (2013): 134–37.

¹⁷ Rupa S. Valdez et al., “Beyond Traditional Advertisements: Leveraging Facebook’s Social Structures for Research Recruitment,” *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 16, no. 10 (2014): e243, doi:10.2196/jmir.3786.

meaning of their name, and a Scripture reference. This helped the students to gain an understanding about their identity in Christ.

Sophomore Retreat (Friday and Saturday)—Choices and Consequences (Romans 12:1–2)—The purpose of this retreat was to help the sophomores gain an understanding about making their own decisions as they were reaching the legal age to drive and do things for themselves without their parents. Each student was given a journal, to teach them the importance of writing down their feelings and emotions as they encountered certain situations in their lives.

Junior Retreat (Friday through Sunday)—Family (1 Corinthians 13:4–8)—The purpose of this retreat was to help the juniors gain an understanding about the importance of family and the Love of Christ as they were beginning to transition into adulthood. The juniors were given letters written by adults in their life—family members, sponsors/mentors, ASP staff, and teachers. The purpose of the letters was to allow the adults to write positive things about the students and how they were proud of them. Students were also given a cross as a symbol of their relationship with Christ. They also took part in a Saturday service project either at a homeless shelter or nursing home. In addition, they attended a Sunday church service at a Catholic church near the retreat center.

Senior Retreat (Friday through Sunday)—Transitions (Ephesians 6:10–20)—The purpose of this retreat was to help the seniors gain an understanding about what was required of them as they transitioned from high school to college and to know that they were equipped with the Full Armor of God. Their whole senior class was together for the first time for a retreat. They went to a retreat center that was approximately two and a half hours away from Chicago, which was the farthest from home that many of the students had ever been. They were given a Bible as a symbol of the Word of God to take with them wherever they go.

Spirituality Data Results—The Retreats, a Safe Place

The twelve participants who completed face-to-face or individual Skype interviews were asked to reflect on their experience of participating with ASP. In addition, twenty-seven alumni responded to the Google Forms survey, using a Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree, evaluating four statements regarding their experience in ASP (see table 1). The purpose of the questions was to have alumni reflect on their teenage years and evaluate the effectiveness of the program in terms of its spiritual retreats, preparedness for college, academic achievement, and its importance in their high school years. In this section, my focus is only be on the impact of the spiritual retreats.

Table 1: Influence of ASP on respondents' lives, per the Google Forms survey

Statement requiring response (agree or disagree)	Number (percentage) of respondents				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The program was an important part of your high school years.	19 (79.5%)	8 (20.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The spiritual retreats were an important part of your high school years.	22 (81.5%)	5 (18.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
The program prepared you to transition to college.	14 (51.9%)	11 (40.7%)	2 (7.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
The program assisted you to succeed academically.	19 (70.4%)	6 (22.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (7.4%)	0 (0%)

From table 1, I focus on the statement, “The spiritual retreats were an important part of your high school years.” This statement resulted in the highest rate of “strongly agree” responses (81.5%) of all the questions regarding their experience participating in ASP. In order to illuminate this experience, I draw from the interviews and the Google Forms survey. When asked during his interview, “What was the most influential component of your experience while participating in Agape Scholars Program?” Paul Jackson responded, “The spiritual retreats were the most influential part of my ASP experience. As teenagers, we were at the age of finding our identities. I feel that the retreats allowed us to come together spiritually.” Since the ASP scholars went to different Catholic high schools, the retreats were the only space (besides mandatory meetings or events) where they came together for a length of time (twenty-four or forty-eight hours) and could hear each other’s stories. Numerous scholars commented that the retreats were judgement free zones to share personal issues, as well as it was an opportunity for many of them to form bonds with their peers for whom many were living in similar neighborhoods. For many of them, the retreats were “a place to vent,” “think differently,” “express ourselves”, “was an open forum where we cried, laughed, acted, rolled our eyes” and “a lot of us lived in bad neighborhoods but the retreats allowed us to get away.”

The spiritual retreats also offered leadership development. During their junior or senior year, ASP scholars were given the opportunity to be “retreat leaders” for the freshmen and sophomore retreats. A few research participants reflected on the fact that they were able to find their voice and the retreats strengthened their relationship with God to deal with real life situations. Malcolm Gaston during his Skype interview passionately shared about being a retreat team leader. He recalled from memory leading a discussion about forgiving his father who was absent in his life. However, the highlight of his story centered on giving his life to Christ during the Catholic mass attended on last day of retreat. He stated,

So, I was sitting there (in the pew) with my head down, just kind of reflecting, when my best friend who was also a retreat leader came and tapped me on the shoulder and told me to go up there (the altar). I remember I began to start crying. So, I took the walk up the aisle and fell into the arms of the priest and he just embraced me as I cried. I had never experienced anything like that in my life, but it was life changing. Here I was supposed to be the retreat leader making an impact on the lives of the sophomores. I realized then that God was real in my life and I gave my life to Christ.

Paul Jackson reflected, “The spiritual retreats instilled Christian values that are needed to get us through our daily lives. As teenagers, we were at the age of finding our identities.” Hubert Wright commented, “I learned the spiritual tools needed to make informed decisions about my life.”

The spiritual retreats also cemented the involvement of adults in the research participants' lives. In their interviews or the Google Forms survey, many respondents referenced letters or journals from the retreats as impactful in their lives. At the sophomore year retreat, ASP scholars were all given a journal to help them learn how to "be still, reflect, and regroup." These journals became of significant importance to the participants. Throughout the retreat, they were given moments to reflect and write down their thoughts, and they are encouraged to continue the practice afterward. For the junior retreat, unbeknownst to ASP scholars, their parents, siblings, sponsors/mentors, and sometimes even teachers or coaches are asked to write letters to them, to be distributed on Saturday night after dinner. The purpose of these letters is for recipients to read positive words about themselves and to know how much they are loved. Some students may only get one letter, and others could get five or more, depending on who responded to the request. No matter the number of letters, this is an emotional time for the students as they begin to read the letters. In the interviews and the Google Forms survey, many research participants shared how these letters still impact them as adults. Sasha Jones during a focused group meeting stated, "Those journals taught me a lot about writing things down and how to connect that spiritually. The retreats were the first time that people outside of my family got to really understand why I was shy or why I was not as vocal or being able to talk about my emotions. I remember I became one of the retreat leaders and it helped me to grow in my faith and understand who I was as a person. I found my voice."

I Rise above Adversity, I Am Resilient – A Perspective on Resilience

The question of whether the research participants viewed themselves as resilient was only asked of those who were interviewed either face-to-face or via Skype or who participated in a focus group meeting. Each research participant was asked whether they viewed themselves as resilient based on the following definition, which was given to them to review and reflect upon during their interview: "Resiliency is defined by the ability of a person to rise above significant adversity and have a reasonably successful life course, avoiding serious psychiatric disorder, substance abuse, criminality, or social-relational problems."¹⁸

I used this definition—a quotation from Kimberly Gordon Rouse—based on the complexity of the negative aspects of one's life course that could affect whether someone is deemed resilient. However, in contrast, my focus is not on the negative aspects of my research participants' lives, but rather on the positive protective factors that assisted them during their life course, helping them advance through adversity. Christian and Barbarin state, "African American children raised in impoverished communities deserve further attention. The story of resilient children becomes just as important as the story of children with behavior problems."¹⁹

Majority of the research participants came from adverse, low-income inner-city neighborhoods of Chicago, many experienced crime and violence, some experienced or witnessed emotional or physical abuse, many were first-generation college students, some had either one or two parents who struggled with substance abuse, some were raised by either a grandmother or another non-immediate family member, and some were raised in single-parent households. During interview

¹⁸ Kimberly Gordon Rouse, "Resilience from Poverty and Stress," *Human Development and Family Life Bulletin: A Review of Research and Practice* 4, no. 1 (1998), <http://www3.uakron.edu/schulze/401/readings/resilience.htm>. Accessed 13 January 2015

¹⁹ D. Marcelle Christian and Oscar A. Barbarin, "Cultural Resources and Psychological Adjustments of African American Children Effects of Spirituality and Racial Attribution," *Journal of Black Psychology* 27, no. 1 (2001): 1.

with a former ASP staff member, she highlighted in spite of the tremulous home life of many of the scholars, she credits the spiritual retreats. She shared, “I would say a lot of them had difficulties that had been related to socioeconomic situations and those who did not have the typical issues may have had mental illness in the family, or something like that, you know but some of them were in abject poverty, they all had something. However, the spiritual development provided support for them.”

Janine Jones writes about the effects of the violence that is experienced daily in urban communities filled with socioeconomic stress. She states that African American children who are exposed to violence within their neighborhoods may suffer damage to their emotional and cognitive development. However, Jones acknowledges that—despite tremendous stressors experienced within urban communities—some researchers such as Barbarin state, “some children appear to be less affected than others.”²⁰ My research participants would fall into this category of young adults who were affected by chronic community violence and yet made it out of “Da Hood.” Even Brian, in his interview, stated, “Coming from the hood and surviving, going and keep going and see what I have seen and am now doing today. I am the master of my destiny. My biggest influence came from the product of my environment coming from the hood itself. I learned just as much from it.”

The Results – Spiritual Retreats creates Sacred Space

This study determined that the ASP alumni were impacted by the annual spiritual retreats in which they participated across all four years of high school. The weekend spiritual retreats offered a safe environment away from family, friends, and other outside influences. A majority of the alumni stated that the ASP spiritual retreats were more impactful than their school-initiated retreats. They felt a connection with their ASP peers and were more comfortable sharing their individual experiences than at home, at school, or in their neighborhood. Many of the ASP alumni attended predominantly White, Catholic high schools, where they experienced racism from their peers, faculty, coaches, and staff. Some also felt that their White peers could not relate to or have an understanding about the adverse situations of their own homes or communities. As one alumna stated, many of her peers did not know that she could not afford a laptop, books, or even—sometimes—bus fare to get to school. She could get by without many of her school peers knowing her situation. However, at ASP spiritual retreats, which were predominantly attended by African American scholars, she felt safe sharing her experiences in an atmosphere that was set by retreat facilitators for open discussions about personal situations at home, school, and in one’s neighborhood. Lastly, many of the alumni shared that they had experienced God during an ASP retreat, either through small group discussions or church services, where they received salvation and a relationship with God. These experiences were central to their spirituality as they matriculated to college and continued their relationship with God. Only two alumni stated that their beliefs and relationship with God changed either during their senior year of high school or while attending college. One stated that he is agnostic, and the other converted to Islam.

The alumni received support in their spiritual development from ASP staff/retreat facilitators, family, and mentors/sponsors. The social capital of family, peers, sponsors/mentors, and other adults impacted the lives of the research participants. As the researcher, I found that these individuals were the protective factors that assisted the research participants in becoming

²⁰ Janine Jones, “Exposure to Chronic Community Violence: Resilience in African American Children,” *Journal of Black Psychology* 33, no. 2 (2007): 126.

resilient. As a Christian educator, I view the presence of supportive individuals as a key factor in assisting urban African American adolescents to become successful teenagers who will matriculate into adulthood and become active citizens, making an impact in the world.

Implications for Spiritual Retreats to Promote Resilience

The results of this study may assist other college readiness scholarship programs, Christian educators, secondary and higher education institutions, and community and church leaders to have a better understanding of the lived experiences of African American adolescents from an urban context. The results of this study can be shared in higher education courses, Christian educators' conferences, Christian schools, church youth groups, and community youth programs. Through an extensive review of the literature on spirituality and resilience and thirty-nine interviews/surveys with participants from ASP, this study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the lived experiences of the research participants, many of whom came from impoverished inner-city neighborhoods. The themes from this study support the finding that three key components assist in developing resiliency among African American adolescents from low- to middle-income communities: spirituality/retreats, support systems/social networks, and academic opportunities. The key component in developing resiliency—and the most influential in the lives of the research participants—was the spiritual development through annual spiritual retreats.

This study determined the importance of spiritual development during adolescence for the thirty-nine research participants who were interviewed face-to-face and/or filled out a Google Forms survey. Many participants felt they found their voice, accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, took advantage of resources availed to them, gained leadership skills, learned how to manage their emotions through journaling, learned the importance of a relationship with God not through religion but through spirituality, and created bonds of friendships and commonality among their peers. Participants discussed how they had garnered positive experiences with ASP staff/retreat facilitators, sponsors/mentors, family, and peers. Many participants discussed the difficulties that they had faced in attending predominantly White, Catholic high school. They talked about their experience of racism and a lack of support from peers of other ethnicities. They felt that their White peers could not relate to or understand them, because these school peers were often from middle- to high-income families. A few reflected on the fact that they had to learn how to code switch to fit in with their non-Black peers. Despite these experiences, the research participants beat the odds of adversity and view themselves as resilient, because of the spiritual formation they received from annual spiritual retreats while in high school.

All my research participants had matriculated to a four-year college or university, many with partial or full scholarships. One participant, Brian Hicks, was called the half-million-dollar man because he received \$500,000 in scholarships to attend a top-tier university. Eleven of the twelve participants graduated from college; two have completed graduate degrees—one a juris doctorate (JD) and the other a master's degree in occupational therapy. All participants have obtained professional careers in ministry, law, marketing, banking, healthcare, insurance, municipality, or non-profit industries. One participant resigned from a high-paying entertainment industry job to become an entrepreneur.

As a Christian educator who has facilitated spiritual retreats for over twenty years, I have learned that it is important to create a sacred space for inner-city African American youth. This sacred space opens the door for adolescents to be heard. They can share without judgment traumatic events they may have experienced at home, in school, or in their neighborhoods. In addition, they bonded with their peers as they listened to each other share their stories, therefore,

many created lasting friendships. Allowing youth to give voice to their pain, reflect through journaling, and learn Biblical Scriptures are healing mechanisms that enable them to gain a relationship with God, walk in forgiveness, and obtain salvation, as they learn who they are in Christ. Many of the research participants stated that they learned what it meant to be a leader through being a retreat leader for underclassmen in the program. This opportunity offered them a means of inclusion and acceptance, teaching them that they had a voice and had a responsibility to show leadership skills and make a difference in their own life and the lives of their peers.

Giving youth, a voice will allow churches, schools, community organizations, and other programs to address the needs of the youth and validate them to know that they have a purpose. Through the spiritual retreats, the ASP youth were given opportunities to assist in the planning and implementation of the retreats alongside the adults. Anne Streaty Wimberly has researched the importance of intergenerational ministry between African American youth and adults. She states, “In my opinion, one of the real voids in most churches is the lack of a truly intergenerational focus within them. Contact with older adults is more likely to give young people mentors with mature faith.”²¹ It was always my goal through the spiritual retreats to have Jeremiah 29:11–13 as the foundational Scripture, so that retreat participants could hear from adults that their lives had a meaning and purpose, that they might have hope for the future.

This study unveiled the importance of creating safe spaces for African American adolescents to feel comfortable to share their lived experiences of being in adverse environments. These opportunities allow participants to create bonds, share their stories, gain an understanding of who they are, and practice leadership and spiritual development. Providing this type of emotional and spiritual support can assist many youth and adolescents who need a space to vent and be themselves without any judgment. The study can be replicated to other programs that are similar to Agape Scholars Program. Spirituality provides a sense of self, meaning, and hope for one’s future. Further research can examine how other African American youth and adolescents see themselves as resilient and how spirituality is a protective factor.

²¹ Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Keep It Real: Working with Today’s Black Youth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 114.

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Knowing With the Other: The Encounter Experience

Abstract

The aim of this study is to emphasize that “the encounter experience” is an important opportunity for “knowing with the other” by doing a philosophical analysis of the concept of experience. To this aim, firstly, I will discuss John Dewey and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s conceptual analyses about the experience. Although there are some differences in the opinions of these two philosophers regarding the experience; their mutual opinion is that it is a relationship, and man has a different kind of knowledge with this relationship. Secondly, from these analyzes, I will answer the question of how “the encounter experience” enables “knowing with the other”. Finally, by giving examples from the bases of Islamic religion that promote “the encounter experience”, I will conclude that this opportunity is also valid for Islamic religious education.

Introduction

The fundamental problem we have with this research is that *“the experiences that people have through their relationships with another who is different in many respects make it possible to know with the other.”* In looking for the answer to this question, I will take advantage of the Dewey and Gadamer's conceptual analysis on the experience.

Method

The method of this research will be a concept analysis. From Dewey and Gadamer’s conceptual analysis about the experience, I will defend my thesis with “the encounter experience” has an important potential for “knowing with the other”.

Main Point

The concept of experience generally refers to a knowledge that is achieved through practical relationships established with a reality. (Vergote, 1969, 26-27.) John Dewey is the person who brought it into the field of philosophy of education by making philosophical analysis of this concept. He establishes a bond with education by explaining the experience in terms of interaction and continuity principles. According to him, experience does not occur in space, just as it does not take place within man; it occurs in a real world with objective conditions. For this reason, both human internal conditions and external world conditions are influential on it. He names it “the principle of interaction of experience”. (Dewey, 1963, 39-43.)

He also deals with continuity as another principle of experience. This principle means that every experience takes some things from previous experiences and influences the quality of the later experiences. These two principles of experience are not separate from each other; instead they are their transversal and longitudinal stages. Educational meaning and value of an experience emerge when these two principles actively combine with one another. Thus the experience becomes a force in motion, and this force compels man to change. So man changes with this force and gains a new knowledge. (Dewey, 1963, 38-45.)

Hans-Georg Gadamer is the other philosopher who analyzes the concept of experience on a philosophical level and establishes a relationship with education. He draws attention to the direct relationship that the person has established with a reality, and the permanent / deep conclusion that he has achieved from this relation. Moreover, he gives the name of “erlebnis”, is a German word, to permanent / deep experience. According to him, the word “erlebnis” is derived from the verb “erleben”. “Erleben” means “still alive when something is happening” and expresses the concept of immediacy of a person in grasping something. There is also a “das Erlebte” (lived) form to express the permanent content of the thing being experienced. The importance and continuity of this content is like a permanent product or result that evolves from the experience of the past. For this reason, the

derivative Erlebnis word has both of the following meanings: 1. Immediacy 2. Its discovered product and the permanent result. (Gadamer, 2008, 83-84.)

In this context, he indicates that the experiences are not things that get lost in the past quickly, and they can't be immediately forgotten, by quoting from Nietzsche: *"Every experience continues to live in deep people for a very long time."* He underlines that experience not only becomes an idea, it also turns into one of the elements of life process, and it enriches and matures the person along the way. (Gadamer, 2008, 91-96.)

As can be seen so far, Dewey and Gadamer draw our attention to different aspects of experience, but what they have in common is that they consider the experience as a relationship which a person has with external reality, and the person has a deeper and different knowledge with this relationship. Moreover, the person opens a new door of knowledge through this dynamic relationship established with external reality that is now and here. The mental and emotional world of a person who crosses this threshold expands and gets enriched. Moreover, this expansion and enrichment are not temporary and leave deep traces on the people.

After these explanations on the concept of experience, we can pass on "the encounter experience" that is related to it. First, the reason why we include the concept of experience is to better analyze "the encounter experience" that we will consider it as a different form of experience. In this research, "the encounter experience" means an experience which a person obtains through a practical and dynamic relationship with another person who has a different religion, language, race and culture. Based on Dewey's opinion that experience is a force in motion, and Gadamer's idea that each experience leaves a deep influence on human beings, it can be said that this encounter experience has a force that can deeply affect both people. Because in this encounter, the view of both people about themselves and others may have changed profoundly. Both people can emerge from this experience by collecting a new knowledge about themselves and the other, and by having a new awareness. In particular, it can open the door to a new knowledge about the other by leaving the bias, and the person can be more understanding, respectful and tolerant towards the other. Here, "the encounter experience" includes important opportunities in terms of enabling one to return to himself and to think again about himself and to contribute to being more understanding, respectful and tolerant towards the other.

When we look at "the encounter experience" from the perspective of Islamic religion, we see that the meeting others- *tearuf* - is encouraged in the Qur'an, the main source of Islam. (Qur'an, 49 Hucurat, 13) In her article in which she analyzes the concept of "tearuf" in terms of religious education, Selçuk states that this concept holds an intellection seeing the "other" as an element enriching the person and developing the existence. And she says that despite all differences, all the people can meet on a common ground. (Selçuk, 2005, 239-240.)

However, it is obvious that this will not be easy. For before entering into the world of the other / traveling with him, we may have prejudices about him. What is important is to carry out mutual understanding for deeper and new knowledge about the other. As you can see, Islamic religious education encourages people to meet with different societies and cultures and live "the encounter experience" with them. In addition, Islam invites Muslims to meet with the others on the common ground of humanity. In a world that is becoming increasingly smaller, it is our duty to obey to that invitation and open ourselves to "the encounter experience" that became a necessity. Because knowing with the other is much more enriching and stimulating than the theoretical knowledge about them.

Conclusion

As a result, Dewey and Gadamer have a common understanding on the experience, that they both see it as a relationship, and at the end of this relationship, one has a deeper and different knowing. In this context, we can arrive at the conclusion that "the encounter experience" has the potential to deeply affect both people, based on Dewey's opinion that each experience is a force in motion, and Gadamer's idea that each experience leaves a deep influence on person. Because, both of them can go out from this encounter experience by collecting a new knowledge about themselves and others, and can have a new awareness. As a last word, "the encounter experience" that has significant opportunities for "knowing with the other" is also encouraged in the Qur'an, which is the main source of Islamic religious education.

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Experience, Encounter, and Ritual in the Aesthetic Theory of John Dewey

Abstract:

Among both pedagogical theorists and pragmatist philosophers, John Dewey might seem an unlikely source of insight on religious ritual. Yet, as I suggest in this paper, Dewey's examination of art and the commonplace, as well as his limited but insightful work on the communal dimension of religious practice, mark important and often overlooked contributions. In conversation with three of Dewey's contemporary interlocutors, I argue that Dewey's understanding of the formational, integrative quality of experience, and the relationship between experience and the aesthetic, offers fruitful philosophical groundwork for theological reflection on the role of ritual in the spiritual formation of communities, particularly those characterized by cultural difference.

Introduction

Among both pedagogical theorists and pragmatist philosophers, John Dewey might seem an unlikely source of insight on religious ritual. Yet, as I suggest in this essay, Dewey's examination of art and the commonplace, as well as his limited but insightful work on the communal dimension of religious practice, mark important and often overlooked contributions. These are not only important for the study of ritual and aesthetics, but they also help to expand our understanding of Dewey's educational theory. When read in conjunction with his philosophy of experience, Dewey's aesthetic theory provides a valuable philosophical resource for approaching the interpretation of religious ritual in ways that help us to overcome a priori dichotomies and simplistic understandings of its function while also helping us to articulate more clearly questions about the pedagogical dimension of ritual practice. In my engagement of Dewey's understanding of ritual, I also draw on three of his contemporary interlocutors: Christopher Tirres, Gregory Pappas, and Adam Seligman.

Dewey's Criteria of Experience

Dewey's understanding of experience is elaborated most comprehensively in the educational theory for which he is most widely known. Dewey conceives of experience as the basis of democratic education. *Education and Experience* (1938) offers a concise explication of his understanding of experience. Published more than two decades after his landmark *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Education and Experience* can be read as Dewey's "final word" on his theory of experience and educational philosophy. The educative significance and

value of an experience, Dewey argues, can be assessed through two mutually interdependent criteria: *continuity* and *interaction* between learner and the subject of learning.

Continuity. The principle of continuity marks the ground to which Dewey's vision of experience is anchored. His notion of continuity points to a vision of experience that is holistic, organic, and integrative. On a basic level, Dewey eschews the notion that experience occurs in a social or temporal vacuum.¹ Continuity means that experiences must be conceived of not as isolated points on a unilateral and unidirectional timeline of events, but rather as moments in an evolutionary tide: "Every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after."² The meaning of an experience transgresses time in a way that blurs too starkly drawn lines between past, present, and future. Within the individual, then, the continuous nature of experience contributes to one's formation in "attitudes of desire and purpose" – a formation that can be either positive or negative.³

Interaction. According to Dewey, traditional modes and philosophies of education viewed the educational task as context-neutral. According to traditional approaches, the classroom was understood as the student's world and the context of her learning. Dewey regarded traditional education as failing to attribute pedagogical or epistemological value to the present conditions of students' lives, instead viewing its task as preparation of pupils for a distant vision of future success.⁴ For Dewey, one of the fatal flaws of this system was its tendency to operate with a thin understanding of experience that failed to acknowledge the constant exchange between an individual and the environment.⁵ Against this legacy, Dewey argues that just as experience cannot be conceived phenomenologically as a dot on a timeline, neither can it be viewed socially/contextually simply as something that happens to and unfolds within an individual person.⁶ Rather, experience is intrinsically social as well as environmentally mediated, and the implications of an experience are manifested beyond the individual doing the experiencing. Thus, Dewey contends, "Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had."⁷ Experience is not only influenced by external conditions but also shapes them; experience and context exist in a dynamic and mutually influential relationship. As we will see in the final section of this essay, this sense of the porosity of experience stages an implicit critique of any philosophical, educational, or religious tradition "that has been used to validate any quest for purity"⁸ – a critical point for understanding the significance of ritual in light of Dewey.

¹ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (EE) (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1938), 40.

² Dewey, EE, 35.

³ Dewey, EE, 39.

⁴ Dewey, EE, 49. Here, the influence of Dewey's critique of traditional education is evident in Paulo Freire's critique of the "banking concept" of education, which domesticates students by educating them into passive acceptance of "the world as it is." See Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), especially Chapter 2.

⁵ Dewey, EE, 43.

⁶ Dewey, EE, 39-40.

⁷ Dewey, EE, 39.

⁸ Gregory Fernando Pappas, "Dewey and Latina Lesbians on the Quest for Purity," in *Pragmatism in the Americas*, ed. Pappas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 265.

Aesthetics, Experience, and the Everyday

The turn to aesthetic theory marks a thematic departure for Dewey. *Art as Experience* (1934), in which he develops his theory of aesthetics, is unique among Dewey's works as his only sustained engagement with notions of art or aesthetics. Yet the work marks a continuation and extension of, not a departure from, the integrative understanding of experience developed in his educational theory. In continuity with his critique of traditional understandings of experience, Dewey again rejects a dualistic manner of conceiving the aesthetic that buries the nuance of experience under false simplicity. With respect to art, he eschews common distinctions between matter and form and between the artist as active creator and audience as passive recipient. In both cases, he argues, these facile distinctions fail to capture the reality of art as a socially situated site of dynamic, ongoing negotiation of meaning. Above all, Dewey laments the separation of art from experience. Works of art, particularly those that have achieved the cultural status of a "classic," become not more embedded in the human experiences from which they emerged but rather more isolated from them.⁹ In turn, for most people, viewing art becomes like an "experience from a foreign country."¹⁰ For Dewey, this wall of separation between art and the everyday is tragically ironic. Art, after all, does not descend from heaven or materialize out of a realm apart but rather emerges from the lived experience of the artist situated in a community and society; it is received and interpreted by people who are also situated socially and historically. Divorcing works of art from the context of the everyday, both the past out of which they emerged and the present within which they continue to be interpreted, "a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance."¹¹ When artistic classics are rendered "timeless," they are also robbed of meaning.

For Dewey, a more adequate understanding of the aesthetic is concerned not merely with the glorification of the artistic "final product" but with the entire process of art-making and reception as emerging from deep within of the ordinary experiences of human life.¹² He advocates a pragmatist approach to the aesthetic undergirded by the metaphysics of experience he develops elsewhere. The goal of such an approach "is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience."¹³ In other words, Dewey seeks to "[recover] the continuity of aesthetic experience with the normal processes of living."¹⁴ He argues, "The roots of aesthetic experience lie... in commonplace experience, in the consummatory experiences that are ubiquitous in the course of human life."¹⁵ Thus, the aesthetic quality of something can only be discovered by going back to this "experience of the common."¹⁶ In this way, for Dewey, something has aesthetic standing to the extent that it becomes an experience for the human being.¹⁷ Read in a theological key, Dewey's understanding

⁹ Dewey, *Art as Experience* (AE) (New York: Penguin, 2005; [1934]), 3.

¹⁰ Dewey, AE, 13.

¹¹ Dewey, AE, 3.

¹² Dewey, AE, 12.

¹³ Dewey, AE, 3.

¹⁴ Dewey, AE, 10.

¹⁵ Dewey, AE, 11.

¹⁶ Dewey, AE, 11.

¹⁷ Dewey, AE, 4.

of the intrinsic continuity between art and the everyday suggests a related and analogous continuity between sacred and profane, or, as U.S. Latino/a theologians have emphasized, the theologically revelatory nature of *lo cotidiano*. It also bespeaks the need for theological emphasis on communal processes and practices and not merely on their “end result.”

Tirres, Dewey, and the Integrative Capacity of Ritual

Dewey’s understanding of the formational, integrative quality of experience, and the relationship between this notion of experience and the aesthetic, offer potentially fruitful philosophical groundwork for theological reflection on the role of ritual in the religious and spiritual formation of communities. U.S. Latino theologian Christopher Tirres engages this trajectory of Dewey’s thought by drawing on Dewey to establish a dialogue between Latin American liberation theology and U.S. Latino/a aesthetic theology. Tirres convincingly argues that a Deweyan understanding of experience allows us to view ritual as possessing an integrative capacity that conceptually and practically reunites the aesthetic/cultural and ethical/political dimensions of religious faith, disclosing more fully what both Latin American and U.S. Latino/a liberation theologians have attempted to convey in their emphasis on “integral liberation.” This is primarily true, Tirres suggests, of popular ritual, which can be understood in Deweyan terms as a kind of formational (and thus educationally significant), shared aesthetic experience that emerges from the everyday lived experience – *lo cotidiano* – of the people.

In the tradition of scholars such as Roberto Goizueta and Virgilio Elizondo, Tirres grounds his project qualitatively in the Good Friday liturgies of San Fernando Cathedral, particularly the *via crucis*, the living Way of the Cross performed annually throughout the streets of San Antonio. For Tirres, the Good Friday practices hold a certain “aesthetic charge.”¹⁸ They are “bodily, visceral, and tactile encounters” – with the Jesus Christ in his suffering, agony, and death; with Mary in her grief; as well as with other people. “At the same time,” argues Tirres,

these liturgies also prove aesthetic insofar as they engage participants at the level of the imagination. Through ritual practice, participants forge new epistemic connections between that which may seem, at first glance, to be disconnected.... [R]itual participants engage multiple identities simultaneously, they imaginatively merge past and present, and they creatively straddle universal and enculturated meanings of the *via crucis*. In short, participants engage ritual experience in a subjunctive, ludic, and liminal way. They use their imaginations to bring together what may, at first, appear to be discreet and independent aspects of experience.¹⁹

Dewey’s notion of experience resonates in Tirres’ description of the aesthetic dimension of the San Fernando Good Friday rituals. Tirres identifies in the work of Dewey a way of speaking about experience that allows him to read ritual as a site of integral liberation. “Rather than begin with an a priori understanding of what ritual is,” a Deweyan, pragmatic approach to the study of ritual “invites us to look at ritual practice primarily in terms of the profound effects

¹⁸ Christopher D. Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith: A Dialogue Between Liberationist and Pragmatic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 18.

¹⁹ Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith*, 18.

it has on participants.”²⁰ For Tirres, the spiritual and moral power of the Good Friday liturgies is related to the power of these rituals to become sites of integration and boundary transgressions. He states, “ritual performance at San Fernando helps to subvert commonly held dichotomies:”²¹ it renders ambiguous boundaries between past and present, living and dead, private and public, sacred and profane, personal story and communal narrative, participant and observer. The Good Friday liturgies not only transport participants into the past, to the site of Jesus’ death on the cross; they also bring the past into the present, inviting participants to read their own daily stories of suffering and grief through the passion of Jesus Christ. When distinctions between past and present, “us” and “them” are ritually collapsed, Tirres suggests, people are moved at the moral level through the feelings of deep solidarity and empathy that are evoked.²² Thus,

At its best, popular ritual practice proves significant not only because it stands as a unique experience unto itself (with its irreducible feelings of anguish, solidarity, or healing, for example) but also because it serves as a means, as a conduit, to new moral sensibilities.

The Good Friday rituals are sites of both affirmation of Latino/a Catholic identity and practice (aesthetics) and social challenge to racial injustice and all forms of crucifixion in society today (ethics). Dewey’s integrative understanding of experience is thus clearly manifested in Tirres’ vision of the aesthetic and ethical as dynamic and continually evolving qualities of experience, not wholly distinct realms of experience.²³

Dewey’s Interlocutors on Ritual and Ambiguity: Seligman and Pappas

Contemporary scholars of ritual and religious practice have also retrieved Dewey’s work for the way in which it accounts for ambiguity within human experience and the porous nature of boundaries and identities within communities. Their retrievals suggest the ongoing relevance of Dewey’s theory of experience to a present moment characterized by pluralism and contested national, cultural, and social boundaries.

Adam Seligman and Robert Weller propose three models for understanding how communities characterized by plurality and ambiguity negotiate boundaries: notation, ritual, and shared experience.²⁴ Naming and defining difference – what Seligman calls notation – is critical for upholding the integrity of distinct cultural communities within a space. But merely defining difference doesn’t help us to live with it. Seligman argues that the latter, practice-oriented categories – ritual and shared experience – function as both notational (or boundary-defining), and ambiguous (or boundary-transgressing). Following Dewey, Seligman argues that ritual, when understood as a kind of shared experience, allows us to take practical action, “teaching us to live with differences and all their associated ambiguities”²⁵ in context characterized by

²⁰ Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith*, 41.

²¹ Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith*, 39.

²² Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith*, 36.

²³ Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith*, 89.

²⁴ Adam Seligman and Robert P. Weller, *Rethinking Pluralism: Ritual, Experience, and Ambiguity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

²⁵ Seligman and Weller, *Rethinking Pluralism*, 8.

plurality and difference. Elsewhere, Seligman and co-authors state, “Rather than trying to eliminate boundaries or to make them into unbreachable walls—the two approaches that so typified the twentieth century—ritual continually renegotiates boundaries, living with their instability and labile nature.”²⁶ Ritual allows us to construct and operate out of a sense of what Seligman et al. call “life in the subjunctive,” through the creation of a shared social “as if” world that imaginatively tolerates the ambiguities inherent in life together.²⁷

Gregory Pappas, also drawing on Dewey, elaborates an understanding of U.S. Latino/a borderland identity. Pappas’ concern is with the “the ontological status of being [metaphysically] ‘in between.’”²⁸ He suggests that a Deweyan concept of experience discloses a “borderland” character, insofar as it has a capacity to deal conceptually with the impure, ambiguous, and in-between. He positions Dewey’s nondualistic metaphysics of experience in contrast to an “atomistic metaphysics” that views entities (such as cultures) as discrete and monolithic wholes. Within such a system, existence and belonging can only be conceived of in singular terms – one must be either *this* or *that*. In a dualistic metaphysical framework, “ontologically speaking, the existence of the kind of single but dual identity claimed by border people seems to make no sense.... It is a philosophical tradition that regards ambiguity, vagueness, and continuities as not part of reality.”²⁹ Such an understanding, which by design guards against the possibility of impurity, may succeed in “saving border people from illegitimacy,” Pappas argues, but only by “[denying] features that are essential to their border-culture experience.”³⁰ In Dewey’s ontological landscape, by contrast, “what is primary is the ongoing interactions of cultures with all of their raggedness and impurities.”³¹ With this acknowledgement of and appreciation for continuities and indeterminate boundaries, being “in between” is, ontologically speaking, “a real place to be.”³² A Deweyan cultural framework of experience acknowledges not only continuity, but also the possibility of emergence.³³ Thus, what makes borderland spaces distinctive, argues

²⁶ Seligman et. al., *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11. Sociologist of religion R. Stephen Warner echoes and explains Seligman’s point, emphasizing the “crucial role of embodied ritual as a key to the capacity religion has to bridge boundaries, both between communities and individuals” (pp. 217-218). Warner argues that in contexts of difference, there is a need to move conceptually beyond paradigms of assimilation, which disregards difference, and multiculturalism, which essentializes it, to something akin to *mestizaje*, which seeks meaning in the reality of the “impure,” embodied, and experiential dimensions of communal experience over more theoretical or categorical approaches (p. 234). See Warner, “Religion, Boundaries, and Bridges,” *Sociology of Religion* 58:3 (1997).

²⁷ Seligman, et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 7.

²⁸ Pappas, “Dewey and Latina Lesbians on the Quest for Purity,” 267

²⁹ Pappas, “Dewey and Latina Lesbians on the Quest for Purity,” 267-268.

³⁰ Pappas, “Dewey and Latina Lesbians on the Quest for Purity,” 268.

³¹ Pappas, “Dewey and Latina Lesbians on the Quest for Purity,” 268. Here, Pappas’ analysis demonstrates that Dewey’s cultural understanding foreshadows that of postmodern theorists of culture such as Kathryn Tanner (see *Theories of Culture; A New Agenda for Theology* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997]) and Homi Bhabha (see *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. [Routledge, 2004]).

³² Pappas, “Dewey and Latina Lesbians on the Quest for Purity,” 269.

³³ Pappas, “Dewey and Latina Lesbians on the Quest for Purity,” 269-270.

Pappas, is the gradual and dynamic emergence over time of something new and exciting in the ambiguous in-between space between cultures – something based on the significance of the interactions between people.³⁴

Conclusion

In this essay, I have related Dewey's praxic understanding of experience within his theory of education to his limited but significant aesthetic theory. Utilizing three contemporary Dewey interlocutors, I then drew implications for understanding pedagogical dimensions of ritual within a Deweyan framework. When read in conjunction with his philosophy of experience, Dewey's aesthetic theory provides a valuable philosophical entrée into the examination of the critical role of embodied ritual in "borderland" contexts characterized by plurality, ambiguity, and porosity. At the same time, Dewey's integrative, continuous, interactive understanding of human experience allows us to approach the study of culture and cultural practices in ways that overcome unhelpful understandings of both as discrete and neatly bounded wholes.

³⁴ Pappas, "Dewey and Latina Lesbians on the Quest for Purity," 269-270.

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Encountering the Differences in Religious Education: A Scale Development Study (1st Stage)

Abstract

First and foremost the religious aspects, what are the cognitive, affective and behavioral elements shaping individuals' experiences when they face with the differences; in what ranges are these experiences lived and what is the complex mixture of mindsets, dispositions, values, sources, thoughts and attitudes forming these experiences? The answers for these questions give an opportunity to live together, to rethink encountering ethics. In this framework, the study aims to develop the “Scale of Experiences in Encountering the Differences (SEED)” in order to determine the teachers' experiences in encountering particularly towards the differences in religious education. It is expected that the data obtained by the application of SEED will make it possible to see the borders of encountering experiences either they point richness, proliferation of understanding or dispute, chaos, violence even conflict and of giving an opportunity to understand and interpret them.

Introduction

Differences lead to a theoretical perspective within the framework of we as humanbeings need others in order to be ourselves (Fay, 2001). It is also claimed that the relationship between me and others involves sides that does not consider, the universe and human beings as a meta (as a thing or object) which cannot be taken in possession, does not minimize to the relationship between subject and object, and on the contrary, interprets the

relationship between me and others as a dialogical opportunity to understand the reality by grasping it ontological and existential-wise, and that ensures production of constructive – ameliorating meanings that prevent the individuals from alienating themselves from their environment and themselves. (Kalin, 2016).

How the differences that are intertwined in different cultures will be resolved against all the optimistic approaches, its risks or opportunities cause another problem (Göle, 2009). So to speak, there is a dilemma of peace and conflict. The possibility of providing clear answers to how this dilemma will evolve and conclude has become questionable.

When we talk about tolerance, dialogue, peace and the cohabitation culture, one of the fields that we come across both in our day and in the past and where differences intensively appeared is religion. Religion provides versatile encounters and forms in the fields of education, culture and art by its individual, social, historical and universal nature.

Question of fact about differences and religion is whether religions/faiths are an obstacle or a chance to live together and form a culture of tolerance and collaboration. In this sense, “definition” of religion and its “perception/understanding”, perception of believers towards each other, religious attitudes assumed by their believers and theological approaches are discovered as the fields to study in the literature.

The answer to the questions what are cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors forming the experiences of the individuals against the differences especially the religion, the situations where these experiences occur and mentalities, dispositions, values, sources, thoughts and attitudes forming and shaping these experiences would provide an opportunity to reconsider living together and ethic of encounter. Diversity and versatility formed against religious differences provide an insight towards where and how to handle the differences.

Methodology

Research Design

General framework of this paper to be made can be expressed as follows: to share the findings based on the course, depth and content of the grounds of experiences of encountering religious differences with the participants and to include the valuable contributions of the participants in the discovery of experiences regarding religious differences as the first part of the study.

This is the first step of a descriptive study which focuses on designing a scale to examine experiences in encountering the differences, and determining its psychometric features (validity & reliability).

Scale development is a process of obtaining a reliable, valid and practical measure of a construct in order to assess an attribute of interest. It is important to follow certain steps during a scale development process (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2013; Crocker & Algina, 1986; DeVellis, 2014). We can list these steps as follows:

- 1) Defining the concept to be measured, purpose of the scale, and the target group
- 2) Deciding/Determining the scope and content of the scale
- 3) Generating items based on this scope and content
- 4) Checking the items (expert judges) and creating the scale form
- 5) Identifying the methods to score the items and procedures for data analysis

- 6) Piloting the scale among the scale development group
- 7) Scoring the items and analyzing the data (validity and reliability studies)
- 8) Creating the final draft of the scale based on these results

Defining the concept to be measured, the purpose of the scale & Deciding/Determining the scope and content of the scale

There are two different approaches for scale development. One of them is “*deductive approach*” which focuses on an already existing, conceptualised construct. This approach is practical when the definition of the construct is known and robust enough to generate the draft item pool. The second approach on the other hand is “*inductive approach*” which is used when there is an uncertainty about the definition and/or the dimensions of the construct. With an inductive approach, first of all it is tried to be explored that in which fields and at what levels the encountering the differences have been experienced in RE. The basic discussions about the psychological feature -Experience in Encountering the Differences”- we have interested in is given above.

What would be the starting point when it's required to formulate an encounter principle in the field of religious differences and reach the agreed general principles of an ethic of encounter? It seems possible to talk about an ethic of encounter when the course, depth and content of the encountering experiences can be understood and explained well. Then how religious differences evolve becomes more explicit in line with the characteristics of encountering experiences. This is because it supports the argument that the experiences have different courses when the people who have the same religious background reading the same texts adopt distinct approaches such as exclusive, inclusive and pluralism regarding religious differences. Therefore, in the first stage of the study conducted, grounds, course, depth and content of experiences of encountering religious differences were tried to be understood, explained and discovered. In the second stage, scaling studies which are going to allow seeing the main principles will be included. And in the third one, the research attempts to reach the principles constituting the basis for encountering principle. Briefly, the three stages indicated below;

- Discovery of experiences of encounter religious differences,
 - The development of a scale assessing experiences of encounter the differences,
 - Principles regarding experiences of encountering that can be talked about,
- constitute the main frame of the study to be conducted.

In the discovery phase of the fields where experiences of encountering religious differences occur and their levels, research was carried out through literature reviews and analyses of qualitative researches on this subject. In terms of theoretical sides of experiences of encountering and examples selected from the field, the following works of Dr. Ahmet Yemenici, one of the authors of this paper were utilized: ***Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretmenlerinin Diğer Dinlere ve din mensuplarına ilişkin yaklaşımları (nitel bir çalışma)*** [Approaches of Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teachers towards Other Religions and Their Adherents (a qualitative study)]; ***Din Kültürü ve Ahlak bilgisi Öğretmenlerinin Diğer Dinlere ve Din Mensuplarına İlişkin Yaklaşımları. Yayımlanmamış Doktora Tezi*** [Approaches of Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teachers towards Other Religions and Their Adherents. *Unpublished PhD Dissertation*].

Experiences Regarding Religious Differences and Areas/Environments of Experiences

After the literature reviews and qualitative studies, it was found that the experiences/approaches regarding religious differences occur in the theological, socio-cultural and pedagogical fields, either only in cognitive level or both cognitive and self-experience level (Yemenici, 2012, 2014).

In the following sections, the study will touch upon some examples based on the studies conducted regarding the fields where religious differences are seen and the experience of encountering. These examples will also be utilized to present several examples regarding the factors of the scale for experiencing differences.

- ***Different Approaches Occurring in Theological Level and Examples of Experiences of Encounter***

The approaches based on accuracy claims and discussing diversity of religions in this sense in philosophical and theological level ask the following questions in terms of the diversity of religions: a) can only one of the religions make you find God and salvation? b) Can other religions also be considered as Holy and savior? c) or are all the religions equal in terms of reality? The approach adopting (a) is called exclusivism, while the one adopting (b) is called inclusivism and (c) is called pluralism (Kılıç, 2003).

Michael Peterson et al. suggest that the philosophical approaches with regard to religious diversity are grouped under three main titles which are exclusivism, pluralism and inclusivism (Peterson et al., 2006).

There are discussions and researches whether these three paradigms could define the approaches of members of different religions sufficiently. For instance, there are also approaches such as the one stating that only God can decide who would find the salvation and that we can only criticize and discuss about the understanding and interpretation of religions.

Different approaches are seen regarding this concern in terms of the experiences of teachers about religious differences. For instance, AG1 who is a long-time teacher in England and who encountered people with different religious backgrounds both cognitively and personally states that:

“AG1: Actually the number of categories *should be increased. I mean, it’s not right to consider this subject only in terms of these three categories.* For example, I consider myself a member of the second approach. I have an including character by behaviours and perspectives. So in my opinion, if a person believes in God and does not commit sins, God would accept that person to heaven. This person can either be a Jew, a Christian or a Buddhist. God may accept that person to the heaven or not. There is always this possibility in my opinion. I don’t find this categorization accurate. First of all, the only religion that God accepts according to Muslims is Islam. The Holy Book is Quran, and Prophet Muhammed is the last prophet. But neither Jews, Christians, nor Buddhists don’t accept this. But it was sent as the last religion and Muhammed was sent to us as the last prophet. Therefore, I don’t consider or say this as an exclusivist. It may be defined in that categorization as exclusivist, but this is not true. This my truth, and I still believe that the essence is to be a good person and serve the humanity. Three things are important in our religion: to believe in God, to believe in the prophet and to believe in afterlife, or in other words, to believe that we will resurrect after death. If a person believes in

these three things, this person is a Muslim, or a believer. This person is a good person in the presence of God. So s/he believes in God. S/he believes in the prophets and that s/he will resurrect after death. This is how it's explained in our religion... And this is what I believe. So, if a person believes in these, God will place that person in heaven. **So it's not possible to go to hell and this is inclusive, and the other thing shouldn't be said in an exclusivist way.**" (Yemenici, 2012)

TG4 who didn't have many experiences encountering people with different religious backgrounds expresses his/her experiences in a more different way:

"Does anybody have the right to say "This is right in the presence of God" for another religion or to say "s/he found the salvation or failed in the presence of God" for a believer of another religion? For this question, TG4 stated that "a person can say this for other religions." "I don't consider their ways of living. I care about their belief systems." said TG4 about the question **how do you evaluate whether a person found the right path while approaching people with different religious backgrounds? Do you consider their Holy books, theology or their ways of living?** (Yemenici, 2012)

Scaling examples regarding experiences based on only three paradigms when it comes to approaches about differences:

"I believe that the Holy texts are exclusive in terms of different groups."

"I believe that the Holy books are including other religions and their believers."

"People cannot decide whether a person will go to heaven."

"There are universal values in all religions and beliefs emphasizing common characteristics of humanity."

- ***Different Approaches and Examples for Experiences of Encounter in Socio-cultural Level***

By saying approaches in socio-cultural level, it's intended to explain social, cultural and political encounters and experiences regarding other religions and their adherents apart from a perception-association-communication level considering only epistemological and theological values regarding different religions and the people who believe in those different religions.

When the approaches describing the situations experienced by people in the mutual socio-cultural settings about differences are considered, the following statements are striking:

"We are now on the verge of dialogue age. We can travel the whole world and we can reach anything. There is almost nowhere left on earth where different languages and accents are spoken. Our streets, workplaces and homes are full of foreign products. We are able to see many different nations, cultures and religions in our living room thanks to our TVs (Smidler, 2007)."

It's seen that the experiences of encountering differences in socio-cultural level are formed around two concepts: "ignorance" which tends to ignore differences, or "recognition" which doesn't consider differences as a threat, considers them natural and enriching, and tends to form values through mutual understanding and collaboration (Selçuk, 2005). In this context; *respect, tolerance, dialogical dialogue, sincerity, collaboration* can be considered under the title of *recognition*, while *conflict, exclusion, marginalisation, insincerity, ignorance, assimilation* can be considered under the umbrella of *ignorance*.

In the experiences of teachers regarding differences in socio-cultural level, it was discovered that they weren't in a state of ignoring due to difference of beliefs (ignorance) when

it was about their Daily-life and cognitive encounters with people who believe in different religions in the situations such as being neighbours, friends, working together, knowing about other religions. Their readiness for becoming in close relations such as friendship thanks to historical background, confidence and their daily experiences are really interesting. And their ideas stating that the past negative experiences were not due to religion or belief, but were due to political reasons shows that the real situation wasn't the negative encounters or experiences but it was the situation due to lack of experiencing.

In socio-cultural level, especially the experiences of the teacher ÖG1 are interesting. ÖG1 who works as a religion culture teacher at French private school in Turkey states that:

"I realized I didn't really know them until I came here. My perspective about them, perspective on life and people changed a lot after I came here. Maybe because of the way we were raised... The rightest, most perfect, flawless belief was ours. But when I came here, I realized that their beliefs are also right, perfect and flawless for them. Therefore, experiences differences and being aware of them is really important. We didn't have any difficulties here. We had really good dialogues. One of my best friends is a pastor who is also an English teacher. We used to study English together every day. We used to take the ferry together. We showed each other respect. I can say he was a good friend of mine. Maybe we didn't have any problems because of the place we worked and that it was a group of people who were mature enough to respect each other. I was quite respected since it was a foreign school and I was teaching religion. For example, I didn't have any classes on Fridays so that I could freely go and pray, or when I had classes, I could have a 2-hour class and then break during the prayer times. They could sometimes let me for a day-off when I made speeches in the mosque. They let me when one of our students died. And I could lead the funeral prayer. We got a lot of respect as religion teachers. And they were really sensitive and careful about our beliefs. This wasn't the case in most of the state school." (Yemenici, 2012)

Examples for the ways of experiencing approaches regarding differences in socio-cultural level:

"Knowing about different beliefs allows people to know about their own beliefs better."

"Exchanging information with the people with different religious backgrounds increases mutual respect."

"Parties should trust each other first for a collaboration with people with different religious backgrounds."

"Artistic activities make people with different beliefs and religious backgrounds closer."

- ***Different Approaches and Examples for Experiences of Encounter in Pedagogical Level***

One of salient aspects in terms of the experiences with regard to including different religions and their believers-adherents- in the education was that it wouldn't change a p-give any harm to- a person's belief to know about other religions and people with different religious backgrounds and that it was necessary to include other religions in the education. The fact that including current issues and comparing other religions in the education kept the attention and interest higher was mentioned by participating teachers. It was mentioned that the lectures in the normal course without any other associations didn't interest the students.

Examples for the ways of experiencing approaches regarding differences in pedagogical level:

“I believe that communicating with people with different beliefs in the same learning environment will improve me.”

“When teaching a different religion, you should approach it from that religion’s own perspective.”

“A comparative approach should be adopted when teaching about different religions and beliefs.”

Before moving on, it would be beneficial to provide some brief information about the other stages of the study. In the second stage of the study where scale development is carried out; first teacher candidates will form the study group. Once the study will be completed with them lecturers, teachers ranging from higher religion education to formal and non-formal religious education, and religious officials will form the next study groups for new validity and reliability studies. Because religious education is the main focus of discussions in terms of its learning environments such as school, teacher, prayer halls; program understandings, contents, resources and tools for experiences differences. On the other hand, religious education is supposed to respond to the demands and duties that it has to fulfil.

Defining the Target Group

RE has been an issue of debate in experiencing the differences, with its opportunities and materials like school, teacher, multiple learning environments, programme approaches and content. On the other hand RE is obliged to answer the demands in order to perform the duties, expected from itself. In this respect, as being one of the most important components of education, the focus of this study has been teachers and trying to find out the appearance of their experiences in encountering the differences. However, the refusal the researchers faced during the application permission process from the Ministry of Education, a mandatory change emerged in the target group. Teacher candidates have been chosen as the new target group of this study. *Our study will be carried out with two different scale development groups:*

1. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability (Internal consistency) Studies Group: This group will be the group from which the data will be collected in order to explore the factor structure and the internal consistency of the scale.
2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Reliability (Test-retest) Group: The aim of applying the scale to a different group is to determine whether the explored construct will be confirmed or not.

Both groups will consist of 220, because the literature tells us there should be at least 5 cases for each item (there are 44 items in the draft scale) (Tavşancıl, 2002). And also while we will sample these groups, the gender will be another issue and the number of males and females will be close to each other. The researchers will reach the applicants by purposive sampling method also known as selective or subjective sampling).

Generating items based on this scope and content & Checking the items (expert judges) and Creating the Scale Form

The draft item pool was generated according to the discussions held in this respect. Also the literature and the opinions of the target group (by asking them to write an essay about what they understand from the experience in encountering the differences) were taken into

account while writing the draft items. A total number of 86 items were generated within the first draft form. The draft item pool has been sent to 21 different experts from the fields of RE, social psychology, educational statistics, educational measurement and evaluation, and the other basic Islamic sciences of the theology field. The experts were asked to review the items and comment on whether they cover a representative sample of the domain and . According to the expert judges, the face and content validity were determined. The items with low content validity rate ($<.90$) were excluded from the scale and some of the items were revised according to the expert comments. Also this revised form was checked by Turkish Language experts as well.

The scale will be a five point Likert scale between “Strongly Disagree – (1 point)” in one end and “Strongly Agree – (5 points)” in the other. The instructions has been written and the draft scale is ready to apply to the target groups. As soon as the 2017-2018 academic year will start, data collection process will also start.

In the following stages of the study, after collecting the data in iterative applications, the validity and reliability studies will be completed. Obtained data will be transferred into IBM–SPSS 22, AMOS 22, and LISREL 8.8 programs. In order to determine the validity and reliability of SEED, techniques such as Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test, Bartlett Sphericity test, Varimax rotation, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient, and confirmatory factor analysis will be used (Büyüköztürk, 2013; Özdamar, 2013). For the construct validity of the scale factor analysis (both exploratory and confirmatory) will be conducted to the data. For reliability evidences, Cronbach Alpha (α) Coefficient will be calculated to determine the internal consistency of the scale. and also to test the stability of the scale over time, test-retest reliability method will be used. In order to analyse the data IBM–SPSS 22 ve AMOS 22 will be used.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to develop a scale -*Scale of Experiences in Encountering the Differences (SEED)*- in order to determine the individuals’s encountering experiences particularly towards the differences in religious education. Because Turkey is in a struggle for understanding and to develop its experience in the context of differences in terms of the country’s current status (Coşkun, 1997).

In the first stage of our study it was mostly aimed to understand content, course and depth of experiences and to share them with you. With these qualitative data, we avoid making any generalizations about the approaches that may occur following the experiences of encountering in religious, socio-cultural and pedagogical levels. However, with the data obtained a significant progress was made to write scale items and for the implementation of SEED. After the implementation of the scale, we aim to access more general information about the experiences. And also, it is expected that the data obtained by the application of SEED will not only make it possible to see the borders of encountering experiences either they point richness, proliferation of understanding or dispute, chaos, violence even conflict and of giving an opportunity to understand and interpret them, but also will enable the usage of an instrument for new studies in the field, such as psychology and sociology of religion.

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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF INTERRELIGIOUS CLASSROOM TEACHING

Interreligious learning should overcome cultural and religious diversity in the classroom by changing perspectives. For this four contexts are important: auto-interpretation of one's own religious tradition, and of foreign traditions; allo-interpretation(s) of one's own tradition, and of foreign tradition(s). In the past empirical research in the Netherlands seemed to indicate that interreligious learning by students is not possible in the classroom. We will present an interreligious exercise and focus on empirical research into this exercise. Interreligious learning was examined by focusing on teaching; 24 religious and world view teachers (student teachers, school teachers and teacher trainers) took part in a workshop with this interreligious exercise for secondary schools and were interviewed afterwards. The largest part of the teachers discuss the own or foreign tradition from their own perspective. Half of the teacher trainers discuss the own tradition from the foreign perspective, and none of the teacher trainers discusses the foreign tradition from the foreign perspective. However, student teachers reached the highest level of interreligious learning and they use more perspectives in an inquiring and debating way of learning. We have an optimistic view that interreligious teaching needs more thorough training, though interreligious learning is problematic at multiple levels (teacher trainers, school teachers and students).

Key words

Interreligious classroom teaching, interreligious learning, religious diversity, activating exercise, dialogue, empirical study

INTRODUCTION

In classrooms in Dutch secondary schools we nowadays find cultural and religious diversity. The Netherlands is, like more western European countries, a pluralistic, multi-religious and secularised country. With its origin in Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, the Netherlands nowadays has high percentages for the Christian religion (40%; in the world 33%), for no religion (49%; in the world 12%), and much lower percentages for Muslim (5%; world 22%), Hindu (0.5%; world 14%), Buddhist (0.5%; world 7%) and 'other religion' (5%; world 12%) (see Johnsons & Grim, 2013, for world percentages; Schmeets & Mensvoort, 2015, for Dutch percentages).

However, when we look at the religious background of schools, it seems as if the secularization process is hardly taking place at all. In the Netherlands, most of the 655 secondary schools are confessional, being either Roman Catholic (153) or Protestant (133), with 184 public schools and 185 other non-public schools (Statistics Netherlands, 2016). But what does it mean to be a school with a religious denomination, e.g. being a Catholic school? Parents do not choose a school for its religious identity, but much more for its

accessibility and quality of education. In 2000, over 40% of non-religious parents chose a school with a religious identity, whereas 20% of religious parents chose public or non-confessional schools (Brenneman-Helmers, 2008, 24).

Van Dijk-Groeneboer and Brijan (2013) found, in a survey among students at confessional schools, that the main reasons to choose a school were location (40%), reputation (36%) and atmosphere (30%). The school's identity was seldom mentioned; only 8% of Christian students gave this as a reason. As it was possible to provide more than one answer to this question, these figures show that choosing a school based on confession did not often happen. Thus, in a Catholic school, large amounts of non-Catholic students will be present. A recent study among 1450 students in Catholic secondary schools (Van Dijk-Groeneboer & Brijan, 2013, 5; see also: Faber, 2012; Miedema, Bertram-Troost, ter Avest, Kom, & de Wolff, 2013) carried out in 2013 showed that 36% were Christian, 53.1% non-religious, 3.2% were Muslim, 0.8% Hindu, 0.1% Buddhist and 6.8% had another religion. The 36 % Christians consisted for 16% of Roman Catholics, with the other 20% being Protestant or of another Christian faith. When teaching religious education at a catholic school like this, teachers have to be aware that most students are not religious, especially not Roman Catholic, and therefore often know little about the Roman Catholic faith, tradition, rituals and so on. Still, when directly asking the students whether they call themselves religious a third confirms they do. These are explicitly not just Christian students; there are students who call themselves Christian who not confirm themselves to be religious. Moreover, students who proclaim not to be a church member or part of any other worldview say they are religious.

Having such a pluralistic population inside the classroom, thereby adding that most of the students who call themselves protestant, catholic or Muslim hardly know what it really means to *be* religious, a religious education teacher has a lot of work to do. Mono-religious education is obviously quite impossible dealing with this diversity. Multi-religious classroom teaching of course is a possibility often chosen in public schools. Teaching is *about* religions, in a broad perspective and without learning about the functional dimension of religion for people, because there hardly are any experiences inside the classroom. We consider this as teaching too much from a distance, and therefore plead for interreligious classroom teaching.

Interreligious learning has his own challenges, as Pollefeyt (2007) calls them. What exactly are the goals of interreligious learning? Is interreligious learning only to take place in the classroom or also in the entire school as an institution? With what theological presuppositions interreligious learning has to deal, e.g. the religious truth claims? What kind of teacher is needed for realising interreligious learning? Is the knowledge of their own religious tradition sufficient for students to participate in an interactive learning process? How does interreligious learning relate to the identity of the school? How does interreligious learning take place in a pluralistic classroom, e.g. with atheists in it, and with groups of students having the same religious background? Which pedagogical principles are supportive for interreligious learning, e.g. dialogue, hermeneutics, deduction and induction? Which didactical instruments are needed to realise the goals of interreligious learning? How can interreligious learning be evaluated, thinking of the skills, attitudes and insights?

Religious education is meant to offer topics to the students that help them consider questions like whether they are religious human beings, and what it means to belong to a religious tradition. Learning experiences in the classroom must provide these kind of experiences by entering a narrative dialogue, where the teacher as well as the students tell their personal, biographical stories. Exchanging these stories in a genuine way is significant to the stories of each of them and to every one of them. Then we can state that there has actually been religious-thinking-through (Kienstra, Van Dijk-Groeneboer, & Boelens, 2016). An interreligious dialogue is possible only when the differences between dialogue partners are

accepted and the focus shifts towards what is connecting them; such as hope, love, friendship. Then a genuine dialogue can take place and interreligious learning can be fruitful.

It is often said that religious education should contribute to overcoming cultural and religious differences. Thus interreligious learning has become a new branch in religious education (Roebben, 2015, 60). However, earlier empirical research in the Netherlands seemed to indicate that interreligious learning by students is not possible in the classroom (Sterkens, 2001). In the discussion of his results Sterkens (2005, 87) suggested, among others, that this may be caused by the teacher teaching the Islamic tradition mostly from the Christian perspective, because he is not sufficiently able to teach from the perspective of the Islamic tradition. In the Netherlands this has not yet been investigated empirically.

The affective and attitudinal prerequisites for the development of a religious self that consists of multiple perspectives, could be enhanced by a interreligious curriculum aimed at changes of perspectives and interpersonal exchanges of ideas (compare Sterkens, 2005, 85). In the context of the Catholic School of Theology, van Dijk-Groeneboer, Boelens, and Kienstra (2017) developed teaching materials intended to approach the foreign tradition from the perspective of this foreign tradition (instead of a teacher's own tradition). They also investigated the teachers' interreligious learning.

In line with the previously mentioned study we integrate the effects of interreligious learning and the contexts for changes of perspectives. Thus four perspectives are important (Sterkens, 2005, 70). The first perspective is the *auto-interpretation of one's own religious tradition*, for example: a Christian reflects on his own Christian tradition. The second perspective is the *auto-interpretation of foreign religious traditions*, for example: a Christian looks at the Islam as a Christian. The third perspective is (are) the *allo-interpretation(s) of one's own tradition*, for example: a Christian interprets or criticizes the Christian tradition from the perspective of the Islamic tradition. The fourth and final perspective is (are) *the allo-interpretation(s) of foreign tradition(s)*, for example: a Christian shifts his perspective to that of the Islamic tradition and reflects on the Islamic tradition.

A NEW EXERCISE: AN INTERRELIGIOUS PASSPORT

On the 17th and 18th of January 2017 a conference took place in the Netherlands about orthodoxy and fundamentalism in religious and world view education. In this conference we twice gave a workshop to teachers to guide them in developing an interreligious teaching practice. A third workshop was given to student teachers. During the 2016–17 academic year, these student teachers were enrolled in a methodology course of religious education at the first authors' university. The workshops dealt with making their own passport and using it in dialogues. The activating exercise *Passport: Let's talk about the real stuff* was embedded in a theological discourse (note, not in a religious studies discourse, see Baumfield, 2002). Each individual elaborated an interreligious encounter passport. These passports were first discussed in smaller groups and then in a plenary evaluation. The preparatory material that we had developed was conveyed to the teachers in such a way that they could use it immediately in their classroom (Imants & Oolbekkink, 2009).

The procedure employed for the exercise *Passport: Let's talk about the real stuff* ran as follows. First there is an introduction about an assignment that is usually given for the school subject: "Create a world view passport, containing the following elements: name, age, place of residence, composition of family, faith, friends, hobbies, three nicest television shows, favorite music, my best quality, a less good quality, I can really be happy with, I want to become later, what I like about this school, which I like less". Then the exercise is embedded in a theological discourse. An interreligious encounter passport is being prepared and the most

essential elements of it are discussed in the classroom. These elements are values, stories and role models, who am I inside, who do I want to be and why? Subsequently the students are asked: "Above you can see an example of a world view passport. You have to write another passport yourself: an interreligious encounter passport. Please write them on this worksheet."

The worksheet then starts with individual thinking: "Create an interreligious encounter passport, containing the following elements: name; age; What kind of work do you / Where do you work; What's in your backpack of personal experiences, what do you take with you from your biography; What is your faith? What does your answer mean." After this there is time for a dialogue in a small group: "For example, how do you, as a Christian, view your own Christian tradition? How do you, as a Christian, look at Islam, for example? How would you look at your own Christian tradition from the Islamic tradition? As a Christian, how do you view Islam from the Islamic tradition? Which aspects do you particularly address in religion (Biblical stories, rituals, insights, figures from church history, etc.)? Please be specific here. How does this backpack affect your interests? What expertise do you have in your backpack for the backpack of students?" This worksheet ends with a plenary evaluation: "How do you prevent conflict, racism? Is this passport finished? What have you learned: did you learn to listen and to express yourself?" Using a questionnaire we interviewed the teachers at the end of the workshop about the way and the level they had learned, and which perspectives they adopted.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Questionnaire

In questionnaires 24 religious and world view teachers (6 student teachers, 5 Christian and 1 skeptic; 12 school teachers, 10 Christian and 2 no religion; 4 teacher trainers, all Christian; and 2 with an unknown status, with one Christian) indicated when they expressed themselves most explicitly about religion: during the instruction, the thinking about and writing of their own interreligious encounter passport; or during the dialogues in the smaller groups and in the plenary evaluation.

The religious and world view teachers also indicated which way of learning fitted most closely to the exercise that was used. Following Kienstra, Karskens, and Imants (2014) and Kienstra et al. (2016) we distinguished three ways of learning. These approaches are learning through narratives and conversations (connective truth finding, CTF), learning through inquiry (test-based truth finding, TTF), and learning through juridical debate (JD).

They were also asked which perspectives were discussed in the dialogues in the smaller groups and in the plenary evaluation, i.e. an auto own tradition, auto foreign traditions, an allo own tradition, and allo foreign tradition(s).

Last, it was asked what level of interreligious learning was reached by the teachers in the dialogues. To qualify such levels, higher-thinking skills were adopted (compare Baumfield, 2003, i.e., evaluation, critique, thinking about one's thinking). These levels entail testing, producing criticism, and reflecting, where reflecting is the highest level (Kienstra et al., 2014; Kienstra, Imants, Karskens, & van der Heijden, 2015).

Consent forms were distributed to teachers to sign (see American Psychological Association, 2003, *as amended* 2010, 10). The teachers were informed about (1) the purpose of the research; (2) their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research (one teacher withdrew after the workshop, in the interview); and (3) whom to contact for questions about the research.

Individual results

Table 1 presents the descriptive findings for the 24 teachers. The topics in the table follow the order they had in the questionnaire.

In the last column of Table 1 we find that teachers state that, for the Design variable approaches, learning through narratives and conversations (CTF) is realized most often (22 out of 24 times), and learning through inquiry (TTF) and learning through debate (JD) less often (3 and 4 out of 24 times). Notice that some teachers used more than one approach.

Only two teachers state that all four Perspectives, *auto own tradition*, *auto foreign traditions*, *allo own tradition* and *allo foreign tradition(s)*, are realized in their workshops (teachers 4 and 22), and another four teachers see three perspectives in their workshops (teachers 7, 20, 23 and 24). The other teachers state that less than three perspectives are found. In the last column of Table 1 we find that ‘auto own tradition’ is observed most often (18/24), followed by ‘auto foreign traditions’ (16/24). The two other perspectives appear much less often (‘allo own tradition’, 6/24, and ‘allo foreign tradition(s)’, 6/24). We did not find an order in the perspectives, i.e., we did not find that observing one specific perspective implies finding another specific perspective.

W.r.t. Interreligious learning by teachers, *testing*, *producing criticism* and *reflecting*, we distinguish ‘testing’, from the latter two, which are higher-order levels. ‘Testing’ appears less often (3/24) than ‘making criticism’ (4/24) and ‘reflecting’ (9/24). Thus higher-order levels are mentioned by more than half of the teachers (13/24). For the three teachers mentioning ‘testing’ the level of learning is adequate. Seven teachers did not indicate any of the three levels, which leaves us with an ambiguous interpretation that it is unclear whether the highest level reached by them is lower than ‘testing’, or that they missed this question for other reasons (for example fatigue, it was the last question in the questionnaire).

When we compare the realizations of the four variables, the Design variable is realized most often (23 times at least one approach is used), followed by the auto Perspectives (18 and 16 times), followed by Interreligious learning of a higher-order level (13 times). Realization of the allo Perspectives seems most difficult (6 and 6 times). The variable Perspectives has to do with the domain specific context. On the one hand the interreligious perspectives were sufficiently clear to the teachers and it is likely that the teachers are working from their own Christian tradition. On the other hand, the teachers are less often referring to the foreign tradition from the perspective of this foreign tradition, and to their own tradition from the foreign perspective.

Comparative case study

We adopt a mixed-methods comparative case study methodology (Yin, 2014), wherein teachers are compared. This comparative case study is carried out by analyzing Table 1 with the quantitative tool correspondence analysis (CA, Greenacre, 2007; compare Kienstra & van der Heijden, 2015, and Kienstra, Van Dijk-Groeneboer, and Boelens, 2016). Correspondence analysis (CA) is a popular statistical tool for a graphical, descriptive representation of data, in particular categorical data, in a multidimensional space. It will help us in comparing teachers.

Table 1
Descriptive findings for Context variable, Design variable, Perspectives and Interreligious learning by teachers

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	Total	
I. Context variable																										
<i>Teacher characteristics</i>																										
Student teacher	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
School teacher	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Teacher trainer	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
II. Design variable																										
<i>Approaches</i>																										
Connective truth finding (CTF)	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	22
Test-based truth finding (TTF)	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Juridical debate (JD)	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
III. Perspectives																										
<i>Auto/allo of own/foreign tradition(s)</i>																										
Auto own tradition	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	-	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Auto foreign traditions	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Allo own tradition	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	-	-	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	6
Allo foreign tradition(s)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	6
IV. Interreligious learning by teachers																										
<i>Highest level reached</i>																										
Testing	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Producing criticism	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Reflecting	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	9

In the graphical representation of teachers, teachers (rows in Table 1) that are close in proximity indicate similarity and the presence of levels of common variables. Likewise, columns that are close in proximity denote the presence of similar variable levels, and thus indicate that they were used by the same teachers. Hence, the graphical representations of the teachers (rows) and levels (columns) are closely related. Apart from a scaling factor, the teachers are included in the mean of the levels used by them, and the levels are included in the mean of the teachers in which they were used.

Table 1 was analyzed using correspondence analysis (CA). We made minor adjustments by recoding the four perspectives into variables counting the number of times auto, allo, own and foreign were used. For example, teacher 1 has scores 2 on auto, 0 on allo, 1 on own and 1 on foreign. This recoding makes it easier to interpret the four perspectives in Table 1 in terms of the two variables (auto/allo and own/foreign) that make up these perspectives. In Figure 1, each variable is placed on a separate horizontal line, beginning with teacher characteristics and ending with the highest level. There are separate lines for auto/allo and for own/foreign. The 24 scattered dots along the bottom line represent the teachers.

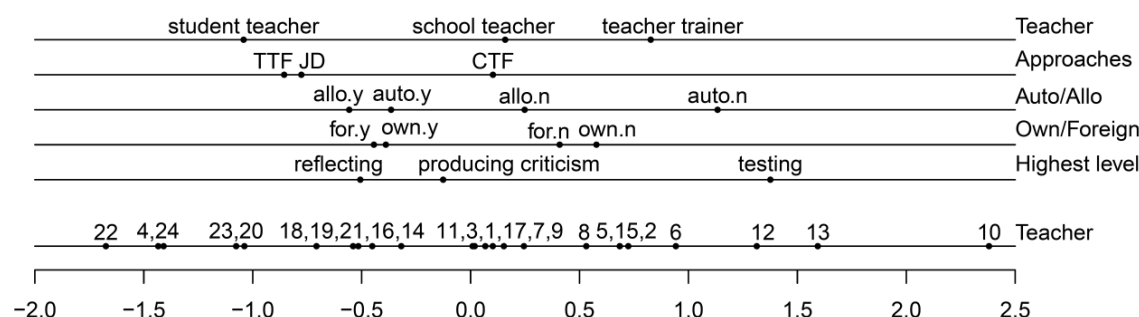


Figure 1. First dimension of the CA of Table 1.

Overall, the dimension displayed in Figure 1 distinguishes more effective teachers on the left from less effective teachers on the right. Teachers on the left (the lowest line indicates that these are teachers 22, 4, 24, 23, 20, and so on) have more often as highest level of interreligious learning 'reflecting', they mention more often perspectives including 'foreign' (label for.y), 'own' (own.y), 'allo' (allo.y) and 'auto' (auto.y). They mention the approach TTF and JD relatively more often. They turn out to be the student teachers.

On the other hand, teachers on the right (teachers 10, 13, 12, 6, 2 and so on) indicate as highest level 'testing', and they less often mention 'own', 'foreign', 'allo' and 'auto' (indicated by labels ending with .n). Among these teachers CTF is found relatively more often, and among these teachers the teacher trainers are overrepresented.

The two most extreme teachers (in terms of effectiveness) serve as examples to clarify the CA. Excerpts from the most-effective teacher (i.e., 22), which was a student teacher, follow.

Student teacher 22: The most effective

Questionnaire responses from this student teacher are described below.

The questionnaire contained a question concerning when a teacher expressed himself most explicitly about religion: during the instruction, the thinking about and writing of their own interreligious encounter passport; or during the dialogues in the smaller groups and in the plenary evaluation.

- This student teacher wrote: “During the dialogues in the smaller groups and in the plenary evaluation”.

The questionnaire contained a teacher-behavior question “What did your workshop leader do during the exercise, how did she support what happened?”.

- This student teacher wrote: “[The workshop leader] was giving space to participants to express themselves”.

Other remarks:

- “Thus you better get to know yourself and the position of others”.

Teacher trainer 10: The least effective

Teacher trainer 10 was the least effective. The following are responses from this teacher on the questionnaire.

The answer to the question concerning when a teacher expressed himself most explicitly about religion: during the instruction, the thinking about and writing of their own interreligious encounter passport; or during the dialogues in the smaller groups and in the plenary evaluation.

- This teacher trainer wrote: “During the dialogues in the smaller groups and in the plenary evaluation”.

The answer to the teacher-behavior question “What did your workshop leader do during the exercise, how did she support what happened?”.

- This teacher trainer wrote: “[The workshop leader] was giving little guidance”.

Other remarks:

- “Not enough time”.

DISCUSSION

The results raise a number of questions. First, in this study, teachers were examined in various learning contexts among different workshop groups. However, the obvious question is whether the results for the six student teachers, 12 school teachers, and four teacher trainers generalize to other teachers? We consider this question by focusing on the summary of the results as displayed by the correspondence analysis. An important feature of this analysis is that there are teachers where the highest level reached was reflecting, and teachers where the highest level reached was testing. The display shows, for example, that reflecting goes together with student teacher, auto own tradition, auto foreign traditions, allo own tradition and allo foreign tradition(s) and debating (JD). Testing goes together with school teacher and teacher trainer, the absence of the four perspectives and learning through narratives and conversations (CTF). These relations observed for the student teachers fit with the theoretical perspectives of using higher-thinking skills in religious education (Baumfield, 2003), and the effectivity of discussion (Hattie, 2012) and debating (Kienstra et al., 2015). For this reason we expect that the positive results for the six student teachers will generalize to other student teachers, and that the less positive results for the school teachers and the teacher trainers will generalize to other school teachers and teacher trainers. We acknowledge that we can only be certain about this by doing further research. The methodology used in our study is already well established, and future research requires data from a larger sample of teachers.

Second, how can we interpret that student teachers appear to be more effective? For example, the most effective teacher 22 is a student teacher and we consider his responses in the questionnaire to be a good example of interreligious learning and engagement. However, notice that the younger age of a student teacher can be the explanatory factor, but also the

period in which younger people have grown up, i.e., the cohort they are in. American (Putnam, 2007) and Dutch sociological research (Engbersen, Snel, & 't Hart, 2015) found in longitudinal research that there is less engagement among early ethnically less diverse groups, there is more engagement among more recent ethnically diverse groups, and there is less engagement among the current ethnically more diverse groups. If we link this with the age cohorts of the teachers and the immigration movements in the Netherlands, then school teacher and teacher trainers could belong to the cohort of early ethnically less diverse groups (less engagement goes along with fewer perspectives and fewer effective interreligious learning) and student teachers to more recent ethnically diverse groups (more engagement goes along with more perspectives and more effective interreligious learning). If this interpretation is correct, then the challenge lies in the contemporary students who belong to current ethnically more diverse groups where there is possibly less engagement. Precisely where the interreligious problems and therefore the need for active engagement is the greatest, relatively few students are engaged.

Similarly, if we compare our study with the study of Sterkens (2001), we find a comparable interpretation problem. I.e., Sterkens studied primary education in 2001 where we studied secondary education in 2017. Where Sterkens had difficulty to accomplish interreligious learning, this may be due to the cohort and, roughly speaking, the cohort of pupils of Sterkens in 2001 is the current group of students now.

Third, Kienstra et al. (2015) found that connective truth finding (CTF) is not always the most effective truth-finding method. In a later small-scale study (Kienstra et al., 2016), students learned most effectively using CTF through a form of debate during a bibliodrama exercise. A bibliodrama exercise as well as an interreligious exercise can be categorized as a CTF approach (Van Dijk-Groeneboer et al., 2017). In the study we discuss in this paper, teachers learned most effectively during an interreligious exercise (CTF) through a form of debate. Connective truth finding (CTF) could be effective because the connective truth finding (CTF) approach goes along very well with religious education.

Finally, w.r.t. teacher behavior, the student teacher 22 reports in the questionnaire that the workshop leader was 'giving space'. Would this explain the effectivity of the workshop leader? More research is needed to study this, but in another study we also found that the specific contribution of an effective religion teacher is to show understanding, give space and listen (Kienstra et al., 2016). In a recent empirical study into a related area, democratic citizenship education, Schuitema, Radstake, van de Pol, and Veugelers (2017, 26)

“... underline the importance for teachers to think carefully about what they want to achieve with a classroom discussion, and to be aware of the different ways they can conduct a classroom discussion, the different roles they can take, and what the consequences of their behavior may be for how the discussion proceeds. A discussion aiming to confront students with different perspectives on controversial issues may demand a different approach from a discussion that aims to foster authentic discussion among students.”

We agree with these authors that teacher behavior is an important topic for further research.

CONCLUSIONS

The results from the questionnaire show that the largest part of the teachers discuss the own or foreign tradition from their own perspective. Sterkens (2005) suggested that interreligious learning by students may not be possible in the classroom because teachers teach the Islamic tradition mostly from the Christian perspective, as they are not sufficiently able to teach from the perspective of the Islamic tradition. Our findings are in line with

Sterkens suggestion. Even though we present an interreligious exercise to the teachers, almost all of them did not make use of the four auto-allo of own-foreign perspectives. An optimistic view is that interreligious teaching needs a more thorough training than we offered to the teachers, using only a single workshop. We have an optimistic view because two teachers *were* reporting that the four perspectives were used.

Other results from the questionnaire are that half of the teacher trainers discuss the own tradition from the foreign perspective, and that none of the teacher trainers discusses the foreign tradition from the foreign perspective. This may be why interreligious learning by students is not possible in the classroom: when teacher trainers are not able to take the foreign perspectives, how can we expect the school teachers to do so? And when school teachers are not able to take the foreign perspectives, how can we expect students to do so? We conclude that we bump up cultural and religious diversity in classrooms, because interreligious learning is problematic at multiple levels (teacher trainers, school teachers and students).

In the context of curriculum studies, this study also illustrates a gap between the intended and the attained curriculum (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, 139). The Passport exercise was meant to bridge this gap. However, we were not able to bridge this gap in a single workshop. Given that the teachers differed in the number of perspectives they reported, we expect that more training will produce better results. More exercises like this can be used in training school teachers, and in designing new lesson materials in religious and world view education.

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Abstract

“From the Depths I Call-Out to You” (Psalms - 130): Janusz Korczak’s Prayer Book - *Alone with God: Prayers of Those Who Do not Pray*

Prayer, as a turning to God as a Supreme Being before whom human beings stand and express their deepest feelings, hold internal conversations with themselves and the world and undertake serious self-accounting, is legend among the writings of the outstanding humanist moral educator of Polish Jewish origins, Janusz Korczak (1878-1942), and holds a significant place in his world-outlook, educational thought and practice. Through the interpretation of the prayer book Korczak composed, this paper explores Korczak’s conception of God and human beings and his understanding of the aims of praying.

Introduction

It is generally assumed that Korczak composed *Alone with God: Prayers for Those People Who Do Not Pray* between May, 1920 and September, 1921. It was likely published before Christmas 1921, though 1922 is the date that appears on the inside cover page of the book. Prayer, as a human turning to God as a Supreme Being who is disclosed in nature and life and before whom persons stand and express their deepest feelings, hold internal conversations with themselves and the world and undertake serious self-accounting, is legend among Korczak's writings (*Children of the Street*, 1901; *Child of the Drawing Room*, 1906; *The School of Life*, 1907-1908; *The Unlucky Week*, 1914; *Confessions of a Butterfly*, 1914; *Educational Moments*, 1919; *Ghetto Diary*, 1942). In light of this it is possible to state that the substance and style in this work, which can be compared to a personal, private prayer book, have deep roots in many other works of Korczak.

At the same time, this prayer book has singularly unique features: It is the first and only time Korczak composed and published a collection of prayers directly connected to and derived from clear auto-biographical contexts. The most general context was his frequent encounters with death and national and social loss--as a pediatrician serving children with severe diseases in the Berson-Bauman children's hospital in Warsaw (from 1904-1912); as a military doctor in the Russian army in the Japanese-Russian War (1904-1905) and in World War One (1914-1918), and as a doctor in the Polish army in the war between Poland and Communist Russia in 1919.

However, it apparently was his mother's death in February, 1920 and the specific circumstances that led to it that was the most decisive factor engendering Korczak's need to compose this book of personal prayers. After he returned to Warsaw from the Polish-Russian war in 1920, Korczak continued to serve as a doctor in a military hospital for soldiers suffering from infectious diseases. Concerned that he somehow may pass on contagious infections to the children in the orphanage he led, he decided to move into his mother's apartment in this period. Perhaps due to insufficient caution he indeed contracted typhus and infected his mother with it while she was taking care of him. He recovered from the disease



but she did not. Her death in and of itself caused him great sorrow, and very profound feelings of guilt accompanied this sorrow since he held himself directly responsible for her death. These very strong feelings, coupled with: his memory of the trauma he underwent when his father died unexpectedly from a mental disease some twenty five years before; the powerful images of death and suffering still fresh in his mind from the war from which he had just returned; the pressures and tensions of his life running back and forth from his work at the orphanage to his work at the military hospital; and the physical attacks on Jews taking place on Warsaw streets in this period that greatly distressed him, intensified his feelings of loneliness, and depression as well as generated suicidal thoughts in him. Several years passed until he was able to significantly recover from these very difficult pessimistic feelings.

The prayer book he penned is composed of eighteen prayers. His choice of this particular number of prayers can perhaps shed some light on Korczak's attachment to the Jewish religious tradition whose most central prayer is the *Shmone Esreh*, the prayer of eighteen benedictions. However, the similarity between Korczak's prayer book and the key prayer in the traditional Jewish prayer book does not go beyond the similarity of the number of prayers in it.

Many of the passages from the 18 prayers in this prayer book that will be quoted in this paper's exposition appear here for the first time in an English translation from the original version published in Polish (Silverman, 2017:105-118). These have been translated into English by Ms. Lydia Bauman.

The title of this collection of prayers *Alone with God* shows that Korczak was concerned with the individual, not the collective, because he was convinced that God's presence in the world is experienced and conceived within the subjective – context of each human being's life. The sub-title, *Prayers of Those Who Don't Pray*, is paradoxical, of course, unless it is taken to mean people who do pray but always outside of institutional religious frameworks.

It is possible to offer an interpretation of this paradox that is perhaps more incisive and captures the latter's full power. A brief review of the Spanish religious existential philosopher, Miguel De'Unamuno's (1864-1934) interpretation of this passage from Psalms 14-1: "The malevolent person hath said in his heart, there is no God" offers a useful entrance into the interpretation we have in mind. Honest, simple, innocent people generally and naturally tend to believe in God; many people endowed with scientific, empirical and more complex minds would like very much to emulate this former group of people who find and hold faith in God in relative ease. However, they encounter considerable difficulties, sometimes insurmountable ones, to embrace such a faith. In their hearts they would like to find God, but their minds discourage and prevent them from making this "leap to faith". According to Unamuno this passage in Psalms does not refer to either one of these two groups. It refers exclusively to a third group of people, and the Psalmist's wrath in this passage is directed at this group alone. This group's members are evil-minded, or simply evil people, whose very hearts are appalled by the belief in God and they furiously negate the existence of such a Supreme Being's existence in and outside of the world. In short, only mean and malicious people do not want deeply and passionately "in their hearts" the presence of God in their lives.

It is possible to propose that Korczak wanted his prayer book to address this rather large second group of people who would like to believe in the existence of a God to whom they can turn in prayer. However, they find it close to impossible to find this God.

At the same time and herein lies the paradox, the difficulties these people encounter in succeeding to pray, and the feelings of pain, suffering and the sense of missed opportunities that accompany these difficulties become a strong call to establishing a connection with God. In this light, the people praying in Korczak's prayer book are people who succeeded to find God after they undergo a long period of complete alienation from such a Supreme Being. And these people's prayers are meant to assist people like them to find a way back to believing in and encountering God in prayer.ⁱ

In light of these introductory remarks, the paper now turns to explore Korczak's understanding of God, people, the act and aims of praying and the role these play in his world-outlook, educational thought and practice. This exploration will be based mainly on the analysis and interpretation of passages from abridged versions of a selected number of the prayers from the eighteen prayers in Korczak's prayer book.

1 Korczak's conception of God

I know that the human mind is too small to comprehend God, it is just a drop in the sea. You the only Almighty, there is nothing you don't know or cannot do. Everyone turns to you, and you choose to agree or disagree. (Little Girl's Prayer)

God, when I love this child more than anything else, maybe through my love of him I love you, since you God are present, present, and present in a child--the greatest mystery of all". (Mothers Prayer)

But after all, You are not only present in a human being's tears but also in the lilac flower's scent. You are not only in the heavens but also in a kiss. (Prayer of Playfulness)

Part of You is my spirit, and so you have rebelled against yourself. I--God, challenge you, God, as my equal. (Prayer of Rebellion)

The first passage from the small child's prayer above intimates Korczak's belief that the human mind is much too tiny to comprehend the essence of God's infinite Being. Due to this Supreme Being's infinite nature, human reason does not and cannot have an answer to the question of God's nature. A firm belief in God stemming from Korczak's encounters with creation – the natural world and all the creatures inhabiting it, coupled with deep respect for human reason, and for the infinite and impenetrable nature of God are interrelated themes which appear in many of his writings and are major features of Korczak's religious world view. One of the first expressions of these themes appear in the following entries from Korczak's semi-auto-biographical work published in 1914 *Confessions of a Butterfly*. According to Korczak scholars it is likely that the reflections and confessions of the fictitious young university student, who calls himself the Butterfly, reflect Korczak's state of mind as a young adult:

January 20

This morning I really prayed the way a human being should pray...I was completely aware of what I was saying, not so much in the words, but in my thought and spirit. Only this type of praying can strengthen a person; only this type of praying becomes a reflective being. The other type of praying can be likened to the ramblings of a beggar on church steps. (As I now experience infinite harmony in God I'm no longer surprised this Being has no beginning

and no end. The cosmos and the stars, not the priest lends testimony to me of the 'Creator of worlds' existence). I've created for myself a new type of faith. Its direction is not yet entirely clear to me; but I know it is based on the purity of the human spirit. It claims God exists. What is God's nature? Human reason does not have an answer to this question. Behave fairly and do good deeds, pray not to petition God but in order to never forget Him because we can see God in everything. (146-147)

April 10

I'm afraid of the dark, afraid of hallucinations...Books seem to make me nervous but they protect me from something even worse. I have come to deny and reject ritual practices. But I still believe in God and prayer. I preserve them because it's not possible to live without them. It's not possible that human beings are a mere accident." (Ibid: 156-157)

The dialectic of the human heart's certainty of God's presence in the world and the human mind's certainty of the impenetrability of this Being makes it possible to experience God's Presence in bold anthropomorphic images, such as the ones quoted in the last three passages heading this section. For the mother who has just given birth to her first child, God, the greatest secret of all secrets, is found in her newborn baby. For the free spirited young woman who prays the prayer of playfulness God is found not only in a human being's tears but also in the sweet smell of lilac flowers; not only in the heavens but also in a kiss. And for the rebel who prays the prayer of rebellion part of God is in him so when he rebels against God, God takes part in this rebellion (See also Korczak, 1996, Vol. 2: 19-21; 24-5; 33; Korczak, 1999: 73; 77). The very fact that persons who pray in the "Korczakian spirit" discover the Divine presence in Nature (the real world and its creatures) suggests that observation, contemplation of and reflection on the world are in themselves forms of prayer.

In a way strongly resembling images of God and manners of talking to and with this Supreme Being heard in Black gospel music and spirituals, God is present to Korczak's praying people as their closest, intimate, wise and caring best Friend – God is their Friend of all friends. The people praying in most of these 18 prayers turn to God in first person single possessive pronouns, such as my Lord, my God. With very few exceptions, the adjectives they employ when they turn to address God are very friendly, soft and gentle: God is "precious", "precious beyond everything", "good", "beloved", "forgiving", "kind-hearted", "smiling", "compassionate", etc. The nature of their turning and relating to God is always direct and intimate, rarely formal or hierarchal. (Korczak, 1996, Vol. 2: 9-34).

It is possible to hypothesize that the liberty Korczak takes in employing rich, radical and rash – at times playful and ironic, usually engaging and often shocking - anthropomorphic imagery in his and his prayers' God-talk stems from the uncompromising anthropocentric nature of his religious humanism. Since rational-critical reflective human beings cannot possibly gain access into the essence of the infinite Supreme Being they call God, the best they can do is to imagine this Being in terms of the human at its best – of humanity in its finest actual achievements and highest (possible) aspirations.

Stating this in terms of an educative model we can say any human image or representation of God that assists human persons to confront more sensitively and successfully the difficulties and dilemmas life poses to them, and that motivates them towards life-constructing and ameliorating acts is not only legitimate but desirable and praiseworthy. In a way of

summarizing these points we can say Korczak's God is human beings' Great, Old, Wise and Closest Friend of Friends Who Ever-lends them support and encouragement to grow, flourish and create, and to accompany and do good to the world and to all others in it, human ones especially, and human children most especially.

In Korczak's prayer book God's presence is at once immanent – in the world - and transcendent - and beyond it. In a Rabbinical Mystical formulation “God is the Place of the world – God is everywhere - but the world is not this Supreme Being's place”. Or, the world contains God but God is not fully contained in or by it. Korczak's religious world view was panentheistic: he believed that God was in every created thing, while intimating that at the same time God existed beyond it.

Korczak's anthropomorphic images of God indicate a clear theistic, transcendent element, which is expressed in the connections he sees between nature, humankind, and their Creator, and in the importance he attributed to personal, direct prayer. This view of Korczak as a panentheist differs from those who claim that he was a pantheist, meaning that he believed that God and nature were identical. Nevertheless, the transcendental elements in his thought are thin. He believed there was just one Divine commandment: to love one's fellow person (as in Lev. 19:18)ⁱⁱ. He attributed no importance to ritual commandments, and his prayers were personal, composed of radically anthropomorphic images. Moreover, his attitude toward death was stoical, not based on an ordinary theistic system of reward and punishment.

His religious faith and the demands it made on him flowed from his understanding of Creation. Korczak learned about God from this Supreme Being's creation of the world and the creatures inhabiting it, and not from a historical revelation. His religiosity was rational and sensitive. Korczak could have adopted Terence's saying that nothing human was alien to him, as his motto. According to him, a person's willingness to take responsibility for the advancement of his fellow, to support him, underlies his humanity and is the test of his religiosity.

Korczak's faith in God was entirely based on love of God, not fear. He regarded God as people's best friend in their struggle to reduce evil and increase goodness. For him, God was the greatest good that people could imagine and seek to resemble. God was the source of human yearnings for a better world founded on compassion. God was close to all who called out to him and could be revealed to every creature, in every action and feeling, in every sentient being. Korczak called Him “the educator of educators” and “the physician of physicians.” This God made only one demand upon people: to love and honor themselves, their fellows, and nature.

This conception of the interrelationship between God and human beings offers us a key towards understanding the major existential – intellectual and emotional –source of Korczak's disinterest in and opposition to the structures and strictures of explicit religions in general and to those of Catholicism in particular (Korczak's familiarity with the latter religion was significantly more extensive than with Judaism).

To Korczak's sense and sensibilities these structures and strictures tend all-too-often to diminish, devaluate and distort at once the spiritual-rational-ethical nature of human beings and the impenetrable ineffable nature of God. Putting this more pointedly, these structures and strictures dehumanize. A detailed analysis of these prayers, would show that Korczak

located the powers of dehumanization in the following dimensions of explicit religions, especially Catholicism's orientation, organization and practices:

God as a Grand Inquisitor who induces fear in human beings, punishes them for their bad failings and fallings; bestows on them material benefits in exchange for their loyalty and good deeds. God is severe, lacks irony, never laughs, suppresses human beings' freedom of thought, and freedom to try to live life to its fullness.

God as only truly accessible to human beings through chosen intermediaries arranged hierarchically and through performing prescribed specific ritual acts. These usually uproot religion from the "Ministry" of the Interior –affairs of the heart and spirit, and transplant it into the Ministry of Finance; Religion becomes a base of political and economic power, catering to and serving the needs and interests of the religious institution's hierarchies at the expense of the people faithful to it. These official agents of God also engender a process through which the rituals, the symbols incrementally ever-gain more importance than the ethical-spiritual meanings symbolized in them. Humans become robot-like mindless ritual-dispensing 'machines' instead of spontaneous, searching, struggling, reflective rational spiritual beings.

2 Korczak's portrait of people who pray

A careful examination of Korczak's portrayal of human beings who pray in his prayer book discloses that they turn to prayer when they are ready to speak sincerely and open-heartedly with this Supreme Being. These praying people bring the totality of their feelings, sensitivities and thoughts in their prayers to God.

In light of this it is possible to say that in Korczak's eyes prayer is persons' most exposed encounter with themselves and God. Furthermore, a review of most of these people's prayers suggest that they see themselves as persons who essentially want to be good yet often find themselves overpowered by sinfulness. Consequently, they often turn to prayer to seek God's help to become better people and to resist sinful temptations.

It is possible to divide the prayers in Korczak's prayer book into two main categories: Prayers of people who are experiencing specific emotions and prayers of people who hold a specific position or status.ⁱⁱⁱ The range of the feelings expressed in the first category of prayers is very broad and extends from ecstatic joy to profound sadness, from serenity, tranquility to uncontrollable rage. Examples of such powerful emotions abound in these prayers. In the way of two examples among many more:

- The individual who prays the prayer of sadness describes the bitter sadness that envelops her:

Sadness, oh God, sadness. I took my heart out of my breast, oh God, oh God, quietly my heart is beating. Oh God, quietly, quietly my heart is beating, oh God, oh God, out of my breast I took my heart. Tear stained, sad heart of mine, sad heart, tear stained.

- The person praying the prayer of complaint castigates God for the radical sense of loneliness he experiences:

You abandoned me God, is it something I've done?
I am alone now and I lost my way.
I got lost in gloomy dusk, I got lost in the gloomy thicket of life.

You abandoned me God; how have I offended you?

Alone and troubled I wander.

...What have I done to you, God, that you should leave me now, just as my feet are tangled in thorns, and my hands and heart are bleeding?...

The prayers in this category are emotionally high-charged ones that burst out of the persons praying them as if they truly feel they can not contain their feelings on their own and that they must share them with God in the form of a prayer. The prayers in the second category are less intense and impassioned. However, they too disclose that the individual people praying them are motivated by an existential need to share their inner-most feelings, concerns, questions with God and they too approach this Supreme Being in a position of exposure, honesty and sincerity. Since they are aware that God knows everything, the individuals who pray in the spirit of Korczak – Korczakian prayers - do not want to and also know they cannot hide anything before God; they entrust this Supreme Being with their “deep-down things” feelings, thoughts and appetites. This standing in front of God in complete honesty, sincerity and openness even if some of the thoughts and feelings that are expressed are difficult, unkind and offensive ones is the common thread that ties all these different prayers together.

3 Praying: Its essence and aims

Each of the eighteen prayers in Korczak’s prayer book is unique and fascinating. While warranted, an in-depth analysis and interpretation of each of them is beyond the scope of this paper. In light of this our analysis and interpretation of them here will focus on several prominent features these prayers hold in common. Combined together these features will afford us a window into the essence and aims of prayer in Korczak’s eyes.

Prayer as Encounter

Oh, the bell ... it’s him ... I am sorry ... don’t be angry God... It’s you who controls everything after all... bye for now, dear God, thank you; we had such a good time just the two of us. (Loose Woman’s Prayer)

... I will not send you long prayers oh God. Nor countless sighs.... I have no wish to win your favors, or solicit lofty gifts...And yet I will send one heartfelt request, oh God. I have one gem, which I will not entrust to fellow man. In my silent humility you may barely notice me, but in my request I stand before you, God--as a demand of fire... Give children good fortune, lend help to their efforts, and blessings for their hardships...and as a down payment of my request, accept my only asset: sadness. Sadness and work. (The School Teacher’s Prayer)

Both the title itself *Alone with God* (a person alone with God) of Korczak’s prayer book and the sampling of these two passages from the prayers heading the sub-section above lend clear testimony that in Korczak’s eyes more than anything else praying affords human beings the opportunity to encounter God and hold a personal, unmediated, meaningful conversation with this Supreme Being. The individual praying aspires for the moment when in the midst of her tumultuous life she at once finds and can face God directly and openly share all that stirs in her heart with this Supreme Being.

The view of praying as an intimate encounter generates several perspectives on its nature: Prayer occurs whenever and wherever a person encounters God. Therefore, in depth observation of and reflection on nature entails an encounter with God's immanence in it and often becomes a form of praying. Indeed, many of Korczak's own prayers, and many of the prayers offered by characters in his writings (fictional, non-fictional and educational) can be read and understood as odes to creation (Korczak, 2003; 1999; 1998; 1996- Vol. 1; 1996, Vol. 2). The following passage from Korczak's Ghetto Diary in which he contrasts his world view to Nietzsche's can serve as a very strong example of such an ode to creation:

I intend to refute a deceitful book by a false prophet. This book has done a great deal of harm - Also sprach Zarathustra...I had the honor to speak, with Zarathustra. His wise mysteries...have landed you poor philosopher, behind the dark walls and the heavy bars of a lunatic asylum. "Nietzsche died insane, at odds with life!" In my book I want to prove that he had died painfully at odds with truth... For in the hour of reckoning I am not inside a solitary cell of the saddest hospital in the world but surrounded by butterflies and grasshoppers, and glowworms, and I hear a -concert of crickets and a soloist high up in the sky—the skylark.

Merciful Lord!

Thank you, Merciful Lord, for the meadow and the bright sunsets, for the refreshing -evening breeze after a hot day of toil and struggle. Thank you, Merciful Lord, for having arranged so wisely to provide flowers with fragrance, glowworms with the glow, and make the stars in the sky sparkle. How joyous old age is. -How delectable the silence. How sweet the repose. "Man is so immeasurably blessed with Thy gifts, whom Thou hast created and saved" (<http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf:15-16>).^{iv}

Prayer as a Pouring-Out of the Soul

Each of the prayers in Korczak's prayer book expresses and fulfills a specific need or set of needs of the individual who is praying it. At the same a pouring out of one's soul before God takes place in all of them. The person who prays in the spirit of Korczak – the Korczakian prayer - turns to God with the objective in mind of making this Supreme Being into a partner with whom she can share her inner self, all the stirrings of her soul. She tells God what disturbs her and what are her understanding and feelings about herself and her life. It is possible to propose that in this context prayer realizes a profound human psychological need: To unwind and share the cacophony of painful, disturbing and joyful feelings in one's inner-self with a Being outside of oneself. In this type of turning the person praying only wants God to listen to her cries, to serve as a silent sounding board for her – nothing more and nothing less than this. (See the *Prayer of Sadness* and the *Little Girls Prayer*).

Prayer is not a Business Transaction Yet...

The notions that true prayer is characterized by an intimate meeting and sharing with God, a genuine pouring out of the soul in front of this Supreme Being, and that seeking rewards, benefits, favors etc. from God literally destroys the purity of praying's meaning and aims appears in a considerable number of the prayers in Korczak's prayer book. However, a further reading of these prayers intimates that the Korczakian prayers find themselves conflicted and ambivalent about the total elimination of the possibility of soliciting favors from God. On one hand they want to encounter God unconditionally without any "business strings attached." On the other hand, they know, or feel and believe that God is the source of Good in the world and that this Supreme Being has the power to help and assist them.

This conflict coupled by ambivalence remains and is never completely resolved. However, several of the persons praying seem to have come up with a partial solution to it. This passage from the Loose Woman's prayer paves the way for it:

How terribly people bother you: everyone wants something, everyone feels entitled to something from you. How do you cope with all this? Sometimes I think that you don't listen, but how can that be? I resolved never to ask for anything. It doesn't seem very nice somehow: to love you, supposedly, and suddenly a request, a petition. And yet, I might not ask, but secretly think that just because of that, you will fulfill my wish.

Though Korczakian prayers know on principle that it is wrong to seek gifts or favors from God, they sometimes pursue this course in the hope that precisely because their prayers are truthful ones, not motivated by business-like considerations, God will respond favorably to their requests and will refrain from 'seeing' it as an impure or contaminated prayer.

4: Prayers' Role in Korczak's World-View, Educational Practice and Theory

As discussed in section 1 above, Korczak's world view was based on the way he experienced and understood creation. Korczak understood God's Creation in terms of two endless, recurring, and interdependent processes of life: growth and decay, dissolution and death. Korczak found and identified God's relationship to the world and humankind in these processes, and his personal relationship to God emerged out of his responses to them. Indeed, his writing is shot through with references to these processes (See Korczak, 1999; 1998: 357-360; Korczak, 2003: 209)

The expression of radical amazement (Heschel, 1955) at these processes is the thread that binds Korczak's three major responses to these processes. First, this radical amazement inspired his belief in the human capacity of growth, giving him seemingly infinite strength to fortify this capacity in the people he encountered, in particular in the children he educated. This response is at the heart of his strong belief in the possibility of re-forming young people who came from difficult and oppressive backgrounds, whose patterns of behavior were anti-social, so that they would adopt positive, productive, and ethical patterns of behavior. Second, it assisted him in dealing with the inherent, natural limitations that impede human growth, providing him with consolation in response to these limitations. Third, it led him to adopt an attitude of stoical equanimity in the face of the inexorable destructive forces in nature.

All three of these responses inform the core of 'Ameliorative Compassion', the foundation and overarching guiding principle of Korczak's educational theory and practice. After briefly presenting its main features, it will be possible to proceed to demonstrate strong similarities between them and major features of the desirable relationship between God and human beings disclosed in Korczak's conception of prayer.

A pedagogy based on ameliorative compassion includes:

1. Viewing the difficult actions of a pupil as an expression of the experience of his present self;
2. According respect to the pupil's present self, including a tolerant and patient attitude toward negative behavior and traits;
3. Pedagogical forgiveness, respecting the pupil and accepting her as she is, building relations of trust between pupil and educator, which are a necessary condition for

- having any educational influence on a pupil;
4. Offering the pupil opportunities for action that will challenge her to improve herself and the society in which she lives;
 5. Calling upon the pupils to acquire the tools and skills necessary for self-improvement and social improvement, to practice them and to apply them in life.

Ameliorative compassion enables the educator to help students overcome their innate and socially conditioned limitations and become better people. However, the educator must also be aware of the limitations of this compassionate relationship itself, as expressed in Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer: "Father, give us courage to change what must be altered, serenity to accept what cannot be helped, and the insight to know the one from the other."

According to Korczak, ameliorative compassion and its concomitant, pedagogical forgiveness must characterize the worthy educator's attitude toward the pupil and his ways of working with her. The worthy educator truly respects the pupil and is involved in her life, caring for her and sincerely desiring to help her overcome her difficulties and achieve her goals. Hence, the pupil feels that the educator is not interested in judging her. The non-judgmental, compassionate educator deals with the pupil in the here and now.

The parallels between the features of these worthy educators who build relationships with their charges based on: attentive listening to their needs, struggles, joys and problems; genuinely caring for them; treating them with respect and compassion; patient acceptance of their shortcomings; refraining from judging, indicting and punishing them for their misdeeds; and at the same time encouraging them to choose paths of self-re-formation, and between God's relationship to individuals who are ever-turning to pray to this Supreme Being are or at least appear to be quite apparent.

In this context it is worth remembering that Korczak's God is an extremely user-friendly Supreme Being. Korczak calls this God "the educator of educators" and "the physician of physicians." This God ever-encourages human beings to grow, flourish and create, and to try to do good to the world and to all the creatures who inhabit it. This God issues one and only one command: My children - love your neighbor (see end note iii.).

Concluded-Yet-Ever-to-be-Completed

End Notes

ⁱ I owe this interpretation as well as several others in this paper to Ms. Limor Reiz, a student from the Hebrew university who took a seminar I gave on Korczak's Legacy, fall semester, 2016, and wrote her final course paper on Korczak's prayer book..

ⁱⁱ Korczak's play *The Senate of Madmen*, was first performed in the Athanaeum theatre, the most important workers' theatre in Warsaw on October 1, 1931. This play is set in a mental asylum. In its seventh scene one of its saner patients, the old man, shares a fable with a young boy named Yanek about "How God took to His Feet and Ran away from the sanctuary the townspeople built for Him." It is possible to locate Korczak's conception of God and vision of the desirable relationship between human beings and God in this fable. In God's appearance in front of the townspeople the only words spoken out loud by this Supreme Being to them are issued in the form of the following command: "My children - love your neighbor." (Silverman, 2017:123)

ⁱⁱⁱ The appendix to this paper contains eleven prayers from the eighteen prayers in Korczak's prayer book. These prayers were translated into English from Polish for the first time by Ms. Lydia Bauman. And they were abridged and edited by the author of this paper. The *Prayer of Sadness; Complaint; Rebellion; Reconciliation* and the *Joyful prayer* belong to the first category mentioned above: Prayers of people who are experiencing specific emotions. *The Mother's, the Loose Woman's, Young Child's, Old Man's, Little Girl's and School Teacher's* respective prayers belong to the second category mentioned above: Prayers of people who hold a specific position or status.

^{iv} In this last line Korczak alludes to a passage in a church hymn of F. Karpinski.

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Alone with God: Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray

With prayer I fastened together the whispered secrets of your
soul.

I know that with and through God, each and every
being's life must bind world's vast expanse. I know. I am
certain of it--so help me God.

Mother's Prayer

Bent over you, my darling child, why so precious to me, my little one?--Like so many, I know, I believe, believe, believe that unseen amongst thousands, I will know your voice, unheard, I will know your lips suckling at my breast--you, my only one.

Without words I understand you, without a sound you'll rouse me from the deepest sleep--with but a look, a wish.

My child, life's true essence, you are to me a wistful memory, a sweet yearning, my hope and my consolation.

Be happy my child. Forgive me, God for not addressing you, if I pray it's in fear that in a jealous fit you will harm him. I fear to put my trust even in you my Lord--for you take children from their mothers and mothers away from their children. Tell me, why do you act so?--this is not a reproach, only a question my Lord.

Forgive me, God, that my love for him is greater than my love for you - for I brought him into the world, as did you, my God: we share the responsibility and jointly carry the blame for his life and even now for his suffering. We must be vigilant.

He suffers - crying.

God, when I love this child more than anything else, maybe through my love of him I love you, since you God are present, present, and present in a child--the greatest mystery of all.

I do not believe in sin. If there is sin then my love would be sinful, but can a mother's love of her child be a sin? ...

Give him happiness, my God, so that he will not complain that we have granted him life. Such happiness is unknown to me but you know what it is; it is your duty to know it. Therefore, you must provide it!

See, I'm searching, bent over you, my darling child, and asking with all my heart, do you understand--will you understand? --Tell me. --Give me a hint by blinking your eyelids, through the movement of your tiny hand--give me a sign that no one else will understand other than the two of us: God and me, your mother. --Tell me you won't have complaints against life and me; tell me, my dear child, you hear my heartfelt prayer.

Loose Woman's Prayer

My dear God, it is so long since we spoke. Perhaps I don't pray that often because I dislike kneeling. Yes, I'll put away my cigarette, but I will sit on the sofa looking at flowers. Surely you will not be offended, the Kind, Loving God that you are. You never once harmed me. And yet I have been wicked many times, disobedient. I have so many sins.

Just look. I want to pray, and already a sinful thought enters my head. Because I felt like saying:

- Sit here Old Man, next to me--closer--do not be afraid, I won't do anything--unless you want me to. Such a sin, such an unclean thought.

I am so strange: I never harmed anyone, not consciously. I'm quick to apologize, and if I cannot apologize, I weep even though I know my eyes will be red and swollen. Fine--let them be red, let me be ugly since I am so wicked...wicked...wicked...

I am pretty - is that not so? Nothing wrong I think in my speaking the truth? You yourself created me and your will is sacred. Sometimes I even wish I was ugly, not quite ugly but a little bit. No doubt I would have been wiser, more obedient, better. Well, maybe not better. Am I good? --Tell me. What a pity I cannot see you, or I would have sidled up close to you, batted my eyelashes at you, and you would have smiled and said--"Don't be so silly" You would, wouldn't you?

You don't answer me and I would love to know why you create ugly people. I would make everyone beautiful; both women and men, even them. But I will not discuss men with you - you know why. --See: I 'm not jealous. If all women were pretty, the best loved among them would probably be the cleverest ones. And I am not so clever. A pity.

I read only novels, and even then not too carefully. As for poems, I don't even like them. Though I don't believe you get clever from reading books. You have to be born that way.

Dear, kind God, I like you so much. Sometimes I'd like to make a sacrifice for you. I do give to charity but that's not it. Do you remember that time I visited a woman sick with typhus, in order to prove to her that I trust in you; I was so scared. Not of death, no, but after typhus I know people lose their hair and when sick one can say a lot of unnecessary things.

How terribly people bother you: everyone wants something, everyone feels entitled to something from you. How do you cope with all this? Sometimes I think that you don't listen, but how can that be? No wonder I don't know--how can I? It seems to me not even priests really know. I resolved never to ask for anything. It doesn't seem very nice somehow: to love you, supposedly, and suddenly a request, a petition. And yet, I might not ask, but secretly think that just because of that, you will fulfill my wish.

You wouldn't like it if I wasn't pretty either, would you? You find me attractive, admit it. Sure, not in the way that people do; but are you not -pleased when you manage to create a thing of beauty?

How stupid of me, is it possible for God not to succeed in something? Everything is like it is because you want it so.

You came up with so many flowers. And some of them quite sinful. A red rose, the highly scented red variety, that's a sinful flower. Perhaps it wasn't you who created them, but the devil himself? No, it cannot be: as if you wouldn't be powerful enough to make sinful flowers fade? Poor you, my Grandpa.

I would so like to help you sometimes, lighten your load, cheer you up. Because, really, to be always thinking of poverty, of chastity, of the orphaned. I hate having fillings, but still I

went to the dentist to have a healthy tooth filled; I wanted to mortify my flesh; and that ass laughed at me. In truth, I also started laughing, although at first I was mad. He probably told all his friends. Ugh what cock-roaches men are. I hate them.

I know, you tell people to forgive. I do forgive them, but it's even worse. Cheats, ingrates the lot of them--a hundred, a thousand times worse than us.

Oh, the bell ... it's him ... I am sorry ... don't be angry God... It's you who controls everything after all... bye for now, dear God, thank you; we had such a good time just the two of us.

Prayer of Sadness

What sadness oh God, oh God, what sadness.

Grey sadness. Oh God, oh God, grey sadness.

Neither sounds nor colors, oh God, neither colors nor sounds.

Sadness, oh God, sadness.

I took my heart out of my breast, oh God, oh God, quietly my heart is beating.

Oh God, quietly, quietly my heart is beating, oh God, oh God, out of my breast I took my heart.

Tear stained, sad heart of mine, sad heart, tear stained.

Black bird with white wings. Oh God, white are the wings of the black bird.

Thick mist, black bird, white wings, oh God, white wings, black bird, thick mist, oh God.

Sadness, oh God, sadness.

The sun was out, it was, but is no longer, oh God, it is no longer, no longer, the sun was out, oh God.

Silence, sadness, sadness, silence.

Silence and sadness, a coffin rocking upon a black wave. Black butterflies drinking black dew off black flowers. Never will man sing again, never will a child smile, the last bell has cracked, all the world's clocks have stopped, the last tower lies in ruins, the last star was extinguished - for whom would it shine?

Nothing, there is nothing oh God, there is nothing.

I open my eyes wide - I look, look, look, God, there is nothing, I see nothing, I listen but I hear nothing, neither a whisper, nor a sigh.

Grey Lord of silent world, God, I feel around me those black birds with white wings, those black butterflies drinking black dew out of black chalices.

Such sadness, God, such sadness.

Neither colors, nor sounds, God, God, neither sounds nor colors, nor tears.

Prayer of a Young Child

Dear God, Sophie did a wee. --Sophie is bad; Sophie did a wee.

Mummy cross with Sophie--bad, bad girl. --Mummy is smacking. --bad mummy. Don't smack. -

Don't smack mummy. --Don't smack Sophie. --Arm hurting. Afraid--afraid. --Arm hurting, God.

Sophie scared. --Bad mummy, such a naughty girl.

Sophie loves mummy and daddy.

Where's the wee? --Tummy wee. --I won't do it again mummy.

Why did you do it, why did you?

Warm down the legs--see, see, what is this? Yuck, panties yuck, stockings yuck, shoes yuck. --Mummy is cross with Sophie.

Bad mummy, bad doll, bad dog, bad such nice dog. Ah, look little dog, here is a potty, use it.

Sophie is good, don't smack, mummy.

My God, where tummy? Sophie afraid tummy, Sophie afraid doctor.

Don't be scared Sophie, mummy--not cross, not smacking, mummy will buy, because Sophie is good, good good... Sophie loves God.

Prayer of Complaint

You abandoned me God, is it something I've done?
I am alone now and I lost my way.
I got lost in gloomy dusk, I got lost in the gloomy thicket of life.
You abandoned me God; how have I offended you?
Alone and troubled I wander.
A light flashes; who knows, a dwelling, or the deceptive glint of a firefly over a pond?
I see a spring; but who knows, might it be but a mirage of the senses?
My lips are parched, despite the darkness which bakes like sunlight, or maybe freezes,
perhaps the fire comes from within me to fight the dark.
I know not.

What have I done to you, God, that you should leave me now, just as my feet are tangled in thorns, and my hands and heart are bleeding?

I call: "People!" - no answer. I call: "Mother!" Still nothing. At last I call; "God!" nothing still - alone.

Give me an Angel of Sadness. It's not joy I ask for, nor green peaks, azure dreams, or heavenly beams of light. Sadness at least, for how am I to wander alone, companionless again, wading and bleeding my way through darkness?

To myself I complain, to my soul I confide my grievance against you, my grievance, God.

I am not asking - but demanding from you, my God.

With you I set out on my path, am I now to walk alone, abandoned when I'm lost and weary and when in the thicket I know not the way?

Do you remember God, I trusted you, have you forgotten, God, those naively whispered exchanges, those softly confessed secrets, those doleful tears shed for you?

It was not reproach but disbelief, not doubt, but anxiety, not anger but entreaty I felt when I saw you leaving me, receding, disappearing.

With not a word.

I look within me for blame, but none is so great that rather than admonish me or warn me, you should want to leave me altogether.

And if you should come back now, what will I say to you, what will you reply?

I lost my way in gloomy dusk, and God went somewhere far away, leaving me alone.

I hang my complaint from a necklace of tears upon my chest. It is your fault, God.

Prayer of Rebellion

Don't hold me in contempt Almighty God, as I myself disdain the mockery that is my life, for only death can penetrate my armor, and I scoff at death.

I--so many bucketfuls of dirty water, slop clothed in skin. That is how you made me, almighty, just for fun.

You gave thought wings; but the snout of life gnawed at the wings, smeared shit on the wounds. Hey, I could have reached heaven on those wings, but heaven is only for your meekly adoring flunkies.

But there is neither submission nor devotion in me, only rebellion. Not aggression, but defensive pride.

Standing tall, I don't ask for mercy and I don't fear punishment.

I am a world all to myself, I am the master of my world and I am its God. I am my own command, my own signal to action, my own will to create and destroy. I have my own suns and my own thunder within me.

My will be done.

I'll make blood boil white hot, I'll set all bells of lust ringing, I will weave a single thunderbolt out of all sinful desires, smallest whimsies even, I will fill thoughts with poison--I will light a great furnace on the altar of my revolt against you and lay myself on it. This is what I want.

I don't want old age, munificent gift of steady descent into the grave, the charitable offering of slow death.

I am a slave in revolt, who has but one remaining freedom, the sole word of resistance--no!

I want not, I will not--I will not listen--I do not give in.

Part of you is my spirit, and so you have rebelled against yourself. I--God, challenge you, God, as my equal. I pit an Almighty God of mockery against a God of revenge: I will crush you, tear you apart, trash you within me.

So that you disown and punish me--and let me remind you--burn in the fires of hell.

You are the Almighty, yet baseness triumphs, taunting and hounding homeless Virtue.

You are the Almighty, yet powerless Truth wrestles with the voracious ocean of lies.

Justice covered her eyes.

All is baseness and lies in man's dual nature, all except tooth and claw.

So, I growl at you like a dog, a predator ready to jump, I long to sink my teeth into you--I measure the distance with bloodshot eyes--and charge--into nothingness.

That's why I believe that you have created and controlled us to court -blasphemy.

Prayer of Reconciliation

I found you my God, and I'm happy like a lost child who sees the figure of a loved one at a distance. I found you my God, and I am happy like a child who, woken from a bad dream, greets a gently smiling face with a happy smile. --I found you my God, like a child left in the care of an unkind stranger, who breaks free and after many hardships and adventures shelters at last in the embrace of a beloved person, listening to the song of their heart.

Who is to blame, that absorbed in carefree amusement, I distanced myself from you, my God? --that a market stall of trinkets, raucous music, monkey on a chain and a bright throng at a fair seduced a frivolous soul?

Who is to blame, that in pursuit of the forest berry, hopeful that just beyond those trees he will find so-so many--all the sweeter for being unexpected, all the sweeter for being gathered by his own industrious hand--too far into the treacherous forest will the lad wander.

Who is to blame that, naively preferring a lively sight over a dull one, and the clamor of a dancehall to softly whispered secrets, I should search out illusory happiness with my eager lips and heart?

One tear of anxiety at being alone in a crowd---and here you are with me, together again my God.

The night is dark. But under the eyelids of the sleeper much is happening. A swarm of frightful comets, grimacing faces, fires, blood, gales, whirlpools--one moment I swim through murky waters, the next, I chase a thunder--laden cloud on strangely heavy wings, then again a red-head sinks her teeth into me, or a flame with a friend's face drags me into a swamp; I want to scream--a cold hand grasps my throat - slowly a bell - or is it a clock? --rings out.

A single whimper--that I feel helpless--and we are together--you are with me.

Who is to blame that in a deranged moment the mind was filled with ghostly ravings?...

And here is the worst ...

That your bright presence, God, was darkened by the shadows of your deceitful devotees.

Through a dark thicket I was forced to wade

Old Man's Prayer

Lord God, just Judge--I am sorry to leave this life, but it is time to die. --Not many of my peers still remain on this earth--cemeteries are full of them. --First went masters and -venerable ones, then elder brothers, then friends. One was struck down by a thunderbolt, another, sleep closed his weary eyes for eternity. Of some it is said "God's will", of others "ah well, it was time--he was old"

- I know, we must make way for the newborn, the young--they've grown up and are hungry for action. For us, the old ones, silence. And which is the deepest silence if not that of the grave? --Often I speak with them at length--the living with the dead, about the good old days. Were they good? Would I want to start that journey again? Perhaps out of an unmanly fear?

Lord God, Just Judge--I am sorry to leave this life, its remaining, dying embers of warmth and happiness. I walk with short steps, chew my food unhurriedly, speak quietly, my blood courses slowly through my veins--maybe it will last longer? --It is so nice to look at the green vegetation and the sun; how deep and how abundant everything is around me, how momentous and wise.

The sun and vegetation--do the young understand? --they think that's how it should be, there is no other way. They don't understand the meaning of death the reaper, they do not know humility, the meaning of--the end. In vain their ambitions and grievances, their enterprises and their settling of scores--they don't know the meaning of death the reaper, the meaning of - the end.

We are closer to you Just God, they are in a hurry, they have no time. But we don't know either, until you tell life's last secret in the first moment of death; us, children before a baby's tiny coffin. --I'm not in a hurry to know, it will come--and soon.

I am not afraid, only sorry: so much still to see, to read, experience, everything so new, so interesting, perhaps because it is seen for the last time.

Thank you, Just Judge, for my advanced age. I've come to know valedictory beams of sunlight and birdsong, I've come to know old man's love and hope. Everything old is changed again, renewed. You too, God--are changed, heralding unfamiliar good news.

God, --Just Judge, it is time--I know--could I but prolong farewell's warm embrace--for this new and unfamiliar journey?

Little Girl's Prayer

Omnipotent God, I made a promise to mummy that I won't fuss anymore, I made a promise that I'll be good. --It is easy to make a promise but how to keep it? I'm scared. I will try--I really want to. But do we always get what we want? So many times I said : "--from tomorrow I'll change". Maybe this time it will really be the last time!

I'll keep my promise--I want to. But help me, Almighty God.

You created the world which turns around its axis and around the sun. You created the equator, the meridians and the poles. You created peninsulas, capes, bays and isthmi--mountains, plateaux and lowlands. You created so many mammals, so many plants and so many types of granite and quartz. At your command there are woods full of beasts, at one wave of your hand rivers burst their banks and kings gather their loot or put down their weapons. Nothing happens without your knowledge or without your consent.

I know that the human mind is too small to comprehend God, it is just a drop in the sea. You the only Almighty, there is nothing you don't know or cannot do. Everyone turns to you, and you choose to agree or disagree.

I believe with all my heart in your mind and your Kindness, and if I don't understand everything it's because I am too young and too stupid. Forgive me God for my blasphemy but I must be honest, in any case there are no secrets from you, because you know my thoughts. --So God Almighty, if you want all people to be good and virtuous, why don't you create them good and virtuous? --Why do you let them sin? --if you gave people a stronger will, so that whatever they decided to do they could do it. I try, I try so hard, but it doesn't help. My mummy worries and so do I--Sometimes it's about something very small, but still I can't give way. Perhaps it's because at home and at school, not everything is good and virtuous. I experienced many bad things not through my own fault, but because of lies and filth, which fill the world.

- It is true that I am my own responsibility, but all those lies, gossip and insincerity just spoil things.

God Almighty, I don't wish to be fickle, I want to do what I am told--but give me the will to persevere--help me--give me just a tiny bit of your omnipotence.

You created the world in one day! So now just say this "Let children be obedient" and let thy will be done.

Joyful Prayer

Radiant God.

I raised my arms, eyes open wide, breast thrust forward, lips smiling, forehead turned heavenwards. I look, I wait, I listen. Through my veins flows not blood but... what? Joy!

What would you like, radiant God, in return for your generous gifts?

I don't need wings ; the ground is not holding me down. Let it: clouds pass above me and around me a thousand greens, innocent and honest and proud. A brook is murmuring.

I drink in the air-- "to your health, God"

I stand before you in my festive robe, festooned in silk of solar threads, the rainbow wrapped around my waist, my breath longing for song.

I will not sing; I do not know a song worthy enough.

Joyful awareness that I know, calm peace of mind that I can--sweet sense that I feel. Without insecurities, I am strong, without doubts I am good. I shall be so forever...

Are you not happy yet? Young diver, are you not able yet to bring up from the depths your own Sun, to meet that of God? Can you not hear inside yourself, young knight, the cries and sounds of God's battle for you? You will!

You are my brother, God, you're not my Father.

I lose myself in the joyful tale of your life.

Many paths, each mapped by a different desire.

I believe!

So many truths are born within me.

The truth that I see. The truth that I have a heart. The truth of my thought and of cherry blossom.

The truth that I will hum, --that I will shout.

With enamored whisper of my eyes I kiss the flurry of joyful truths.

- To your health, truth!

Tell me God--how can I repay you for those lavish gifts of yours? For the crystals of snow and bubbles of soap and the swathe of eternity and of heavens?

Yes, yes! --the heart is beating and in the unfathomable depths of the soul, one by one a new feeling is born.

Conception and death are both a joy to me.

Rung by rung with joyful effort I climb towards you, sleep's silent sister, white death, virgin--queen.

Into your hands.

Swarm of humming birds, flowers, butterflies alighted upon me. I brush then off with playful joy, clap my hands to startle them, catch them and throw them up into the air, without damaging their wings or bending their feathers, without crushing their petals or brushing off the fine colored powder. Bells and chalices soar, fall, soon they grow into the earth, and breathe all around with a new flame of flight.

Arms aloft, lips smiling.

What do you wish for, Lord, in return for your generous gifts?

The School Teacher's Prayer

... I will not send you long prayers oh God. Nor countless sighs.... I will not bow low before you or make rich offerings in praise of your glory. I have no wish to win your favors, or solicit lofty gifts.

My thoughts have no wings which could bear my song to heaven.

My words are without color or scent or flowers. I am tired and heavy-eyed.

My sight is dimmed, and my back bent under the heavy burden of duty.

And yet I will send one heartfelt request, oh God. I have one gem, which I will not entrust to fellow man. I fear man will not understand, will not sympathize, will not pay heed, will laugh it off.

In my silent humility you may barely notice me, but in my request I stand before you, God--as a demand of fire. I may whisper inaudibly, but I make my appeal in a voice of unbending will.

My commanding eye takes aim beyond the clouds.

Standing tall I make my demand, as it is not just for me.

Give children good fortune, lend help to their efforts, and blessings for their hardships.

Lead them not down the easiest paths, but the most beautiful.

And as a down payment of my request, accept my only asset: sadness.

Sadness and work.

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Black Millennial Encounters with God through the *Coloring Book* of Chance the Rapper

ABSTRACT

Millennials are creating spaces beyond traditional communities of faith where they can encounter God on their own terms, spaces like the music of their generation. For many Black Millennials, Hip-hop music represents an alternative space where they can experience God. This paper will examine how *Coloring Book*, the 2016 mixtape of Chance the Rapper, a Grammy award-winning Black Millennial Hip-hop artist from Chicago, serves as an alternative space for Black Millennials to encounter God.

*The ancestors must be laughing.
 How could we have forgotten so easily that prophets arise in every generation?*¹

I. INTRODUCTION

While listening to a national morning news show, I was introduced to Chance the Rapper, a highly acclaimed Black Millennial Hip-hop artist, social activist, and philanthropist from Chicago. He was singing “Summer Friends,” a track from his most recent mixtape entitled *Coloring Book*. The lyrics reflected an impressive depth of vulnerability and maturity. This young adult lamented that violence and death had/might claim/ed his friends during the summer. He spoke of streets and neighborhoods that produced so much summer fun, but also brought violence that targeted Black and brown bodies. The track also included words of divine benediction that called on God’s presence to cover and protect. When I listened later to the entire mixtape, it became clear that Chance was intentionally using Hip-Hop music and his lyrics to say something about God and his God encounters as a Black male Millennial in the United States. Additionally, his mixtape made room for his listeners to encounter God with him.

According to a 2016 report, there are 83.1 million Millennials in the U.S. and 14% or 11.5 million of these Millennials are Black.² It is well-documented that the numbers of Millennials opting out of organized religion is growing. Many are leaving traditional faith communities to create spaces beyond traditional mainline communities of faith where they can

¹ Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 179.

² Cheryl Grace and Saul Rosenbery, *Young, Connected and Black: African-American Millennials are Driving Social Change and Leading Digital Advancement*. 2016 Nielson Report, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2016/young-connected-and-black.html>.

encounter God on their own terms.³ Predominantly Black Christian churches have not been exempt from this trend.⁴ One of the alternative space beyond established mainline churches that Black Millennials are meeting and experiencing God is in Hip-hop music, a genre that emerged in the 70's as a cultural production of Black and brown young adults in New York city. This paper will examine how *Coloring Book*, the 2016 Hip-hop mixtape of Chance the Rapper, functions as a site beyond traditional religious congregations for Black Millennial encounters with God.⁵

Chance uses his music to creatively intersect God-talk with the current realities of being a Black young adult in the United States.⁶ He, along with some other Black Millennial Hip-hop artists, is generating sounds, rhythms, and language that resonate with many Black Millennials generally and resonate particularly with those seeking to claim space and speech to experience God. Unquestionably, Hip-hop music and God-talk are not strangers. Hip-hop music flows from a larger history of Black music in the U.S. The music of Chance merits treatment in that it points to the possibility that Hip-hop music like his might soon become a more prominent site for Black Millennial encounters with God than mainline churches. Such a shift has present and future implications for religious education.

Black Millennials are being highlighted in this paper because the particularities of their experiences tend to get less attention in larger studies. Current trends of Black and brown young adults in the U.S. not only leaving mainline traditional churches, but 'disappearing' through

³ While acknowledging the trend among Millennials of leaving mainline denominational congregations, I do not assume that their disengagement from congregations means disengagement from God. I assert that increasing numbers of Millennials are encountering God by identifying and designing alternative spaces where this is happening or can happen. cf. Angie Thurston and Casper ter Kuile, *How We Gather* accessed at <https://casperth.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/how-we-gather.pdf> and *Something More* accessed at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/556cec5be4b0d8dc09b0ba87/t/570e56b32b8dde0beebd7ca/1460557497838/Something+More.pdf>.

⁴ Perspectives vary regarding Black Millennial flight from mainline churches. This paper aligns with those who claim that predominantly Black churches have not been exempt from Millennial flight. cf. Bryan T. Calvin, "Why Aren't Black Millennials Leaving the Church?," in *Relevant Magazine*, August 21, 2013, <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/church/why-aren't-black-millennials-leaving-church/>; Rahlel Tesfamariam, "Are Black Millennials Being Pushed Out of the Church?," *Washington Post*, August 27, 2013 accessed September 1, 2017, http://wapo.st/13XdD84?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.5ca10964bb9d; D. Danyelle Thomas, "Exodus: Why Black Millennials Are Leaving the Church," *Unfit Christian*, May 11, 2017 accessed at <https://www.theunfitchristian.com/black-millennials-church/>; Anyabwile, Thabiti, "Black Millennials and the Black Church," October 1, 2013, accessed September 1, 2017, <http://thefrontporch.org/2013/10/black-millennials-and-the-black-church/>.

⁵ I am not claiming that all Black Millennials listen to Hip-hop music, that all Hip-hop music provides God encounters in the way that the music of Chance the Rapper does, or that all Black Millennials are seeking God encounters. Rather, I want to begin a conversation about how the God encounters in one Black Millennial Hip-hop artist's music can be instructive for examining God encounters in Hip-hop music for those Black Millennials who listen to Hip-hop music, particularly those who are seeking God beyond traditional religious spaces.

⁶ cf. Jon C. Rogowski and Cathy J. Cohen, *Black Millennials in America: Documenting the Experiences, Voices and Political Future of Young Black Americans*. Black Youth Project, November 4, 2015, <http://www.blackyouthproject.com> and The GenForward Survey reports at <http://genforwardsurvey.com>.

violent deaths, incarceration, suicide,⁷ or voluntary withdrawal has immediate and long-term consequences, e.g., removing potential from Black churches and communities temporarily and/or permanently. The urgency of attending to Black Millennials, their spirituality and overall wellness, requires more than a cursory review by ad hoc congregational committees.

I focus on Hip-hop music as a means of privileging Black Millennial voices and experiences given that their voices currently are the most prominent in the genre. By doing this, I position Black Millennials as subjects rather than objects and thus, view them as teachers, cultural guides, and primary informants about their spirituality. Additionally, while Hip-hop music's listeners and practitioners today extend beyond urban Black young adults, it is the most listened to music of Black Millennials.⁸

II. ENCOUNTERS

In Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, a community of enslaved Blacks gathered regularly in a space called the Clearing, a space situated beyond their oppressors' gaze and control. There, Baby Suggs Holy, their elder and religious leader, exhorted them to love their whole selves.⁹ They sacralized an open field through their communal presence, their music and dance rituals, and their claim of divine presence with them. They related individually and communally; different and yet bound together through the shared experience of enslavement. In that space, non-traditional and unauthorized, they encountered God and one another.

For the purposes of this paper, I use the concept of encounter in an expansive way to point toward experiences, gatherings, and relating that bear the potential for transformation similar to the Clearing in Morrison's novel. I frame 'encounter' in terms of intentional, purposeful relating that requires authenticity, transparency, and exchange. Encounter can include room for confrontation and is not limited to physical space or face-to-face interactions between persons. Thus, it can happen through technology, written or spoken word, and through music.

Hip-hop music like *Coloring Book* facilitates encounters with God in the above sense through its lyrics, beats and rhythms, and narratives that resonate with many Black Millennials. *Coloring Book* models transparency, contextual relevance, and collaboration. Like its Hip-hop ancestors, it is music through which today's Black young adults communicate their joys, pains, and societal critiques, sometimes with the raw honesty of the biblical psalmists and prophets.¹⁰ Chance's music draws his listeners into a worldview wherein God-talk has been integrated with real-world talk. He grants listeners permission to experience God without fear of critique.

⁷ The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2014 that the top three causes for death among 15-24 year olds and 25-44 year olds was accidental, suicide, and homicide. U.S. Centers for Disease Control, "10 Leading Causes of Death by Age Group, United States – 2014," at https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading_causes_of_death_by_age_group_2014-a.pdf.

⁸ Jessica McKinney, "Hip-Hop Becomes Most Popular Genre in Music for the First Time in U.S. History," *Vibe*, July 18, 2017, https://www.vibe.com/2017/07/hip-hop-popular-genre-nielsen-music/?utm_source=share-email&utm_medium=button.

⁹ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York, Vintage International, 2004), 102-104.

¹⁰ Brent A. Strawn, "Sanctified and Commercially Successful Curses: On Gangsta Rap and the Canonization of the Imprecatory Psalms," in *Theology Today*, 68 (4) 2013: 403-417.

Listeners of *Coloring Book* enter a space where they will hear about God through the lens of a Black Millennial who has been/is being shaped by the God encounters of his life.

III. “AND THE CHICKEN TASTES LIKE WOOD.”¹¹

Every generation has defining songs and sounds. When you hear *that* song, it takes you back. For the first generation of Hip-hop listeners, “Rapper’s Delight” is one of those defining songs.¹² The album hit the scene in 1980 and became the first Hip-hop record to enjoy market success. Most date the beginnings of Hip-Hop music almost ten years earlier, but “Rapper’s Delight” transported Hip-hop music from neighborhood parties filled with Black young adult-dancing bodies in New York city to a national stage. In its embryonic stage, Hip-hop music was all about Black young adults having fun, feeling good, partying. As the genre continued to develop, its artists discovered a way to marry their voices, sounds, and concerns with this distinct musical genre. According to cultural critic, Michael Dyson, “Hip-hoppers joined pleasure and rage while turning the details of their difficult lives into craft and capital.”¹³ The music provided entertainment and a means of survival. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan and Marlon F. Hall comment:

... Hip Hop music does what music always does: it provides an aesthetic matrix, a venue in which one can imagine and recreate a reality of beauty and nobility; a world that can make sense amidst the daily tragedy of crime and hard times, transforming the mundane into the sublime even as one comes of age. Music that appeals at such a visceral level provides leverage against annihilation from societal and familial oppression.¹⁴

Hip-hop music tapped into the heartbeat of a generation of Black young people who had not marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. and had not participated in the sit-ins or freedom rides led by SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee). They had not been jailed, water-hosed, or attacked by dogs in the pursuit of racial equality. It was supposed to be good for them. But instead, their lives were circumscribed by racial discrimination, poverty, unemployment, and police violence.¹⁵ Hip-hop music was their response.

*Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don't care...
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far
'Cause a man with a tow truck repossessed my car
It's like a jungle sometimes*

¹¹ Sugarhill Gang, “Rapper’s Delight,” (1980), <https://genius.com/Sugarhill-gang-rappers-delight-lyrics>.

¹² cf. Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002).

¹³ Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 177.

¹⁴ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan and Marlon F. Hall, *Wake-Up: Hip-Hop, Christianity, and the Black Church* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2001), 19.

¹⁵ The CERCL Collective, *Breaking Bread, Breaking Beats: Churches and Hip-Hop — A Basic Guide to Key Issues*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 23.

*It make me wonder how I keep from going under*¹⁶

Hip-hop music was uncensored and unencumbered by fears of transgressing boundaries. Eventually it would spread throughout the country. It would capture the attention of corporations who recognized, then exploited its profitability. Even so, it had already begun a journey toward establishing an enduring music legacy.

IV. ROOTS AND WINGS

Hip-hop music did not emerge in a vacuum. It arose from the deep and rich currents of Black music in the U.S. Historically, Black music in the U.S. offered Blacks public and private spaces to vocalize the cares that seeped from auction blocks and plantation fields; juke joints and protest marches; lynching trees and urban streets. It validated Black personhood and “announced that we are here.”¹⁷

The creativity of Black music allowed it to serve diverse needs for its listeners. It could be a prayer for freedom, a coded escape itinerary, social and theological commentary, a protest chant, biblical interpretation, praise to God, a balm for wounded spirits, and entertainment to set oppressed bodies in joyful motion. Blacks did not have the luxury of confining God-talk and God encounters to officially authorized spaces during the early centuries of their time in the U.S. Therefore, Black music also gave artists the freedom and permission to claim space to name God and relate to God across musical genres. Hip-hop music walks in this tradition of creative freedom and defying boundaries so that its artists can tell their generation’s narratives of life, death, and survival. Hip-hop artists “have something to say about what gives life meaning, what is inspiring...and what is dangerous and worth taking risks for.”¹⁸

Likewise, God-talk and Hip-hop music are not strangers. Many Hip-hop artists use their music to talk about God while talking about other aspects of their reality. Biblical and religious themes like incarnation, the reality of evil, divine judgement and justice,¹⁹ redemption, and resurrection²⁰ appear often in Hip-hop music.²¹ It is not unusual to hear rappers described as prophetic or countercultural.²² Some Hip-hop artists employ certain symbolic and performative elements of ‘Black church’ with confidence that their audiences understand them and resonate

¹⁶ Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message” (1982), <https://genius.com/Grandmaster-flash-and-the-furious-five-the-message-lyrics>.

¹⁷ *The Songs are Free: Bernice Johnson Reagon and African American Music* (1991), <http://gailpellettproductions.com/the-songs-are-free-bernice-johnson-reagon-and-african-american-music/#.WbIDqsNxjpx>.

¹⁸ Lance Williams, “Hip Hop as a Site of Public Pedagogy,” in *Handbook of Public Pedagogy: Education and Learning Beyond Schooling*. Jennifer A. Sandlin, Brian D. Schultz, Jake Burdick, eds. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2010), 222.

¹⁹ Ralph Basui Watkins, *Hip-Hop Redemption: Finding God in the Rhythm and Rhyme* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 112-113.

²⁰ Corey Walsh, “Shout-Outs to the Creator: The Use of Biblical Themes in Rap Lyrics,” in *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Vol. 25, Issue 2, Summer 2016: 230-248; cf.,

²¹ Admittedly, Hip-hop music is not a monolithic genre. This means that the presence of religious/biblical themes and God-talk is not ubiquitous in the music.

²² Walsh, 232.

with them.²³ It is also common to hear public expressions of gratitude to God from many Hip-hop artists in their public award acceptance speeches²⁴

When Chance the Rapper hit the music scene in the first quarter of the 21st century, his Black Millennial Hip-hop music was watermarked with inheritances from Black music generally and from previous generations of Hip-hop music. One such inheritance shows up in the God encounters of *Coloring Book*. Chance is not unique in talking about God in his Hip-hop music. However, *Coloring Book* stands out because Chance does more than mention God. He integrates his spirituality into the entire mixtape in such a way that his listeners meet God explicitly and implicitly throughout. His goal is not to convert. Rather, he offers a Black Millennial worldview that has been influenced by God, family and his life experiences.

V. CHANCE THE RAPPER

Chance the Rapper was born Chancellor Johnathan Bennett on April 16, 1993 to Ken Williams-Bennett and Lisa Bennett in Chatham, a south side middle-class neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. He has one younger brother named Taylor Bennett. In 2015, he became a first-time father of a daughter, Kensli Bennett. In an Instagram posted on Dec. 31, 2016, Chance wrote about Kensli: “This is the girl who reintroduced me to God. She's the woman who reminded me how to be a man, and taught me how to love. She is everything I am but much better. I can't wait for her to one day help the world the way she has helped me.”

His music resides in the intersections of message or conscious Hip-hop, gangsta rap, and Christian Hip-hop. In April 2016, Chance, at age 23, released *Coloring Book*, the last of his mixtape trilogy (*10 Day* was released in 2012 and *Acid Rap* in 2013). The success of *Coloring Book* catapulted him into the public sphere as an innovative, independent young artist with a countercultural narrative. In 2017, Chance made history with *Coloring Book* by becoming the first streaming-only artist to receive a Grammy. He won a total of three Grammy awards (Best New Artist, Best Rap Album, and Best Rap Performance). *Coloring Book* established Chance as a national music phenomenon in much the same way that “Rapper’s Delight” established Sugar Hill Gang and Hip-hop music in the 80s.

Chancellor/Lil Chano/Chance’s journey not only stands out because of his exceptional talent. It is also the ordinariness of his journey that connects him to numerous Black Millennials. His music captures the nostalgia, the joys, and the burdens of Black urban life. His listeners identify with his relationship stories, family shout-outs, his struggles, his triumphs over the status quo, childhood and adolescent memories, mis-steps with drugs and the violence of the streets.²⁵ He reflects the persona of a generation for whom God-talk and profanity share space. Holy ground is constructed in the midst of life rather than apart from it. Many Christians might see stark contradictions here. However, Chance and other Millennials continue to push the boundaries to suggest that what may be contradictions to some are not deal-breakers to God.

²³ Monica R. Miller and Ezekiel J. Dixon-Roman, “Habits of the Heart: Youth Religious Participation as Progress, Peril, or Change?,” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 637 (September 2011), 83.

²⁴ Ebony A. Utley, *Rap and Religion: Understanding the Gangsta’s God* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 11-15.

²⁵ cf. Katie Couric, *ABC Nightline* interview with Chance the Rapper, https://youtu.be/Co_Zq8DfYOM.

The influence of family and culture is evident in Chance's music and public representations. He refers several times to his parents on *Coloring Book* and includes voices of family members on a few tracks. He spoke about his family support in an interview with Zach Baron for *Esquire Magazine*. Chance recalled his grandmother's intervention during his period of drug abuse. Her uncharacteristically negative prayer to God, "that he fails at everything that is not like You," helped him to reverse his course.²⁶ Recently, Chance has made headlines for his activism and philanthropy, societal engagements he attributes to familial influence.²⁷

Coloring Book is a creative, public space where Chance talks to/about God as a Black male Millennial. His music is contextual, non-traditional, anti-status quo, relational, and collaborative. By freely expressing his faith publicly and through the lyrics of *Coloring Book*, he models his vision of a young adult life framed by God.

VI. ENCOUNTERING *COLORING BOOK*

Developmentally, Chance resides in that in-between space of young adulthood wherein he is cultivating a "critical awareness," a "self-consciousness," and "a capacity to act" that enables him to reflect on what has been and imagine forward to what will be.²⁸ Additionally, his life, like the lives of many Black and brown young adults in urban areas, has required a measure of resilience that accelerates the need to 'grow up' sooner. The repeated nostalgic yearnings expressed in *Coloring Book* are especially relevant in his lived context of attacks against Black and brown bodies in the U.S. His music reflects his familial and Black cultural heritages, his Christian identity, and his Hip-hop inheritances. *Coloring Book* integrates these multiple layers through the improvisation and hybridity of Hip-hop music.

I have categorized the 14 tracks on *Coloring Book* thematically: 1) relationality, 2) passion for music, and 3) hymns.²⁹ These themes also represent the three most important areas of his life while producing *Coloring Book*, i.e., his family and friends, his music, and his relationship with God. This thematic approach helps in analyzing the individual tracks, but the analysis keeps the overall context of *Coloring Book* in view. The entire mixtape reflects Chance's understanding of God as One who frames his life and One he relates to within the fullness of his young adult life.³⁰

²⁶ Zach Baron, "How Chance the Rapper's Life Became Perfect," *Esquire Magazine*, August 24, 2016, <http://www.gq.com/story/how-chance-the-rappers-life-became-perfect>.

²⁷ For example, Chance sponsored a voter registration drive/free concert in Chicago during the 2016 Presidential elections; pledged \$1 million to support the underfunded Chicago Public School system in 2017; supported the #SaveChicago initiative, an anti-violence campaign; and donated his Grammy for Best Rap Album to Chicago's DuSable Museum of African American History.

²⁸ Sharon D. Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 143. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁹ Relationality: "Summer Friends," "D.R.A.M. Sings Special," "Same Drugs," "Juke Jam," "All Night," and "Smoke Break"; Centrality of Music: "All We Got," "Mixtape," and "No Problem."

³⁰ I spend more time with the section on the hymns in order to highlight Chance's Christian identity that I claim informs the entire mixtape.

His claim that “I don’t make Christian rap, but I am a Christian rapper”³¹ means that his Christian identity informs all of what we hear on *Coloring Book*, whether the lyrics explicitly praise God or do not mention God at all. Likewise, his choice of Hip-hop music rather than the genres of Gospel music or Christian rap aligns him with a general Millennial resistance to boundaries that confine God to traditional religious spaces.

A. “All We Got”

The majority of the tracks on *Coloring Book* fall into the first two categories of relationality and his passion for his music. Chance lyricizes about adolescent romantic exploits at the roller rink (“Juke Jam”); drinking and dancing with friends (“All Night”); the trauma of losing friends (“Summer Friends” and “Same Drugs”); and the relationship challenges of adulthood (“Smoke Break”).

The opening track, “All We Got,” reveals the sense of purposefulness that he finds in music as well as his fervent commitment to support the creative freedom and independence of his music peers. Here he also connects his music with his relationship with God:

*This for the kids of the king of all kings
This is the holiest thing
This is the beat that played under the Word
This is the sheep that ain't like what it herd*

Black Millennials who grew up on the south and west sides of Chicago find connections with specific references to Chicago in Chance’s lyrics. For example, his track, “Summer Friends” mentions frequented Chicago sites. They can also relate to the anguish he describes about those living in neighborhoods marked by the proliferation of violence and the deaths of Black youth and young adults.

*JJ, Mikey, Lil Derek and them/ 79th street was America then
Ice cream truck and the beauty supply/ Blockbuster movies and Harold's again
We still catching lightning bugs/ When the plague hit the backyard
Had to come in at dark cause the big shawtys act hard
Okay now, day camp at Grand Crossing/ First day, n***a's shooting
Summer school get to losing students/ But the CPD getting new recruitment...
Our summer die, our summer time don't got no time no more*

B. The Hymns of *Coloring Book*

Some might wince at categorizing tracks on a Hip-hop project as hymns, just as those in predominantly Black churches initially resisted the Blues-tinged Gospel music of Thomas A. Dorsey and Mahalia Jackson. However, Black Millennials producing and listening to Hip-hop music today see nothing blasphemous about placing God-talk, profanity, confrontation of racism, relationship challenges, and celebrating family and friends in conversation with one another. One

³¹ Jordan Peele, “Chance the Rapper Opens Up About What It’s Like to Challenge Kanye West.” Edited by Elaine Weiteroth in *Teen Vogue*, May 15, 2017, <http://www.teenvogue.com/story/chance-the-rapper-jordan-peeel-cover-interview-music-issue-creativity>.

might say that they take seriously the Psalmist's declaration that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."³²

There are three tracks on *Coloring Book*, "Blessings," "How Great," and "Blessings (Reprise)," that I designate as hymns because they reflect Chance's Christian identity by explicitly praising God. They feature recognizable Gospel sounds, Christian symbolism, scriptural references, and a view of God as a sovereign, omnipresent, gracious protector and provider. The videos and public performances of these pieces have featured nationally known Gospel artists like Byron Cage, Tamela Mann and Kirk Franklin, along with choirs and improvisational testimonies that create church-like worship atmospheres.³³ Chance commented on television during one performance about his joy in being able to express his personal Christian faith publicly.³⁴ In an interview, he stated, "I think the new generation and the forward is all about freedom and all about the ability to do what we want and we're not free unless we can talk about God."³⁵

1. "Blessings"

"Blessings"³⁶ includes and expands upon lyrics from "Let the Praise Begin," a popular song by Gospel artist Fred Hammond & Radical for Christ.³⁷ The life stance we hear from Chance on "Blessings" ("They want four minute songs/ You need a four hour praise dance performed every morn") reflects the perspective of one who stands in what Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann calls a space of "new orientation" wherein "the speaker and the community of faith are often surprised by grace, when there emerges in present life a new possibility that is inexplicable, neither derived nor extrapolated, but wrought by the inscrutable power and goodness of God, that goodness cannot be explained, predicted or programmed."³⁸ One reaches a season of new orientation after living through a season of "disorientation."³⁹ Chance shares about surviving disorientation caused by earlier drug use. He unabashedly expresses his gratitude to God for all the good that "keeps falling in my lap."⁴⁰ He recognizes "the difference in blessings and worldly possessions." Blessings endure. Blessings, like the birth of his daughter Kensli, are

³² Psalm 24:1

³³ Chance the Rapper, Feb. 12, 2017 Grammy Performance of "Blessings," <http://content.jwplatform.com/previews/8357Vk5o-necgKPaX>.

³⁴ Saturday Night Live 2016 Christmas show performance of "Finish Line/Drown" with Noname during, <https://youtu.be/PfaKtyWlrlM>. Chance exclaims: "Jesus, it's your birthday. Happy Birthday, Jesus. I like when we say His name on network tv."

³⁵ Zane Lowe, Interview with Chance the Rapper (May 2016), <https://youtu.be/UbRbjPp1c4g>.

³⁶ Chance the Rapper, "Blessings," performed on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, <https://youtu.be/0j8frgmdvgc>.

³⁷ Fred Hammond and Radical for Christ, "Let the Praise Begin," <https://youtu.be/6KV4glz5FXY>.

³⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 47-48.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-45.

⁴⁰ cf. "Blessings," Lecrae featuring Tye Dolla Sign (2017), https://youtu.be/krpdSno_qXI.

life-changing versus material goods that vanish quickly. Blessings come from God rather than human effort alone.

With the lyrics, “When the praises go up, the blessings come down,” Chance samples from a popular theological trope among Christians — the idea that God responds favorably to the praise of the faithful by rewarding them. This concept has roots in a biblical theology wherein obedience and right actions are rewarded with blessings or good things. Disobedience is punished with curses or negative consequences.⁴¹ This theology informs much of contemporary Christian praise and worship music and Christian God-talk. While many Christians privately wrestle with troubling questions of theodicy and evil, they publicly fall back on a belief that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.⁴² Chance has been shaped by this Christian culture he was raised in and that continues to exist.

The first verse of “Blessings” includes a contemporary reference to the Black Lives Matter movement and a statement of identification with a Black Jesus/God: “Jesus’ black life ain’t matter, I know I talked to his daddy”. This reference mirrors the contextuality of Hip-hop and other Black music genres that have roots in the Spirituals of enslaved Blacks whose lives lined their music, telling stories of embodied suffering and hopes for freedom entrusted to an unseen God. Here, Chance makes a claim that speaking about Blackness and Jesus/God belong together.

2. “How Great”

The opening two minutes and a half of this track sound like music from a church worship service. It begins with Nicole Steen, Chance’s cousin, singing “How Great is Our God,” a song by praise and worship artist, Chris Tomlin.⁴³ Her solo voice is soon joined by an ensemble of singers led by a director. Chance and Jay Electronica, a prominent rapper and record producer, follow the song with individual verses that narrate the activity of a praiseworthy God in their lives. The verses are introduced by a spoken declaration of faith: “The first is that God is better than the world’s best day/ God is better than the best day that the world has to offer.” Chance’s verse contains references to Matthew 17:20,⁴⁴ the praises of the Psalter,⁴⁵ and the book of Malachi. He also mentions two historical rebellions led by enslaved Blacks: the 1805 Slave Rebellion at Chatham Manor (Stafford County, Virginia) and the 1831 Nat Turner Slave

⁴¹ It reflects the Hebrew Bible’s Deuteronomistic Retribution Theology best captured in Deuteronomy 28, e.g., vv. 1-6, 15-19.

⁴² Hip-hop artists who address theological themes vary in how they deal with God, evil, and human suffering, e.g., Kendrick Lamar (2017), “Blood,” <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-blood-lyrics>.

⁴³ This song functions as a contemporary reinterpretation of the Christian hymn, “How Great Thou Art”.

⁴⁴ Matthew 17:20b: “For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

⁴⁵ e.g., magnify, *shabach*, *barack*, edify, exalt, glorify. cf. Lauren Nostro, “Chance the Rapper Annotated a Few Lyrics from ‘Coloring Book’,” <https://genius.com/a/chance-the-rapper-annotated-a-few-lyrics-from-coloring-book>.

Rebellion (Southampton County, Virginia).⁴⁶ Additionally, references to family, Chicago, and pop culture appear here as they do throughout the project.

The official video for the song was filmed live from an iPhone in black and white, giving it a vintage or historic feel.⁴⁷ Filming an official music video from an iPhone speaks to the Millennial nature of this artist and his audience. On the one hand, the vintage feel of the black and white video is contrasted to the more contemporary method of using an iPhone to capture anything significant. On the other hand, both together represent a model of how the old and the new can work together. This type of intergenerational mix is also an act of translation, taking an ancient sound and expressing it in a way that is relevant for a new generation. Chance masterfully gathers diverse generations, religious expressions,⁴⁸ and musical genres (Hip-hop and Gospel) on common ground to speak about faith in God through an undeniable outpouring of praise to God's goodness and faithfulness.

3. "Blessings (Reprise)"

Chance fills the final minute of *Coloring Book* by repeating the refrain: "Are you ready for your blessing?/ Are you ready for your miracle?" The reprise takes the form of a sermon-type journey through Chance's life. It is filled with memories and visions — memories of "momma's hands," "rice and beans," "cracked" iPhone screens, Michael Jackson, Nat King Cole and Daddy Mufasa from the *Lion King*; visions of "promised lands" and "prophetic stories of freedom" ("You must've missed the come up/ I must be all I can be"). Basking in the assurance of God's appreciation ("He think the new shit jam/ I think we mutual fans"), Chance rejoices in survival and success ("I made it through, made it through, made it through").

Some might critique the depth of a theology that prominently celebrates divine blessings. I contend that for Black young adults to claim any measure of faith in God or God's blessings represents an act of resistance given the world they have inherited, the hostile world they currently inhabit, and the ambivalence of religious institutions toward them. Hip-hop music provides many Millennial Hip-hop artists and their listeners a forum to experience non-judgmental transparency about their relationship or lack of relationship with God. As such, the music encourages freedom for young adults to question, praise, express rage and doubt, talk to/about God. It yields unconventional God encounters that can inform and nurture the spirituality of his listeners.

4. Angels and Water

Two additional tracks, "Angels" and "Finish Line/Drown," deserve mention in this section because their lyrics explicitly employ religious language, imagery, and themes.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nat_Turner%27s_slave_rebellion: <https://youtu.be/uqIYt9MauhQ> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chatham_Manor.

⁴⁷ October 20, 2016 tweet from Chance the Rapper: "#HowGreat Official Video featuring my cousin Nicole. Shot on iPhone. Lock yo screen."

⁴⁸ The second verse on "How Great" comes from Jay Electronica who is Muslim.

⁴⁹ Chance the Rapper, "Angels," <https://youtu.be/eedeXTWZUn8>.

“Angels” draws from the primarily Hebrew Bible concept of divine messengers that has been popularized in contemporary culture, in and outside of religious contexts, i.e., angels as divine emissaries who invisibly provide protection for human beings,⁵⁰ and angels as the divinely received souls of deceased loved ones, now sanctioned by God to also cover and protect. Some Black faith communities link the concept of angels to the African concept of ancestral spirits who extend the life continuum beyond physical death.

“Finish Line/ Drown” is a two-part collaboration with artists from Hip-hop (T-Pain, Noname) and Gospel (Kirk Franklin). Religious themes of prayer and water (baptismal waters) sync Chance’s testimonial verses with T-Pain’s hook on prayer (“All my days I prayed and prayed and now I see the finish line/ I’m gonna finish mine”). Noname’s autobiographical verse reflects how her grandmother’s faith influenced her journey toward claiming faith in God.⁵¹ Kirk Franklin’s ending verse immerses the entire track in Christian affirmations —“You wash me new... This water is deep... Jesus rescue me/ Take me to your mountain/ Hallelujah/ So someday Chicago will be free/ Someday we’ll all be free.” This selection is a collaborative praise session of a God who they depict as One whose presence enables the fulfillment of goals.

VII. A MODEL FOR BLACK MILLENNIAL GOD ENCOUNTERS

I speak to God in public, I speak to God in public.

He keep my rhymes in couplet.

*He think the new shit jam, I think we mutual fans*⁵²

Chance the Rapper’s *Coloring Book* fosters Black Millennial God encounters through its lyrics, Hip-hop and Gospel sounds, diverse collaborations, and contextual relevance that are informed by his spirituality. Like other Black Millennials, he has been formed by the Hip-hop culture of his generation as well as the culture of his parents and grandparents, including their religiosity. These generational influences equipped him to imbue *Coloring Book* with the feel of Sunday morning Black church worship; real-talk about real life and prophetic utterances of Hip-hop, along with the sensibilities of Black Millennials who care about their world.

In *Coloring Book*, Black Millennial listeners can find another Black Millennial talking about God and life without trying to convert or judge. He is transparent and authentic, acknowledging mistakes without condemning aspects of young adult culture that raise eyebrows among older adults. Increasingly, traditional religious spaces are ‘othering’ Millennials when they reject Millennial culture or regard Millennials as peripheral to the congregational culture. *Coloring Book*, in contrast, invites Black Millennials to come as they are, to step into lyrics that honor their culture and respect their personhood, all while enjoying the rhythms of their lives. The music and lyrics make God accessible with familiar language and ideas, thereby facilitating encounter, e.g., dialogue about God and/or with God; consideration of divine presence in Millennials lives and the world; and fostering of relationship with God for those seeking God.

⁵⁰ cf. Richard Smallwood, “Angels;” Amy Grant, “Angels Watching Over Me;” “Touched by an Angel,” a television series in the mid 90s to early 2000s.

⁵¹ cf. Donnie Trumpet & the Social Experiment with Chance the Rapper, “Sunday Candy,” <https://youtu.be/vQriCKszlHc>.

⁵² Chance the Rapper, “Blessings (Reprise),” *Coloring Book* (2016).

Theologically, Chance's lyrics imply that God is One who sanctifies young adult humanity. The God who is celebrated in *Coloring Book* is as available to young adults as God is to older adults. There is no hierarchy of legitimacy based on age. This God does not mind being talked about on a Hip-hop mixtape. Chance demonstrates divine collaboration in his willingness to work with artists from diverse genres and religious faiths. Rather than using religion to draw lines that separate, he uses his faith to open up broad spaces in his music that celebrate the gift of differences. Chance seems unafraid to welcome diverse voices to the table. He presents us with a 'great' God who welcomes diverse young adult voices to a table where there is room for tattoos, locs, grillz', snapbacks, profanity, praise, God and Hip-hop. He does not bifurcate his Christian faith and his music. His lyrics affirm that relationship troubles, escapades with friends, and Black Lives Matter belong within the realm of one's relationship with God as much as the Bible, prayer, and the celebration of God's goodness.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Black Millennials, as well as the previous two generations of Black young adults, have used Hip-hop music to speak truths about their experiences. For some, Hip-hop music has been a holy womb for gestating imagination, hope, and meaning-making. Hip-hop artists like Chance the Rapper use Hip-hop music as a platform to invite others into their lives, lives they claim have been framed by God. Chance situates God within a music genre where a Young Thug, Lil' Yachty, Kanye, Ty Dolla \$ign, Noname, and Chance all call home. For he and his listeners, this is not problematic. They claim it as normative. In this way, his music sends a message that God can be encountered anywhere because God is everywhere.

Hip-hop music gives Chance an artistic medium through which he expands the understanding of what it looks like to relate to God as a Black male young adult who lives in the U.S. in the 21st century and who foregrounds his Christian identity. Chance, a "Christian rapper," includes God in the Hip-hop music he produces and in the lyrics he writes because God is not separate from his music. God is in his Hip-hop music because God is in him. Thus, his music serves as an alternative space of encountering God for others as well.

Chance is one example of Black Millennials who claim a religious identity that does not conform to traditional expressions of religiosity like regular worship attendance in brick-and-mortar buildings or membership in mainline denominational faith communities. His music provides a glimpse into one alternative way that faith formation is taking place and God encounters are happening beyond established religious institutions.

Coloring Book casts the young adult vision of Chance the Rapper. It has reached and will continue to reach Black Millennials. Because they are listening to his music, they are being formed by it. The good news is that he is evidence that members of his generation who are disengaging from organized religion are not all disengaging from God. They are claiming their own "Clearing" spaces to encounter God, to talk about God, to hear about God, and to experience God. Even those who are not religiously affiliated or call themselves spiritual will meet God in Chance's music because God is in the DNA of Chance's lyrics. They, like all his listeners, will determine what they will do with such encounters. The disconcerting news is that many mainline churches are more focused on getting Millennials back to church *as it is* rather than listening to the Millennial voices that are pointing toward God encounters *as they are*

becoming for them. Hopefully, Chance, other Hip-hop artists, and other Millennials will continue casting their visions and leading the way so that when the church *as it is* has ears to hear, it will have something transformative to listen to.

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Evoking Places: Vocation, Roots, and Routes

Abstract

Discerning our partnerships with God's work in the world (our vocations), knowing where we dwell, and embracing ways we can fulfill those vocations are rarely easy. Such discernment is hindered by a failure of vocational imagination that affects clergy and laity alike. Failed vocational imagination constrains our ability to sense God in our midst and dis-places us from the enfolding Kin-dom of God. My argument is that we need to give close attention to the places in which we dwell. The dynamics of place (its intersectionality) evokes and inspires the stories that form identity and vocation. Taking place seriously fosters robust vocational imagination.

Identity, Vocation, and Place

Finding a storyline for identity and purpose within Christian traditions requires facing the questions of *whose* we are and what vocation we claim as ours.¹ The answers to these questions are deeply and profoundly intertwined with place.

Naturally, the primary theological answer to whose we are is that we belong to God our creator. We are creatures of God. An equally important, and theological, answer is that we also belong to *places*—the contexts and relationships in which God's creating call arises. Saying that we belong to place is not some form of romanticized parochialism; rather it is a way of naming the embodied human, ecological, physical, and spiritual relationships that constitute our identity. God's creative work of forming life from the soil of Eden continues to this day. In each moment of experience, God offers the most redemptive and life-giving way to form our past and the elements gathered by place into relationships that make us who we are. We are creatures of place. We can only know our vocations if we see them embedded in places—making a difference in those places.

Place is not simply the setting in which identity and vocation are expressed nor is it the backdrop to the divine-human-creation drama—place is the fabric of the drama itself, the unfolding web of relationships between God, humans, and creation. Place evokes us into identity and partnership with God. Place and vocation are intertwined in a rhythm of form-giving in which place gathers local elements of experience and vocation responds to God's vision for these elements to become life-giving relationships. We are in *vocation*, have purpose, as we respond to and partner with God's continual creating, redeeming, and sustaining work that forms the elements of place into relationships increasingly reflective of God's Kin-dom. Attributed to Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Kin-dom" emphasizes the just relationships in God's reign in contrast to the patriarchal rule of territory that "Kingdom" connotes.² Kin-dom is an apt term in this project since place is an arena of meaningful relationships rather than a controlled space. Place gathers together a certain set of

¹ James Fowler, *Becoming Adult: Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 2000), 75.

² See Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 4.

people, creatures, plants, climate, and physical structures. The relationships between these take particular forms such as a home, workplace, school, or outdoor area. God is active in places leading them toward the Kin-dom. When we encounter God in a place, calls us to be more than a spouse, co-worker, student, or recreationalist. Our partnership with God evokes us to form relationships in place that are redemptive, sustaining, just, and loving.

Failure of Vocational Imagination: Limited and Displaced

Discerning the forms of our partnerships with God's work in the world (vocation) and knowing where we dwell are rarely easy because they involve deep commitments, complexities, and life implications. Too often, vocational imagination fails because we look for abstract answers for all time, rather than an embedded call for a particular time and place. Clergy, church professionals, and laity alike unintentionally fall prey to a failure of vocational imagination—it is not a conspiracy but an accumulated habit of mind.

Vocational imagination, like faith itself, is a way of being in the world. Imagination is about recognizing connections between things in the world and giving relationships meaningful form. "Place" is the way we imagine the web of relationships in particular areas and the relationship between God and the world in those areas. "Vocation" is the way we imagine God's relationship with the world, God's work in the midst of the world, and ways to partner with it. Failed vocational imagination constrains our ability to sense God in our midst and dis-places us from the enfolding Kin-dom of God.

Failed vocational imagination has several indicators:

- Vocation is equated with career, profession or paid employment.
- Vocation is compartmentalized into isolated roles and statuses.
- Vocation seems to be static and a thing to possess.
- There is a sense that the roles and responsibilities one has in various places are in competition with each other, especially when we identify vocation with only one of these places.
- The vocations of persons with disabilities are dismissed.
- The vocations of children, youth, and older adults are disregarded.
- Attention is limited to human need to the exclusion of the rest of creation.
- Persons fail to recognize the intersections of social, ecological, economic, and personal dynamics.
- Vocation is disconnected from place.

Vocational Tensions

To revitalize vocational imagination, we need to consider several tensions woven into the concept of vocation itself. I wish to focus on three major tensions in vocation (some having tensions within them as well) and respective neglected aspects that diminish vocational imagination.

Tension 1: Following in Discipleship ⇔ Partnering in Vocation. In its fullest expression, **discipleship** involves serving others and one could rightly argue that vocation is encompassed by such discipleship. Unfortunately, discipleship is too frequently embraced as individualistic spirituality and is framed primarily as **followership**. Several dynamics in the United States context fosters such a framing:

- Individualism in US Christianity shapes discipleship into a personal and inward spiritual journey
- Within such individualism service is framed as an expression of spirituality and discipleship
- As an expression of spirituality, expectations to serve may become contingent on reaching certain levels of faith development
- Within the pervasive clergy paradigm and professional model, discipleship is implicitly cast as followership of congregational leaders with varying degrees of lay passivity

When discipleship is not held in tension with the core concept of **partnership** found in **vocation** we err on the side of passivity rather than initiative in lived faith. When partnership is not held in tension with following the way of Jesus we err on the side of assuming our actions are God's will.

Tension 2: Vocational Continuity ⇔ Vocational Evolution. The problems of understanding faith as a noun is a common topic in faith development theory. As a noun, faith easily becomes an object of cognitive belief, something to hold, rather than a way of being in the world (John Westerhoff)³ and a process of meaning-making (James Fowler).⁴ Vocation suffers from a similar objectification into a static noun—a misplaced concreteness that makes vocation a static thing to possess. Think of the ways we refer to vocation as something one “has” and one “seeks to find.”

The claim that objectification of vocation is a mistake is rooted in the assumption that the world is in a continuous process of becoming moment by moment.⁵ We arise in a moment, the moment ends and we arise again in the next moment. In each moment of experience, we sense our past and that of the world about us—both **human and non-human**. God participates in each moment of experience of each part of the world offering, luring, propositioning...**calling**...with a way to weave together our past and our radical interrelationships. That proposition from God offers the most redemptive and life giving option for us individually and the world as a whole in the moment. God's offering is not coercive—there is radical freedom in each moment to reject in whole or part the proposition from God. Despite such radical freedom, the reality is the weight of past experiences and decisions creates a trajectory, inertia, habituation to replicate prior ways of being and responding to God. In working with each moment God is calling toward a consistent vision for the wholeness and flourishing of the world but the advance toward that future involves many embodiments in the dance with the world.

³ John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 2000), 87.

⁴ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1981), 91.

⁵ I am working largely from a Whiteheadian process theology perspective.

The process of becoming moment by moment means that our self and vocation are in constant process as well. ***Vocation is not a thing we possess, but rather the shape of our continual responses to God and our relationships (human and non-human). Consistency and continuity of responses in the past and of anticipation of responses in the future can mislead us into objectifying vocation into something to “have”—a situation of “misplaced concreteness” in process philosophy terms.*** The implication is that over our life span the embodiments of vocation (responses and partnerships with God) will change and evolve even though we can recognize a trajectory between those embodiments.

When vocational continuity is not held in tension with vocational evolution (the arising of vocation in each moment and place), vocation becomes a station or function to hold. When we do not hold vocational evolution in tension with vocational continuity, we risk losing the contributions of prior experience, learning, gifts, and graces to our current partnership with God.

God’s participation in each moment of becoming means that everyone experiences the opportunity to be in vocation—we need only say “yes.” If nothing can separate us from the love of God, nothing can separate us from the lure/call of God. So, vocation is not reserved for clergy, not just for those mature in faith or human development (vocation is intergenerational), and not just the saved and sanctified. The depth and consistency of responsiveness to partnership with God may differ significantly between these groups but not the fact of being summoned by God.

Tension 3: Personally Based ⇔ Contextually Evoked. A third tension in understanding vocation is between vocation as personally based and contextually evoked. Many discernment processes related to vocation (and career) make extensive use of various inventories to assess individual attributes. They may cover personality types, strengths, spiritual gifts, aptitudes, psychological dynamics, conflict management styles, learning styles, intercultural competency, multiple intelligences, and the like. I think these are very important and helpful in understanding oneself and the capacities one brings to partnership with God. *Their use is also an indicator of the extent to which we understand vocation as rooted in the person.*

The tension between personally based and contextually evoked vocation shapes how we perceive our personal uniqueness. A beloved biblical passage for many is Isaiah 43:1, “...I have called you by name, you are mine.” (NRSV) Vocation here is a cherished gift of one’s personal relationship with God and indeed it is since it reflects God’s calling us into being in every moment—uniqueness of vocation is personally based. However, individual uniqueness arises from contextually rooted vocation as well. God calls us into being each moment from the webs of relationships in which we find ourselves—our places. No one exists in the same set of relationships whether in the mode of receiving blessings or of giving service—uniqueness of vocation is contextually rooted.

When we do not hold the personal base of vocation in tension with contextually rooted vocation, context and place become backdrops to individual action—persons seek a place to express their

gifts; persons bring their vocation to a place (gift or baggage). In this framework, either the task is to find a location in which a pre-determined vocation fits or ways a pre-determined vocation can be “contextualized” (adapted) to a setting. Here, we risk conflating personal needs with needs of others and distorting vocation into subjective spirituality or worse yet a personality cult. When we do not hold the contextual evocation of vocation in tension with personally based vocation, the demands of context and place overshadow passion, and vocation can become sacrificial duty. Here, we risk numbness to prophetic voices, ambivalence to the stranger, and disinterest in confirming giftedness.

A Revised Understanding of Vocation

I wish to offer a general definition and description of vocation that addresses some of these issues. The broad nature of the description has a purpose—to act as a stimulus for dialogue and a foil for raising awareness of vocational assumptions regardless of whether the ideas presented are embraced in part or whole.

The work of James Fowler influences my understanding of vocation. I think it is a helpful reference point in reconsidering vocation because it offers a broad framework that can be helpful across theological divides, conceptually connects faith and vocation, and centrally positions the role of partnership in vocation. Stemming from his work on faith development, Fowler came to recognize that *vocation* was how he talked about the vision a particular faith community held for the end of development while he used the term *faith* relative to a universal human process of meaning-making. In brief, Fowler defines vocation as the “...response a person makes of their total self to the address of God and to partnership with God.”⁶ A more extensive definition found in Fowler’s *Weaving the New Creation* is:

Vocation, as set forth here, involves a process of commitment, and ongoing discerning of one’s gifts and giftedness in community, and of finding the means and settings in which those gifts—in all the dimensions of our living—can be placed at the disposal of the One who calls us into being and partnership.⁷

Vocation is partnership with God’s work in and for the world within particular places. The call to partnership comes from God but the places in which we dwell and between which we move evoke it. Rooted in the concrete elements of a place, vocation responds to God’s vision for forming relationships reflective of God’s Kin-dom. Vocation is a relational and communal way of being in the world animated by a variety of passions. Redemptive and prevenient grace makes both our giftedness and limitations resources for vocation. Over time and across the places of daily life and our lives, we come to recognize a pattern and trajectory to the forms of our responsive partnerships. Partnership is possible at any point in life, but grows in depth and consistency with education and nurture.

⁶ Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 95.

⁷ James Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 121. This definition seems to assume that vocation is something one has and one needs to find a setting in which to express and embody it.

Partnership with God's work in and for the world. Partnership names a relationship. It does not mean we are on equal footing with God nor that it diminishes God's sovereignty. The witness of scripture and the saints is that God chooses to work with and through human agents. Knowing the heart and will of God, the One with whom we partner, is a fundamental task for our journeys and our ministries of discipleship.

God calls but place evokes vocation. In the ongoing process of creation, God continually calls us into being and partnership. The graces and needs of place also evokes us into being and partnership—we are the histories and relationships that place gathers. The complex ways that these graces and needs come together in both oppressive and liberative ways (intersectionality) puts a claim on us.

Vocation is a way of relationally being in the world. With God and place evoking identity and vocation, responsiveness to others (service) is constitutive of who we are and not just an expression of spirituality. Vocation is an expression of topophilia involving love, empathy, and care for place. ***Such care means giving forms to relationships that are redemptive and life generating—a relational integration of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. This relational form-giving work is central to vocation and is a reason that place is central to vocation.*** Often we think of vocation as what we do for others, but the relationality of vocation demands mutuality where we receive as well. Without mutuality in vocation, others become merely the objects of our work.

Vocation weaves together personal and communal. We are persons-in-community, so our interconnectedness means that our vocations arise together—God is calling the one and the many at the same time. In this light, we can understand place as a web of vocations. Using vocation as a way to make ourselves feel like unique individuals, different from the rest, rends this web. While our vocational distinctiveness has roots in our personal histories and relationship with God, distinctiveness also arises from the uniqueness of one's location in place. No one shares the same history or locus of relationships in place as I, nor the same opportunities for collaborating in communal vocation.⁸

Vocation in community raises issues of organization, roles, accountability, and authority—matters of ecclesiology beyond the scope of this project. Here vocation falls on rocky ground because we do not have adequate ways of talking about the range of ways Christians are in partnership with God. Too often vocation refers in a limited way to those ordained. We become confused in the categories of professional, volunteer/worker, staff, certified in (____), etc. We must find ways to create order that fosters freedom of vocational imagination.

Vocation involves various forms of animating passions. The etymology of passion goes back to the late Latin *passionem* which denotes suffering and enduring. The suffering in passion is not a masochistic one. Pain is evitable when we care about others, communities, and the world —

⁸ I need to explore Lutheran understandings of this aspect of vocation.

when see brokenness and injustice. It is also the pain of birthing and creating. Emotion is something closer to the center of our selves than mere feelings. Passion—suffering, joy, endurance, emotion, and desire—is a dynamo for who we are. Without it, we go through the motions: assignments, graduation, ordination, licensing become hoops through which to jump.

We experience joy and bliss when we are in harmony with our truest self—when we do “what I was born to do.” We suffer when we face aspects of our own brokenness (whether from our choices or actions of others) and the brokenness of our places. The desire to alleviate suffering can motivate the work of redemption, healing, mercy and justice. We have longings to pursue powerful visions of the ways things could be—life questions of “what if?”⁹ We fall into awe and wonder as we encounter beauty, creativity, love, courage, and the face of God in the world. Sometimes passion is the compulsion to do what must be done in the face of fear, hardship, pain, and danger.

Passions are poured into particular forms of vocational activity manifest across all that one does and all the places one dwells. Passion for beauty, wholeness, justice, or faithfulness finds embodiment in various ways at office, clinic, church, school, recreation, home, and public space. Collapsing vocation to one aspect of our life pits that aspect over against the rest of our life creating a divided self.

Vocation is a grace holding together our giftedness and limitations. In choosing to work with and through human agents, God gets a mixed bag. While our weaknesses and failings do make us reliant on God’s strength, we should not let this fact diminish our responsiveness to partnership with God. Our limitations are not just the results of sin and brokenness—we are simply finite creatures. Our capacities for partnership varies because of developmental stage, abilities, health, resources, and the like. God’s redemptive creativity allows God to use whatever we have, wherever we are. In using our limitations, God redeems them in vocation thus making them a grace to accompany our gifts. We also encounter a form of prevenient grace as we encounter *I AM—PLACE* in the places we dwell. If place is the ground of calling, it is also the ground of grace. God does not call without liberating and empowering, nor blessing us with co-workers. Partnership is a possibility at any point and in any place of life.

Vocation is a growing freedom of responsiveness. Being in vocation across the whole journey of life and discipleship only requires the capacity to respond—even taking the next breath is a response to God’s call to life. Hopefully, the depth, consistency, and freedom of response to partnership with God’s work in the world grows over time. Such growth can happen when developmental stages, education, and discipleship add knowledge, skills, and attitudes available for vocation and place. Sometimes we must begin by removing obstacles to vocational growth created by personal choices and social injustice. Growth in vocation is a process of sanctification as we experience freedom *from* the intention and desire to sin and freedom *for* deepening consistency to say “yes” in the moment to God’s lure of partnership. Vocation is not deferred to

⁹ Thanks to Dr. Lisa Withrow of Methodist Theological School in Ohio for this insight.

adulthood, abandoned at retirement, or blocked by disabilities. While the robustness and consistency of service may vary, the option to be responsive partnership with God's work in the world does not.

Vocation connects past and future in the now of place. We have a tendency to use a future tense in the way we speak of vocation—it is something out there that we pursue. On the other hand, we can fall prey to thinking that the ways we have been in partnership during the past defines our vocation. While there is anticipation and preparation for vocation in the future and there is faithfulness in the vocation of the past, the now of place is where our vocation is experienced and embodied. If we cannot be in partnership with God in the present, how can we expect to be in the future?

Relationality in Vocation and Place

When I have explained my writing project to people, they quickly resonate with the vocational issues raised but show puzzlement with the connections with place—the awkward pause or befuddled look give it away. The puzzlement reflects differences between how place is commonly understood and how persons across many disciplines are rediscovering the richness of the concept “place.” I will address several common assumptions about place needing reconsideration, but highlighting one in particular may be helpful. ***Place is a particular collection of formative relationships rather than merely a location in space—it is the web of relationships from which we come to be and to which we contribute.*** Place is a fundamental way to experience and understand embodied human, ecological, physical, and spiritual relationships. We cannot exist apart from place—we become who we are from what places gather and from our ongoing encounters with God (*I AM—PLACE*).

Relationships are central to our identities and at the heart of our vocational partnerships with God. As the collection of relationships in which we exist, place then too is at the heart of our vocations. We are tethered, however tenuously or problematically, to the places evoking our identities and vocations. In turn, we partner with *I AM—PLACE* to evoke places reflecting the Kin-dom of God. Place is a new way of recognizing interdependence within parishes of our vocations.

A Working Definition of Place

Place is a continual process of gathering particular sets of people, creatures, plants, climate, and physical structures—it is the unfolding web of relationships between God, humans, and creation. Shaped by culture and practices, “place” is the way we imagine this localized web and our position in it—our relational way of being in the world. Habits in the process of forming relationship between elements give places their character. Places are full of assets, hindrances, and graces for flourishing.

A process and history of gathering events. We sometimes talk about certain locations as “gathering places,” but *gathering* is a key dynamic of every place. Tim Cresswell quotes Edward Casey:

...places gather things in their midst - where 'things' connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts. Think only of what it means to go back to a place you know, finding it full of memories and expectations, old things and new things, the familiar and strange, and much more besides. What else is capable of this massively diversified holding action? ... The power belongs to place itself, and it is a power of gathering.¹⁰

Assemblage theory informs thinking about the gathering power of place. This is different from systems theory. Cresswell describes assemblage as:

...a unique whole 'whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts.' Assemblages are distinct from organic structures which are also assembled from parts but depend on each part in order to exist. In an organic structure, if you take away a constituent part the structure would cease to exist in a recognizable way. With an assemblage constituent parts can be removed and replaced. The parts can then enter other assemblages and contribute to new 'unique wholes'.¹¹

Gathering is not a one-time event. "Places are never 'finished' but always 'becoming.'"¹² The elements place gathers change constantly through new experiences, seasons, evolution, decay, and movement. The event of gathering happens over and over again—it is an ongoing process. Place involves an ongoing series of gathering events, but this does not mean that it is fleeting. The gathering process has a history and pattern to it. Cresswell notes:

As Arturo Escobar has argued 'places gather things, thoughts, and memories in particular configurations.' Place in this sense becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic. Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence.¹³

A way of making the world meaningful. Place is more than a simple geographic location or area. Place is a fundamental way of making meaning from localized human and nonhuman relationships. If asked where we are from or where we dwell, our response is not a set of coordinates—a city is not a place because it is locatable by GPS. Our answers involve a name that stirs up meanings for those acquainted with it in terms of geography, demographics, history, culture, economics, personal connections, or some other category. If another is unacquainted with our city, or reflects what we take to be a misrepresentation of it, we explain the meanings of the relationships we have with the people, land, creatures, and the natural and built environment. Place enables us to give meaning to a local set of relationships. Tim Cresswell describes place as "...how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power."¹⁴ Place, in contrast to space or mere location, is neither an objective thing in itself nor a characteristic of things in the world but

¹⁰ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Chichester, West Sussex UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 52.

¹¹ Cresswell, 52. Cresswell is quoting Manuel De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 5.

¹² Cresswell, 65.

¹³ Cresswell, 71.

¹⁴ Cresswell, 19.

rather “...an aspect of the way we choose to think about it—what we decide to emphasize and what we decide to designate as unimportant.”¹⁵

Stuff of what we are. Place gathers and presents to us the raw material for constructing our identity and vocation—we are the histories and relationships that place gathers. We take what place offers and weave it into who we are in ways that are novel, conformist, antithetical, or a bit of each. It is amidst the relationships gathered by place that we continually come into being and contribute to the becoming of others—both place and that which it holds are in processes of becoming at the same time. Cresswell notes:

...place is made and remade on a daily basis. ...Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than an *a priori* label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice.¹⁶

Jeff Malpas also argues place precedes subjectivity:

Place is instead that within and with respect to which subjectivity is itself established - place is not founded on subjectivity, but is rather that on which subjectivity is founded. Thus one does not first have a subject that apprehends certain features of the world in terms of the idea of place; instead, the structure of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place.¹⁷

The connections between identity and place that Cresswell, Malpas, and Martin Heidegger describe seem consistent with process theology. The self is a continuity of individual moments of experience...a continuous process of becoming moment by moment. We arise in a moment, the moment ends and we arise again in the next moment. In each moment of experience, we sense our past and that of the world about us both *human and non-human*.¹⁸ It makes sense to speak of place as the gathering of what we sense. This means we are radically interrelated with others and the world...we arise along with the world, we arise in a web of relationships. God participates in each moment of experience of each part of the world offering, luring, propositioning with a way to weave together our past and our relationships. That proposition from God offers the most redemptive and life giving option for us individually and the world as a whole in the moment. The assemblage of elements (creatures, plants, land, climate, built environment, culture, habitat...) that constitute place are internally related and are co-constituting. Any one element arises from its relationships with other elements in a place. At the same time place is the assemblage of these elements. In working with each moment God is luring toward a consistent vision for the wholeness and flourishing of the world but the advance toward that future involves many embodiments in the dance with the world.

Roots, routes, and nested places. While place endures over time it is also dynamic and while place is localized it is also open and interconnected. These claims point to the ways that identity and vocation have roots in particular places while at the same time they transcend particular

¹⁵ Cresswell, 18.

¹⁶ Cresswell, 70-71.

¹⁷ Cresswell, 50. Cresswell quoting Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophy of Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35.

¹⁸ Need to address the problem of anthropocentrism when talking about the relationships from which we arise.

places as the routes of life take us between places. Over the course of life, we dwell in different places. Within daily life, many of us move between the places of work, school, home, marketplace, and play. We move between different cultural places in privileged and disadvantaged ways. Networks of family, friends, and associations may cause us to travel between places. As Doreen Massey suggests, we encounter both the roots and the routes of identity and vocation in relation to places.

Formed by practices, power, and intersectionality. Social and relational systems shape the meanings that transform space into place through narratives and practices. Practices enculturate us into a *habitus* or lasting dispositions that function “at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions.”¹⁹ Cresswell writes,

Places are never finished but always the result of processes and practices. As such, places need to be studied in terms of the ‘dominant institutional projects,’ the individual biographies of people negotiating a place, and the way in which a sense of place is developed through the interaction of structure and agency.²⁰

Practices condition but do not determine how persons experience and construct place—freedom to improvise is also part of how practices work.

Hierarchies and power mark the terrain of social and relational systems as well. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre, Cresswell observes:

Clearly the things people do in place...are not always the result of free will. Some actions are freer than others and it is therefore necessary to take into account restraints on action that are the product of social hierarchies and power relations within society. ...A given social order, [Lefebvre] argues, imposes its rhythms onto the bodies of people.²¹

When people do not conform to imposed norms, they are viewed as transgressors and labeled “out of place.”²² The terrain of power in place is complex and many layered—we lose track of where we are when we focus on a single layer of gender, race, class, or ability. Place is an encounter with intersectionality. The primacy of place means that “[place] is a force that cannot be reduced to the social, the natural, or the cultural. It is, rather, a phenomenon that brings these worlds together and, indeed, in part produced them.”²³

Vocational Imagination and Place Evoking Vocation

Several lenses seem important for reflecting on vocational imagination and places evoking vocation:

Gathered by and in place. The lens of gathering focuses on knowing the places we dwell and our movements between places. This is both a prayerful and a studied knowing. Prayerful, in that we focus our attention (Simone Weil) on the activity of the Spirit, signs of the Kin-dom, graces

¹⁹ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 210), 35. Fulkerson quoting Bourdieu.

²⁰ Cresswell, 68.

²¹ Cresswell, 65.

²² Cresswell, 42.

²³ Cresswell, 47. Cresswell on Robert Sack.

embodied, and brokenness displayed. Studied, in that we draw upon diverse tools to recognize the many layers personal, social, and ecological layers of place. Through prayer and study, we not only know place but also begin the process of valuing and transforming it.

Intersectionality. We experience the relationships in place through structures of society, culture, and power. Systems such as racism, sexism, classism, anthropocentrism, heterosexism, and ableism often distort the terrain of relationships. The lens of intersectionality brings the relational terrain of place into focus, or more accurately, brings out what hidden dynamics there may be. We will need practices that open up intersections of relationships (human and ecological) for transformation: hearing into voice (Nelle Morton), seeing into visibility (Mary McClintock Fulkerson), and crossing borders into understanding.

Identity and Vocational Narratives. Part of what place gathers is our personal history—our sense of who we are and our purposes in life. Identity and vocational narratives hold together the experiences in our personal history. These narratives mark the trajectory of gifts and brokenness we bring to places. As places and our movements between them evoke us into being and vocation, they continually recreate these narratives in ways that succumb to the inertia of the past and yield to God's creative call.

Place-making. Not only do places evoke us, we evoke places. Place-making is an empathetic response to tend the gifts and brokenness of place in light of God's work in the world. Tending to place means fostering a gratitude that makes manifest and nurtures the graces woven into places by God. Tending to place means participating in continual valuing, revaluing, and re-forming of relationships toward flourishing—that is, sharing in re-deeming work. Being equipped for place-making draws deeply on our formation as disciples of Jesus: knowing scripture and our heritage, fruits of the spirits, spirituality, prayer, worship, community, and servanthood. Place-making also requires a commitment to our own transformation as we encounter the relationships of place and expand our responsiveness to vocation—in essence our deepening sanctification. In place-making, we practice both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as dimensions of the Kin-dom of God.

Topophilia. Knowing places does not necessarily mean that we identify or have solidarity with them. Lacking such connection, places and movement between them lose their evocative vocational power to lay claims on us. In fact, we need to think of place and vocation in terms of empathy, mutuality, and love. I wonder at times if we lose sight of empathy and solidarity in the ways we utilize praxis as a methodology for practical theology and religious education in North America. Has problem posing morphed into objectification of situations and seeking a fix for them?

In many ways, my hope for renewed vocational imagination is that it calls us to love, identify with, have empathy for, and care for all that place gathers. I find it meaningful to adopt *Topophilia* as a name for such a call. The term combines the Greek *topos* (place) and *philia* (affectionate regard and friendship). Yi-Fu Tuan introduced the concept of Topophilia in the field of humanistic geography: “The word ‘topophilia’...can be defined broadly to include all of the human being’s affective ties with the material environment.” Jim Cresswell notes this is essential to “place as a ‘field of care.’”²⁴ The lens of topophilia focuses on empathy and mutuality as part of belonging to God and belonging to places and routes between them. Topophilia is an important dimension to maintain in the ongoing cycle between action and reflection on situations/actions (praxis). Topophilia is also a part of fulfilling the Great Commandment to love God completely and our neighbors (inclusive of creation) as ourselves, for place gathers all that makes us who we are and all that we are to love.

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²⁴ Cresswell, 35.



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Fighting the Fear of Encounter: Discernment, Imagination, and Praxis in Educating for Resistance

In a political climate where fear of immigrants and minorities, white nationalism, and alternative facts are the norm, a religious education that embraces encounter must prepare people to resist the seduction of an easy exclusion. This resistance of exclusion involves establishing hospitality and encounter through the exercise of imagination, discernment, and commitment to praxis. A pedagogy of resistance equips youth to name and resist a social imaginary that has replaced hospitality and encounter with fear and suspicion.

In the Religious Education Association call for papers for this year's conference, the coordinators provide us with some parameters to consider under the rubric of "encounter." In particular, the inter-religious encounter is seen as both the goal of religious education and the site of religious education. As an educational goal, inter-religious encounter points to the responsibility of religious educators – in schools, parishes, and other religious organizations – to prepare young people to encounter those whose religious tradition differs from their own. This involves the "task of helping pupils learn the skills which will enable them to deal not only with their own religious tradition but with difference and diversity among religions and worldview orientations."¹ So, in order to educate toward an openness to this kind of encounter, religious educators help students understand their own religious traditions so that they can be confident in their own religious beliefs. They also provide students with sufficient information about other religious traditions so that students can encounter them in openness, respect, and a willingness to learn from these traditions. At the same time, encounter with difference also becomes a site where religious education happens. It is in the encounter with those who have religious beliefs that are different from our own that we learn the skills of inter-religious encounter. The Christian practices of hospitality, generosity, respect, and humility are learned in praxis – in the doing of them in real-life situations. Thus, religious education for encounter is a dynamic educational program that involves both "learning about" – learning about religious traditions and practices – and "learning through" – learning from the encounter itself.

These are all worthy and necessary goals. As the United States and other countries where Christianity has historically been a majority religion become more and more religiously diverse, the need for religious education to prepare students to respectfully and hospitably encounter people with differing religious beliefs and practices is clear. And this call for a religious education that embraces encounter is itself reflective of the Gospel call to hospitality. Jesus provides the model of the teacher who is prepared to welcome and break bread with those who society would consider the stranger, the outsider, the other. The Good Samaritan and the stories of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman and the Syro-Phoenician woman, for example, all

¹ Religious Education Association, "Call for Proposals," <https://religiouseducation.net/rea2017/call/>

provide Biblical warrant for the call for Christian communities to welcome encounter with the stranger. Yet, the Biblical witness also reminds us that Jesus experienced significant reluctance and argumentativeness from his disciples. They objected to his welcome of children, of a woman considered unclean, of a tax collector. They wanted to exclude these people from Jesus' ministry, or, at least, to move them to the margins so that they would not intrude on the disciples' vision for what Jesus' ministry should be. But, again and again, Jesus pushed back on this exclusion; Jesus welcomed all (even when he had to be reminded to do so as in the case of the Syro-Phoenician woman).

Jesus' hospitality provides the example for our encounters with those who are different from ourselves. Like the disciples, it is all too easy to fall into an easy exclusion, operating with the assumption that "we" do not need "them" or that "they" are a danger to "us." Like the disciples, we find that it is often easier to follow the practices of the culture around us – seeking to surround ourselves with those like us, seeking to protect ourselves from difference or change. We often couch this exclusion in terms of service to our own before serving others or of a celebration of the uniqueness of our own group or of mindfulness of a perceived danger presented by members of some "other" community. But, regardless of how we explain it to ourselves, this exclusion of others from being welcomed into our Christian communities too easily mimics the wrongheadedness of the disciples and fails to walk the path laid out by Jesus. And, just as Jesus resisted his disciples' attempts to exclude those who they thought were too different, the Christian church is called to continue resisting this kind of exclusion.

These practices of exclusion seem today to be deeply rooted in our culture and, by extension, in our churches. Racism, sexism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, discrimination against immigrants (regardless of their legal status), and white nationalism all seem to be finding new purchase in our cultural awareness. While these evils and the unjust structures that reinforce them were always there, these voices of injustice seemed marginalized. But the list of events that bring to public awareness the persistence of these attitudes and practices continues to grow: Ferguson, Charleston, Orlando, Charlottesville.

When our public discourse seems to propose a religious faith that is exclusionary and isolating, religious educators have a responsibility to, in the language of Walter Brueggemann, denounce the dominant consciousness and announce a new consciousness. To do this, religious educators can cultivate an imagination deeply rooted in the Biblical tradition of prophetic resistance to injustice. And they can invite religious education students into the dialogical process of discernment – a practice that not only helps us to imagine God's perspective but also helps us to form communities with other Christians, joining together to create communities of encounter and hospitality. But merely forming communities of like-minded believers is not enough; if the goal is the prophetic denunciation of a social imaginary that has become toxic, religious educators and their students are called to engage in practices of resistance. Even in the face of a seeming rising tide of hate and exclusion, there is the opportunity for religious education programs in schools and parishes to resist the turn away from encounter and to draw attention to practices of hospitality that welcome difference and dialogue.

Social Imaginaries and an Easy Exclusion

Philosopher Charles Taylor provides a perspective on the ways that societies imagine their common existence and make sense of reality. Taylor adopts the term "social imaginary" which he defines in this way:

By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.²

While a social imaginary might be grounded in or explained by a social theory, it points to the largely un-reflected-upon understanding that the people in a society have of the way things work.³ Social imaginaries, then, are the ways that societies as a whole imagine their social existence; it “is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”⁴ Social imaginaries, because they ground the ways that societies and their people think about reality, underlie both the good and the bad of those realities.⁵

Social imaginaries have historically been grounded in the religious imagination of a society. Taylor describes a time, particularly from the Middle Ages until the advent of what he names as secularity, when Western society was embedded in a social imaginary that was largely shaped by a religious perspective. In this social imaginary, belief in God was assumed and participation in the religious rituals, teachings, and practices of the community was unquestioned.⁶ In this social imaginary, the practices of the community were shaped by Christian commitments and there was an at least implicit understanding of the need for hospitality and welcome. Outsiders would have been relatively uncommon and, when strangers did visit a community, they would likely to have at least seemed familiar – sharing the same religion, race, or class expectations. Nevertheless, there was in the social imaginary an expectation that strangers in the community could request and would be offered hospitality – a bit of food, a dry place to sleep, a word of welcome.

In the social imaginary of the early twenty-first century in the United States, this has shifted. No longer is the social imaginary shaped in an unquestioned way by a shared religious perspective. Even when a majority of members of a community claim the same religious tradition, the meaning of that religious tradition and its role in shaping the ways we live together are often disputed. For example, while Christianity is the majority religion in the United States, we seem to be in a period where the meaning of Christianity in the public sphere is under

² Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23. Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann put it this way: “The man on the street does not ordinarily trouble himself about what is ‘real’ to him and about what he ‘knows’ unless he is stopped short by some sort of problem. He takes his ‘reality’ and his ‘knowledge’ for granted” (Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 2).

³ Again, Berger and Luckmann are helpful: “Only a very limited group of people in any society engages in theorizing, in the business of ideas... But everyone in society participates in its ‘knowledge’ in one way or another. Put differently, only a few are concerned with the theoretical interpretation of the world, but everybody lives in a world of some sort” (Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 15).

⁴ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

⁵ For example, the belief that, in a democratic society, all people have the opportunity to participate in the common decision making can make it so that people expect all institutions (such as the Catholic Church) to function democratically; we see democratic participation to be such an obvious good that we do not understand why all institutions are not democratic. On the other hand, those in positions of privilege in a democratic society tend to assume that all people participate in that democracy and all people experience the same results; this ignores the impact of structural oppression and marginalization (such as racism and sexism) on the ability of some to participate in the democratic process.

⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 25.

question and the relationship of Christianity to our social imaginary seems to have become problematic.

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 has revealed this shifting of the social imaginary in unexpected ways. Prior to the election, many of us⁷ assumed that our social imaginary included a commitment to encounter, welcome, and hospitality. While there were situations where those who were considered “outsiders” were not met with welcome, we assumed that these instances were not part of the “mainstream” of our social imaginary. However, since the election, we have seen increasing incidence of hate speech, harassment, and xenophobia. Swastikas painted on synagogues and mosques, attacks against people who look Hispanic or Muslim, attempts to roll back the legal protections afforded to gay, lesbian, and transgender people, attempts to restrict access to voting in African American communities. Most disturbing, the resurgence of white supremacy movements, calling explicitly for the exclusion from the community of those who don’t fit a narrow definition of what it means to be an America citizen. It seems that the America that many of us thought we lived in – one that was making progress (too slow, sometimes) towards increasing openness, hospitality, care, and justice – does not exist. We can no longer take for granted that our communities are places that welcome encounter with those who are different from ourselves.

Prophetic Imagining

Walter Brueggemann’s articulation of the prophetic imagination is particularly useful for describing how an ancient vision – the critique of their social context offered by the biblical prophets – can become a call to a renewed social imaginary today. For Brueggemann, the study of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible must draw the reader from an analysis of the prophets’ message to their world to a continual re-reading and re-appropriation of the biblical message for our world. Brueggemann insists that “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.”⁸ This alternative consciousness is one that is both critical of the dominant culture and energizing of the community in creating a new way of doing things. If our social imaginary is the way that we have come to understand our reality, the way things are, then the prophetic imagination is one that calls this social imaginary into question and pushes the community to continually reshape this social imaginary so that it conforms ever more closely with the vision of God’s reign that is articulated by the prophets.

Brueggemann’s analysis of the work of the prophets can be understood in the categories of discernment, imagination, and praxis. Discernment and imagination go hand in hand for the prophet. The ability to see and judge the existing social order, especially when that social imaginary is unjust and oppressive, must, in the work of the prophet function alongside an ability to propose a new vision for the life of the community. The prophet calls for an evaluation of the current social imaginary and a break with oppressive structures. Engaging the community in the process of seeing – perhaps for the first time – that the social imaginary is an inadequate expression of God’s call to love, mercy, and justice, prophets encourage the community in the

⁷ The perspective I’m describing comes from my own contextualized experience as a white, middle-class resident of the East Coast of the United States. Clearly, members of communities of color and others on the receiving end of hate, harassment, and violence have been aware of these currents in our social imaginary. My point is simply that the events of the last year have brought these to the forefront – especially for those of us with white middle-class privilege – in stark and frightening ways.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

process of discerning their choices. This choice, discerned through the exercise of a prophetic imagination, is between the current social imaginary that undergirds a system of injustice and oppression and a renewed social imaginary more aligned with the biblical call to justice, hospitality, and openness to encounter. The process of discernment involves the imagining of new possibilities, an alternative consciousness that is proposed by the prophet and which provides an energizing hope for the community. The prophet “creates the sense of new realities that can be trusted and relied upon just when the old realities have left us hopeless... We are energized not by that which we already possess but by that which is promised and about to be given.”⁹ In taking the side of the marginalized and victimized in history, the prophet calls for a renewed vision for how things should be and instills the hope and confidence that this vision is coming to reality. The prophet and the prophetic community engage in the collective re-shaping of the social imaginary by visioning a new reality.

Under the influence of a prophetic imagination, this call for the community to reshape its social imaginary becomes a call to action. And, this call to action involves both the resistance of injustice and the creation of more just structures and communities. Prophetic resistance to injustice rests on a foundation of seeing injustice, judging in contrary to God’s vision, and acting in concrete ways to resist that injustice. In their denunciation of the unjust social imaginary and their annunciation of a more just vision, prophets call the community to praxis on behalf of those who are oppressed and marginalized. Brueggemann suggests that “prophetic imagination begins in the ancient covenant but it is carried, in concrete articulation, to current issue of the day, so that daily transactions are delineated as instances of old covenantal commitments.”¹⁰ And he reminds us that, as with the ancient prophets, this is a difficult task: “The prophetic act, now as always, is decidedly upstream and against the grain. Its work is to take deeply rooted memories (to which we still tip our hats in vague acknowledgement) and show how these memories continue to inform and shape and compel even now.”¹¹

Resisting Injustice

The Bible teaches us that God is a God of steadfast love, loyalty, and care, and, because of this, God’s actions towards the people of Israel are just. God’s justice is described, for example, in the mouth of Moses: “The Rock, his work is perfect and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4). And God’s words to Isaiah paint a portrait of a God who wants nothing more than to act with justice: “Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18). God stands up for those who are most in need of protection and care and expects the same from the people: “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). In calling the people to act with *hesed*, the prophet Micah also calls the people to act with justice: “[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

⁹ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 14.

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 31.

¹¹ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, 40.

However, the biblical call to justice also means that communities are called to be communities that resist injustice. In other words, in addition to actively working to end oppression, we are called to form communities that empower people to resist the effects of injustice. Religious educator HyeRan Kim-Cragg, in exploring communities that practice this kind of resistance to injustice, names remembrance and relationship-building as “important threads that weave a theology of resistance, a theology that uncovers realities of violence and reflects the faith and wisdom of people who work to overcome it.”¹² Remembrance, which goes beyond a simple knowing about an injustice, to an embodied and faithful remembering,¹³ is a transformative practice that both recalls the injustices of the past and hopes for a more just future. Practices of remembrance become, therefore, practices of resistance; by remembering the injustices of the past and present, those injustices can be resisted and ended. Relationship-building – particularly the building of relationships across differences – functions to bind together in solidarity the community that seeks to resist injustice. “A theology of resistance as a relationship-building is a work of the body that touches and moves the soul of people. It ‘occurs only through the actual presence of people who have the courage to be physically present, to *be* in a place of hunger, violence, or despair.’”¹⁴ Remembrance and relationship-building in communities of resistance function together; the stories that we tell in order to recall injustice need both tellers and hearers.¹⁵ In a community that resists injustice, not only does the sharing of stories help in the building of community, it provides alternative ways of imagining the ways of understanding the social imaginary at work in their world.

Resisting injustice calls on the same three categories of discernment, imagination, and praxis. Discerning injustice – seeing its manifestations in our current social imaginary; hearing the stories of injustice told within the community and by those outside the community; evaluating the effects of violence, oppression, marginalization, and exclusion – lays the foundation for resistance. We cannot resist injustices that we do not yet see and understand. Furthermore, communities engage in discernment as they consider not only what the injustice is that needs to be resisted but also how that resistance can happen. Exercising a prophetic imagination calls the community to critically evaluate the social imaginary and the injustices that it undergirds and to propose a new vision for the community – new ways of remembering, building relationships, practicing solidarity, and resisting unjust structures and protesting unjust acts.

And, in resisting injustice, it is not enough to discern the injustice and to imagine the appropriate response; the commitment to praxis for justice must follow. When we participate in communities that are resisting injustice, we are practicing solidarity, living alongside those who are oppressed and marginalized, and acting in the world as God acts. Because communities of resistance are built on a network of relationships that span all kinds of differences (in age, gender, class, and race), they can function to form people in the real relationships that help them to imagine God’s justice in the world. Practices of resistance – such as sharing stories of marginalization, participating in rallies and protests, petitioning government, raising funds, and

¹² HaeRan Kim-Cragg, “A Theology of Resistance in Conversation with Religious Education in the Unmaking of Violence,” *Religious Education* 110, no.4 (July-September 2015): 422.

¹³ Kim-Cragg, “A Theology of Resistance,” 424. For Kim-Cragg, “Faith is an act performed by the body such that it comes to know. This bodily knowing, through the communal gesture of remembrance, continues to be learned in this physical gathering.”

¹⁴ Kim-Cragg, “A Theology of Resistance,” 426. Kim-Cragg is quoting Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 206.

¹⁵ Kim-Cragg, “A Theology of Resistance,” 427.

engaging in dialogue across ideological differences – help people see the ways that various injustices impact the lives of the people around them and how they can participate in the fight against these kinds of oppression and marginalization.

Educating for Resistance

A most obvious source for a pedagogy for resistance to injustice and the creation of communities oriented toward inclusion and encounter is the liberative pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Freire argues that the role of the education 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 and analyze the situations of social, cultural, political, and economic oppression and marginalization in their lives (a practice of discernment), the poor become able to imagine ways to change these situations of injustice, transforming their lives and the whole of their world.¹⁶

Like the work of the prophet, Freire describes the work of the revolutionary teacher as one who aids students in the discernment and imaginative processes of rejecting a “banking education”¹⁷ and engaging in the process of problematizing, asking questions, dialogue, and conscientization.¹⁸ This conscientization can only occur in the dialogical process in which teachers and students struggle together to understand and take ownership of some particular content, echoing Kim-Cragg’s call for practices of remembrance and relationship-building. To do this, Freire argues that

it is impermissible to train engineers or stonemasons, physicians or nurses, dentists or machinists, educators or mechanics, farmers or philosophers, cattle farmers or biologists, without an understanding of our own selves as historical, political, social, and cultural beings – without a comprehension of how society works.¹⁹

Students learn to discern their social imaginary, to understand the ways the world works – and especially the ways that it works to keep them marginalized and oppressed. In doing this, they also come to see that the way things are – the present social imaginary – is not necessarily the way things must be. And, in this understanding, is born the struggle for change and justice.

Feminist scholars of liberative pedagogy have argued that Freire’s approach points towards the integration of conscientization (through processes of discernment and imagination) and praxis. If this conscientization is “the process by which individuals recognize the systems of oppression in which they exist, articulate their roles and places in these systems, and develop concrete strategies to empower themselves and others to engage in social action,”²⁰ then conscientization happens through the processes of

(a) dialogic practice, which encourages those who have been silenced to speak for themselves; (b) praxical pedagogy, which emphasizes skill development that prepares individuals to ‘understand and intervene into their own history;’ and (c) a pedagogy of

¹⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1989), 100.

¹⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 57-59.

¹⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 67.

¹⁹ Paulo Freire, “Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” in *The Paulo Freire Reader*, ed. Ana Maria Araujo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (New York: Continuum, 2001), 263.

²⁰ Carolyn Zerbe Enns and Linda M. Forrest, “Toward Defining and Integrating Multicultural and Feminist Pedagogies,” in *Teaching and Social Justice: Integrating Multicultural and Feminist Theories in the Classroom*, ed. Carolyn Zerbe Enns and Ada L. Sinacore (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005), 6.

articulation and risk, which focuses on making connections or maps between different practices and theories to find methods that work.²¹

An education for conscientization is one that brings students and teachers together into communities where open dialogue and concern for those who have been silenced, marginalized, and oppressed combines with a commitment to act with them and on their behalf.

A liberative pedagogy also has the effect of nurturing the imaginations of students. Educator bell hooks notes that “in dominator culture, the killing of one’s ability to imagine serves as a way to repress and contain everyone within the limits of the status quo.”²² The recurring and unexamined experience of silencing, marginalization, and oppression effectively stifles the imaginations, but a liberative pedagogy, one that focuses on conscientization, has the power to counter this.²³ If, as hooks insists, “imagination is one of the most powerful modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited folk can and do use,”²⁴ then it is also the task of education to find ways to nurture the imagination. And, for hooks, this nurturing of the imagination is an engagement of the prophetic:

The power of the imagination [feels] prophetic. In Mary Grey’s *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope*, she explains that “prophetic imagination is outrageous – not merely in dreaming the dream, but in already living out the dream before it has come to pass, and in embodying this dream in concrete action.” Individuals from marginalized groups, whether victimized by dysfunctional families or by political systems of domination, often find their way to freedom by heeding the call of prophetic imagination.²⁵

By engaging the imaginations of students, particularly the imaginations of those students from marginalized and oppressed groups, liberative pedagogies have the potential to enable students to analyze the world in which they live, to discern the ways that that world is unjust, and to propose new ways to engage that world in order to resist that injustice. In other words, a liberative pedagogy sets the stage for educating students in a prophetic imagination that denounces injustice and announces new ways of being in the world. Flowing from the perspective of a liberative pedagogy, practices of resistance to injustice become critical praxis – the cycle of informed action and critical reflection – rooted in a reading of the world and the word and engaging in prophetic imagining.

Fighting the Fear of Encounter in Religious Education

The social imaginary that seems operative in the United States – and that seems especially visible since the 2016 election – is one that cultivates fear of the other. At best, this results in a lack of hospitality and a reticence to welcome others into our church communities. At worst, this leads to racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, xenophobic rhetoric that lives in and goes unchallenged by church communities. Most likely, church communities reject these

²¹ Enns and Forrest, “Towards Defining,” 7-8.

²² bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 60.

²³ Annie Lockhart-Gilroy, “A Way Forward: Nurturing the Imagination at the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Age” *Religious Education* 111, no. 4 (July-September 2016): 422. Lockhart-Gilroy makes this argument about the experiences of black adolescent girls: “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.”

²⁴ hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 61.

²⁵ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 185-186. hooks is quoting from Mary C. Grey, *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope: Prophetic Dreams for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2001).

extreme expressions of hate that have surfaced in the United States; but they need more strategies for educating their congregations to resist these kinds of injustices and to shape a community that welcomes the encounter with those who are different and that embodies Jesus' example of hospitality and resistance of injustice. The categories of discernment, imagination, and praxis can provide a framework for educators to engage youth in a religious education that resists the fear of encounter.²⁶

Discernment

A religious education program that wants to fight the fear of encounter can provide young people with skills of and practice in using discernment. As defined by David White, discernment is the attempt to “understand how God reveals truth to humans amid our potential for distorting this truth.”²⁷ Discernment is the Christian practice of listening for God's message to humanity amid the historical circumstances in which the community finds itself. In today's context, discernment means seeking out God's history of being on the side of the most marginalized, of calling the community to hospitality and justice, and of calling the community to action on behalf of the oppressed, marginalized, and maligned. Discernment today means seeing the ways that God's message to humanity calls into question the current social imaginary, the unjust status quo. Discernment enables the community to see the interconnectedness of the world and to see the need for relationships across difference.²⁸

As White suggests, the practices of discernment are largely already in place in most of our church communities – practices of listening, understanding, remembering and dreaming, and acting.²⁹ However, “despite the presence of these habits in popular youth ministry, they remain unrelated and discrete, and the responsibility for these habits lies largely in the hands of adults.”³⁰ Practices of discernment have the potential to empower young people to see for themselves what God is calling the community to be and to do. Simply telling youth to be welcoming is not as powerful as helping them to see for themselves that hospitality and encounter is rooted in God's Word and functions to cultivate real relationships among people. This echoes HaeRan Kim-Cragg's call for remembrance and relationship-building in educating for resistance – it is through the telling of the stories of God's interactions with God's people and through the relationships that are formed in the community that everyone in the community is empowered to engage in the resistance to injustice that the current social imaginary calls for.

²⁶ In this section, I consider some guiding principles for youth in religious education, but the principles outlined here could and should also be used in adult religious education programming.

²⁷ David F. White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 66. White broadens this definition, suggesting four ways that that discernment draws on human capabilities “as means of illuminating God's Word and resisting self-deceit: (1) discernment as a language of the heart that focuses on affect and intuition, through which God speaks; (2) discernment as language of the mind, which engages in intellectual analysis, through which God speaks; (3) discernment as language of the soul, which privileges contemplation and biblical/theological imagination, through which God speaks; and (4) discernment as a language of the body, of practical exploration of the world, through which God also speaks” (66-67).

²⁸ White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 83.

²⁹ White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 200. He claims: “Youth ministers routinely create Bible studies or youth talks based on their practice of listening to young people and the themes of their lives. Most youth curriculum in some way engages in analysis of some social issue and frames it theologically. And most youth groups actively engage in missions work, whether journeying to Mexico or Appalachia or to nearby centers for ministries with the homeless and poor” (200-201).

³⁰ White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 200-201.

Imagination

A religious education that nurtures a prophetic imagination is one that takes seriously the importance of imagination in the ways that people make sense of the world. According to Mary Warnock, the imagination is the foundation of the ability to interpret experiences and to propose new ways of being in the world.³¹ Inviting young people to exercise their imaginations is not simply the effort to encourage them to create new things (through drawing, writing, and so on). Even more, it is an invitation for them to feel more deeply and to think more creatively about everything in their world.³² In taking on the challenge of educating for imagination, Maxine Greene notes that cultivating an imagination in young people means helping them move beyond their ordinary and habitual ways of thinking. This is a challenge for teachers: “It may be a challenge to pose questions, to seek out explanations, to look for reasons, to construct meanings. It may be a provoking of dialogues within the classroom space.”³³ Greene suggests that the classroom space that is most conducive to education for imagination is one that provokes thoughtfulness and conscientization when teachers and students learn together in “a kind of collaborative search, each from her or his lived situation.”³⁴ This search must be rooted in hope. Following Freire, she asserts that “people trying to be more fully human must not only engage in critical thinking but must be able to imagine something coming of their hopes; their silence must be overcome by their search.”³⁵

As explored earlier, Brueggemann reminds us that key to the prophetic imagination is the prophetic task of denouncing the dominant consciousness and announcing a new, more liberative consciousness.³⁶ Similarly, Freire argues that, in our educative efforts, we have a responsibility to both denounce and announce – to denounce the injustice that we see and experience and to announce the ways that the world can be changed.³⁷ In the process of asking questions, posing problems, and engaging in dialogue, we examine our world, read our world, and commit to changing it. The biblical prophets 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 that community to act. Following their model, young people can be invited into the Christian prophetic imagination as, with the community and from their own positionality, they imagine the church as God has called it to be – to be a community of faithfulness, mercifulness, loving-kindness, and justice.

Praxis

Discernment and imagination are the first steps; for a church community to educate for resistance to a fear of encounter, discernment and imagination – seeing God’s message to the church, denouncing the unjust social imaginary, and proposing a new way of being in the world – must be followed by praxis. White suggests that young people are hungry for action:

Young people yearn to “do something” and so are expressing a holy desire to engage meaningfully in the reconciliation of the world and their true selves – beyond frivolous social and recreational activities we provide in hopes of retaining their interest. They

³¹ Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1976), 202.

³² Warnock, *Imagination*, 207.

³³ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), 26.

³⁴ Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 23.

³⁵ Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 25.

³⁶ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 7.

³⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 40.

yearn to be actors in history and not simply acted upon. Youth sense that the world is filled with wounds for which they have resources. Youth yearn to break free from the pacifying slumber of adolescence to engage the world as agents of faith, to participate with the God of Jesus Christ in redeeming life within the bounds of history, space, and time.³⁸

Young people want to make a difference in world, but they do not yet know how to connect what they believe and what they have discovered through discernment and imagination with the real problems they see in the world.

Praxis – action that is rooted in discernment and imagination – helps young people to see the connections between an activity and their faith commitments. It equips them to engage in encounters with others that are just, respectful, hospitable, and deeply rooted in the Christian faith.³⁹ And, as Freire reminds us, education (particularly religious education) and praxis cannot be separated: “For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human being pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”⁴⁰

In confronting the fear of encounter, this praxis moves young people beyond simple action to a reflective and creative practice. Any individual activity in a church community can invite youth to think more deeply about their faith. But, by combining reflection and action, church communities can help young people engage in the kind of praxis that can lead to a transformation of their world and, ultimately, of the social imaginary.

Conclusion

The social imaginary of the United States in the early twenty-first century seems to have shifted. The un-reflected-upon ways that we thought the world worked no longer seem to be true. Instead of a world that seemed to be making progress in eradicating hate, mistrust, and fear of difference, we find ourselves in a world where those who preach exclusion are finding new audiences. While this may be the “last gasp” of a dying imaginary rooted in a history that can no longer be recreated, it is, nevertheless, still operative in our day-to-day lives. In the quest to confront a social imaginary – both in the church and in the wider community – that undergirds an easy exclusion of those who are different, young people can be on the front lines of change. Discernment and imagination, remembrance and relationship-building, when combined with praxis with and on behalf of those who are marginalized or excluded provides young people with a way to put their deep yearning to “do something” into conversation with the Gospel call to love, mercy, and justice.

³⁸ White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 187.

³⁹ White provides an example, which I retell using the categories of discernment, imagination, and praxis: A youth group exploring the connections between racism and the juvenile justice system used practices of discernment to learn about the issue and about God’s call for love, care, and respect. They used practices of imagination to critique the social imaginary that led to the disproportionate incarceration of African America youth and to imagine ways of being community that are more just. And, finally, they took action both in the church community and in the wider community. This praxis not only helped them advocate for a change of an unjust system, it also helped them change themselves and their own practices of welcoming and hospitality. See White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 197-199.

⁴⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 58. Freire says this even more pointedly: “To affirm that men [and women] are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce” (35).

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Title: Learning in Encounter between Secular and Christian Students in Merged Schools.

Abstract.

The feature of religious diversity in the Netherlands is very explicit at schools that are the result of a merger of a public and a confessional school, the so-called cooperation school. This PhD-research concentrates on a thick description and an action research concerning the design of a new religious celebration at one specific cooperation school. Focusing on this activity we ask the question how and based on what motives teachers of this religiously diverse school construct a celebration for students from various religious backgrounds. We present the analyzed values and content that are practiced in this activity of religious education in which encounter between students from Christian and of secular background is organized. Based on these results we draw conclusions concerning religious diversity and encounter in education.

1. Main concepts/issues

In the religious plural society of the Netherlands we detect an increase of a special type of school: the cooperation school. This school is the result of a merger between a confessional school and a public school. The first is religious affiliated, the second is neutral and active multiform.

Religious plurality is particularly evident in these cooperation schools. Our previous research indicated this plurality of the student population as a key characteristic of these schools.

In the completed three articles of our research we have answered the following questions:

1. How are core values of cooperation schools formulated and how is religious education at these schools organized?
2. How do the core values relate to collective moments of contemplation?
3. How do the core values relate to segregated moments of contemplation and collective religious celebrations?

In these questions the position and the appreciation of the school values play a major role. In particular in the case studies of articles 2 and 3 it appeared that there is a tension between the school values of equality and encounter and practices of religious education. According to literature, these practices can be identity markers of these values. However, the original identities of public and denominational education are expressed in the practice of the moments of contemplation and celebrations. Also an explicit place is reserved for sources from the Christian tradition. Besides the question of how the core value of equality relates to this attention to one tradition, it is important to examine how the core value of encounter can be stimulated in these practices.

In a broader and international context, the above-mentioned tension is important because it addresses the question of how practices of religious education can be motivated and organized in such a way that they do justice to the plurality of the student population. By addressing this question we refer to literature about religious education and diversity. As an example we quote: *'Not only students who are socialized in a religious tradition, but also students from secularized families should be welcomed in schools that want to foster interreligious teaching and learning, and they should feel at ease too. It is in such schools that students are taught, learned, and practice to build bridges between people, bridges between religions and worldviews, bridges from today until tomorrow.* (Miedema en Ter Avest, 2011, p. 417).

In the final stage of our PhD-research teachers of one school conducted action research in a so called Professional Learning Community: they designed a religious celebration for students from secular and Christian backgrounds.

We selected this school to complement our previous research because its teachers recognized the discrepancies between ideals and praxis and supported the necessity of implementing dialogue. With the teachers, we designed a new practice of interreligious dialogue, introducing a new element in our research: the construction and implementation of a concrete practice of religious education and its valuation by the teachers. In this design, the teachers created a religious celebration, focusing on implementing dialogue, for students from secular and Christian backgrounds, which is optimal in the context of a rural cooperation school. In the case of this particular school, the teachers also faced a new challenge: they had little or no experience with interreligious dialogue because of their segregated moments of contemplation and the character of the celebrations: during these celebrations, students present to each other

on stage and do not interact about religious subjects (Renkema, Mulder, and Barnard 2017). By developing this celebration in action research and by investigating the motives of the teachers, we explored a new way of dealing with the discrepancy between the core value of encounter and the practice of religious education. The resulting celebration tells us more about the process and content for religious activities involving plurality.

Our main question in this research is: How and based on what motives do teachers of a cooperation school construct a religious celebration for students from these backgrounds? This celebration is a practice in which encounter between students of different religious views can be implemented. We explored this question by examining the following sub questions:

1. What do teachers see as core values of the school and how are these related to the formal school values?
2. How do teachers express their values in the design requirements of a celebration for students from secular and Christian backgrounds and in their concepts of the term 'celebration'?
3. How do teachers express their values in the content of a celebration for students from secular and Christian backgrounds?
4. How do teachers evaluate the celebration related to the school core values and the design requirements?
5. How does the academic researcher contribute to the process of the meetings by putting forward the concept of dialogue?

These questions are investigated from a theoretical perspective of encounter in religious education. This concept plays an important role in the academic discourse on religious education and diversity.

2. Description of methodology for addressing the topic

We conducted a single case study using qualitative data. A thick description of this school provides us with detailed information about current motives and practice of teachers dealing with religious diversity in classroom. For this thick description we studied formal school documents concerning the history and the recent policy and practice of this school.

Next to this study of documents we conducted an action research in designing a religious celebration. Based on the results of our previous, descriptive research, this action research is oriented at development and participatory in nature. The teachers are encouraged to participate as researchers. This means that their questions and their practice are the starting point. In our case we put teachers of Christian and of secular education together in a group that was given the assignment to design a celebration that reflected common values.

The research focuses on the concrete practice and the improvement of this practice. In our case this is the implementation from encounter between students from Christian and secular backgrounds. We used action research as a method by setting up a so-called Professional Learning Community (PLC).

We analyzed the results by coding, based on which we could draw conclusions for the

practice of religious education in schools that deal with religious diversity and are challenged to organize encounter between students of Christian and secular world view.

3. Description of the school

The cooperation school in this study is a primary school in the southwest of the Netherlands, situated in a rural village with a population of 1300. The school is the only school in the village and is attended by 155 students.

The school website and the school guide outline the vision on religious education, expressing the school identity as an “encounter school”: “a school where teachers, students, parents of various religious backgrounds work together and have joint responsibility for education and upbringing” (school guide 2014-2018, 4).

Parents can choose between two types of religious education: Christian and general.

4. Conclusions

Based on the thick description of the school and the action research we have drawn conclusions that concern dialogue in religious education between students from secular and Christian backgrounds. These conclusions lead us to a more distinct perspective on the expressing of the school values of encounter and dialogue in the concrete practice of religious education.

In our presentation we will ask questions that deal with this expression and that focus on learning in encounter between students from secular and Christian backgrounds. This way we take a close look at the theme of our REA Meeting using a Dutch practice with an international significance.

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A closer look at Catholic and non-Catholic students in Catholic schools: Some insights for religious educators.

Religious education is deeply interested in the interface between religion and the wider culture. One of the most important aspects of this interaction is how to better understand secularization. To say that we live in a secular culture or that young people are becoming more secular is a very common observation. What is meant by secularization is weighty and almost inexhaustible topic but in this paper I would like to briefly outline some of the dimensions and implications of secularization *in situ*. What does secularization look like when we examine the responses of young people? I would propose that we need to develop a more nuanced understanding of secularization, one which sees it not as a uniform and inevitable aspect of life today. Rather secularization is best understood as having its greatest impact in practical lived experience. In this sense it tends to impact across a broad range of groups and certainly religious communities are not immune from the effects of this type of secularizing tendency. As we move away from impact on everyday life then religious ideas re-emerge but these tend to be quite abstract notions with low salience or impact. Salience is a sociological term that refers to how much influence beliefs – in this case religious beliefs – have on how a person lives and what they think. Secular here does not mean hostility or overt anger about religious belief, practice, and commitment. It is just that for an increasing number of people, and these are by no means just young people, religion has a relatively minor part in shaping what they believe and how they live. There is a very important distinction to be made here between overtly rejecting religion and regarding it, in practice, as having only a small impact of life. The latter position is one that is becoming

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normative in many cultures and is a good working definition of the process of secularization in many Western post-industrial countries such as Australia.

This understanding of secularization can be seen more clearly if we examine the responses of a selective, differentiated sample of young people. A range of studies have reported on the religious and spiritual lives of contemporary young people.ⁱ Many of these have examined representative samples in order to make inferences and draw conclusions about national trends.ⁱⁱ In any representative sample, however, there is recognition that in obtaining normative data, information about subgroups can be lost or obscured. In this paper I will be reporting on research done on one such sub group, namely, students in Catholic schools in Sydney. Catholic schools educate a significant number of people in Australia today.ⁱⁱⁱ Enrolments are, however, not representative of the wider community even though schools now educate large numbers of non-Catholics. Indeed the enrolment growth in Catholic schools in recent times has been driven largely by non-Catholics. In Sydney Catholic schools approximately 72% of students identify as Catholics, 16% as other Christians, 4% as other faith traditions and 7% as no religion. Despite changes in the wider community students in Catholic schools exhibit a marked preponderance to professed Christian allegiance. Those with no religious allegiance account for only 7% of enrolments and this is in contrast with the rapid growth of “nones” in the wider community. This is a widespread phenomenon in Western countries. In Australia, for example, in 1911 only 0.4% of the population described themselves as having no religious affiliation. In the 2016 census this figure had increased to 30.1% and is expected to grow further in coming years.^{iv}

This Study

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This is an ongoing research project and the results have been published in several journals . Due to the scope of the study some decisions need to be made about the focus of individual reports and presentations. In this paper attention will be given to responses on the worldview and religious practises of Catholic and non-Catholic students. This study replicates an earlier collection of data Survey responses to select items at Years 5, 7, 9 and 11 will be presented. This is to examine changes over time in key response categories.

The survey consisted of 47 questions involving Likert scale responses or asking students to rank order responses. In addition, there were some questions which invited short open ended written responses. No presentation of the responses to these questions will be given in this paper. On average the survey took about 30 minutes to complete. There were 13,857 responses with an almost equal number of males and females (49.9%). The survey was completed in school hours at the school the students attended. All students in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese, through their parents or guardians, were invited to take part. The combined completion rate for all Year levels was 68%.

Results and Discussion

Most students in Catholic schools profess some kind of religious affiliation what can be said about differences or similarities between Catholic and non-Catholic students? A number of areas will be reported on in this paper. The first examines support for Christian beliefs. A statement such as “I believe that Jesus is truly God and truly man” reflects a dogmatic belief. The same can be said for the statements and responses recorded in Tables 2 and 3.

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Strongly agree/agree (%)	83.9 (84.9)	78.2 (82)	65.6 (70.4)	61.2 (67.4)
Neutral	11.9 (11.3)	14.7 (13)	22.5 (21.4)	25.7 (32.2)
Strongly disagree/disagree	3.8 (3.5)	6.5 (4.5)	11.2 (7.6)	12.8 (8)

Table 1: Responses to statement: I believe that Jesus is truly God and truly man. (Catholic students only in brackets)

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Strongly agree/agree (%)	87.9 (88.7)	81.2 (85)	68.7 (73)	64.8 (70.4)
Neutral	8.2 (7.6)	11.7 (10.1)	18.4 (17.7)	21.4 (20.3)
Strongly disagree/disagree	3.8 (3.5)	6.7 (4.5)	12.4 (8.6)	13.5 (8.9)

Table 2: Responses to statement: I believe that Jesus died and rose again

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Strongly agree/agree (%)	92.4 (93.6)	86.7 (89.8)	76.6 (80.9)	71.8 (77.6)
Neutral	5.7 (4.9)	9.3 (7.8)	15.3 (14)	17.7 (16.2)
Strongly disagree/disagree	1.7 (1.4)	3.7 (2.3)	7.8 (4.8)	10.2 (6)

Table 3: Responses to statement: I believe in God

The three tables above show responses of all students and Catholic students only in brackets. The first finding to note is the decline for both groups over time from what can be seen as traditional Christian views. The largest decline seems to be between Year 7 and Year 9 and this continues into Year 11. It can also be noted that there remains a majority view by students in Catholic schools that supports the dogmatic statement of belief proposed. This is especially so of Catholic students but the figure for all students also supports this conclusion. These findings are in accord with some researchers who have found that belief in dogmatic statements of belief amongst younger Catholics remains high.^v

Affirmation of dogmatic beliefs can be compared to other responses which probe beliefs of a different nature. If we ask students about topics that have a clearer referent in moral theology a different pattern of responses is evident. In these respondents support of the traditional Christian worldview is not as clear cut. This is in keeping with the view that secularization becomes more evident the closer an issue comes to a person's lived experience. Table 4, for instance, asks about the exclusivity of religious views. The modal response of all students in Catholic schools is that it is OK to pick and choose religious beliefs. There was little difference between Catholic and non-Catholic students.

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Strongly agree/agree (%)	42.9 (43.2)	44 (42.4)	42.4(41.6)	46 (46.3)
Neutral	29.1 (29.1)	31.8 (30.6)	31.7 (33)	31.8 (31.9)
Strongly disagree/disagree	27.8 (27.3)	23.7 (26.1)	25.8 (24.6)	23.7 (21.3)

Table 4: It's OK to pick and choose religious beliefs without having to accept all the teachings of one's religion

When asked explicitly about morals, Catholic and non-Catholic students responses were again very similar and discordant from what could be seen as a traditional Christian view. This is also seen in Table 5 which shows a majority of students across all ages agree that morals are personal choices and there are no definite rights or wrongs.

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Strongly agree/agree (%)	61.6 (62.2)	59 (59.4)	52.7 (62.8)	50.9 (52.4)
Neutral	26.2 (25.9)	31.1 (30.8)	33.6 (33.9)	29.9 (29.5)
Strongly disagree/disagree	11.6 (11.5)	8.6 (8.5)	13 (12.6)	18.8 (17.7)

Table5: Morals are a matter of personal choice because there are no definite rights or wrongs

The results of Tables 4 and 5 can be interpreted as being reflective of dominant moral cultural norms on moral questions. In the wider culture the ascent of relativistic views has been well documented.^{vi} In one well-known categorization the dominant worldview of young people is described as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD).^{vii} This is a worldview that seeks to minimize difference between all groups in a culture and lends itself very much to relativistic notions of morality. In MTD one of the key principles is to recognize the open ended nature of moral judgements which need to be seen as being reflective of cultural and personal preference. What “works” for one person may not be applicable elsewhere and a perceived major transgression is to make judgements on actions or decisions. In light of the cultural pressure to conform to these views it is interesting to speculate whether just under 20% of the Year 11 students in Catholic schools in this study disagreeing with the proposition that there are no definite rights or wrongs is a high or unexpected figure.

If we now turn to indicators of praxis or how life is lived we find further evidence of lower religious salience. Table 6, for example, records responses to a very explicit statement about life trajectory. It asks students about how much they try and base their life on the teaching of Jesus. Notice that this is a strong statement. Far stronger, for instance, than one on, say, respecting Jesus teaching. Compared to the results recorded in the first three tables which look at more abstract beliefs, the responses for the tables below show much lower levels of religious salience. In addition, there is no consistent difference across the three measures between Catholic and non-Catholic students. Table 7 shows a similar pattern with the majority of students in Catholics schools by Year 11 being neutral or strongly disagreeing with the proposition that religion influences their lives.

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
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Strongly agree/agree (%)	70.7 (71.1)	56.3 (58.7)	43.2 (45.5)	46.4 (49.2)
Neutral	28.5 (22.3)	29.5 (29.7)	36.2 (37.4)	32.5 (33.2)
Strongly disagree/disagree	6.3 (6.0)	13.4 (10.7)	19.6 (16.2)	20.6 (16.6)

Table 6: I try to base my life on the teaching and example of Jesus

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Strongly agree/agree (%)	68.9 (70.1)	55.9 (57.9)	44.9 (47.1)	47.2 (48.8)
Neutral	21.6 (21.2)	26.0 (26.3)	29.1 (29.6)	28.3 (29.5)
Strongly disagree/disagree	8.6 (7.9)	16.5 (14.3)	24.5 (21.9)	23.3 (20.5)

Table 7: Religion influences the way I live my life

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Most important (1), or 2 nd most important	72.9 (72.9)	62.4 (63.9)	46.3 (46.1)	40.2 (40.2)
Least important (6) or 5 th most important	6.7 (6.3)	14.1 (12)	24 (21.7)	30.1 (26.8)

Table 8: Consider how each of the following influences your life: God

If we compare the results shown in Tables 1-3 with those in Tables 6-8 we see the incongruence that often emerges when we examine beliefs against religious salience. For instance, a much higher number of all students agree with the statement that Jesus died and rose from the dead when compared to those who base their lives on the teachings of Jesus. It does seem reasonable to conclude that if you believed that Jesus rose from the dead it would have some impact on how you regarded his teachings and how you lived your life in this light. For this reason measures of religious praxis often give a clearer picture on the impact of religion on the lives of young people than measures of agreement with dogmatic propositions on their own.

Further evidence for a more nuanced view of secularization is seen if we look at measures of religious practise. These, again, can be seen as markers of salience. If religion is having an impact on how young people live and how they think then this should be reflected in how they behave. A good but by no means the only measure of this is a practise such as prayer. Table 9 shows responses to frequency of prayer by students in Sydney Catholic schools. We can see here again the decline across age levels with frequency of prayer decreasing as students get older. There is a close alignment of practise between Catholic and non-Catholic students with the notable exception that by Year 11 there is a significant difference in the number of students who never prayer. Non Catholic students report a much higher figure for never praying when compared to Catholic students. Given that only approximately 5% of students in Catholic schools in this sample report no religious affiliation the reasons for this difference are worth exploring further.

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Each day (%)	53.5 (54)	39.4 (40.6)	33.8 (35.2)	28.2 (30.4)
Regularly	23.4 (24.1)	26.3 (26.7)	21.4 (22.8)	19.8 (21.1)
A Few Times a Year	4.2 (4.1)	7.3 (6.6)	10 (8.9)	13 (12.4)
Never	1.7 (1.4)	4.2 (2.6)	13 (12.4)	12.1 (7.0)

Table 9: Frequency of prayer

Conclusion

It seems, like all good research, the data reported here raise a range of issues for further consideration. There is evidence here for a more nuanced view of secularization. In this view secularisation is seen as a loss of religious salience seen most clearly in a decline in praxis, how people live their lives and the views that they hold that influence this praxis. It seems that most students in Catholic schools agree with many classical statements of dogmatic Christian belief. The trend is away from acceptance of these views as

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students get older so the longevity of this agreement once students leave school can be questioned. It would seem though that Catholic schools do play a role in maintaining these views, at least while students are attending them. To be sure, significant numbers do not support these positions but these findings challenge the view that students in Catholic schools are heavily in discord over traditional teachings. This, however, does not necessarily lead us to question the impact of secularization on students in Catholic schools. More in accord with the view of secularization taken here, its influence can be seen if we look at other measures.

When we examine more praxis based responses the situation becomes more complex. It seems that for many students in Catholic schools, the impact of religious beliefs on how they live and in what they think is relatively weak and not in accord with assent to theological positions. This supports the view that religious salience even amongst this sub population of students in Catholic schools is diminishing. A question for further examination is whether or not this decline is in step with wider cultural attitudes. How would students in Catholic schools compare with students in public or independent schools is a question for further study. These results could then be contrasted with control samples which extrapolate to national representation. It may be the religious salience is decreasing amongst students in Catholic schools but this decline may be less significant than for the population of young people as a whole. For the religious educator the question that is posed here is how best to make the connection between theological propositions and how these are translated into everyday life?

The difference between Catholic and non-Catholic students across all measures is less marked than some may have expected. This is in keeping with the vast majority of students being from a Christian background and only a small percentage having no religious affiliation. Many of the assumptions that are made about non Catholic students in Catholic schools could, on the basis of these findings, be reevaluated. Non Catholic students share many of the views and practises of Catholics and both groups reflect an increasingly secular trend. The secularizing forces on Catholic and non-Catholic students alike tend to

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homogenize responses and draw out more similarities than differences. This is in keeping with a view of secularization that sees it as a strong general cultural influence. In this view Catholic students will be just as influenced by the tendency to align their moral views with the normative societal expectations as non-Catholic students. For religious educators one implication of these findings is that the differences in outlook of young people in Catholic schools are more likely to be reflective of the wider culture irrespective of religious background. The mechanism of this realignment is a topic that warrants further examination. One key question is how can religious communities have a more formative influence on young people within their communities and what role can Catholic schools play in this process?

The results presented here strongly support the general decline in engagement predicted by the plateau theory of religious engagement.^{viii} The data from this study suggests that students in Catholic primary schools may be more receptive to religious education as at these ages they seem more connected to the worldview of the religious tradition. Whether this is because of a greater natural sensitivity and interest in religion at younger years or to some external factor such as the influence of the primary school is a question for further study. To take just one finding, consider the number of children who see God as being an important factor in their lives. At Year 5 level close to three quarters of students in Catholic schools nominate God as either the first or second most important influence on their life. This should have some impact on how religious education teachers approach their subject. To take a practical example, if students see God as being active then they are likely to feel comfortable learning about prayer and also praying more than if they had a more distant sense of God. This type of sensibility could be reflected in the RE curriculum at primary level with more time given over to prayer.

Rymarz argues that what is needed is a more intentional approach to religious education.^{ix} It is intentional in the sense that it responds to the background of students in schools today and also

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the cultural reality of the world in which they live. In contemporary culture religious groups can only rely on persuasion, rather than coercion or socialization, to get their messages across. In Catholic schools most students will not be persuaded by arguments that are grounded in references to Church authority and which do not respect students' perspectives. Religious education in this context is a difficult and countercultural task. The worldview of students today tends to be shaped by wider cultural forces and religious communities must recognize that their position does not have any intrinsic merit or perceived higher status. In a culture where a range of options are open but what is often lacking is support for real freedom of choice, religious education must be able to offer a coherent alternative. This will help offer an alternative to the hegemony of a ubiquitous consumerism that Bauman has identified as a position that does not bring with it stability, joy or human flourishing^x.

One of the most significant goals of a religious education program that is both propositional and content driven is to create a classroom culture where the questions of students are given a very high priority. One conclusion that can be drawn about participants in this study is that they are not strongly disposed to any worldview. In light of this they may be open to dialogue about new positions and insights as long as these are well proposed. In this study this openness is reflected in the large number of students who expressed neutrality in their response. At Year 11, for example, many students were neutral on questions about the Eucharist and the resurrection of Jesus. This would suggest that topics such as these should be more explicitly addressed but in a fashion that recognizes the complexity of the topic and the predisposition of students. In this framework active questioning by students can be seen as a vindication of the approach.

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This leads to considerations of classroom practise as this will determine how content is presented. A content focus fits well with an emphasis on pedagogy, that is, how religious education is taught in the most meaningful and effective way. A more content driven religious education is dependent on how well teachers can deliver this in the classroom. The two aspects of religious education – content and pedagogy – need to be seen as both necessary and complimentary. The key determinate of how well religious education will meet the needs of students is the quality of classroom teaching. This teaching aspect has been the neglected piece in the recent history of religious education in Catholic schools. So often the teaching piece is regarded as if it is a relatively straightforward and uncomplicated area which can be completed without much serious effort. It is, in fact, often the most difficult aspect of religious education because it involves an engagement with the learner and a translation of what can be highly abstract concepts into a more intelligible form.

ⁱ Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton and Ruth Webber, *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia* (Melbourne: John Garrett Publishing, 2007),

ⁱⁱ William D'Antonio, Michelle Dillon and Mary Gautier, *American Catholics in Transition*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Australian Catholic Schools 2012* (Sydney: National Catholic Education Commission, 2013).

^{iv} The figures from the 2016 census for religious affiliation show a marked decline in the total number of Christians in the Australian population. This was measured at 52.1%, with Catholic making up the largest group with 22% of the population nominating this affiliation. The figure for other (non Christian religions) was 8.2%. The rise in those with “secular beliefs and other spiritual beliefs and no religious affiliation” was 30.15. This represents a staggering 45.1% increase for the last census conducted in 2011. Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/7E65A144540551D7CA258148000E2B85?OpenDocument>

^v William D’Antonio, Michelle Dillon and Mary Gautier, *American Catholics in Transition*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

^{vi} Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton and Ruth Webber, *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People’s Spirituality in a Changing Australia* (Melbourne: John Garrett Publishing, 2007),

^{vii} Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

^{viii} Richard Rymarz, Reaching the plateau: A follow up study on active adolescent Catholics. *Journal of Youth and Theology*, 2007, 6(2), 9-23.

^{ix} Richard Rymarz, *Authentic Catholic Schools*. (Toronto: Novalis, 2016).

^x Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted lives: Modernity and its outcasts*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).



Social Justice Education through Immersion: Encounter, Service or Solidarity?

Introduction

Service immersion experiences abound in many diverse educational and ministry settings. Youth groups go on service trips. Increasingly high school grads do gap years working or traveling prior to college, often engaging in service work. On the secondary and college level, cross-cultural immersions have become a popular form of education through international service-learning and global exchange programs. Study abroad and international mission trips can be found at diverse institutions that often single out the powerful effects of such learning encounters by naming them “high impact practices.”¹ Following a college graduation a plethora of “volunteer year” offerings immerse young people in a vast variety of settings, often radically different than ones to which they are accustomed. Urban plunges or rural ministry immersions are often required for seminary degrees. And congregations of every denomination offer adults immersions focused on service, advocacy and education.

There is no question that immersion experiences are ubiquitous and multi-dimensional while often being associated with service and social justice education work. What is less common is a consistent language and purpose behind such immersion offerings. Some speak of service trips or plunges; others speak about alternative break mission trips; still others might name these offerings social justice immersions or even global community-based partnerships. Language of solidarity is often cited both from the lens of religion and social science. Immersions are also discussed from the development perspective as boundary-breaking experiences. The field of religious education² can offer important contributions to this discussion of immersion experiences. In particular there has been considerable attention especially in the European context to the notion of encounter. Siebren Miedema (2009) notes that this emphasis originates in an effort to “realize interreligious education in public schools emphasizing dialogue and encounter.”³ Drawing from the scholarship of Miedema and others, especially the work of Hans-Gunter Heimbrock (2009), this paper first proposes that a deepened understanding of encounter positions immersion experiences to develop into relationships of solidarity.⁴ Multiple definitions of solidarity from the perspectives of social ethicists, Kurt Bayertz (1999) and Sallie Scholz (2008), are next explored. Then, gleaned from the trajectory of thought commenced by Paulo Freire (1970) and others, it is argued that the growth of solidarity be considered a chief goal of immersions. But how might an understanding of solidarity be enriched by a deeper appreciation of encounter?

¹ George D. Kuh. 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Association of American Colleges and Universities. 1

² See *Religious Education as Encounter: A Tribute to John M. Hull*. 2009. Siebren Miedema, ed. New York: Waxman

³ Siebren Miedema, 2009. *Religious Education as Encounter: A Tribute to John Hull*. New York Waxman. P. 9,

⁴ Hans Gunter-Heimbrock. 2009. “Encounter as Model for Dialogue in Religious Education,” from *Religious Education as Encounter: A Tribute to John Hull*. New York: Waxman. 83-98

Encounter and Immersion

When university students from the USA travel to sites domestically and throughout the world to engage in service immersion, the first questions posed to students embarking on these experiences are often: what did you do? Did you build a house? Tutor children? The focus is often on actions and results. When teenagers are involved in synagogue or church-based service, possibly as part of Confirmation preparation, bar or bat mitzvah formation, or simply as a Sunday school assignment, there is often an emphasis on the number of hours completed as a very chief criterion for satisfying the assignment. In each of these examples the amount of time or the actual results of the service are primary features for assessing the significance of the project.

Without devaluing these dimensions, encounter immersions, as distinct from service hours and projects, focus first and foremost on people and relationships. Heimbrock (2009) describes the “phenomenon of encounter” as a social situation in which one interacts with someone other than oneself. In this interaction there is a “quality of difference.”⁵ Encounter means that subjects meet subjects and dwell intentionally in that space of interaction. The subject encountered is not valued as a means to an end (a host at a site; a tour guide, a social agency supervisor); rather the subject is valued as an end in his or her self. Employing the language and thought of Martin Buber, Heimbrock suggests that in encounters one moves from a detached and objective stance of “I- it,” to the engaged and subjective stance of “I-thou.”⁶ Difference is recognized and respected for what it is. Interpersonal interaction becomes the focus of the exchange.

A key vehicle to healthy and sustained encounter is dialogue. For the experience of encounter to be productive those planning immersion opportunities need to be intentional and pro-active to promote time and space for dialogue. Teachers and advisors of such immersions need, as Heimbrock advises, to remove themselves from the “guiding center of learning” and understand their role more as a facilitator of interaction within and beyond the group.⁷ In much of religious education literature, encounter is closely allied to interreligious understanding and appreciation. In cross-cultural service immersions, interreligious interaction is only one dimension of dialogue. Differences of race, ethnicity, economic background, gender, and cultural norms, amongst other areas, shape the overall experience of encounter. While immersions grounded in encounter may not devalue service by any means, they may understand service as best administered if it is rooted in relationships of trust generated through sustained dialogue. The tradition of encounter helps to ground immersions in people-centered dialogue as integral and not secondary to a project-oriented focus of immersion.

⁵ Heimbrock, 87

⁶ Heimbrock, 87

⁷ Heimbrock, 95

From Encounter to Solidarity

But do encounter immersions rooted in dialogue, relationship-building and service foster genuine solidarity? Or do these encounters generate meaningful yet simply passing conversations? In fact, could these experiences create a false sense of solidarity? In order to address these questions adequately it is important to explore more fully how contemporary religious education and social ethicists have understood this notion of solidarity.

When using the word “solidarity,” one could be referring to at least four different approaches to this word: social, moral, civic/welfare, and political/liberationist.⁸ The roots of *social* solidarity emerged in the thought of Rousseau, Comte, and Durkheim. While this notion develops in social thought through the nineteenth century labor movement, many other forces in society can produce a social solidarity. Sally Scholz characterizes social solidarity as being based primarily in shared human experience⁹. This could be the human experience of suffering a common disease or sharing in a club or organization. A primary quality of social solidarity, according to Scholz, is the unity cultivated through the experience of being a part of a group. In higher education, the cultivation of class cohorts or alumni chapters relies on the same quality of groupness. Kurt Bayertz describes this sense of being part of a group as a “particularistic interpretation” of the term solidarity.¹⁰ In other words, participation in a group depends on fulfillment of a particular set of criteria – for example, shared illness, class or club membership.

Political solidarity differs from social solidarity in its capacity to rally a sense of cohesion against an unjust situation.¹¹ It is rooted in a praxis of liberation and emphasizes the roles of conscience, commitment, and group responsibility.¹² Scholz emphasizes the strong moral dimension of political solidarity. Bayertz points out how political solidarity involves more than working for a common cause; juntas and mafia groups do as much. The cause must be just.¹³ Scholz also proposes that political solidarity can only be formed when there are “real people, real problems, and real relationships.” Signing petitions on the Internet without any involvement in the matter at hand, may constitute a “project-oriented” solidarity,¹⁴ but such acts do not constitute, according to Scholz, political solidarity. This brand of solidarity, Scholz maintains, calls for positive duties that may involve such activities as: boycotts of products, active advocacy of policy changes, and lifestyle alterations involving water use or meat consumption.¹⁵ Feminist writer, bell hooks, captures Scholz’s understanding of active commitment to an issue when she recommends self-descriptions such as “I advocate for specific feminist issues” rather than “I am a feminist.”¹⁶ Political solidarity, according to Scholz, requires a resolve to act on a moral conviction rather than a passive affinity for a particular cause. For Bayertz, Camus

⁸ Sally Scholz. 2008. *Political Solidarity*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press and Kurt Bayertz. 1999. “Four Uses of Solidarity.” In *Solidarity*, edited by Kurt Bayertz, Dordrecht: Kluwer. 3-28.

⁹ Scholz 2008, 161

¹⁰ Bayertz 1999, 9

¹¹ Scholz 2008, 34

¹² Scholz 33

¹³ Bayertz 1999, 17-18

¹⁴ Scholz 2008, 37

¹⁵ Scholz 57-58

¹⁶ Scholz 2008, 51

captures the spirit of political solidarity when he argues that true change must be gained through meaningful revolt.¹⁷

Scholz maintains that those who are not oppressed can share in a political solidarity with the oppressed.¹⁸ The danger, however, can be an “over-identification” with an experience that simply is not that of people from privileged backgrounds. Allen J. Moore (1982) expresses the same concern of trivializing a liberation perspective when one comes from a privileged North American perspective and rallies for the rights of oppressed groups within the population.¹⁹ Scholz also points out how the very nature of solidarities can shift as relationships and historical movements for social change began through political solidarity for the interests of labor and, in time, evolved into a form of social solidarity of workers both within and beyond the boundaries of Poland.²⁰ The effort to cure AIDS began as a form of political solidarity for the rights of people with the disease, according to Scholz, but in more recent decades, with the global fund for a cure for AIDS, has become a form of international civic solidarity. Because the types of solidarities shift, there can be multiple solidarities at work in a given situation and some aspects of situations may call forth the qualities of one type of solidarity as opposed to another.

Linking its historical roots to the formation of the European Union, Scholz characterizes *civic* solidarity as the bonds of citizens to protect the basic needs of the most vulnerable in society through a re-distribution of resources.²¹ Bayertz connects this form of solidarity with the notion of the “welfare state.”²² Tracing such welfare actions to France’s Declaration of Human Rights (1793), Bayertz recalls the term, “holy duty,” as the language evoked to promote such actions towards the neediest of society. In identifying other sources of civic solidarity, Bayertz cites the work of John Rawls, whose chief criterion in evaluating whether justice is served is: the extent to which the weakest members of society benefit.²³ Current examples of civic solidarity in the United States can be seen in legislative efforts by Senator Bernie Sanders and others, towards achieving universal health care.²⁴

Scholz understands moral commitment as being manifested primarily in political solidarity. Scholz also introduces the idea of pseudo or “parasitical solidarity,” which may best be described as sympathy, similarity, or camaraderie.²⁵ She cautions against a conflation of these sentiments with what she deems more legitimate forms of solidarity rooted in moral conviction and positive duty. Interestingly, neither Scholz or Bayertz dwell on the sense of solidarity as virtue, proposed by Pope John Paul II (1987).

¹⁷ Bayertz 1999, 19

¹⁸ Scholz 2008, 57

¹⁹ Allen J. Moore. 1982. “Liberation and the Future of Christian Education.” In *Contemporary Approaches to Religious Education*, edited by Jack Seymour and Donald E. Miller. Nashville: Abingdon. 103-122.

²⁰ Scholz 2008, 39

²¹ Scholz 27

²² Bayertz 1999, 21

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Scholz 2008, 27

²⁵ Scholz 47

From the perspective of religious education, Paulo Freire (1970) unpacks this term, “solidarity” by explaining first what solidarity is not, that is “false charity.”²⁶ Freire equates false charity with a patronizing attitude only serving to make the oppressed feel more helpless. A more genuine sense of generosity, a term he seems to prefer to charity, empowers people to action on their own behalf in an effort to change their status in life. False charity is a tactic of the oppressor. It should not be confused with solidarity. Many examples of acts of charity could be characterized as “handouts” that appease the guilt of the one “giving;” these, however, do not do anything to liberate the one oppressed.

Standing in the tradition of Freire, Suzanne Toton (2006) calls on religious educators to not simply cultivate awareness about poverty and injustice but to teach about the need for structural or institutional change. In *Justice Education: From Service to Solidarity*, Toton levels strong criticisms at educational endeavors aimed at simply exposing students to the poor in undeveloped countries.²⁷ She argues that such consciousness-raising efforts promote good feelings among volunteers, appease the guilt of those in the developed world but do little or nothing to change the structures that perpetuate and oppression. Arguing against the whole notion of “doing service,” Toton likens such activity as a form of “false charity,” preserving the status quo and the interests of the dominant class engaged in the serving. Besides the enormous expenditure of time it involves, “service-learning,” she contends, often avoids engagement in the deeper and more significant questions such as: why does poverty and destitution exist in the first place?²⁸

Toton’s (2006) understanding of a religious education for transformation bases praxis in research, advocacy, and political action. Her argument mirrors and expands that of Michael Warren who calls religious educators committed to justice and peace to engage young people in a “politicization.”²⁹ Commenting on Freire’s notion of a “semi-intransitive consciousness,” one ultimately concerned with its own survival, Warren challenges religious educators to introduce young people to the affairs of the polis. He believes that religious educators and youth ministers must confront a barrage of passivity that is inculcated in young people (though writing before the Internet), starting through television, advertising and continuing in the “hidden curriculum” of secondary and higher education. According to Warren, churches and schools often “domesticate” young people rather than “politicize” them; ensuring their passivity and reinforcing “powerlessness and voicelessness.”³⁰ He admonishes congregations and schools for not soliciting the feedback of young people in making important decisions. For this reason, he advocates education about the dynamics of power and social change. Could encounter immersions promote genuine experiences of solidarity that might lead to political action for social change?

²⁶ Paulo Freire. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder. P. 29.

²⁷ Suzanne C. Toton. 2006. *Justice Education: From Service to Solidarity*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press. Pgs. 110-115.

²⁸ Toton 2006, 112

²⁹ Michael Warren. 1987. *Youth, Gospel, Liberation*. San Francisco: Harper & Row. Pgs. 28-40.

³⁰ Warren 1987, 34.

Summary Conclusions

In reviewing the broad terrain of religious education and social ethics literature discussed thus far it is helpful to synthesize the main points of this discussion.

It bears repeating that many secondary and higher education institutions, as well as houses of worship, sponsor immersion offerings, many of which are motivated by a commitment to social justice. The goal to promote solidarity is often cited as associated with these immersions. Often the language of service, solidarity, and social justice can be somewhat jumbled in reference to these immersions. This paper calls for a clear and genuine commitment to solidarity, manifest in the multiple forms that Scholz and Bayertz explain, but taking into account key cautionary concerns that Freire, Toton and others have helped to elucidate. There can be a tendency towards a “false charity,” which only serves to make the privileged feel better about themselves but does little to change the structures that produce oppression and squalor the guilt. What are strategies that might prevent this “false charity” from encroaching into the ethos and operation of immersion experiences?

Several suggestions come to mind. First, there is much to learn from the perspectives of those who advocate and execute religious education as encounter. A focus on encounter can solidify the critical importance of dialogue to building up relationships of real commitment and solidarity. Second, there is a key dimension to the cultivation of solidarity through dialogue and shared concern. That is, the on-going nature of it all. The growth and maturation of dialogue and solidarity are processes that begin well before an immersion experience and well-after the post immersion. Genuine solidarity is not a one-stop proposition. Traveling across the world to build a water-system in a remote African village may make a huge impact on that village, radically changing education, employment opportunities, gender roles and practices, as well as the overall health and safety of a community. This service impact cannot be underestimated. At the same it is the cultivation of lasting relationships, sustained through dialogue, friendship, and commitment that will empower people of diverse backgrounds to transform and to embrace together the many injustices they face. A water system can break but relationships of sustained dialogue carry on.

This point leads to a third dimension of solidarity that is critical to the sponsorship of immersion encounters. The effort of solidarity needs to be larger than a charismatic personality or social entrepreneur who may have initiated the relationship in the first place. Solidarity is strongest when it is grounded, as Toton recommends, in an institutional commitment. When educational institutions work with community-based partners to increase literacy, lift more people out of unemployment, or provide increased opportunities for low income housing, then immersions are rooted in a meta-goal, solidarity. To the extent that houses of worship, non-profits, and higher education institutions sponsoring immersions can establish long-term economic, educational or environmental goals, for example, with networks both domestically and internationally, there seems more of a chance to grow solidarity. A cautionary note, though, remains: the efforts of solidarity should not subsume subsidiarity. In other words, solidarity initiatives through grassroots immersions should not lose the personal dynamic of dialogue and encounter or else they risk becoming bureaucratic and patronizing.

As I write this paper, delegations of helping people (armed forces, police, doctors, nurses, and everyday citizens) are heading toward hurricane-ravaged Texas and Florida. A mega effort of civic solidarity is underway in order to remove debris, provide clothing and shelter for the homeless, and food for the hungry. These acts of solidarity, grounded in direct service, are impressive and very much needed. Many questions remain, however. Will these civic solidarity missions stop in two or three weeks when people have to resume their life responsibilities? Might moral and political solidarity actions be needed to ensure that the poor, the elderly, and most vulnerable will receive the on-going funding needed to recover their livelihoods? The burgeoning of social media in the past decade highlights the social solidarity that people extend to others especially in these natural disasters. But unless these expressions of concern and affinity give way to resolve and action steps they could simply become mere sentimentality or pseudo-solidarity.

The year 2017 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication by Pope Paul VI (1967), “On the Development of Peoples.” In 1967, the profound needs of the world’s poor are foremost in his mind after immersing himself in Latin America, Africa, and India and he declares quite emphatically that “the world is sick.”³¹ Paul VI call for a “solidarity in action.”³² Regarding economic development as the solution to the world’s destructive poverty, Paul VI emphasizes, “that there can be no progress toward complete development of man without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity.”³³ In other words, development must be more than an economic phenomenon for select super powers. Social, spiritual, cultural, and educational development are all needed to give birth to what Paul VI calls, “authentic integral development.”³⁴ Such a holistic vision of development was inspired by Paul VI through his direct encounter with the poorest of the poor. To cultivate and sustain this understanding of development, a rigorous commitment to dialogue and solidarity is needed. Educators and ministers seeking to emulate this commitment to the poor through the sponsorship of strategic immersion encounters would do well to name solidarity as fundamental.

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³¹ Pope Paul VI. 1967. *On the Development of Peoples*. Vatican City, 60.

³² Pope Paul VI 1

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Creating Changes in Faith Practices through an Entry-Level Theology Class at a Catholic University

Abstract

Undergraduate, entry-level, theology instruction at Catholic universities are expected to meet a wide range of learning outcomes. This article asserts that these courses can and should be designed for learning outcomes not only in the cognitive domain, but in the affective domain as well, which in turn may impact personal choices and faith practices of students. A three-semester scholarship of teaching study involving 175 undergraduate students, using quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, suggests that students' affective learning and personal choices, including faith practices, can be impacted if certain foundational premises are incorporated into the course.

Introduction

After teaching entry-level, undergraduate Christian theology courses at two American Catholic universities, the primary author-researcher of this study began to ask the following question: to what extent might an entry-level, undergraduate Christian theology course in a contemporary American Catholic university impact the faith practice of students?

The documentation of real change and the question of what creates that change is the basis of the study presented in the following article, which is divided into five sections. Following the introduction, the second section presents the broad context for the question. The third section explains the methodology of the study. The fourth section introduces the findings, the fifth section draws conclusions based on the study, while the sixth and last section makes recommendations for instructional strategies in undergraduate theology instruction.

Background of the Question

Theology courses in Roman Catholic colleges and universities draw on educational practice and developmental research in higher education; scholarship in theology going back millennia; contemporary concerns of identity and mission in American Catholic higher education including evangelization, personal meaning, and spirituality; and religious freedom in the multi-religious, pluralistic milieu that is an undergraduate classroom. As such, the background for this study is diverse.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the undergraduate years are a time of significant personal growth, especially regarding beliefs and attitudes. This has been repeatedly affirmed by developmental psychologists and sociologists for the past decades, perhaps starting with Astin's (1977) landmark study, *Four Critical Years*. Since then, his research at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute continued to indicate that undergraduate students develop beliefs and attitudes during this stage of life. His most recent book utilizes a 7-year longitudinal, mixed

methods study including 112,000 surveys; 15,000 interviews; and over 100 universities (Astin, 2011). He and his colleagues conclude that students are interested in spiritual and religious ideas; they grow spiritually, defined as being more caring, tolerant, connected with others, and involved in spiritual questing or searching; and that religion and spirituality positively influence college students' lives. Further, colleges and universities can foster spiritual development in a variety of ways, including utilizing pedagogy that encourages questions and conversation about meaning and purpose.

Daloz Parks's (1986) *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By*, rewritten and retitled in 2000 as *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, draws the same conclusions as Astin, though from a more explicitly religious faith perspective. She maintains that young adults aged roughly 17-30 experience a distinctive stage of development in their self-consciousness of interpreting meaning from life (6). She concludes:

At its best, higher education is distinctive in its capacity to serve as a mentoring environment in the formation of critical adult faith... higher education inevitably functions, at least to some degree, as a mentoring community for those who are young adults in faith... Thus every institution of higher education serves in at least some measure as a community of imagination in which every professor is potentially a spiritual guide and every syllabus a confession of faith (159).

In sum, the manner in which undergraduates test their new consciousness will make a difference for the rest of their lives.

Where Daloz Parks (1986) classified those aged roughly 17-30 as “young adults,” Christian Smith, along with a number of co-authors, has been a prolific and significant voice interpreting research related to the religious faith and practice of American teenagers and emerging adults (those aged 18-23 years) using data from the National Study of Youth and Religion (Smith and Denton, 2005; Smith and Snell, 2009; Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson, and Snell Herzog, 2011; Smith, Longest, Hill, and Christoffersen, 2014). Broadly speaking, his thesis is similar in all these works: youth and emerging adults need to be explicitly guided to both critique larger negative social and cultural forces, and these emerging adults need to be engaged by other adults throughout their emerging adulthood years (i.e. through their early 20's) to foster adult lives of purpose, meaning, and character.

Astin, Daloz Parks, and Smith all represent a larger body of research in a variety of fields that overwhelmingly indicate that the undergraduate years are a significant time of personal, spiritual, and religious growth. There is an increasing awareness that universities and colleges ought to be explicit in encouraging students to evaluate questions of meaning, value, ethics, and belief. Ken Bain (2004), award-winning author of *What the Best College Teachers Do*, shares a poignant anecdote about an instructor in a medical school who taught her students excellent “clinical reasoning skills” but increasingly realized that her students were seeing patients as ““disease manifestations” rather than human beings.”¹

However, there is a perception in higher education that learning outcomes or course goals need to be measurable in order to be fairly assessed, and so instruction and assessment emphasize the demonstration of cognitive outcomes: will students “understand” or “analyze” or

¹ Bain, pages 89-90.

even “evaluate” in order to meet a given standard?² This is understandable but limited in that it overlooks affectivity and ultimately personal change and growth manifest in student decision-making. There are at least two reasons for focusing learning outcomes in the cognitive domain and avoiding learning outcomes in the affective domain and involving student life choices. First, there is academic objectivity: these outcomes are difficult if not impossible to accurately and fairly assess using any credible measure or experience. Second, these outcomes are by nature personal and value-oriented, which might seem to counter the value-free aegis of empirical reason prized in higher education. These reasons justifiably caution any instructor advocating the inclusion of affective and behavioral learning outcomes. Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition that a university education needs to create experiences that change students in positive ways that go beyond their intellectual growth.

The cognitive instructional challenges of “changing the brain” (Zull, 2002) of students and especially “creating significant learning experiences” (Fink 2013) are key components of this growing recognition. Zull claims that learning causes neurological changes in the brain in the form of more neurons and neural networks, so an instructor should incorporate teaching strategies that change students’ brains, such as repeatedly practicing higher-order thinking and involving students’ emotions and utilizing instruction that engages the four main regions of the brain which involves more neurons and more neural networks (Zull, 2004). Zull asserts instructional pedagogy should therefore involve each of these regions by sequentially promoting student experience, reflection, abstraction, and active testing of ideas³ (Kolb, 1984).

That instructional pedagogy should align with how students learn or “change their thinking” is the basis of Fink’s (2013) *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (2nd ed.). He has developed a learning taxonomy that incorporates important learning that does not fit in a cognitive taxonomy such as Bloom’s. His major categories are: foundational knowledge, application, integration, the human dimension (personal and social awareness), caring (developing new feelings, interests, values), and learning how to learn. Instrumental to this taxonomy is a teaching paradigm where students actively engage in learning they care about, interact with others, and receive constant feedback on their thinking. Numerous case studies have been done in undergraduate courses using Fink’s work on significant learning experiences in a variety of academic areas such as Spanish (Davis, 2009), music (Kelley, 2009), biology (Mester, 2009), economics (Miners & Nantz, 2009), education (Nicoll-Senft, 2009), art history and philosophy (Rose & Torosyan, 2009), and religion instruction (Jones & Hilaire, 2012).

The importance of pedagogy that “changes the brain” and “creates significant learning experiences” aligns with Wiggins and McTighe’s (2005) *Understanding by Design* and especially their emphasis on “essential questions” expanded on in McTighe and Wiggins’ (2013) *Essential Questions: Opening Doors to Student Understanding*. Essential questions should guide course design, lesson planning, and instructional practices. For Jesuit and Catholic university theology instruction, the teaching and tradition of the Catholic Church provide the initial form and content of questions that invite students to engage in questions of meaning and value. The significant learning experiences are therefore intended to change students in their understanding of Catholic theology as well as potentially impact their values and life choices.

² Drawn from Bloom’s Cognitive Taxonomy, see Anderson, et al. (2001).

³ Zull cites Kolb on pgs. 13 and 233.

St. John Paul the Great's 1990 Apostolic Exhortation *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is the primary directive for Catholic universities worldwide. This document's first section, "Identity and Mission," outlines parameters for Catholicism to be essential and evident on campus. It encourages students to "continue the search for truth and for meaning throughout their lives," and then cites Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* calling for the "development of religious, moral, and social sense" which will enable "them to acquire or, if they have already done so, to deepen a Christian way of life that is authentic" (23). The "Identity and Mission" section concludes with two paragraphs on "Evangelization." It is unequivocal: "By its very nature, each Catholic University makes an important contribution to the Church's work of evangelization... Moreover, all the basic academic activities of a Catholic University are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing mission of the Church" (§49). For a university's Catholic identity and mission to become operational, faculty must understand and value this directive; and this is especially important for theology faculty.⁴

The course that is the subject of this study is part of a university founded by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). The mission of the Society of Jesus, which includes all of its universities and colleges, has been articulated since 1975 as "the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement."⁵ Twenty years later this pairing of "faith" with "justice" continued, with the explanation that "faith" means explicitly "Christian faith" as it is "deeply rooted in the Scriptures, Church tradition, and our Ignatian heritage."⁶

Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., superior general of the Society of Jesus, 1983-2008, elaborated on the mission and identity of Jesuit higher education. In 1989 he addressed Jesuit higher education leaders at Georgetown University. He affirms the mission of the order as the service of faith through the promotion of justice⁷ and then proceeds to define characteristics of the Jesuit Apostolate of Education, beginning with the characteristic of Jesuit education as "value-oriented" in that values provide motive and meaning, identifying a person for who they are.

23. Values have three anchor bases. First, they are anchored in the "head." I perceive, I see reasons why something is valuable and I am intellectually convinced of its worth.

24. Values are also anchored in the "heart." Not only the logic of the head, but the language of the heart tells me that something is worthwhile, so that I am also affected by its worthiness. "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also."

25. When the mind and the heart are involved, the persona is involved, and this leads to the third anchor base, namely the "hand." Values lead to decisions and actions--and necessarily so. "Love is shown in deeds, not words."

Kolvenbach includes curriculum, courses, and faculty as responsible for a value-oriented education, seeing the academic and intellectual component of a Jesuit university education as part of a "fuller human context" that intrinsically involves a pastoral dimension without which an education risks "remaining cerebral, not fully human in its quest for God's love and guidance."⁸

⁴ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, see paragraphs 16, 19, 20, and 29.

⁵ The 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Decree 4, #2.

⁶ The 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Decree 3, #4: 53.4.

⁷ See paragraph 11.

⁸ Paragraphs 27-31.

Throughout the literature there is an inherent balance between presenting a Catholic worldview and theology with respecting the religious freedom of students. The “General Norms” of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* explain that “Catholic teaching and discipline are to influence all university activities, while the freedom of conscience of each person is to be fully respected.”⁹ This was amplified for the United States context by the U.S. bishops in the 1999 USCCB document, “The Application for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* for the United states,” where they state: “Recognizing the dignity of the human person, a Catholic university, in promoting its own Catholic identity and fostering Catholic teaching and discipline, must respect the religious liberty of every individual, a right with which each is endowed by nature” (Article 2, #4). The footnote to this goes even further: “The university’s Catholic identity should in no way be construed as an excuse for religious indoctrination or proselytization” and references the Vatican II Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*.

Fr. Kolvenbach demonstrates balancing this tension for Jesuit institutions. In 2000 he addressed the Conference on Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education at Santa Clara University, insisting Jesuit education “propose Jesus and his message of God’s Kingdom in a spirit of love to everyone,” as opposed to proselytizing or imposing the Catholic religion on others. In a 2007 article entitled “The Service of Faith in a Religiously Pluralistic World: The Challenge for Jesuit Higher Education,” Kolvenbach reminds Jesuit university faculties that “many students come to a Jesuit, Catholic university because they expect to be helped to grapple with questions of faith in explicitly Jesuit and Catholic ways.”

The mission statements of the University, College, and Theology Department that house the course that is the subject of this study reference the norms for higher education expressed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the directives for the Society of Jesus. The Theology Department Mission Statement adopted in 1996 specifically cites the classical Anselmian expression that theology is “faith seeking understanding,” directly quotes paragraph 13 of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* where the four “essential characteristics” of a Catholic university are outlined, and includes the following statement from *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*:

Since the end of the Society and of its studies is to aid our fellow men and women to the knowledge and love of God and to the salvation of their souls; and since the branch of theology is the means most suitable to this end, in the universities of the Society the principal emphasis ought to be put upon it (*Part Four, Chapter Twelve*).

The department *teaching* mission states: “The intellectual and personal formation of our students is paramount.” Further:

While refraining from proselytizing or indoctrinating, we continually foster active reflection on the content of our courses believing that theological disciplines are essentially paths for personal wisdom, for Christians the Triune God known to us in Christ Jesus. As part of students’ personal formation, we are committed to fostering attitudes of service to the people of God and to the entire human family.

⁹ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Article 2, paragraph 4.

The teaching mission then acknowledges that “the theological disciplines have an important part to play in exploring and implementing these themes of the Jesuit mission.” These statements clearly anticipate “personal” or “affective” outcomes from theology instruction.

The course that is the focus of this study fulfills a university core curriculum requirement for the “Christian Tradition.” On its syllabus, immediately below the “Course Description,” four instructor-specific “Foundational Course Premises” are listed. These four explicit premises are personal and affective: 1) Relationships and community in the class is the basis of learning; 2) Conversations, not propositions, are educational; 3) Student questions are essential; 4) Students’ own ideas and experiences are foundational to engaging the content. The syllabus also includes the four core-curriculum mandated “Learning Objectives”:

1. Students will identify and discuss the fundamental teachings, history, and practices of Christianity.
2. Students will identify and discuss the distinctive teachings, history, and practices of Catholicism.
3. Students will identify and describe the key elements of the Jesuit intellectual tradition in its more specific religious sense, its historical foundation and its spirituality.
4. Students will identify and discuss particular challenges facing Christianity (in general) and the Catholic Church (more specifically) in the contemporary world.

In addition to the four Core Curriculum-required cognitive learning outcomes listed above, the syllabus includes two instructor-specific learning outcomes that are explicitly affective.

“Students will be able to demonstrate they have...

5. Articulated a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, their personal values through reflection on their lived experience in light of the Christian and Catholic tradition.”
6. An appreciation of the necessity in theology for asking questions and seeking answers and the ability to coherently communicate their analysis of theological themes and questions through discussion and written assignments.”

Methodology

Five sections of an introductory Christian theology course were surveyed over the course of three semesters: two sections from the fall of 2015, two sections from the spring of 2016, and one section from the fall of 2016. Each section included 35 students. Students were given pre-course, mid-course, and post-course surveys. There were some modifications to the survey instrument after the fall of 2015; however, the instrument was consistent between the spring of 2015 and the fall of 2016. This study provides a quantitative report on the latter three sections.

The questions on the pre-course surveys prompted responses related to religious affiliation, formation, and practice, including prayer; the acceptance of “God”; and their feelings about Christianity, and Catholicism and being required to take a Theology course. Questions were both open-ended (e.g. “Do you have a religious affiliation”) and followed a Likert-scale format. The mid-course survey asked the same questions as the pre-course survey, though added questions related to the progress of the course, for instance the course’s potential impact on students’ communal worship, understanding of scripture, moral decision-making, life-decisions

in general and decisions specifically related to prayer and volunteer service. The post-course survey focused on the same topics as the mid-semester survey, but expanded them to query if the course had an impact on their beliefs and practices in these areas to this point in their experience, and whether they thought the course may have an impact on their future decisions on the same topics.

After final course grades were submitted, the instructor-researcher used paired samples T-test comparison of means (Knapp, 2017). Students from each section of the course were then identified as having demonstrated “significant change” in their responses recorded on the Likert scale from the beginning to the end of the course. The criteria for significant change was an increase of two classifications on the Likert scale in response to multiple prompts related to personal values. For example, if at the outset of the course, in response to the prompt, “I expect this class to impact my moral decision-making”, a student indicated she “generally disagreed (2)” with the statement, but by the end of the course “generally agreed (4)” with the statement, that indicated an increase of two classifications.

Once students with significant change were identified from each class, these students’ self-identified religious affiliation and experience with formal religious instruction or formation was reviewed. Students representing a range of religious affiliations and educative and formative experiences were then invited to be interviewed. The goal was to interview three students from the two fall sections of 2015 and two spring sections of 2016, six students total per semester. Each student invited via email from the fall of 2015 was interviewed; seven students were invited from the spring of 2016, and six were interviewed. From the fall of 2016, six students from the same class section were invited and all were interviewed. In total, eighteen of the nineteen students invited to interview did so.

These eighteen students were interviewed for twelve to twenty-two minutes; each interview followed an identical script. The students were given the questions ahead of time so they could prepare their responses if they wished. Some students did so, while others did not. Once initial introductions and explanation for the interview were given, the same questions were posed to the students in the same order.

1. What significant experiences do you recall from our [theology] class?
 - a. Were there any specific readings? Can you explain why they were/it was significant for you?
 - b. Any specific activities? Can you explain why they were/it was significant for you?
 - c. Any specific questions you were asked? Can you explain why they were/it was significant for you?
 - d. Anything else that you can recall?
2. How has the course impacted you outside and since the conclusion of the [theology] class? Anything concrete? Connect to the specific parts of the class?
3. How was the learning experience in [theology] like or unlike prior learning on similar topics and themes?
4. Any final comments or insights?

Follow up questions only prompted further detail. The script closed with a formal statement concluding the interview and an expression of gratitude for sharing the time. The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy.

Findings

The survey data for the three sections over the latter two semesters indicated that the course had a positive impact on students' personal prayer (See Table 1) and how they read and interpreted Christian scripture in their lives (See Table 2). Students also indicated that the course impacted how they made personal choices in their lives (See Table 3). Lastly, the course impacted their understanding of the connection between spirituality and daily life, and specifically impacted their practice of key elements of Jesuit spirituality (See Table 4).

Table 1: Outcome: Impact on Personal Prayer

Semester and Section	Timing	Mean 1	Mean 2	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
THL 110D Spr 2016	Pre-Mid	3.12	3.27	-1.000	25	.327
	Mid-Post	3.27	3.61	-1.428	25	.116
	Pre-Post	3.18	3.61	-2.364	27	.026
THL 110E Spr 2016	Pre-Mid	2.81	3.12	-2.545	32	.016
	Mid-Post	3.12	3.72	-4.013	31	.000
	Pre-Post	2.81	3.72	-5.988	31	.000
THL 110F Fa 2016	Pre-Mid	3.19	3.03	1.304	34	.201
	Mid-Post	3.03	3.47	-2.098	33	.044
	Pre-Post	3.18	3.47	-1.437	32	.160

Table 2: Outcome: Impact on How Christian Scripture Is Read and Interpreted in Students' Lives

Semester and Section	Timing	Mean 1	Mean 2	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
THL 110D Spr 2016	Pre-Mid	3.88	4.50	-3.333	25	.003
	Mid-Post	4.50	4.46	-.700	25	.490
	Pre-Post	3.88	4.46	-3.545	27	.001
THL 110E Spr 2016	Pre-Mid	3.91	4.52	-4.030	32	.000
	Mid-Post	4.52	4.53	.000	31	1.000
	Pre-Post	3.91	4.53	-3.507	31	.001
THL 110F Fa 2016	Pre-Mid	4.00	4.69	-3.968	34	.000
	Mid-Post	4.69	4.68	.000	33	1.000
	Pre-Post	4.00	4.68	-3.550	32	.001

Table 3: Outcome: Impact on Personal Life Choices

Semester and Section	Timing	Mean 1	Mean 2	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
THL 110D Spr 2016	Pre-Mid	2.92	3.35	-3.353	25	.003
	Mid-Post	3.35	3.65	-1.895	25	.107
	Pre-Post	2.92	3.65	-3.911	27	.001
THL 110E Spr 2016	Pre-Mid	3.09	3.58	-2.317	32	.027
	Mid-Post	3.58	3.88	-1.660	31	.025
	Pre-Post	3.09	3.88	-3.498	31	.000
THL 110F Fa 2016	Pre-Mid	3.55	3.31	1.785	34	.083
	Mid-Post	3.31	3.96	-4.492	33	.000
	Pre-Post	3.55	3.96	-2.514	32	.017

Table 4: Outcome: Impact on Practice of Key Elements of Jesuit Spirituality

Semester and Section	Timing	Mean 1	Mean 2	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
THL 110D Spr 2016	Pre-Mid	3.54	3.50	.196	25	.846
	Mid-Post	3.50	4.27	-4.792	25	.000
	Pre-Post	3.54	4.27	-3.732	27	.001
THL 110E Spr 2016	Pre-Mid	3.21	3.48	-1.272	32	.213
	Mid-Post	3.48	4.06	-2.583	31	.015
	Pre-Post	3.21	4.06	-4.178	31	.000
THL 110F Fa 2016	Pre-Mid	3.64	3.36	1.785	34	.083
	Mid-Post	3.36	4.26	-5.193	33	.000
	Pre-Post	3.64	4.26	-3.339	32	.002

A closer review of the data showed that some students demonstrated more significant change than others. The eighteen students interviewed were drawn from this pool of students. These students self-identified their religious affiliation and formation in the following manner:

Roman Catholic but not Catholic high school	4
Roman Catholic and graduated Catholic h.s.	6
Lutheran (but attended Catholic h.s.)	1
No religious affiliation	2
Buddhist	1
Christian	1
Jewish	1

Methodist	1
Muslim	1

The transcripts of the interviews were first coded based on students' mentioning experiences or ideas that correlated with the "Foundational Premises" for the course given in the instructor-specific syllabus. Second, the interviews were then coded by students' mentioning specific personal values or beliefs that they attributed to their course experience.

Weaknesses of the study include the large number of variables impacting validity and reliability, and the fact that some students self-select themselves into courses based on instructor reputation. Further research in the following areas are needed. First, designing significant learning experiences into undergraduate theology courses. Second, research into the disposition of the instructor towards evangelization, understood as "engagement" and "proposal." Third, a broader study of students, instructors, and courses.

Student Experience of Foundational Course Premises

Premise 1: "Relationships and community in the class is the basis of learning": 8/18 students recollected that there was a sense of community in the class or that they got to know a larger number of their classmates relative to other courses in their experience. One student said: "I felt like I could name every single person in that class. I walked in and I knew who I was talking to..." Another student, when prompted to explain what helped her understand the material elaborated: "It just felt like as a class as a whole, we were all learning together.... And it did feel more like a community just because everyone was participating and was on the same page."

Premise 2: "Conversations, not propositions, are educational": 15/18 students mentioned class conversations and/or discussions as memorable or important to their experience. For this course, conversations began on the assigned readings through online discussion posts due the night before the class would discuss the reading. "I just kind of like how you [instructor] in person did the discussion in class. You were able to make it very welcoming and very open for everybody. You would ask a specific person a question about their discussion post and ask their thought process on it. That little bit of conversation starter really improves the conversation. Another said: "The most significant experience for me would be the daily conversations we would have in class and then your [the student's] ability to ask a question..."

Premise 3: "Student questions are essential": 16/18 students stated that the fact that they could ask questions and were asked questions was memorable or important to their experience.¹⁰ A student who went to a Catholic high school had this to say about questions:

I think this course really did help deepen my faith in a way because going to Catholic school ... we were told what happened... that's what we believe, no questions. But this class finally opened up the doors to question the things you learned and when the class included the quote that said "doubt is important, it means you are realizing your faith," that was super important to me and that impacted me b/c then I realized that I can question aspects of my faith and that's okay, through that I develop more understanding

¹⁰ Interview question 1.C. asks about what questions students remember being asked by the instructor. It did not include the student asking questions of other students or the instructor.

of my faith b/c I was thinking about it and questioning it and finding answers. I think that's what has carried with me from this course.

Another student explained: "[This] class especially encouraged a lot of questions and deep thought. It wasn't just 'Read this and then we'll summarize what we read.' It was, 'read this, and then tell me what you didn't understand, tell me what bothers you, tell me what you want to know.' That's what was really important."

Premise 4: "Students' own ideas and experiences are foundational to engaging the content": 14/18 students noted that they felt they could share their thoughts and ideas in the class and that this was memorable or important to their experience. One student was able to connect the sharing of thoughts and ideas to his personal faith but significantly noted that, at least from his view, everyone was effectively invited to participate.

I would say [the class] definitely helped me understand my faith more, but also kind of gain an appreciation for people who don't have the same faith as me. You [the instructor] just did a good job of incorporating everyone into the class, be it believers, not believers, anywhere in between. And so definitely it helped me understand things at my own pace and kind of how I wanted to take it personally.

In addition to comments that reflected the foundational premises of the course, students mentioned responding to the course in ways that suggested the course impacted their personal values and choices.

All eighteen students mentioned the significance of reading and understanding scripture in the theology course. For instance, one student with a Catholic school background stated: [Catholic high school and grade school] just want to get you familiar with all of the material and get familiar with the stories. And now we're actually interpreting it more and putting it into our lives and putting it into use." This student was encouraged to explain that response, to which she added, "Just like trying to apply the information to our lives and in that way change the way we behave and think about things." However, no student mentioned reading scripture on his or her own.

8/18 students indicated that the course broadly impacted their personal life choices. One student explained: "Before the course I was skeptical of God and didn't pay much mind to it because I didn't think that believing in something or not would affect my life. I thought I was just living my life to live it; to get a high-paying job, to live by whatever materialistic things there are and just die." The student concluded my saying "[Now] I've separated myself from a lot of things I did and had before." When pressed about whether the Theology course played a role in that development or whether it was coincidental, she said, "I don't think it was a coincidence." Catholic students mentioned attending mass more frequently or getting more out of mass. One explained it this way: "Once this class picked up I started going to mass more [where she hadn't previously]. I definitely think there was a correlation with this class, because I was like 'Oh, I'm busy, I don't have time,' but then again, with this class I started to go to mass more and now I go every Sunday, like every time." She also said "I definitely pray more. When we did the Jesuit examen, since then I've found myself just praying more, finding more time to do that and stop making excuses, saying I'm busy."

2/18 students mentioned prayer, though only one—the student mentioned above—explicitly stated she prayed more frequently.

However, 10/18 students mentioned spirituality and/or the Jesuit charisms/values as being significant. A student from a Jesuit high school commented that doing the examen was “impactful,” even when reminded that he had had experience with the examen in high school. Another student who practiced the examen for a week stated: “Since the theology class last fall, I reflect a lot more than I used to. [During freshman orientation] they really pressed that on us at first, the Jesuit values, and now I try to think about where God would be in my life in everyday situations, especially since the Theology class. I mean, it’s not like you [the instructor] were trying to persuade us to do that or anything, but it really invoked [pause] it got me thinking more.”

Conclusions

This research study endeavored to respond to the question “To what extent might an entry-level, undergraduate Christian theology course in a contemporary American Catholic university impact the faith practice of students?” Could such change be documented, and if so, could the causes of that change be identified? The study’s quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews indicate that some students experienced a significant change in their personal values related to religious faith and faith practice due to their participation in an undergraduate theology course. This study further concludes that the personal change evident in some of the students correlates with fundamental premises for the course.

The four premises explicit in the course syllabus flow from this university’s identity and mission and are informed by pedagogy for significant learning experiences, insights from sociological studies, and best practices in education. First, relationships and community in the class is the basis of learning; second, conversations, not propositions, are educational; third, student questions are essential; fourth, students’ own ideas and experiences are foundational to engaging the content. These premises become operational through instructional practices and assessment strategies intended to engage students in a variety of ways and propose the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them in a meaningful way without proselytizing or indoctrinating. This includes encountering and defining prayer; defining spirituality and experiencing spiritual practices; understanding and evaluating scripture; and the invitation to consider the relevance of the course content, including Christian doctrine, for their lives. The evidence gleaned in the surveys and elaborated on in the interviews suggest these encounters were memorable, possibly valuable, and impacted some of their faith practices.

The final conclusion is that an undergraduate theology course can be a place of evangelization, carefully understood as “engagement” and “proposal.” This is evident both in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and documents from the Society of Jesus applicable in Jesuit institutions. What exactly “engagement” and “proposal” means is nebulous, but that does not mean it is not operative and important. It may be best understood as a disposition on the part of the instructor towards the content and the students that could be summarized as “Students need to meet the cognitive learning outcomes for this course; in doing so, they will engage the Catholic, Christian tradition and be invited to evaluate and incorporate its relevance for their lives: the extent to which they value and incorporate those tenets and doctrines remains with them.”

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions, this study closes with the following recommendations for strategies that align with the four foundational premises of the course.

To intentionally foster community in the class, instructors can:

- Refer to the importance of community for learning both in the syllabus and orally in class
- Learn each student's name and a bit about each's background
- Assign partners for brief, focused conversations in a variety of ways so students talk with different classmates
- Incorporate a brief ice-breaker at the outset of the course and continually encourage new conversation partners to learn each other's names

To cultivate a climate of conversation in the class, instructors can:

- Facilitate and encourage questions and conversation among the students in small groups and the large class forum
- Provide feedback orally and in writing that responds to students' ideas and promotes further response

To frame instruction around questions for and from the students, instructors can:

- Prepare "essential" questions for each lesson and share them with the students
- Frame questions and their responses as the start of a conversation with further questions and responses
- Hold students accountable in a variety of ways for responding questions

To explicitly invite students' experience and ideas into their engagement with the content, instructors can:

- Encourage students to draw on their own experience in responding to questions
- Facilitate students' assessment and possible re-evaluation of their experience in light of new understandings based on the course content
- Craft assignments and assessments that invite students' assessment of the content after demonstrating they have met the cognitive learning outcomes

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Holy Communion on Canfield Drive: Listening, Liturgy, and Learning on a College Group Pilgrimage in Ferguson, Missouri.¹

Abstract

This paper argues that listening to stories of community leaders and activists as well as writing a Eucharistic liturgy to practice together were effective elements of a pilgrimage that had the goal of educating Christian college students about racial justice. Together these practices helped students imagine new possibilities of building community across lines of difference, embrace unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice, and sense forward movement in vocational discernment.

Introduction

Many engaged in the work of racial justice visit the section of Canfield Drive where Michael Brown was shot and killed by police officer, Darren Wilson, on August 9, 2014.² While there once was a community-created memorial in the middle of the street and a crowd of people to foster mutual inspiration toward the work of racial justice, the scene is quite different today. Along with the fact that the street operates as any other, the actual asphalt where Michael Brown's body once lay for hours has been clearly cut out from the street and replaced with a new rectangle of pavement. This does not change the significance of the space, but it can raise questions for individuals and groups who continue to make pilgrimages to this site. How might a person or group of persons participate in a meaningful visit to this site now that the crowds and the memorial in the middle of the street are gone?³

This paper focuses on the experience of a racially diverse group of nine Christian college students who embarked on a school-sponsored spring break pilgrimage from Boston, Massachusetts to Ferguson, Missouri in March 2017. The pilgrimage involved listening to the stories of community leaders and activists and writing a liturgy to practice Eucharist during the visit to Canfield Drive. As an organizer and guide for this pilgrimage, I offer this paper as an invitation for the reader to join in meaningful reflection on Eucharist and the possibility of teaching and learning faithful practice of Eucharist in context. This paper has three major moves. In the first move, I offer a portrayal of Eucharist as a prayerful protest and suggest that the work of this pilgrimage can be understood as educational endeavor of mutual discernment toward such a practice. In the second move, I offer an overview of the work of listening and

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² Unless otherwise explained, the use of "Canfield Drive" in this paper refer to this particular area of the street.

³ There are markers on the sidewalks, including the Michael Brown Memorial Plaque. However, this is quite different than community-created memorial of stuffed animals, hats, flowers, and other mementos.

liturgy on the pilgrimage, including a presentation of the Eucharistic liturgy that was written on this pilgrimage. In the final section of the paper, I offer a report on what students learned from the pilgrimage. Ultimately, I argue that listening to stories of community leaders and activists as well as writing a Eucharistic liturgy to practice together were effective elements of a pilgrimage that had a goal of educating Christian college students about the intersection of Christian faith and racial justice. Together these practices helped students imagine new possibilities of community across lines of difference, embrace unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice, and sense forward movement in vocational discernment.

Toward Practicing Eucharist as a Prayerful Protest

For the past two decades, William Cavanaugh's book, *Torture and Eucharist*, continues to spark theological academic interest in the practice of Eucharist, as it portrayed the practice as a creatively subversive act in the face of injustice.⁴ In this book Cavanaugh offers a practical theological analysis of the Catholic Church's response to the widespread torture and "disappearing" that took place during the era of Pinochet's regime in Chile. The first portion of the book explains, how the regime would abduct its own citizens at random, use emotional and physical torture techniques on them and then either dispose of their bodies or send them back into society with only emotional scars and no physical evidence of their torture. The purpose of this was to create a sense of isolation among citizens and an absolute dependence on the state for social control. Because victims were either "disappeared" or lacking physical evidence of their experience, the ability for communities to hear and share these stories and oppose the state was severely challenged. Cavanaugh explains that because of the accepted influence of Jacques Maratain's dualistic philosophy of the "distinction of planes," the Church's authority was relegated to spiritual matters alone while the state was given full control over physical, or in this case, bodily, matters.⁵ For years, the Chilean society was left without a social mass that had any ability to publicly name and effectively challenge the state's practice.

However, the Church eventually turned toward an understanding of ecclesiology and Eucharist that rejected the dualism, recognized "...Christians as the real body of Christ," and viewed Eucharist as a unique practice that mystically "knits" Christians together as a social body with a particular social responsibility of creatively bearing witness to God's way in the world.⁶ In Eucharist, they could "re-member" the body of Christ, which did not only involve a cognitive memory of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection but also a gathering of the community as *members* the Body of Christ.⁷ With this understanding and practice, the Catholic Church engaged in practices that challenged the state, such as excommunicating anyone involved in torturing, providing services for victims of torture, and finding creative ways to make public the stories of the victims of torture.⁸ Rather than being lost from social memory or untrusted individuals, the victims of torture and their stories became testimonies and prophetic calls for the Church to challenge injustice. And as a result, the practice of Eucharist became an act of protest, and the church's "counter-discipline to state terror."⁹

⁴ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998).

⁵ Ibid, 151.

⁶ Ibid, 212, 229-36, 267.

⁷ Ibid, 229.

⁸ Ibid, 253-77.

⁹ Ibid, 229.

I begin with this lengthy discussion of Cavanaugh's text, because it provides a thick backdrop for discussing Eucharist as a protest to injustice. As the practice announces a narrative and a hope that is not tied to a nation-state, it has the ability (or responsibility) to tell honest stories about oppression and declare God's stirring in situations and places that can appear God-forsaken. In the context of racial injustice in the United States, Eucharist has potential to make significant declarations in protest to the deaths of unarmed black men and women by police officers, the systemic injustices that continually lead to their deaths, and the unethical ways their stories and the stories of protesters are portrayed. However, the reality is that despite various attempts to declare the ways Eucharist or Holy Communion can foster healing, justice, and peace in communities,¹⁰ the practice is rarely discussed in this manner.

As an educator in the field of practical theology in the Church of the Nazarene, one goal of mine was to let this pilgrimage to the Canfield Drive serve as an opportunity for students to learn about and experience Eucharist in a manner that reflects the heart of what is discussed in Cavanaugh's text while taking the Ferguson context seriously and staying faithful to the Wesleyan theological discourse.¹¹ Maria Harris's influential contributions regarding curriculum and forms in religious education supports the kind of creative work we pursued on this pilgrimage.¹² In *Fashion Me a People*, Harris suggests that education is not merely one of the church's tasks but an essential aspect of the church's identity that flows out of its life together. In this vein, she challenges the "schooling models" of religious education and calls readers to consider the church's curriculum to be the church's journey of relationships and discernment as it seeks to faithfully live out the Way of life it is called to embody in the world.¹³ Along the Way, this work of relationships and discernment is practiced and taught through five "forms" that reflect the traditional markers of church practice that was developed from the Book of Acts. These forms are *kerygma* (proclamation), *leiturgia* (prayer), *koinonia* (community), *diakonia* (service), and *didache* (teaching).

The five curricular forms, as Harris presents them, do not make up a static checklist of isolated tasks for educators to complete. Rather, she argues that each of these forms ought to display an interplay with the others as well as an on-going dynamic of improvement over time in light of global and local (contextual) needs and injustice.¹⁴ Harris also explains that the five curricular forms are not the responsibility of clergy alone. Rather, she points out the need for

¹⁰ See Thomas Porter, et al. *Conflict and Communion: Reconciliation and Restorative Justice at Christ's Table* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2006).

¹¹ It is important to point that this is not the only reason for making Eucharist a central practice of the pilgrimage. Another reason for doing this was because reflecting on the narrative elements of Eucharist and having a project that requires collaboration can help participants embrace important aspects of pilgrimage, such as the experience of being a stranger in a new land, the demeanor of openness to change, the welcome of new community, and the transition to returning home, we structured the entire pilgrimage around the practice of Eucharist. See Sheryl A. Kujawa Holbrook, *Pilgrimage—The Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), 58-63, 135-67; Also see Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Practicing Pilgrimage: On Being and Becoming God's Pilgrim People* (Cascade Books: Eugene, OR, 2016), 65-81.

¹² Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989).

¹³ Ibid, 24-25, 95. Harris' exact words to describe curriculum are, "the entire course of the Church's life." I emphasize "Way" of life to highlight the relational, non-linear, as well as the Christological aspects of her argument. She grounds the church's vocation in the traditional offices associated with Jesus—priest, prophet, and king. She views this identity as offered to the entire body of Christ and describes the church's vocation as priestly, prophetic, and political. In many ways, Harris' argument is ecclesiological in nature and suggests that the church is the curriculum.

¹⁴ Ibid, 27-32, 64.

mutual involvement between clergy and laity as they engage this interplay as an imaginative and artistic endeavor.¹⁵ In other words, everyone in the church is called to participate in re-creating or re-fashioning church practice, as we are all image-bearers of the Creator. And it is in this work, that the very people called church are continually re-fashioned for faithfully living out its vocation. She clarifies that this does not mean the church is left to its own demise. Rather, “We are held in the divine hands, and the grace of God and the Spirit of God abide within us, enabling us to become what we are called to be.”¹⁶

In many ways, the pilgrimage discussed in this paper practiced the kind of education that Harris describes, especially if we view the pilgrimage as a journey of relationships and discernment and the participants a group engaged in the work of re-fashioning and being re-fashioned. I am most interested in highlighting Maria Harris’s emphasis on *leiturgia* or liturgy, which she describes early in her book as “...coming together to pray and to re-present Jesus in the breaking of bread.”¹⁷ While this description can be interpreted as limiting liturgy to official worship services in which the Eucharist is celebrated, she clarifies that she views the curricular form of liturgy as including all types of prayer in all places. Throughout the book, she emphasizes a broader view of liturgy as “prayer” and leans upon the work of John Westerhoff III to suggest that this includes prayer in both ‘ritual celebration’ as well as ‘daily life.’¹⁸ She explains:

We are educated *to* prayer, and we are educated *by* prayer. And that education can happen anywhere and everywhere, not only in classrooms. It can happen in church and at home certainly, but also on a bus, at a ball game, on the job, while going for a walk, or while visiting in a nursing home, holding the hands of someone we love.¹⁹

In many ways, this paper seeks to show the significance of adding “while on a pilgrimage to Canfield Drive” to that list. Harris’s focus on liturgy as educational alongside her broader call for interplay with the other curricular forms connects well with the groups’ experience of imagining artistic and meaningful connections between Eucharist and the church’s response to the police shootings of unarmed people of color.²⁰ More specifically, Harris’ work offers support in understanding the pilgrimage encounter at Canfield Drive as one that creatively “...concentrate[d] on the proclamation of the gospel in its priestly, prophetic, and political demands, and on the human longing to *be*: in adoration and wonder and love and hope in the

¹⁵ Ibid, 32-35, 41, 65-70.

¹⁶ Ibid, 16.

¹⁷ Ibid, 16.

¹⁸ John H. Westerhoff III, *Living the Faith Community* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 57. Quoted in Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 95.

¹⁹ Ibid, 95.

²⁰ It is important to point out that Maria Harris does not directly address the work of creatively engaging Eucharist or writing a Eucharist liturgy in *Fashion Me a People* through her narratives or suggested exercises in this book. However, she opens space for readers to engage in the spirituality or imagination of sacramental life beyond the walls of a church building and beyond the space of a worship service. She does briefly address Eucharist in a previous book when discussing “Eucharistic spirituality.” She writes in support of congregations and groups without a priest who find creative ways to practice Eucharist via mutual involvement of the laity and resources at hand. See Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 47-48.

presence of God” all while exposing injustice for what it is.²¹ For the participants on the pilgrimage under consideration in this paper, it became clear after a week of listening and liturgy that Eucharist can challenge attempts to erase the story of Michael Brown’s death from social memory, allow a community to encounter Canfield Drive as a site for inspiration toward social action, and maintain a discipline of awareness and action.

Listening and Liturgy: An Overview of the Pilgrimage

This trip was not simply about meeting influential leaders and hearing perspectives on how to engage in the work of justice. Rather the goal was to listen well and let the encounters along the way contribute to the faithful Eucharistic encounter at Canfield Drive. In this section of the paper, I will offer a brief explanation of who participated on the pilgrimage then share the basic flow and elements of the pilgrimage. After that, I will offer two snapshots or brief narratives from the pilgrimage, then display the call and response Eucharistic liturgy that was developed and practiced on the pilgrimage.

Participants

The pilgrimage consisted of nine students. The entire group travelled with two leaders—my spouse and myself—to and from Ferguson/St. Louis and participated in all meetings and activities during the week as a collective.²² The student participants were all undergraduate students from the same private Christian college in Boston, and their ages ranged from nineteen years old to twenty-three years old. Along with diversity in majors and year in school, the group represented racial and gender diversity. Of the student participants, there were three black women, three white women, two white men, and one black man.²³

Basic Flow and Elements

We arrived in Ferguson/St. Louis on a Saturday, visited Canfield Drive on the following Thursday (five days later) and returned to Boston on Friday (the day after the visit to Canfield Drive). The work of listening began Saturday night as the group watched and discussed *13th*, a

²¹ Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 101. The quote by itself does not reveal Harris’ broader discussions of hope and human longing as grounded in honesty about injustice. For example, she writes, “Deep within the human heart is a longing for a holy time when ‘all will be one,’ a dream of a new heaven and a new earth where death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore. In that new heaven and new earth, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21). This, ultimately, is the undersong of every joining” (76).

²² My wife, Jennie Williams, and I served as leaders throughout the week. It should be noted that we also brought our 1 year-old daughter on the pilgrimage. If there were more space in this paper, I would share about how the presence of a toddler made space for the group to embrace rest and play along the pilgrimage.

²³ Initially, the composition of student participants included two black men, but one of those students took a break from school for the spring semester. The fact that five black students even applied for one of the school-sponsored spring break trips displays break from the norm with ENC’s program of spring break service-learning trips. Often there are no black students on any of the trips. The school-sponsored spring break trips are made available to all students at Eastern Nazarene College (where I served as College Chaplain and Assistant Professor of Religion and Culture). Students who apply go through a rigorous interview process, in which the Office of Spiritual Development pastoral staff assesses students’ motivations and readiness for the trip. For this pilgrimage, we put a great deal of intentionality into the work of promotion and personal invitation, in order to develop a diverse application pool.

recent documentary that displays connections between race and mass incarceration. In light of the documentary's attention to and footage of Ferguson, students of different backgrounds and experiences expressed statements, such as, "It's strange to think that all of this happened a couple miles away," and "I can't believe we're here." The work of listening continued the next morning as participants were introduced to *Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community* by Leah Gunning Francis and given chapter assignments to have read for discussions throughout the week.²⁴ The group left that morning discussion to attend a worship gathering at Wellspring Church and begin the work of face-to-face listening. On Sunday evening, participants reflected on insights from Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist* and discussed potential connections to our work of writing and practicing a Eucharistic liturgy together.

Throughout the week, the pilgrimage participants met with ten pastoral or faith-based organization leaders, three activists who were not pastoral leaders, one lawyer who represented activists and faith leaders, and the Ferguson police chief. They interacted with residents by eating at local restaurants, such as Cathy's Kitchen, and attending local events, such as the public debate between the mayor (James Knowles III) and the leading incumbent mayoral candidate (Ella Jones) at the time. We began each meeting by thanking the storytellers for meeting with us and offering an explanation of our pilgrimage. We explained the connection between the meeting and our practice of Eucharist in the following manner:

We are framing our trip as a pilgrimage to the site where Michael Brown was killed. We're working on a Eucharist or Holy Communion liturgy together throughout the week, and every conversation and experience we encounter along the way will contribute to how we form and practice that liturgy on Canfield Drive. We're heading to Canfield on Thursday afternoon, and you are certainly more than welcome to join us.

The storytellers rarely connected their stories and insights to Eucharist, and the group did not ask any questions directly related to the practice. However, the plan to practice Eucharist influenced the group's way of listening. The goal was not simply to gain information. Rather, the participants on this pilgrimage listened for the sake of sharing in communion with the storytellers, each other, and the "cloud of witnesses," through the fellowship of Holy Spirit. Every evening, the group met to reflect on insights, wonders, and experiences, including how

²⁴ Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2015). This book was helpful for several reasons. First, it offered an introduction to the happenings in Ferguson—including the rise of #BlackLivesMatter—from someone who was living in the area. Secondly, the book focused specifically on the work, theological reflection, and narratives of faith leaders in Ferguson and the St. Louis area. Thirdly, the book highlighted the way in which faith leaders had to learn from and listen to young activists who did not identify as part of the church. Fourthly, the final three chapters of the book focus on engaging in the work of racial justice regardless of city. In fact, one of those chapters is entitled, "There is a Ferguson Near You." This perfectly complimented the group's transition to returning home with a commitment to discern faithful action in their own context of community and vocation. Along with offering a thematic structure to the pilgrimage, this book introduced participants to some of the locations, leaders, activists they would encounter on the journey and provided a context for asking questions, hearing narratives, and navigating the city with their eyes open. For those who felt very informed on matters related to racial justice in general, this book served as an equilibrium-disrupter by unearthing the complexities and displaying the significance of the local context. For those who felt less informed at the start of the trip, this book offered an extensive introduction. Regardless of one's background and experience, reading *Ferguson and Faith* during the week in Ferguson opened each person of their own sense of being a stranger in a new land with a need to learn more.

they experienced the presence of God throughout the day. I took notes of what students shared and formed a draft of a call and response Eucharistic liturgy by Wednesday morning that made space for every participant to serve as the “Leader” at least twice.²⁵ On Wednesday evening, the pilgrimage participants were invited to read the entire draft aloud, reflect silently, make notes, change wording, add wording, and identify “leader lines” they would personally like responsibility for saying while at Canfield. This process ended after every pilgrimage participant felt comfortable about the written liturgy.²⁶ One interesting result that came from this dialogue was the group’s decision to leave a “leader line” unassigned and available for any guests who chose to join us at Canfield.

Snapshots

To display the significance of collective creativity and to allow readers to have a glimpse of the pilgrimage experience, I will briefly offer two snapshots or brief narratives from the pilgrimage. The first shares of the group’s turn toward prayer practices in the middle of the week. The second insight regarding the group’s walk to and from Canfield Drive.

Snapshot 1: A shift happened on the third day of the pilgrimage. Before leaving the hotel for our day of meetings, we decided to hold hands and pray for each other and the upcoming encounters. We proceeded to sing an acapella version of song we heard during the Sunday morning worship service at Wellspring Church. The song speaks of being open to God’s calling and work in the world and a desire to serve as a sanctuary in the world. This demeanor of prayer continued throughout the day. Struck by the intensity of the stories shared by the pastor in our first meeting, we asked if we could pray with her. After she gladly welcomed the offering, the group surrounded her and laid hands on her shoulders as participants volunteered to pray. As this pastor/activist expressed sincere gratitude, the rest of the trip transformed into a pilgrimage of prayer. From this point forward, we continued the practice of praying with pastors, activists, and other community leaders after hearing their stories and engaging in meaningful conversation. Later in the week, we saw a post on social media from the pastor/activist mentioned above, which included a picture of the group and a caption that shared about the encounter. The post ended with the following words, “When we concluded, they asked if they could lay hands on me and pray. That was a gift from GOD!”

Snapshot 2: The entire pilgrimage culminated on the day we made our way to Canfield Drive, practiced of Eucharist at Canfield Drive, and then made our way back from Canfield Drive. This journey reflected several creative ideas and decisions that developed throughout the week. Aside from the insights expressed in the written liturgy itself, two developments from the week should be explained here. First, because the group heard and read about the way several pastors and activists found the McDonald’s on West Florissant to be a meeting point and safe haven during the marches and gatherings, the group decided that the journey to Canfield Drive would include the half-mile walk from the McDonald’s parking lot. This also gave the group a way to embrace the imagery of walking that is often associated with pilgrimage. With all of the conversations throughout the week, this half-mile walk to and from the place where Michael

²⁵ Specific lines were reserved for the two leaders on the pilgrimage who were ordained in the Church of the Nazarene to preside over sacraments.

²⁶ For more on the significance of embracing democracy among young people in religious education, see Kieren Scott, “The Church as an Ecology of Human Development,” *Religious Education* 76, no 2 (1981): 141-62.

Brown's body once lay gave an extended time of pause and silence to prepare for the encounter and to reflect afterwards.

The second creative idea emerged as participants reflected on the connections between Michael Brown's story and the stories of many others. Participants became interested in displaying this through the imagery of Skittles and Arizona tea, which are the items that were found in Treyvon Martin's backpack after he was killed in Sanford, Florida in 2012. To be clear, the group did not use these items during the practice of Eucharist, but they wanted to make use of them in an artistic and expressive way. The decision was made to meet with the Ferguson chief of police on the way to McDonalds and give him a bag of Skittles and a can of Arizona tea after conversation and before prayer. The decision was also made to stop at the Michael Brown Memorial Plaque during the walk back and leave a bag of Skittles and a can of Arizona tea near a piece of the remaining bread and a container of the remaining grape juice. The group did not force each other into an interpretation of these creative expression, but let them remain as points of reflection and continued meaning-making.

Our Eucharistic Prayer in Call and Response

Leader (Ordained): The Lord is here.

All: The Lord is with us.

Leader (Ordained): Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All: It is right and our deepest joy
to give God thanks and praise.**

Leader: It is by grace that we have known You,
O God of this and every age.
In mercy, You heard the cry
of Your enslaved people
and reached out to deliver them.

Leader: In loving-kindness, You offered a covenant
to bind Yourself in faithfulness to the vulnerable, hurting, and oppressed Hebrew community.
When they chose their own path, You sent prophets to speak Your word and reveal Your heart of love.

**All: Through grace, in the fullness of time,
You sent Your Son to be our Savior. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, was nurtured in
and born from Mary's body to redeem all of creation.**

Leader: Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a town looked down upon by many in society and considered unworthy of anything good.

Leader: Jesus has received all of Israel's story into himself. He is the fulfillment of the priest, king, and prophet and calls the people of God toward justice and righteousness.

Leader: We rejoice to sing Your praise that in Jesus,
Your covenant has been opened to every single person and group of people. With generations before us and all of heaven, we proclaim:

**All: Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of Your glory;
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is the one who comes
in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest!**

Guest: The Lord is making all things new.

**All: By His life, death, and resurrection,
You restore Your image within us
and let us share in Your new creation.**

Leader (Ordained): On the night He was betrayed,
Jesus took bread and gave You thanks.
He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying:
“Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Leader (Ordained): In the same way, after supper
He took the cup and gave it to them, saying:
“Drink this, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for all for
the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

**All: We remember Christ’s death.
We proclaim Christ’s resurrection.
We await Christ’s coming in glory.**

Leader: We are not left alone as we await
Christ's return and His heavenly banquet.
For You have poured out your Holy Spirit
into the world to gather your church
in the Love of God.

**All: By grace, You call and empower us
to grow as a community of holiness.**

Leader: You offer us new eyes, ears, and imagination
amidst all the world's pains and promises.
And You open our hearts to Your upside-down Kingdom of sacrificial love.

**All: We thank you Lord!!!
Give us an assurance to live out
this Good News in our daily lives.**

Leader: As we remember that Christ died by the hands of agents of the empire, we are
compelled to resist forgetting the story of Michael Brown who was killed here and whose
bleeding body lay visible for hours in the sun, exposing the unjust realities of the empire before
the watching world.

**All: We must not forget the story of Michael Brown and the related stories of so many
others.**

Leader: Say their names.

All: Say their names!!!

Leader: Let us take a moment to say names of individuals whose lives ended as a result of racism, sexism, and/or classism in society's systems.

(Allow time for individuals to speak names out loud. Then listen to the song, "Neighbor" by Rev. Sekou²⁷)

Leader: It is only when we can unapologetically declare, "Black lives matter," that we can sincerely affirm that all lives matter.

All: Black lives matter!!!

Leader: As we remember that Christ died by the hands of agents of the empire, we are compelled to resist forgetting stories of those who put their bodies on the line for the sake of others here in Ferguson.

All: Let us remember the stories of people we have met and shared life with on this pilgrimage. Let us remember the stories of people we have read about on this pilgrimage.

Leader: We remember exemplars who have prayed with their feet and followed Jesus into the streets.

All: Let us also remember the stories, questions, and wonders of those who are earnestly discerning what it means to live faithfully here.

Leader: We are thankful for this journey.

All: We are thankful for the Body of Christ.

Leader (Ordained): Lord, You make Your presence known in the mundane elements of our daily lives.

Consecrate *these* mundane elements, Lord, that this shared meal of broken bread and poured out wine may reveal in us the abundant Life that is offered in the broken body and poured out blood of Christ.

Leader (Ordained): As we share and consume the bread and wine, we pray that Your healing, hope, and way of being in the world would consume us.
Draw us into the Body of Christ
for the sake of the world.

All: Transform our broken lives to reveal the ongoing stories of Your presence

²⁷ Rev. Sekou and The Holy Ghost, "Neighbor," *The Revolution Has Come*, FarFetched, LLC, 2016.

through the unity of the Body of Christ.

Leader: Yes, Lord. Sanctify us for Your mission in the world.

All: Open our eyes to see the world from the perspective of your coming Kingdom that is already breaking into the world. Open our eyes to the possibility of righteousness and justice in our communities.²⁸

Leader: Let us rely on the Holy Spirit to stay awake to the realities of injustice and the needs of our neighbors affected by injustice.

All: Lord, help us be good neighbors.

Leader: Let us rely on the Holy Spirit to stay awake to the ways God is at work in the world, revealing hope in unexpected places and actions, and inviting us to participate in God's mission of restoration.

All: Lord, help us stay woke.

Leader (Ordained): And now let us pray as our Savior has taught us...

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Leader (Ordained): Let us share in this meal together.

(Share in the meal saying, "The Body of Christ is broken for you; The blood of Christ is shed for you.")

Leader: You are the Light of the world, O Lord, and you have empowered us to participate in Your mission. Help us play our part in shining Your Light wherever we go, so that the world may see You in Your fullness.

²⁸ The language of *kingdom* in this liturgy could be changed to *kin-dom*, which would challenge the patriarchal and hierarchical implications of the former and embrace the family-oriented mutuality displayed in Biblical depictions of the community for which Christian hope and long. See, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha-In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004).

Leader: Be with us as we share this journey with our friends and family members, and help us do so in a manner that reflects Your patience, persistence, and peacemaking. *(Take a moment for silent prayers)*

Leader: And now, Oh God, send us to out to do the work You have given us to do.

All: To love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord. To Jesus, You, and to the Holy Spirit together be honor and glory forever. Amen

Learning: A Report from the Processing and Feedback Survey

Learning on this pilgrimage can be observed in multiple areas. The first is in the written Eucharistic liturgy that was formed in community. The individual lines of the liturgy and the document as a whole display reflection, discussion, analysis, negotiation, commitments, and communal decision-making. A second place to observe learning can be found in the speeches two students gave during a campus-wide chapel gathering that focused on student experiences on school-sponsored spring-break trips. A third place to observe learning can be found in the fact that the three graduating seniors on the trip altered their post-college plans in light of their experiences on the pilgrimage. A fourth place to observe learning is in the responses to the “Processing and Feedback” survey that student pilgrimage participants were given one month after returning to Boston.²⁹ Due to the constraints of this paper, this section focuses primarily on the fourth area to observe learning—the responses to the “Processing and Feedback” surveys. After receiving the completed surveys, I identified themes and presented the findings during campus-wide academic symposium with all of the pilgrimage participants present.³⁰ The findings suggest that the work of listening and liturgy helped students 1) imagine new possibilities of building community across lines of difference, 2) embrace unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice, and 3) sense forward movement in vocational discernment. These themes are not isolated from each other, but they do display distinct aspects of learning that can help in assessing how the students personally found the trip to be impactful and meaningful in their lives. I will briefly explain each theme and offer examples from students’ response.

Imagining New Possibilities Community Across Lines of Difference

Several students of different backgrounds and life experiences commented on how the group felt like a family or a unique community. Others named being encouraged or surprised by how much mutual learning took place among the group. Along with this, some commented on how this experience gave them hope regarding the ability to address seemingly divisive topics in the future with other diverse groups. This dynamic can be seen in words from a student who explained the following:

²⁹ The surveys gave opportunity for students to write out responses to the following questions: 1) In our conversations with each other and people we met along the way, we often described the trip as a pilgrimage to the site where Michael Brown was killed. In what ways have you found this pilgrimage metaphor to be helpful or meaningful? 2) We encountered various people (each other, pastors, a lawyer, police chief, activists, mayoral debate) in various locations (hotel, churches, home, parking lot, restaurant) around Ferguson and the broader St. Louis area. Please explain any encounters you found particularly memorable, meaningful, or impactful. 3) Over time, our pilgrimage included a great deal of listening to stories and praying with people. Please share any reflections you have about the work of listening and praying on this trip. 4) One aspect of this pilgrimage included working on a liturgy together for Communion (a.k.a. Lord’s Supper and Eucharist) on Canfield Drive. In what ways did you find the liturgy and/or communion helpful or meaningful? 5) How would you describe the community formed among participants on the trip? 6) How important was it for this pilgrimage to include participants of different upbringing, racial identities, and genders? 7) Please explain up to three things you learned on this trip. These can be tangible things or more abstract.

³⁰ This gave pilgrimage participants an opportunity to confirm, question, or correct interpretation of the data.

Getting to know some of the group members on this trip was one of the best parts for me! I connected with each member in some way, and it was truly a blessing...I felt like the pilgrimage metaphor truly fit our trip to Ferguson. Not only were we travelling to an unfamiliar area but we were exploring topics that sadly remain unwrapped in our society. Many people feel uncomfortable discussing the issue of race, so it can be ignored or pushed to the side. We were willing to have open minds and hearts...Our journey isn't over. A new pilgrimage actually began once we stood where Michael Brown was killed.

Embracing Unity Between Spirituality and Bodily Engagement in Social Justice

The focus on unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice first emerged in group discussions as the group reflected on what it means for Jesus to have grown up in Nazareth, live in a way that challenged daily injustices, die by way of capital punishment, and then empower disciples to take up their cross. These reflections are clearly seen in particular lines of the written liturgy. However, the responses on the student survey revealed the significance of listening and liturgy in helping students embrace this in their own lives. As one student explained:

It was interesting to see the ways in which we had been shaped by the conversations we had that week up until we visited the site where Michael Brown's body lay. The pilgrimage metaphor was helpful for me, since in many ways, it was as much a social justice pilgrimage as much as a Christian one. In my own way, I've internalized the experience as an affirmation of my call. All the events and conversations leading up to the site prepared me for the emotional experience we had when we connected to the memories and events of the past on Canfield Drive. Though I hesitate to overly compare the two, I can only imagine that going to the Middle East to the places where Jesus walked would be a similar experience. I experience Jesus in my life in a very abstract way, but to walk where he walked and see the places where he performed miracles would give me something concrete to imagine...Similarly, without the pilgrimage to Canfield Drive, I would still have a passion that is abstractly connected to Mike Brown's life and untimely death. However, to walk where he walked and stand where he lay; it has intensified my imagination and longing for equality and justice.

In a similar direction but explicitly naming a personal experience with racial identity, one student explained:

The main things I learned on this trip is the importance of presence and a caring heart. I know now that we don't have to have all the answers or feel confident in every issue in order to make a difference. The ministry of bodies is extremely important. I also see the need for people with privilege to speak into the issue of racial discrimination. I used to feel uncomfortable by being a middle-class white female trying to speak on race, but the truth is that everyone needs to be talking about race and equality.

Sensing Forward Movement in Vocational Discernment

As college students, constantly faced with the question of what to major in and what kind of life to pursue after school, student responses leaned heavily toward the area of calling and vocation. Some expressed a broad sense of vocation that pointed toward a personalized sense of Christian responsibility in the world rather than a career. An example of this can be seen in the following response from a student who explained the following:

One encounter I found meaningful was when we observed the dynamics going on between the members of the [a predominantly white church in Ferguson that is part of my own denomination]. This was meaningful to me because I felt like [the pastor] represented many people who believe they know about the issues at hand and are doing what they think is enough to address the problem, but in reality are unobservant of the underlying conflicts going on between the people around them. This encounter reminded me that I must always make an effort to be observant of the struggles of those who are different from me.

Several students shared how certain encounters with professionals affirmed or inspired their own sense of calling toward a particular career. Three examples are listed below:

Student 1: I learned that pastors can be cool. Pastors and religious people can stand at the pulpit and at a protest. I don't think I could have imagined what that was like without hearing those stories, which wouldn't have led to my second realization that I'd be okay with being a pastor someday. But aside from that, I also think I learned to see the ways in which Ferguson is not so different from where I am from.

Student 2: As someone who is planning on going into the counseling field, I was excited to engage in this opportunity to listen to so many others' stories. By the end of the week, I realized that being attentive to others for such a long period of time every day could be quite tiring. Nevertheless, I think this experience reinsured me that the counseling field is one that I would definitely like to go into.

Student 3: The encounter that left me with goosebumps was when we met with the civil rights lawyer. I was so invested in her answers that I didn't even take notes. She basically has my dream job!

Conclusion

I have attempted to offer a glimpse of the pilgrimage to Ferguson, Missouri that my spouse and I led for nine Christian college students of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Because the pilgrimage experience is tied to the relationships formed along the way and includes several meaningful moments in between the planned encounters, it is not possible to offer a complete picture. However, I offered three moves as way of welcoming the reader into the educational experience. First, I invited the reader to consider a portrayal of Eucharist as prayerful protest and the possibility of walking with students toward such a practice, specifically on Canfield Drive in Ferguson, Missouri. Next, I offered an overview of how the pilgrimage participants engaged in listening and liturgy during the pilgrimage, and I ended that section with a presentation of the written Eucharistic liturgy that was developed on the pilgrimage. In the

final move, I presented findings from analyzing the student surveys that were completed after the pilgrimage. The surveys suggested that listening to stories of community leaders and activists as well as writing a Eucharistic liturgy helped students imagine new possibilities of community across lines of difference, embrace unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice, and sense forward movement in vocational discernment.

While the experience of this pilgrimage may not be fully reproducible on paper, my hope is that readers will find inspiration to engage in—and engage their students in—pilgrimages to sites that bear the marks and stories of injustice as a way of discerning God’s presence and call there. As we do so, may our eyes be continually opened to see from the perspective of the coming Kin-dom that is already breaking into this world and declaring sacred the very places that often appear God-forsaken.

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Educating for Religious and Moral Commitment in an Age of Encounter

ABSTRACT: I argue in this presentation that we face a crisis of religious and moral commitment today, and that an understanding of the existential dynamics of commitments can enable religious educators and other academic and pastoral leaders to recognize and respond to the crisis.

“This case, Tom Robinson’s case, is something that goes to the essence of a man’s conscience. Scout, I couldn’t go to church and worship God if I didn’t try to help that man. Before I can live with other folks, I’ve got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience.” -Atticus Finch¹

Atticus Finch in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a paradigmatic example of a person of laudable religious and moral commitments. While Finch’s outlook on life is grounded in his local community and relationships with others, he is able to reflect critically upon and then act against dominant social norms. This presentation explores the dynamics of religious and moral commitment. It emphasizes how, in educating for the formation of such commitments, religious educators should strive to help people develop deep and firmly-held commitments, while at the same time teaching the art of critical reflection and guiding people to be open to the ongoing refashioning of their deepest commitments. In my experience there are many people like Atticus Finch, and many of our religious communities nurture viable religious and moral commitments. Still, I argue that religious educators should address the issue of education for moral and religious commitment because of a contemporary crisis of commitment. I explore this crisis in the following section.

Religious and Moral Commitments: Essential yet Problematic

Religious education in religious communities entails, in most instances, more than teaching about religion. It also forms people to embrace a commitment to live according to the beliefs and values of some particular religious community. In high school and college settings, even with a religiously diverse group of students, religion or theology courses can and, arguably, should go beyond teaching about one or more religious tradition and invite students to consider what they can learn from their study of religion that can shape their own religious and moral commitments. In any setting, if the study of religion and/or morality is to be more than an arid, pedantic exercise, it should connect with people’s lives, shape their worldviews, and help to form them to be persons of character who can make good life choices.

However, we face at the present time a crisis of religious and moral commitment. That is, we live today in an age of encounter, an age in which people of diverse religious and moral commitments are frequently in contact with one another. This is due in part to the many life

¹ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960), 120.

choices available to people today, and the numerous ways contemporary individuals seek to construct a meaningful sense of life. Additionally, networks of local and global communication and travel lead people with diverse religious backgrounds and social, moral, and political commitments to interact and even live in proximity to one another. Hence, people encounter differences in religious and moral commitments more frequently than in the past, and they sometimes experience these differences as being a source of seemingly unresolvable conflict or as threatening or overwhelming. In extreme cases, people who feel that their religious and moral commitments are threatened by encounters with differing outlooks on life may try to protect their beliefs by lashing out violently against others. For instance, when he was on trial for setting off a bomb at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta that killed one person and injured dozens of others, Eric Rudolph said that his actions were based on his Christian faith.² Less destructively, differences in religious and moral commitments contribute to political gridlock in the United States, and create obstacles to civic discourse in many social contexts.

One common way of responding to the crises of religious and moral commitments is to call for tolerance. The word “tolerance” is from the Latin *tolerare*, which means to endure, especially that which is difficult or unpleasant. Those who call for tolerance of differences presume that all of us can get along if we each step back from our own commitments and agree to endure those whose outlooks on life differ from our own. Another response is to focus on the universal aspects of religious and moral commitments, while distancing ourselves from their particularity. Those who adopt this perspective presume that if we focus, for instance, on what Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews have in common rather than what divides us, we can find ways to co-exist peacefully.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who respond to the crisis of commitment by trying to protect and defend their own core convictions. Those in this group often adopt a strategy that involves a combination of backing away from/minimizing and pushing against/confronting differences. Specifically, there are those who seek to distance or even wall themselves off from those with differing outlooks by retreating into or trying to forge seemingly-secure communities of people who think, act, and are otherwise similar to them. At the same time, when those who adopt this strategy cannot avoid contact with those who hold a differing outlook on life, they tend to pivot from efforts to back away from differences and, instead, adopt a confrontational stance. For example, as the marriage equality movement gained momentum in the United States, Christian groups who do not accept gay marriage often sought to prohibit discussion of it in their communities. However, once same-sex marriage began to become legal, these Christians often began to adopt a more oppositional stance. Some churches argued, for instance, that businesses that are run by their members should refuse to provide goods and services for gay marriage ceremonies and, instead, should speak out publicly against same-sex unions.

Now, these common ways of responding to religious and moral differences compound rather than resolve the crisis of commitment in contemporary, global culture. They place us in a position that is similar to that of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* when he was between Charybdis (a deadly whirlpool) and Scylla (a murderous monster of rock). While calls for tolerance and a focus on the universal are grounded in an admirable effort to show respect for all persons as persons, they require us to hold our religious and moral commitments lightly. These responses to differences presume that if we distance ourselves from our deepest commitments and limit the

² Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), xi.

ways in which they shape our perspectives and actions in our everyday lives, we can make room for others. We can live and let live. However, these frequently found responses are flawed because they fail to take into account that religious and moral commitments are life orienting and life propelling.

In morally charged situations our moral commitments help to direct our awareness to situations of injustice or moral harm. They may also propel us into reflection and guide us in deciding how we can and will respond. When we see, for example, white supremacists take to the streets, engage in hate speech, and threaten or even engage in violent attacks, we may react against their actions because of deeply held religious and moral commitments. For most of us, a passion for justice or for caring for people in need, or a belief in the importance of respect for the dignity of persons as person, or other moral norms provide an orientation for our lives and motivate us to seek what is morally good and true. Similarly, if we are to develop religiously our religious commitments are not convictions that can or should be held lightly. Rather, they must be central and life-orienting. Personally, for instance, the language of Catholicism was my first religious language, and my commitments as a Catholic have and forever will shape how I see the religious dimensions of life. I can connect with and learn from accounts of life transforming experiences of faith shared by followers of other religions because I have had life-sustaining and at times transforming experiences of faith through my relationship with Jesus.

Turning next to the two-fold strategy of backing-away when-possible/confronting-when-necessary, it is also flawed. In the past people could realistically seek a haven from the complexities of the world within communities of like-minded people. Today, in our contemporary global age, it is virtually impossible to avoid contact with people who hold differing religious and moral outlooks. Not even Boko Haram, an extreme militant, quasi-religious sect in Northeast Nigeria, has been able to separate itself from contact with its Muslim and Christian neighbors. On national or regional levels, policies that involve such things as travel bans, laws against wearing religious attire or presenting religious symbols in public settings, and efforts to restrict education so that children are only taught the beliefs of a dominant group, may slow or hide the intermingling of people with differing religious and moral outlooks, but they are unlikely to halt the constant flow of information and intermingling of people with diverse backgrounds in our contemporary, global age.

Hence, there are increasing incidents today of people encountering those who hold differing religious and moral outlooks and adopting a confrontational stance. In my experience many people who adopt such a stance begin with a sound grounding in their own religious and moral commitments. That is, their views are based on a sound premise: the insight that while religious and moral commitments are personal and specific, they are not wholly private. Rather, they have a public significance. As a Christian, for example, I believe that God is a God of life who wants abundant life for all God's creation, especially for human beings who I believe are uniquely made in the image of God. I also believe that God, as made known through Christian Scriptures and traditions, has a special concern for the poor and oppressed. While these beliefs are grounded in my specific religious and moral commitments as a Catholic Christian, they lead me outward to involvement in society. Similarly, as I listen to people of faith discuss, for example, homosexuality, torture, gay marriage, human trafficking, abortion, immigration, and capital punishment, I recognize when the stances they take express the public significance of their religious and moral commitments.

However, as I listen to people address socio-moral issues based on their core life commitments, I frequently encounter some degree of unwillingness to be open to ongoing moral

growth and development, and to God's ongoing presence, and creative and redemptive activity in the world. In some of instances, people adopt what can be called a *closed communal perspective* or a *my-God-and-my-country outlook*. For instance, a parish in which I was once invited to speak has long-standing commitments to various social causes. The community is especially drawn to supporting educational programs throughout the world. It is also willing on a limited basis to aid refugees seeking asylum in the United States. My conversation with them reminded me of a bumper sticker I saw in their community. It read: "Why the hell do I have to press 1 for English?" The people of that community support educational programs that, essentially, teach others to think and act like them. They are willing to offer assistance to refugees coming into the United States, but only if they are willing to learn English and adopt a white, middle class, American worldview. They are, essentially, not interested in genuine conversation with people with differing outlooks on life. Instead, they want to colonize them. While this community provides a somewhat extreme example of a trend within religious communities, I have encountered similar attitudes among religious people throughout the world. They think of their commitments as providing them with religious and moral truth as a fixed reality or product and are willing to share this truth with others. Yet, they tend not to see others as people who have something to share with them, to teach them. They also tend not to be open to exploring how God is at work in the world beyond their closed community. They are primarily if not exclusively interested in the god they have mentally constructed; a god who they envision as blessing their country, their church, and their way of life.

I also often meet people and groups whose religious and moral commitments lead them to see the world primarily in a negative light, and who adopt what can be called a *closed countercultural outlook*. Among people in this group I often observe a two-fold pattern of analysis. They articulate or presuppose that the dominant characteristics of the world are unbridled consumerism and materialism, excessive individualism, moral relativism and/or other negative social influences that have corrupted societies and diminished the quality of life. Sometimes they characterize contemporary culture as a culture of death. Then, they look at socio-moral issues in the light of their harsh critique of society. The immediate difficulty with a closed countercultural outlook is that it is non-dialogical. Those with a closed countercultural outlook are not usually open to conversation with those with whom they disagree. Instead, they tend to judge them as being deficient, and then dismiss them. Those who adopt such an outlook also neglect an often-difficult yet essential prerequisite for making sound social judgments: the task of evaluating the complex intertwining of positive/life-giving and negative/death-dealing influences within contemporary society. At a deeper level, they often fail to reflect on where God is present in contemporary society, and how God may be acting within the world, working to transform negative social realities. While there are many times when religious people should be critical of social trends, when a negative social outlook and a countercultural stance become default responses, religious and moral commitments are likely to become distorted.

In any educational setting, explorations of morality and religion(s) should connect with people's lives and help to shape how they see and respond to life concerns. Religious educators should guide people in forming firm religious and moral commitments while at the same time educating them to be open to exploring how God may be calling us to new ways of thinking and acting, especially in and through dialogue with those who hold differing outlooks on life. However, efforts to teach people to tolerate all religious and moral perspectives or to step back from their personal and social commitment and to adopt a universal perspective are likely to lead people away from understanding how deeply-held religious and moral commitments provide a

starting point for making sense of life, and standing up against injustice and other forms of immorality. Such strategies will in most instances also lead us to devalue the experiences of the religious or transcendent dimensions of life that provide a touchstone for being attentive to and understanding the ongoing presence of God in our lives, and discussing with others how God or the Transcendent is made known to them in theirs. Additionally, far too often today when people who hold firm religious and moral commitments seek to challenge or confront those who hold differing religious and moral perspectives, their outlooks on life and actions are problematic. At the core of these problematic responses there is in most instances a lack of openness to the ongoing creative and redemptive activity of God in the world and a failure to respect others as persons. Hence, before we can educate people to form viable religious and moral commitments we need, I suggest, to have a deeper understanding of the dynamics of making and sustaining commitments, and a clearer sense of how commitments can become distorted. In the next section I strive to offer such a deeper understanding of commitment, and in the section after that I will discuss more fully how commitments can become distorted.

The Paradoxical Character of Commitments

Based on contemporary research and my own pastoral and life experience, I suggest that the key to understanding commitments is to recognize that they have a paradoxical nature.³ On the one hand, in making commitments we are led to focus fully on the concrete conditions of our lives and what could bring us greater fullness of life. The process of forming a commitment is, thus, guided by a logic of personal and social involvement. It goes beyond the logic of inductive, deductive, and abductive reasoning by means of which we strive to understand something. For instance, there was a significant difference between considering and then asking a woman who had become the love of my life to marry me and, eight years before that, reflecting on the concept of marriage in an undergraduate theology course. From a Christian perspective, in making major commitments we must go beyond reflecting on an issue and strive to discern what God is making possible and calling us to do in our lives.

On the other hand, and paradoxically, the fullness of commitment is a fullness that is never full, never complete. Our commitments, such as the commitment to marry, bind us and close off other possibilities. We accept this binding because with it comes a fullness of life that would otherwise be absent. At the same time, commitments direct us to the future and create new possibilities in our lives, possibilities we could not have imagined before we made the commitment. For instance, after thirty-one years and taking into account the challenges my wife and I face in our marriage, I now experience a fullness within marriage that is even beyond what I experienced when I first joined my life with another. Moreover, when I have been asked by students to discuss issues concerning their marriages that are impacting their studies, I have turned for insight to my experience of my marriage commitment and how it has brought a fullness into my life. Yet, in discussing marriage with others I have sometimes been led by them to envision ways in which my marriage could expand and become even fuller.

³ For a seminal exploration of the dynamics of commitment see Margaret A. Farley *Personal Commitments* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013). See also James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment* (San Francisco: Harper and Row 1981). His discussion of convictional knowing offers rich insight into the nature of convictional commitments.

Now, religious and moral commitments are *convictional commitments*. Such commitments become core beliefs or convictions that are constitutive of our sense of personal and social identity and as a result, the sense of fullness they bring to our lives is greater than the fullness of other commitments. When a person says, for instance, “I am a Christian” or “I am a Jew” or “I am a Muslim,” they are expressing the fullness of personal and social identity they experience because their religious and moral commitments have become foundational for their sense of self and their outlook on the world. As social beings we are also drawn to share with others within and beyond our religious communities the experience of fullness of life that is grounded in our religious and moral commitments. In religious terms, we may feel compelled to witness to our faith by sharing it through words and deeds. Moreover, we are drawn to stand against violations of moral and religious commitments in the social world. For instance, if we see someone being bullied, whether it is in our town or halfway around the world, we may feel drawn because of our convictional life commitments to consider what we might do to help the person.

However, because of the paradoxical nature of commitments, we must balance the firmness with which we hold our religious and moral commitment with an openness to even greater fullness. Hence, religious and moral commitment compel us to listen, as well as to speak. They lead us beyond ourselves to recognize the integrity, value, and sacredness of all creation, especially the sacredness of the human person. Overall, religious and moral commitments are dynamic rather than static aspects of human life. In order for these commitments to continue to evolve we need to learn to balance firm adherence to convictional commitments with a genuine openness to encountering the Other, even when such encounters are challenging. Anytime we think that the fullness of our religious commitments is a complete fullness, we may be tempted to allow our conception of God to become more important than our actual relationship with God, whose Fullness we can never fully grasp. Morally, any time we think we possess the fullness of truth and value, we are likely to fail to respect others and to be open to the ways they, based on their distinctive outlooks on life, can guide us to greater moral insight.

Today, we experience a crisis of moral and religious commitment because many people fail to appreciate the paradoxical nature of commitments and, consequently, do not recognize how religious and moral commitments can become distorted. In the next section I discuss this issue more fully.

A Crisis of Religious and Moral Commitment

Efforts to promote tolerance or calls to step back from our specific religious and moral commitments and adopt a universal perspective are often motivated by a praiseworthy desire to discover the fullness of religious and moral truth that is found beyond our specific outlooks on life, outlooks which are always limited and, hence, limiting. However, those who advocate for such initiatives often fail to recognize that commitments are more than reflective stances. They fail to appreciate that commitments are embodied ways of being involved in the world, and that our convictional commitments provide an essential grounding for our outlooks on life and our actions. Religious educators who teach tolerance or encourage students to try to adopt a universal religious and moral perspective ask students to set aside the convictional commitments that help them make sense of life and find their way in the world. Students who accept the teaching of such educators are left without a place to stand, and without something to share, when they encounter those who hold differing religious and moral perspectives.

In contrast, the back-away-when-possible-and-confront-when-necessary strategy is firmly grounded in a sense of the importance of our convictional religious and moral commitments. This strategy calls people to try to protect their convictional commitments and to defend them when they are threatened. However, there is an underlying deficiency to the strategy that can be illustrated by referring to a concept that some consider to be old fashioned: common decency. It refers to the conviction that we are bound by underlying socio-moral standards because of our common humanity, our shared human story. For example, there are numerous historical examples of political back-biting, such as Alexander Hamilton's characterizations of Aaron Burr in early U.S. politics. Such characterizations have often been seen as lacking in common decency because they violate an unwritten political norm; specifically, that political opponents should not use derogatory nicknames or show disrespect for one another in other ways as well. The most interesting aspect of appeals to common decency is that they reveal how people can be socialized to have a strong sense of the importance of a convictional social commitment that is unwritten and not fully defined. More fully, in at least some social contexts today people are still socialized to internalize a convictional commitment to respect common decency so that disputes among people do not go too far and become personally and socially destructive. While this convictional commitment can be very firmly held, standards of common decency express the tacit, often unreflective conviction that within opposing perspectives there is a fuller sense of meaning and value that, while not fully revealed, could with effort be uncovered and provide a way for those who disagree to find common ground. Unfortunately, in social, political, and religious discourse today there is often a lack of respect for common decency, and religious persons and communities who adopt a back-away-or-confront strategy are among the most vocal violators of norms of common decency. An extreme example of such violations is found in the mean-spirited, homophobic, and often racist rhetoric and practices of the Westboro Baptist Church.⁴ However, less extreme examples are found in many religious communities today. When the default stance is to confront rather than to engage respectfully, one can be led to see others in an overly negative light. Religious educators who teach a back-away-or-confront strategy tend to promote an unhealthy sectarianism, even when they discuss the public significance of religious and moral commitments, because they lead their students to close themselves off from the potential for greater fullness within their own and others' commitments. Moreover, they are inclined to turn away from the Fullness of God and to idolize some particular conception of the divine.

If we grant that we do face a crisis of commitment in our religious communities today, the question to raise is: How can we educate people to form firm religious and moral commitments and at the same time be genuinely open to others who hold differing commitments in our contemporary, global age? Rather than addressing this question abstractly, I suggest in the next section that it may be more fruitful for religious educators to explore it based on an understanding of the history and commitments of the Religious Education Association (REA:APPRRE).

The Commitments of Religious Educators and Educating for Religious and Moral Commitment

⁴ If interested in learning more, prepare to be sickened and then do an internet search for "Westboro Baptist Church."

William Rainey Harper and the other founders of the Religious Education Association envisioned the organization as a clearing house for both resources concerning practical efforts to educate in faith and research at the intersection of the various fields of religious studies/theology and education.⁵ The overall goal of the organization was to improve the quality of “religious and moral education.”⁶ At its 1903 founding convention, several major addresses focused on the universal aspects of religion. For instance, in his major address Edwin D. Starbuck stated that, “Religion is a part of life. It is not something tacked on, something which has come *ad extra*.”⁷ In the address preceding Starbuck’s, George Albert Coe called religion “an essential factor of the human personality.”⁸ Coe urged those attending the convention to “learn more of Christian union” so that they could discover the “settled” “principles of the spiritual life” underlying all religions and then formulate a “unified ideal” for educating in faith.⁹ However, due primarily to Harper’s expansive vision, from the beginning the REA went beyond a concern for Christian union and welcomed religious educators from all religious traditions from around the world. Jewish educators in the United States, in particular, responded to REA’s invitations to join, and from the end of the first decade of the twentieth century onward have shaped significantly the REA and the field of religious education. Over time, the REA, now REA:APPRRE, became a more Christian ecumenical and interreligious organization, and in the second decade of the twenty-first century it has moved closer to becoming truly international and interreligious.¹⁰

By the 1940s REA’s members had reimagined how they relate to each other, and the image of fellowship began to shape the identity of the organization. For example, in 1944 Coe stated, “I think of the Association, first of all, as a religious fellowship.”¹¹ In this article Coe began by envisioning the REA as a group of learners who humbly accept that they have a limited understanding of the world. Thus, he signaled that he had given up the search for self-evident, unifying first principles for religious education. Coe then discussed the membership of the REA being united by a search for rather than the possession of truth. At the forty-first convention of the REA, the organization’s retiring president Ernest J. Chave voiced a similar perspective. He stated: “Perhaps in a united search for a fuller comprehension of truth, with mutual respect for each other, ... we may move forward to more significant systems of faith and conduct.”¹² According to Chave, religious educators’ search for truth through research at the intersection of religion and education shaped the REA to become a “three-faith fellowship” whose members were united in service to humankind. Chave referred to systems (plural) of faith and conduct, thus recognizing that religious educators contribute to developing distinctive ways of providing

⁵ Religious Education Association (REA), *Proceedings of the First Annual Convention, Chicago, February 10-12, 1903* (Chicago: Executive Office of the Association, 1903), 230-233.

⁶ REA, *Proceedings of the First*, 237.

⁷ REA, *Proceedings of the First*, 53.

⁸ REA, *Proceedings of the First*, 47.

⁹ REA, *Proceedings of the First*, 50.

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the development of the guiding vision and imagination of the REA:APPRRE see Harold D. Horell “The Imagination of REA: APPRRE,” *Religious Education* 111, no. 4 (2016): 349-365.

¹¹ George Albert Coe, “The Religious-Education Movement – A Retrospect,” *Religious Education* 39, no. 4 (1944): 220.

¹² Ernest J. Chave, “Today and Tomorrow in Religious Education,” *Religious Education* 39, no. 4 (1944): 228.

religious and moral education in their respective religious communities. Moreover, he held that, “People should see varying concepts and practices set in vivid contrasts so that thought is evoked and interest aroused in a search for dependable growing concepts.”¹³ At the REA’s 1950 Biennial Convention, Harrison Elliott took a comparable stance. He described the REA as a fellowship of educators of various religious convictions within which there is more than “superficial tolerance” for differences. He claimed that, “We have believed that our own experience would be enriched and the common cause furthered by the contribution of these diverse viewpoints.”¹⁴

I suggest that we can gain a fuller understanding of developments within the REA, by looking at them in the light of a conception of the dynamics of convictional commitments. In its early years the organization sought to discover the universal principles of moral and religious education by stepping back and reflecting upon education in faith within the various religious communities of the world. However, by its fourth decade its member understood the faults of this strategy. They recognized that “superficial tolerance” did not lead to fruitful exchanges because it deprived them of the ability to draw insight from their convictional religious and moral commitments in their conversation with one another. Then, because the members of the REA continued to seek ways of discussing their “diverse viewpoints” fruitfully, they discovered that when “varying concepts and practices (are) set in vivid contrasts” thought was “evoked and interest aroused” to such an extent that members of the organization could recognize their “common cause” of contributing to ongoing developments in education in faith in their respective communities and being of “service to humankind.” Essentially, the experience of being united by a “common cause” became a convictional commitment that has enabled the REA to develop as a fellowship or friendly association of scholars and practitioners with shared interests. At the same time, the REA and then REA:APPRRE developed an organizational culture in which its members seek to share their diverse perspectives with one another as a way of being open to the ongoing revelation of the greater fullness of meaning within their own professional and religious commitments, and the convictional commitments of REA:APPRRE as an organization. This has propelled the organization to look continually outward so that it has become an emerging international and interreligious fellowship.

The REA was founded to address what many at that time regarded as a crisis in religious and moral education. There is no less a crisis in religious and moral education today, albeit the present crisis is of a somewhat different nature in that it is the result of unsuccessful efforts to address challenges created by the emergence of a contemporary, global culture of encounter. Nevertheless, just as the REA addressed the early twentieth century crisis in religious and moral education, REA:APPRRE can draw insight from its heritage and present-day structure to address the contemporary crisis in religious education. Moreover, as an emerging international and interreligious organization, it has unique resource for addressing this crisis.

So, how specifically can the REA:APPRRE and its members help to educate people to form viable religious and moral commitments today? I suggest that we can begin by taking three steps. Due to space limitations, I sketch these only briefly.

First, I suggest that we need to embrace more intentionally and share more fully the history and vision of the field of religious education. In an age in which religious and moral

¹³ Chave, “Today and Tomorrow,” 227-228.

¹⁴ Harrison Elliot, “Reflections of a Religious Educator,” *Religious Education* 45, no. 4 (1950): 196.

commitments are becoming increasingly problematic, we as religious educators need to ensure that our work is grounded in the viable convictional commitments of our field. We can also share our story and vision as an example of how viable convictional commitments can be forged. In sharing our story we can draw attention to approaches to educating in faith and explorations of issues from religious educational perspectives that are informed by or presuppose an understanding of the paradoxical nature of religious and moral commitments.¹⁵

Second, as part of our commitment to focusing on religious education in religious communities I suggest that we should 1) include an emphasis on helping religious communities and their members learn to explore the public significance of their religious and moral convictions in conversation with those who hold differing commitments, and 2) strive to help religious communities develop language that can guide such conversations. Some religious communities and their members lack a language for distinguishing between differences and distortions in religious and moral commitments because they have focused on tolerance of all perspectives. In contrast, within communities that adopt a back-away-or-confront strategy there is a tendency to equate differences in religious and moral commitments with deficiencies. We need to develop richer languages of religious and moral encounter that can guide religious communities and their members to discover through conversations with those who hold other outlooks on life how differing commitments can sometimes be complementary (affirming the convictional commitments of the dialogue partners) and sometimes challenging (calling the dialogue partners to look outward to discover the fuller meaning of their commitments). At the same time, our languages of religious encounter should lead members of religious communities to reflect critically on possible limitations or deficiencies in their own and others' religious and moral commitments.

Third, as part of its commitment to exploring the contribution of religious education to the common good in public life and the global community, I suggest that religious educators need to attend more fully to how the contemporary crisis in religious and moral commitment is having a negative influence on social and political life. We must consider how we as religious educators may be called to help people recover a sense of how religious communities can bring distinctive insights into public forums of discourse, while at the same time helping to expand those forums by showing how an openness to a fuller sense of meaning and valuing is made possible when people look at socio-moral issues in the light of an understanding of the transcendent aspects of life. Ultimately, religious educators can take a leading role in exploring what we can do to address socio-moral issues, while also helping us recognize our dependence on the grace of God.

¹⁵ See for example Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox 1993); Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Covenant & Call* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000); Karen Marie Yust, et al., eds., *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Elizabeth F. Caldwell, *God's Big Table* (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 2011); Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith?* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011); Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989); and Gabriel Moran, *Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books: 1992).

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Encountering Dignity: Building Human Community

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When you are out in the world, act as if meeting an important guest. Employ the people as if you were assisting at a great ceremony. What you don't want done to yourself, don't do to others. (Analects 12:2)

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years... She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak ... Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. (Mark 5:25, 27, 29, NRSV)

Encounters were central in the lives of Confucius and Jesus, as to many other religious founders and leaders. Their own worldviews and sense of the Holy were shaped by interactions with people and communities in distress, and their encounters were imbued with dignity. Encounters with dignity are learning moments that foster humanization and communal values, even in settings of radical difference. This paper probes the potential of such learning, beginning with a brief review of pedagogies of encounter and an analysis of the values of dignity implicit in that work. For many educators, encounters and dignity are inherently related (as in Freire 1978, 2004), but little has been written to explore that relationship explicitly. This paper is an effort to explore the intersection in some depth, drawing particularly on narratives of encounter, as represented by two documentary narratives, *The Lemon Tree* and *I Shall Not Hate*, and oral histories, all analyzed to discover the textures of dignity encounters.

Our thesis is that *encountering dignity is a critical goal and process in religious education. Such encounters foster humanization and communal values in complex ways that are revealed in lived religious practice and taught in Confucian and Christian traditions.* The very idea of dignifying encounters is tantalizing but what does it mean? We begin with Donna Hicks basic understanding of dignity as “the *feeling* of inherent value and worth” and “a mutual sense of worth” and/or recognition of basic human rights (2013, 6). What we want to learn, however, is how people themselves experience and describe encounters and dignity. Thus, we ask four questions of the documentaries and oral histories: (a) what were the moments of encounter; (b) what did people learn in the encounters; (c) where did dignity appear, and how was it described; and (d) how did the people describe their own learning to dignify others?

We discovered a treasure trove in the narratives and theological analysis, yielding expected and unexpected insights. We thus invite readers to join a journey of discovery. The paper unfolds in four movements: (1) emerging insights from the literature; (2) analysis of published narratives and oral histories of dignifying encounters; (3) analysis of both from Confucian and Christian perspectives; and (4) generative proposals for dignifying encounters in learning communities faced with radical difference. The paper is exploratory, and further research will develop the themes in greater detail and nuance. We seek to learn from living cases of dignifying encounters, and to reflect religiously and educationally on the emerging insights.

Encounter and Dignity: Emerging Insights

Research and reflection on encounter and dignity have been growing and expanding in the past 50 years. Those who do this research are motivated to build human community and justice by fostering understanding and respect for the value of all persons, especially in contexts of radical human difference. What has been missing in research to date is an explicit focus on the *interplay* of encounter and dignity, so important in religious traditions. This is our concern.

Religious education research reveals that much learning takes place in encounters, or unexpected experiences of meeting. Encounters are often informal and unplanned meetings with other persons or situations, especially people and situations that are unfamiliar. Encounters may be informal, but educators can also create opportunities for these moments of meeting. The educational research on encounters often reveals much about dignity, but dignity itself is largely unnamed. Paulo Freire (1978, 2004), in particular, planned *encuentros* that created opportunities for deep meeting with others.

The educational research is wide-ranging. For some, learning in encounter has focused on experiential education, honoring the dignity of the learners (Dow 1971; Clark, Erway, & Belzer 1971). For others, the focus has been on encounters with human differences and differential power, honoring the dignity of human diversity (Evans, Evans & Kennedy, 1987; Freire 1978, 2004; Cassidy 2006; Miedema et al, 2009). Some highlight multiple forms of encounter – divine and human; religion and culture; diverse cultures and values, and power differentials (Brinker-Gabler 1995; Davis & Spears, eds. 2013; Lamm 2010; Miedema et al, 2009). Still others emphasize the complications in such encounters, such as power differentials (Botha 2015) or the psychological limits of dignity (Skinner 1971).

While educators have been focusing on learning through encounters, many advocates for justice and peace have been studying the phenomenon of dignity and the role of encounters or direct engagement in that work, whether focusing on forgiveness (Tutu and Tutu 2014) or on attitudes toward others (Yablon 2012 and 2010; Gopin 2012). Donna Hicks (2013) analyzes the phenomena in global peace-making pursuits and in families and local settings, identifying factors that contribute to or inhibit dignity in human relationships. In her international peacebuilding work, Hicks concluded that dignity is critical for relationships that are just, rights-respecting, and peaceful: “I saw that if indignity tears us apart, dignity can put us back together again” (xii).

This brief review reveals the power of encounters in learning dignity – learning to appreciate the inherent worth of others. Previous work invites a deep dive into narratives of encounter, particularly dignifying encounters. We thus turn to the stories.

Analysis of Dignity Narratives

To explore encounters the complexities of dignifying encounters, we analyze a sample of documentary narratives and oral histories (Abuelaish 2012; Tolan 2007; Oral History Project of Boston University School of Theology). We share our findings through portraits, portraying human lives within their complex cultural contexts, a method influenced by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis’s social science portraiture (1997).

Abuelaish – I Shall Not Hate

Izzeldin Abuelaish was born on February 3, 1955, in Jabalia refugee camp, Gaza Strip (Abuelaish, 2012). The separation of Israeli state from Palestine in 1948 had dispossessed his family of its heritage and property, leaving them poor. Abuelaish’s mother helped him cope with

the appalling situation, raising goats and pigeons to make money with which she sent Abuelaish to the United Nations school in the camp (40). Her passion for education taught Abuelaish that education is necessary to escape from a miserable existence. He called her “the hero, the one behind the successes” (47). He himself became a medical doctor and the first doctor to practice in an Israeli hospital, beginning as a researcher in Sheba Hospital in Tel Aviv, while also working to build human relationships in Israel and Palestine.

On January 16, 2009, the Israeli military attacked the Gaza Strip in reprisal for the killing of Israeli civilians by Qassam rockets. Identifying Abuelaish as an activist, Israel tanks shelled his apartment, hitting his daughters’ room, killing Bessan, Mayar, and Aya and injuring his niece. Abuelaish sent a message to an Israeli friend, Shlomi Eldar from Israeli TV’s Channel 10, and was soon broadcasting live the horror of discovering his gifts. “Ya Rabbi, Ya Rabbi—my God, my God—they shelled my house. They killed my daughters. What have we done?”(177). The catastrophic loss strengthened Abuelaish’s belief that God could bridge the divide, sharply aware of his daughters’ sacrifice and God’s providence. He interpreted this tragedy as God’s test for him as found in Ayoub in the Quran or Job in the Bible (197). He believed God’s plan was to establish him as a messenger to help bring about the peaceful coexistence of two states. He said, “Hatred eats at your soul and takes opportunities away from you. It’s like consuming poison” (122). Instead of hatred, violence, and despair, Abuelaish dreamed of a better future for Palestinians and Israelis through the educational organization, Daughters for Life. Abuelaish became determined to use education to make the Middle East peaceful and secure.

Abuelaish argued strongly that coexistence, cooperation, and partnership at the grass-roots level were the only way forward for Palestinians and Israelis. This vision inspired Daughters for Life, named for his dead daughters who had been filled with dreams for a better future. The aim of the foundation is to promote relationships between Jewish and Palestinian children. He claims that the organization gives both groups of children strong voices with which to improve human dignity in the Middle East (223). In particular, the foundation seeks to improve the status and role of girls and women; it provides scholarships for female students for high school and university studies and examines the existing programs and curriculums to assess what is working for girls and women. Abuelaish believes that improving the status of women can positively affect all levels of Palestinian and Israeli societies (224).

Another dignifying encounter was similarly influential for Abuelaish. When his three daughters and niece were hit, his friend Doctor Zeev Rotstein was filled with indescribable grief. He asked Abuelaish to come immediately with his wounded children to the Sheba Medical Center (181). Ignoring the political risks, Rotstein wanted to save lives with compassion, and without regard for ethnic differences. This encounter convinced Abuelaish that health care is a humanitarian action to bring about social transformation. He and Rotstein became partners in a vision that health care can be a critical bridge between Israel and Palestine. It can save lives and renew relationships. They want people to see the faces of Israelis and Palestinians, not through a rifle’s scope but through compassionate, non-hostile eyes (216). They believe that humanitarian health care can help restore dignity, revealing that the dignity of Palestinians is equal to that of Israelis; the value of life is not hierarchal. Thus, humanitarian action can promote human dignity and reinforce collaborations for peace and reconciliation.

According to Abuelaish, human dignity means freedom from physical and mental suffering. However, the Palestine people continue to face a deep human crisis, whereby millions of them are denied their human dignity because of brutal oppression by the Israeli government

and the Palestine Authority's (PA's) corruption and ineptness. Specifically, Gaza's health-care system does not work; it is unable to provide proper treatment to many patients because the procedures for requesting permission to leave Palestinian territory are complicated. Palestinians have to get permission from both the PA and the Israeli authorities, meaning that Palestinian patients who are gravely ill are unable to see doctors and medical teams in Israeli hospitals that are equipped with the medical devices they need. For Abuelaish, proper health-care is the minimum requirement for human dignity and offers a significant way to connect Palestinians and Israelis.

Abuelaish learned much from his mother, the tragic death of his daughters, and his encounter with an Israeli doctor. These encounters convinced him that education and health care can transform Israeli and Palestinian societies and improve human dignity. For him, human dignity belongs to all regardless of ethnicity, gender, culture, or religion; all humans deserve to be respected by others. Education and health care cannot only bridge the divide that separates Palestinians and Israelis, but they can also result in social transformation.

Tolan – The Lemon Tree

We turn now to another narrative of encounters (Tolan 2006), also in Israel and Palestine and also under the influence of actions in 1948, 1967, and beyond. The story opens in 1967, and Bashir Khairi travels with two cousins to the Al-Ramla homes their families had to evacuate almost 20 years earlier. Bashir is filled with dread. Meet also Dalia Eshkenazi, whose family fled from Bulgaria to Israel with thousands of other Jews after World War II. They settled in Ramla (Al-Ramla to Bashir) in 1948, moving into the home that Bashir's family had left behind when forced across the thirsty desert to Ramallah. Dalia sits gazing into the garden behind her home, enjoying the jacaranda tree planted by her father and lemon tree planted by another father long ago (Bashir's father). She has often wondered who lived in this house before her family. She learned in school "that the Arabs had fled like cowards, with their hot soup still steaming on the table ... but the older she got, the less sense it made. Why would anyone voluntarily leave such a beautiful home?" (20). As the first chapter ends, Bashir stands with his hand on the bell of his family's (now Dalia's family's) home (24).

As the book unfolds, readers encounter two families, two peoples, and two geo-political entities. Bashir's father, Ahmad, had built the house himself, created a beautiful garden, and planted a lemon tree. "Once the tree was in the soil, Ahmad knew it would be at least seven years, and probably more, before the strong Palestinian sun and sweet waters of the al-Ramla aquifer would nurture the tree to maturity. The act of planting was thus an act of faith and patience" (30). The house and tree were living symbols of the Khairis' family life. And they were living symbols of Islamic values of compassion and respect for their neighbors.

Bashir and Dalia both encountered indignity at many points, as did their families. The Khairis were among those forced to leave their homes and their hometown al-Ramla in 1948, and yet the Eschenazis had their own story of near destruction. They were among the masses of people herded into a school yard to be deported on trains to a death camp. Fortunately, the Orthodox Christian Church and a few brave Jewish leaders and Bulgarian officials intervened on behalf of thousands of Bulgarians standing ready for deportation and almost certain death. As Tolan notes, if things had happened differently, the likely result is that "forty-seven thousand Bulgarian Jews, including Moshe and Solia Eshkenazi, would have perished at Treblinka, and that Dalia would have never been born" (62, end of Chapter 3).

The world was upside down after World War II. The Holocaust took a huge toll on Jewish lives. The Zionist movement was growing and emphasizing the return to Zion, describing the region as a “‘land without people for a people without land’” (93). With the British takeover after WWI and the Balfour Declaration, a new national home was promised to the Jews (104). This historical moment laid the ground for Bashir’s family to lose their land and Dalia’s family to make home where they could be safe from the devastations of Jewry in Europe.

Bashir and Dalia both grew up in loving families in the midst of a war-torn, constantly changing and explosive land. Dalia carried the nagging question of why the Palestinian people had left their homes, and Bashir carried the embodied memory of losing his hand to a landmine as a young boy. Both knew that some people were treated worse than others, and both were concerned; yet, they brought different histories and experiences to these realities.

Bashir became a lawyer and a strong advocate for Palestinian rights, particularly for the right of return. His first protests landed him in prison for many months, where he was tortured daily. He became known as a strong, level-headed leader among the Palestinians, but he was frequently cast into prisons or exile, sometimes for many years. After the first imprisonment, Dalia went to visit Bashir in Ramallah, where she met his family and experienced extravagant Arab hospitality for the first time. The connection she and Bashir felt on their first meeting was still strong, and they entered a moment of truth-telling that shook them both. Dalia said, “I know this is a sensitive issue ... It must be very difficult that someone now is living in your house” (186). Bashir did not desire this turn of the conversation, but realized that “Dalia needed and deserved to be engaged,” so he replied: “Listen, Dalia, ... How would you feel to leave your home, all your belongings, your entire spirit, in one place? Would you not fight to get it back with everything you have?” (186).

Then, Bashir stood suddenly and led her to a cabinet. There, amid the books and decorations, she saw a lemon. When she asked about it, he spoke of his first visit with her: “‘Do you remember that Kamel asked you for something as we left? And what you gave him as a gift?’” Bashir recalls her response: “‘Oh, my God. It’s one of the lemons from that visit. But why did you keep it? It has been almost four months now’” (187). He replied: “To us this lemon in more than fruit, Dalia ... It is land and history... A few days after we brought the lemons home, it was night, and I heard a movement in the house ... and I got up. The noise was coming from this room right here. Do you know what I saw? My father, who is nearly blind. ... Dalia, I saw him holding the lemon with both hands. And he was pacing back and forth in the room, and the tears were running down his cheeks.” (187)

Bashir and Dalia recognized that both had exile stories and future hopes – for Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) or Arde Falastin (Land of Palestine) (188). Bashir resisted comparisons, however, because Western occupying powers had created Israel on Palestinian land (189). Dalia replied: “‘Okay, Bashir, I live in your home ... And this is also my home. It is the only home I know. So, what shall we do?’” He replied calmly, “‘You can go back where you came from.’” (190) Dalia “felt as if Bashir had dropped a bomb” but she “forced herself to listen.” He said, “‘We believe that only those who came here before 1917’ – the year of the Balfour Declaration and the beginning of the British Mandate in Palestine – “‘have a right to be here. But anyone who came after 1917 ... cannot stay’” (190). Dalia “was struck by the total contradiction of her situation: complete disagreement across a seemingly unbridgeable gulf, combined with the establishment of a bond through a common history, in the Khairi home where she felt utterly protected and welcomed, and where she felt the depth of their gratitude (190). She recalled later:

“That every body could feel the warmth and the reality of our people meeting, meeting the other, and it was real, it was happening, and we were admiring each other’s *being* ... And on the other hand, we were conversing of things that seemed *totally mutually exclusive*. That my life here is at *their* expense, and if they want to realize their dream, it’s at *my* expense.” (190)

Bashir and Dalia were not to find a resolution then or ever. Dalia’s response was: “I have nowhere else to go, Bashir ... We have to live together. To accept each other.” Bashir’s reply was: “You are living in a place that does not belong to you, Dalia. ... It’s not your country, Dalia. You stole it from us” (190). As Dalia prepared to leave that day, the whole family bid her a warm goodbye, and Bashir said: “You are not a guest in this house, Dalia ... It means you have to come again and again, and we’re going to do this, too.” (191)

Many horrific events happened after that – violence perpetuated by state governments, individuals, organizations, alongside efforts at peace and the gradual or sudden unraveling of those efforts. Bashir was arrested and often tortured for long periods, but he never confessed to the acts attributed to him. He never gave up the fight for the “right of return,” and he spent almost twenty years of his adult life in prisons and in exile. The communication between him and Dalia continued on and off until both were in their sixties when the book ended.

When Dalia’s father died in 1985, she wanted to do something to make reparations with the house. She thought of selling it for reparations, but she went to visit Bashir. His suggestion is the one she enacted, creating a pre-school for Arab children. Bashir said to her: “I want them to have the childhood that I never had” (221). Dalia did establish the school, and it eventually became Open House, which was not only a school, but a site for summer peace camps, and dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis.

In 1988, when Bashir was imprisoned for his suspected role in the intifada, Dalia wrote a letter to him in the newspaper. She described her sadness in their intertwined histories, but also how she hoped (assuming that he was guilty) that he would now choose a nonviolent way to lead (231-234). Due to imprisonment and exile, he saw the letter many months later. They were never to agree on the best path forward, but they continued to listen to one another, realizing how overwhelming the challenges were. In 1995, peace talks between Rabin and Arafat showed promise; yet, on November 4, 1995, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated (263-266). Hopes for peace unraveled again.

During that time, Open House was like an island for intense conversations. Dalia and Yehezkel (her husband) “were amazed at the outpouring of emotion from Arab citizens who began talking openly about their own family stories from 1948” (274). Yehezkel saw a shift: “Liberal, well-meaning Israelis who thought they were building cultural bridges and alliances were forced to confront the fact that there were endemic problems and injustices in Israeli society that required much more than cross-cultural encounter and coexistence activity. It required social and political transformation on a societal scale.” (274)

The horror continued ... another suicide bomber, another arrest of Bashir, more missiles, bombs, and demolished homes, evoking more violence and fear. Many Israelis decided to leave, but Dalia would remain. “I am going to stay present for the pain, and for the hope. I am an integral part of it all ... I am part of the problem because I came from Europe, because I lived in an Arab house. I am part of the solution, because I love” (281).

In 2004, amid controversy about the Israeli wall, Dalia visited Bashir in his office in Ramallah. Bashir said to Dalia: “I’m eager to see you, but I was very afraid for you.” (292) Dalia eventually spoke her hopes: “Bashir. Maybe I have no right to say what I’m going to say. We need to make sacrifices if both of us are to live here ... By not accepting the state of Israel or by not accepting the state of Palestine, I think none of us has a real life here” (294). Bashir reiterated his insistence on one state where everyone was equal rather than a Palestinian state on 22% of the original Palestinian land (295). They closed with hopes: Bashir’s wish that “more people were like you [Dalia],” and Dalia’s hope for deep care between the two peoples so “We could create a reality together” (298). They looked deeply into one another’s eyes as they parted, and Dalia said softly: “Our enemy ... is the only partner we have” (298).

The book closes with mutual disappointment, but Bashir and Dalia share something deeper than friendship, “something to do with family” (308). The narratives in *The Lemon Tree* reveal the possibility, power, and fragility of encounters with dignity. The encounters themselves may be life-changing, but they alone are not sufficient to transform injustice to justice, violence to compassion. For that, social-structural change is also necessary.

James Lawson, Peter Storey, and Mercy Amba Oduyoye

We will share less from the 55 oral histories, but these three life stories represent many others, describing dignifying encounters that point to dignity-based responses to racism.

James Lawson (1928-present) has been a major Civil Rights and justice leader since his young years. He led sit-ins and marches, and advised Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others on non-violent action. As a young boy, however, he had his share of racially-infused fights with white boys. When asked to describe significant people and moments in his life, Lawson describes a time when he was 8 years old and his mother sent him to buy bread. On his return, a young white boy hung out of his car and taunted him. Jim spoke words in return, and the two got into a physical fight. Then Jim went home to deliver the bread and sit with his mother as she cooked. With her back turned to him, she said, “It looks like you had some trouble.” Jim told her the story, and awaited in the silence until his mother said “There must be a better way.” That is all she said, but Jim Lawson sees that moment of encountering dignity (the dignity of his mother and that to which she pointed) as the beginning of his own search for a way of non-violent resistance.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1934-present) is a native of Ghana and a global ecumenical leader, seeking to build communities and societies marked by human justice and dignity. Mercy has taught on every continent; served as Youth Education Secretary and Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC); founded the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians; and authored many books and articles, including *Daughters of Anowa* and *Beads and Strands*. She recalls a poignant moment of global encounter in 1968:

The fourth assembly of the World Council of Churches which was held at Uppsala in Sweden in July of 1968 was to have had Revered Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as keynote speaker at this assembly whose theme was, “Behold, I make all things new.” In him the Council had a person who was working for the transformation of human relations. But that was not to be. The presence and the address of James Baldwin, the shock of the assassination, and the power of the civil rights movement propelled the Council into what became the Program to Combat Racism.

We cannot forget the turmoil that Africans were going through at this time. And especially the struggle against apartheid ... As a faith community, Christianity professes a theology and a view of life that is incompatible with racism ... We search for the roots of violence and we try to uproot them. But then we also experience the inadequacy of using violence to combat violence. The military language of combat was rejected ... We are trying to overcome violence, not to combat anybody. What we are after is to transcend the attitudes that breed racism.

For Oduyoye and the WCC, an encounter with violence and indignity, and the deep pondering of it, evoked the urgency of dignity and a 10-year program to resist racial violence.

Peter Storey (1938-present) is a white South African Methodist minister and Bishop, who struggled for decades against the racist philosophy and structure of apartheid. He was chaplain to Nelson Mandela and others on Robben Island, and a major leader in the Church's anti-apartheid movement. Storey's whole ministry emphasized the importance of non-violent struggles, drawing on his early encounters with the life of Jesus as one who resisted evil with nonviolence, and on Martin Luther King Jr., whose stories of non-violent protest he heard from his father.

After the abolition of apartheid in 1994, Storey believed that the path toward restorative justice was listening to the voices of apartheid victims in South Africa. He argued for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and gave leadership to setting it in place. He was convinced that TRC was a first step in restoring dignity to victims, so victims and perpetrators from all sides were required to attend the hearings. Storey and others wanted victims to have "*the dignity of being heard and acknowledged*, their suffering recognized and revered" (oral history, Nov. 20, 2013). Healing justice required reparations, speaking, and listening: "Unless there is something beyond punishment, there is very little hope for the restoration and healing of societies which have been deeply divided and deeply wounded" (ibid.).

Storey today recognizes that encounters with dignity were critical to resisting the apartheid regime and establishing reconciliation. In spite of ongoing political and economic challenges, South Africa is growing stronger, having had no major acts of revenge based on the past and having had four peaceful democratic elections. From his viewpoint, encounters with dignity have been at the center of the positive transitions, past and present.

Analysis of Confucian and Christian Perspectives on Dignifying Encounters

To reflect religiously on dignity encounters, we turn to Confucianism and Christianity. In different ways, these two traditions accent the importance of humanization and communal values. The highest goal of learning in Confucian tradition is 仁 (*Ren*), which begins with compassion and is critical for dignity. Confucius did not define *ren*; however, it refers to a caring heart, compassion, and empathy. Thus, learning in Confucian tradition is a cultivation of ever-expanding compassion toward others. The greatest value in Christianity is love for God and neighbor. We explore these two traditions to discern deep meanings of dignifying encounters.

Confucian Traditions

"Cruel politics are more dreadful than tiger." (苛政猛於虎) This saying comes from an ancient event in the *Book of Rites*. (Legge, 1879) This book contains a dialogue between Confucius and a woman. Confucius talked with a crying woman. Confucius asked her, "Why are you crying?" She answered, "My father-in-law, my husband, and my son have been killed by a horrible tiger on this mountain." Confucius asked her, with a quizzical glance, "Why don't you

leave the mountain and go to the town?” She answered, “There is no oppressive government here.” Confucius then said, “Oppressive government is more terrible than tigers.” (190-191)

Confucius (551 BCE - 479 BCE) lived in the Warring States period (770 BCE – 403 BCE) in ancient China approximately 2,500 years ago (Peimin Ni, 2002). During the period of ancient China, there was the socio-political and economic unrest because feudal lords revolted against Zhou Dynasty (1045 BCE – 256 BCE) and small and big wars often provoked. By waging war against other states that other feudal lords governed, the states collected excessive taxes and drafted soldiers, regardless of their age, for wars (2-3). Moreover, if feudal lords died, their slaves, wives, and children were buried alive with the dead. Suffered the indignity of being forced to pay heavy taxes, to serve in the military, and cruel customs (4-5). Because human dignity was lacking, Confucius claimed that humaneness (仁, *ren*) based on empathy (恕, *shú*) was the most crucial elements to improve human dignity.

Ren (仁) means to overcome one’s selfishness and to coexist and love others. The logogram 仁 combines of two other Chinese characters, 人 (a person) and 二 (two). It means that a person cannot live without others, and indicates how people should treat one another. There are various meanings of *ren*, including kindness, goodness, perfect virtue, humanness, generosity, and altruism. However, all meanings are concerned with our relationships with others.

Yan Yuan (514 BC – 483 BC) who Confucius regarded him to be a valuable disciple, asked Confucius about humaneness (仁) in the *Analects* (Legge, 2012), Confucius defined humaneness as overcoming selfishness and having a sense of propriety (12:1). That is, humans should struggle against their selfishness, establish proper relationship with others, and behave with propriety. Confucius also considered humaneness to involve coexistence in the society. A person who has humaneness “wishes her/himself to be established and sees that others are established, and wishes her/himself to be successful and sees that others are successful.” (6:30) Coexistence is a vital element and the right direction in humaneness. Lastly, humaneness is to love others. Fan Chi, who was Confucius’s wagon driver, asked about the meaning of humaneness. Confucius said simply, “Love others” (12:22). Encounters with others necessarily need love, which helps one to become a true human and to build up a loving community.

Confucius suggested that a way to show humaneness is through the demonstration of empathy (*shu*, 恕), which is the Confucian golden rule for society. The logogram 恕, is a combination of 如 (to be equal in) and 心 (mind-heart). It means that when one empathizes with others’ mind-heart, humaneness can be accomplished in empathic action (恕). Thus, a term of *shu* refers to respectful attitude toward and empathy with others. Confucius explained the importance of empathy thus, “My Way (*Dao*, 道) is penetrated by a single thread (*shu*).” (4:15) Since Confucius’s ideas are based on empathy, it is the best way to interpret Confucian ones. In this sense, the aim of Confucian ideas is for humaneness to be actualized in the empathy.

The Confucian cultivation of humaneness based on empathy is a key to establishing human dignity in society and involves expanding the empathy from the dimension of “self” to the dimension of “others” in human relationships. *Great Learning* (Legge, 2012), a work by Confucius, provides guidance on how to become an exemplary person (*junzi*, 君子) through the cultivation of empathy. According to this book, one must cultivate one’s mind-heart and body to expand one’s focus from the level of “self” to having empathy with one’s family and then to

expand this empathy from family to country and from country to world. Confucius taught us to always endeavor to overcome selfishness, to coexist with others, and to love others as these are core moments in learning to be truly human and in improving human dignity by cultivating our mind-heart and body with empathy.

Christian Tradition

The goal of Christian life is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27, NRSV; cf: Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30-31; Deut. 6:5). Again, the accent is on right relations, marked by love. This accent on love is not a mild-mannered, soft concept, but one that leads to challenging unjust social structures and acts of hate. Such love emerges in encounter. Indeed, encounters with dignity mark the life of Jesus, as noted in the opening quote from Mark 5:25-34. In Jesus’s encounter with the suffering woman who touched his garment for healing, he stops to engage, “Who touched my clothes?” (5:30b). The woman comes forward to tell Jesus “the whole truth” (33b). He then recognizes this woman’s courage and says: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (34).

One of the boldest advocates for love in the twentieth century was Martin Luther King, Jr. King himself associated love with encounter, including encounters with himself in moments of deep questioning and prayer; with countless marchers and leaders in the Civil Rights Movement; with political leaders in streets and courthouses; and with congregations where he preached and conducted funerals for people killed in the Movement or in random acts of racial hate. According to Walter Fluker, Martin Luther King believed that “ethical leaders are transformed nonconformists who become aware of the transforming power of the encounter with the other within themselves and in community with others” (Fluker 2009).

In both Confucianism and Christianity, learning is the cultivation of compassion or love – being with and for others. Thus, dignifying encounters are central to teaching and learning.

Interpretation and Proposals for Dignifying Encounters

We conclude with a proposal that religious education be reshaped with a central place for encounters with dignity. We draw on the narratives of this essay and themes in Confucian and Christian traditions. Our brief summary points to radically reconstructed educational practices, especially in communities living with radical differences. Here we list our central findings, to be explored further:

1. Encounters with dignity are life-changing and life-shaping, and are at the center of Confucian and Christian traditions (and many others).
2. Encounters are not the final word (Dalia and Bashir) in resolving, or even living with, complex conflicts. The potency of these encounters for creating social change is affected by socio-political-economic factors.
3. Common projects create opportunities to continue building dignifying encounters (Abuelaish and Oduyoye).
4. Encounters with *indignity* disrupt the potential to create social change (continuing violence in Israel and Palestine).
5. Encounters with difference can stretch one’s imagination about what is possible in human relationships and actions (Abuelaish).

6. Communal encounters with dignity over time increase the possibility of real and lasting change, however fragile, however complex, and however long it takes (TRC in South Africa).
7. Encounters with dignity are often be rooted in childhood, opening people to dignified encounters later in their lives (Lawson and Storey).
8. Encounters may disrupt the dominant narrative of one's life or one's community, opening people to imagine the world differently (Lawson).

Though these conclusions will be expanded later, the central message is clear. Learning toward compassion and love is learning toward justice, and it happens best in encounters with dignity. This calls forth a disruption of didactic educational systems and demands a system in which genuine encounters are encouraged and supported. What better community to build such a system than religious educators, whose very religious traditions center on compassion and love!

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Beyond Solidarity? Responding to the Call of Discipleship in the Present Age

I. Discerning the Script of Discipleship.

Bonhoeffer's classic work *The Cost of Discipleship*, written eight decades ago,¹ has left an indelible mark upon Christian theology, especially in the (post)Christendom contexts of Europe and the United States. It also has left its mark on me, as a white-privileged, cisgendered male, (now post-)evangelical Christian, person.² I still remember the moment thirteen years ago, while reading Bonhoeffer's *Cost* for the first time, when I realized that the Sermon on the Mount was *not* hyperbolic rhetoric, but a manifesto for a Christian ethic that insisted upon real-world actualization. Despite having been a lifelong Christian, it was as if scales had fallen from my eyes. For me at least, this was the beginning of my journey away from the spiritualized, pietistic, and self-obsessive notions of faith that I had inherited (a journey that I remain on today).

Since then, my conception of "discipleship" has been shaped perhaps most dramatically, beyond my own experiences, by the stories and living examples of disciples throughout the centuries. Back in seminary, I became particularly affected by the life and writings of John M. Perkins. For research for a class I was afforded the distinct honor of meeting him briefly, and receiving an inside glimpse into his living legacy in Pasadena, CA, at Harambee Christian Family Center. I soaked up his autobiographical writings, his harrowing account of his own near-lynching at the hands of Mississippi police in the early 1960s, his resilience and commitment to a holistic gospel that saw no tension between living in a "new life in Christ" and working for justice and for *non-superficial* racial reconciliation.³ This was a disciple, I thought, if I had ever seen one.

The fact is, "discipleship" cannot be defined apart from narrative. The term itself invokes a certain fidelity to the gospel-narratives, and to the lived experiences of the original followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the itinerant rabbi. Their discipleship was, in fact, ontologically prior to all christological and theological assumptions.⁴ The Synoptic gospel accounts can thus be viewed as pedagogical narratives, that not only offer explicit teachings like the Sermon on the Mount, but

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995; orig. Ger. 1937).

² It is important, I believe, despite the awkwardness of this phrasing, to not omit the implied "person" when offering our self-descriptions of hybridized identity-belongings. Among many benefits, it serves as a reminder that at the root of our hybridity is a common identity-as-person, that is at once universal and immanent.

³ See n.22 below.

⁴ See Terrence W. Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus: Christology as Reconciling Practice* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 11-15, 25-26.

also interpret the discipling-community's actions and practices which embody those teachings, in such a way that readers of the authors' day might imagine themselves to be following Jesus as well.

If there is an implicit discipleship "script" here,⁵ i.e., a normative narrational structure in some sense, Brueggemann's rooting of discipleship in the perpetual narrational dynamic of the God / Jesus who *both "calls" and "sends"*⁶ perhaps serves as an apt summary. Jesus calls disciples to participate, and then Jesus sends them, not only at the point of the "great commission" (Matt. 28:18-19), but also in the midst of Jesus' earthly ministry (Matt. 4:18-24; Matt. 10:5-15; Lk. 9:1-10:24).

But a discipleship-script, even more specifically, refers to pedagogy. Indeed it refers to a particular kind of pedagogical relationship, between "disciple" and rabbi. After being (literally) called, the original disciples (literally) "*followed*" Jesus from the Galilean countryside and throughout Judea. The discipling-community is a dramatically peripatetic⁷ community, which follows a Jesus who takes to the streets and visits others' homes to share "gospelizing practices," and takes his community with him (followed by periods of reflection and interpretation). As Tilley emphasizes, these practices not only include verbal proclamation of a new ethic according to the Fellowship (or Reign) of God—but *also* healings and exorcisms, table fellowship with people at every societal level, and the practice of forgiveness.⁸ Together these constitute the *missio inter gentes*:⁹ the healing and proclaiming¹⁰ work of the rabbi Jesus *among* the people, that *is inherently relational and face-to-face, and brings about the restoration of people*.¹¹ Disciples first accompanied (i.e., "followed") Jesus, and *then* were "sent" to practice this way of being themselves (and then later returned to reflect upon the experience with their rabbi). Paying attention to the pedagogy at work, one could even say that the discipling-community is

⁵ For Tilley (*The Disciples' Jesus*, 73) the gospels are scripts that structure performances of discipleship, and aid the development of a repertoire of practices pertaining to discipleship.

⁶ See Walter Brueggemann and Patrick Miller, *The Word That Redescribes the World: The Bible and Discipleship*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 92-113.

⁷ I first heard the word "peripatetic" to describe disciples by William Willimon, at a series of talks at Baylor University's Truett Seminary, ca. 2010-2011.

⁸ As Tilley says, "the early communities remembered the disciples as doing three crucial things: they exorcised, they healed, and they preached—just as Jesus famously was remembered as doing and empowered them to do." ... "These are not, of course, the only practices [of the community], but they are a place to begin seeing what it means to have, in practice, the imaginative, faithful *phronēsis* that characterizes discipleship." Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 136.

⁹ Credited to William Burrows, Latin for the "mission among the people," this phrase invokes and expands upon the term *missio ad gentes*, which refers to one of the most seminal decrees from the Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*. See Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 187; 256. [Per Tilley (256 n.35), Burrows coins the term in "A Response to Michael Amaladoss," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 56 (2001): 15-20.]

¹⁰ These two sides were co-dependent with each other: Jesus' preaching about God's Reign provided interpretive guidelines for his healing work, which in turn actualized and made manifest that Reign.

¹¹ See Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 215.

narratively presented as a “community of practice” (Wenger and Lave), where disciples are guided from more to less peripheral forms of participation in a community.¹²

Discipleship, then, is at once pedagogical and missional, and these qualities are inseparable from each other in the narrative script of *being called-following-being sent*. The “following” connotes not just a split-second decision, but an ongoing process that involves both learning and doing—and especially learning *by* doing. The disciples still have much to learn about Jesus’ mission,¹³ and yet they are asked to participate in it; while there is a pedagogical accommodation of observed learning, they are not afforded the option of a sequestered learning-space, sheltered from Judea’s pain and suffering. Discipleship is learned by going, experiencing, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, experiencing.¹⁴

Perkins himself exemplifies this. After having long resisted faith while growing up, as an adult in California he began to listen to something stirring within him, something that he began to pursue. But as this pursuit evolved into faith, it soon became clear to him that this faith would not allow him to remain where he was, in relative safety. It in fact compelled him to move his family back to Mississippi, the home that he had escaped, the land where he watched his older brother murdered by police, now a community energized with hatred in the wake of *Brown v. Board*. Now bringing his faith back with him, he successfully sought to form a community of loving resistance against the political and psychosocial metanarratives of racism, thus becoming one of the U.S.’s many heroes during the Civil Rights era.

Neither Perkins’ story, nor anyone else’s, need be perfectly conformed to the precise pattern found in the gospel-narratives. Generally applying this “script,” however, suggests that for the disciple there is an encountering of God (a being-called) that impels the encountering of real people and communities (a being-sent)—but both encounters are inherently *relational* and *missional*. “In the other, there is a real presence of God” (Levinas);¹⁵ to hear and respond to God is thus to hear and respond to others. Yet real relationship takes time, and takes a commitment *to be with* others and to learn from them, which requires more than a fleeting “encounter.” “Following” thus reminds us of this processual and pedagogical quality to discipleship. Jesus’ message regarding the “reign of God” moreover reminds us that following is also distinctly

¹² Wenger and Lave speak of social learning in terms of “legitimate peripheral participation,” referring to the ways that new members can gradually develop their mastery of a community’s engagements and a fluency in its shared repertoire. New members learn by doing, through intermediate activities that approximate some form of full membership, until that full membership is attained or granted. See Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University, 1991).

¹³ The narrative of Luke, according to Tannehill, makes clear the fact that the disciples continued to demonstrate many deficiencies in their understanding; see e.g. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 253-274.

¹⁴ Tilley in reference to Walter Ong mentions that “catholic” (*katholikos*) is better understood as “‘through and through’ rather than ‘everywhere’”; the truly catholic church therefore is the “‘leaven in the lump’” that dies if it is never fully kneaded into the dough of the world (Tilley, *The Disciples’ Jesus*, 186).

¹⁵ As quoted in Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 118.

political.¹⁶ But if this is a political contrast-community,¹⁷ it is one that operates precisely by locating its primary identity in being in relationship with and seeking the fullness of life for others, and not by consolidating its own power or by neatly defining its own identity-markers.

II. The Double Bind of Discipleship-as-Solidarity for the Privileged.

If we consider Perkins to be instructive to the present-age, particularly in the context of the United States, we should consider his own explanation of the goals of discipleship, according to what he calls his “three R’s” of community development: *Relocation*, *Redistribution*, and *Reconciliation*. A holistic approach to the gospel in this approach involves: a “living involvement” that “turns poor people from statistics into our friends”¹⁸ (relocation), working together with the poor in order to create greater sociopolitical and economic equality for them (redistribution), and directly yet lovingly confronting the barriers to justice in order to seek greater mutual awareness of and respect for our common human interconnectivity, including but not limited to repentance and forgiveness (reconciliation).¹⁹ These three principles have guided Perkins’ work with the Christian Community Development Association, and indeed his entire life. They certainly concur with the notions of “following” and “being sent,” suggested by the discipleship-script.

Here the real “cost of discipleship” emerges, especially in regards to the (post)Christendom U.S. context from which I write. The renewed focus upon discipleship post-Bonhoeffer generally corresponded with theology’s turn to the subject, its renewed emphasis on the ethics and practices of faith, and the asserting of the “response-ability” (à la Levinas) of the Christian faith community to be in *solidarity* with those on the margins of society. Yet even now, eight decades after Bonhoeffer, these communities themselves continue to embody these theological developments inconsistently, to say the least. Embodying the character of the peripatetic community of disciples—that *follows* Jesus into the crowds and into homes, that *relocates* itself in concrete ways, etc.—will invariably require a different *modus operandi* than most communities currently possess. Per Perkins himself, “if the gospel of reconciliation is going to interrupt the brokenness in our society, our churches are going to have to rethink their vocation.”²⁰

Institutional churches, whether evangelical, mainline, or Catholic, do substantial good in the world—although much of it goes underreported. Many in fact actively pursue *solidarity*, a term used to describe the proper response of all Christians towards the poor and oppressed.

¹⁶ See Daniel S. Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology* (Birmingham: Religious Education, 1988), 131-132.

¹⁷ E.g. see Bruggemann et al., *Word that Redescribes*, 94.

¹⁸ Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 29.

¹⁹ Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 28-30.

²⁰ As quoted by Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 108.

Formal definitions aside, pending on the specific context and who is speaking, the term in the U.S. is often used to frame varying forms of engagement, from communal prayer, to awareness-building, to making proclamations or public denunciations of oppression, to a community's informal or formal participation in acts of protest and/or civil disobedience.

As with the early sixties when Perkins answered the call to discipleship, we in the U.S. currently live under a political climate that has rendered it impossible for churches to circumvent the question of whether or not it will be a church of solidarity. Even in considering the ways we must continue to grow, I do believe that recent examples, displayed from Ferguson, Missouri to Charlottesville, Virginia, exemplify an increasing momentum among faith communities and leaders to “follow” God’s call beyond the (relative) safety of the church’s walls. Churches that have made progress, and have taken concrete steps to increase their sense of solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed, should indeed be commended. Admittedly, no “script” or threefold model can overcome the fact that societal change is messy, hardly straightforward, and never complete. And personally I am exceedingly proud that my journey of discipleship has led me, following my ordained spouse, to claim a tradition, the United Church of Christ, one that on the whole has sought to confront headlong the monster of racism (as well as that of sexism, economic disparity, colonialism, heteronormativity, ecological devastation, etc.)

But from my own limited perspective, both Perkins’ life of discipleship and model for ministry have nevertheless continued to challenge me. It is a challenge that I for one cannot simply resolve by the word “solidarity” (or at least a reduced notion of it), or even with the wonderful and *necessary* actions of solidarity that my denomination, and many other traditions, are enthusiastically taking. This challenge when unrecognized can be experienced as a “double bind,” to borrow a term from psychology. In its original context, a double bind promotes inertia, fear of change, unwillingness to “stir the pot,” and/or immersing oneself in distractions. These qualities might well describe many a faith community today.²¹

On the one hand, disciples *follow* and are *sent*, to offer works of generosity and compassion to the poor, as well as to take formal stands for justice—but also, to be in relationship with the poor. When encountered by the face of the other, that is only the beginning of a mutual journey. Perkins’ call for “relocation” and his call for “friendship” implies this: For a community to collectively display authentic concern for the poor and oppressed, this requires a genuine, sustained connection with the marginalized. Giving to causes that are on-the-ground, or participating in social media campaigns and economic boycotts, or calling representatives and picketing city halls, etc., are all necessary activities. But a vision for discipleship as the *missio inter gentes* implies that these activities can never replace the need for our relationship, our real human interconnection, with the poor. There is something deeply lacking in simply being struck

²¹ Note that explaining some forms of church stagnation or paralysis, particularly in privileged contexts, in terms of a “double bind” is in no way intended to recuse such communities of their responsibility to oppression and suffering.

by the deontological imperative created by the encounter of the other, and then being dispassionately compelled by blind obligation. We must go, experience, see, hear, touch, taste, and experience our ontological oneness and interdependence with the poor. And like the original disciples, we can only learn by doing, and so we cannot simply wait until we deemed ourselves “ready” to venture forth.

And yet, there are problems with naïve notions of being “sent,” as well. There is the obvious practical issue with taking Perkins’ practice of “relocating” to the mission field of his home state, and trying to apply it in some literal way to every Christian with varying degrees of privilege. Not everyone will relocate permanently, even if only to the less economically-advantaged areas of our present towns and cities (although perhaps a more radical, grassroots strategy of widespread “relocation” and “redistribution” together, might be a worthy endeavor). But even beyond this, there are additional difficulties. Christian history contains far too many examples of “sentness” serving as a divine cover for neocolonial behavior. And as liberation theologians such as Cone have shown, white- and otherwise-privileged persons, even if they are well-intentioned, might engage and seek “reconciliation” with the other, but often do so on their own terms and in accordance with their own agendas.²² It cannot be underemphasized that any *requirement imposed* upon people or communities that have been historically marginalized to build relationship, to forgive or to reconcile, or to accept “help” in whatever form on the terms of the privileged—is itself yet another form of marginalizing privilege. Even progressive Christians who fancy themselves to be “enlightened” can still be guilty of this—if they lose sight of the relational and dialogical character of discipleship, that is.

III. Communities of Solicitude: A Tentative Way Forward.

This essay is ultimately one that seeks to raise questions, more so than it does to answer them. A discipleship-oriented perspective returns Christian identity back to the ground from whence it came, to the level of concrete experience with God and others, specifically the marginalized. Yet a true *missio inter gentes* must somehow be *with* others, including the poor, in non-superficial, yet also non-controlling ways. Relationship—specifically a dialogical relationship in which the dangerous stories (Metz) of both marginalization and of bystanding and/or oppression can be told—is the means by which this tension is navigated. It is not any kind of relationship either; in my own research on the subject, I have taken to calling it a “narrative” relationship, or a “story-exchange.” Paul Ricoeur’s narrative ethical philosophy has played a prominent role in shaping this perspective for me. For Ricoeur, the ethical aim of the “good life, with and for others, in just institutions,”²³ is pursued via in environments characterized by what he calls *solicitude*—a “narrative solidarity,” perhaps. This is solidarity that recognizes and illuminates the narrative and cumulatively-transformative character of human relationality. The “supreme test” of

²²James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 207.

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University Press, 1992), 172, emphasis in text.

solicitude is the presence of moments of “authentic reciprocity of exchange which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands.”²⁴

The reason solicitude is interesting to me is that it rings true of my own personal experiences of (what I believed to be) genuine mutuality. We experience solicitude, not only when we are encountered by the other, but also when we sustain or re-enter that reverence beyond a moment of initial encounter. In solicitude, empathy that is not (as) tainted by the condescending spirit of one’s privilege becomes possible. This is because it is an empathy that *cannot* be disengaged from the actual other-as-person. While one increasingly gains a “knowing” (in the relational sense) of the other’s story, one also gains an ever-increasing depth of awareness with regards to the other’s otherness, that cannot be overwhelmed by sameness or self-assurance of knowing. Our deepest relationships—our significant others, our families—testify to this possibility, that the more we know someone, the more we realize how little we know them, and that this precludes our capacity to “grasp” them or to violate the mystery of their personhood. Ricoeur expresses this as the “lack dwell[ing] at the heart of the most solid friendship.”²⁵ This very lack, when acknowledged, precludes the possibility of any one ever truly possessing an other. When this impossibility itself becomes celebrated as a gift by all involved, you have solicitude.

Solicitude is the recognition that everyone has a story, that that story has not yet been finished, and that by engaging others in story-exchanges we are sharing sacred parts of ourselves. It is present where there is empathy but not presumption, vulnerability but not self-abnegation. It is what enables bystanders to begin to accept their personal *and* systemic complicities in unjust systems without ever succumbing to the illusion that they are “free from racism/etc.” It is the moment when the oppressed dares to risk to share from their own experiences of injustice, and claim their right and space to do so. It is the spirit of *ubuntu* (Tutu), the recognition that we belong to each other, that we are caught up in each other, even as we do not subsume each other.

Of course, this perspective is difficult to come by. This is where religious education comes in. But the nurturing of solicitude, as the journey of discipleship, takes time. It requires intensive self-reflection and willingness to confront one’s own darkness. Also, this kind of interaction faces the challenge of a globalist, virtual age, where in social media we engage otherness with breadth but with less depth, separated by the barriers of distance and with the “safety” of anonymity. Real listening and attending to each other—and for that matter, real sincerity and vulnerability in our self-disclosures—are muscles that U.S. adults need not exercise all that much, making the task of narrational religious education all the more daunting.

²⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 191.

²⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 187 (text in italics).

But in conclusion, I would tentatively suggest an intermediate step, not unlike that of the initial following of disciples that provided the necessary space for their learning and for mutual transformation: Creating alternative communal spaces that permit opportunities for new kinds of story-exchanges. This “strategy” can take myriad forms. Churches, or churches together with other faith communities, can gather together; a group from a church can have open picnics in the city park where anyone can participate; an intentional community or co-housing arrangement is formed; etc. etc. The group can simply be about the sharing at first, or it can take action together and then gather again to reflect together. The format of gatherings can be more formal (an invited speaker) or informal/casual; the stories shared can be oral, performed, re-enacted, artistically depicted, etc. (If food can be shared, this is always a plus.) Whatever the structure or method, the key is that new communities are formed in unlikely ways and in unlikely places, and that people of faith are encouraged to come and share their stories, and to receive the stories of others. Solitude might take a long time to develop among the individuals in a community; yet community leaders, to paraphrase Parker Palmer, can still create spaces where reverence to people’s stories is practiced. In this participants begin to learn by doing. (Part of the belief here is that, following narrative psychologists as well as Ricoeur, engaging the narrative consciousness itself invokes a “detour” of the mind that can uniquely impel change and/or new ways of thinking.)²⁶

Again, this is a tentative, even if flexible, proposal. There are multiple aspects of such gatherings that must be dutifully considered, only some of which can be summarized here: The means by which such communities are created are critical to whether or not solicitude will be rightly encouraged. Whenever possible the initial formation should be a shared effort between leaders of involved communities, and the spirit of inclusion should always be one of invitation and openness. Despite the emphasis on equal respect, prejudices and biases must be appropriately confronted in such spaces. Conflict must not be encouraged but also not stifled, so long as people’s lives and stories continue to be upheld as sacred. Leaders themselves will likely need to possess certain skills in facilitating the transformative movements of the narrational consciousness in participants (which I attempt to explore in my forthcoming dissertation).

Despite the challenges, the modest suggestion here is that Christian religious educators find creative ways to forge new kinds of communities that facilitate compelling and relevant encounters across differences. In so doing, mutual learning occurs in the context of the formation of friendships, characterizes by a solicitude that refuses to subsume all difference under sameness. These communities and relationships can serve to accompany the various inspired works of solidarity already being conducted by our most active and vibrant faith communities, or it can serve to energize the life of communities whose collective sense of discipleship has largely

²⁶ Ricoeur, “Narrative Identity,” trans. David Wood, in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 195.

atrophied, and to spur concrete acts of solidarity. Either way, in the end human beings give ourselves to what they care about, and to those whom they care about. In the course of forming new friendships, new unforeseen kinds of relocation, redistribution, and/or reconciliation—i.e., solidarity—might be imagined, discovered, and practiced.

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MEDIATING FRUITFUL ENCOUNTERS WITH TRUTH, TRANSCENDENCE, AND DIFFERENCE BY TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Abstract: Curricular focus on critical thinking can provide a means of addressing troubling cultural trends like breakdowns in public discourse and misconceptions about the compatibility of faith and science. This paper expands the concept of critical thinking by engaging the work of J.H. Newman and B. Lonergan. The latter part of the paper narrates how one university has integrated Lonergan's "generalized empirical method" into the curriculum and faculty development with promising outcomes for collaboration across disciplines, faculty spirituality, and facilitating difficult conversations on campus.

INTRODUCTION

On May 24, 2015 the Vatican released Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment, *Laudato si'*.¹ Some warmly embraced the Pope's call to exercise greater conscientiousness and concern for the environment. Others lambasted the Pope for straying from matters of faith and morals and into environmental and economic matters of which they believe him to be ignorant.

On January 27, 2017 the Trump administration issued an executive order banning travel from seven countries. Many Americans celebrated the order as an overdue measure to prevent terrorists from entering the country. Many others decried the order as an act of racism that does nothing to improve national security.

The radically polarized reactions to these two events are in many ways indicative of the breakdown in public discourse presently obstructing mutual understanding and social progress in the United States. This state of affairs poses significant challenges to the work of religious educators, who aspire to hand on their religious traditions within this hostile cultural context. As a practical theologian and religious educator who addresses his work to the threefold audience of church, academy, and public,² I perceive the following to be some of these challenges: First, for those who speak to and for the church, it is concerning that the church so often gets mired in these conflictual encounters and is sometimes the very source of the conflict, as in the case of Pope Francis's *Laudato si'*. It is concerning because an important aspect of the Church's mission is restoring the unity of the human beings with God and one another.³ Besides belonging to a

¹ Francis, "Laudato Si'," *The Vatican*, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

² Cf. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

³ John 17:21; John Paul II, "Ut Unum Sint," *The Vatican*, 1995, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html.

faith community, many religious educators also belong to an academic community. One would think that, if anywhere, open-minded discourse is likely to occur in our institutions of higher learning. Yet for several decades the trend in our nation's universities has been toward ever greater specialization and marginalization of liberal arts programs that inculcate integrative thinking and communication skills. Finally, American religious educators have abundant cause for concern insofar as we are citizens of a society experiencing a crisis of truth and meaning. The proper functioning of a society requires a degree of common understanding about what is true and real. Therefore, it does not bode well for the future of our society that some people are increasingly disposed to dismiss scientific research and well-sourced journalistic reporting and that an alarming percentage of current students are unable to distinguish fake news stories from real ones.⁴

How are religious educators to respond to these challenges? On what common ground can we stand to begin reunifying a divided nation? Acknowledging the benefits of other efforts like compassion training and courses in conflict management,⁵ in this paper I focus on how universities can promote fruitful encounters among their own faculty, staff, students, and the wider public through teaching critical thinking. Because not everything that passes as critical thinking today is equally helpful in this regard, I begin by offering an overview of some of the most popular definitions of critical thinking before exploring how the writings of John Henry Newman and Bernard Lonergan provide a more holistic foundation for the kinds of thinking that would promote more fruitful encounters in our universities, religious communities, and public spaces. In the latter part of the paper I describe how one university has operationalized a distinctive approach to critical thinking in its curriculum, instruction, and faculty development with promising initial results.

CRITICAL THINKING: MUCH INTEREST, MANY CONCEPTIONS

In recent years the value placed upon critical thinking has swelled tremendously in academic and employment settings. Surveys show that over the past 25 years college faculty have increasingly adapted their pedagogy in order to better promote students' critical thinking.⁶ A growing number of universities are offering courses specifically on critical thinking.⁷ Accrediting agencies include promotion of critical thinking among their criteria for academic

⁴ Stanford History Education Group, "Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning" (Stanford University, 2016), <https://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/V3LessonPlans/Executive%20Summary%202011.21.16.pdf>.

⁵ See, e.g., The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, "About Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)," <http://ccare.stanford.edu/education/about-compassion-cultivation-training-cct/>, *The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education*, (2016).

⁶ Higher Education Research Institute, "Undergraduate Teaching Faculty: The 2013-2014 HERI Faculty Survey" (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2014), <https://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/HERI-FAC2014-monograph.pdf>.

⁷ See, for example, the hundreds available from a variety of universities on Coursera: <https://www.coursera.org/courses?languages=en&query=critical+thinking>.

excellence.⁸ All of the above stands as evidence of the formal valorization of critical thinking in higher education. Statistics and surveys aside, the basic truth of the matter is that nobody wants to be considered an uncritical thinker. Given the virtual consensus on the value of critical thinking, current discussions of the topic might present an opportunity to get people of differing perspectives talking to one another at a time when Americans are otherwise deeply divided.

Of course, talking about and teaching critical thinking will not in itself heal social divisions. For one thing, despite general agreement on the value of critical thinking, it seems that the U.S. educational system may not actually be doing a very good job training students to be critical thinkers.⁹ Part of the problem may be confusion about the meaning of critical thinking among scholars, academic professionals, and students.¹⁰ With regard to this last group, I find that many of my students associate critical thinking rather reductively with criticizing the ideas of authors and their fellow students. It has also been my experience that professors often unintentionally reinforce this reductive understanding. Even professors who encourage students to find strengths in others' positions sometimes end up rewarding and reinforcing faultfinding by means of verbal affirmation or by failing in the heat of the moment to insist that students acknowledge what is worthwhile in each other's positions. Despite schools' and professors' best intentions, teaching critical thinking poorly may contribute to social division rather than healing it by training people who are quick to criticize and unpracticed in listening.

Fortunately, many institutions and scholars do in fact offer examples of thinking well about critical thinking. Scholars like Richard Grallo,¹¹ Peter Facione,¹² and Jennifer Moon¹³ offer a helpful basic definition of critical thinking as thinking that leads to judgments.¹⁴ Other scholars offer a variety of definitions. Mark Mason summarizes three categories that predominate in the literature: (1) substantial knowledge of particular content, (2) the skills of critical reasoning (e.g., assessing arguments properly), and (3) a disposition (e.g., a critical attitude or moral orientation).¹⁵ While all three are helpful, some are more helpful than others for promoting fruitful encounters. Basic content knowledge (#1) is a necessary foundation. However, substantial knowledge of a particular discipline (or even of critical thinking itself) does not necessarily help one to talk to others outside that discipline. It may even present an impediment.

⁸ Middle States Commission on Higher Education, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education* (Philadelphia, PA: Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006).

⁹ An analysis of data from the College Learning Assessment Plus found that at about half of the colleges examined large groups of seniors were unable to make a cohesive argument or interpret evidence. (See Douglas Belkin, "Exclusive Test Data: Many Colleges Fail to Improve Critical-Thinking Skills," *Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 2017, sec. US, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/exclusive-test-data-many-colleges-fail-to-improve-critical-thinking-skills-1496686662>.)

¹⁰ On the imprecision of definitions of critical thinking in scholarly literature, see Richard Grallo, "Thinking Carefully about Critical Thinking," *Lonergan Review* 4, no. 1 (2014): 154–80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Peter Facione, *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts* (Millbrae, CA: Insight Publishing, 2006).

¹³ Jennifer A Moon, *Critical Thinking: An Exploration of Theory and Practice* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁴ Grallo notes that "critical" comes from the Greek κρινω, which means "to judge".

¹⁵ Mark Mason, *Critical Thinking and Learning* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=437531>.

Critical thinking skills (#2) are often emphasized in school proficiencies and competencies, but, if training in critical thinking goes no deeper than providing intellectual tools, those skills can be too easily instrumentalized (e.g., developing critical thinking skills primarily or solely for the purpose of preparing students for 21st-century jobs).¹⁶ Employing critical thinking for such narrow, self-serving purposes does little to promote mutual understanding.

These limits of critical thinking conceived as knowledge or a skill set make it clear that simply teaching some form of critical thinking does not guarantee that students will become more open to others' views or that this common starting point will lead to more meaningful dialogue. I suggest that, if more meaningful encounters with difference are the goal, then the dispositional dimension of critical thinking (#3) is key. In order to substantiate this suggestion I now turn to the writings of John Henry Newman.

NEWMAN'S "ENLARGEMENT OF MIND" AS A DISPOSITION FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Based on a series of lectures occasioned by John Henry Newman's founding of the Catholic University in Dublin, *The Idea of a University* articulates Newman's vision of what a (Catholic) university should be. According to this text, "the end of a Liberal Education is not mere knowledge" but rather "the process of enlightenment," which Newman identifies with an "enlargement of mind."¹⁷ He characterizes this perfection or virtue of the intellect as a habit of reasoning well in all matters, of reaching toward and grasping the truth. It is "the power of viewing many things at once as a whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence."¹⁸ This enlargement involves an openness to new ideas and experiences and the ability to understand them in relation to one another. The training of the intellect in this way, according to Newman, serves to train good members of society, for it teaches one to "throw himself into [another's] state of mind... how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them."¹⁹

In Newman's thinking, even though a university may be accomplishing many other laudable achievements, it betrays its fundamental purpose if it neglects to form its students in this habit of mind. Indeed, training students well within specific fields of study does not guarantee the absence of "narrowness of mind."²⁰ The educational trends that vexed Newman persist in the present day. Our modern universities often emphasize the acquisition of specialized knowledge and professional competencies while neglecting the dispositions that make for good citizens and neighbors. This kind of formation does little to curb tribalistic and egocentric thinking or to build

¹⁶ For an example, see Laura Billings and Terry Roberts, *Teaching Critical Thinking Using Seminars for 21st Century Literacy* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014).

¹⁷ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 98.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

up communities. It should therefore come as little surprise that today we often find ourselves in antagonistic encounters, for, rather than cultivating the enlargement of mind needed to engage the ideas of others with curiosity and equanimity, our education has trained us to think of others as competitors and opponents.

We might ask what kind of training would be required to enlarge students' minds as Newman envisions. Newman suggests that, most basically, one should cultivate a familiarity with many different areas of study. He proposes that the first step of intellectual training is to impress upon the student the idea of method, order, and system (e.g., by the study of Grammar, Mathematics, History, and Poetry). Cultivating this sense of order and method allows one to compare ideas with one another, to work out of "their mutual and true relations," and to connect new information with old understanding.²¹ Most importantly, Newman explains, one does not achieve enlargement of mind by passively absorbing lectures, for it is first and foremost the "the work of discipline and habit."²²

Given that Newman's vision flies directly in the face of the prevailing winds of modern education, his pedagogical prescriptions might seem unrealistic to us today. Furthermore, given how highly specialized the various academic fields have become, we might doubt that any single method or system is capable of unifying them all. But, as we will see presently, such a method does in fact exist and one modern university has succeeded in using it to achieve many of the aims for which Newman hoped.

SELF-APPROPRIATION AS THE FOUNDATION AND FULFILLMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING

The Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan was greatly influenced by John Henry Newman. Lonergan builds upon the thought of Newman in order to articulate even more precisely how to develop the human subject in a way that makes one more open to truth and likely to serve as a catalyst in the progress of society.²³ Lonergan takes as his starting point the observation that all human beings spontaneously ask questions about the world and experience a psychological tension until they find satisfactory answers to those questions. Lonergan describes this natural desire to know as humans' "pure question"²⁴ or "unrestricted desire to know."²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 101. In his *Grammar of Assent*, Newman describes a related concept, which he calls the "illative sense" ("An Essay In Aid Of A Grammar Of Assent," *Project Gutenberg*, 2010, 343 <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34022/34022-h/34022-h.html>). He describes the illative sense as an intellectual counterpart to the Aristotelian virtue of prudence (*phrenosis*). More precisely, it is the intellectual virtue of judging what is true in the realm of the concrete where formal incontrovertible proof in favour of a decision is not possible.

²² Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 115.

²³ For Lonergan's account of the role of the authentic subject in promoting social progress and reversing decline, see *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 52–55.

²⁴ 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), 34.

²⁵ Ibid., 376. bell hooks in writes in the same vein, "The heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know—to understand how life works" (*Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010, 7).

According to Lonergan, this “pure question” takes the form of questions on different levels. On the most basic level, we ask questions for understanding: *What is the Pope talking about?* In response to the tension created by such intelligent questions, the mind generates possible answers: *He’s saying that human beings are the cause of global warming.* On a second level we ask questions for reflection: *Is he right? What evidence would prove him right? Does such evidence exist?*²⁶ Even after making the judgment that something is true or not, further questions remain, namely, questions of valuing and deliberation. The person who judges that human beings are in fact responsible for global warming is confronted with the questions *Is that a good or bad thing?* and *What will I do about it?* In answering these questions one decides how the matter affects them and what kind of person they want to be.

Lonergan’s account of this invariant pattern of cognitive operations not only provides the language for a precise understanding of critical thinking (namely, thinking that leads to judgments) but also contextualizes judgment (and thereby critical thinking) within the broader unfolding dynamic of human consciousness. Attending to these cognitional operations within oneself and striving to perform them deliberately enables one to understand how human beings generate knowledge, meaning, and values and how these become distorted; to correct these distortions; and to collaborate with others operating out of different contexts and disciplines. Such is the purpose of Lonergan’s “generalized empirical method” (GEM). Insofar as these patterned cognitive operations occur spontaneously for every human being, GEM is a method of thinking demanded of us not by the standards of any particular discipline but rather by the human mind’s innate drive for understanding, truth, and value.

In Lonergan’s cognitional theory we see a portrait of the human subject who utilizes their mental tools in a way that opens them up to self-examination, intellectual exchange with others, and openness to transcendent truth. According to Lonergan, a person is authentic to the extent that they consistently give free reign to questions as they arise and seek intelligent, reasonable, and responsible answers to those questions. Despite our innate desire to ask and answer questions, bias easily creeps into our thinking, causing us to ignore the questions and insights that we find inconvenient or uncomfortable.²⁷ Given the constant threat of bias, we are more likely to achieve authenticity (and to be truly critical thinkers) to the extent that we understand and intentionally embrace this dynamic unfolding of consciousness within ourselves, that is, to the extent that we are “self-appropriated.”²⁸

²⁶ Both Newman and Lonergan grappled with the question of how truth can be known with certainty. Lonergan asserts, “The ground of absolute objectivity is the virtually unconditioned that is grasped by reflective understanding and posited in judgment” (Ibid., 305). In other words, for someone to know that something is true they must know the conditions that must be fulfilled in order for something to be true and they must know that those conditions have been fulfilled. Lonergan claims that this notion of the virtually unconditioned was inspired by Newman’s illative sense (“Theology and Man’s Future,” in *A Second Collection: Philosophy of God, and Theology*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 273.) Therefore, Lonergan, like Newman, locates the criteria for truth not somewhere external but rather in the operations of the human mind.

²⁷ Gallo analyzes some of the obstacles to critical thinking in the latter part of “Thinking Carefully”.

²⁸ Lonergan, *Insight*, 17. Cf. Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982) and Baxter Magolda Marcia Baxter Magolda, “Self-Authorship as the Common Goal of 21st-Century Education,” in *Learning Partnerships: Theory and Models of Practice to*

Situating development of critical thinking skills within the more holistic project of self-appropriation provides a vision of the kind of education that can train a citizenry with the desire to seek truth wherever it may be found and the corresponding capacity for engaging difference in a fruitful manner. Creating a culture of positive encounter requires not so much amassing critical thinking skills as forming authentic subjects, for there is no circumventing the role of the human person. No tools, techniques, or skills can guarantee apprehension of truth or mutual understanding because all of the above must be utilized by persons who are in varying degrees authentic or inauthentic. To the degree that a person is inauthentic, they are prone to instrumentalizing and abusing for self-serving purposes the resources at their disposal, including critical thinking skills.²⁹ For this reason it should be a priority for universities who purport to serve the needs of society to train not merely critical thinkers but authentic subjects. Although this may seem a lofty goal, my own university offers proof of how training faculty and students in GEM can promote greater openness to engaging and learning from different disciplines, the differing perspectives of others, and spirituality and religion.

ONE UNIVERSITY'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE MORE FRUITFUL ENCOUNTERS

Like most other institutions of higher education today, there is frequent talk of critical thinking at Seton Hall University, where I currently teach.³⁰ What is interesting about Seton Hall, however, is the fact that alongside and intertwined with more typical discussions of critical thinking there are also many robust conversations about Lonergan's generalized empirical method, which have been facilitated primarily by the presence of the Lonergan Institute and its director, Monsignor Richard Liddy. In addition, a distinct program was developed in 2013, which utilizes GEM to apply the mission of the University to the various disciplines. This Praxis Program of the Advanced Seminar on Mission is co-sponsored by the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership and the Center for Catholic Studies, Bernard J. Lonergan Institute at Seton Hall University.³¹ Taking these intra-faculty conversations as my starting point, I begin below by describing how Seton Hall's appropriation of GEM has promoted more fruitful encounters in the academic realm in which meaningful interdisciplinary conversations are increasingly rare. I will

Educate for Self-Authorship, by Marcia Baxter Magolda and Patricia M. King (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2004), 1–35, on “self-authorship”.

²⁹ Inauthentic subjectivity has the same corrupting effect on scientific and medical research. See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd enlarged (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970) on how scientists have frequently resisted new evidence that did not conform to preconceived notions. See also Dominic Fitzgerald and David Isaacs, “Seven Alternatives to Evidence Based Medicine,” *BMJ* 319, no. 7225 (1999): 1618 for a brief overview of similar trends in the medical profession.

³⁰ For Seton Hall University's most official statement on critical thinking see <https://www.shu.edu/core-curriculum/upload/Critical-Thinking-Guidelines-2.pdf>.

³¹ I offer special thanks to two individuals for their generous support of this paper and for our ongoing conversations--Linda Garofalo and Danute Nourse, Praxis Program of the Advanced Seminar on Mission, the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership and the Center for Catholic Studies, Bernard J. Lonergan Institute at Seton Hall University.

then describe how discussions at SHU scaffolded by GEM provide a model for facilitating more fruitful encounters with difference in the public sphere and with religion, respectively.³²

Promoting More Fruitful Encounters Within the Academy

The potential of Lonergan's GEM for promoting fruitful encounters among people of differing perspectives has been most evident at Seton Hall in faculty development efforts, specifically in the Praxis Program of the Advanced Seminar on Mission. The stated purpose of the Praxis Program is:

to engage faculty and administrators in a process of peer mentoring and curricular/co-curricular support designed to apply the mission of the University to their respective disciplines and departments, through a method which connects the disciplines to each other, to an integrated understanding of knowledge, and to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.³³

The program aims to support the mission of Seton Hall University by promoting the intellectual, personal, and spiritual development of faculty and staff and, through them, the university's students. Since its launch in 2013, the Praxis Program has drawn participants into conversations about truth, meaning, ethics, and method from the fields of Medical Education, Nursing, Law, Diplomacy, Business, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Sociology, Religion, English, and others as well as from the university's senior administration. These conversations take place in regular seminars throughout the semester facilitated by local and visiting experts in Lonergan's thought, as participants collaborate on projects applying GEM to their respective disciplines, and in several summer workshops. Although the program does not focus on critical thinking per se, there is ample evidence that studying Lonergan's cognitional theory has enhanced participants' capacity for critical, creative, and reflective thinking.

The first such evidence is the participants' (commonly referred to as GEM Fellows) reports of how their training in GEM has clarified their thinking and enabled them to understand their respective disciplines more deeply. For example, a SHU sociology professor praised GEM for introducing greater discipline and a clearer methodology into his efforts to develop a unified theory of collective human behavior.³⁴ Even more impressive than helping scholars clarify their intra-disciplinary thinking is the capacity GEM has given faculty for communicating and collaborating across disciplinary lines. As a physics professor remarked, "In the steps to develop a large integrated University community I absolutely agree that having a common language or

³² I write out of my experience in Catholic universities and therefore expect that these reflections will be more immediately relevant to other Catholic educators. However, I hope that non-Catholics will also find some benefit in what follows.

³³ Seton Hall University, "Praxis Program of the Advanced Seminar on Mission," *Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership*, 2017, <https://www13.shu.edu/catholic-mission/servant-leadership-praxis-program.cfm>.

³⁴ Richard M. Liddy, "Transforming Faculty Development: A Recent Experiment," in ed. Whelan Gerard, *Lonergan's Anthropology Revisited: The Next Fifty Years of Vatican II* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico and Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2015), 385. For a sampling of how other participants have applied GEM to their different disciplines, see <https://www13.shu.edu/catholic-mission/upload/bio-and-abstracts.pdf>.

method to relate to each other is the key element.”³⁵ He found such a common language in GEM through his involvement in the Praxis Program. Because all disciplined inquiry involves the cognitive operations of attending, asking questions, getting insights, and making and acting upon judgments, scholars in different fields are able to explain their methodology in these basic terms, which do not require specialized training to be comprehended.³⁶

At Seton Hall this common language and methodology has facilitated collaborations in the form of peer mentoring relationships between participants in different disciplines, joint projects, and spontaneous collaborations that emerge organically out of the seminars, workshops, and participants’ ongoing conversations. Annual assessments have found that the Praxis Program has created a strong community among faculty and administrators who previously felt isolated in their respective silos and who lacked a sense of how their work fit within the university’s mission.³⁷ Besides promoting collaboration across disciplines, GEM also provides faculty with a common language for teaching critical thinking and methodology across the curriculum. This makes possible a level of integration in undergraduate education to which many institutions aspire but that is seldom attained.

Promoting More Fruitful Encounters in the Public Sphere

A number of SHU faculty who have studied Lonergan, myself included, have in turn taught GEM to undergraduate students with positive outcomes. Although I am yet to encounter a student who does not want to be considered a critical thinker, students vary in their determination to develop traditional critical thinking skills like analyzing arguments and sources. By contrast, my students tend to exhibit more enthusiasm when discussing Lonergan’s “transcendental imperatives”—be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible.³⁸ In the context of Seton Hall’s Core I course, which centers on questions about happiness and the meaning of being human, the transcendental imperatives provide students with a framework for thinking about what human authenticity looks like in concrete terms. As much as students want to be critical thinkers, they are generally more interested in being authentic human beings.

More to the point of this paper, GEM helps students to identify something constant within themselves and within those around them. For all the diversity in human thought and for the myriad ways that culture and individual experience influence people’s mental structures, the dynamic pattern of attending, questioning, understanding, judging, and deciding are a permanent

³⁵ Liddy, “Transforming Faculty Development,” 388.

³⁶ Although typical language about critical thinking may provide a common language, it does not provide a bridge of mutual understanding across disciplinary lines in the way that GEM does.

³⁷ Praxis Program of the Advanced Seminar on Mission, the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership and the Center for Catholic Studies, Bernard J. Lonergan Institute at Seton Hall University, <https://www13.shu.edu/catholic-mission/servant-leadership-praxis-program.cfm> (accessed September 1, 2017).

³⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 53.

fixture of human cognition.³⁹ Recognizing this common feature of our thinking can serve as a foundation for dialogue among people of differing views. Coming to an awareness of how one's own mind operates begets the realization that insights and truths are not simply "out there" to be found. Rather they are products of the subject's intelligent and reasonable interaction with the world. This realization brings with it an awareness of the fragility of one's knowing and a greater willingness to listen to others with differing viewpoints. Whether they lean left or right politically, people on both sides can affirm that they have arrived at their positions through a process of attending, questioning, understanding, and making judgements. This is significant because, once acknowledged, this pattern of cognitional operations can then provide an agreed upon process or method (viz., GEM) for discussing contentious topics.

These are not idle hopes. Faculty in the Praxis Program at Seton Hall have seen the results I describe here as they have allowed GEM to shape their teaching. For example, a law school professor observed that learning about GEM "has forced me to consider how others approach thinking, which has made me much more sympathetic towards the (often struggling) thinkers that I see in front of me during my classes."⁴⁰ Another GEM Fellow who teaches speech therapy reflected, "One of the greatest benefits of the GEM model for my students is 'awareness' - I see them beginning...to ask 'Why? -- Why am I doing this?' - and 'When I do this, what does this mean I believe or know.'"⁴¹ The benefits of GEM were on full display one day this past November when I opened the floor for my first-year students to express their thoughts and feelings the morning after Donald Trump's election to the presidency. Tensions were high in the classroom on account of the diversity of races, ethnicities, and political views present, but I began the conversation by reminding my students of what they had practiced all semester—patiently attending to what other people are saying and making the effort to genuinely understand the other's perspective before making a judgment about its correctness. This required students to strain against the biases that often poison such encounters—the temptations to protect one's own ego and to think with one's group and write off the "other". As a result, on a morning when emotions were at their rawest, this group of 18- and 19-year olds succeeded where our country as a whole seems to be failing, namely, engaging in civil dialogue about issues of importance with people of differing perspectives.

As new cohorts of teachers pass through the Praxis Program every year and apply GEM to their teaching, students will gain more consistent exposure to this method. We hope that this ongoing reinforcement will enable students to persevere in this practice when they depart campus and enter into the public square.

³⁹ To reject Lonergan's cognitional theory is to implicate oneself in a performative self-contradiction. In other words, to deny that one understands intelligently and makes judgments would itself involve achieving an insight and making a judgment about one's lack of understanding and judgment. See Lonergan, *Insight*, 352-3.

⁴⁰ Liddy, "Transforming Faculty Development," 387.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 386-7.

Promoting More Fruitful Encounters with Religion

Catholic universities and colleges, insofar as they are institutions of the Catholic Church, seek to advance the Church's mission of uniting human beings with God and one another. Besides promoting dialogue among individuals, this work also involves turning people to the transcendent ground of their being. That is not to say that Catholic universities exist to proselytize. Rather, to the extent these schools are faithful to the mission of the Church, they will present invitations to conversion and foster an environment that nurtures faith. But how to do this in a day and age in which not only many professors but also an increasing number of students are put off by traditional religion and its institutions?

Many people who reject traditional religion—particularly millennials—do so because of what they perceive to be signs of inauthenticity or hypocrisy—abuse of minors by supposed moral authorities, ostentatious displays of wealth by those who preach poverty of spirit, promises of eternal beatitude from the mouths of “sourpusses”.⁴² In contrast, they are attracted to people and communities (and brands) who embody authenticity, even if they struggle to articulate what makes one authentic.⁴³ In my experience most undergraduate students' operative definition of authenticity is something along the lines of “being true to oneself” or simply “not fake”. Of course, this raises the question what it means to be true to oneself.

In the context of such conversations Lonergan provides those seeking authenticity with language for articulating its meaning at the same time as he provides Christian people and institutions with language for connecting with this disaffected demographic. Authenticity, asserts Lonergan, is achieved in self-transcendence. Our questions for intelligence raise us above the limits of immediate sensory experience. Judgments of fact expand our horizons beyond our narrow perceptions to what truly is. Judgments of value and decisions lead us to live not merely for personal satisfactions but for values, for God and others. In short, we transcend the limits of our sensitivity, biases, and moral impotence to the extent that we act attentively, intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly. Presented with a precise language and method for achieving the authenticity to which they aspire, my students have exhibited great eagerness to learn more and to embody these characteristics of the self-transcending subject.

According to Lonergan, this process of self-transcendence is not only a going out of oneself but also a rising up to God because anyone who gives free reign to their questioning will eventually come to the question of God. Herein lies the opportunity for Christian universities whose missions include presenting opportunities for spiritual growth. Faculty and students who might otherwise be reluctant to engage with explicitly religious questions may be more inclined

⁴² Francis I, “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” #85 (Vatican, 2013), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁴³ Karl Moore, “Authenticity: The Way To The Millennial's Heart,” *Forbes*, August 14, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karlmoore/2014/08/14/authenticity-the-way-to-the-millennials-heart/#5da2d53a4531>.

to engage with GEM, which begins with innocuous questions about cognitive performance but inevitably leads to the question of God.⁴⁴

In fact, we have seen just this at Seton Hall. GEM Fellows from a wide variety of disciplines have praised the program not only for helping to clarify their thinking and research methodology but also for providing a space for engaging colleagues in conversations about truth, meaning, and community. Numerous participants have also testified to how engaging Lonergan's thought with other fellows has catalyzed personal spiritual growth. For example, one GEM Fellow with little religious background reflected:

The Praxis pilot has been central to [my life here at Seton Hall University] by exemplifying and promoting things I value such as the friendship and support of colleagues, interdisciplinary conversation, stimulating intellectual questions, and a shared sense of purpose. I also find myself slowly rediscovering my faith and finding a greater appreciation and understanding of our Catholic Mission and its importance.⁴⁵

Testimonials like this one witness to how teaching Lonergan's GEM promotes a truly authentic subject. More than producing thinkers capable of criticizing arguments and opponents, thoughtful engagement with GEM promotes self-transcending, integrated human beings. Capitalizing upon the richness of this method, the Praxis Program at Seton Hall provides a viable model for how Catholic institutions of higher learning might bring more people into communion with God and one another by means of promoting faculty's and students' authentic cognition and self-transcendence.

CONCLUSION

How do we facilitate more fruitful encounters among people of differing perspectives in a time when there is such vociferous disagreement about fundamental issues of religion, values, and democracy and even about basic facts of reality? I have suggested that a first step might be to step back from the hardened positions that divide us and find some common ground. Especially for those of us involved in university life, the near universal valorization of critical thinking can provide this common ground. However, if that starting point is to lead to reengagement with the issues that divide us—this time on more productive terms—it will have to pass through the crucible of self-examination.

"Genuine objectivity is fruit of authentic subjectivity," writes Lonergan.⁴⁶ We might well add that genuine community is the fruit of the same. In order for a person to consistently escape the narrow confines of bias and self-interest and live in the realm of what truly is, one must yield to the internal imperatives to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. Doing so necessarily involves becoming a critical thinker—a goal to which most Americans aspire today.

⁴⁴ Of course, to raise the question of God is not yet to believe in God, but simply posing the question in compelling terms is a significant achievement in our increasingly secularized culture.

⁴⁵ Liddy, "Transforming Faculty Development," 389.

⁴⁶ Lonergan, *Method*, 292.

Yet it involves something far more profound, namely, the transformation of the thinking subject. This transformation involves acknowledging the fragility of one's own knowing, decentering one's own perspectives and desires, and recognizing in others the same desire for truth, goodness, and meaning that one sees in oneself. Only such a fundamental transformation of the subject can ensure that critical thinking skills will not become one more weapon in the battle to preserve one's ego or privilege.

For educators to facilitate this transformation requires a focus not only on proficiencies and competencies but more fundamentally on the persons in our classrooms. Indeed, training students to treat others as human beings requires that we act like human beings ourselves.⁴⁷ We professors need not only reward students for lifting up the good in their peers but also embody ourselves compassion and readiness to learn from others. We ourselves must be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and also loving. For, as Lonergan says, although our questions for intelligence, reflection, and deliberation constitute our capacity for self-transcendence, that capacity only becomes an actuality when one loves. Rarely do we speak of love in relation to critical thinking. Nevertheless, critical thinking can lead to self-awareness of the context of one's values and beliefs, which can lead in turn to recognizing the same in others. Insofar as this mutual recognition is often the first step in seeing the "other" as a human being who loves and needs love, critical thinking may very well prove a propitious starting point for more fruitful encounters with difference in our divided society.

⁴⁷ This is why Newman recognized the indispensable role of the living influence of professors. John Henry Newman, *University Sketches* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1964), 9.

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The Promise and Perils of the Public Dialogue Movement: The Politics of Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation

Abstract

The struggle for mutual recognition and respect of difference is seen by many people as the paradigmatic form of public conflict in the U.S. and around the globe today, wherein cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious conflicts fuel violent enmity between diverse groups. In recent years, a movement and broad community of practice has emerged, using strategies that bring persons and groups together across sharp divides to engage in public dialogue aimed to reduce polarizing conflict, and foster mutual understanding. This paper introduces the public dialogue movement and the need for it, and draws on political theorist Nancy Fraser's framework of justice-making, and selected concepts from liberation theology, to critically assess its promise and perils.

Introduction

In his older and widely acclaimed book *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Miroslav Volf writes, "It may not be too much to claim that the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference. The issue is urgent. The ghettos and battlefields throughout the world--in the living rooms, in inner cities, or on the mountain ranges--testify indisputably to its importance."¹ Though written two decades ago, the book's concerns are ever more pressing today.

In this first section, I utilize empirical research to briefly depict the divides between persons and groups that appear to be most salient in the U.S. today, on the theological conviction that where the social groans and pain of people is most acute, we are assured to find the healing and reconciling presence of God at work, and are given a generous share in it.

To begin with, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reports that from 2011 to 2015, nearly half of all hate crimes in the U.S. were motivated not by *religious* prejudice (as widely assumed) but rather by *racial* prejudice--with crimes against Hispanics ahead of those against Blacks and Whites.² Next in ranking, a third of hate crimes targeted victims because of their ethnicity, or their gender, followed by persons victimized on account of their sexual orientation. Approximately one in six hate crimes were motivated by bias against the victim's religion, and one in six against disability. The Bureau evinces that more than half of all hate crimes against the aggregate of protected groups go unreported.³

¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 20.

² Madeline Masucci, and Lynn Langton, "Hate Crime Victimization, 2004-2015, Special Report," U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, June, 2017.

³ Ibid.

Certain scholars contend that hate crimes, much like lynchings, do not merely victimize particular individuals. Rather, they also serve as an effective means to control entire identity groups through intimidation, fear, and violence.⁴ In this manner, such crimes serve both a symbolic and an instrumental function.

While scholarly research on hate crimes has increased, the focus is largely on incidents against racial, religious, and sexual minorities, with less attention given to incidents against Hispanics and other groups *as immigrants*--likely because immigrants as such are not a protected category in hate crime law.⁵ Yet, we know there has been an increase in incendiary "immigrant-as-threat" narratives, wherein immigrants "are portrayed as threatening national security (through their supposed links to terrorist organizations), economic security (by 'taking' jobs away from natural-born citizens), and cultural security (by bringing with them different languages, customs, and religions)."⁶ Research shows that increased anti-immigrant sentiment strongly correlates with rises in immigration, and that prejudice and anxiety is often aroused by increased diversity in a given context, suggesting the need for communities not simply to become diverse, but also to use strategies that foster face-to-face friendship and sense of mutuality. This is urgent, inasmuch as the U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2044 less than half of the U.S. population will be single-race non-Hispanic whites. Already, as of 2015, over half of U.S. babies younger than one year old are racial or ethnic minorities.

The End of White Christian America

Robert Jones, CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), contends—and various researchers corroborate--that the surprising outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election was not primarily about economic anxiety among working class whites, as some narratives suggest, but rather was an epic battle over identity and difference. Essentially, Jones argues, it was the "death rattle" of "white Christian America."⁷ Whereas in 1976, 81 percent of Americans identified as white and Christian, today only 43 percent identify as such. In *The End of White Christian America*, Jones uses the classic iteration of stages of grief to depict the anger, anguish, and fear of cultural displacement being felt by a broad swathe of white Christians, especially conservative evangelicals, as their place of dominance declines in U.S. society."⁸ Research shows that in the face of rapid demographic shifts and social change, certain groups of people become vulnerable to the politics of fear and of nostalgia, and to nationalistic and authoritarian ideology. In *The Party of Fear*, David Bennett contends that the most persistent

⁴ R.D. King, et al., "Contemporary hate crimes, law enforcement, and the legacy of racial violence," *American Sociological Review*, 74 (2005), 292.

⁵ The Hate Crimes Statistics Act specifies that hate crimes are ones "that manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, gender or gender identity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity."

⁶ Michele Stacey, et al., "Demographic Change and Ethnically Motivated Crime: The Impact of Immigration on Anti-Hispanic Hate Crime in the United States," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 27(3) (2011), 282.

⁷ Robert P. Jones, "Trump Can't Reverse the Decline of White Christian America," *The Atlantic*, July 4, 2017.

⁸ Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016).

⁹ David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: The American Far Right from Nativism to the Militia Movement* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995).

fear in U.S. society has been *fear of outsiders*.⁹ Steven Hahn, historian at New York University, suggests that what is striking today is not the number of organized hate groups (on the rise), but rather the number of ordinary citizens who, aroused by fear and anxiety, are allied with the sentiments of such groups, especially white nationalists. We must not allow attention given to direct acts of violence (i.e. hate crimes) to eclipse concern for forms of “slow violence” that permeate our society—inflicted, for example, by hateful and demeaning stereotypes and incendiary rhetoric, which make acts of direct violence thinkable in the first place.

Partisan Divides

A study conducted by Pew Research Center confirms empirically what many Americans observe and experience personally--namely that U.S. society is more intensely polarized along cultural, political, ideological, and generational lines than at any point in a quarter century, and public discourse is more acrimonious.¹⁰ Ideological differences across generations—on issues including immigration and border regulation, treatment of LGBT persons, the role of government, the social safety net, the environment, reproductive rights, and other concerns—have created deeper than ever divides *between* the political parties, and divides *within* the Republican party in particular. Paul Taylor of Pew contends that *hyperpartisanship* is “arguably the most powerful force in twenty-first century American politics.”¹¹ It is, he notes, “a by-product of the many new ways Americans are sorting themselves—by ideology, age, race, ethnicity, wealth, gender, education, religion, immigrant status, neighborhood—into silos that align with their party affiliation.”¹²

Surveys by Pew reveal that partisan antipathy is deeper and wider than ever, and that U.S. political parties see no common ground between them.¹³ The majority of both parties harbor fear and anger toward the other, and say its policies threaten the nation’s wellbeing. The antipathy spills over from the political realm into everyday life. Recently, a popular author in religion commented on Facebook that she had had an acrimonious exchange with her brother over his support for President Trump; her brief post ended with, “I no longer have a brother.”

As Reinhold Niebuhr once contended, “Whenever the followers of one political party persuade themselves that the future of the nation is not safe with the opposition in power, it becomes fairly certain that the nation’s future is not safe, no matter which party rules. For such public acrimony endangers the nation’s health more than any specific policies.”¹⁴

¹⁰ “Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016: Highly negative views of the opposing party—and its members,” Pew Research Center, June 22, 2016.

¹¹ Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2016), 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ “Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016: Highly negative views of the opposing party – and its members,” Pew Research Center, June 22, 2016.

¹⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, “Democracy and the Party Spirit” (1934), in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1957), 66.

“And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19)

I contend that in the face of all the toxic forms of social division, the wellbeing of our nation, and our global community, depends on the church committing itself to more robust public presence and public witness to our Creator’s dream and promise of peaceable, equitable, and interdependent creaturely flourishing, including our Earth Home. By the church I mean all faith traditions, including Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and others working collaboratively in the public square on endeavors of reconciliation and justice-making, bringing persons and groups into transformational relational encounters.

Over against the seeming triumph of incivility and mutual contempt, as James Davis asserts “we need counter-indicators, counter-movements that push our public culture in more virtuous, respectful, and constructive directions.”¹⁵ If Parker Palmer is correct, the impulse toward such a virtuous direction lies within us, ripe to be harvested for “healing the heart of democracy.” As Palmer asserts,

Within us is a yearning for something better than divisiveness, toxicity, passivity, powerlessness... Within us is the courage to pursue that yearning, to hold life’s tensions consciously, faithfully, and well, until they break us open. The broken-open heart is a source of power as well as compassion... We can access and deploy that power by doing what every great social movement has done: put time, skill, and energy into the education and mobilization of the powers of the heart.¹⁶

I suggest that one counter-movement pushing our public culture in respectful directions and mobilizing “powers of the heart” is the public dialogue and deliberation movement. Over the past several decades, numerous streams of practice in public dialogue emerged at the grassroots level, often without practitioners being aware of what was similarly happening elsewhere. Slowly, a nascent and disjointed field of practice has coalesced into a coherent movement and field of inquiry, and vital community of practice. This is positioned in well over half a century of educational, religious, and social science efforts to generate and apply knowledge about promoting constructive interaction between groups with a history of conflict. Interreligious dialogue is part of this history.

Today, the practice of public dialogue draws guidance from, and generates research questions for, a family of interrelated fields of inquiry, including intergroup relations, intergroup conflict theory, intergroup contact theory, intergroup dialogue (IGD), social psychology, peace studies, and others. In 2013, the *Journal of Dialogue Studies* was launched (in the UK) as a multidisciplinary, blind peer-viewed academic journal, with the aim to contribute towards establishing “dialogue studies” as a distinct academic field. The Journal understands dialogue “to consist of meaningful interaction and exchange between people (often of different social, cultural, political, religious or professional groups) who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding.”¹⁷ The field is comprised of a

¹⁵ James Calvin Davis, “Civil Character and the Church’s Public Ministry,” *Eerdword*, August 30, 2017.

¹⁶ Parker Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 23-24.

¹⁷ Paul Weller, ed., *Dialogue Theories* (London, England: Dialogue Society, 2013), 11.

rich mosaic of approaches to dialogue that include, for example, The Way of Council, World Café, The Conversation Café, Circle of Trust, Appreciative Inquiry, Reflective Structured Dialogue, Insight Dialogue, Bohm Dialogue, Difficult Dialogue, Civil Dialogue, Crucial Conversation, Civic Reflection, Living Room Conversations, The Open Table, 21st Century Town Meetings, Study Circle, Story Circle, Talking Circle, Dialogue-to-Change, The Way of Openness, Sustained Dialogue, along with others.

Though practitioners and theorists use different terminology, techniques, and conceptual frameworks, the endeavors bring persons and groups together in structured public settings to engage in truly *civil* dialogue, in efforts to help heal enmity, reduce prejudice, foster mutual understanding, and cultivate the common good. Practitioners seek to create inclusive, safe space so that everyone who shows up can tell their story and share their identity and convictions--and be heard and understood, even if not agreed with. Theologically seen, civil dialogue is a concrete way to affirm and honor the image of God even in persons and groups with whom we vehemently disagree. As Robert Stains notes, "...healing dialogue invites people to stand in a place of honor in the identities that matter most to them (race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) and that they feel have been maligned. Participating in a dialogue may be the first time someone has had a conversation with people of different identities that does not begin with making someone wrong because of who they are."¹⁸

Many of the models are based, in part, on the premises of *intergroup contact*, demonstrated to be an effective way to help groups resolve and reconcile conflict of all kinds, and achieve mutual understanding. The seeds of this approach, known as Intergroup Contact Theory, are rooted in Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). Though Allport theorized certain conditions for intergroup encounter to be beneficial, a massive meta-analysis conducted by T. F. Pettigrew and associates of well over 500 empirical studies found that all that is needed to promote mutual understanding between groups is social contact, period."¹⁹ Certain conditions may facilitate and optimize positive outcomes, but not be absolutely necessary.

It is important to note that mere proximity is not the same thing as direct intergroup contact, which refers to and involves actual face-to-face encounter between members of different groups. It is not enough that institutions, communities, and congregations become diverse; there needs to be face-to-face interaction among diverse members. Without this, increased diversity may have the unintended effect of arousing anxiety. The more we cultivate meaningful dialogue and relationships across groups, the more likely it is the contact will reduce prejudice and animosity.²⁰

¹⁸ Robert R. Stains, Jr., "Repairing the Breach: The Power of Dialogue to Heal Relationships and Communities," *Journal of Public Deliberation*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, Article 7.

¹⁹ T.F. Pettigrew, and L.R. Tropp, "A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5) (2006), 751-783.

²⁰ Linda R. Tropp, "A Summary of Research Findings on the Effects of Intergroup Contact: Testimony Prepared for the Minnesota Education Commission Task Force on Integrated Schools" (University of Massachusetts Amherst, December 20, 2011), 3.

How and Why Does Intergroup Contact Work?

Empirical studies reveal three key mediators which show that social contact works by (1) reducing the role of perceived threat, and of anxiety about encountering the diverse other; (2) increasing empathy for the lived experience and concerns of the outgroup, and fostering perspective-taking; and (3) enhancing knowledge about the other. While Pettigrew's meta-analysis indicates the mediational effects of all three mechanisms, the increase of cognitive knowledge *about* the outgroup appears to be less strong as a factor than empathy, perspective-taking, and threat reduction. Group-oriented perceived threat refers to perceptions and fears that the outgroup poses a threat to one's values and belief system, or one's culture, or one's political and economic power. Quality of contact can reduce the sense of threat and anxiety. Empathy refers to the capacity to understand and share another person's feelings and put oneself in another's shoes. It is elicited through hearing the stories, sufferings, perspectives, and situations of people once regarded as threats. Empathy "makes group membership salient by reminding people of the experiences a person has as a member of an outgroup."²¹ The increase in empathy and perspective-taking operates to diminish prejudice, fear, and anger toward outgroups. Stereotypes are replaced with empathic perceptions of fellow human beings who have legitimate concerns and fears.

Pettigrew further found that the positive effects of intergroup contact emerge not only for religious, racial, and ethnic groups for whom the original theory was developed, but also for other, often stigmatized groups, such as homosexuals, the disabled, and the mentally ill."²² All in all, *affective* and *relational* factors--rather than cognitive ones--turn out to be the major mediators in reducing conflict, fear, and hostility between groups.

Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD)

While intergroup contact can happen in varied ways, the focus here is on intentional, face-to-face dialogue in structured settings, including *group* dialogue, as in the Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD) and Circle of Trust approaches, and *intergroup* dialogue (IGD) as especially practiced on college and university campuses wherein, in many cases, the lens of critical theory or critical race relations is added.²³ Inasmuch as Reflective Structured Dialogue is both a representative and widely influential approach to public dialogue, and one in which I've received training, in this section I will depict its basic precepts."²⁴

While the RSD approach draws on a range of disciplinary areas--including intergroup contact, conflict mediation, interpersonal communications, and neurobiology—it gives special prominence to tools and concepts drawn from the field of family therapy, to where it traces its

²¹ Ananthis Al Ramiah, and Miles Hewstone, "Intergroup Contact as a Tool for Reducing, Resolving, and Preventing Intergroup Conflict: Evidence, Limitations, and Potential," *American Psychologist*, Vol. 68, no. 7, 532.

²² Thomas F. Pettigrew, et al., "Recent advances in intergroup contact theory," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35 (2011), 275.

²³ See, for example, Kristie A. Ford, ed., *Facilitating Change through Intergroup Dialogue: Social Justice Advocacy in Practice* (2017); Zuniga, Ximena, et al., eds. *Intergroup Dialogue in Higher Education: Meaningful Learning About Social Justice* (2007).

²⁴ For an introduction to this model, see Maggie Herzig and Laura Chasin, *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide From Essential Partners* (Cambridge, MA: Essential Partners, 2006). Available online.

original inspiration. The precepts also reflect the influence of regarded theorists of dialogue, such as David Bohm and William Isaacs, among others.

RSD takes at its starting point the power of face-to-face personal storytelling to break down stereotypes, and engender trust and relationships where fear and alienation previously existed. In the RSD approach, dialogue refers to a structured conversation intended to enhance mutual understanding between people who differ deeply about significant and treasured values, identities, convictions, and practices. The process is aimed to disrupt the chronic polarizing cycle of attack and counter-attack. It disallows debating, advice-giving, arguing, fixing, interrupting, criticizing, correcting, or generalizing (“people like you”).

“Reflective” refers to the aim to disrupt habitual knee-jerk reactivity and emotionally hijacked responses that breed acrimony and polarization. Processes are designed to encourage thoughtful speaking, deep listening, and open hearts. “Structured” refers to strategies used to shape interaction, especially carefully crafted questions, and timed go-rounds blended with free-flowing conversation. In a go-round, the facilitator poses a question and indicates how much time each person will have to respond, so they can prepare accordingly. Then the facilitator provides time for participants to pause in silence to collect their thoughts, and perhaps make notes. The facilitator repeats the question and then designates the first speaker who shares within the time parameter given (a cellphone timer can be set with a non-intrusive sound to signal that time is up); then, after a pause, the next person shares. After several timed go-rounds, the facilitator opens up free-flow conversation, inviting participants to contribute in one of several ways, such as noting a point of learning; picking up on a theme or idea and adding to it; noting things that were especially meaningful, surprising, or challenging; asking a particular speaker to clarify or elaborate on something she or he said.

In order to help create a safe space wherein persons can entrust their stories and deepest selves to the group, particular principles are used to guide dialogue sessions, including the following.

Contribute to safe space. At the outset of the dialogue session, facilitators ask participants to articulate what agreements would need to be in place that would help them feel safe enough to speak from the heart, as well as listen deeply to others whose convictions and values are sharply at odds with their own. This includes at least a confidentiality agreement, and a “pass” or “pass for now” agreement.

Reflect, don’t react. Participants are urged to allow what is in them to take shape before giving words to it, and then to speak their own truth, regardless. They are encouraged to slow down, practice mindfulness, and pause between speakers in the group, so that everyone can take in and reflect on what the last speaker said before the next speaker begins.

Speak from the heart; listen from the heart. Rather than speak in theoretical abstraction, or declare and defend a position on the issue at hand, participants are invited to share stories and concrete lived experiences that reflect how they came to hold convictions, values, views, and assumptions that bear on the matter at hand, and to speak from their heart about these things.

Move from “we” to “I.” Individuals are asked to use “I” statements, and speak only for themselves, rather than attempt to represent, explain, or defend members of a particular identity or professional group.

Engage to understand--not persuade or convince. Conversation is not to be used in efforts to debate, persuade, convince, or negotiate. Instead, RSD encourages listening to understand the speaker from within that speaker’s own point of view and life experience.

Narrow the gap between intention and impact. If a listener feels hurt, upset, or offended about something a speaker said, he or she is encouraged to say so openly, but not to make accusations, or impute motives, or leap to assumptions. Participants are told that when they get *most frustrated*, they need to get *most curious*. First, as to oneself: “why is this so difficult for me to hear?” And then about the speaker, asking questions such as: “How did you come to believe that; is there a story there?” “Why is that really important to you?” “Do you ever feel conflicted, or have uncertainties or questions?”

Listen with resilience. Deep listening is the heart of dialogue--listening to others, listening to self. Participants are invited to make a commitment to hang in and stay engaged even when it may be tough to listen.

Democratize speaking. Participants are asked to stay within the designated time frames for speaking during the go-rounds--and during free-flowing conversation to share airtime and help ensure equitable access to the “group ear,” and refrain from interrupting others.

Move from certainty to openness. Facilitators design “bivalent” questions aimed to disrupt binary either/or frameworks of thinking that lead to polarized and acrimonious debate. Good dialogue questions encourage people to complexify their thinking about contested issues, and to express *both* their hopes *and* their fears, *both* what they appreciate about a matter *and* what troubles them about it. This helps participants see people on the other side of an issue as more than one-dimensional, and helps break down caricatures and demeaning stereotypes. Helpful questions to inwardly ask one’s own self include: “Why are you so certain?” “What is leading you to hold on to that perspective?” “What do you fear about letting go?”

An iconic example of the healing, reconciling power of this form of public dialogue was reported in a *Boston Globe* article on January 28, 2001.²⁵ In response to the murder of two people by a pro-lifer and serious injury of several others in women’s health care clinics in Boston, outspoken pro-life and pro-choice advocates began engaging in structured dialogues, meeting eighteen times over the course of six years. They discovered it is possible and liberating to shift one’s own attitude toward opponents instead of trying to shift the opponents’ values and beliefs. On both sides, participants began to see one another not simply as one-dimensional activists for a “cause,” or irrational and malicious agents, but rather as complex fellow human beings who have religious and moral convictions and legitimate concerns that deserve consideration, even if no agreement or common ground ensues.

As another example, in 2012 the Minneapolis Council of Churches convened RSD sessions across the state in response to divisive reactions to a proposed Amendment to Define Marriage. Called the “Respectful Conversations Project,” the purpose was neither to support nor

²⁵ “Talking with the Enemy,” *Boston Globe*, January 28, 2001.

oppose the amendment, but rather to bring people together who disagreed in order to reduce public vitriol and foster mutual respect. Since then, 80 public dialogues have been convened on a variety of divisive topics, including racial implications of public statues and public art (as in Charlottesville); Muslims and Christians on border security; Jews and Protestants on Israel/Palestine relations; gun control policy in Minnesota; and other hotly contested issues. Participants reported that attitudes, values, and skills they acquired transfer to other situations, including relations in their workplace and family.

The Paradox and Peril of Public Dialogue

For all its powerful and positive effects, public dialogue may have an ironic downside. There is research evidence that positive intergroup contact, in certain circumstances, leads to the unintended consequence of reducing the motivation of minoritized group members to engage in collective action aimed to reduce institutionalized injustice and intergroup inequalities. Certain studies show that outgroup and minoritized group members with the *most* positive contact with majorities often indicate the *least* willingness to work for social change--possibly due to a false sense of conflict resolution and of equality.²⁶ In this case, the net effect is mere *tension-reduction system maintenance*. Also, too many people have been taught that in the name of Christian love, one should avoid the messiness of politics, where endeavors may become confrontational and conflictual.

In the public sphere, dialogue across divides is engaged in order to promote *civility* and *understanding* as goals, while in religious spheres, dialogue across differences is seen theologically as a means of practicing *hospitality* and *reconciliation*. The latter are indeed profound and indispensable ecclesial practices. Yet no matter how theologically robust, they cannot carry the full freight of Christian ethical response to entwined forms of violence and injustice—direct, structural, and cultural—being inflicted on minoritized groups and outgroups in the U.S. today. Neither hospitality nor reconciliation as such, for example, was what ended institutionalized slavery in the U.S. Rather, it was another ancient biblical practice--*justice-making*. I venture there is biblical warrant to claim that justice-making is a practice so decisive to authentic worship of God that when this practice is absent, other ecclesial practices become domesticated, colonized, self-serving --and hospitality and reconciliation become hollowed out affairs which keep structural arrangements of white and ingroup privilege and power intact. In Hebrew scripture, justice-making has to do with securing a rightly ordered, collective way of life that conforms to God's own character as the Utterly Just One, and with enacting God's promised Shalom in all societal spheres--social, cultural, economic, political, and religious.

Jennifer Harvey argues that rather than setting our sights on others who are racially or otherwise different from us and from whom we are alienated—seeing reconciliation of that relationship as primary—we need to set our sights on the *sources* of alienation, “seeing transformation of unjust structures and disruption of our complicity in those structures as primary in our justice work.”²⁷ Similarly, Robert Bellah worries that Parker Palmer's Circle of Trust approach—and by extension, RSD and related models--comes perilously close to the idea

²⁶ Thomas F. Pettigrew, et al., “Recent advances in intergroup contact theory,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 278.

²⁷ Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Erdmans, 2014), 62.

that changing society happens by changing one heart at a time, and that concentrating on individuals and face-to-face groups can inadvertently compound, not challenge, the individualistic approach prevalent in the U.S., in efforts toward structural transformation.²⁸

In the RSD and other models, there is a subtle subtext of stigmatizing public expression of anger and outrage, thereby robbing its epistemological and moral potential. Research evidence suggests that anger and outrage against injustice and inequality is an important source of impetus and energy to sustain the long, slow work of justice-making. In a classic essay, feminist theological ethicist Beverly Harrison insisted that anger is not the opposite of love, but rather a vivid form of caring and connection. We must not, she writes, “lose sight of the fact that all serious human moral activity, especially action for social change, takes its bearings from the rising power of human anger.”²⁹ Jeffrey Stout likewise insists, “A democratic republic cannot do without expression of passions such as grief at catastrophic loss and anger at particular instances of domination, injustice, and indifference.”³⁰

With these caveats in mind, I argue that seeking change in *social agents* and change in *social structures* are not mutually exclusive endeavors, but rather are dialectically (not linearly) related—and contra Miroslav Volf, both concerns are proper to Christian theology. We need a comprehensive paradigm of social transformation—one that maintains the agency-structure dialectic, and that incorporates but goes beyond the work of respecting and reconciling differences, as sought through public dialogue.

The three-dimensional framework for justice-making iterated by feminist political theorist Nancy Fraser addresses this concern.³¹ Fraser contends that certain groups in the U.S. may suffer three distinct yet interrelated types of injustice: *cultural/symbolic*, *socio-economic*, and *political exclusion*. These dimensions reciprocally influence and reinforce each other; none is reducible to the other. The remediation of these entwined forms of injustice requires a triadic model for the concrete practice of justice-making, with interrelated public endeavors—namely, engagement in what Fraser calls the politics of recognition, of redistribution, and of representation. The *politics of recognition* has to do with addressing cultural matters of identity, difference, diversity, otherness, status, and so on. This is the contribution of the praxis of public dialogue. The *politics of redistribution* has to do with addressing economic matters—reducing class exploitation, and ensuring equitable access to resources and conditions needed for interdependent flourishing. The *politics of representation* has to do with addressing political parity—with ensuring that minoritized groups have a seat and collective voice at tables of public decision-making.

For Christians, the practice of justice-making presupposes that believers have all along been engaging together in an ecology of ecclesial practices and means of grace that nurture in them *phronesis*, i.e. practical wisdom and discernment, and that form them as “social agents

²⁸ Robert N. Bellah, Review of Healing the Heart of Democracy, *Christian Century*, October 18, 2011.

²⁹ Beverly Harrison, “The Power of Anger in the Work of love,” in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Ethics* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985), 14.

³⁰ Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 218.

³¹ Nancy Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation,” in *Matters of Culture: Cultural Sociology in Practice*, ed. Rogert Friedland and John Mohr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

capable of envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies.”³² Our identity as agents and beings created in the image and likeness of God means that God’s own Spirit is breathed into us and the whole created order, and is the source of our spiritual-ethical power and agency to engage in justice-making neighbor love—the heart of our baptismal vocation as Christians. The Spirit is the Divine choreographer in justice-making, blowing where it will, even outside the church walls. As Jurgen Moltmann holds, “The hidden presence in world history of the divine justice in God’s Spirit ‘destabilizes’, so to speak, human systems of injustice, and sees to it that they cannot last.”³³ This is our hope and our promise.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have wanted to make the case that as religious educators and leaders, we should see ourselves as called upon today—by the “signs of the times”—to widen the bandwidth of our concern for dialogue across divides, and extend the praxis beyond our historic and robust leadership in the field of interreligious dialogue, though of course not forsaking that. After all, one favored account of the etymology of the word religion traces it back to the Latin word *religare* -- *re-* (again) + *ligare* (connect, tie), thus to reconnect, to bind fast. Through our tie to God, by God’s own embrace of us, we are tied to all that God creates and loves, and are called to be restorers and repairers and reconcilers when ties get severed, and when dominant groups exclude others, on any basis, from the sphere of equal regard and just relations. Our agenda needs to include not only helping orchestrate public praxis of dialogue across divides—as a dimension of larger justice-making endeavors—but also efforts to theologically ground and reflect upon such praxis, so that we better understand it as an ecclesial practice and theological means of grace wherein God is seen as the initiator and major actor, in whose work in the world we have been given a generous share.

³² Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 21.

³³ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 143.

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Encounter in Different Work Places: A Research on Top 250 Turkish Industrial Enterprise Managers' Perceptions on Value Based Management

Abstract

Differences in values, personality and work preferences affect the way people perceive others and their behaviors at work. Thus increasing the capacity of the organizations to listening or welcoming stranger, dealing with the differences, diversity and intersectionality, social inequality and people with disabilities become significant. Survey method will be used to analyze 250 Turkish Industrial enterprise high level managers' perceptions on “Value Based Management”. The paper consists of two parts. The first part puts forward a conceptual framework and the second part describes a field research. The idea here would be to explore encounter in its present forms, in ideas which have been “work-place tested”.

1. Conceptual Framework

The paper is based on an ongoing project which has been supported by the Ankara University Scientific Research Projects Office (BAP), Turkey.¹ The aim of the project is to identify the nature of the organizational problems in terms of encounter faced by senior managers at the level of General Manager/ Assistant General Manager and to develop solution suggestions. Within the direction of the determined target, a literature review was made, and the values constituting the conceptual framework of the research were determined based on the mission and the vision of Ankara University.

Vision of Ankara University

The vision of Ankara University is to become an innovative university that leads the future with its distinguished efforts at universal level by conducting qualified research and making use of its knowledge and talents for humanity.

Mission of Ankara University

Ankara University, with its responsibility to be the first university of the Republic, aims

¹ The research is supported by the Ankara University Scientific Research Projects Office (BAP), Turkey.

- to raise creative individuals who have critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, who constantly renew their personal and professional field, and who are environmentally conscious, and who respect the differences among individuals
- to conduct interdisciplinary researches that contribute to the universal level of knowledge and art, and take ethical value into consideration,
- to provide services that are motivated by social responsibility and corresponding to the problems of the country as well as such services that contribute to the improvement and development of the residential city by taking public interest into account.

In this context, the researchers who proposed the project developed the concept of "Value-based Management (VBM)". The main aim of value-based management in this research is to support the organizational culture with a value-based approach and to assist in a transformation that takes diversity into account.

VBM literature consists of some different definitions. Mostly the definitions of value and VBM differ according to the organizational culture. The value of a organization is determined by its discounted future cash flows. Value is created only when companies invest capital at returns that exceed the cost of that capital. VBM extends these concepts by focusing on how companies use them to make both major strategic and every day operating decisions. Properly executed, it is an approach to management that aligns an organization's overall aspirations, analytical techniques, and management processes to focus management decision making on the key drivers of value. VBM is not a staff-driven exercise. It focuses on better decision making at all levels in an organization. It recognizes that top-down command-and-control structures cannot work well, especially in large multi-business corporations. Instead, it calls on managers to use value-based performance metrics for making better decisions. When VBM is implemented well, it brings tremendous benefit. It is like restructuring to achieve maximum value on a continuing basis. It has high impact, often realized in improved economic performance. The focus of VBM should be on the why and how of changing corporate culture (Copeland, T., T. Koller and J. Murrin, 1994).

Stakeholders play a very significant role in the organizational culture. Organizations exist to create value for all stakeholders. Stakeholders include customers, owners, managers, employees, suppliers and society in general. Organizations determine the degree to which they will prioritize the interests of each stakeholder group and will therefore balance performance goals accordingly. Values depend on the stakeholders, however, examples might be: Markets and owners expect that economic value be created; customers may expect to obtain desired goods and services on time and at competitive prices; employees may expect a substantive and meaningful job with commensurate compensation; suppliers may expect to be paid on time; society may expect that their environment will be improved (Sumantra, G., C. A. Bartlett and P. Moran, 1999). Organizations have to change constantly in order to meet expectations. VBM focus the efforts of people in the organization on driving to achieve what's important in a holistic manner. For example; satisfied customers, correctly assigned resources, growing profits, streamlined processes that deliver, business facts to manage the business, motivated and accountable people, waste eliminated...etc. Disciplined application of defined measurements and goals is critical to accomplishment of the desired values/goals (Sharman, P.A., 1999).

Some researchers (Sharman, P.A., 1999) consider VBM not only as a matter of creating values but as a discipline that focuses on the management of the organization holistically. It emphasizes the creation of value as defined by its stakeholders and priorities defined by

management. It focuses on the deployment of strategy and value creation by managing processes, activities, jobs, and compensation and organization structure.

The relatively scarce academic research examining the use of VBM has mainly compared the success of firms having adopted VBM to those that have not (Wallace, 1997; Kleiman, 1999). In the other areas of management accounting, evidence shows the divergent use of management accounting methods, such as ABC and Balanced Scorecard (Gossein, 1997; Kaplan and Norton, 2001; Malmi, 2001). Thus one may expect that companies could vary with respect to their VBM use as well. Such variation has even been acknowledged in the normative VBM literature (Martin and Petty, 2000; p.p. 228-229), though the precise nature of these differences remains unexplored.

Ittner and Larcker(2001), building on normative VBM literature, suggest that VBM consists of the following six basic steps:

1. Choosing specific internal objectives that lead to shareholder value enhancement;
2. Selecting strategies and organizational designs consistent with the achievement of the chosen objectives;
3. Identifying the specific performance variables, or "value drivers", that actually creates value in the business given the organization's strategies and organizational design;
4. Developing action plans, selecting performance measures, and setting targets based on the priorities identified in the value driver analysis;
5. Evaluating the success of action plans and conducting organizational and managerial performance evaluation;
6. Assessing the ongoing validity of the organization's internal objectives, strategies, plans, and control systems in light of current results, and modifying them as required.

The literature contains prescriptions on the design of a management control system, including objectives, performance evaluation, target setting and rewards. Moreover, a number of examples have been presented to illustrate how the adoption of VBM should impact on decision making, both at strategic and operational levels. (see e.g. Martin and Petty, 2000).

Yet there is a need to uncover the philosophy behind any implementation. VBM is an approach and also a philosophy that enables and supports the leaders of an organization to create a meaningful environment and help the workers find meaning in their work in relation to others. Thus the stakeholders feel more connected to be part of the organization as a living body and a community.

It is important to note VBM differs from a profit-focused way of managing business. Specifically, VBM means that the decisions that you make today are not simply driven by short-term profit. Instead, we consider the longer-term effects that the decisions will have on organizational sustainability and profitability. VBM asks people within a organization to think like owners and to make decisions that will ultimately benefit the owners. Managers and executives must constantly look for investment and growth opportunities that will create value- and use the organization's capital in ways that ensure long-term, sustainable success (<http://flevy.com/blog/what-is-value-based-management-vbm/>).

Being inspired from the international literature mentioned above the researchers of the project raised the following questions in their own context, Turkey.

- What can we do as academics for a better workplace? Moreover, is it not possible for

scholars from different disciplines to gather and work together to find solutions for the problems we experience in different work places?

- Will our future survival be only through technological developments and profitability?
- We thank Google for expanding our world and enhancing the concept of sharing among us. But, here is the question: is our inner world expanding our moral sensitivity growing?
- How can organizations take responsibility for solving problems?
- What kind of projects should they produce to fulfill their social responsibilities?
- How can we encourage business leaders to work for the common good and share resources and practices for sustainable organizational development?
- “Push the bottom!” works well with machines but it does not work in our interpersonal existence where the psychological, moral and religious energies of our social worlds come into play. So how can our faith contribute to our personal relations in work places where self needs to bind itself to other selves?

2. Field Research

After completing the conceptual framework the researchers sent out a question requesting an essay on “What does VBM mean to you and to your organization?” to 2500 members of KALDER (Turkish Quality Association) via e-mail. Unfortunately only eight of the members gave a respond.²

It was a breakdown for us. The reasons of this low response rate might be their unfamiliarity with the concept of VBM, lack of time or their work overload. However these eight feedbacks profoundly changed our perspective and provided us so valuable information to develop an attitude scale assessing the concept of VBM.

Before moving to the process of developing an attitude scale we would like to make a brief analysis of the feedbacks. The feedbacks generally illustrate the current problems at workplace under three categories and present VBM as a way to overcome these problems. The categories are; being undercapitalized, bad market condition and unqualified people. When it comes to the meaning of VBM there is no single regulatory, accepted body of definition or meaning in the essays. Some consider VBM as an alternative business model, one of them sees it as a system of global management, another one defines it as a faith-based approach.

These eight responses have been an important aspect of the development of the research questions. What we are doing here is not intended to be as the whole research analysis but as mapping out the areas that are in need of arising awareness in the meaning of VBM towards the further steps of our research.

Even this low response rate shows that there is a deep concern to oppose any kind of instrumentalization of human individual and work life. Yet the question still remains: How is it expressed in the work culture and in the daily life of the organization?

²We would like to thank Alpay E. İĞNEK, Prof. Dr. Aysun YILMAZLAR, Bülent ÖZDOĞAN, İrfan ONAY, Önder KIRATLILAR, Remzi ACAR, Taner ALGIN, Yılmaz BAYRAKTAR for the valuable comments we have received from them.

Starting from the theory and abstract ideas we face the challenge of translating them into practice based on the understanding of “ a common action for common good”. An understanding which has its basis in Islamic culture called “amel-i salih, and tasabuk el hayrat” within a broader meaning of working with one another in the performance of righteous work. We undertook to bridge the gap between theory and practice under this understanding of action for common good. Our way of being faithful will be ultimately defined by how we respond in our action in every aspect of our life. As it is stated in the Quran “(...) lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord and give better grounds for hope” (18:46).

A common goal for common good

It was time then to discover the related values to create a common goal for common good. We developed a draft scale depending on related values. Dimensions of the scale have been designed by “*respect for*” the following twelve values:

1. Human Dignity
2. Justice
3. Diversity
4. Worthiness
5. Honesty
6. Creativity
7. Courage
8. Commitment
9. Humility
10. Empathy
11. Trust
12. Environmental Concern

Those are not series of moral orders, or doctrinal deposit that we impose on ourselves or others but more of a leading to a better work culture and way of interaction. It is in sustaining these values we hope for a clear pathway for the culture of the organizations. The main argument here is to put forward how the organizations position themselves and pay attention to the differences and how they work with the values involved. How values manifest themselves in participation, action and decision making in the organization? How they function among the members of organization relating to each other?

Integrating values to work place means to create a precise place where people can bring their whole selves and work together, even with people they don't agree with. This is an encounter between a value-created mindset and the management process which senior managers are fully aware that they have a solid understanding to drive their organization. In judging of this understanding we should be on the lookout for the inconsistency of how such values are applied. How is human dignity expressed at work place and its culture? What does just action mean at workplace? What is fair trade? How diversity is being understood and practiced in decision making? How does the organization contribute to a friendly environment? What are the effects of trust on the workers' attitudes and behaviors?

As a second step a draft of attitude scale has been sent to the experts in the fields of theology, management and statistics. This research is an example of a new and an uncommon

collaboration of these three fields in Turkey. By coming into a closer dialogue around this theme of VBM we feel that we are experiencing a real encounter.

The received interdisciplinary feedbacks and suggestions helped to create a draft version of the survey questionnaire and the scale.³

Survey method will be used to analyze 250 Turkish industrial enterprise high level managers' perceptions on "Value Based Management". For data entry, the package software of IBM SPSS Statistics 24 will be used. Data will be converted into the package software of IBM SPSS Statistics 24 (.sav) and Excel format (.xls). Following the data entry through statistical methods and using the package software of IBM SPSS Statistics 24, statistical tables will be drawn. Then, final reports on the data about validity and reliability analysis and its results will be prepared. In accordance with the final report and raw data and problems observed during implementation, solution suggestions for the business managers will be provided.

When the research is completed, it is planned to get it published in English and Turkish as a book and to be circulated among the participants of the "Value-Based Management" Training Module, which will be developed at the Continuing Education Center of Ankara University. We are seeking a module which will give new insight and depth into the meaning of work not only offers technical knowledge or simple tactics for success!

In order to make intercultural comparisons in the future and expand the research universe by communicating with the US businesses there will be collaborative efforts to conduct research with Mr. Steve Lawler, the Director of Eden Theological Seminary Walker Leadership Institute in St. Louis, USA.

We look forward to hearing your comments and thoughts during the meeting!

³ We would like to thank Dr. Ömer Kutlu for his assistance to finalize the scale.

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Encountering Other, World, and Self in Communities of Productive Practice

Abstract

In a consumer society, practices of production in popular culture represent a reclamation of the anthropological values of the person as producer. Communities of productive practice are potential loci for fostering this anthropological development in the encounter with self, others, and the material world. Religious educators ought to be looking for opportunities to support and promote these communities. I propose here that institutions of higher education ought to be one venue in which religious educators can do so in ways that encourage persons to flourish with a healthier understanding of themselves and their relationship to the material world.

Consumer Culture and Limits on Human Flourishing

The personal dissatisfaction that is rampant in consumer culture is well-documented. For the most part, here I simply posit the dissatisfaction based on commonly observed symptoms.¹ Consumerism and the adoption of the materialism that is at its core are correlated with ill-being. Among the personal effects associated with materialistic values are depression, anxiety, narcissism, increased substance use, physical symptoms like headaches and stomachaches, and a lower frequency of the reported feeling of pleasant emotions. These negative effects appear across a broad span of ages.² In theological terms, consumerism appears to inhibit the full flourishing of the human person who is created in the image and likeness of God.³ Religious educators must be concerned with the flourishing of the human person, and therefore ought to be seeking pedagogical tools to help learners combat the discontents of consumer culture. One potential pedagogical tool brings learners together in contact with each other and the material world while allowing them to actualize parts of their very selves often neglected in consumer

¹ The literature supporting -- and occasionally disputing -- the negative effects of consumerism on persons is fairly extensive. For a few examples see Helga Dittmar, "The Costs of Consumer Culture and the 'Cage Within': The Impact of the Material 'Good Life' and 'Body Perfect' Ideals on Individuals' Identity and Well-Being," *Psychological Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 23–31, doi:10.1080/10478400701389045.; Tim Kasser, "Materialistic Values and Goals," *Annual Review of Psychology* 67 (January 4, 2016): 489–514, doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033344.; Tim Kasser et al., "Changes in Materialism, Changes in Psychological Well-Being: Evidence from Three Longitudinal Studies and an Intervention Experiment," *Motivation and Emotion* 38, no. 1 (February 2014): 1–22.; Helga Dittmar et al., "The Relationship Between Materialism and Personal Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 107, no. 5 (November 2014): 879–924, doi:http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bc.edu/10.1037/a0037409.; Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004).

² Tim Kasser, "Materialism and Its Alternatives," in *A Life Worth Living: Contributions to Positive Psychology*, ed. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Isabella Celega Csikszentmihalyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 200–214.

³ Having placed human flourishing at the center of the project of living, I must be frank about an inability and reluctance to define that flourishing too narrowly or to describe it too confidently. There is room for debate over what constitutes flourishing and whether or how we can recognize it when it is happening. Undoubtedly, there are many manifestations of human flourishing and no single *telos* to which every person must drive. I nonetheless assert that the collective recognition of certain experiences as fulfilling, especially when that fullness accords with the gathered wisdom of Scripture and Tradition, likely points to genuine flourishing.

culture. Religious educators should be trying to engage learners as participants in what I call communities of productive practice.

The failure of consumer culture to promote human flourishing can be traced to the inadequacy of the anthropology that is operative in that culture. A culture grounded in a poor understanding of the human person is ill-equipped to foster the flourishing of that person. Theologian Vincent Miller offers a definition of consumer culture that helps to unpack the problem: "the cultural habits of use and interpretation of commodified cultural objects."⁴ In the economic sense intended here, "commodification" is a neutral term referring to turning anything -- material goods, ideas, people -- into an object of exchange. Ethicist John Kavanaugh, though, sees in this definition the root of the failure of consumer culture. It treats everything, including the person, as commodity. It is only a culture that recognizes the human person as valuable herself that is likely to encourage human flourishing.⁵

Kavanaugh's critique of the consumer culture is rooted in the Marxian concept of the "commodity fetish." For Marx, the commodities that we fetishized were the material goods produced by human hands (or, more so, human labor in the factory). These commodities turned from mere "things" into idols, objects of devotion, even a type of worship. The human person, then, becomes two things only -- a laborer and a consumer of the products of his labor. For Kavanaugh, this fetishization is especially problematic when the goods, experiences, and images that we consume (and, I add, display) become who we are. Hence, "we become re-created, not in the image of a living personal God, but in the image of dead things which can neither see nor feel nor listen nor speak." He goes on, then, to describe this strange mix of self-idolatry and self-imposed limitations:

Entrusting our identity to dead objects, we take on their characteristics and imagine ourselves to be things without capacity for listening, feeling, or truly communicating. Thus we become estranged from our very selves, from each other, and even from the living and true God. Human relationships, activities, qualities become thing-like relations, actions, qualities. . . . [I]n measuring ourselves by their qualities, we have created a false god which exacts from us our freedom and personhood.⁶

In particular, consumerism is built on and reinforces an anthropology that limits the person, as a consumer, to someone who makes meaning and identity only through the signaling she does with her consumption.⁷ The rise of the brand economy is an especially egregious example of this anthropology. Although this focus on the power of brands is not entirely new, it is perhaps more important than ever. Indeed, marketers focus almost exclusively on selling the brand more than the product. Brands have value that is only partly tied to or reflected in the assets of the corporations themselves, and the brand is meant to stir feelings only partly connected to the particulars of the product. TV commercials for Nike, for instance, one of the most valuable and easily recognized brands in the world, rarely sell us athletic shoes, clothing, or

⁴ Vincent Jude Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 30.

⁵ John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, 25th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, 1st ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

helmets. They sell us Nike. Practical theologian Tom Beaudoin⁸ likens this phenomenon to a dualism that wants to elevate the soul (brand) above the body (product).

Brands do not strive simply to engender loyalty among consumers; particularly when marketing to adolescents, brands seek to foster love⁹ and identity. We identify ourselves by what we wear, what we use. Even for adults, marketers speak of creating that elusive aura around a brand that converts a mere logo into a “lovemark.”¹⁰ The goal is for brands to shape the centers of value, to encourage us to put our faith in the values of the brand or even the brand itself.¹¹

The problem is that identifying ourselves so closely with brands inhibits us from exploring and expressing our full humanity, perhaps from building an identity around a career interest or as someone who contributes to society as a whole.¹² Overblown though this concern might seem, there is empirical evidence supporting the claim: for instance, the dominance of a consumerist cultural narrative in lives of adolescents does indeed translate to a similar hegemony of the values and goals that support that system. They “crowd out” other values and goals, even limiting their exploration.¹³ Adapting James Marcia's work on identity development, we can say that other options, then, are “foreclosed.”¹⁴ In other words, the values and goals around which a person builds a sense of self, the values and commitments that define who we are and in which we place faith, in large part are dictated by consumer culture.

The Flourishing Person More Fully Considered

The inadequacy of the anthropology of consumerism cries out for a fuller and better Christian anthropology. We need to imagine differently, more robustly, what the human person is. It is not enough that we move the human person back to the center of the culture, including the culture of consumption, if that culture is to be redeemed.¹⁵ We must also have an adequate conception of who that human person is if the culture is to be truly humanized, and therefore sanctified. One aspect that is crucial, but all too often neglected, is that the person is a creative producer as well as a consumer.

The human person is not only a consumer but also a creative laborer, a producer. Human labor is not merely for the production of what is to be consumed, but is an expression of human freedom and, in the words of John Paul II, an opportunity to participate in God's ongoing work of creation, to be co-creators with God. He sees work neither as a punishment for sin nor as an unfortunate consequence of humanity's fallenness, but as an essential, creative, and potentially

⁸ Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2003), 68-9.

⁹ Gene Del Vecchio, *Creating Evercool: A Marketer's Guide to a Kid's Heart* (London: Pelican, 1998), 9.

¹⁰ “The Persuaders.” *Frontline*. PBS. 9 November 2004.

¹¹ The language of “brands striving” for a goal is metaphorical; a brand itself is not an agent. The agents in question are the owners of brands and the marketers who seek to maximize brand value.

¹² American Psychology Association, “Driving Teen Egos – And Buying – Through Branding,” *Monitor* 35 no.6 (June 2004): 60, <http://www.apa.org/monitor/jun04/driving.aspx>

¹³ Kasser, and others, 2.

¹⁴ James Marcia E., “Common Processes Underlying Ego Identity, Cognitive/Moral Development, and Individuation,” in *Self, Ego, and Eidentity: Integrative Approaches*, ed. Daniel K. Lapsley and F. Clark Power (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988), 211–25.

¹⁵ The language of “cultural redemption” is paradoxical when paired with a personalist anthropology. What it should convey is that because the person is of the culture, and the person's flourishing is conditioned by the culture, then the culture must be transformed so that persons can be liberated for flourishing. Because the culture is created by persons, then it can be transformed by human effort. By saying a culture can be “redeemed” I mean that a culture can be transformed so as to better create the conditions in which human persons can be liberated for their fullest flourishing.

sacred part of the human experience. He distinguishes, though, between "work," which is creative and productive, and "toil," which is exhausting and minimally productive. Toil is indeed part of a fallen condition. A culture of consumption that promotes sweatshop labor conditions -- toil *par excellence* -- is indeed a fallen culture, in need of redemption.¹⁶

Taking seriously our roles as both producers and consumers encourages us to engage the true materiality of the human condition,¹⁷ to overcome that "economic docetism" of which Beaudoin is so wary.¹⁸ We are producers and consumers both as individuals and as a society. Our potential to consume and the work through which we produce are intimately related. Accepting this reality in our lives as persons is also part of considering its social importance. Sociologist Juliet Schor calls this reality "true materialism."¹⁹ True materialism is cognizant of the value of material goods -- and the real costs of those goods. I contend that this true materialism is fostered in the person's experience of producing.

There is evidence, in the midst of contemporary consumerism, of a continued longing for greater agency in production and a new ethic of materialism. Some traditional handcrafts like knitting and homebrewing have undergone a resurgence as hobbies among young adults. Specialized markets seek to elevate handcrafts to the level of "artisanal" products -- craft brews or farm-to-table meals, for example. Similarly, handmade products that carry the exotic whiff, authentic or not, of another culture than that of the consumer, are especially desired -- like brightly painted Salvadoran crosses, or Australian didgeridoos.²⁰ Many would argue, with justification, that the commodification of the aura of artisanship is part of the triumph of consumer culture. Often, in buying such products, we are signaling our knowledge, our ethics, our cultured-ness in the same way that our Adidas shoes signal that we are not taken in by the crowds who flock to Nike.²¹ My point here is not uncritically to celebrate this turn to artisanal consumption. It is to argue that the turn itself is evidence of a deeper hunger that is not yet satisfied.

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens" (Vatican Press, 1981), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

¹⁷ Nicholas Boyle, *Who Are We Now? : Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 40, 117.

¹⁸ Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are with What We Buy*, Pbk. ed. (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2007).

¹⁹ Juliet Schor, *Plenitude : The New Economics of True Wealth* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010).

²⁰ One accessible example of the commodification of artisanship and the slipperiness of the concept of authenticity comes in the Discovery network television series *Moonshiners*, which purports to follow Appalachian moonshiners as they tap into the demand for their handmade liquor while, supposedly, evading the law and other misfortunes. In one episode, a pair of moonshiners hire an inventor to make them a means of giving their liquor the taste of well-aged bourbon in a fraction of the time. The invention works, and the moonshiners sell their product to a well-heeled buyer thrilled to be getting the "real" article. While I cannot speak to just how much of the show is staged and how much is "reality," the mere existence of the show epitomizes the consumer culture's commodification of a fetish for the artisanal. "Moonshiners," *Moonshiners* (Discovery Channel, 2011).

²¹ Sociologist of consumption Grant McCracken writes that the "patina," the greenish film that accrues on bronze through the process of oxidation, was much prized in eighteenth-century British and American homes as an indicator that the object must have been in the family for a considerable period of time and therefore must have been inherited from a wealthy or successful forebear. Manufacturers of new goods sought to increase their value by covering them with an artificial patina, giving the aura but not the reality of antiquity and wealth. Perhaps something of the same dynamic is at work when we buy "distressed" jeans, pre-torn to hint at the history of adventures that the wearer has not actually had. Grant David McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

Juliet Schor points to another manifestation of this longing to be producers -- the growth of a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic that has many people building their own crafts or repairing their own goods even though it would be, in the short run, more efficient to pay a professional to do it. She notes also, though, a newer type of DIYer -- those who are willing to embrace technology as a way to allow them to produce goods efficiently on a small enough scale for personal use or for a small manufacturing business. Production need not be restricted only to the realm of expensively-equipped custom machine shops and massive factories.²²

What Schor points to is also captured in the ethos of the loose "Maker Movement." It is an ethos that connects various DIY builders around such values as sharing knowledge and encouraging design, and its appeal seems to be growing. Schools and summer enrichment programs increasingly use the term "maker" in their slogans. Adult "fabbers" and tech enthusiasts see themselves as creating but also sharing ways of designing and creating functional goods that are enjoyable to use.²³ It is not simply about making things yourself and for yourself. It is about creating, designing, and sharing knowledge with the idea that the use of technology and the sharing of information scale up the labor in a way that is liberating. Schor insists that the Maker Movement is not simply about a nostalgia for doing everything with painstaking hand-craft, which is not particularly conducive to human flourishing. She summarizes the insights of the philosopher Frithhof Bergman in capturing the Maker spirit, "Self-provisioning is great, but it needs advanced technology to be liberating"²⁴ from the drudgery.

Situated Learning in Communities of Practice

For the education needed for a change that appreciates the value of the person as producer, I turn to the potential for what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger call "situated learning" through "legitimate peripheral participation" in a "community of practice."²⁵ Learning in a community of practice (CoP) happens to a great extent through negotiation of identity in the context of social practice. In bringing these concepts from the fields of management studies and education into religious education, Jane Regan sheds light on how discipleship works, both for Jesus's original circle and in the Church today. Jesus's earliest disciples learned to be the Jesus-movement. They developed as a movement through their participation in the community that formed around and imitated the practice of Jesus. She sees in CoPs not simply a descriptive model for how situated learning occurs, but also a prescriptive model for renewing congregational life in religious education. Regan distills from Wenger²⁶ a useful definition of a community of practice as a "sustained gathering of people whose practices are marked by mutual engagement around a shared enterprise with a common repertoire." She adds, though, that not all such gatherings are communities of practice; part of what makes such a gathering a community of practice is that it is also characterized by a particular type of learning, where "the collective

²² Schor, *Plenitude*, 115–23.

²³ See, for instance, Mark Hatch, *The Maker Movement Manifesto: Rules for Innovation in the New World of Crafters, Hackers, and Tinkerers* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013). Another articulate if perhaps overly optimistic enthusiast of the movement is Chris Anderson, *Makers: The New Industrial Revolution* (Crown Business, 2014). Anderson especially thinks that the technology that is emerging will give significant economic power to makers, so that small-scale manufacturing is less cost-prohibitive and will aggregate significantly.

²⁴ Schor, *Plenitude*, 119.

²⁵ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning : Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

²⁶ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 1st pbk. ed. (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

learning involved in thriving as a community leads to practices that enhance the members' identities and further the group's goals."²⁷ Effective CoPs depend on the encounter with others who help shape identity and practice.

Given the origin of the concept of CoPs in the field of business management, it is easy to consider its applicability to a division of a company, or to a project team in a workplace. Often, where people are placed into a group, and management has the goal of forming them into an efficient and effective community of practice that passes on learning while incorporating new members. Regan thinks more broadly about CoPs, including those that are more voluntary, such as in religious organizations. Communities of practice, she contends, should not just be places of learning in business or schools. She brings CoPs into the realm of religious education, arguing that religious educators should intentionally create and shape CoPs as loci of faith formation.²⁸ Extending her logic, here I argue that communities of practice have the potential to be effective places of learning for the humanizing of consumer culture because they are places where identity as producers can foster greater appreciation of the self, of others, and of the material world. In particular, I turn to communities that foster identities of persons as producers in relationship. I call these CoPs "communities of productive practice."

In exploring this notion of communities of productive practice and the role they play in shaping identity and encounter, I turn for illustration to Bikes for Change (BfC).²⁹ Bikes for Change is a community-based organization in a northeastern city of the United States. Their programs include working with local youth to repair bicycles and to encourage habitual safe cycling. Some graduates of the program continue their affiliation with the organization and become instructors in the program. BfC is located in an area of the city that exhibits diversity of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Its youth programs are especially designed to be accessible to youth of families with limited incomes; the program fees are fairly minimal, and even those are charged on a sliding scale. I had the opportunity to observe the program on multiple occasions and also to interview four young adults who had participated in the program as youth and then gone on to work for BfC in various capacities. The program is precisely what I would call a community of productive practice. Though it has no religious identity, it can offer us insights into the value of such communities for religious education.

Communities of Productive Practice Enhancing Identity and Encounter With the World

I argue that including practices of production as part of a CoP's shared enterprise tends to help people better flourish in alternatives to consumerism in at least two ways. First of all, it tends to foster what Schor calls "true materialism." By this term she means that we value our material world, our material items, in a way commensurate with the human and natural costs of their production. When we do so, she suggests, we are more likely to think differently and to change our consumer behaviors to become more conscious consumers as well as producers. For example, she suggests that we will prize better-made, longer-lasting goods than we currently do in our throwaway society.

Philosopher Matthew Crawford, reflecting on trading in his academic for the opportunity to open a motorcycle repair shop, contrasts consumerist materialism with the materialism fostered by practices of production and repair. The experience of repair, he says, "chastens the

²⁷ Jane E. Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Transforming the Parish through Communities of Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 30.

²⁸ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*.

²⁹ Both the name of the organization and the names of any participants mentioned here have been altered.

easy fantasy of mastery" that permeates a culture of consumption. The repairer has to "notice things" for what they are, get into the reality of the material world.³⁰

The second way in which the inclusion of practices of production in CoPs tends to foster alternatives to consumerism is tied to the development of identity. The more of our identities in a CoP evolve around ourselves as producers and makers, the less we depend on displays of what we consume to give ourselves souls. Granted, we are all complex persons, with multiple aspects to our identities, aspects that are not always perfectly integrated. There is less room for the narrow aspects of the consumer self, however, if the producing self is prominent. Moreover, I contend here that part of the goal of educating for encounter and identity is to lay bare for the learner any dis-integration of the producing and consuming self, to provoke in the learner a subjective sense of disequilibrium that brings this mismatch into consciousness and forces change and integration.

My experience with the producers at Bikes for Change suggests that Schor is right about this tendency towards true materialism. At the time I interviewed nineteen-year-old Daniel, even though he was a BfC bike shop employee, his personal bike was not currently in functional condition, and was going to require some significant work to get it running well. His intention to rebuild it was a matter of aesthetics, a sense of ownership, and an appreciation for the material reality of the bike. He said, "I mean, I would modify it, to improve it, but, I don't know, it's just like that bike, it's just like, I've had it for so long and I love the way it is and how it rides and stuff. . . . But it's just, I love the bike so much, I don't want to just let it go to waste and let it break down. I just want to keep it for as long as possible. And I built it." Repair and restoration are symptoms of his "true materialism."

My experience at BfC also points towards the developing sense of identity as a producer leaving less space for, or at least changing one's sense of, an identity as a consumer. For instance, when I asked interview subjects about their purchasing behaviors, they very rarely mentioned specific brands. The exception that stood out was in conversation with Daniel, who claimed not to spend much on sneakers, but whom I had observed on an earlier occasion tying plastic bags around his shoes before bringing students outside to play a game. Reminded of the incident, he smiled. "Yeah, those were my Ewings."³¹ When he mentioned other specific brands, however, he did not seem to be tying his identity to the "soul" of the brand. An aspiring car mechanic, he lauded Hondas for their reliability.

By and large, when the BfC subjects got specific about preferences, it was about styles, not brands. Deron, nineteen, mentioned that he likes to travel outside of the city, to the area near his mother's workplace, because he could find there styles different from what he perceives that every store close to him sells. He wanted something different from what everyone else was wearing. Daniel similarly emphasized a desire to distinguish himself a little bit, not through brands, but with the pastiche of styles that allowed him to carve out an individual space. There is a certain level of independence from the consumer culture here in that these young adults seem not to be tightly tied to the hegemony of brands that so much of the literature emphasizes.³²

³⁰ Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 17.

³¹ The Nike-branded signature model of former basketball star Patrick Ewing.

³² See for instance Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, 10th Anniversary ed. (New York: Picador, 2009). Other works that note the prevalence of brand strategies as central to marketing include Gene Delvecchio, *Creating Ever-Cool: A Marketer's Guide to a Kid's Heart* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publ. Co., 2002). See also Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith*. Adriana Barbaro and Jeremy Earp, *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood*, DVD (Northampton,

A particularly notable aspect of the limited influence of brands on consumer preferences and identity came when I spoke to subjects about their bicycles. (Most had multiple bicycles that they had earned from the shop with volunteer credit hours and had repaired themselves.) Expecting them to talk about the brands and models of the bike frames and perhaps components, it was I who brought up the subject. Daniel spent several minutes trying to remember the brand of his bicycle. Sheila, twenty-four years old and a long-time participant in BfC as a community of productive practice, rolled her eyes when, as she described the Campagnolo components she had installed on her commuting bike, I "oohed" in approval. "Listen to you, you're, like, ooh, Campy and whatever." Deron was able to identify the brands when pressed, but was much more interested in describing the styles, and Malik, also nineteen, more or less dismissed the subject entirely. The brand preferences, and the assumption that they were meaningful, either in terms of quality or signaling as a consumer, were mostly my own projections.

The Church Offering a Place for Practice

Given the potential for communities of productive practice to enhance members' identity as producers and to foster a healthy "true" materialism, these communities can be tools for promoting human flourishing in defiance of, or as an escape from, a culture of consumption. Given that the Church's mission includes cultural transformation in support of human flourishing, then the Church ought to be finding venues in which to promote such communities. Here I propose considering one in particular: institutions of higher education.

I offer just one quick example here, with the hope that student life professionals look to their own contexts and knowledge for ways to utilize communities of productive practice creatively and effectively. Many universities have outdoors clubs that sponsor outings and that have sports equipment that members can borrow or rent. When the gear wears out, club dues and university funding are used to replace it. Some universities even have employees in charge of the gear and of organizing trips. Consider, however, how powerful might be the experience of members of such outdoors clubs also involving themselves in the practices of caring for, repairing, or even of making some of their equipment. In addition to learning practical skills, such students develop their identities as producers, appreciate the materiality of the equipment they use, and are further in touch with the way in which the sharing of such resources makes those resources more abundantly available than if each participant needed to purchase his or her own.

Granted, not all equipment is equally amenable to this sort of treatment, and, because safety matters, any repairs must be taught and supervised by qualified and experienced leaders. Participants can be taught to care for climbing ropes, but certainly not to repair them. Participants can patch a hole in an air-filled foam camping mattress or re-seal the seams of the rain fly of a tent used for a weekend backpack trip, but probably should not be re-sewing seams on a four-season tent destined for a winter trip up Mt. Washington. Still, from re-stringing tennis rackets to fixing chains on bicycles, there are plenty of ways in which such clubs can become CoPs that promote practices of true materialism. While students in engineering programs may be more attuned to their productive selves, such an identity, and the true materialism it tends to foster, ought to be part of the broader mission of education in the Church and throughout her institutions of higher learning.

MA: Media Education Foundation, 2008) focus on the brand affiliation as central to marketing strategies to children with an aim of creating lifelong brand loyalists.

The university can play the role of providing the logistics to let these communities of productive practice function -- space to meet and work, relationships with community agencies engaged in production, and transportation for students who might otherwise be stranded on campus, for example. The other crucial resource that universities must provide, though, is the psychic space, the time, and the prompts to reflect imaginatively on these experiences. When students must reflect on the way in which experiences confront their "basic assumptions about the world," then their complacency about their assumptions is shaken.³³ Otherwise, the unreflective encounter with new experiences merely reinforces old ways of knowing and seeing the world.³⁴ Scholars of higher education Adrianna Kezar and Robert Rhoads emphasize that experiential learning is most effective when it is not siloed as one part of the university. It should involve a shared commitment among academic, administrative, and student life professionals.³⁵

Of course, communities of productive practice ought to be used well beyond the walls of higher education. In parishes and in partnership with others in the broader community, the Church can creatively and fruitfully foster such CoPs. In finding ways to bring people into encounter with each other that allows them to develop their own identities as producers and to engage afresh with the material world. In so doing, and in helping people to reflect on themselves as producers in the material world, the Church operationalizes an anthropology that encourages human flourishing in a culture of consumption that too often curtails it.

³³ Adrianna Kezar and Robert A. Rhoads, "The Dynamic Tensions of Service Learning in Higher Education," *The Journal of Higher Education* 72, no. 2 (March 1, 2001): 148–71, doi:10.1080/00221546.2001.11778876.

³⁴ I think here of Upton Sinclair's "Travel is So Broadening." His Babbitt character repeats the maxim of the title, but his own recounting of his travels display an ignorance and lack of reflection that render his travels merely the occasion of reinforcing his own old biases. Sinclair Lewis, *The Man Who Knew Coolidge: Being the Soul of Lowell Schmaltz, Constructive and Nordic Citizen* (Harcourt, Brace, 1928).

³⁵ Kezar and Rhoads, "The Dynamic Tensions of Service Learning in Higher Education," 155.

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The Thinker & The Guide: A Portrait of Religious Disaffiliation

Abstract

For a denomination that is canonically is difficult to leave, many American Catholics are migrating beyond the institution's immediate influence.¹ These new religious patterns represent a somewhat cohesive movement influencing not just Catholicism, but the whole of American religion. People flow more freely through what was once a boundary distinguishing who is religious and who is not. This paper explores this phenomenon in and through the portrait of one religious educator and his disaffiliating student.

Introduction:

Religion in the United States today includes a growing number of people disaffiliating from institutional communities. American Catholicism has experienced the "greatest net losses as a result of affiliation changes" (Pew 2017).² For a denomination canonically difficult to leave, many American Catholics are migrating beyond the institution's immediate influence.³ These new religious patterns represent a somewhat cohesive movement influencing not just Catholicism, but the whole of American religion. People flow more freely through what was once a boundary distinguishing who is religious and who is not.

This paper explores this phenomenon in and through the portrait of one religious educator and his disaffiliating student. This essay introduces the methodology of portraiture, puts the portrait in context, and concludes by suggesting questions for further study.

The Methodology

Portraiture offers disciplines interested in disaffiliation a compelling blend of analysis and aesthetics to answer the questions: What is happening here? What is working? And why? (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 2002, 142). The researcher who asks these questions first will experience a very different reality than one "who is on a mission to discover the source of failure" (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, 9). This

¹ Disaffiliating Catholics now make up 10.1% of the overall adult population. If these "former," "lapsed" or "non-practicing" Catholics, as they are often pejoratively described, were seen as a religious denomination, they would be the third-largest religious group in America (Pew 2014).

² 52% of all adults who were raised Catholic have left the church at some point in their lives. Roughly the same amount of United States residents identify as Catholic today as in the 1970s, but the effects of migration obscure the larger trend of movement out from standard affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church in the United States (Murphy 2015).

³ Disaffiliating Catholics now make up 10.1% of the overall adult population. If these "former," "lapsed" or "non-practicing" Catholics, as they are often pejoratively described, were seen as a religious denomination, they would be the third-largest religious group in America (Pew 2014).

study proceeded with the assumption that positive religious educational encounters that result in disaffiliation could be found, and could be learned from.

Over the course of four months, I interviewed and observed Catholic high school teachers and their disaffiliating former students. The research included a group interview to shed light on these two perspectives, educators on the one hand and learners on the other, and to reveal the lived religious praxis being constructed in these teaching-learning relationships. These perspectives provide insight on an under-represented experience in religious educational research. The portrait presented does not reduce the complexity of disaffiliation but hopefully makes that complexity more comprehensible (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 2002, 215).

Framing the Portrait

Charles Taylor argues post- foundationalism has generated an explosion of “third ways” between orthodoxy and atheism (Taylor 2007, 302). Wade Clark Roof suggests a “Great Spiritual Divide” has grown due to the variety of options (Roof 1994, 122). While two poles might exist at the extremes, most people occupy the space in between and come into regular contact and shape religiousness as an ongoing choice (Drescher 2016, 11). In this context, the number of those who check the box “None” when asked their religion is increasing. Nearly one-in-five American adults (18%) were raised in a religion before disaffiliating from it, compared with just 4% who have moved in the other direction (Liu 2012).⁴

Elizabeth Drescher suggests a provocative pairing to this phenomenon. She intends the term “Somes” to describe the religiously affiliated, but the language, and her findings imply that Nones and Somes are not opposites. “Somes” are not “Tons” or “Totally Ins,” so to speak. They have some religion, and some other stuff too. Drescher paints a poignant image of this shared quality: half empty church parking lots on Sunday mornings in America as both religiously affiliated and disaffiliating persons drive by on their way to hiking, surfing, dog parks, and brunch to enjoy intimacy with friends and/or the natural world (2016, 247).⁵ The once consequential boundaries of adherence and single religious identity have become porous to create a space where bodies move and mix. Inter-faith families⁶ represent one example of the pluralism-plus that increases the

⁴ In other words, for every person who has converted, more than four people have “de-converted” and joined the ranks of the religious Nones. See Nagle 2017 for a discussion on deconversion. It is significant for this study to note that research suggests very few Nones just drift away. One particular example comes from an “exit interview” survey of nearly 300 “lapsed” Catholics in Trenton, NJ in 2011. Byron and Zech’s demonstrated that an overwhelming number of their respondents shared they had left the Church, but a quarter still considered themselves Catholic. They cited the failure of the institution as their reason for leaving the Church but not the tradition (2011).

⁵ Tom Beaudoin argues that affiliated religious identities (Somes) are no less dynamic and complex than their disaffiliating counterparts. Moreover, affiliated religiousness appears to “harbor elements of disaffiliation, and vice versa.” I am grateful to Dr. Beaudoin for the many conversations and support regarding this work. The quotes given in this footnote reflect his response to Elizabeth Drescher’s lecture presented at Fordham University in 2016.

⁶ In her book, *Being Both*, Susan Katz-Miller presents a “kaleidoscope” of complex patterns of heritage and practices that in-form the lives of some families. The idea of being both presents a challenge to notions of

viability of believing and practicing otherwise.⁷ As persons meet and mingle, things get remixed.

Scholars define remix as a contemporary practice enabled by the increased exposure to ever-expanding sources of cultural content (Eduardo, Gallagher and Burrough 2017, 8). Despite understandable resistance to this practice, what seems clear to scholars is that in the twenty-first century, all interpretation of cultural forms will have to engage with questions of remix (Eduardo, Gallagher, Burrough 2017).⁸ The following portrait suggests the same.

An Initial Sketch

When I met with Elliot Chance, 56 years old, and Michael Keene, 32 years old, I had already spoken with them individually on a number of occasions.⁹ I was curious how the pair would discuss the potentially uncomfortable topic of disaffiliation that developed since their time together as teacher and student. On the first summer-like day in the heart of New York City, Eliot and Michael sat down with me to talk about the experience they shared.

The elder Chance grew up in what he described as a typical Catholic family of his generation. An alumnus himself of an all-boys Catholic high school in the area, Eliot earned advanced degrees in theology and explored a vocation as a priest. He has taught religion in Catholic high schools for thirty years. The younger Keene also spoke positively of his Catholic childhood and his “Catholicness.” Michael works in a consulting firm, and lives with his fiancé. He does not attend Mass regularly. Michael and his fiancé are not planning a Catholic wedding. That said, Michael does not believe he has “left” the Catholic tradition. Michael concedes he does not have “a good label” for who he is religiously.

Knowing these details, the two appeared an unlikely pair – even more so sitting by side. Over six feet tall with a baritone voice, Chance commands attention. Michael is short and softer spoken. The surface differences, including their religious affiliation, obscure the more intangible elements that make up these two men. What they shared in

exclusive religious identity, but also offers a helpful new view in a world where interfaith friendship, love, and marriage is an increasingly common and inevitable reality (2013, ix).

⁷ The vastly expanded contemporary social media also provides immediate and relational access to diverse details of everyday religious life, and the people living it. Drescher suggests technology in particular undermines the structural expectation of affiliation. The logic of digitally integrated social practices encourage self-representation in which affiliational commitments are muted. The expression of religious and spiritual perspectives signal a lack of institutional, doctrinal rigidity (Drescher 2016, 11, 62).

⁸ In his book, *Virtual Faith*, Tom Beaudoin explains this tendency of contemporary culture to reshuffle the fragments of pre-existent traits to solve the religious dilemma of their age with the term “bricolage.” Religions have become symbolic “tool-boxes” from which men and women today draw freely, without necessarily identifying themselves with the bounded institution the symbol came from (Beaudoin 2000, 148).

⁹ I have given each of the research participants pseudonyms to keep their identities confidential in compliance with Fordham University’s Internal Review Board. All the proper names of places and people given during their interviews have similarly been changed. All interviews and observations were conducted in New York City April – June 2017.

common quickly became apparent and brought into focus what I had learned about Eliot as an educator and Michael as a learner. They both like to talk about things that matter. As we sat down together, there was an immediate and easy inter-generational banter between like-minded men.

Meeting Eliot Chance

Chance was interested in the research from our first phone call. We agreed to meet at the New York Public Library. The clarity with which Chance responded during our conversations about his hopes for his students, the realities of teaching religion, and his own formative experiences that contributed to his theology and practice struck me immediately. The stories Eliot shared provide insight into the connection between the religious person and the religious educator. Eliot possesses a disarming swagger that can only be characterized as that of a man with a secret he is completely willing to share.

In our first interview, Chance quoted a mentor and described his own *je ne sais quoi* indirectly: “If you want someone to give up their life for this thing you call your religion, I better see a hell of a lot of joy in your face, not the sourpuss’.... Joy may be too strong a word on most days, but I try to live that. It provides me meaning.” Eliot presents Catholic tradition in a persuasive way that only authenticity can produce. Chance is, for lack of any better descriptor, “evangelical” in the best sense of that term. He has *evangelion* - “good to be made known.”¹⁰

“The Church As it is” – A Critical Appraisal of the Institution

Chance does not shy away from sharing the reality that religious life is complex and imperfect. Eliot shared core experiences that influenced his strong connection to the Church, including lessons of the Church’s flaws. As a student, Eliot thrived in his theology classes. He expressed gratitude for his religion teachers’ openness. How the Brothers treated Chance, not just what they taught him, made them some of his most significant teachers. However, a number of those Brothers, including the principal and vice-principal, left the school and their order during Eliot’s first year in high school. They left and married their secretaries. Chance recalled that watching them leave their vows was traumatic, but added he has met some of them over the years. “They are wonderful!... They’re not traitors.”

Chance explained that during that time he recognized the Church for what it was - not eternal and unchanging, but human and limited. Chance suggested this humility is part of growing up. This and other experiences also taught young Eliot that the Church’s limitations are not deal breakers. This theme of maturity and openness continues to guide his teaching.

“When in Doubt, I Lean Toward Being Open. Absolutely” – A Practical Theology

As an educator myself, I believe the physical space you teach in is significant. My own classrooms have always reflected my approach to religion so that even if a student

¹⁰ Before the Greek word *evangelion* became synonymous with the Christian Gospels, it was used to more broadly describe good news and tidings to be shared. Tom Beaudoin uses the helpful translation “good to be made known” in his courses on Evangelization, Faith, and Culture at Fordham University.

did not listen to a thing I taught, but just stared at the walls for a period, there was a narrative they could not help but absorb and remember. When I walked into Eliot's classroom, I smiled, and began staring at the walls.

Chance's classroom seems equal parts chapel and man-cave. The room is small and there is little empty space on the walls. They are covered with Da Vinci sketches, religious icons, and photographs of Cathedrals, along with framed posters of Jerry Garcia, The Beatles, and significant sport pages from Met's History. A large banner centrally located on the far wall dominates and organizes the assemblage. What the attention-deficient student in his classes walks away with, at the very least, is religion = "Finding God In All [*these*] Things."

Talking about his goals as an educator, Chance shared, My hopes for my students during and after my classes are that they see that religion is relevant to their lives and to the questions that every life ought to engender, and that despite some of the mistakes the Church has made historically, there's still a treasure chest of wisdom that I think includes the best of the human tradition, philosophy and the arts and the like.

In order to reframe religious questions for an audience that thinks they have heard it all before, Chance takes his students to the boiler room the first day of class. In the dark and unfamiliar room, he has them imagine they are being brought into existence and this is their reality. "What questions do you want to ask?" When his students suggest "Where are we? What is this stuff around us? What are we supposed to do here?" Chance explains:

These are the great questions for any human being to address at the core of his or her being, and at the core of religion. Religion is one of the ways humanity has set out to respond to the questions that life ought to engender with doctrine, ritual and symbol. Let's go back to the classroom and with that in mind. I want you to spend the year thinking about how adequate the responses we're going to study are. I want you to always feel free to raise your hand and say this either doesn't make sense or I think you're trying to ram some BS down our throats.

Chance explained, for him, if religious education is not a conversation where he is meeting his students where they are "then it's a colossal waste of time for both of us."

In addition to this surprising classroom and style, Chance shared his own children, age 25 and 23, have an ambiguous relationship with Catholicism. I explained awkwardly in the form of a question the reason for my surprise. "If *your* kids are disaffiliating, what do you think that means?" Chance smiled accepting the implied compliment and responded with clarity that indicated this was not the first time he had wrestled with the question.

I don't know if it's rationalization, but this is between them, God and the Holy Spirit. I've just got to be a role model...I've been humbled by how little I have

known that's turned out to be true in my life, and even more humbled by what I thought was absolutely true in my life and has turned out not to be. That openness, I think...comes from when I see Jesus in the scriptures, and experience Him in the Mass. That is the God I resonate with. That it is ok. He says, "I want you to work your ass off, and I want you to be humble, but I want you to have a sense of humor, and I want you to care about every single person that's in need because everyone is an instance of my son or my daughter. Some days that's easier than others...but when in doubt, I lean towards being open. Absolutely.

Chance learned this humility both in and out of the classroom.

"Being Right vs. Being Good" – A Formative Experience

Eliot Chance's life provides a rich template that informs his practice as a religious educator. Humility and theological reflection emerged as a consistent theme. Though Eliot told this next piece of his story without a smile, the tale is not dark. Chance shared that around the age of eight, he began to notice his father came home "a little out of focus."

I can still hear it, the pop of a Schmidt's beer bottle. Whether it was 11am or 12am, that just marked that it was going to be a different day. So I would make myself scarce... He never laid a hand on us, never got fired, but just that change, it was not desirable for anybody...

Eliot has given retreat talks about being the child of an alcoholic and shares it in his classes when teaching the Paschal Mystery. Eliot often framed the value he places on religious life and learning in terms of getting through the, "Crap storms that are sure to come, if they haven't already, and will come again and again." He explained in one interview, "I tell my students you will suffer like everyone else. You may even suffer for taking a stand for justice...but do you believe that through Good Friday there is an Easter Sunday coming after? If the answer is yes, and there is a community to share that grief with in dialogue with tradition, you can receive graces that you otherwise would not receive through suffering." This faith was tested early on in Eliot's life.

Chance's parents separated due to the pain his father caused. Eliot recalled noticing a lump on the side of his father's neck while visiting him. "Long story short, oncologist, lymphoma, radiation, and then they finally called us in and said, 'There is nothing we can do. So it's time to prepare.'" Chance shared the life changing way his mother helped him and his family prepare:

My mother called my brother and sister and I into the living room and said, "We're going to bring your dad home." We set up a hospital bed in my bedroom on the first floor. I slept on the couch and took care of him for two months... He was sober the whole time... Those were the best two months that I can remember... For my mom to be able to want to do that, to bring him home, that is the most formative experience of my life... She taught me an important distinction, one that I wish more people understood: There is a difference between being right and

being good. It's important to know what the right thing to do is, but there's sometimes a higher calling in a situation.

Eliot Chance teaches with this level of gravitas. He embodies the teaching that hangs centrally located in his classroom. One of the reasons Chance hoped Michael would choose to participate in the study was that he thought he was one of the few students in his long career that had understood what he does in the classroom.

Meeting Michael Keene

Even after hearing Eliot's memories of him, as the product of public schools, I must admit I had some preconceived notions of an east coast prep school graduate. Michael Keene quickly dismantled my pre-judgments. Keene was responsive in making time to speak with me despite what was clearly a busy period between work and wedding planning. We met in the middle of the business day in midtown Manhattan. Michael arrived early and politely would not let me buy him a cup of coffee. And before I realized it, he had paid for my bottle of water.

Keene looks a young 32 years old. He wears glasses, and his hair cropped short. Michael was well dressed in a suit and tie. What struck me meeting Keene was what I experienced as a dissonance between the suit and the man I was speaking with. I also work in midtown Manhattan. In that context one is not accustomed to the patience Michael communicates with. We both leaned into an engaging exchange concerning his religious life and learning.

I was curious about Michael's upcoming wedding and wondered whether he and his fiancé's choice to not have a Catholic wedding was hard for his family. Michael explained he had not felt any judgment from his family, but added that he thought Mr. Chance might have an opinion about it. (Eliot had in fact mentioned it with concern). Michael explained his view:

I thought about it, I made a decision, and I am ok with it... The religiosity of [our wedding] does not come from being in a church necessarily or needs to be provided by a priest. I think it's about the event itself... Instead of the religious quality being given to the event externally; it is coming from a more internal expression of us... I am not going to get married by someone I don't have a relationship with. We are both not church-goers, so we will have someone who knows us well and have a thoughtful ceremony that means something to us. That seems more appropriate, but you are going against tradition.

Despite how it might sound, tradition matters to Michael.

“Proudly Catholic” – A Disaffiliating Identity

Michael explained in our first interview that he identifies proudly as a Catholic, but “Catholic sociologically.” I followed up to clarify this distinction. I was curious how he understood the difference between being Catholic sociologically, religiously, and spiritually. Michael explained that, to him, “religiously” meant the “going to church.”

Being “spiritually Catholic” included Catholic belief and theology. Identifying as “Catholic sociologically” meant the cultural context that continues to shape him. When I asked what was keeping a sociological Catholic from joining the community, Michael laughed at the irony and replied:

The reason that I don't go to church is that as much as it's been a habit to go, it's become a habit to not go ...Although I don't go to church anymore, I love the Tridium...I really love Good Friday, Holy Thursday, the whole Tridium. To me, it's what all the rest of Catholic ritual is based upon.... I find the historical progression of the Pagan religions, into the early church, and Muslim influences fascinating. I feel the Catholic Mass captures a lot of the collision of those traditions ...When I go to Mass, that's what I think about...I learned that in Mr. Chance's class...The Church was not stamped out as one thing.... I don't go anymore because I have lots of frustrations with the Church: It's resistance to move forward and all the obvious abuses.

Michael repeated that while he has developed a new habit of not going to church, he has not “departed” his relationship with God. He discussed an expansive theology learned from exposure to diverse points of view, including those presented in formal religious education. “My mindset is not exclusive,” he asserted. “I don't feel like I have left anything because there's nothing to leave from. It [Catholicism] is a relationship with God. It is not ‘we are in this box, and you're not.’ We are all together and the boxes don't matter in the end.”

“Which Side I Sit On” – Religious Learning in the Presence of Other

Michael shared that as a child although he did not understand the difference, he was aware difference existed. There was a synagogue a few blocks from his home; His uncle was Jewish; And one of his aunts had converted to an Evangelical Christianity. In high school, Keene began to learn what it meant to be Catholic or not. Rather than narrowing his notion of religiousness, Michael explained his education prepared him for when he would encounter religious others. His teacher revealed to him that other religions not only existed but also had always been mixing with each other throughout history. This level of honesty spoke to Michael.

The class was taught by someone who was in the middle of this struggle trying to help us make sense of what appears to be a bit of nonsense. What we're supposed to believe is a little nonsensical in a lot of ways. So how do you handle that? How have people for the past 2000 years handled that? It was a practical approach to history. What does it all mean? What do the sacraments mean in relation to life? What are they telling you? Why are they important?

Michael learned to ask the questions “any life ought to engender.”

The year Michael spent in Eliot's class was significant in light of this struggle. It was 2011 in New York City. In addition to the collective trauma of September 11th, two

of Michael's classmates committed suicide. Chance described those months after 9/11 as a series of challenging moments where he hoped to "adjust [his students'] image of God in a way that would serve them well for the rest of their lives." It was in that class that Michael was shown how to reflect on his life. His motivation, Eliot observed, was not academic but the desire for an encounter with the material, and the theological reflection being demonstrated. Keene confirmed his education prepared him for the next steps in his adult religious life.

After graduation, Keene attended college where he met Evangelicals, Atheists, and encountered a conventional contrast to the "sense of tradition"¹¹ he had learned. Keene explained this encounter was thought provoking.

I wondered what being Catholic meant exactly? There is so much dogma in the Catholic tradition and so much precedent that if you were to be a strict catholic, your life would be pretty constrained. The way we each have gotten around that is that we each kind of have our own belief system. Right? That's how it really plays out... Strict adherence was not something I had ever experienced as being Catholic... That wasn't the religious curriculum I learned in high school. My grade school was like that, but I didn't put much credence in that kind of conventional religion... I learned a very broad thought process and a very deep philosophical tradition.

After graduation, Michael chose to live in the Holy Land because "he wanted to better understand the religious conflict." Michael worked for a small Christian international development company and lived with a Palestinian family. The experience was transformative. Michael searched for appropriate language to explain it.

Maybe it was a religious experience, but not in a religious way... There were months of having nothing to do but think, write, and try to understand what was going on. There was a lot of time for reflection... I don't know how to describe it, but it felt like being at the center of something... A lot of my thinking on the social construction of religions started when I was in the Holy Land. You can't help but think that a lot of people thinking about the same thing in just slightly different ways have been killed over that difference ... I think I learned a lot about myself and my approach to things. When I was in the Holy Land, I feel like *I* defined who I was. What made *me* tick and who I was as an adult. I don't think I knew that at the time, but I left there with something fundamental. It was growing up, I guess. That was the internal take-away. Externally I learned you can't always take for granted how religious things are presented.

Persistent Tradition: The Religiousness That Remains

Michael shared one feature of contemporary culture influencing him and others like him: Whether it is craft beer or artisan shaving instruments, those who can afford to

¹¹ David Hansen uses this language to distinguish between "traditionalism" and a more living and evolving "sense of tradition" (2017). In my own work, as it emerged in the language of my research participants, I used the language of convention vs. a sense of tradition to identify a similar felt distinction.

think in those terms have a desire for design thinking.¹² Michael compared this to disaffiliation. “You’ve been exposed to a broad range of ideas, philosophies, religions, cultures, you can’t help but select the things you like and not the things you don’t.” Michael has mixed feelings about this practice but believes it fits contemporary experience.

Within this tension, Michael chooses significant elements of Catholicism to design this life. He still prays. “My prayer is reflection and the repetition of prayers that I’ve been saying forever. My prayer is a discourse with God.” His sense of tradition is also expressed in more innovative ways. His affinity for ritual shows up in the kitchen, garden, and more. Michael and his fiancé do not attend church, but have initiated a new meaningful ritual. They cook soup together on Sundays.

We decided to stop doing anything after a certain time and just hang out together... It became a thing we do... It’s not explicitly religious... It’s just this event to be together, the soup takes a while to make, and the smell of the soup rises up like an offering, like it says in Hebrew Scriptures... It’s not a date night. There is no pressure to find a place to go. It is a let’s have a glass of wine and just hang at home with no agenda. We fold laundry. I’ll call my folks. She’ll call hers... It has become a ritual... That is probably why we do it. And that’s why church is church.

This consistent embodiment of a complex but coherent religious life represents what Michael and his fiancé do want to share as they start a family.

I guess my feelings about going to church could change with children. I don’t know how much it would... Going to church as a habit is not there anymore. But the relationship has remained. I would like to pass that on to our children. When I was growing up, my mother would pray with me. Then we’d just talk. Prayer at home always included open discussion... That is one beautiful thing about church, I think. You share something. That is the point of the conversation. And it is also the point that you are supposed to come to your own understanding... I think that experience would be nice to share with children.

Michael admitted that planning the next phase of his life has reminded him of what prepared him to take these steps. He particularly identified the inclusion of non-religious concepts into this practice of discernment of God in all things. Michael explained that his religious education taught him to be comfortable “going outside of religion to find religious answers... or even going outside of being Catholic to find spiritual answers.” Keene shared, “My teachers never actually said that, but it is something I learned from them.” I shared with Michael that his comments were striking because Eliot Chance had said something very similar.

Michael: That’s funny because he probably never said it that way in class, ever, but I heard it. I guess that’s the point

¹² Design thinking is an engineering methodology to find desirable solutions in an action oriented way to create a preferred future. The process involves iterative prototyping and evaluation (Roth 2015).

(laughing) That's very interesting.

Interviewer: Indeed, It is.

Final Portrait: “Put it in the Win Column”

Before Eliot Chance and Michael Keene met with me to discuss the experience they shared from their different perspectives, Eliot said he often wished to be able to meet former students as part of a reunion weekend to listen to where they were and “hit them with a couple more lessons.” Sitting in Bryant Park, on his school’s reunion weekend, Eliot had something like that opportunity. As the three of us spoke, Chance described the younger man across from him as a disciplined student who integrated perspectives and practices from any tradition if he could see their value and relevance. “So, it was on me to communicate tradition in a compelling manner.” If Chance felt it was up to him to guide Michael through a broad and applicable meaning of Church history in compelling manner, he did so. Keene’s appreciation of tradition and ritual is a testament to this. But, in many ways, it was a collaborative educational encounter.

Eliot shared with Michael that his typical evaluation of a student included initially determining what it was that a particular learner needed to grow. Eliot shared to Michael he felt he was able to, and ought to, relate to the young man as himself from the start. As an educator, I felt this was an integral piece of a very different type of teaching. What occurs in such a teaching and learning relationship is unpredictable and transformative for both subjects. Michael spoke of Eliot as a trusted guide because he taught from the authority of his own struggles. Michael felt his guide was preparing him for a similar struggle of his own.

Sarah Tauber suggests teachers-as-guide develop an awareness of what direction a learner needs to move in for growth to occur, cultivate a familiarity with the strengths and weaknesses of a learner, and ultimately trust the learner can complete the challenge ahead (Tauber 2015).¹³ This commitment to openness invites learners to pose questions and propose new perspectives. Chance shared, “I have a job to teach what the Church teaches. That said, I want to hear their reaction to that... That's the best part of the job, I could do something else if I weren't really interested in what they were thinking.”

Keene learned being religious was something that developed. Michael described his experience in Chance’s class as a time when he was building his own religious identity. Chance nodded often during this exchange and added that what Michael described “marks the difference between authentic religious education and education in some other Catholic schools where it pushes tradition into a student and expects the students to act like sponges and absorb it.” He explained when he was teaching Michael and his classmates, he wanted to know what these young men experienced and what gave them a sense of awe and wonder, and where they had suffered. Chance wanted to share

¹³ I am grateful for Dr. Tauber’s guidance myself during the portraiture process and in many conversations during the editing process.

how tradition may be able to speak to that. Tauber argues the effectiveness of this approach derives from when guides present a viewpoint, “they do so in a manner that encourages the learners to make their own decisions and informed choices” (Tauber 2015, 112). Doing so, the teaching-learning relationship involves shared deconstruction and reconstruction of existing views for the sake of something new. Chance invites his learners into this reflective and interpretive process relating tradition with their lives. If he did not, “It would be a colossal waste of time.”

Michael did not believe his religious education was a waste of time. Teachers like Chance taught him the depth and value of Catholic tradition. Teachers like Chance prepared him to be able to “have conversations like this,” Michael said with a smile - meaning the questions we were exploring together in this study.

To understand what I believe, regardless of whether it is line with Church dogma. My religious education got me ready for the next steps of learning in my life. Regardless where it took me, it got me ready for the context I live in and am comfortable with.

Despite his ambiguous relationship with the institutional Church, Keene characterizes his religious education as “successful and effective.” He did note the dissonance that may cause for some: “I don't think that Church leaders would say the same thing, but I would say it was successful. Absolutely.” Chance and I both exchanged glances during this conversation. Eliot knew the question would return to him. I had asked Eliot in an earlier conversation if affiliation is important to him as a result for his students. He hesitated and realized the tension that could surface, but admitted more quickly than I anticipated, “That's a good question. My gut is no, it's not.” He went on to qualify that response:

I believe that we're all on a quest to find that which will still the restlessness of our heart. I have found it for the most part, not completely, in the Catholic faith and being affiliated with the Church, but I recognize that most of the great saints have gone through times when they've struggled with the Church, or Church authority, or even Church teaching. So to wander away from it at some point for some length of time does not freak me out... I guess what would scare me more is a loss of that desire to find those meanings. I sometimes worry about the kids who are gung-ho affiliated. What are the reasons why they are, and how does that translate into the way they live their life and the way they live their marriage and their parenting and their relationships with others who don't share that experience? I'd probably have much more in common and have a few more laughs and sweet moments with somebody who's disaffiliated but searching than I would with somebody who's affiliated for the wrong reasons.

Eliot added that he has a real faith that in and through young people like Michael, and the Holy Spirit, the Church might be “laboring into a new era of understanding which may be more Christian when we come out on the other end.” That said, he is still concerned. “I teach this stuff because it has worked for me. I worry my kid's generation won't have a tradition to lean on.” Both his concern and faith exemplify the range and

depth that he draws from. Chance's deeply embedded value of "finding God in all things" appreciates this complexity and indicates Eliot's trust in the revelation that may be occurring outside his control. When I asked Chance if Michael's religious education had been successful, he and Michael smiled at each other— not an awkward I-cannot-tell-a-difficult-truth kind of smile. The shared moment fit the rest of the engaging and respectful conversation. With the smile still stretching across his face, Eliot nodded without hesitation and drew a sports metaphor that reminded me of his man-cave-chapel: "You gotta put this one in the win column."

Questions for Further Study

These two religious persons embody the promise and inspiring unpredictability of religious education. What Eliot and Michael share beneath differences of size and affiliation is an active religiousness. Eliot is the product of practical religious knowledge and invites learners to develop a similar *phronesis* through ongoing *praxis* (Miller-Mclemore 2014, 2). In many ways it was this reflective process modeled by Chance that prepared Michael to live the sense of tradition he learned in innovating ways. Michael's remix of Catholic tradition is nonetheless is an authentic expression of "Catholicness" worthy of research because it suggests a theological transformation at the level of lived religion¹⁴ This portrait offers access to the educational and theological intersection that R. Ruud Ganzevoort describes as the ongoing process and exchange with various sources, norms and traditions that "aims at a more profound and more adequate spiritual life" (Ganzevoort 2009). In the contemporary cultural circumstances, is the meaning of religious being obscured by the binary of affiliated or disaffiliated? What might be an alternative to affiliation?

In his book, *Experience and Nature*, John Dewey warns educators to distrust simplifications that make judgments easy. Instead, he encourages educators to discover and wrestle with the complexity of a thing (Bender 2010, 44). The disaffiliation "crisis," I suggest, is just this sort of thing. When the three of us stood to say our goodbyes, I walked away first and looked back to see Michael Keene and Eliot Chance had sat back down together to continue the conversation.

¹⁴ I use this term in the sense Maynard, Moschella, and Hummel deploy the term "The everyday practices through which character is formed, communities are strengthened or subverted, and religious meaning is made" (2011, 4).

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Encounter with Sewol: Madang as a Possibility of Interreligious Solidarity for Social Justice in South Korea

Abstract

This research begins with my own encounter with the tragic incident of Sewol Ferry in South Korea on April 16, 2014. It starts from the reaction during the Holy Week. Since this tragedy with more than 300 people – mostly teenagers – found dead or missing, the Lenten and Easter season became one of painful times for all people in life and faith. This research will examine how the churches responded to such collective “shipwreck” experience and how interreligious dialogue and action for social restoration began as a possibility of a redemptive community. And then it will discuss the concept of Madang and core principles of it as an alternative redemptive community in Korean context.

Shipwreck

Heesung, did you see the news?

It was Thursday morning, April 17, 2014 when I got a phone call from one of my Korean friends. It was during Holy Week and I was busy working in my church office for Easter Sunday and Children’s Egg Hunting. I did not have time to check the late news yet, so did not know what was going on around the world. During the season of Lent, I was rather devoted to meditating on Christ’s life and suffering, and preparing for Easter events.

Yesterday Sewol Ferry sailing to Jeju Island sank on their way. My heart breaks that most of them in the water were teenagers.

Yet, I did not realize how serious the situation was. I asked with no real interest or compassion, as if it was one of numerous incidents that could happen anywhere or anytime in the world.

So, are people rescuing the passengers? They must have!

I slowly realized the seriousness of the situation listening to my friend’s account and browsing internet news. My friend who was raising two little boys said in tears that her heart had

fallen as if her children had fallen into the water. Since then, my soul seems to have sunk into the water. Just like listening to the sounds in the water and trying to breathe forming bubbles, the shock of the incident revolved around my consciousness.

On Holy Friday, the cantata and worship was more serious than ever. The climax of the cantata, the scene of Jesus taking the cross to Golgotha and his last cry on it, saying “My God, my God, why have you left me?”¹ overlapped with the situation of people in Sewol under the water. After the worship, the senior pastor mentioned about the Sewol incident in Korea and requested intercessory prayer. His benediction included that Almighty God would rescue those young people as if God raised Jesus from death, so that everyone would witness the power of God and rejoice together in this season of Easter. We still had some hope until then.

Easter Sunday, the fourth day after the incident arrived. The critical time of the rescue already passed. Yet the ‘resurrection,’ which had so earnestly begged by so many people, did not happen. For Korean Christians, it was the first Easter Sunday without joy of Christ’s victorious resurrection. They felt perplexed between despair of death and little hope for life.

On April 16, 2014 in South Korea, Ferry Sewol with 476 passengers began their voyage to Jeju Island which was famous for tourism. Among 476 passengers, 325 were high school students from the same class of Dan Won High School in Ansan for their field trip and sightseeing. Before entering the last grade to take the college entrance exam, it is a tradition for Korean students taking a memorable field trip together.² Most of those students who joyfully departed from home could not come back to their parents. Except for the students who escaped nonetheless, most of students who followed the wrong announcement to sit still and wait for evacuation, eventually drown in the ferry.

The incident with great chances to minimize the damage if there was a quick rescue operation, became the unforgettable live broadcast of the process of their dying.³ The news related to Sewol were the first of daily newspapers and television and the desperate images of the parents who rushed to the closest port were reported in photographs and videos every day. Yet, without a clear explanation of the main cause of the accident, 304 people were reported dead or missing. It was the main reason that made people, including me, most frustrated. Before this sudden accident, people wanted to know ‘why.’ Even if you cannot reverse the accident, at least you want to know the exact cause and see a sincere response of the authority.

Since then, encountering the technical shipwreck of Sewol, all of the people in South Korea went through – is still going through – emotional and spiritual shipwreck collectively. The tragedy that could happen anybody in one’s own family, neighbors, community was broadcasted nationwide and all over the world. And the poor response of the government and personnel to cope with it has added to the anger of people’s sorrow. Deep sadness, anger, and helplessness swallowed them. Many people complained of emotional suffering. Some of the victims’ parents even committed suicide. In her book, *Big questions, Worthy Dreams*, with the dialogue with Richard Niebuhr, Sharon Daloz Parks discusses the meaning of shipwreck.

¹ Mark 15:34, Common English Bible.

² Su-Hyun Lee and Sang-hun Choe, “Students Among Hundreds Missing After South Korean Ferry Sinks,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/17/world/asia/south-korean-ferry-accident.html>.

³ Youngchul Kim, “세월호 이후(post-Sewol)의 교회를 생각한다: 교회는 큰 방주인가, 작은 구조선인가? [Reflection on the Church of Post-Sewol Era: Is the Church an Ark or a Small Salvage Boat?],” *남겨진 자들의 신학: 세월호의 기억과 분노 그리고 그 이후* [Theology of The Left: Memories of Sewol, Wrath and Beyond it], ed. The National Council of Churches in Korea: The Special Committee for Sewol Disaster (Seoul: Dongyeon, 2015), 161-173; Byungki Park, “‘세월호’의 윤리학과 불교의 역할[The Ethics on ‘Sewol Ferry’ and the Role of Buddhism],” *The Buddhist Review*, September 1, 2015, <http://www.budreview.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=1591>.

Metaphorical shipwreck may occur with the loss of a relationship, violence to one's property, collapse of a career venture, physical illness or injury, defeat of a cause, a fateful choice that irrevocably reorders one's life, betrayal by a community or government, or the discovery that an intellectual construct is inadequate. Sometimes we simply encounter someone or some new experience or idea that calls into question things as we have perceived them or as they were taught to us or as we had read, heard, or assumed. This kind of experience can suddenly rip into the fabric of life, or it may slowly yet just as surely unravel the meanings that have served as the home of the soul.⁴

Not only survivors and their families of Sewol incident, every Korean and Korea diaspora who had friends, relatives, or neighbors felt deep sorrow. And Christians were no exception here. In fact, the reality Korean Christians encountered in faith was even worse. The existing belief systems and theological interpretation could not explain what was happening in the season of Lent and Easter, like my own shock and struggle.

On that Easter morning, while children were busy finding Easter eggs in the courtyard, their mothers gathered talking to each other. It was not bright at all for the Easter talk, since it was all about the Sewol incident. One of mothers approached me and asked.

Pastor Heesung, did you see the news? What do you think? What should we do? How could God do such...?

Other than compassionately sharing the most current update with each other, I honestly could not answer to any of their questions. In fact, I wished so much I could have someone else to ask the same questions. "What is going on in this world? Why is this happening to us? How can we cope with it? How can we understand God in this? What can we pray and do?"

There were some churches visited the site or offered comforting messages to people who were feeling confused and despair. Although their actions cannot be regarded as impatient and wrong, the interpretation and response particularly from conservative theology, which occupies the majority of Korean Christianity, hurt the audience, especially to Sewol victims and survivors and arouse the questions of theodicy. Among some sermons followed right after the incident,⁵ for example, the sermon of Rev. Sam-hwan Kim, a lead pastor of Myung Sung Presbyterian Church, one of the largest churches in Korea, was criticized by the public. In his sermon on May 11, he said "God did not sink Sewol Ferry for no reason. God wanted to sink the entire country, Korea. But by sinking the students, those young people like flowers, God gave us another chance...to repent... and to make things right...."⁶

⁴ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 39.

⁵ A research led by Dr. Jung-Bae Lee discovered that only about 20 out of 1,500 churches mentioned about Sewol disaster during Easter service. Dong-Suk Kang, "'세월호 이후'의 한국교회는..."[Korean Churches after Sewol...], *The NewsnJoy*, July 21, 2017, <http://www.newsnjoy.or.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=212232>.

⁶ Mi-hyang Park, '명성교회 김삼환 목사, '세월호 참사' 설교 논란[Rev. Sam-Hwan Kim of Myungsung Church, His Controversial Sermon on Sewol Ferry Tragedy]', *The Hankyoreh*, May 29, 2014, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/639710.html#csidx1242af96f425d5bb4943a35bd366a9c; Do-hun Kim, '세월호 관련 명성교회 김삼환 목사 설교 논란[Rev. Sam-Hwan Kim's sermon on Sewol Ferry in controversy]', *Huffpost Korea*, May 29, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.kr/2014/05/28/story_n_5404486.html (translation mine); See also "한국교회 논란의설교 3 - 세월호 논란: 믿음의 3 요소, 김삼환 목사 설교[The Controversial Sermon #3 in Korea: The Three Factors of Faith by Rev. Sam-Hwan Kim, Myung Sung Church]", *Youtube*, December 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afbRVO229Cw>.

Was it indeed the work of God? Was it to warn people of their wrong doings and wrong beliefs? Does God give hardship only you can bear? Such messages and questions rather became a catalyst for existing members leaving the church. Fortunately, of course, not everyone interpreted the Sewol incident like Kim. As one of responses to Kim's message, Sung-hwi Ko, a New Testament scholar of Korean Anglican Church, criticized the disruption of the Christian moral consciousness, violent languages that isolates the church from social relations.⁷

I also argue that we cannot truly overcome this shipwreck without rebuilding this communal and educational space for solidarity with our neighbor. Therefore, my research began with the collective shipwreck experience leads to theological struggle after Sewol and pedagogical breakthrough for the church and the society. In the same regard with Ko about the social isolation of the Korea church and theology, I want to challenge the Korean church to recover social relationship with its neighbor beyond its comfort zone. And as a pedagogical methodology for the suggestion, I suggest the concept of *Madang*. The definition of *Madang* comes from architecture, referring to the communal space in traditional Korean houses, or a part or chapter of a performance that can happen in that space.⁸ In this personal and communal space, people share human life histories of joy and sorrow from birth to death with others.

The Crucified Christ: Toward the Post-Sewol Theology

Before we begin discussing the issue of community, we must first deal with the questions of theodicy caused by the Sewol incident. Many Korean theologians compared the experiences of Sewol and Auschwitz. Although it is not comparable on a scale basis, the emotional and theological impact of it is so for Koreans.⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, a prominent German Reformed theologian who went through the Nazi regime shares theological insights from his own experience.

...In what seemed like a miracle, I lived, and I still don't know today why I am not dead too, like my companions. In that hell I didn't ask: why does God let this happen? My question was: my God, where are you? Where is God? Is he far away from us, an absentee God in his own heaven? Or is he a sufferer among the sufferers? Does he share in our suffering?These questions bring us to the heart of the Christian faith: the message of the crucified Christ.¹⁰

For Moltmann, God is not the God of judgment that exists without emotion in the distant, but the one who has come to this earth with love and compassion, and is participating in human suffering. As he asserts, this crucified Christ, this suffering God is at the center of the Christian faith, unlike any other religions.¹¹ This God understands our complicated struggles and helps us

⁷ Sung-hwi Ko, "세월호 참사 2 주기에 즈음한 한국교회의 반성과 전망[The reflection and prospect of the Korean church in the second Memorial for Sewol Ferry]," The Presbyterian News, April 16, 2016, <http://www.pck-goodnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=2037>.

⁸ See the definition of 마당 [madang] in Korean dictionary.
<http://krdic.naver.com/search.nhn?query=%EB%A7%88%EB%8B%B9&kind=all>

⁹ Jumin Hong, "아우슈비츠 이후와 세월호 이후의 교회 이야기: 디아코니아를 통한 재구성 [The Stories of Church after Auschwitz and after Sewol: Reformation through Diakonia]," 남겨진 자들의 신학: 세월호의 기억과 분노 그리고 그 이후[Theology of The Left: Memories of Sewol, Wrath and Beyond it], ed. The National Council of Churches in Korea: The Special Committee for Sewol Disaster (Seoul: Dongyeon, 2015), 174-185.

¹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 31.

¹¹ Moltmann, 64.

through his own suffering and tears, not in some miraculous ways.¹² Yet, if God only stays among us and struggles with us in the midst of injustice without changing the problems in the world, is this God still good?

In his article, “The Review of Theology of the Left”, Choong-Yeon Kim also points out that “this traditional answer is no longer a great 'comfort' for the grieved or those who have experienced [the suffering].”¹³ Then he urges us to change our perspective from seeking an answer from theodicy to hamartiology.¹⁴ His appeal is convincing given the fact that the Sewol disaster revealed the corruption between government and entrepreneurs.¹⁵

In the seminar for the Second Memorial Rally for Sewol in March 31, 2016, Geunju Kim and Sung-hwi Ko also argue that it is not right to pass the responsibility of suffering to God. They insist that we need to ask questions not to God but to ourselves, to our human beings, to profit-seeking corporations, to governments that do not save lives. God should not be a scapegoat against the perpetrators' fault in alliance with the power and capital.¹⁶ Rather, they assert the government and officials to reveal the true causes of the incident in the name of God, God of Justice.

It is very natural and important, of course, to seek for God's presence in the midst of the storm of life. Yet, the honest yearning for understanding God's will should not be used as a means of passing the responsibility of human-made disasters. Kim and Ko also point out the lack of awareness of the publicness of faith in Korean churches. They criticized that most Korean churches focused solely on their own spirituality and individual salvation, not putting enough effort into the issues of social justice.¹⁷ If God is understood only as a judgmental and exclusive figure to Christians or non-Christians, it is a task for we theologians and religious educators to change. With this in mind, the Korean church should renew its understanding of God and religion and make it an opportunity for open dialogue with society and other religions, rather than being isolated by itself.

Throughout the period of great revival in the 1980s and '90s, the Korean Church enjoyed glorious growth and success. The pride of believing in the God of victory and success made the Korean church fail and forget those who were marginalized. The Korean theology, focused on the resurrection of Christ, forgot the suffering and humiliation that human Jesus went experienced on the cross. It is important to ask what the will of God is before the suffering of the human world, but it is also important to look at how our God acts for humanity. We need to remember how Christ humbled himself and joined in human suffering. Here, it is noteworthy that Moltmann urged to remember crucified God and to think about what it means to follow Christ.

So following Christ means engaging in the struggle of life against death, and against the people who spread death. It means engaging in this struggle in our own place and our own time. In my own situation, I see ‘the way of Christ’ In the struggle against the system of nuclear deterrent and

¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³ Choong-yeon Kim, “세월호, 하나님이 인간에게 묻다: 책 *남겨진 자들의 신학* 서평 [Sewol Ferry, God is Asking to Humanbeings.: Book Review on the Theology of the Left],” *The Ecumenian*, July 9, 2015, <http://www.ecumenian.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=12239>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; See also Sang-Hun Choe, “Ferry Disaster That United South Korea Now Polarizes It,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 2, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/03/world/asia/sewol-ferry-disaster-polarizes-south-korea.html?_r=1

¹⁶ Ko, <http://www.pck-goodnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=2037>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

for peace on the foundation of justice; in the struggle against the exploitation and indebtedness of the countries of the Third World; in the struggle against the deadly destruction of nature.¹⁸

Our God choose to save us by fully participating into human suffering. However, if we are comforted only by God who is with us, our faith loses the joy of resurrection and the power of salvation. The death of Christ is completed by resurrection, and the Christian faith is completed by sharing and living the joy of resurrection with others. As Moltmann stated, by participating in the path of Jesus suffering, we, his followers encounter social injustice, not walking away from it. By facing and changing it, we announce the resurrection of Jesus to the world.

In his article about Post-Sewol theology, Chang-hyun Park, a Korean Methodist theologian in Missiology, urges that we should recognize the true meaning of Christ's resurrection and anticipate and prepare for the resurrection of the unjustly dead, the survivors, and the witnesses in our own context. For it, he emphasizes the resurrection as a religious mystery. Therefore, what we expect is not the physical resurrection of Sewol victims, but religious experience as a sign of resurrection through social transformation.¹⁹ Korean churches participated into the suffering of Sewol survivors and cried "with those who were crying."²⁰ Yet, many of them failed to enduringly stay and work together with them and with other groups of people.²¹ I believe such social transformation as a sign of Jesus' resurrection can be made through the active social participation of the church and the solidarity with other religions for common good. It is the way of our faith and action in resurrecting the suffering Christ. Crying with the crying and helping them to wipe their tears and stand up, walking along with them should be the beginning and the foundation of Post-Sewol theology.

To the New Shore

On March 23, 2017, after 1,073 days of waiting and protesting, the Sewol was finally salvaged. It was transported to a near harbor for further investigation with the hope of finding the last nine bodies.²²

From now on, the task is to clarify the real cause of shipwreck, make those who were in charge take legal responsibility. We also need to remember those who could not come out from the water, those who survived, and those who devotedly worked for the rescue. As Christians, asking God's intention and action plan is a task. We also need to continue to communicate with our neighbor. Here our neighbor means two things: people who are hurt and marginalized and people in different religious traditions. Among the victims and survivors of the Sewol incident,

¹⁸ Moltmann, 48.

¹⁹ Chang-hyun Park, "세월호 이후의 신학 – 한국교회는 어떻게 세월호와 함께 죽은 예수 부활의 증인이 될 것인가? [A Theology of the Post-"Sewolho"(Sewolship) Calamity : How Will the Korean Church Be a Witness of the Resurrection of Jesus Who Died with the Sewolho?]" *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 103, (2017), 357, 365.

²⁰ Romans 12:15. CEB.

²¹ Jung-Bae Lee, "세월호 참사 이후 하느님 영을 말하는 법 [How to Say about God's Spirit after Sewol Tragedy]," *Theology of The Left: Memories of Sewol, Wrath and Beyond it*, ed. The National Council of Churches in Korea: The Special Committee for Sewol Disaster (Seoul: Dongyeon, 2015), 15-29.

²² As of July, 2, 2017, according to the headquarter of investigation, four bodies of the nine people were found. The investigation for the remaining five will be closed at the end of September. "세월호 수색 작업 종료 시점이 확정됐다 [The time of the end of the search for the time of the month was confirmed]," *Huffpost Korea*, July 2, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.kr/2017/07/01/story_n_17364218.html?utm_hp_ref=kr-sewol-ferry.

Christians were in fact minorities. There were many Catholics, Buddhists, representatively, as well as atheists. The shock and theological strikes of Christians in this tragedy that happened during Holy Week, therefore, are multilateral. With the exclusiveness of faith which emphasizing no other way of salvation other than Christ, it is not possible to interpret and speak of the wounds of our neighbors. It is the same – or similar at least – dilemma that people had after Auschwitz and after 9/11. It is also revealed in the interpretation of Moltmann's salvation and hell.

Do we know anyone who is in hell? Would we tell a mother weeping at her son's grave that her son is in hell because he never found faith while he was alive? We should respond to the first question with an embarrassed silence. And we would not answer 'yes' to the second one either. But I know someone who was in hell: it is Jesus Christ, who the creed says 'descended into hell.'²³

Is the work of the Christians in the scene of the accident, only for the church members, or for the whole people there? The answer is simply 'no.' The charitable activities of the Christians are for everyone, and it should not be with an intention of evangelism and conversion. For there is no exception in Christ's love and salvation. Likewise, Christians are subject to the altruistic salvation of other religions, such correlations expand the scope of each other's understanding and redemption.

Madang: Interreligious Solidarity for Social Justice

In a multi-religious society like Korea, solidarity with other religions is essential for such theological interpretation and action. Jumin Hong, a scholar of Diakonia theology in Germany, asserts that the Sewol incident is a turning point for Korean Christians to pay more attention and participate into the world of pain and joy, as the experience of Auschwitz called for the reformation of the German church to Diakonia church.²⁴ He defines the Diakonia church as a model of a community that jumps into the water and actively rescues people, rather than just drawing a lifeboat watching people dying.²⁵ In this way, the Sewol incident led to the "Theology of the Square" phenomenon, meaning that churches and seminaries got out their own comfort zone and communicate with the neighbors in the midst of protest for justice. It is not a metaphysical theology, but a theological conversation and process that fights and worries together in the field of human suffering and contradictions.

While waiting for rescue in Paeng Mok Harbor, the nearest harbor from where Sewol fallen into the water, diverse religious people gathered, worshiped, and helped survivors over times. However, this was not an act of cooperative worship for all, but rather a coexistence of diverse religious groups in a shared space for a common purpose. Nevertheless, I saw a possibility of solidarity here. I saw the possibility to look for a common place and to pursue common good, beyond the numerous barriers of antagonizing, criticizing and rejecting each other. This reminded me of the hope for the redemptive community that Jack Seymour described: "Even in the midst of oppression, the realm of God is possible. Redemptive

²³ Moltmann, 144.

²⁴ Hong, 174-185.

²⁵ Hong, 175.

community can be built, if we stop hoarding, hiding, and excluding.”²⁶ Now, I lift my head in the depths of despair and look for the movement of hope.

Even though it is still a small number, religious dialogue is also taking place, focusing on the ethics and social role of religion. The Korean Conference of Religions for Peace (KCRP), a collaborative organization of seven major religions in Korea, celebrated their thirtieth anniversary in 2016 and issued a joint statement for urging further investigation of the Sewol incident.²⁷ With the famous quote of Hans Küng saying “no peace among the nations without peace among the religions,”²⁸ the presence and cooperative work of KCRP is significant. I believe their dialogues and cooperative works make social justice and transformation in South Korea possible.

Witnessing such possibility for solidarity made me envision *Madang* approach as a part of continuing the theology in the square that began after Sewol. In general, a square or plaza usually refers to a huge space for gathering activities of religion, politics, commerce, and social gatherings are held. Historically, it has served as a center of social life for citizens. Yet, in Korean architecture, *Madang*, which is comparable to the courtyard in the Western house, smaller than a square, is a space that is in every traditional Korean house. In dictionary, *Madang* is defined as the courtyard laid flat on the front or back of the house as a space for individual activities, for family’s project, or for communal events. Overall, any flat space in front (or back) of the building where the group can gather and do something can be called as *Madang*. In the *Madang*, each family invites their neighbors to have a meal, a birthday party, a wedding ceremony, or a funeral service. *Madang* in a house is therefore a private and public space at the same time. Here people communicate with neighbors and share the joys and sorrows of life.²⁹ Now, in South Korea, at least in Seoul, it is not easy to find traditional houses with *Madang*, as these spaces have been replaced by apartment complexes. However, this concept of *Madang* did not completely disappear, but is becoming a virtual space as the concept of gathering and communication of people. In the public bulletin board of the Internet, *Madang* continues as a place of communication between neighbors.

As mentioned above, I have gained the insight of *Madang* from people who have gathered in the harbor for Sewol beyond the boundaries of religions, politics, and all the reasons for separating each other. This is the reinterpretation of the redemptive community in Korea. In Seymour’s definition, people in redemptive community look for signs of God’s realm in the midst of human life. They invite strangers and the marginalized to their table. They also “pray for relief; challenge the principalities and powers that feed fear and callousness; and work for community.”³⁰ It was a sign of redemption community when my friend watched the news in that morning, paid attention to the pain of human life, and prayed with tears; when I asked God’s presence in the midst of the incident; when believers of different religions went to Paeng Mok

²⁶ Jack L. Seymour, “Pay Attention: Educating for Redemptive Communities,” in *Educating for Redemptive Community: Essays in Honor of Jack Seymour and Margaret Ann Crain*, ed. Denise Janssen (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 13.

²⁷ Eunho Lim, “KCRP 30 돌 ‘종교 간 대화로 상생, 협력’ [In the Thirtieth Anniversary, KCRP Urges Coexistence and Cooperation Through Interreligious Dialogue],” *Beopbo: The Buddhist News*, June 21, 2016, <http://www.beopbo.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=93108>; The website of the Korean Conference of Religions for Peace represents Protestant Christianity, Buddhism, Won Buddhism, Confucianism, Cheondoism, Catholicism, and the Korean Ethnic Religious Council. See its website for further information. <http://www.kcrp.or.kr/>.

²⁸ Hans Küng, *Islam, Past Present & Future*, trans. By John Bowden (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), xxiii.

²⁹ Dae Kyun Lee, “마당, 아직 잃어버리지 않았다 [Madang, We Have Not Lost It Yet],” *The Architecture Review Blog 마당 (Madang)*, December 26, 2015, <http://madangsr.tistory.com/90>.

³⁰ Seymour, 14.

Harbor for worship and support; when leaders of various religious traditions gathered to make a collaborative statement and to take actions accordingly; when Christians parents of Sewol survivors attended the Buddhist service for 49th day funeral memorial.³¹ Here, religions encounter each other and the world for cooperative work for compassion and justice. Here, educating for redemptive community means to help people to do such things for reconciliation.³² The approach of *Madang* is for this redemptive community. *Madang* is therefore my vision of the redemptive community that communicates with people and inherits culture and heritage in the Korean context. Based on this understanding, I have summarized the principles of *Madang* approach as follows.

1. *Mutuality*. This communal space is based on interrelationships. It is important to acknowledge and respect conversation partners. Only with the mutually influential beings, *Madang* can be established. If there is only you, an individual or one religious body, *Madang* cannot exist. *Madang* is therefore based on mutual invitation, respect, and interdependence.
2. *Mediation*. *Madang* is not for a discussion to draw one correct answer, but is a place of intervention that reveals various aspects of life of each other to enhance mutual understanding and to reflect one own interpretation. It is a compromise rather than a confrontation. Rather than making one's own argument, it should be preceded by an attitude of listening to the others.
3. *Movement*. The purpose of all dialogue and meeting is toward a common action. Whether you are gathering for a pre-determined act or setting up an action plan for a common good based on the results of the conversation, the purpose of *Madang* is to learn and fulfill social justice through solidarity. Opening the doors of churches and temples for interreligious dialogue, and designing programs for believers in other traditions are good examples of activism of *Madang*. Leading a campaign for global climate change or offering trauma counseling opportunities to Sewol survivors can be also a good way of movement.

Ending as a Beginning

This essay follows my reaction and reflection on the Sewol incident. It reveals how I encountered and struggled through the incident. Just as Sewol arrived to a new shore, just as the truth comes out, the suffering Christ should not be confined to death, which means theology not related to life or social isolation of the church. Just as God has opened the path of reconciliation and salvation by participating in human suffering, we must resurrect Christ by following such God. Eventually I came out of the water of despair. And now, it is my hope and faith as small as a mustard seed that *Madang*, the Korean redemptive community with interreligious solidarity spreads and multiplies beyond frustration and hatred among people after Sewol.

³¹ Sarah Lee, "하나님이 어디 계신지, 무엇하시는지 알려달라: 단원과 김다영 양 아버지 김현동씨 인터뷰 [Tell Me Where God Is and What God Is Doing: the Interview of Hyundong Kim, father of a Sewol Victim, Dayoung Kim]," *The NewsNJoy*, January 14, 2015, <http://www.newsnojoy.or.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=198243> 1/.

³² Seymour, 16.

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Ecological Encounter

On Inhabitation and Transforming How We Know

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In her collection of essays, *Belonging*, bell hooks traces the long and winding story of her committed and complicated relationship to her home place in the hills of Kentucky. Having “escaped” rural Appalachia and its persistent racial and economic struggles, hooks finds herself longing to return to the place that “formed the ground of my being.” Fleeing Kentucky had made possible a cosmopolitan academic life in places like the bay area of California and New York City. In each new place, ecological encounters invoke both her longing for Kentucky and a sense of wonder:

Just as I found solace in nature in Kentucky, the natural environment, trees, grass, plants, the sky in Palo Alto, California, all offered me a place of solace. Digging in the California ground my hands touched earth that was so different from the moist red and brown dirt of Kentucky I felt awe. Wonder permeated my senses as I pondered the fact that traveling thousands of miles away from my native place had actually changed the ground under my feet.¹

At the end of his essay, “A Native Hill,” hooks’ Kentucky neighbor Wendell Berry recounts another kind of ecological encounter, lying down on a soft bed of leaves in the woods after a long walk near his home in upland Kentucky. He imagines himself dying there, his flesh slowly joining the humus below him, weaving his body with together the body of the earth:

And now a leaf, spiraling down in wild flight, lands on my shirt at about the third button below the collar. ... (S)uddenly, I apprehend in it the dark proposal of the ground. Under the fallen leaf my breastbone burns with imminent decay. Other leaves fall. My body begins its long shudder into the humus. I feel my substance escape me, carried into the mold by beetles and worms. Days, winds, seasons pass over me as I sink under the leaves. For a time only sight is left me, a passive awareness of the sky overhead, birds crossing, the mazed interreaching of the treetops, the leaves falling – and then, that, too, sinks away. It is acceptable to me, and I am at peace.

When I move to go, it is as though I rise up out of the world.²

¹ bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 12.

² Wendell Berry, “A Native Hill,” in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2002), 31.

Both of these stories demonstrate in sharp relief the ways in which a human being's self-understanding and very life is transformed in embodied confrontation with non-human life. Both hooks and Berry are changed, their perspectives expanded and deepened, by such authentic and unguarded encounters. These are profoundly ecological *encounters*.

In this paper, I explore the pedagogical and epistemological significance of ecological encounters. In a larger project, I develop the purpose, theological and theoretical foundations, and educational practices for ecological religious education. This paper seeks to work out a somewhat complicated theoretical question that grounds that project: What does it mean to know, ecologically? And how do ecological encounters change what and how we know?

Ecological Encounters

An encounter is a meeting between subjects, sometimes fleeting and often accompanied by a measure of mystery or unknowability. One subject meets another, and recognizes a fundamental difference between the self and the Other. This recognition of difference and mystery might serve to re-inscribe estrangement between the two subjects. Or, when embraced with openness and curiosity, the recognition of difference might invite the participants in the encounter into a relationship of mutual discovery and influence. Our call for papers describes an encounter as "simply a meeting between persons. In the context of religious education, an encounter is a meeting between persons of different religions and faiths in dialogical openness and relationship. ...(A)n encounter can be real life religious education with two complementary learnings: learning self and other."

What is envisioned here is a particular kind of encounter – inter-religious – between humans. I want to stretch this concept of encounter, however, to include encounters between humans and non-human living things,³ drawing on the work of Friedrich Schweitzer, who argues that

(e)ven when what is encountered is not a concrete person but, for example, a different culture or religion, encounter at least refers to the *immediacy of personal involvement*. I cannot encounter another person or entity without allowing myself to be influenced, affected or even altered by the encounter. Moreover, encounter implies that the outcome of this process of being affected or altered cannot be predicted or predefined. Encounter requires openness and availability – making oneself available to others. This is what makes encounter risky and fascinating at the same time.⁴

Schweitzer's description makes clear the transformative potential of ecological encounters. When engaged with openness and availability, they summon embodied, affective, and imaginative human capacities. Ecological encounters like the ones described above by Berry and hooks bear within them the "immediacy of personal involvement." They are immediate because the encounter with nature is unmediated and embodied. They are personal because they have a profound impact on the person's self-understanding. And they are involved because they reveal the ways in which human life is interconnected, woven together with, our ecological contexts. Ecology is derived from the Greek term, *oikeo*, which means "to inhabit." So to call these encounters "ecological" suggests their potential to help human beings understand themselves as part of a habitat. These

³ In this paper, for simplicity's sake, I frequently use the term "nature" to describe non-human species, when seeking to describe how humans relate to, and are interconnected with, but are not the same as, other species. The relationship and distinction between humans and other species is a complex philosophical and moral question. The question of what constitutes "nature" (for example, does nature include the "built environment"?) is similarly complex. While these questions rightly trouble simplistic references to nature, and they both are related to the epistemological question at the heart of this paper, detailed attention to these argument are outside the purview of these pages.

⁴ Friedrich Schweitzer, "Encounter and Comparison: Complementary Perspectives for Religious Education?," in *Religious Education as Encounter: A Tribute to John M. Hull*, ed. Siebren Miedema (Münster, Germany: Waxmann Verlag, 2009), 37. Emphasis mine.

encounters are the beginning and a summons to inhabitation, a lifelong process of learning to live well in the world.

Ecological Encounters and Environmental Education

In 1956, Rachel Carson published her landmark essay, “Help Your Child to Wonder.”

Although surely not the first to raise the question of how to cultivate ecological awareness, Carson’s essay is often cited as a catalyst for the emergence of the field of environmental education. Codified in documents like the Belgrade Charter (1972) and the Tbilisi

Declaration (1977), environmental education aims to:

1. to foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political, and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
2. to provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
3. to create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups, and society as a whole towards the environment.⁵

Environmental education thus conceived begins with a solid foundation of scientific knowledge and issues in ethical action. Would that our contemporary political discourse valued these two goals! If we understand “encounter” to be an educational and transformative moment, however, do these goals account for the kind of education borne and prompted by the ecological encounters experienced by Wendell Berry, bell hooks, or anyone who has ever sought to know and love a place? Do these goals adequately describe what happens in ecological encounters? Do they describe a pedagogy up to the task of nurturing persons with the affective and imaginative capacities for leaning fully into such ecological encounters, with an openness to being affected, personally, by them?

⁵ UNESCO/United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education, *Tbilisi Declaration* (Tbilisi, Georgia, USSR, 1977). See also UNESCO/United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) International Workshop on Environmental Education, *The Belgrade Charter: A Framework for Environmental Education* (Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1975).

David Orr would argue, emphatically, “no.” Our recent efforts in environmental education have yielded little in the way of an ecologically-sensitive and committed public. While the inclusion of environmental education emphases in public and higher education may net a wider segment of the population who know more *about* the environment, they do not necessarily demonstrate thoroughgoing ecological literacy, which is “driven by the sense of wonder, the sheer delight in being alive in a beautiful, mysterious, bountiful world. ...(Ecological literacy) is not just a comprehension of how the world works, but, in the light of that knowledge, a life lived accordingly.”⁶ Orr worries that our efforts at environmental education have failed to ameliorate a discouragingly persistent population of provocatively-named “ecological yahoos without a clue about why the color of the water in their rivers is related to their food supply, or why storms are becoming more severe as the climate is unbalanced.”⁷ Given the inclusion over the last three decades of environmental science and education in public schools, colleges and universities, and more informal educational settings like religious communities and organizations, where is the disconnect?

Educators who are interested in cultivating ecological literacy are thus confronted with a fundamentally epistemological question: What kind of knowing constitutes ecological knowing? If we allow for it, the kinds of encounters described by hooks and Berry challenge not only *what* we know about the world, but *how* we know the world. Scholars in ecotheology, environmental ethics, and educational theory must take on the philosophical question of what it means to know, ecologically, before we can address the pedagogical question of how this kind of knowing is cultivated.

⁶ David W. Orr, “Ecological Literacy,” in *Hope Is an Imperative: The Essential David Orr* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011), 252-53.

⁷ Orr, 252.

Toward an Ecological Epistemology

Some attribute the rather disappointing environmental education outcomes (that generation of “ecological yahoos”) to a perhaps unspoken investment in the old aphorism, “those who know better, do better.” Indeed, the Tbilisi Declaration, above, perhaps implies this assumption in its very first goal: “to foster awareness and concern.” Many ecological education programs turn on this assumption: Once we learn about the environment, we are inspired to be better caretakers of it. In such a formulation, learning is the cognitive act of acquiring data, interpreting it, and developing rational and creative responses to that knowledge.⁸

The theory of knowledge influencing these pedagogical models can be traced to the emergence of the scientific method and the philosophical values of the Enlightenment. The codification of rational modes of inquiry, ostensibly freed from the influence of religion or superstition, made possible remarkable leaps in scientific, historical, and philosophical understanding.⁹ These methods of inquiry have become what ecofeminist philosopher Lorraine Code has described as the dominant, orthodox model of epistemology, which is

guided by a formal conception of knowledge, it works to determine standards for justifying claims to know and for distinguishing bona fide knowledge from belief or conjecture, to establish criteria ubiquitously valid across epistemic domains, thus neither deriving from nor dependent upon certain ways of knowing, the capacities of particular knowers, the particularities of epistemic location, or the purposes of specific epistemic projects. ...(Such epistemologies) presuppose an autonomous, rational, adult, individual knower who is everyone and no one, but whose identity is epistemologically irrelevant.¹⁰

In what follows, I trace the development of an ecological epistemology, first exploring ecofeminist critiques of an over-reliance on empirical understanding and then introducing

⁸ This is the premise of Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy of learning.

⁹ Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 130.

¹⁰ Code, 130-31.

“situated knowledges,” which privilege particularity, affective knowing, and embodied experience.

Rationalist, Instrumentalist Epistemology

Recent eco-feminist scholarship, of which Code is an exemplar, has challenged some core epistemological assumptions that have persisted even in formulations of ecological knowing, such as the application of universal criteria and a knower freed from bias and subjectivity. In orthodox epistemologies, the autonomous, rationalist individual thinker has triumphed over mythological, emotional, and socially-established knowing. Ecological contexts, like anything else, can be known best through dispassionate inquiry, guided by universal norms and yielding generalizable knowledge. This epistemological framework might be traced back to Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, who held that the most intellectually defensible and moral perspective is disinterested and founded upon reason, rather than emotion. Hence, the orthodox epistemology: “(T)he familiar view of reason and emotion as sharply separated and opposed, and of ‘desire,’ caring, and love as merely ‘personal’ and ‘particular’ as opposed to the universality and impartiality of understanding, and of ‘feminine’ emotions as essentially unreliable, untrustworthy, and morally irrelevant, an inferior domain to be dominated by a superior, disinterested (and of course masculine) reason.”¹¹ Certainly, in a political context now described as “post-fact” or “post-truth,” in which political figures repeat with impunity purported “facts” that are demonstrably false, in which what persons “feel” is true matters more than what is measurably true, empirical

¹¹ Val Plumwood, “Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism,” in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman et al. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 293.

evidence and reason are as needed as ever.¹² Feminist biology and philosophy scholar Donna Haraway cautions against the impulse to dispatch with objectivity altogether, arguing that we need “enforceable, reliable accounts” of reality.¹³ Researchers go too far, however, when they treat the “object” of inquiry as “a passive and inert thing,” failing to encounter it as an actor and agent.¹⁴ It is in this process of *objectification* that empirical inquiry has the potential to control and constrain the production of knowledge. An epistemological system so preoccupied with control and verification leaves little room for being changed in the pursuit of understanding. Code describes epistemologies that fixate on accumulating, classifying, and ordering data (“knowing *that*”) as epistemologies of “mastery”: “(W)here a dislocated knower-as-spectator seeks to predict, manipulate, and control the behavior of the material world and of other ‘less enlightened’ people.”¹⁵

Paired with the logic of mastery is what Carolyn Merchant describes as “the instrumentalization of nature.” Whereas up to the around the sixteenth century, “the metaphor binding together the self, society, and the cosmos was that of an organism,”¹⁶ the scientific revolution and Enlightenment thinking replaced the image of an organism with an image of disorder, to be subdued by a (rationally-designed) machine. This shift in metaphors bore epistemological consequences: Francis Bacon, for example, understood nature as a “womb” holding truths which science and technology could wrest and dissect. It is language of control, of extraction, and exploitation. Merchant draws together some of

¹² Code, herself, noted Rachel Carson’s deep respect for and use of empirical, observational science. Code, 38.

¹³ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 580.

¹⁴ Haraway, 592. Haraway suggests that we need not lose the language of “object” in scientific inquiry. In the rest of this paper, however, I continue to use the language of subject-subject encounter to describe ecological epistemology, but understand my argument to be in the same spirit as Haraway’s.

¹⁵ Code, 8.

¹⁶ Carolyn Merchant, “The Death of Nature,” in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman et al. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 278.

Bacon's strongest language: "Nature must be 'bound into service' and made a 'slave,' put 'in constraint' and 'molded' by the mechanical arts."¹⁷ At worst, this instrumentalization of nature makes it a powerless object whose worth is determined according to its utility to human purposes, in the interest of which all manner of extraction, exploitation, and destruction are justified. In even a mild form, instrumentalist epistemologies reduce nature to a storehouse of resources to be stewarded and conserved for future (human) generations. In neither case is nature understood as a subject with the power to influence, affect, or alter those who encounter it.¹⁸

In its distanced rationalism and utilitarian instrumentalism, the orthodox epistemological framework reveals its impoverishment when we try to account for an ecological encounter. How might we characterize the kind of knowledge nurtured in Berry's human to humus encounter? He learns about this Kentucky place by getting up close, by resting his body upon the soil, and by *relating* to it. It is as if he understands himself to be addressed by this land, as it makes its "dark proposal" known. Ecological encounters necessarily disrupt the narrative of knowledge as mastery. Threads of mystery are woven through ecological encounters. Mystery cannot be fully known, and even less known from an impartial distance.

Despite the indispensability of empirical and observational science toward ecological understanding, ecological knowing cannot be *reduced* to the collection, ordering, and application of verifiable data, particularly if the telos of ecological knowing is love and commitment to the planet. Our ecological thinking, however, has not fundamentally disrupted the dominant model of epistemology in much of Western philosophy and ethics.

¹⁷ Merchant, 281.

¹⁸ Schweitzer, 37.

This simply will not do, Code argues: “(Ecological) knowledge is not primarily propositional; and even though empirical ‘facts’ are integral to it, it does not reduce to ‘S-knows-that-*p*’ propositions. Even (*per impossibile*) knowing all such facts about another person might not warrant claiming to know her.”¹⁹ An epistemological revolution is thus in order.²⁰

Ecological Epistemology

Code’s invocation of a human relationship is instructive for efforts to re-imagine an epistemological framework for ecological encounters and their implications for ecological consciousness. For if the phenomenon in question involves a subject (human) encountering another subject (nature), the resultant understanding is far deeper than propositional knowledge. It comes to the knower via embodied, affective, and deeply situated means. These means of knowing have been disregarded and considered suspicious sources of insight in the dominant, rationalist epistemological framework, but an ecological epistemological framework recognizes the values of these ways of knowing for cultivating both ecological and social understanding and commitment.

Importantly, “ecological thinking is not simply thinking *about* ecology or the environment... it is a revisioned mode of engagement with knowledge, subjectivity, politics, ethics, science, citizenship, and agency that pervades and reconfigures theory and practice.”²¹ It relocates inquiry “down on the ground,” taking as its starting point the ecological situations and interconnections of the knower and knowing. This epistemic

¹⁹ Code, 49.

²⁰ Code, 3.

²¹ Code, 5.

relocation has the potential, Code hopes, “to produce habitats where people can live well together and respectfully with and within the physical/natural world.”²² Whereas the dominant rationalist and instrumentalist epistemology emphasizes mastery and order, even as it seeks to think *about* the environment, an ecological epistemology emphasizes a search for connections and particularities, in the interest of a better way of inhabiting the world. It is thinking from *within*, as a member of, the ecological context.²³

In the bracingly embodied and affective practice of imagination described at the outset of this essay, Wendell Berry profoundly understands himself to be an inhabitant, deeply connected to and in a particular place. He arises from and returns to an elemental matrix of life. Locating human living and dying in its ecological context, Berry paints a tender portrait of human life as inhabitance. The path toward inhabitance begins with a response to the claim that humans are ecological beings – situated in their ecological and social contexts. Recall from the beginning of this essay that “ecology” is derived from the verb that means, “to inhabit.” Ecological thinking, then, literally might be described as “the knowledge (*logos*) of inhabiting.”²⁴ Inhabitance as a pedagogical context and goal is described below. Here, however, we pause to consider the qualities of epistemological knowing that give rise to a posture and practice of inhabitance. Such knowing is situated, embodied, and affective.

²² Code, 19.

²³ Code, 7, 9, 279-80.

²⁴ Contrast this sense with the study of environment, a term derived from the French term “*virer*” (*viron*), which means to encircle. An *environ* is that which encircles or surrounds. While it is not necessarily the case that considering the environment as “surroundings” leads us to distance ourselves from it and fail to appreciate the relationship that connects us to it, the etymological distinction might be instructive. See Gillian Judson, *A New Approach to Ecological Education: Engaging Students' Imaginations in Their World* (New York: Peter Lang, Inc., 2010); Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 124-26.

Situated Knowing. As described above, the dominant rationalist epistemological framework assumes that pure knowledge is universal and transcends the particular. Best not let pure reason be clouded by the messiness, confusion, and concern of the everyday! Feminist philosophers and theologians, however, have questioned both the plausibility and the desirability of these epistemological assumptions. Donna Haraway, for example, has described feminist ways of knowing as “situated.” Inquiry should be guided by “embodied vision,” she insists, thus reclaiming “the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere.”²⁵ The latter she coins, “the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere.”²⁶

Indeed, the illusion of transcendent understanding, from an unacknowledged and purportedly disembodied location on high, is a threat to true knowledge: “The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision. ...The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular ...(understanding is not the product) of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position.”²⁷ Put more simply, the principle of situated knowledges rejects the possibility that we might, on our own, know all there is to know about another subject, thus pressing us into collaborative interpretation and understanding.²⁸ The particularities of the knower, her experience, her values and emotional commitments, her community of knowing, as well as the particularities of her

²⁵ Haraway, 581.

²⁶ Haraway, 581.

²⁷ Haraway, 583, 90.

²⁸ In fact, Haraway argues that the unknowability of another is a product of the world’s “elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view.” Haraway, 583. Parker Palmer would add that it is only in community, each bringing to bear their partial understanding, that we can know the truth. Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1993), 55-57.

context which she seeks to know, all influence how she understands what she sees, and how she acts responsibly with that knowledge. When knowledge is situated, even a shared objective such as “living well together” might be met in different ways in different places, and thus is a “mutliply realizable end.”²⁹

Embodied Knowing. Knowing is first situated in the senses. Despite Haraway’s call to embodied vision and embodied objectivity, however, empirical inquiry has considered embodied knowing to be suspect: “(Feminist scientists) are the embodied others, who are not allowed to *not* have a body, a finite point of view, and so an inevitably disqualifying and polluting bias in any discussion of consequence outside our own little circles.”³⁰ The association of gender and embodiment is an example of a philosophical dualism. Ecofeminists have documented well the system of dualisms, and their hierarchical arrangement, that has plagued philosophical assumptions even as far back as Plato and Aristotle. Dualisms simplistically categorize and order mind over body, reason over emotion, human (man) over nature: “This nature is subordinated to man; woman to man... Feminists have long criticized this dichotomy, particularly the structural division of man and nature, which is seen as analogous to that of man and woman.”³¹ Thus, the “natural” ordering and subordination of emotion, “brute matter,” bodies, nature, and women in the search for knowledge.³² Ecological knowing, however, is evoked in the body, by sensory experience: “The ecological subject, then, is materially situated: Embodied location and

²⁹ Code, 25.

³⁰ Haraway, 575.

³¹ María Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 5. Rosemary Radford Ruether would add that the dominant categories in a dualistic system—mind, reason, man, spirit—correspond morally with the category of good (versus evil) and theologically with the category of God (versus creation). See Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5, no. 1 (1992). Carolyn Merchant also vividly demonstrates how scientific metaphors for the cosmos drew on images of violation of a submissive (and often female) body. Merchant, 281-83.

³² Ruether, 27.

interdependence are integral to its possibilities for knowledge and action.”³³ Certainly, Berry and hooks’ encounters and subsequent knowledge would hardly be possible if not for the sensory insights proffered by their lungs, their hands, their eyes.

Christian theological traditions have struggled to make sense of and determine the trustworthiness of sensory experience. Mystics use evocative sensory language to describe experiences of ecstasy and desolation.³⁴ But even larger-than-life representatives of orthodoxy Despite all of his neo-platonist suspicion of the body and the passions, even Saint Augustine reached for sensory language to describe a divine encounter and spiritual knowledge:

You called, shouted, broke through my deafness;
You flared, blazed, banished my blindness;
You lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you;
I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst;
You touched me, and I burned for your peace.³⁵

Of course, Augustine, having dispatched with the senses earlier in Book 10 of the confessions, is likely speaking metaphorically about the sensory character of spiritual insight. Nonetheless, it is the language of the senses that best communicates the profound knowing that he seeks to describe. Others, however, speak quite literally about the role of the senses. In a recent sermon, for example, Presbyterian minister Mamie Broadhurst described the power of sensory experience in her theological and emotional understanding of the August 2017 solar eclipse:

I was still completely unprepared for how I felt, for one and a half minutes, three weeks ago. ...when the inevitable and *completely* logical and understandable darkness fell, I gasped! People around me screamed! They didn't scream like scared screams, they just let out the bigness that couldn't fit inside them anymore. I felt like my breath or my heart was too big for my body. And at the same time that somehow my body was expanding to curve around the awe and wonder that was exploding inside of me with a sort of ravenous joy. I felt part of something really, really big. And at the same time, I felt

³³ Code, 91.

³⁴ See, for example, St. John of the Cross’ *Dark Night of the Soul* and Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*.

³⁵ Augustine, *The Confessions* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997).

really, really small. I could then, and I can, now, tell you all of the mechanics of the eclipse. But none of that explains my experience of the eclipse. On August 21, I was awed by science, *and* by a sense of profound connection to God and to creation. And the two worked together to bring about my gasp of wonder."³⁶

Embodied, sensory, and experiential encounters are important sources of insight. Research on the relationship between memory and the senses demonstrates this phenomenon. A song, a scent, a taste can immediately and surprisingly elicit a powerful memory and its associated emotional responses.

Affective Knowing. Rachel Carson wrote "Help Your Child to Wonder" after spending a summer on the coast of Maine with her toddler nephew. The conservation biologist was struck by the emotional character of the boy's ecological learning, sparked by his sensory encounter with the wildlife of the rugged coastline: "'(I)t is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow."³⁷ Many educators have assumed that engaging children's bodies and emotions are necessary pedagogical strategies for ecologically educating children. Philosophical ethics and moral development theory, however, have tended to present embodied and emotional learning as stages that humans "grow out of," accommodations not needed by fully developed adults. Carson, however, believed that the cultivation of wonder, for example, was perhaps even more necessary for adults, "an unfailing antidote against the boredom

³⁶ Mamie Broadhurst, "Eclipsing Chaos," accessed September 25, 2017.
http://cccoflouisville.org/covenant_community_church/listen/Entries/2017/9/10_Mamie_Broadhurst_Eclipsing_Chaos.html.

³⁷ Rachel Carson, "Help Your Child to Wonder," *Women's Home Companion*, July 1956, 46.

and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength."³⁸

And yet dualistic thinking that subordinates the emotions to reason persists. David Orr, for example, worries that we have come to distrust human emotion as a catalyst for learning: "Why is it so hard to talk about love, the most powerful of human emotions, in relation to science, the most powerful and far-reaching of human activities? ...Perhaps it is only embarrassment about what does or does not move us personally."³⁹ Val Plumwood laments that even environmental ethics has employed dichotomous dualisms in its defense of biocentrism. In a critique of Paul Taylor's *Respect for Nature*, for example, Plumwood writes that Taylor embeds his argument in a "Kantian ethical framework that makes strong use of the reason/emotion dichotomy. Thus we are assured that the attitude of respect is the moral one because it is universalizing and disinterested."⁴⁰

The critiques of key theories of cognitive and moral development (Piaget and Kohlberg, for example) are now well established: These theories often assumed a "universal" or "generic" knower or moral agent who had transcended embodied and emotional stages of development. But the assumptions upon which these theories were based often reflected a cultural, gender, or racial bias. Kohlberg, for example, considered moral responses based on care and relationship (culturally and traditionally associated with women's moral reasoning), to be morally less mature than moral responses based on universal concepts of justice. Similarly, Kohlberg considered moral responses based on

³⁸ Published in 1956, Rachel Carson's prescient essay, later republished as *The Sense of Wonder*, describes in evocative terms the cultivation of wonder in children, identifying the ways in which wonder works among adults, even scientists, too. Rachel Carson, "Help Your Child to Wonder," *Women's Home Companion*, July 1956, 46.

³⁹ David W. Orr, "Love," in *Hope Is an Imperative: The Essential David Orr* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011), 31.

⁴⁰ Plumwood, 292.

social or community values (often associated with non-Western moral reasoning) to be morally less mature than moral responses based on individual reason.⁴¹

And yet, why *not* consider capacities for emotional and relational maturity and sensitivity to be moral resources? Code turns to Gilles DeLeuze, among others, to describe the affective and relational capacities necessary to live well in a place. We need an ethos in which “the capacities for affecting and being affected that characterize each thing” are nurtured.⁴² Human conceptions of interdependence, and consciousness of being members of a shared household, require more than rational assent. It requires the openness and willingness to affect and to be affected: “Concern for nature, then, should not be viewed as the completion of a process of (masculine) universalization, moral abstraction, and disconnection, discarding the self, emotions, and special ties (all, of course, associated with the private sphere and femininity).”⁴³

This extended reflection on epistemological assumptions, labyrinthine as it is, has real and material consequences for education, particularly religious and theological education. Both epistemological frameworks inform approaches to ecological learning. Indeed, both are necessary, to some degree, for ecological learning. An *ecological* epistemological approach, however, privileges the particular, the variable, the bodies and the affections of the learner, and the communities of commitment needed to live well in our world. Such learning and learners are necessary for the future of the planet. Ecological

⁴¹ See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Vanessa Siddle Walker and John R. Snarey, eds., *Race-Ing Moral Formation: African American Perspectives on Care and Justice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004).

⁴² Lorraine Code employs DeLeuze's concept of ethos to account for the role of the affections in ecological thinking. See Code, 26.

⁴³ Plumwood, 295.

knowing, however, in its emphasis on affections, relationship, and honoring the mystery of the other, informs more than the human-nature relationship. It informs how we relate to other human beings, as well. In the logic of mastery, Code warns, the habit of classifying and ordering data risks classifying and ordering persons, communities, and cultures, too: “These issues (associated with epistemologies of mastery) translate, by analogy, into practices of classifying people by race, gender, physical ability, age, and so on, with comparable tendencies to reify, solidify, into stereotyped identities.”⁴⁴ Ecological thinking, in contrast, has the potential to transform how we know in both its micropractices of attentiveness and its macropractices of critical and constructive engagement.⁴⁵ We learn how to think ecologically as we learn how to be inhabitants.

Ecological Encounter and Learning Inhabitation

If the desired outcome for religious ecological education is persons who know how to love and tend a place, persons who understand themselves as part of and responsible for the world, persons who deeply desire to live well in a place, then “mastery” is at best an insufficient metaphor for conceiving understanding. At worst, it will even work against the purposes of real ecological understanding.

Of course, scholars in religious education have long wondered about the effectiveness of rationalist approaches to religious learning. Parker Palmer, for example, has argued that education has too long relied solely on the “eye of the mind,” which employs fact and reason, whereas spiritual traditions have the capacity to nurture the “eye

⁴⁴ Code, 50.

⁴⁵ Code, 31.

of heart,” which sees “a world warmed and transformed by the power of love.”⁴⁶ With the eye of the mind and the eye of the heart, humans might have “wholesight,” whereby understanding and responsibility are nurtured: “(A) knowledge that springs from love will implicate us in the web of life; it will wrap the knower and the known in compassion, in a bond of awesome responsibility as well as transforming joy; it will call us to involvement, mutuality, accountability.”⁴⁷ Palmer’s compelling case for love as not only the end of knowledge, but also its origin, challenges dominant epistemologies of mastery and instrumentalization. True knowledge is communal and committed.

Concurrently, scholars in ecological education similarly have been arguing that approaches that fail to engage human affections, bodies, and imaginations necessarily lack the capacity to nurture ecological ways of *being* in the world.⁴⁸ In other words, what is needed is attention to the relationship between human feeling, human physicality, human knowing, and human situatedness in ecological context. What is needed is a reimagining and re-education of the human being as inhabitant. As noted in the outset of this paper, inhabitation is an unfolding process of learning, self-discovery, and commitment. It is a process of epistemological, pedagogical, and theological significance.

Inhabitation is an art. Learning inhabitation summons human beings’ deepest resources of moral wisdom, affection, and creativity. While one might understand her surroundings with usable knowledge, this does not an inhabitant make. Nothing about this kind of knowledge is necessarily false or mistaken, but technical knowledge holds the thing

⁴⁶ Palmer, xxiii.

⁴⁷ Palmer, 9.

⁴⁸ See, for example, David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*, *Suny Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1991); Gillian Judson, *A New Approach to Ecological Education: Engaging Students' Imaginations in Their World* (New York: Peter Lang, Inc., 2010).

to be known at an objective distance, so that we can *use* the knowledge gained in some way. It relies on a rationalist, instrumentalist way of knowing. Seeking this kind of instrumental knowledge does not elicit any moral obligation or emotional relationship to the thing known. Sallie McFague would describe this way of seeing and knowing the world as the “arrogant eye.”⁴⁹ It is to employ the faculty of vision as a means of holding the thing to be known at a distance, as an all-seeing transcendent knower.⁵⁰

In contrast, to see and know the world with a “loving eye” is to inhabit it with the desire to belong to it. It requires a reorientation of human identity and life, a remembering of who we are as ecological beings. It is a kind of resurrection, a discovery of new life in connection with the earth: “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.”⁵¹ The way of inhabitance is an immersion into this mystery with courage and curiosity. To love the world in this way is to honor its mystery, its unknowability, its “other-ness,” while at the same time knowing profoundly our embeddedness within it. It is an invitation to seek to know the world ever more intimately.

Being transformed as inhabitants is thus, perhaps, the paradigmatic ecological vocation. Ecological religious education that cultivates inhabitance turns on ecological epistemologies, ways of knowing that embrace mystery and interdependence, emotion and somatic understanding. Ways of knowing that are loving, rather than distancing. Ways of knowing that help us to live well, together, in the world.

⁴⁹ Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 33.

⁵⁰ Haraway, 580.

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015), 13.

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Encounters in the Garden: An Ethnography

ABSTRACT

Community Gardens and urban Farmers' Markets seek to practice "beloved community" as Christian scripture describes. Theological understandings of beloved community embody both utopic and heterotopic natures: heterotopically, the gardens and markets target "food deserts" and generate sustainable ideals in the midst of dystopic concerns. Such gardens and markets evolve as temporary festive sites that benefit the health, safety, and cultural capital of surrounding communities. Methodologically, I engage an auto-ethnographic approach by citing the enterprises of two congregations that I have called home: the George Washington Carver Garden at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois, plus the garden and market at Ktizo UCC in Phoenix, Arizona, as my archive. As the past Associate Pastor for Drama Ministries and the Green Committee at Trinity, I collaborated in the genesis of the garden, including the Farmers' Market hosted in that space. I worshipped at Ktizo during graduate school in Arizona. My personal field notes, participant observation, and interviews with garden and market partners at both congregations, comprise the research. I engage Christian scripture as an archive that articulates utopic intentionality and potentiality to describe the heterotopia that faith-based community gardens and farmers' markets provide.

PAPER

Jesus tells nearly forty parables in the canonical gospel texts, and roughly twenty-five of them arguably conjure relations of sowing, tending, harvesting, or feasting. Currently, a proliferation of contemporary churches, and urban congregations in particular, plant gardens and sponsor farmers' markets to work toward building the "kingdom of God," or "beloved community," which I parallel with *utopia*. These gardens and markets engage the agrarian abundance characteristics of utopia as written by Thomas More and other early utopians, reflect Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, and additionally carve festival sites and states as David Guss describes.

Today's faith-based community gardens and farmers' markets "re-mix" yesterday's soup kitchens: they meet the needs of those suffering the injustices of food insecurity and food deserts. They serve those who are hungry and those who lack access to fresh produce where they live, and thus the gardens and markets address kingdom of God concerns. My seminary training and experience as a minister in the United Church of Christ taught me that hopes of utopic reality historically lay in the social gospel kingdom of God theology of the early 1900s, which worked toward building a just society and served the needs of the poor. Given contextual commitments to inclusive language, people of faith also describe "kingdom of God" as "beloved community." "Beloved community" sets aside hierarchy and gender, and retains the sound theology of humanity as Christ's "beloved."

'Utopia,' however, is not a word that my faith-based context would use. Humanity in Christian tradition presumes and accepts its intrinsic imperfection, and believes that its efforts require Divine activity to fully achieve. Even so, shared harvesting, feeding, agriculture and nature's abundance are the primary markers of beloved community, of the kingdom of God here on earth, and these are likewise a thread through the writings of early utopians. Church gardens and farmers' markets pursue like aspirational harmony, so for ethnographic comparison, I embrace the term.

I also embrace that I produce here what anthropologist George Marcus calls a “messy text” (Marcus, 389): as an ethnographer, I embrace relativities that erase boundaries. Marcus argues that the post-modern ethnographic approach “detrterritorializes culture” (389) such that formerly incommensurable areas of study suddenly dialogue, compare, and compete. In this case, if faith, cooking, grocery shopping, gardening, recipe sharing, and eating qualify as *performable* cultural practices—and here, as auto-ethnographer, I argue that they do—then the lens through which I analyze the utopic, heterotopic, and festive properties of the Trinity United Church of Christ Farmers’ Market and George Washington Carver Garden in Chicago, Illinois links and supports my “incommensurables.”

In addition to theorists More, Foucault, Guss, and others, I mine the archive of my own employment as Associate Pastor for Drama Ministries and the Green Committee at Trinity UCC for five years, recent field work in the form of participant observations at gardens supported by Ktizo UCC, which is my local congregation in Arizona, and five interviews that I conducted to supplement my personal experiences: three with Trinity members, and two with Ktizo gardeners. The Trinity interviews share evolutions of the garden and market since I left, and the Ktizo interviews supply history and genesis. Four of the five interviewees are my elders, invested in my journey as a student and as a minister, so I have the fortune to find them forthcoming. The interviews also supply valuable point-of-view beyond my own.

I acknowledge my power as a minister in my ethnography. Though I was one of six Associate Pastors and not at all “in charge” of the congregation, I operated with the authority of the Senior Pastor’s vision as a driving force. Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, III supplied the *Green Bible* as a tool as we cultivated a Green Committee in 2008. The sacred text opens with St. Francis of Assisi’s “Canticle of the Creatures” and contains writings from the likes of Archbishop Desmond Tutu as contributors in the Foreword, Introduction, and framing articles that celebrate how the edition honors Creation. The bible is a “green letter” version, with earth- and eco-justice related scriptures printed in green ink.

My location also means that I recognize echoes of scripture in the writings of More, Thommaso Campanella, and The Land of Prester John. I particularly identify parabolic principles common to the texts that the gardens and markets exemplify. I share the full text of two parables briefly below. Both highlight the growth activity that expands and spreads beyond the human agency and activity.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mt. 13:31-32, NRSV; Mk. 4:30-32; Lk. 13:18-19)
31 The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

The Parable of the Growing Seed (Mk 4:26-29, NRSV)
26 He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

The utopic visioning in community gardens is in fact to plant seeds that spread and have impact, sustainably empowering people to have greater health and to become better stewards of

the earth (Wynn; Anglin). In the parables above, seeds expand beyond what the sowers could imagine, and with magnitude requiring that the sower acknowledge that the growth and impact are beyond her or his human power; beyond “credit where credit is due” or “self-made” or “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” American dream, protestant ethic, capitalist spirit illusions. The two parables imply abundance, availability, and welcome without effort, reflecting the overflowing lands of early utopic visioning (Claeys and Sargeant).

The longer *Laborers in the Vineyard* parable (Matthew 20:1-16)¹ dynamically exemplifies the practice of abundance. The wealthy landowner hires people to work in his fields periodically throughout a single day and with each group, agrees to pay each person the “usual daily wage”—even those he hired at five in the evening. The workers who were hired early morning find this equal distribution unfair, given that they labored for many hours longer than the five o’clock crew. The parable implies that (1) the landowner is free to give generously, (2) the limiting mortal desire for proportional distribution negates the abundance available, and (3) the latecomers would have worked all day if only someone had hired them earlier in the day, and thus calls for empathy to those who are unemployed but would like to work. In social justice tradition, the parables invert and subvert dominant cultural and economic operations that Jesus encounters. Likewise, I argue that parishioners at Trinity and Ktizo seek to experience parable activity to invert and subvert the dominant societal operations that they too encounter.

Biblical scripture undergirds my archive. This ethnography asks the reader to accept that across time and place, sacred text serves as ethical canon, a manual for societal structure, legal instruction, medical document, and economic compass. I submit that Jesus embedded utopic vision in parables. Jesus explains to the disciples (Matthew 13:10-16) that the mystery of the kingdom of God, the complexity of a present and yet “not-yet” community is so available while not-yet attained, and requiring greater commitment and giving of self than is readily fathomable, so he uses parables to do what we express as “make it plain” in response with the sermon.

The parabolic in fact implies the unattainability—of comprehending, and of concretizing, the beloved community. Scott, in *Hear Then the Parable*, expresses his own dilemma in exegeting the parables. The exposition itself, he says, substitutes something that is not parable for that which is (Scott, xi). In this regard, then, the parables express striving for utopia while acknowledging that humanity cannot realize it [except with Divine activity, and here is where the faith vision departs from the secular], which reflects the fictional nature attributed to utopic dreaming. The one gospel text that does not involve parables, the book of John, ends with a story of the resurrected Christ appearing to the disciples along the seashore as they fish in their boats. When they return, Jesus has cooked breakfast. He asks Peter three times if he loves him. Each time, Peter says, “Yes, you know I do.” And Jesus responds, each time, “If you love me, feed my sheep.” Here, in this charge, Jesus transforms the dominant parabolic symbols into the specific task of making sure that people have food. All investment, ownership, and forgiveness serve the purpose of growing food and feeding others.

The George Washington Carver Garden at Trinity United Church of Christ spans 423 – 450 W. 95th Street in Chicago, Illinois. The garden itself is gated, but has open-gate hours. It has the utopic characteristic of being within a [semi] protected space: a few square blocks that include the church, its properties, and the immediate residential streets are uncontrolled spaces amidst two major gang territories: Gangsta Disciples and Almighty Black P-Stones. This locale makes it all the more necessary for Paula Anglin, Master Gardener, to connect with people passing by on foot and let them know that they are welcome in the garden. And there are passers-

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by, since 95th street is a major thoroughfare along the route of at least seven buses and three separate commuter trains for the city and suburbs. The garden and church sit on one side of train tracks that has very modest middle class homes, while across the tracks are even more modest homes, and Lowden Homes Housing Development, where the church has built a neighborly relationship and sponsored activities.

In utopic fashion, the gardening engages the wider community in labor, and also shares the harvest with those who did not. The Carver Garden and the Farmers' Market deliberately reach back to a past agrarian time. In interviews with the *New York Times*, elders recall childhoods of farming with grandparents in the south, and then migrating north with parents to urban areas (Freedman). Several farmers are retired workers from professions such as bank security and teaching, who now culturally and economically recover a past way of life; recover the lost "privilege" of growing and eating healthy, fresh food. Simultaneously, the garden and market look forward to a future time, painting images of an after-life as well as an improved human experience that is more holistic for both physical and spiritual health. The garden and the market at Trinity UCC thus operate along utopic dimensions of time.

The garden has as a goal, as Green Committee Co-Chair Deacon Adrienne Wynn reminded me, of being available to passers-by even when the gates are closed. In 2009, we planted strawberries and sunflowers along the fence so that people might reach in and take them, according to scriptural laws in the Hebrew bible that prohibit harvesting the outer corners of fields (Leviticus 23:22). The scripture resonated with me for years because it requires that landowners leave gleaning the corners of the fields to the poor and foreigners in the community. Unfortunately, we later learned that the sun wasn't right to grow the strawberries along that northern boundary. Still, the garden had the social architecture intended to transform relationships, spaces, and local economy, and it evolved to embody this scripture.

Contemporarily, how food gets to the table and into mouths is more and more monopolized through modernization, and here I find both Foucault and Guss helpful. Performable rituals of planting, harvesting, preparing, and eating must adapt. The transformations that the gardens and markets seek make them heterotopic spaces that create contextual contrast and juxtapositions as Foucault describes: even to specify an "urban garden" implies something oxymoronic. Trinity's Carver Garden disrupts surrounding infrastructures. Likewise, Ktizo stewards gardens in Phoenix that also echo the 16th century religious radicalism, operate within an eschatological dimension of time, and embody heterotopia on the southern end of downtown.

Both St. Vincent De Paul and Andre House are missions buried within warehouse districts in downtown Phoenix. Andre House, a shelter for men, and the Phoenix Human Resources department share a space where St. Vincent De Paul manages the dining room, and it appears to be almost literally in the middle of a train yard. This is the location of Ktizo's first garden venture with St. Vincent De Paul. The Catholic mission has two other satellites, and at one of those, I conducted participant observation and assisted primary gardener Jim Dennis and community partner Tony Kasowski with composting. The visual contrast of "urban garden" is sharp in the Ktizo gardens, for there are no residences nearby. At 4th and Watkins, St. Vincent De Paul has a campus of several acres, houses a clothing program, outdoor bathrooms, and a daycare center with a clearly new and impressive injury-free playground. It sits, however, amongst tire, car, and truck junkyards and/or repair—it becomes difficult to distinguish which.

The garden, tucked away a two-block walk behind the main facility on Watkins Street, is just one and a half blocks away from being under the I-17 highway. It rises like an outer-space freeway in a *Jetsons* cartoon, looming anachronistically behind and above fledgling fruit trees and leafy green swiss chard. Jim Dennis gardens at this site now, because the goal of the Ktizo garden program is only the genesis: the team initiates, teaches, and trains, so that each site can maintain and self-sustain on its own. The hope for the South 9th Avenue site was, like the goal of the Trinity UCC Carver Garden, to grow food for the kitchen to use in serving. Gardening ideally saves kitchens money and serves healthier foods to those in need. The other goal on South 9th was to employ men who live in the shelter at Andre House. But, according to Jim, the process required “too many committees. They got a committee for everything!” and Tony Kasowski seconded. The bureaucratic red tape, both argued, impeded the visions for employment that they hoped the garden could create. Both men shared alternative methods of “hiring” the men they had trained when they had occasion, and have their eyes on land they would farm together, privately, to work toward the goal of employing homeless men.

Another bureaucratic employment example that Jim offered was of a friend who teaches Horticulture to the special needs class at a Phoenix-area high school. He wanted to hire them for summer gardening, but the school would not fund the program. So, instead, the students raised baby chicks during the academic year, sold the adult chickens at twenty-five dollars apiece, and essentially raised the money to pay themselves to have summer jobs (Dennis). All five of the interviews offered examples of such inversions or circumventions of power. Deacon Rose Scott disclosed strategies for cooking classes and tastings that manage to fall under food licensing through partnerships, such as with Soul Vegetarian Restaurant in Chicago, or by moving segments of programs indoors to be covered under the church’s kitchen license.

Tony (Kasowski) discussed composting as another bureaucratic issue, as did Miss Paula, as I call her. Miss Paula contends that with 6500 members, if each household and the church kitchen even only brought coffee grounds and teabags alone, the compost would be rich: visually attractive and pleasantly aromatic (Anglin). Tony has pursued a public works approach and tried thus far unsuccessfully to get the city to devise plans for composting waste from various sites. He is aware that he will have to create the steps for them, but he has found avenues (that he will not disclose!) to circumvent regulations.

Tony partners with a natural juice company in Scottsdale and picks up their pulp every few days. We unloaded eleven five-gallon paint buckets of pulp from his station wagon: apple, carrot, pomegranate, orange, and more. Tony loved the textures and feel, and urged me and other helpers to thrust our hands in to experience it. “Just call me the juice pulp pimp,” he said. “You know, I’ll be over at someone’s house, and I’ll see them start to throw a banana peel in the trash, and I’m like, ‘Whoa there, buddy, just you hang on a minute now!’” Tony exemplifies “passionate about the earth,” which is how Deacon Wynn described the gardeners at Trinity. In fact, Tony is listed as one of five local growers to watch on Instagram here in Phoenix (Crowley).

The anachronisms, or oxymorons—or some other word I have yet to find for that last sentence—aren’t lost on me (and I don’t know how to Instagram at all). Tony, who yells at friends for throwing out fruit peel, who trains homeless men to farm and garden, hikes around the metro area hunting for compost, gardens under a major interstate freeway, *and then Instagrams* his work. In full disclosure, Tony also gardens and landscapes for money to support his not-for-profit habits. But I think Guss would value Tony’s Instagram evidence and his

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mention in the *Phoenix New Times* as a prime example of how the transplanting of festive performance, which in this case is a harvest ritual, from rural to urban space, subverts how and who “owns” gardening knowledge and production sites. The celebratory presentation is in part technological, embodying a festive state principle that Guss calls “multilocal” (Guss 131).

Mrs. Monica Brown Moss (the “First Lady” in black church tradition) was a major force behind the market and garden at Trinity UCC. A *New York Times* interview and the church’s *Empowering Voices* podcast reveal her passion for cultural knowledge and cultural production surrounding food as a justice issue. Mrs. Moss voices the deep disadvantages that the neighboring community suffers from lack of access to healthy and fresh food choices. She mentions that eighty percent of Chicago Public School children receive free or reduced lunch, and that one in six qualify as “food insecure.” Thus, the TUCC market accepts SNAP benefits (federal food stamp program). The benefits provide double dollars: each benefit dollar offers twice the purchasing power at a farmers’ market. Mrs. Moss describes the farmers market as “visible, and it gives people access to healthy foods.”

Mrs. Moss and Deacon Wynn both discussed the need to explain why the market is a better choice for shopping, even though some produce items cost more than at the places where neighbors shop—which are typically big box stores on the outskirts of the city. Deacon Wynn builds an economic argument and explains to attendees that the farmers are making their entire living off their land, and so shoppers cannot expect to receive bulk, corporate prices. She underscores that the church does not make any money from the market: the entire purpose is to support the farmers and the dietary needs of the community. The church tracks the zip codes of the shoppers, so Wynn and Scott both attest to the increased attendance of residents of the neighborhood at the market. Mrs. Moss explains pricing with emotional and physical appeal: “There is so much food waste globally because we transport food so far. Eating locally, eating what is grown within a two-hundred mile radius makes such a difference to our economy and to our bodies but it also empowers farmers—farmers who are the heart, the heartland of America. Farmers who have such a noble, hard job...toiling away for us, so that we can have the benefit of the land.” She later goes on to say, “When we start to realize how much food we waste, how many people could be fed by what we waste, we start being better stewards; change our conscience...it would bring us closer to God” (Moss).

Our partnership with our farmers began when, in December of 2008, Pastor Moss appointed Deacon Adrienne Wynn and me as co-chairs to cultivate a Green Committee, with the garden and market as initial projects. We established a Green Page in the weekly church bulletin, which Deacon Rose Scott now maintains, to offer Green tips to the congregation—recycling, conservation, composting, reuse, etc. At a cultural arts fair, we met founders of Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Living: a married couple of a naturopathic medical doctor and a farmer, who farmed and taught sustainable practices on their acres in Pembroke Township, Illinois, about one hour south and east of Chicago.

The Pembroke – Hopkins Park community has a legendary history that includes an older man escaping enslavement in North Carolina with somewhere between eight and eighteen of his children, walking across the country, and settling there. Historically the community has had periods of thriving, but has always struggled with the political agendas, corporate monopolies, and licensing hoops that consistently plague any small business, and particularly minority ones. The most prevalent and understandable challenge for small farmers is the paperwork and expense of receiving federal permissions to call food “organically grown”—so they use the

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language of “pesticide free.” Black Oaks Center, with educated leaders and multiple streams of income, created a cooperative partnership that covered thirteen of the Pembroke-Hopkins Park farms, eliminating the steps that were cumbersome for some, and rendering all within legal codes. This umbrella was a gift. To build the partnership, I personally went out to the farm for workdays, learning to create compound with mud and hay that would build additional edifices for teaching on the site and to build a bridge over a small stream of water. The farmers also came to the 95th Street site to help the church plant its first harvest. A third organization, Faith in Place, which ecumenically helps diverse faith-based institutions Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle, helped both Trinity and Black Oaks Center access further resources.

Black Oaks Center was attractive to other institutions in the city as well, and in 2010, the second year of Trinity’s market, the collective began to serve markets across multiple communities. Sustaining Trinity’s market evolved to partner with individual farmers—some from that collective, others who were independent. Deacon Rose Scott reports that after that dip in 2010, the market has gradually increased to the original magnitude, and has also expanded to include other vendors. Deacon Scott, as well as Mrs. Moss, Miss Paula, and Deacon Wynn, all report the garden and market experience as one that I argue is a festival every Saturday, July through October.

The garden is named for George Washington Carver, African American nutritionist, food scientist, and innovator of farming technology. The Green Committee engaged the Artists in Residence ministry to work with youth and paint a mural on the street-facing north wall of the storage sheds that separate the garden and the parking lot where the market serves. Zumba classes are held every Saturday at Trinity anyway, and the session relocated outside at the market. “The music is pumpin’, it’s upbeat, and you easily have two hundred people out there,” reports Miss Paula. “One time I looked up from the garden, and two white girls were there dancing in the back!” Her account attests to the visibility of the market from the street, and the transformation of the lot into a festive space. Observations of diversity express that the festival environment attracts participants who typically are absent from the neighborhood, and celebrates that entry. Intentionally, and in line with a congregation whose motto is “Christ, Community, and Culture,” the market and the garden celebrate the recovery of cultural knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge in a new space and time.

When we began the initial planning for the Carver Garden and the TUCC Farmers’ Market, Deacon Wynn had a constant refrain: “Rev. Tiffany, what are we going to do about iceberg lettuce?” For her, iceberg lettuce was a “pet project;” the microcosmic, parabolic symbol of all that was wrong with the community’s food choices. Iceberg lettuce, completely lacking in nutrients as far as she was concerned, was our people’s inexpensive, uninformed, “go-to” attempt at transformation. She proudly reports that the garden grows romaine and mixed greens—no iceberg lettuce. Her goals now are larger scale. “My vision is that every week, for the market to be *bustling*; for people to have the desire for more and more fresh food; for more African American farmers all over the nation to make a living and support themselves...that we educate people to the true benefits of eating from the earth.”

To truly transform dietary habits, the market in fact must achieve festive state every week. The experience *must* be out of the ordinary, and the temporality *must* build desire to attend, or the community will make other grocery choices elsewhere. Deacon Wynn describes that the produce aesthetically contributes to the festival experience. Of the produce from a farmer with a plot in the neighborhood at 96th and Vincennes, she says, “Rev. Tiffany, you

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should have seen his greens—they LOOKED like utopia! They are absolutely incredible. They look so perfect!” For its own sustainability, the market must conjure a festive experience that makes people return. Persons already attending weekly support the market because the experience is one set apart from the rest of daily life.

The Garden has also become a site of specifically scheduled festive activity as well (Anglin, email). For example, the Singles Ministry sponsored the Garden Jubilee. “Jubilee” is a biblical term that means after 50 years, all debts are forgiven, and families can return to the lands that their ancestors owned. Jubilee was a biblical economic justice strategy, such that then families would not lose their land and wealth for endless generations—their communities would not have a “1%” that retained wealth in an ever-increasing gap. In this case, the garden becomes a meeting spot for singles in the congregation. Trinity UCC was celebrating its 50th Anniversary since the founding of the parish. The ministry transplanted and divided perennial plants into 50 parts to donate to 50 spaces (gardens, shelters, food pantries, soup kitchens) around the city. The church particularly donates to the service organizations in its “Christmas is not your birthday” roster.

The Singles’ Ministry also sponsors the TUCC “Hallelujah Party” for youth, and in 2010, began the pumpkin carving celebration in the garden with pumpkins grown in the garden. Many churches that want to create a festive space for children whose parents aren’t comfortable celebrating the demons and ghouls of Halloween. Furthermore, in places like Chicago, parents may be fine with the fun of Halloween, but are not sure where children may safely go trick or treating. The garden has become part of the celebration, since (a) growing pumpkins is part of the harvest, and (b) Deacon Adrienne Wynn, co-chair of the Green Committee, loves pumpkin carving “like she’s ten years old.” Thus, the garden has created additional service opportunities for a ministry that simultaneously engage a festival spirit.

The congregation has also staged Commemorative events in the Garden space (Anglin, email). First, the congregation processed from the sanctuary after worship services one Sunday to have a dedication ceremony of the mural painted by the artists and a team of youth. Second, to commemorate the life of a pastor, the congregation dedicated the Rev. Barbara J. Allen Monarch Butterfly Garden. The garden won a grant from the US Department of Forestry partnered with Faith in Place that included donations of milkweed plants, which are the only place that Monarch Butterflies will lay eggs, and to which they return every year. Rev. Allen always loved and wore butterflies, and now the Garden honors her memory. Thirdly, the woman who founded the TUCC Yoga Ministry continued to lead it for over thirty years, for free, every Saturday morning at 7:30 am for “whosoever will” until she died well into her eighties, and her first name was Rosalia. The ministry thus planted a rose garden to honor Miss Rosalia’s commitment to health. With each honoring, a festival moment occurred with music, dance, and prayer celebration. The Yoga ministry weekly comes to the garden during the market months to hold devotion, which consists of song, prayer, scripture, and sharing, before or after their weekly exercise.

The festival opportunities and the technologies reflected in the garden and market mirror the respatialization that Guss attributes to festive discourse across communities (Guss 133). The festive state conjured weekly, July through October at Trinity further mirrors migrations that Guss describes, and offers the chance to produce new meanings, and reconfigure identities and relations. The more meanings produced, the more Foucault’s juxtapositions become evident in the spaces on 95th street. Alternative medicine, alternatives to gym memberships, alternatives to

mental health care, and sacred, welcome space amidst closed doors of access all highlight the festive and heterotopic qualities of the Carver Garden and the market.

Perhaps the best example of heterotopia is when the children from Vacation Bible School and the Freedom School come to the garden, as Miss Paula describes. “Their first question, every time, is ‘Can we eat it?!’ Before I can explain anything, give a tour—nothing, just ‘Can we eat it?!’ And so I just say yes and turn them loose. And without fail, the next question is ‘Can we plant something?’” Miss Paula describes that the last time, there wasn’t any space, yet she somehow found a corner for them to plant something. She always does; there always has to be room. The children are ready and eager to transform; they want to eat healthy things. This heterotopic space for many of the youth introduces them to the experience of picking and eating, and is and the only space where such options are available. She added raspberries and is praying fervently that a few donated fruit trees survive the winter, to maintain a harvest that the children can select and eat easily and immediately.

Freedom School students also painted the rain barrels that collect enough water to hydrate the roses and about a third of the rest of the garden (Anglin). Deacon Rose Scott reports that this past market season, a team of teenagers helped set up the market at *SIX-THIRTY AM* every Saturday morning! Anglin envisions rolling up the garage-like door on one of the shed spaces, erecting a stage, draping the walls in black, and inviting youth to perform spoken word, open mic, and music in the evenings. Deacon Wynn and Mrs. Moss imagine farming as a viable career choice for youth. Jim Dennis and Tony Kasowski seek to generate jobs for unemployed young men and special needs teens. The effort at inter-generationally transmitting the farming technologies and love of earth within urban centers leads me to call farming an *art*—a *performed* art, incommensurably, parabolically, and heterotopically juxtaposed with the economic and food injustice realities of a congregational garden practicing beloved community.

¹ *The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16 NRSV)*

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4 and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. 5 When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 6 And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ 7 They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ 9 When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ 13 But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

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Encounters through Spirit-Led Imagination: Spiritan Mission and Implications for Religious Education

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Abstract:

This paper will analyze writings of the Catholic Congregation of the Holy Spirit to explore "Spirit-led imagination." Spiritans seek encounters with God termed "practical union," which involve imaginative openness to the Holy Spirit and orient them toward life-giving encounters with others. They carry this disposition into a variety of cultures, with particular commitment to the poor and religiously diverse. Through examination of Spiritan writings, the paper will uncover how "practical union" influences their educational commitments, and consider implications for religious education.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Rev. Francis Libermann wrote to his confreres in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit:

Action or practical union [with God] consists in divesting oneself of natural impressions to open one's soul to divine impressions ...Then we have a superabundance of truth...we see the things of God effortlessly and clearly, because our soul is in its element, the divine light.¹

In 2013, a group of educators from this same congregation wrote:

Spiritan education presumes that every human being possesses a specific vocation in and through which the personality unfolds and character is developed. This presumes that all our educational, evangelizing efforts seek to form and provide an 'upbringing' in the image of Christ who is 'the image of the unseen God.'²

Bringing these expressions together, a particular character emerges for the nature of "Spiritan" spirituality and education: Spiritans, through openness to the action of God in self and others, become capable of seeing the divine image in both self and others. The nature of such openness involves an act of the imagination: the divine image, invisible to our eyes, becomes evident through the Spiritan's faith-based conviction of its presence. Education and all other forms of ministry proceed accordingly, with priority given to forming others in knowing themselves as "the image of the unseen God."

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit (the Spiritans) is a Roman Catholic order of vowed religious men, present in diverse parts of the world. My university, Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, sustains a Spiritan-infused educational vision. Through twenty years at Duquesne, I have observed how the distinctive aspects of this vision promote what I will call "imaginative encounters," conducted for the sake of greater human and planetary flourishing.

Accordingly, this essay will advance the following thesis: The Spiritan vision of education, as grounded in its core sense of mission in evangelization and liberation of the poor and oppressed and its vision of "practical union" with God and others, both fosters and is itself shaped by imaginative encounters. Religious educators can benefit from attending to and incorporating Spiritan educational sensibilities in order to foster imaginative encounters.

In pursuing this argument, I will turn first to a brief overview of the Congregation and how one of its founders, Francis Libermann, developed a spirituality called "practical union" which shaped the members' imaginative openness to union with God in conjunction with mission to others. Guided by this spirituality and the foundational importance of the Christian Gospel text, Luke 4:18-19 this spirituality shaped commitment to evangelization and liberation of the poor and oppressed. Continuing into the present day, Spiritans' growth in the global South (and

¹ Quoted in David Smith, "Libermann's Spirituality: A Spirituality of Presence," *Spiritan Horizons* 3 (2008): 11.

² Jeff Duaime et al., "The Heartbeat of Spiritan Education in the US," *Spiritan Horizons* 8 (Fall 2013): 107.

diminishment in the global North) challenges them to new imaginative encounters as they seek to live interculturally.

Next, I will offer a further exposition of Spiritan education today as imaginative encounter, with reference to work by Duquesne University faculty on its key pedagogical elements. Preliminary analysis of data from a study of Spiritan educators' self-understanding and practice will also be incorporated. I will bring these findings into dialogue with the approaches of scholar Douglas Sloan in his major work, *Insight-Imagination*. Finally, I will offer some openings for religious educators to draw upon Spiritan sources in their own cultivation of religious education for imaginative encounter.

The Spiritans

The Spiritan congregation was “co-founded” through the establishment and subsequent merger of two Catholic men’s religious congregations (orders).³ Claude Poullart des Places, a young Frenchman, founded the Congregation of the Holy Ghost in 1703 in Paris, along with a seminary for poor students preparing to become clergy. The order soon began focusing on preparation of missionaries for work outside the European continent during the eighteenth century, journeying to North America, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

In 1841, Francis Libermann founded another order, the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. Libermann, a convert to Christianity from Judaism, was especially interested in ministry with emancipated slaves, and promoted outreach in the French occupation areas of the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and Africa. In 1848, the two congregations were merged into a single Congregation of the Holy Ghost, with Libermann as its leader.⁴ Its ministries expanded in both North America and the global South throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “Today [Libermann’s] spiritual descendents serve in 62 countries on five continents, and more than 3,000 members.”⁵ Today, most men “in formation” preparing to become Spiritans, as well as fully professed Spiritans, are from the global South, with North American and European members a decided minority.

From the beginnings of the Spiritan congregation, lay people (non-vowed and non-ordained, women and men) have been attracted by the Spiritan vision. Accordingly, various configurations of lay supporters are affiliated with the congregation in regions where they are exercising their mission. Those who wish to commit themselves formally as “Lay Spiritan Associates” participate in formation and are immersed in the spirituality and mission activities of the congregation.

³ Information in this paragraph is drawn from The Congregation of the Holy Spirit Province in the United States, “Our History,” <http://spiritans.org/about-us/our-history/> (accessed 9/18/17).

⁴ Duaime et al. summarizes this history, 101-103.

⁵ Duquesne University Center for Spiritan Studies, “Founders of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit,” <http://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/spiritan-studies/congregation-founders> (accessed 9/4/17).

Spiritan Themes as Related to “Imaginative Encounter”

Douglas Sloan, whose work I will discuss below in greater detail, relies on the work of David Bohm in his characterization of imagination as epistemic catalyst: “All genuinely new knowledge comes by means of passionate, energy-filled insight that penetrates and pierces through our ordinary ways of thinking.”⁶ We depend on our imaginative capacities to receive and interpret data from our perceptions, organizing these into coherent ways of apprehending and responding to our world, as well as communicating these to others. This activity is multifaceted, drawing upon affect as well as cognition, physicality as well as the capacity for abstract generalization.

With this provisional description, let us turn to three themes of Spiritan spirituality and mission that provide fruitful openings for consideration of imaginative encounter in education.

Practical Union

In his important document, “Instruction for Missionaries,” Libermann provided an exposition of how he understood “practical union.” As a person’s operative state of being, it is characterized by such complete openness to the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit that one is able to set aside one’s “nature” and embrace the “supernatural” as a “habitual state of union with God.”⁷ Personal needs and preferences are renounced in order to embrace the priorities of God, known through the promptings of God’s Holy Spirit and the wisdom of the Spiritan community. Indeed, one of Libermann’s best-known metaphors focuses on the human’s disposition as being “light as a feather,” thus able to be directed wholly by the Spirit’s breath.⁸ As Leonard comments,

The attitude of “let it happen” or “may it be done” resists the subtle temptation to control God. It demands an acceptance of the provisional, the new, the unexpected, and a relativizing of all, except for the single absolute, God and His reign.⁹ (

While solely made possible by God’s grace, practical union requires that a person employ free will for intentional cooperation with this grace, thus forming the “habit” of seeking oneness with the divine.

Libermann recommends some key practices to foster this habit, with regular prayer and the discipline of self-abnegation. Here we will note a tension between the positive role for imagination that I argue is integral to Spiritan thought, and the language used by Libermann. In a discourse on “mental prayer” in the “Instructions for Missionaries,” he highlights three “acts” integral to this prayer type:

⁶ Douglas Sloan, *Insight-Imagination: The Emancipation of Thought and the Modern World* (San Rafael, CA: Barfield Press), 141.

⁷ Francis Mary Paul Libermann, *Instructions for Missionaries*, n.d., 40.

⁸ Cited in Smith, 15.

⁹ Pádraig Leonard, “Spiritan Spirituality: A Latin American Perspective, *Spiritan Horizons* 1 (2006): 92.

- 1) *Recollection*, as “the mustering of all faculties” in disposition toward God, in which “a certain diligence is needed to curb the wanderings of the imagination to guide and feed our devotion”;¹⁰
- 2) *Steady attention*, in which the pray-er seeks to avoid the distractions of “the senses and the imagination”¹¹ that can be exacerbated by a hot climate (experienced by many missionaries to the global South!), the desire for physical comfort, exhaustion and a low mood; and
- 3) *Union of wills in love*: Libermann was convinced that the proper exercise of prayer would foster self-denial, leading to a holy union of the person with God. However, this required that we “earnestly apply all our powers to some consideration about our Creator and Redeemer, in the spirit of faith, hope and love.”¹² In such exercise, one’s own desires are perfectly merged with the will of God.

While prayer in these dimensions clearly involves the person’s continual and conscious choices, Libermann makes evident that such acts of the will are only possible through God’s grace. The contemporary reader may justifiably question his dualistic language of nature and supernature, and the corresponding emphasis on abnegation of “fleshly” inclinations in favor of a purity-focused surrender to supernatural union of the soul with God. One might also wonder whether “imagination,” given Libermann’s negative view of it, can be redeemed for religious educators seeking a more holistic approach to imaginative encounter. The next paragraph will address the issue of dualism; later in the paper I will address the question of a positive Spiritan view for the imagination.

In interpreting Libermann’s thought on practical union and its relevance, other Spiritan scholars have uncovered insights that resist dualism and illuminate a deeper, more unified understanding of this approach. In their 2013 Bagamoyo document on education and Spiritan mission, the congregation stated:

2.4 We have received a spiritual heritage rooted in the “apostolic life” (SRL 3). Fidelity to prayer sustains and supports our “practical union”. We are becoming more aware of the call to a deeper interior life and a greater integration of our work and prayer.¹³

This text, like others by Spiritan authors, emphasize that Libermann’s practical union should be understood as an ongoing habit of integrating their “contemplative” and “active” commitments. Similarly, in a study of Libermann’s correspondence with some Spiritan missionaries to Africa, French Spiritans Coulon and Brasseur propose that for Libermann, a complete union of “the urgency of mission (apostolic life) and the urgency of sanctifying contemplation (interior life) combined in a *contempl-action*” (Coulon, 32).¹⁴ James Okoye, in a reflection on the Bagamoyo conference, likewise points to this essential unity as a central insight of those gathered at the

¹⁰ Libermann, 45 and 46.

¹¹ Libermann, 50.

¹² Libermann, 53.

¹³ Bagamoyo Chapter Documents (2013). SRL refers to the *Spiritane Rule of Life*.

¹⁴ Coulon and Brasseur, “‘Make Yourselves Negro with the Negroes’: The Missionary Strategy of a Mystic (1847),” Excerpt from *Libermann 1802-1852*, trans. Fagah (2013), 32.

event: apostolic activity must be nourished by prayer, and prayer gains its direction and depth through its connection with action.¹⁵

I infer that in this dynamic interrelationship, imagination must be at work as the capacity continually to translate between and among the everyday demands, uncertainties, joys and griefs of mission—“apostolic life”—and the way one prayerfully seeks union with the will of God—“interior life.” Contemplation helps to stir up passionate commitment to God and others through bringing the images of one’s complex missionary relationships into continual discernment and reshaping in light of the divine purpose. Action, in turn, offers the opportunities to transfer passionate, Spirit-infused commitment into transformed encounters and actions.

Spiritan mission has specific qualities and contexts in which its members seek to live “practical union,” as shaped by their foundational Scripture texts. These comprise our second theme.

Spiritan Mission as Evangelization, Liberation and Intercultural Identification

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus enters a synagogue in his home town, Nazareth, and reads from a scroll of the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (Lk 4:18-19; New American Bible Revised Version)

Spiritans find in this passage the core of their mission imperative: to follow Jesus by evangelization of the poor and liberation of the oppressed. As noted in my first section, this outreach began in des Places’s care for impoverished seminarians and workers in Paris, and spread through international missionary efforts. These efforts brought Spiritans into difficult and dangerous situations in which a number of them perished, particularly from disease. Their commitments to evangelization and liberation, heightened through imaginative insights, helped to sustain them.

Coulon and Brassuer develop in their essay a central aspect of Spiritan spirituality through which the missionary enters into imaginative identification with the *kenosis*—self-emptying—of Jesus on the cross. This theological theme is rooted through the Christian apostle Paul’s hymn in his letter to the Philippians (“Rather, he emptied himself... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross...” Phil 2:7-8). Coulon and Brasseur go on to argue that for

¹⁵ James Chukwuma Okoye, “What We Have Heard, What We Have Seen with Our Eyes,” *Spiritan Horizons* 7 (2012): especially 7-8.

Libermann, “mission is to be thought and lived out in terms of *conversion* (first movement: l. 49-63) and in terms of both *cultural* and *spiritual kenosis* (l. 63-74) *in imitation of Jesus Christ*.”¹⁶

Spiritans, as highlighted through their work in Africa, understood their mission to the poor and oppressed as a calling into such “*cultural* and *spiritual kenosis*.” One of Libermann’s most famous injunctions to these men encapsulates both the priority of the calling to evangelization and liberation, and the imaginative moves of inculturation in obedience of this calling. He wrote that rather than listening to those who insist on retaining European mores in their mission work, Spiritans should “‘Make yourselves Negros with the Negros.’”¹⁷ One can detect here the importance of imagination in an interior, kenotic move through which white Europeans attempted to set aside their culturally constructed identities and adopt the identities of the “others” they encountered, for the sake of service to them.

While our own perspective today may lead us to critique of Libermann’s language as well as doubt about whether such a move is possible, it is apparent that Spiritans’ spirituality for mission holds this as an ideal. Further, in Coulon and Brasseur’s reading, Libermann intended this especially as a move from a rationality-based consciousness to the supposed African emphasis on emotion. Again, while such language may seem somewhat dualistic and patronizing today, the intent was empathetic identification with a different worldview and reasoning process. From an educational perspective, we can consider this as a call to an epistemological conversion, made possible through God’s grace and openness to God’s Holy Spirit, but given form and sustained through the scriptural texts’ call to evangelization and liberation, and imaginative identification with the self-emptying character of Jesus Christ. By “making oneself Negro,” one is taking on a new identity which simultaneously puts one in greater union with Christ and with subjects of one’s encounter—Africans—to whom the Good News of Christ can then be most effectively addressed.

Furthermore, this disposition emerged for Spiritan missionaries in a larger context in which poverty, enslavement and the Christian evangelistic imperative were linked in specific ways that fostered their practical efforts in Africa. Coulon and Brasseur point out how support for abolition was growing in Europe in the early nineteenth century, as well as the fervor for liberty in the wake of the French Revolution. Libermann’s confreres were making the connection between ending slavery as an institution and bringing Africa, the source for slaves, to Christianity. Coulon and Brasseur contend that the central insight here was that by bringing the Gospel to Africans, Spiritans were directly participating in “proclaim[ing] liberty to captives” (Lk 4:18). Consistent with this message, they also strove to liberate through practices such as purchasing enslaved

¹⁶ Coulon and Brasseur, 28; emphasis in original. Their references are to Libermann’s letters.

¹⁷ Coulon and Brasseur take issue with the usual translation of Libermann here as “Be Negro with the Negroes...” They state, “The nuance can be important. Libermann’s approach implies a movement of volition and an active effort” (1). This emphasis on volition is also important in my analysis of Sloan’s relevance for Spiritan spirituality later in this essay.

people and creating settlements for them, providing educational, agricultural and spiritual support.

Today, the *Spiritan Rule of Life* (SRL) continues to emphasize the call to evangelization and liberation as central to Spiritans' mission. Members declare themselves ready to take on mission activities which are oriented toward "those oppressed and most disadvantaged," and to offer themselves for tasks which other church workers are unwilling to attempt.¹⁸ These very commitments are a source of renewal for the missionaries: "Our closeness to the poor brings us to hear afresh the gospel that we are preaching. It becomes an unceasing summons to conversion and an invitation to adopt a simple style of life."¹⁹

In preaching the Gospel to the poor and marginalized, Spiritans seek to form new community with them. This inclusive character of Spiritan mission, then, leads to my third priority for imaginative encounter: the nature of communal living by Spiritans and those with whom they minister.

Community, Hospitality and (Radical) Intercultural Living

Spiritans have embodied the commitment to community throughout their history; as their motto encapsulates, they seek to be of "One Heart. One Spirit."²⁰ As with other Roman Catholic congregations, they dedicate themselves to God and one another in shared vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Their Rule of Life provides guidance for this lifestyle. A Vietnamese Spiritan, Phung Manh Tien, points out that the Rule lays the foundation for community in the Holy Spirit's call to unity amid diversity. Members are urged to ongoing conversion toward this unity. "Thus we are invited to live every experience in the Spirit of God—our joys, our hardships and our pains, the works we undertake in our zeal, and even our failures (SRL 88)."²¹ Associated with "practical union" in the SRL text, this habitus is one in which the Spiritan exercises imaginative capacity, through belief in the continual presence of the Holy Spirit, to uncover the Spirit's working in the midst of community life. This animates a corresponding impetus and orientation for mission engagement—from one's religious community, into the building of new community with others beyond the congregation.

Unity provides strength to continue the mission, especially when experiencing great difficulties. However, the diversity resulting from Spiritans' international membership and locales makes the work of building community especially challenging. Their insights regarding the accomplishment of this task through attention to cultural differences thus provide us with

¹⁸ Congregation of the Holy Spirit, *Spiritan Rule of Life*, 3rd ed., 1987, 12.

¹⁹ SRL, 24.1.

²⁰ The Congregation of the Holy Spirit in the United States, "About Us," <http://spiritans.org/about-us/> (accessed 9/5/17).

²¹ Phung Manh Tien, "The Holy Spirit in Spiritan Life," *Spiritan Horizons* 12 (Fall 2017, forthcoming): 4.

particularly valuable guideposts for imaginative encounter. In this section I will focus on the work of two Spiritans who write for a broader academic audience, yet show in their attention to our encounters with “the other” a distinctively Spiritan flavor.

A Nigerian Spiritan theologian, Gregory Olikenyi, draws upon his Igbo cultural identity in a theological exploration of *hospitality* as a model for Christian evangelization. He outlines the three essential elements in the practice of hospitality: host, guest and reciprocity. Igbo hosts and guests encounter one another in prescribed ways and with understanding of identities that may be surprising to other cultures, especially individualized cultures such as those of the global North. For instance, the “host” is not simply one person or household, but by extension the entire local community. And the “guest” carries a sacred character “in the sense that he [she] is highly esteemed and treated with *respect* and *care*.”²² Most strikingly, there are implicit assumptions held by all about the nature of reciprocity in the host-guest relationship that prevent these becoming permanent identities. Olikenyi maintains that reciprocity entails “an *unconditional readiness to share* (give and take) both material and non-material things such as foodstuffs, clothes, visits, ideas, condolences and so on.”²³ In the rituals of host-guest encounter such as initial greeting, traditional offering of the kola nut, allowing time for the guest to become acclimated prior to stating his/her reasons for the visit, and so on, each partner in the relationship understands that whatever is *received* in this encounter may require the readiness to *give* in another encounter.

While this mutuality is explicit in what Olikenyi calls the “direct reciprocity” afforded between family members, it is more implicit in the “indirect hospitality” among those not related by blood. Here, since all Africans understand themselves as “potential travelers,” the expectation is that one who is a traveler and receives hospitality will exercise it in turn to other travelers.²⁴ I believe that such recognition of interdependence requires a disposition of imagining oneself, while in one role, continually living in the potential of the other role—thus the guest must anticipate a future role as host, and the host as guest, for true reciprocity to grow. Thus the reciprocity of hospitality offers a dynamism to each encounter that imaginatively roots it in past and future as well as the present.

Anthony Gittins, a US sociologist of religion and Spiritan, has offered to all those in mission work a model for “intercultural living” which speaks to the pressing needs of international religious congregations today. Building on the assumptions of shared community life, he argues that today’s multicultural realities make the fostering of community both more challenging and potentially richer experiences for living toward unity in the Spirit. Like many others, Spiritans have found their center of gravity shifting decisively toward the global South, as the congregation’s membership grows there and the numbers of members in the global North shrink dramatically. With these shifts, a kind of “reverse mission” is on the rise, as the Southern

²² Gregory Ikechukwu Olikenyi, *African Hospitality: A Model for the Communication of the Gospel in the African Cultural Context* (Steiner Verlag, 2001), 104.

²³ Olikenyi, 105; emphasis in original.

²⁴ Olikenyi, 108.

cultures who formerly received missionaries become the source of missionaries to the Northern locales! And as responsibilities to sustain the congregations' work passes more fully to the members of the newer cultures, communal living is increasingly multicultural. (At my university, for example, the resident community of Spiritans includes members from Nigeria, Ireland, France and Mauritius, as well as the United States.)

Gittins presents three models for community. In the first, "community of invitation," new members are invited in and expected to conform to the existing community's cultural norms. Here the expectation is that the community remains "monocultural" and that new members are assimilated. The second model, "community of inclusion," welcomes new members with the hope that their new perspectives will enrich the community and help it become more faithful to its mission. While ostensibly more "multicultural," this model can lead to confusion and upheaval because the direction of incorporation is often from the top down. In discounting inherent power dynamics, it can result in mere tokenism and unchanged communal structures.²⁵

Gittins's third model, "community of radical welcome," seeks to move into a genuinely *intercultural* communal identity. It requires reassessment by all members of the community's resources, with explicit attention to the contributions made by the newer members. "Theologically speaking, intercultural community members are drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds but share an intentional commitment to fellowship, motivated not simply by pragmatic or commercial considerations but by a shared religious conviction and common mission."²⁶ For Spiritans, their founding spirituality and its embodiment in their Rule of Life show that their particular openness to the Spirit requires the sustained commitment to mutual engagement with others while honoring others' uniqueness in race and culture ("Make yourselves Negro...").

This intercultural approach requires a kenotic spirituality consonant with the ministry of Jesus Christ:

Jesus chose to become a person of the margins, a sociological and biblical "stranger" rather than a person of power and influence. Influential people occupy central positions where power and authority lie. But Jesus chose the most effective way to encounter the people marginalized by circumstance and by society: outreach to society's "them" or "other"—whether by gender, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, or social or moral standing. For him, margins and boundaries were points of engagement rather than marks of separation or discrimination.²⁷

²⁵ Anthony J. Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture and the Renewal of Praxis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 180-183.

²⁶ Anthony J. Gittins, "Beyond International and Multicultural: Prerequisites and Prospects for Intercultural Community Living," *Spiritans Horizons* 12 (Fall 2017, forthcoming): 4-5.

²⁷ Gittins, "Beyond International and Multicultural," 12.

Yet, to invoke Olikenyi's notions of reciprocity in hospitality, the vulnerability of intercultural community members is mutual. Each must, by turns, be "host" and "guest" as a new entity emerges from its disparate elements. Virtues such as respect, tolerance and forbearance are essential, as well as knowledge of helpful concepts from psychology and sociology to make sense of the complexities of intercultural engagement.²⁸ Members continue to look beyond their ongoing, sinful failures to live in true mutuality, toward an imaginative immersion in the eschatological possibilities that God offers for the beloved community.

With this selective overview of prominent themes from Spiritan history and current thinking, let us move to educational considerations. In what follows, I will introduce interweave categories from educational philosopher Douglas Sloan's *Insight-Imagination* with some key themes emerging from current work on Spiritan education and pedagogical styles at Duquesne University, along with data from a current research study in which I am participating. I believe that this will provide support for finding in Spiritan spirituality a vision of education as imaginative encounter. This use of Sloan will also help to reclaim from Libermann's writings a contemporary appreciation for the exercise of imagination in "practical union."

Sloan's "Insight-Imagination," Spiritan Education and Imaginative Encounter

For several years, a lively discussion has taken place among Spiritans and other faculty at Duquesne University regarding the nature of Spiritan pedagogy—focused, though not exclusively, on faculty-student encounters in teaching and learning. In panel presentations, essays, brochures and many informal conversations, key elements have surfaced that are consonant with many themes already presented in my essay. Concurrently, two colleagues (Anne Marie Witchger Hansen and Steven Hansen) and I have undertaken a research project in which we have surveyed Spiritan educators and "formators" (those involved in the formation of new Spiritans) throughout the world. We have posed questions designed to elicit Spiritans' self-understandings as educators and the types of experiences they consider educative.

In this section I will weave together key aspects of Douglas Sloan's educational theory from his major work, *Insight-Imagination*, with the Spiritan themes already described and the current practices of Spiritan and Spiritan-inspired educators. I believe that this correlational analysis yields new insights worthy of consideration for religious educators interested in fostering imaginative encounters.

Imagination, Not "Imaginative Fancy"

As noted earlier in this essay, Sloan's interest in imagination arises from its capacity to catalyze new knowledge through inspired rearrangement of elements into new configurations, reshaping our accepted thought patterns into something more than the sum of their parts. He cautions, however, that this capacity must be distinguished from "imaginative fancy," in which one focuses on "memories, habits, personal biases and predilections, social conventions, and so

²⁸ Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally*, 184.

forth,” in ways that reinforce prejudices and rigid epistemological structures.²⁹ He posits that avoiding these flights of fancy involves the use of both “formal logic” and exercise of the “will.” Logic is required to order one’s categories into coherence, but must always be subordinated to the authentic use of imagination. The latter draws its authenticity from the exercise of the will to create “the active openness of the whole person to the influx of new meaning and new perception.”³⁰ The habit of such openness to imagination-insight (terms used by Sloan synonymously) will then be characterized by “openness, spontaneity, anticipation, affirmation, and sustained, critical directedness.”³¹ New insights emerge in the will’s ability to hold “tension between openness and involvement.”³²

Here, I believe, is the answer to the problematizing of “imagination” by Francis Libermann. Instead of authentic, Spirit-led openness, Libermann was concerned with sensory and affective distractions that prevent the cultivation of a disciplined will which is sufficient to sustain the “practical union” necessary for the difficult work of evangelization and liberation. Libermann’s merging of contemplative and apostolic unions into practical union mirrors Sloan’s tension between openness and involvement as a way to foster new insight.

At Duquesne University and among the Spiritan educators in my research study, the work to hold teachers and learners alike in this tension takes many creative forms. One Duquesne professor described, for example, a class in which the students were struggling with a difficult textbook. She invited them into a contemplative exercise in which they were able to reflect upon and speak honestly about the nature of their difficulties, then supported them in a rereading in which they searched for sentences and short passages that were compelling and shared these with peers. “Rather than trying to understand a text that is outside of them and “inaccessible,” students inquired about the contact between interiority and information, where knowing emerges.”³³

In our research study on Spiritan educators worldwide, my colleagues and I have been struck by how readily these people imaginatively identify non-schooling environments and encounters as occasions for claiming their identity as “educators.” For example, a Spiritan in Africa recounted how one of his school’s young students fell critically ill, and how he worked with his confreres to provide medical assistance to her. “[B]efore she died, she confessed that her soul was at peace because of the love she has received and that she had seen a difference in the Catholic Church through the Spiritans.”³⁴ Others spoke of international gatherings of Spiritans who “educated” one another through their shared commitments to their mission to the poor and to intercultural living as distinctively showing “Spiritan education” at work.

²⁹ Sloan, 166.

³⁰ Sloan, 167.

³¹ Sloan, 167.

³² Sloan, 168.

³³ Steven Hansen, Sandra Quiñones and Jason Margolis, “Spiritan Pedagogies in Practice: Possibilities, Tensions and Characteristics of Walking With Learners,” *Spiritan Horizons* 10 (Fall 2015): 103.

³⁴ Anne Marie Witchger Hansen, Steve Hansen and Maureen O’Brien, “Describing a Spiritan Pedagogy: The Expression of the Spiritan Charism in Teaching Practices of Spiritans and Lay Spiritan Associates in Secondary Education, Higher Education and Spiritan Formation Houses,” data from research in progress.

Besides reflecting a broad view of education that religious educators will find congenial, such accounts make evident how the Spiritans' willed openness to divine encounter through the Holy Spirit allows them to name imaginatively the educational dimensions of important, transformative experiences. (Spiritans also have an established vocabulary of "formal" and "informal" educational activities, which encourages a broadened construal.) As with the Duquesne professors, the conviction that the Spirit is moving *within and among* all educational participants keeps teachers committed to a style of teaching-learning in which learners can be gently invited to share in the "tension between openness and involvement," finding in the formal or informal educational space the possibility of imaginative insights. As Sloan puts it, "The imagination is not only that sense in Mary Warnock's phrase that 'there is always *more* to experience, and *more in* what we experience than we can predict' (and control), but it is also the means wherein that *more* to and *more in* can be revealed."³⁵

Caring, Holistic and Reciprocal Encounters

In *Insight-Imagination*, Sloan continually emphasizes the importance of emotions in the creation of new knowledge through imaginative reordering processes. Again, this is not a superficial sentimentality (as so often encouraged in contemporary media and other forms of communication). Rather, there is an agential emphasis as people are taught to "feel for themselves," rather than passively accept external emotional manipulation, and to discern appropriate and inappropriate feelings for various occasions.³⁶ Here Sloan is insistent that other-directed emotions are crucial for imaginative construction of knowledge: "In love and compassion feeling becomes not only an organ of perception but also an organ of cognition in which experience and knowing are one."³⁷ And in the disciplined encounters with others in which one negotiates the tension between the others' integrity and the imperative to relationship, we are able to receive what is revealed through them.

I find in this emphasis of Sloan's a strong resonance with the work of Olikenyi and Gittins. While Spiritans are enjoined continually to move, in the words of some of our research study participants, in a "center/out" direction, this is for the sake of creating new "centers" of mutuality in service and love. As Olikenyi maintains, the practices of Igbo hospitality are premised on reciprocity—one is sometimes a host, sometimes a guest. In teaching and learning, while there may be unequal relationships within formal educational contexts, care for the other involves continually working to increase the other's ability to participate as co-learner and co-teacher. Relationships of love, compassion and concern for the whole person invite such mutuality and reciprocity, and in turn, increase the possibility for imaginative insights as participants shift their perspectives.

In a moving educational narrative, a Duquesne professor describes how she brings her students into empathetic encounter with underserved populations in the local neighborhoods. Starting with the students themselves, she does a series of class exercises in which they are invited to

³⁵ Sloan, 148-49.

³⁶ Sloan, 163.

³⁷ Sloan, 164-65.

place themselves imaginatively within meaningful locations—beautiful landscapes, their childhood homes, the center of campus—and develop attitudes of care and involvement as a result of the awakening of their emotions. They are then ready to throw themselves into a variety of community-engagement projects to serve the poor and marginalized. The professor comments, “I think that Spiritan pedagogy must awaken the heart and then appeal to our students’ competence, creativity, and professionalism and show them that they have a gift to give to the world. We drive with the learners so that they themselves can drive the bus.”³⁸ Through being “guest” in their own studies to the “host” professor, students become ready to encounter others and treat them, in turn, as “guests.” Similarly, a research study respondent, when asked to describe a “distinctively Spiritan educational experience,” simply responded: “Teaching students how to go into the community and listen to clients and staff and to BE present to them, building relationships first.”³⁹

When this happens, as another research participant expressed it: “For me a Spiritan educational experience is one that is “center/out”. It begins with the lived experience of the student, their center, and from that base pushes them out to the margins of their world. At the margin they experience diversity in thought, person and worldview.”⁴⁰ As classroom “guests” who are treated with respect and care, they gain the confidence and security to become “hosts” and servants. Rather than the educational setting as a position of privilege, it is a center of community offering strength and clarity for the mission “out.”

Conclusion

I hope that the preceding analysis offers religious educators some insights to ponder for their own practice in fostering imaginative encounters. Here I will briefly suggest some implications.

Religious education as broadly construed and concerned with continual reshaping of both religious and educational forms. The Spiritan model in dialogue with Sloan calls to mind Maria Harris’s characterization of education as the “work of giving form. . . . especially concerned with the creation, re-creation, fashioning, and refashioning of form.”⁴¹ When the entire community is co-responsible for shaping and reshaping its forms, then imagination will be continually at play among the participants, and will be directly catalyzed through their willingness to encounter critically their religious traditions, other participants and the cultures in which they are immersed. By their very nature, such educational encounters will move far beyond the traditional classroom. They will require a discipline of “center/out” movement, both for the sake of fidelity to the religious tradition’s ethical imperatives and from the conviction that truly, education happens in the encounter with diverse others. In Gittins’s framework, such encounters lead to forging of intercultural communal relationships with them—new models of community attentive to the changing dynamics of the faith community’s mission.

“Orthopraxy” guides all religious-educational efforts, including formation in “orthodoxy.” Religious education within faith communities is justifiably concerned with handing on the faith,

³⁸ Hansen et al., 101.

³⁹ Witchger Hansen et al., data from research in progress.

⁴⁰ Witchger Hansen et al., data from research in progress.

⁴¹ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 40.

yet the Spiritan example of imaginative encounter suggests that mission should become the driver and testing ground for any efforts for formation in core communal beliefs. If, as Sloan suggests, both cold logic and flights of sentimentality block true insight-imagination, so will dry, didactic and non-contextual presentations of religious traditions block appropriation of the dynamism of tradition. Francis Libermann told his confreres that their mission work would be their “second novitiate,” writing to them that in their first novitiate they made idealistic resolutions based on “imaginary situations”—but now, in the field, “your resolutions will be based firmly in reality.”⁴² Spiritans and Spiritan educators’ continuing efforts to be guided by the realities of mission settings provide a model for religious educators to engage in their work attentive to participants’ developmental and contextual “reality.”

Religious education must create opportunities for the conscious appropriation of religious identity which is both flexible and faithful. A theme of the data from Spiritan participants in our research study is that effective Spiritan education requires that one work consciously as a Spiritan. While this may seem self-evident, the experience of “being Spiritan” resonated across many respondents’ descriptions of educational experiences. Thus a participant, when asked to “Describe a learning experience that you facilitated that you felt was distinctively Spiritan,” simply responded: “As a teacher of theology at a Spiritan theological institute I am trying to walk in the footsteps of those who taught me, who gave their best without asking for much in return.”⁴³ In his own educational context, then, this Spiritan sought to adapt creatively the wisdom of his teachers. Another, when asked, the same question, answered: “It’s who I am. I cannot say much more without sounding pretentious. I do in fact emphasize the Holy Spirit as the essential animator of mission and Christian living, but I would hope I would do that if I were not a Spiritan.”⁴⁴ Thus, while guided by his congregation’s vision and thus steeped in its particular identity, he is able to imagine this openness to the Spirit even outside his vowed membership.

Religious educators also continually live with the tension of particularity and pluralism, seeking to draw strength from the first for the sake of the passionate and transformative engagement with the second. The witness of Spiritans in mission and education offers rich insights for us as we seek imaginative, just and transformative encounters within our work.

⁴² From Libermann’s 1847 letter to the Community of Dakar and Gabon, printed in Coulon and Brasseur, 23-24.

⁴³ Witchger Hansen et al., research data in progress.

⁴⁴ Witchger Hansen et al., research data in progress.

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Encountering Others through Compassion:
 Tough Values, Moral Challenges, and Religious Education

Abstract

This paper proposes a pedagogy of compassion based on the reinterpretation of Christian compassion and critical dialogue between three religious educators. Historically, scholarly literature on compassion tends to compartmentalize compassion as one of the following concepts—a virtue, passion, emotion, or duty/obligation. However, no individual concept adequately addresses the issues that emerge in encounters with others, such as those that occur through migration. Therefore, I redefine compassion as a *holistic way of being in the world and participating in others' suffering through an ongoing process of openness and mindfulness towards the other—socially, psychologically, spiritually, and ethically*. Based on this revised definition of compassion, I engage in a critical dialogue among three educators and conclude that a pedagogy of compassion is about cultivating a way of being in the world, rather than teaching knowledge about compassion. I argue that the process of cultivating compassion can be compared to the process through which students grow in socio-political, ethical, psychological, spiritual, and relational awareness.

Through the cultivation of compassion, religious education can contribute to resolving conflicts caused by differences.¹ Historically, the scholarly literature on compassion tends to take a compartmentalized approach by characterizing compassion as either a virtue, an emotion, or a duty/obligation (Cassell 2009, 394). Although each concept is grounded in historical, philosophical, and theological metaphors, no individual concept adequately addresses the issues that emerge in intercultural encounters with others, such as those that occur through migration. A compartmentalized approach limits the embodiment of compassion in the classroom. Contemporary studies on compassion tend to resist monolithic descriptions and instead view compassion as a holistic process that encompasses emotional, behavioral, psychological, social, ethical, physical, and religious components.² In this paper, I redefine compassion as a *holistic way of being in the world and participating in others' suffering through an ongoing process of openness and mindfulness towards the other—socially, psychologically, spiritually, and ethically*. Based on this revised definition of compassion, I propose two key issues in the

¹ Various religious educators have discussed the interconnection between religious education and compassion: see Rogers (2014), Goto (2016), and Parachin (2000). This paper expands upon the existing research on compassion in religious education.

² Despite some variations in language, researchers agree that compassion involves at least the following five aspects: cognitive (recognizing suffering), affective (a sense of concern), aspirational or motivational (a wish to relieve the suffering), attentional (focus and attention), and behavioral (an action that stems from compassion) (Ekman 2008; Gilbert 2005; Neff 2011; Batson, Ahmad, and Lishner 2009).

pedagogy of compassion: (i) how we expand the circle of compassion and (ii) how we embody compassion by integrating its psychological and behavioral aspects.

The purpose of this paper is to propose a pedagogy of compassion based on a reinterpretation of historical and contemporary understandings of compassion and on critical dialogues among three educators: John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Mary Elizabeth Moore. This paper is composed of four sections. The first part builds upon the critical dialogue between historical works of compassion (Augustine, Aristotle, and the Stoics) and contemporary perspectives on the ethics of compassion (global liberation theologians) and presents four ways of defining compassion: as resistance, as forgiveness, as reconciliation, and as peaceful co-existence. The second part provides a pedagogy of compassion in order to connect the four definitions of compassion to the broader social issues that emerge in intercultural encounters. I draw on three concepts developed by educators whose works incorporate compassion: John Dewey's intersubjective transformation in learning, Paulo Freire's understanding of Conscientization, and Mary Elizabeth Moore's process-relational pedagogies. Based on the critical dialogue among these three educators, I conclude that a pedagogy of compassion is about cultivating a way of being in the world, rather than teaching knowledge about compassion. I argue that the process of cultivating compassion can be compared to the process through which students grow in socio-political, ethical, psychological, spiritual, and relational awareness.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL VIEWS ON COMPASSION

Although compassion is at the heart of the Christian tradition, the ways Christians have articulated compassion throughout history differ and contain some ambiguity (Wessel 2016, 2). *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines compassion as "suffering together with another, participation in suffering."³ The linguistic root of compassion is *cum-passio*. *Passio* means "to suffer" and *cum* means "with." Put together, compassion means "to suffer with." The early Christians viewed compassion as morally ambiguous because many of them believed that relating compassionately to the suffering of others required feeling emotion *passionately* (Wessel 2016, 2). This emotional aspect of compassion was considered a serious threat to the ascetic ideal exemplified by the "monks, nuns, and spiritual elite" who dedicated themselves to the pursuit of "emotional tranquility," whether in isolation or in religious communities (ibid.). The idealization of their emotional tranquility therefore produced a tension between the virtue of compassion and Christian life. Among those influenced by this view of the passions was Augustine (d. 430) (Brown 2013, 9-10). Ambivalence between asceticism and compassion, passion and Christian life, and emotion and action is reflected in his early writings in the *Confessions* (Wessel 2016, 121). After 40 years of grappling with the tension, however, he came to believe that because Christians feel the passions in the context of God, they are not distracted by the passions as pagans are (Augustine, 2009, 9.5). In fact, the passions in Christian contexts lead to the practice of virtue and should be cherished for their ethical purpose (Augustine, 2009, 9.4). Augustine writes: "Because such a Christian morality was inherently different from that of the Stoics; the emotions the Christian experienced served a specific ethical purpose" (Augustine, 2009, 9.5). These emotions allow us to be responsible to Christian life as long as they arise in the context of Christian love (Canning 1993, 42-43). How, then, did Augustine turn from avoiding emotions to acknowledging the key role emotions play in compassion and Christian life?

³ "Compassion," in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1340.

Scholars believe that this shift occurred after he made peace with his grief over the deaths of his friend and his mother.⁴ This grief, he concluded, had shaped him in an essential way. In contrast to the ideal of the passionless wise man who was unaffected by grief, Augustine had learned to embrace emotion (Wetzel 1992, 110). Augustine's turn from emotionless tranquility to affective compassion can be viewed as an "affective transformation" (ibid., 115). The definition of compassion we see in the *City of God*—"a kind of sympathy in our heart for the suffering of another that surely compels us to help as much as we can"—was the next development of compassion after Augustine's "affective transformation" (Augustine, 2009, 9.5). The Stoic ideal of the impassive wise man no longer seemed desirable or even possible to attain. Specifically, the idea of the impassive wise man failed because "[h]is refusal to engage emotionally signaled his unwillingness to offer aid to the afflicted" (Wessel 2016, 114). Feelings in the Christian life should be "the virtuous motivation for ethical deeds" (ibid., 118). Therefore, in the *City of God*, Augustine suggests that "[t]he sympathy ('compassio') we feel for another human being motivates us to act compassionately to alleviate suffering" (ibid.).

Augustine's affective turn, as I have described above, parallels a contemporary movement toward holistic approaches to compassion. Augustine's effort to consolidate feelings and actions (i.e., to produce compassionate behavior) have moral implications for education today because the kind of compassion we need does not involve a separation between how we feel and how we act, but is an *embodied* compassion, or a *praxis* that connects the emotional aspect of compassion (i.e., feeling other people's suffering) and the behavioral component (the action that follows the feeling). This "affective turn" is also expanded by contemporary scholars who strive to find ways to enlarge the scope of compassion to include cultural, geographic, and religious others. In the following section, I discuss how contemporary scholars express this continuing effort to (i) embody compassion and (ii) expand compassion.

FOUR CONTEMPORARY THEMES OF COMPASSION

Despite differences in nuance, the Christian theological vocabulary of compassion has five recurring themes: compassion as suffering with, compassion as resistance, compassion as reconciliation, compassion as forgiveness, and compassion as peaceful co-existence. First, many contemporary theologians, including feminist, process, and Latin American liberation theologians, describe compassion as *suffering with* (Heyward 1984, Johnson 1993, Swinton 2007, Whitehead 2010). In this understanding, God is portrayed as a loving God who suffers with humans and is moved by their suffering, as opposed to what Aristotle calls an "unmoved mover." For example, Johnson (1993, 59) depicts the Creator Spirit as participating in the creation's suffering:

Love who is the Creator Spirit participates in the world's destiny. She can be grieved (Eph 4:30); she can even be quenched (1 Thes 5:19). When creation groans in labor pains and we do too (Rom 8:22-23), the Spirit is in the groaning and in the midwifing that breathes rhythmically along and cooperates in the birth. In other words, in the midst of the agony and delight of the world the Creator Spirit has the character of compassion.

The theme of *compassion as suffering with* is explored in the description of the divine-human relationship. Investigating the Hebrew words and etymologies related to compassion in the Old

⁴ On the discussion of Augustine's "affective turn," see Wessel (2016, 115-120).

Testament, Davies (2003, 108) argues that “compassion as a unified concept, unequivocally implying ‘suffering with,’ is more modern in kind.” Building upon Davies’ analysis, Yang (2014, 113) explains that “the meaning of *compassion* in the OT is also associated with the present meaning of the word ‘compassion,’ meaning ‘to suffer with.’” Yang expands the analysis to show that references to God in the Old Testament reveal the compassionate and merciful attributes of God, whose compassion resembles that of “a father or mother for his or her children” (113).

Second, contemporary theologians understand *compassion as resistance* (Fabella and Oduyoye 2006; Farley 1990). Farley (1990), for example, argues that God is present and active through divine compassion that empowers human beings to resist radical suffering. Participating in the compassion of God, humans experience God’s love as a power or a force that empowers people to resist injustice. Compassion is manifested as an active resistance to evil and suffering that strives for healing and God’s communion with the world. Attesting to the power of compassion in history, Farley points out the moments of effective compassion in history—occasions of redemption, healing, and empowerment: “Compassion is love as it encounters suffering” (79). Divine compassion is to be found wherever compassion resists radical suffering. In this sense, interhuman compassion is intimately related to divine compassion because it is the source of interhuman compassion.

Third, the theme of *compassion as reconciliation for communal healing* is promoted by many contemporary theologians, including Latin American liberation theologians. Arguing that God is a compassionate liberator of the oppressed, Gutiérrez (1988, 4) perceives Christ as the one who brings liberation from the sin of all kinds of injustice and oppression. The Asian feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan (2000, 66) argues that in Asia, “where many people are struggling to acquire basic necessities and human dignity, God is often seen as the compassionate one, listening to the people’s cries and empowering them to face life’s adversities.” God’s love is shown in the embrace of human beings for who they are regardless of their location, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, or originality.

Fourth, contemporary theologians understand *compassion as forgiveness*. Suchocki (1994, 144) maintains that forgiveness is “willing the well-being of victim(s) and violator(s) in the context of the fullest possible knowledge of the nature of the violation.” Forgiveness is an essential form of compassion because “forgiveness holds the possibility of breaking the chain of violence” (ibid.). Defining compassion as a wish for the well-being of the other, Suchocki connects it to the Christian interpretation of passion:

This is compassion, a “feeling with” that at the same time longs and works for the well-being of the other and therefore the self. Such a dynamic may well underlie the Christian interpretation of Christ on the cross identifying with all sin and sinners, and therefore able to redeem all sinners from sin. Conformity with the sin is an essential step in transformation. (111)

For Suchoki, the notion of forgiveness as compassion corresponds to the Christian understanding of sin.

Lastly, Christian theologians understand *compassion as a peaceful co-existence* that incorporates a radical inclusion of the marginalized, including the natural world. Citing Albert Einstein, Dowd (1991, 81, my emphasis) emphasizes the task of widening the circle of

compassion to all living beings: “Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our *circle of compassion* to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” Johnson (1993) also argues that the Creator Spirit encourages humans to be “co-creators” of compassion. “Moved by this Spirit [of compassion],” Johnson writes, “human beings are similarly configured to compassion, taught to be co-creators who enter the lists on behalf of those who suffer, to resist and creatively transform the powers that destroy” (59). Expanding the circle of compassion would “rejoin us to the cosmic covenant made after the biblical flood ‘between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth,’ and whose sign is the rainbow (Gen 9:8-17)” (ibid., 49). Widening the circle of compassion to all creatures is one of our responsibilities as co-partners with the Creator Spirit. Likewise, Heyward (1984, 87) connects the themes of sexuality, love, and justice: “Our passion as lovers is what fuels both our rage at injustice—including that which is done to us—and our compassion, or our passion, which is on behalf of/in empathy with those who violate us and hurt us and would even destroy us.”

What these five themes of compassion point toward is the commitment to *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase meaning “repair of the world” (Moore 2004, xii). In the following section, I invite three educators to explore practical ways to embody these five themes of compassion and thereby enlarge the circle of compassion.

COMPASSION AS A WAY OF BEING: THREE EDUCATORS IN CONVERSATION

John Dewey

Despite some controversies of Dewey’s philosophies of education, scholars uphold Dewey’s educational theory and find it relevant to today’s educational context (Hildebrand 2003; Alexander, 2006; Weber 2008; Seigfried 2010; Cunningham and Heilbronn 2016). Among Dewey’s contributions, this paper will point out three aspects relevant to our discussion of pedagogy of compassion.

First, Dewey’s concept of educational experience contributes to what Javier Sáenz Obregón calls “inter-subjective transformation” for teachers, which invites both teachers *and* students to the educational experience. Arguing that the goal of education is realizing individuals’ “utmost potentialities,” Dewey implies that this goal could be applied to teachers as well as students. Teachers, like students, are the “subjects of educational experience,” and that we must learn to apply to teachers the same aspirations we have for students (Obregón, 2016, 96). In particular, pedagogical practices should promote “inter-subjective transformation” for teachers and students alike (Obregón, 2016, 96). Dewey’s emphases on “self-reflection and self-creation” (Garrison, Neubert, and Reich, 2012, 173-174) could be applied to teachers who are also participants of the learning processes.

Second, Dewey gives special attention to the importance of cultivating virtues, calling it “the social aim of education” (Dewey 2010). Dewey writes:

The school must make ceaseless and intelligently organized effort to develop above all else the will for cooperation and the spirit which sees in every other individual an equal right to share in the cultural and material fruits of collective human invention, industry, skill and knowledge (Dewey 2010).

For Dewey, democratic virtues such as “intelligent sympathy” play essential roles in an individual’s life. He writes: “Sympathy as a desirable quality is something more than feeling. It

is a cultivated imagination for what men [*sic*] have in common and a rebellion at whatever unnecessarily divided them” (Dewey 2004, 116). Democratic virtues such as intelligent sympathy and compassion prepare individuals to respond to the social responsibility by preparing them with inner potential. Although Dewey did not suggest that compassion, by itself, is sufficient in promoting the social aim of education, he saw the potential that compassion contributes to moral responsibility and benevolence (Rockefeller, 1991).

Third, as a pragmatist, Dewey was keen in reading the reality that influences educational processes. In his 1934 article, he writes:

The world is being rapidly industrialized. Individual groups, tribes and races, once living completely untouched by the economic regime of modern capitalistic industry, now find almost every phase of their lives affected by its expansion . . . The other especially urgent need is connected with the present unprecedented wave of nationalistic sentiment, of racial and national prejudice, of readiness to resort to force of arms (Dewey, 1934, 244).

Dewey answers to the educational need in his time which reads: “to rebuild the spirit of common understanding, of mutual sympathy and goodwill among all peoples and races, to exorcise the demon of prejudice, isolation and hatred” (Dewey, 1934, 245). Overall, Dewey’s goal to develop a peaceful and democratic culture is still an enduring task in our present time. As Andres English argues, Dewey’s concept of “struggle in learning” has influenced definitions of learning and of learning’s beginning point in contemporary education. The condition of “in-between of learning” (English, 129)—being beyond ignorance but not yet in possession of full knowledge—is uncomfortable and difficult, but it offers rich possibilities for reflective thinking for learners and teachers who are willing to undertake the daunting task of pedagogical reconstruction in the face of changing realities.

Paulo Freire

Freire’s movement toward the process of Conscientization—a process in which learners become aware of socio-political and economic oppressions and act to transform it—provides profound insights to the pedagogy of compassion in five aspects. First, Freire emphasizes the importance of co-learning and co-creating of knowledge. The traditional “banking” education—where learners are regarded as passive recipients of knowledge—inhibits the “emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” which is required for cultivating compassion (Freire, 2014, 81). In “banking education,” learners are “docile listeners” who mechanically memorize and reproduce information. (Freire, 2014, 81). Therefore, Freire promotes the co-creation of knowledge where learners are “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (Freire, 2014, 81). In this Conscientization process, “the teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own.” (Freire, 2014, 81) Students begin to recognize social, political, or economic oppression and act to eliminate it. In this sense, both teachers and learners are active co-participants of the learning process.

Second, Freire emphasizes the “situationality” of learners and teachers where they are placed in a particular situation: “Human beings *are* because they *are* in a situation. And they *will be more* [who they are], the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it” (Freire, 2014, author’s emphasis, 109). The fact that teachers and learners

are located in a particular situation does not mean that it is stagnant. This is why Freire believes both teachers and learners should constantly analyze their realities. “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation,” Freire writes, “they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (Freire, 2014, 49). The critical analyses of realities should motivate individuals to resist oppression and create an avenue to participate in social transformation.

Third, Freire maintains that action and reflection should occur at the same time. For him, critical reflection is also action, and vice versa. This is because Conscientization is a continuous process that begins with the *recognition* of oppressive situation which is followed by *an action* to transform the oppressive situation. Conscientization can be compared to the process of cultivating compassion which requires facing one’s deep-seated prejudice, stereotype, and traumatic memories that hinders one from practicing compassion.

Fourth, Freire introduces three elements of critical pedagogies: critical reflection, dialogue and action. Freire believes that the goal of critical pedagogy is to encourage learners to challenge social inequalities and ultimately transform the oppression. In order to achieve these goals, Freire believes that dialogue and subsequent action should be rooted in critical reflection, which involves active participation, ethical passion toward common human flourishing, critical insight that penetrates surface meanings, and compassion towards humanity. “Dialogue with the people is radically necessary to every authentic revolution. This is what makes it a revolution, as distinguished from a military *coup*” (Freire, 2014, author’s emphasis, 128). Ira Shor aptly summarizes critical pedagogy as “Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse” (Shor, 2012).

Lastly, Freire recognizes the value of creative energy to name the wrong and change the world. Freire believe that inculcation of knowledge “anesthetizes and inhibits creative power” whereas “problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality” (Freire, 2014, 81). This “creative power” enables learners to critically intervene in reality. This is why Freire believes “to the oppressor consciousness, the humanization of the ‘others,’ of the people, appears not as the pursuit of full humanity, but as subversion” (Freire, 2014, 59). For Freire, the essential part of the Conscientization process is learners equipping the ability to decode their situations and see themselves as the subject of the learning process.

Essentially, Freire’s contribution to the contemporary education, in general, and the development of the pedagogy of compassion, in particular, can be summarized in the following concepts: *praxis* and *radical love*. According to Freire, *praxis* is a “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2014, 51) and *radical love* is a “commitment to others” (Freire, 2014, 89). In order to resist oppression, the “act of love” is essential because it is a “commitment to their cause— the cause of liberation” (Freire, 2014, 89). Through this process of intervention and re-intervention, human beings can participate in the betterment of the world through education.

Mary Elizabeth Moore

Throughout her scholarship, Moore shows practical and concrete ways to embody the praxis of compassion based on the process-relational assumption that people are always in

proces). Moore places imagination at the center of her educational theory (Moore 2005, 2006). Although Moore does not use the term “compassion” in the essays discussed here, what she proposes as ways to cultivate imagination are also essential ways to cultivate compassion. In her essay “Imagination at the Center,” Moore (2005) provides five ways to cultivate imagination: Seeking Goodness, Seeking Transcendence—Seeking Goodness, Touching the Unknown, Intimate Knowing, Knowing the Stranger and the Unfamiliar, and Imagining and Responding to the Possible. With “seeking goodness,” Moore (2005, 201) refers to the teleological direction of educational practices that “enable people to discover and analyze forces of goodness and evil, and those practices that stir vision and equip people with skills to enhance the common good.” Moore’s search for goodness in education resonates with the work of Paulo Freire, which I explore in more detail later. By “seeking transcendence—touching the unknown,” Moore refers to “transcending limits of an evil social system, transcending narrow understandings of humanity (and ‘we-ness’), and transcending one way of living in order to dwell in transition and emerge in a new way” (204). Practices of “intimate knowing” refers to practices that lead people to “engage deeply with the fullness of other individuals and communities, other parts of the cosmos, empirical data, and complex ideas” (204). “Knowing the stranger and the unfamiliar” refers to “encouraging people to know the stranger and the unfamiliar” (205). Finally, “imagining and responding to the possible,” refers to the educators’ duty to “engage students in envisioning alternate futures” (207). For the purposes of this paper, I discuss the practices of “intimate knowing” and “knowing the stranger and the unfamiliar” in detail. These two ways to cultivate imagination will ground our discussion of Moore’s process-relational theology of compassion.

When Moore argues that “intimate knowing” is a requirement for cultivating imagination, she understands that intimate knowing requires “attendances to particularity, to relationships within the web of life, and to the cultivation of appreciative consciousness” (204).⁵ This definition of “intimate knowing” shows practical and concrete ways to embody the praxis of compassion. Moore believes that traditional educational methods tend to “neglect to strengthen habits of concrete appreciation of the individual facts in their full interplay of emergent values” as well as “engagement with particular people, beings, observations, and ideas” (2006, 213). These emphases on particularity and local contexts are discussed in her essays “Imagine Peace: Knowing the Real-Imagining the Impossible” and “Ethnic Diversity and Biodiversity: Richness at the Center of Education” (2000, 2006). In “Imagine Peace,” Moore expands Whitehead’s emphases on the balance between “intellectual analysis” and argues that “[intimate knowing] includes relating with others from the deep marrow of human experience” (2006, 213).⁶ Moore explains that “the creation of safe spaces” is necessary for people to experiment with new relationships and new ideas within small communities so that these new way of being can be embodied in larger communities (2005, 205; 2006, 213).

Practices of “knowing the stranger and the unfamiliar” (2005, 205-207; 2006, 213-215) help to enlarge the circle of compassion in practice. This practice presupposes “crossing cultural, geographic, religious, and age boundaries” (2006, 213). Encounters with the neighbor and stranger, the familiar and unfamiliar, according to Moore, are an essential part of education because such encounters “stir imagination by opening new windows of experience from which

⁵ This point will be further discussed in a later section.

⁶ Whitehead’s critique of the imbalance between intellectual analysis and individual facts in traditional education can be found in Whitehead (1925).

people can draw as they face the particularities of their own lives and their participation in the larger world day by day” (ibid.).

It is important to note here that Moore bases this practice on the notion of intersubjective relationship. Moore believes that knowing the unfamiliar requires “genuine, life-changing interactions and the deep knowing that emerges from them” (2005, 206). To elaborate this point, Moore provides three potential dangers of encountering the unknown. First, Moore warns of the danger of collecting otherness as an object to be accumulated, admired, laughed at, or pitied. Objectifying the other is dangerous because such encounters often ignore power differentials (ibid., 214). This attitude can end up externalizing others and taking agency away from them. Therefore, Moore points out the danger of “boundary-crossing education” as the second potential danger in encountering others: “If knowing has to do with relating with the world in a deep and responsive way, then our relationships need to be permeated with awareness and critical response to differentials in power, as well as differentials in language, style, arts, and rituals.” Building such relation-based knowing is possible when we ask “much of the knowers *and* the known, including a redress of inequalities and a movement toward equality and interdependence.” These questions include asking about “real people” who are affected by religious and cultural traditions, worldwide political and economic patterns, and multifaceted web relationships. Third, Moore warns of the danger of teaching people that encountering the stranger and the unfamiliar involves “an encounter with a radical other, which may or may not affect learners.” This disengaging way of thinking otherness, according to Moore, is based on the assumption that otherness is a “substantive, nonchanging, and external” entity. Instead, borrowing Carl Sterkens’ argument, Moore maintains that we should approach the other “recognizing that diversity exists both within and beyond individuals’ experience” (214).

For Moore, these practices of cultivating imagination can contribute to igniting an imagination of global peace and justice. To this end, Moore provides four aspects of Whiteheadian cosmology: visions of peace, inheritance and novelty, open future, and overcoming dualisms—converting opposition into contrast.

[Peace] is a broadening of feeling due to the emergence of some deep metaphysical insight, un verbalized and yet momentous in its coordination of values. Its first effect is the removal of the stress of acquisitive feeling arising from the soul’s preoccupation with itself. Thus peace carries with it a surpassing of personality ... It results in a wider sweep of conscious interest. It enlarges the field of attention. Thus Peace is self-control at its widest,—at the width where the “self” has been lost, and interest has been transferred to coordinations wider than personality. (2006, 204)⁷

Although Moore does not use the term *compassion*, her Whiteheadian analysis of peace recalls our definition of compassion as a *holistic way of being in the world and participating in others’ suffering with an ongoing process of openness and mindfulness towards the other—socially, psychologically, spiritually, and ethically*. First, Moore suggests that Peace “can be actively cultivated through active engagement with the world” (2006, 204). When Moore describes teaching “active engagement with the world,” she does not simply mean teaching students *about justice and peace*; she demands change in “*how we teach*” (Bischoff and Moore 2007, 153): “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

⁷ See Whitehead (1933, 285-86).

of life or in the intentional disruptions aimed at reshaping a stable but destructive situation” (2005, 200)

Second, Moore believes practicing peace in education involves an enlargement of the field of attention or “a broadening of feeling” with the wider world”:

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. In most times, education needs to be involved in all of these actions, this stirring visions and teaching skills that foster some degrees of stability and some degrees of social change, with the higher goal of enhancing life that flourishes for all people and the entire earth. (ibid., 205)

Third, Moore points out the sensitivity to tragedy and the realities of tragedy in practicing Whiteheadian Peace:

[Peace] keeps vivid the sensitiveness to the tragedy; and it sees the tragedy as a living agent persuading the world to aim at fitness beyond the faded level of surrounding fact. Each tragedy is the disclosure of an ideal—What might have been, and was not: What can be. The tragedy was not in vain . . . The inner feeling belonging to this grasp of the service of tragedy is Peace—the purification of the emotions. (As cited in Moore, 2006, 205)

Lastly, Moore provides important insights for our discussion of pedagogy of compassion:

Peace is not a thing to be taught, but a gift to be expected and received. Teachers are thus challenged to cultivate expectation and wonder, rather than teaching reliance on human reason and control. (ibid., 205)

Here, Moore implies that cultivating peace is about cultivating a way of being in the world, rather than teaching knowledge about peace:

It cannot be assumed that the dissemination of information about, for example, the religious beliefs and cultural values of ethnic minorities will, in itself, counter and modify attitudes of radical prejudice or inhibit racist behavior on the part of others. (ibid., 205)

Moore’s attention to process-relational thought and imagination undergirds her commitment to pedagogies concerned with justice, peace, and compassion grounded in the particulars of practice and everyday life. To be specific, Moore fundamentally believes that the person is constantly changing. Her process view of the person does not mean, however, that the person is situated outside a particular social, cultural, economic context. Rather, the fact that a person is constantly changing requires attention to the interconnectedness of contexts. She calls for educators to build compassionate relationships with learners, embodying justice, peace, and compassion in the classroom, rather than focusing on the inculcation of knowledge. Moore (1991) calls this “teaching from the heart.”

TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF COMPASSION

A critical conversation among Dewey, Freire, and Moore provides us with a number of vital elements of the pedagogy of compassion. First, they all emphasize a form of praxis—a critical reflection followed by an action and an action that informs further reflection. Second, they put creation of virtues such as compassion at the center of education. Third, they all acknowledge both students and teachers as subjects of co-learning. Fourth, they address how education can expand compassion thereby potentially contributing to the global peace. Fifth, they explore how life history and social contexts influence critical learning, arguing the importance of reading the realities of a particular community in time. Sixth, they implicitly and explicitly challenge different kinds of oppressions that can occur in the encounters with others, including racism, sexism, classism, and ageism. Last, they elaborate the importance of relationship building, or what Moore calls “intimate knowing.” These pedagogical insights can not only fight the obstacles of compassion such as prejudice but also create an ethical space that promotes co-existence. In the present global context, the cultivation of compassion through the pedagogy of compassion will contribute to cultural, religious, and sociological diversity.

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Learning to See Those Who Suffer
The Community of Practice and the Construction of Knowledge
in a Ministry of Encounter and Care

Abstract

This paper attests to the devastating isolation that suffering effects and argues for a Christian response manifested in a ministry of encounter and care situated in the local church. Ministry to marginalized, suffering people is a multifaceted, interpersonal endeavor that simultaneously comprises an essential dimension of the universal church's mission; this paper proposes that a ministry of caring encounter functions most effectively when undertaken by Christians in the local church working together to recognize and dynamically respond to the particular instances of suffering present in their midst.

Drawing on social learning theory, the paper conceptualizes each local expression of a ministry of encounter and care as a community of practice whose members together construct the formative knowledge upon which their praxis depends, particularly through the key practice of theological reflection anchoring their joint work. Through their shared enterprise of discernment and active care, individuals in this community of practice: (1) cultivate their abilities to see those whom suffering renders nearly invisible, (2) develop together a richer and more fulsome praxis of encounter and care than they could as individuals, and (3) strengthen their Christian identities.

Look at my right hand and see –
there is no one who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for me.
-Psalm 142:4, *NRSV*

The psalmist's ancient cry attests to humankind's ever-present vulnerability to suffering and the loneliness it fosters. For thousands of years, the lament has retained its power and resonance because the pain of tragedy, trauma, loss, illness, chronic distress, and grief are woven into the experience of being human. Suffering recognizes no boundaries; it visits its devastating effects upon people in every age and circumstance.

When it strikes, suffering can, and often does, imprison people in loneliness and isolation. Sometimes it is the wounded one who avoids others, lacking the energy and strength to participate in relationship, bereft of the hope that encounter might offer succor. Sometimes the suffering one bears the brunt of others' inattention. Stigma, fear, ignorance, embarrassment, and even misguided attempts at sensitivity can introduce distance, marginalization, and exclusion into the daily experiences of people already enduring anguish and adversity.

As Christians, we have been called for nearly two millennia to seek out those who suffer. We are enjoined by Jesus to "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Lk 14:21) who dwell at the edge of society in their misfortune. Jesus's mandate remains as challenging today as it was during his earthly lifetime because the experience of suffering continues to sow withdrawal, discomfort, awkwardness, and rejection and to disrupt relationships as it alters the landscapes of people's lives.

In our own time, Pope Francis exhorts the church to heed Jesus's directive. He reminds Christ's disciples in the twenty-first century of their responsibility to fight the isolation suffering engenders by deliberately pursuing connection with those enduring anguish. "In order for this to happen, it is necessary to go out: out from the churches and the parishes, to go outside and look for people where they live, where they suffer, and where they hope."¹ Pope Francis urges the construction of a "culture of encounter"² that consists of "not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening, not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying, 'what a shame, poor people!' but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion; 'and then to draw near, to touch and to say: "Do not weep"' and to give at least a drop of life."³ To create a culture of encounter that intentionally reaches out so personally and tangibly to suffering people is both urgent need and formidable task – one that Christians are called to as an expression of individual discipleship and also as a manifestation of the local faith community's participation in

¹ Vatican Radio, "The Name of God is Mercy: New Book By Pope Francis," accessed 1/22/17, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/01/11/the_name_of_god_is_mercy_new_book_by_pope_francis/1200141.

² John L. Allen, Jr., "Francis and the Culture of Encounter," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 2013, accessed 2/27/17, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/francis-and-culture-encounter>.

³ Pope Francis, "For a Culture of Encounter," Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, 13 September 2016, accessed 2/27/17, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160913_for-a-culture-of-encounter.html.

the mission of the universal church.⁴ Given its highly relational character, it is a work whose dimensions can be learned best by Christians working together at the local level in the practice of encounter itself.

Social Learning Theory – Constructing Knowledge, Building the Culture of Encounter *The Culture of Encounter and the Practice of Theological Reflection*

The faith community's efforts to attend to people who, in their suffering, also endure great loneliness or marginalization can be conceptualized as a new work – a shared ministry of encounter and care. As a practice of discipleship grounded in baptism, this work can be a locus for the cooperative efforts of lay volunteers and ministry professionals in the parish. It is a ministry whose key characteristics are recognition and response. Animated by the “mysticism of open eyes”⁵ that Johann Baptist Metz names as the disposition with which the church must greet suffering and embodied in praxis grounded in discernment and compassionate action, this endeavor of “going out” that Pope Francis calls for requires a secure footing within the parish in which to ground its works.

Before the faith community can respond to suffering through a ministry of care and encounter, the parishioners and ministers participating in that ministry must gather together to identify instances of suffering in their community, discern sufferers' particular needs, seek guidance from their faith tradition, determine their ministerial resources, and plan ministerial action. Trusting in one another and their deliberate process of discernment, they can then work together to fulsomely attend to suffering people with ministering care. These twin movements of recognition and response, however, must give rise to a third movement that allows parishioners and ministers to realize what they have learned through their ministry. Moving from experiences of encounter to a place of joint reflection allows the knowledge gained in practices of care to be named, examined, refined, and finally incorporated into subsequent praxis.

This dynamic process, of (1) recognizing and naming suffering and considering together how to address it, (2) practicing encounter, and (3) drawing lessons from instances of encounter and care that in turn promote further “going out,” can be more properly understood as one of iterative praxis grounded in sustained theological reflection. As a practice, theological reflection enables the local church to flexibly identify the unique ways that suffering is manifesting in its community, to jointly discern the gifts of the Spirit and the material resources within the parish that ministers and laity alike can draw upon in their work to alleviate suffering, and to develop modes of caring encounter that will best serve the people whom they seek to aid. Theological reflection is thus a core practice around which a ministry of care and encounter can be built. It engenders not only ministerial activity, but more fundamentally, the construction of knowledge that facilitates both praxis and the formation of Christian identity.

Theological Reflection As Situated Learning

To understand how learning and identity formation arise for individuals who jointly participate in the ministry of care and encounter, we can employ the epistemological model of situated learning. Theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger propose that a social theory of situated learning best provides the theoretical framework to analyze how knowledge is

⁴ As a Catholic scholar, I situate this analysis of the local ministry of care and encounter at the level of the parish. I will employ the term local church and parish interchangeably, however, in recognition that such a ministry is well-suited to enactment by local congregations of many faith traditions.

⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God*, ed., trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 163.

constructed by human persons working together in a common endeavor. By examining social learning theory's key insights, particularly as they are contextualized in communities characterized by a common practice, we can better understand how engaging in theological reflection together can allow people in a ministry of care and encounter to develop the transformative knowledge that supports their praxis and shapes their identities. With that understanding, in turn, we can discern more readily that the knowledge and identity Christians develop through participation in a ministerial community of practice can be more comprehensive and transformative than the knowledge such individuals could gain through their own personal acts of discernment and discipleship.

Social learning theory locates learning at the intersection of the individual, a particular community, and its practices.⁶ In contrast to the models of "learning as internalization"⁷ (characterized by Paulo Freire as "banking education"⁸), this conceptualization proposes that learning must be understood as decoupled from the traditional instructional paradigm and recognized as a "dimension of social practice."⁹ Learning is not the passive byproduct of instruction, but rather the active construction of knowledge that emerges from participation with others in joint practices.¹⁰ Wenger theorizes that knowledge's telos is "the ability to experience our world and our engagement with it as meaningful."¹¹ In a ministry of care and encounter, knowing who needs care, what kind of care is possible, how the faith community can structure, initiate, and sustain care, and how the faith tradition can guide that care, is vital. Such knowledge makes possible the meaningful engagement with suffering others that ministering Christians hope to initiate. Social learning theory makes clear, however, that this knowledge cannot be *taught*. It is not knowledge that is received by a learner. Rather, it is developed jointly by those who participate in the ministry. Their learning arises among and between them as they work together in the tasks of theological reflection and the caring praxis that their reflection stimulates. The more robust their engagements with one another, the more robust, complex and multi-faceted their learning will be.

Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger name the community in which actors construct knowledge the "community of practice."¹² It is important to note that these communities are distinguished by the actions of their members. It is their involvement with the work around which the community is centered that makes a community one of practice and not of simple camaraderie. To belong to the community of practice in any capacity, Lave and Wenger explain, "imp[lies] participation in an activity system about which participants share understanding concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities."¹³ Conceptualizing those members of the parish who participate in the ministry of encounter and care as a community of practice is a first step in understanding how the relationship between practice and learning that Wenger and

⁶ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

⁷ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 49.

⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition (New York: Continuum, 2000), 72.

⁹ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 43.

¹⁰ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 33.

¹¹ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 4.

¹² Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 98.

¹³ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 98.

Lave emphasize is operative within the ministering community as it engages in theological reflection and ensuing works of care.

Communities of practice, irrespective of their practices' particularities, share three features. Each one is characterized by the mutual engagement of its members, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. These three attributes attest to practice's prominence in the community's ethos, and together they demonstrate how practice functions as "a source of coherence in the community."¹⁴ Understanding each element's particular contribution to the community of practice can allow us to develop a fuller appreciation of the features a nascent ministry of care and encounter must develop in order for it to function as a true community of practice.

Mutual Engagement:

Mutual engagement describes participants' commitment and contributions to the community's practice. It encompasses "not only our competence but also the competence of others. It draws on what we do and what we know as well as on our ability to connect meaningfully to what we don't do and what we don't know – that is, to the contributions and knowledge of others."¹⁵ Participation need not be identical across the community. In any community of practice, there can be newcomers, old-timers, people whose efforts make "complementary contributions," people who bring "overlapping forms of competence,"¹⁶ people whose engagement can be described as full participation, and still others whose efforts are legitimately peripheral.¹⁷ Expressions of mutual engagement may vary in form, but in any community of practice, it is demonstrated by and recognized in all participants to some degree. In the specific instance of a ministry of care and encounter, mutual engagement is expressed by members' willing involvement in each of the three movements of the ministry's praxis. Through their interactions with one another, with the tasks particular to each movement, and with the suffering people whom the ministry encounters and cares for, each member actively contributes to and learns from the practices central to the ministerial community.

Joint Enterprise:

Joint enterprise names the primary endeavor of the community and the "sense of ownership" that participants feel toward it. A social theory of learning reminds us that practices are processes and, as such, "come to life" only when performed by the members of the community. It is in enacting the practices that make their endeavor manifest that participants recognize the enterprise of the community as their own. While each person may not perform identical practices, the members of the community influence their enterprise as they perform their works situated within the larger context of the community itself. It is important to note that the level of autonomy with which the group functions can be significant or limited, affording greater or smaller opportunity to participants to alter the community's enterprise. Despite that variation, for a community to be a community of practice, members must somehow recognize their own and one another's works as valued contributions to their group's joint endeavor. This joint enterprise, Wenger notes, "is defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it. It is their negotiated response to their situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control."¹⁸ The members of the community themselves determine the scope and shape of their enterprise. For people in a

¹⁴ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 49.

¹⁵ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 76.

¹⁶ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 76.

¹⁷ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 100.

¹⁸ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 77.

parish's ministry of care and encounter, such ongoing naming of and commitment to the ministry's contours is a fundamental work.

Shared Repertoire:

Shared repertoire describes the specific resources the community uses to carry out its practice. It "includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence."¹⁹ Attaining competence in manipulating the elements of the shared repertoire to perform the practice of the community is a central task for each member. The process of theological reflection, along with the practices of prayer and discernment and the scriptural and doctrinal texts ministry participants employ when they undertake theological reflection, comprise key elements of the shared repertoire of a ministry of care and encounter.

Learning in the Community of Practice

Conceptualizing learning as a social process makes clear that knowledge as it is constructed in the community of practice has two dimensions: "the production, transformation, and change in the identities of persons [and] knowledgeable skill in practice."²⁰ Participants develop the skills needed to use the community's repertoire of artifacts, tools, language, and concepts, but they also develop their identities as people who, through their participation in the community of practice, engage with the world in new ways.

Recognizing the community of practice's formative influence on identity is particularly important for those seeking to establish new communities of practice. Wenger cautions, "Communities of practice should not be introduced to purely instrumental purposes. They are about knowing, but also about being together, living meaningfully, developing a satisfying identity, and altogether being human."²¹ The identity developed through one's affiliation with the community perdures beyond the moments in which one is engaged in active practice; "as a constituent of meaning, participation is broader than mere engagement in practice.... It is part of who they are that they always carry with them."²² By participating in the situated learning that occurs in the community of practice, participants acquire the discernable ability and identity of practitioners. By participating in the learning that is constructed in the community of practice devoted to encounter and care, participants' abilities to see and embrace those who suffer is developed and their identity as Christians who cultivate the eyes to look with compassion upon suffering, lonely, and neglected people as an expression of discipleship is forged.

Communities of Practice, Communities of Discipleship

Adopting the community of practice framework enables us to analyze more closely the situated learning inherent to ministry in the local church. Jane Regan, practical theologian and scholar of religious education, explains that the particular identity and competency that communities of practice at the parish level foster are those of Christian discipleship and increasingly skilled participation in the universal church's mission of evangelization. Regan writes, "it is our relationship with Jesus, our commitment to the community of faith, and our capacity to participate in the mission of the church – that is, our life of faith – that is fostered and

¹⁹ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 83.

²⁰ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 47.

²¹ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 124.

²² Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 57.

enhanced by our connectivity with smaller groups within the parish.”²³ Although the ministries extant in any given parish may exhibit considerable variety, from the choir to the youth group to the food pantry to the finance council, when conceptualized as communities of practice characterized by mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire, each ministry becomes the site in which Christians manifest their faith and more deeply come to know it.

Understanding the works of the parish’s ministry as practices and the people in each ministry as communities of practice allows ministry professionals and laity to conceptualize the dimensions of their work theoretically. The community of practice framework thus enables the parish to develop well-articulated, multi-valent, dynamic, and purposeful ministries. That ability is particularly important for the construction of new expressions of mission, such as the ministry of encounter and care.

The Four Marks of a Discipling Community of Practice

Regan identifies four traits of ministries that function ably as communities of practice. Hospitality, conversation, followership, and discernment mark ministries that authentically demonstrate and develop participants’ faith and foster their participation in the universal mission of the church.

Hospitality:

Hospitality characterizes the orientation of the community of practice. Pointing to the scriptural account of the Judgment of Nations (Mt 25:31-46), in which Jesus teaches that recognizing and attending to the needs of suffering people will be the metric by which the “sheep” are separated from the “goats,” Regan makes clear that hospitality is the very “foundation on which the Christian is judged.” This disposition, expressed in the community’s acts of welcome and care, attends carefully to context. Hospitable communities of practice not only greet those with whom they interact in a gracious and loving way, they foster inclusivity that extends to the excluded and the marginalized in their parishes and communities.²⁴ Undoubtedly, hospitality must be a hallmark of the community of practice charged with encountering lonely, marginalized, isolated, suffering people and attending to them with loving kindness.

Conversation:

Conversation describes the manner of engagement between the community’s participants. Regan defines conversation as the “*sustained, engaged, and critical interchange* between two or more people constituted by *active listening* and *respectful dialogue*.”²⁵ It is through conversation that the members of the community of practice will name its purposes, question its assumptions, propose new directions, challenge one another, gather information, plan, and interact with the world beyond its borders. Gathering those activities within a frame of conversation anchors the relationships of the members of the community *ad intra* and *ad extra* to a Christian disposition of humility, compassion, and respect. Moreover, Regan notes, “providing the time and the context for meaningful conversation sets a framework within which the Spirit can work;”²⁶ a necessary condition for any community of faith that seeks to cooperate with God’s grace active in the world. For the encountering, caring community of practice, the commitment to conversation as

²³ Jane E. Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Transforming the Parish Through Communities of Practice*, (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016), 28.

²⁴ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 82.

²⁵ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 98.

²⁶ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 82.

the signature mode of interpersonal communication places the essential practice of theological reflection, for example, in a larger frame that allows the diversity, disunity, disagreement, and multiple viewpoints that inevitably arise within all groups to be expressed within the ministry without fragmenting the unity of their shared enterprise.

Followership:

Regan names the third characteristic of the parish community of practice “followership.”²⁷ She explains that although “the words *follower* and *disciple* are basically interchangeable in this context,”²⁸ followership attends to the reality that in any Christian community of practice, following, rather than leading, describes the positionality of most persons within the group of disciples. Cultivating the receptive, cooperative, yet critical agency required to participate productively in the community of practice and so join in “the process of interpreting and giving life to the shared vision”²⁹ is a central task of members, irrespective of the particularities of their joint enterprise or the structure of leadership within the community. In any joint lay and professional venture, questions of leadership and followership may arise. Regan’s highlighting this characteristic reinforces the qualities of openness, flexibility, and humility that every member of this cooperative enterprise must cultivate in order for the community of practice to ably seek and serve suffering people who may greet any ministerial outreach with trepidation.

Discernment:

If the joint enterprise and shared repertoire of a community of practice speak to what the community *is* doing and how its members *can* accomplish their work, discernment is the foundational practice the community employs to determine what members *ought* to do, begin, cease, resist, or cultivate. Through discernment, the community of practice collectively attends to its members, its context, its Christian tradition, its scripture, and, most significantly, to the inspiration of the Spirit. Each individual in the community of practice likewise cultivates a personal disposition toward discernment.³⁰ The nimble responsiveness that the community of practice devoted to caring encounter needs to effectively perform its work only can be realized if the community is likewise devoted to allowing the sustained (and sustaining) practice of discernment to shape its praxis.

The Ministry of Encounter and Care

Hospitality, conversation, followership, and discernment – with these four foundational commitments guiding them in their missional endeavors, parishes can intentionally enter into the work of constructing a local manifestation of the culture of encounter and care Pope Francis so ardently champions. The persistence of suffering in our world attests to the great need for such ministry. But, what might it look like? How can ministry professionals and laity together enact a Christian praxis attuned to discerning, encountering and attending to the particular instances of suffering located in their communities? From grief and loss, to illness, injury, or addiction, to intimate partner violence, joblessness, or homelessness, trauma and pain take many shapes in contemporary life. Their instances can be so varied as to defy universalizing answers to these questions. Yet, in every community, the particular sufferings that arise there can be observed, recognized, and met with care. In naming for themselves their joint enterprise, developing their

²⁷ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 109.

²⁸ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 117.

²⁹ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 128.

³⁰ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 138.

shared repertoire, and navigating their mutual engagement, the members of a nascent ministry of encounter and care learn together “what to do” and “how to do it” for their context. Together in conversation, guided by a commitment to cultivating the “open eyes” Metz insists upon and the discerning hearts Regan recommends, they can consider such initial questions as “what suffering plagues our community?” “who needs our care?” and “what kind of compassion and care can we offer to them?”

These questions particularly pertain to the signature practice grounding the ministry of care and encounter – the work of theological reflection. This core practice anchors the work and hence the identity of the community of practice’s members in (1) deliberate attention to God’s suffering people, (2) a Christ-like commitment to compassion, and (3) a recognition that the work of discipleship is never a solitary endeavor, but always a partaking in the communal mission of the church. With the mutually constructed knowledge that arises through their practice of theological reflection, they can then move, as followers of Christ, into ministerial works contoured by graceful hospitality – works that they anticipate can console, support, and help the struggling ones whose needs they have come to see.

A Practical Theological Method – Repertoire and Enterprise in Development

The work of theologian Richard Osmer offers parish communities of practice a model for establishing, guiding, and refining such theologically informed practice. Osmer identifies a simple sequence of four questions that can guide the theological reflection process: “What is going on?” “Why is this going on?” “What ought to be going on?” and “How might we respond?”³¹ These questions help parish communities of practice accomplish the “four core tasks of practical theological interpretation: the descriptive-empirical task... the interpretive task... the normative task... [and] the pragmatic task.”³² In the language of situated learning, answering these questions permits the community of practice to define its enterprise, determine the boundaries of its work, identify and/or construct the elements of its shared repertoire, and evaluate its endeavor in order to continually evolve its practice. This model helpfully trains the community of practice’s awareness on its own specific context, its joint enterprise and its connection to the larger mission of the church, and on the future its members hope to move toward. It is a model that attends to imagination, action, and evaluation. The questions illustrate Wenger’s insight regarding the interconnectedness of theory and practice in the life and work of the community of practice. “Practice is not immune to the influence of theory, but neither is it a mere realization of theory, or an incomplete approximation of it. In particular, practice is not inherently unreflective.”³³ Adopting this type of method enables the community of practice to deliberately and dialogically integrate theory and practice into seamless praxis.

Working With Others – The Constellation of Encounter

Although this analysis explores the individual community of practice, it is important to recognize that the community does not operate in isolation. As Regan explains, the parish is a larger whole constituted by many distinct communities of practice “like a constellation is made up of stars.”³⁴ Inter-community engagement can enhance the work of each community of

³¹ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008), Kindle.

³² Osmer, *Practical Theology*, Kindle.

³³ Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 48.

³⁴ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 48.

practice and allow the parish to deepen its expression of discipleship and its identity as a missioned and missional people.

Consider for example the grievous case of suicide. Regrettably, the societal stigma surrounding a suicide tragically compounds the shattering effects the victim's death has upon surviving family members.³⁵ In a ministry of encounter and care, volunteers and ministers may work to consider how they can directly support a grieving family of survivors. Working with other communities of practice, however, can amplify their expression of care. Recognizing that survivors are often avoided, the youth ministry community of practice may study how they can teach adolescents to resist excluding a peer whose family has suffered a suicide. Helping teens develop the ability to answer the question "what should I say?" empowers them to embrace, rather than avoid, a moment of encounter at school. The social justice committee may sponsor suicide awareness and prevention events, advocating for and contributing to a more just and humane society where fewer people feel driven to despair. By reaching out to other communities of practice within the parish, the ministry of care and encounter helps many people in disparate ministries work together to comprehensively manifest compassion to such suffering families and simultaneously to grow in the charity that is a signature of Christian faith.

Cultivating such "cross-boundary relationships"³⁶ can be the work of some designated people in the community of practice. No one person need be responsible for all inter-community interaction. Additionally, the various members of the community of practice can flexibly work with different communities of practice in distinct areas. This collaboration can extend beyond the parish to the arena of interfaith work and engagement with the larger community in which the parish resides. The ministry of care and encounter, for example, may collaborate with the parish youth group, the youth groups of other faith communities, and the local school to coordinate a charity run whose proceeds might contribute to needed home renovations for a local veteran paralyzed in the course of her wartime service. In this way, a ministry of encounter and care established by people in a given parish can serve as a foundation stone for the larger culture of encounter that Pope Francis exhorts women and men of good will throughout the world to build.

Conclusion

Pain and suffering distress their victims and that distress can repel those who do not know what to say, what to do, how to help, or how to understand them. Yet, this need not be the case. "Poor and weak people can disturb us," Jean Vanier writes, "but they can also awaken our hearts."³⁷ It is the task of the faith community to recognize in suffering the summons to awaken and heed the imperative to respond with a practice that offers people thirsting for human flourishing at least a consoling "drop of life."³⁸ While learning to do so constitutes for each individual the work of a lifetime, the learning necessary to so do arises as the community of practice's members work with one another to construct it. Conceptualizing a parish's ministry of care and encounter as a Christian community of practice reveals that it is through their work in that shared endeavor that Christians can best grow in the knowledge they need to ably answer

³⁵ Jacqueline G. Cvinar, "Do Suicide Survivors Suffer Social Stigma: A Review of the Literature," *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 41, (January 2005): 14-21, doi:10.1111/j.0031-5990.2005.00004.x.

³⁶ Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 36.

³⁷ Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 200.

³⁸ Pope Francis, "For a Culture of Encounter," accessed 2/27/17, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160913_for-a-culture-of-encounter.html.

Jesus's call to "go out" and "bring in" (Lk. 14:21) those suffering ones who yearn for loving encounter.

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Catholic Schools as Spaces for Transformative Encounter

Abstract

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops created a curriculum for Catholic secondary schools that describes *what* adolescents should learn including the importance of developing a Catholic identity, encounters through service, and a deeper understanding of interreligious dialogue. This study adds the *how* to the bishops' *what* by exploring Augusto Blasi's theory of the moral self (1983) as it relates to Robert Kegan's constructive-developmental theory (1982, 1994) to enable religious educators to create a transformative curriculum of encounter in Catholic Secondary schools that helps adolescents develop a religious and moral identity amid the complexities of contemporary society.

Introduction

Pope Francis calls on Christians to embrace a culture of encounter by working together to build up the common good by nurturing shared values in a pluralistic world. In his *Evangelii Gaudium* he states how it is important to "build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity" (2010 n. 228). In 2016, he created a [Youtube](#) video where he described the urgency of engaging in interreligious dialogue and prayerfully requested "that sincere dialogue among men and women of different faiths may produce the fruits of peace and justice" (The Pope Video 2016). It is by embracing the other through encounters in dialogue that we can begin to *see others in their deepest dignity*.

Increased religious diversity calls religious educators to rethink how we approach education in secondary schools. The United States Catholic Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework (Framework)* Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis also focuses on the importance of recognizing diversity and communion and fostering interreligious dialogue. They created a curriculum "Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues," often referred to Catholic high schools as a world religions course. The Bishops' goals for this curriculum include "help[ing] students understand the manner in which the Catholic Church relates to non-Catholic Christians as well as to other religions of the world" (49). The Bishops' acknowledge the importance of dialogue with other faith traditions by helping students understand the various forms of interreligious dialogue; such as, "the dialogue of daily life in religiously pluralistic societies/communities" and "the dialogue of shared service to the needy" (53).

This study embraces the prophetic call to enable young people to engage in transformative encounters with others and experience deep communion. Research shows that by creating spaces where adolescents encounter people unlike themselves through meaningful dialogue and engaging activities where they are taught how to work together, for example, through service or an intentional classroom experience, they can deepen their own religious and moral identity and develop a habit of mind committed to the common good, or shared moral responsibility (Burbules & Rice, 1991; Parks, 2000; Patel, 2007). Sharon Parks states the

dynamics of a “constructive encounter with otherness” shows the human “capacity to take the perspective of another and to be compelled thereby to recompose one’s own perspective, one’s own faith (2000, 140). The ability to take another person’s perspective requires a developmental shift in how we make meaning. This study explores how constructive-developmental theory can enable religious educators to help young people experience deep communion by creating spaces of encounter in Catholic secondary classrooms.

Background

Religious Diversity and Pluralism

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, maintains that young people want to belong, they want to feel a part of something larger than themselves, but it takes someone to recognize them for their potential and their abilities, to show them they belong. Organizations and schools are important places to nurture the moral, spiritual, academic, and psychological formation of young people; however, as Patel states, “it’s not a place young people need so much a *role*, an opportunity to be powerful, a chance to shape their world.” (Patel 2007, 16).

Young people, especially those who feel marginalized in society, are extremely vulnerable to organizations who see cultural and religious diversity as a threat to their way of life. As Patel notes, organizations with religious totalitarian ideologies are quite successful in putting their resources into recruiting and initiating young people to their ways of life. Religious extremist organizations, he argues “prey on young people’s desire to have a clear identity and make a powerful impact. We see their successes in the headlines of our newspapers every day” (Patel 2007, xvii). People in the United States saw an example of this on August 12, 2017 when a young man, affiliated with the white supremacist protest formed by a group called “Unite the Right,” drove his car into a group of counter protestors killing one young woman and injuring over a dozen others. The driver of the vehicle was only 20 years old, just two years out of high school. As a religious educator, I pause to reflect on what could have been done to help this young man grow towards acceptance and understanding instead of intolerance and hatred. Religious educators are called to respond to all forms of intolerance, hatred, fear, and bigotry to minimize the effects of tribalism, misunderstanding, and false narratives in our society.

Religious and cultural diversity has dramatically shifted the landscape of the United States in the last 30-40 years. The findings from Robert Wuthnow’s research with the National Religion and Diversity Survey describe how fifty years ago the majority of immigrants to the United States were Christians from Western Europe (2005, 2). From 1965-1999, 22 million people immigrated to the United States from religious traditions other than Christianity. These “new immigrants” include Muslims, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Zoroastrian, and other non-western religious traditions (2-4). A recent report by Public Religion Research Institute states, “white Christians, once the dominant religious group in the U.S., now account for fewer than half of all adults living in the country” (Cox and Jones 2017).

Americans often view the response to diversity as something of a challenge. Wuthnow observes rather than engaging actively with religious pluralism, many people in the United States choose tolerance or “coexistence rather than pluralism” (2005, 74). Diana Eck, director of *The Pluralism Project* at Harvard, explores the effect of religious diversity and pluralism in the United States. She notes that the increasing religious diversity in the United States is causing leaders to rethink how they understand and respond to religious pluralism. While religious diversity points to the fact that there are many religious traditions in the United States, Eck states, “diversity alone is not pluralism. Pluralism is not a given but must be created” (2001, 70).

Eck describes three characteristics of religious pluralism. First, she argues it is not synonymous with diversity, rather, “religious diversity is an observable fact of American life today...[and] pluralism is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest difference” (2001, 70). Second, pluralism is something that needs to be fashioned and refashioned with every generation and goes “beyond mere tolerance to the active attempt to understand the other” (Eck 2001, 70). Finally, Eck notes that pluralism does not give rise to an *anything goes* mentality, that it “is premised not on a reductive relativism but on the significance of an engagement with real differences” through dialogue (71).

Anatanand Rambachan, religion scholar and advisor to the Pluralism Project, sets the difference between diversity and pluralism in the context of spirituality and our efforts to understand the transcendent. He states, “the movement from mere religious diversity to religious pluralism is inspired by the understanding that God is not an object or a commodity to be possessed exclusively or controlled by any single tradition and that God or the absolute exceeds all human efforts to define and describe” (Rambachan 2000, 174).

There is a growing concern among some religious educators and leaders in the institutional church that the growing cultural and religious diversity in the United States is leading young people to lose a sense of Catholic identity and moral commitment, or worse, to become religiously and morally “illiterate.” These concerns shaped the drafting of the USCCB’s *Curriculum Framework* (Schroeder 2015). Their goal was to ensure that religious educators teach the doctrines of the Catholic faith with fidelity by providing them with the content, or the “what,” including the “what” of encounter. For example, *The Framework* indicates the content for a course on “Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues” should include teaching young people the importance of interreligious dialogue and working with people from different faith traditions “in service to those in need” (USCCB 2008, 53). *The Framework* describes *what* adolescents should learn, namely the importance of encounter through service, and the need for them to understand interreligious dialogue based on common ecumenical religious practices. It does not supply the *how*. This study focuses on how religious educators can be attentive of the dynamics of creating a mature pluralism in Catholic secondary schools.

Dialogue and Encounter

Encounters through dialogue can provide meaningful ways for students to engage in critical thinking, grow in their understanding of their faith and religious practices, and nurture what Nicholas Burbules and Suzanne Rice describe as “communicative virtues;” such as, tolerance, patience; [and] respect for difference” (Burbules and Rice 1991, 411). Being attune to the constructive and transformative characteristics of dialogue helps religious educators intentionally nurture transformative encounters.

Encounters come through experiences with someone or something larger than ourselves that changes how we come to know the world. A true encounter with someone unlike ourselves occurs when we bring our own narrative or understanding of reality into dialogue with another person’s understanding of reality through patience and understanding. Eoin Cassidy reflects on the meaning of a religious encounter from the perspective of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He writes, “...it is only in listening to another that one finds the key that will unlock the door to either one’s own heart or to the presence of God in one’s life...” (2006, 883). A conversation may provide us with new information, but if we are not attentive to discovering something new from someone else, it may leave one or more people unchanged. An encounter, on the other hand, has the potential to radically challenge our understanding of ourselves, others, and our relationship with the divine.

Dialogue in education is not a one-way discourse, commonly found in what Paulo Freire refers to as the “banking model,” or a simple “exchange of ideas” (Freire 1970, 77). He notes, dialogue is “the encounter between men[sic], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (76). For Freire, “only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education” (81). Rambachan affirms Freire’s description of dialogue stating interreligious dialogue should never simply “inform us about others in a detached and abstract way” (2000, 179). A curriculum of encounters with the other can lead to a deep communion with the divine and with others. Critical thinking and dialogue then require us to consider and reflect our own perspectives as well as recognize and reflect on the perspectives of others.

Burbles and Rice believe the best space for dialogical encounters are initiated and sustained through “educational contexts” because “they do espouse and frequently enact a commitment...to the value of communication across difference and the benefits of encountering new and challenging points of view” (407). The authors outline three reasons why they believe it is important for educators to actively engage students in dialogue across difference: it has the potential to nurture the “construction of identity along lines that are more flexible without becoming arbitrary;” it can expand “our understanding of others and, through this, our understanding of our selves;” and, finally, it can “foster more reasonable and sustainable communicative practices” (404).

This study takes seriously this call to create contexts for young people to encounter others in dialogue across difference before they reach young adulthood. Parks, Keen, Daloz, and Burbles and Rice describe how higher education can provide one important space for encouraging encounters in dialogue. This study argues that by creating a Catholic secondary school classroom as a space for transformative encounter, religious educators can begin fostering habits of dialogue across difference in adolescence and early young adulthood.

How, then, can a Catholic secondary curriculum on “Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues” embrace the religious other? Gabriel Moran reminds us that “the material of religion lends itself to a more personal involvement. The teacher draws upon the meaning of the environment which includes the experience of students and teachers” or an ecology of learning forms (Moran 1982, 76). If we take Freire, Rambachan, Moran, that “*education does not have as its aim the attainment of anything*” (Moran 1982, 44 italics in original), then a curriculum on “Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues” should move beyond expecting students to know and understand more about the world’s religious traditions. It should be created in a way that is attune to the developmental needs of young people and encourages students to understand the perspectives of others unlike themselves through dialogue in classroom encounters.

Methodology

This paper presents a conceptual analysis of Augusto Blasi’s theory of the moral self (1983) as it relates to Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory (1982, 1994) to explore how religious educators can create a curriculum of encounter in Catholic Secondary schools. Kegan maintains that a person’s “culture of embeddedness,” or those people and structures in a person’s immediate community, provides natural supports (or hindrances) for healthy human development (1982, 115). According to Kegan, the ways in which our culture and communities support adolescent development can directly affect the emphasis young people place on moral issues; such as, interreligious dialogue that is focused on promoting peace and justice. Hence, the development of a moral self (using Blasi’s language), as integral to one’s identity, is impacted by

a person's culture of embeddedness (e.g., one's school, home, and church) and how one is socialized and makes sense of life experiences. This study calls religious educators to be attuned to the constructive-developmental aspects of moral development and the dynamics of fashioning a religious and moral identity amid the complexities of contemporary society.

The context of one's social environment plays an important role in the growth and development of human personhood (Kegan 1982, 1994). The dynamics of creating and developing meaning from our experiences with others help us understand more fully who we are and how we relate to others and our environment. How people perceive themselves in relation to their experiences evolves through psychological stages, or what Kegan calls levels of consciousness (Kegan 1982, 13). People evolve in the ways in which they organize their experiences, and over time become more mentally complex as they grow. Blasi's theory of the moral self maintains that moral thought and behavior directly reflect personality or identity. Around the period of adolescence, Blasi states: "the true inner self" develops "not as a result of one's effort and the object of one's responsibility" but emerges as something that is a given part of how we are seen by others in our relationships with them (Blasi 1983, 105). Wuthnow affirms this stating, the way we construct and develop how we make meaning has a direct effect on how we perceive of others and our society and adds that "making sense of religious diversity is one of these meaning-making activities (2005, xii-xiv).

Blasi and Kegan describe how people undergo significant identity developments throughout adolescence (Blasi and Milton 1991, Kegan 1994). Explaining the period of adolescence, Kegan writes: "[it] amounts to that time in our lives when we move from being 'brought up in the faith' to becoming ourselves spiritual adherents *to that faith*" (1994, 267 italics in original). The way in which adolescents are nurtured in their faith development will have a direct effect on how they connect to their faith and to others. In this way, preparing and guiding young people towards meaningful encounters with others helps them develop their religious and moral identity, and Catholic schools could provide important space for this undertaking.

Adolescent Development

During the high school years, adolescents may be transitioning between the second and third levels of consciousness. In the second level of consciousness, we organize our knowing around our own needs, and self-interest. That is, we often make people and things objects of our own interests as a way to fulfill our own needs. At this level, we have the developmental capacity to recall a sequence of events, but struggle to formulate abstract concepts. They can articulate their own points of view and see that other people hold different points of view, but they struggle to hold two different views concurrently (Kegan 1994, 30). Kegan describes how a 12-year-old, for example, may be able to recall every detail of a movie, but they may not be able to articulate the overall thematic significance of a given movie (see Kegan, 1994, 33).

As we evolve towards the third level of consciousness we come to share the needs of others by developing interpersonal relationships. We feel good when others feel good; that is, our sense of self comes directly from our relationships with others. At this level of perception, we begin to rely on role models, and we start to understand our place in the larger society. This participation in "the common weal" often gives people direction and "a definite sense of their place, their time, and their song in the universe (104) and "lets us know how we matter" (268). We can begin to think abstractly, to empathize with others, and to coordinate more than one perspective at a time.

With this stage of moral reasoning, more commonly found as we transition from adolescence towards young adulthood, we focus more on living up to the expectations of society or authority. In desiring to live up to the expectations of those around us (like our parents, or teachers) we “relativize or subordinate [our] own immediate interests on behalf of the interests of a social relationship” (Kegan 2000, 54). This level of shared expectations, often referred to as an ability to follow “the golden rule,” shows that we are now able to understand how our moral actions affect others, *and* ourselves, while a person at the second level of consciousness is less likely to follow “the golden rule” because he/she has not yet developed the capacity to “reciprocally role-take,” or take the perspectives of others into account when she/he makes moral decisions (Kegan 1982, 55).

Blasi’s theory of the moral self (1983) explains how a person’s understanding of moral reasoning and moral judgment is dependent on a person’s self-definition and surrounding social context. In contrast to Kohlberg’s research, which only focused on moral reasoning, Augusto Blasi’s theory focused on one’s sense of morality identity as influenced by both moral action, and moral reasoning. For example, based on Blasi’s study, if asked about the morality of stealing, an adolescent may reason that the act of stealing was morally wrong (182). However, when the adolescent was actually in the situation, and heavily influenced by his/her peers, that young person may steal a can of soda from a convenience store. Blasi’s theory points out that that this adolescents’ moral reasoning and moral actions are not in accord with one another. Blasi suggests that if a person can build up a strong moral identity, then their moral reasoning and moral actions are more likely to be consistent (186).

Blasi describes four key aspects of a person’s experience of moral identity, based partly on Lovinger’s research on ego development: Social-Role Identity (most commonly found among adolescents), Identity Observed, Management of Identity, and Identity as Authenticity. In the middle and high school years, adolescents may be constructing and developing a sense of morality through the Social-Role Identity, similar to Kegan’s second level of consciousness. This level of morality helps adolescents follow rules when they believe it is fair or if it benefits them in some way. For example, Blasi and Milton, from their interviews with early and late adolescents, observe that when Paul, a sixth grader, “is presented with a concrete example of insincerity, he focuses on the consequences for other people: It is not nice to act friendly with a boy you dislike; “He should tell him, so that the person he doesn’t like shouldn’t come near him” (Blasi and Milton 1991, 234). Paul does not consider his actions in terms of what is right or wrong rather he evaluates how the consequences of an action relate to himself to determine if he should act a certain way.

Kegan’s third order of knowing shares features with Blasi’s Identity Observed mode, namely “the true inner self” develops “not as a result of one’s effort and the object of one’s responsibility” but emerges as something that is a given part of how we are seen by others in our relationships with them (Blasi 1993, 105). The transition from basing our moral self on personal or immediate rewards or consequences to focusing more on self-reflection and how our actions affect others can begin during late adolescence during one’s senior year of high school. When we transition out of the third level of consciousness and move toward the fourth level we seek a new balance based on differentiation, rather than inclusion. As we develop a new sense of identity our own voice and experiences become the authority by which we make decisions. At this stage in life, our own opinions and values are held as ultimate, more so than the feelings and opinions of others. With the development of our own internal authority, or identity, comes the capacity to act on our moral judgments, and evaluate our responsibility or obligations to those

judgments. In third level knowing, we take many of the moral values of those closest to us as our own values.

Societal Expectations

Kegan expands his discussion of growth toward maturity by considering the effect of culture and society on human development. He argues that there are specific sets of demands or levels of expectations that society places on persons at each stage of life that can spark growth and development (1994, 100). Societal expectations can include parents' expectations for their adolescent children to be responsible and honest, teachers' expectations for their high school students to become "good citizens" and to "think critically," or employers' expectations for their employees to take responsibility for their own work and see the bigger picture (See Kegan, 1994, 18 and 153 respectively). A person's ability to meet these differing expectations depends on how they organize meaning and how efforts to meet these demands support development by encouraging the formation of particular ways of knowing. Each way of knowing, or level of consciousness, provides a set of tools that we can use to help us address the challenges of life. Kegan contends that far too often today our levels of consciousness (the tools we have to make sense of life) do not fit with and are not adequate for meeting the expectations of society and culture, thus making many of us feel "in over our heads" (1994).

Society makes traditional mental demands on adolescents, in effect, creating a holding environment that will challenge and nurture their psychological development. Traditional mental demands support the third order of consciousness. At this level people are expected to and do rely on an external authority, often without evaluating or critiquing it. The third level of consciousness enables us to be taught or socialized as members of a community; and to develop an ability to meet the traditional expectations, or third level, expectations of society. Most parents hope, for example, that as their children grow towards young adulthood, they will start to become more responsible and trustworthy, develop virtues of patience, tolerance, and kindness, and make the right choices when their parents are not around (see Kegan 1994, 18). Few parents want their children to bully other people or behave negatively towards others because of their religious preferences, race, or cultural background. They want their children to understand *why* it is important be respectful and caring, to oblige by the rules of the house, and follow guidelines for living a healthy moral life.

For adolescents to share in their parents or anyone else's point of view, to understand and accept as their own beliefs that certain virtues are important to uphold, they need the capacity for third level knowing, to empathize, to take the perspectives of others as their own. Kegan refers to these expectations and our ability to meet these expectations as the "mental demands of society" that create a holding environment that will challenge and nurture their psychological development.

Classroom Encounters as Holding Environments

This study explores how Kegan's theory of development and Blasi's theory of the moral self encourage religious educators to create spaces of encounter in Catholic Secondary schools that nurture mature pluralism towards a sense of shared moral responsibility. 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" (1982, 121). Kegan describes these functions as *confirmation* (holding on), *contradiction* (letting go), and *continuity* (remaining in place). This section explores how Catholic secondary classrooms, specifically through a curriculum on "Ecumenical Interreligious Issues," or world religions, can be created in a way that supports, yet

challenges adolescents to evolve and develop a more complex and moral sense of self towards a mature pluralism by exploring the way a curriculum can *confirm*, *contradict*, and *endure over time* (Kegan 1994, 121).

In designing a classroom as a space for transformative encounters early in the academic year,¹ religious educators can create lessons that support or *confirm* the second level of consciousness by affirming how some adolescents struggle to take the perspectives of others. Religious educators can first acknowledge how understanding other religious traditions affect themselves and their own religious convictions. A curriculum that *confirms* adolescents in the second level of consciousness supports their desire for personal mastery and personal achievement (Kegan 1994, 46). Students could; for example, present their own individual work on a religion other than their own, if they practice one, or one they are unfamiliar with if they do not practice any religion. Through small group reflections, students can learn to reflect on how they perceive the faith traditions of others and the impact their perceptions have on their relationships and interactions with others, and on their own developing sense of self.

As the academic year progresses, religious educators can *challenge* students at the second level of consciousness, while also *confirming* students who have evolved the third level of consciousness, by providing students with opportunities to work collaboratively, rather than cooperatively, in small groups of their peers. Nationally, over 18% of students enrolled in Catholic schools identify as non-Catholic (McDonald and Schultz 2017), putting religious educators in a unique position to help young people form their own religious identity and learn the skills for dialogue and perspective-taking through encounters with people from other faith traditions and other ways of living.

Organizing small mixed ability heterogeneous groups, for example, on students' abilities, gifts, and talents or based on their learning style, encourages students to rely on one another. In relying on the gifts and talents of their peers, we encourage students to see the value in one another's skills and perceptions; the hallmark of the third level of consciousness and of the Christian call to discipleship. Religious educators can begin scaffolding lessons that encourage students to understand the value of communicative virtues through dialogue. For example, teachers might offer a series of lessons that explain and show what patience, tolerance, and empathy look like, then they can ask students to identify these virtues through a series of case studies (using examples and non-examples) or experiences in their own lives.² They can begin to practice these skills in structured dialogues with a small group of their peers and then reflect on how those conversations moved them to think differently about others and how they talk to others. Strategies such as role-playing, structured debates, Socratic seminars, scenarios/case studies and collaborative grouping can also help students develop reflective reasoning skills and communicative virtues beyond understanding and mere acquisition of knowledge.

Through extensive research and interviews, Kegan (1994) and his associates have reported that nearly one half to two-thirds of the adult population are still functioning at the third level of consciousness, and *not* operating fully in the fourth level (191). What is more, very few young adults will evolve past the third order of consciousness before leaving college. Kegan

¹ The majority of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans offer a course on world religions based on the *Bishops Framework* for "Interreligious Issues" during the senior year of high school. The following examples are from the perspective of a 12th grade world religions class.

² For a list of case studies adaptable to the high school classroom, see <http://pluralism.org/casestudy/> and Pugliese, Marc A., and Alex Y. Hwang, eds. 2017. *Teaching Interreligious Encounters*. New York: Oxford University Press.

proposes that for many the ages between “twelve and twenty [might be] a time during which normal mental development consists in the gradual transformation of mind from the second to the third order” (1994, 37). For many, the early young adult years (around age 18) often mark the beginning of a slow transition towards the third level of mental complexity. This would be particularly true for students enrolled in a World Religions class their senior year. Religious educators can respond to the growing Traditional demands of society providing an important developmental bridge from the second order of consciousness to the third by teaching young people how to encounter the perspectives of others through dialogue

Conclusion

This study takes seriously the need engage religious pluralism through intentional encounters in dialogue by creating to create spaces where young people can experience deep communion and encounter the religious other. In *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*, Laurent Daloz et al. (1996) studied the lives of people who overcame the challenges of diversity by actively promoting the common good, or shared moral responsibility, in their daily lives. Keen notes, “From our research, we are convinced that promoting encounters that help people learn to sustain relationships which reach across boundaries of irreducible difference should be among the most important aims of contemporary higher education” (Keen 2000, 207).

The *Framework*, whose goal, quoting Pope John Paul II, “is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (USCCB 2008, 1). This goal aligns with a characteristic of high school age students who have an internal desire to belong, to be a part of a community, and to experience the intimacy of communion. This study focuses on how religious educators can be attentive of the dynamics of creating a mature pluralism in Catholic secondary schools. Burbules and Rice, with McLaren, note “this is the postmodern task of the critical educator - to live with courage and conviction with the understanding that knowledge is always partial and incomplete” (Burbules 1991, 413)

It is increasingly challenging to find spaces in contemporary society to engage with one another in real dialogue. Transformative spaces of encounter can expose young people to a vibrant alternative to the polarizing and discursive discourse common in contemporary society and politics. Teaching adolescents how to listen and better understand the perspectives and religious traditions of others can also help them come to a deeper understanding of their own faith and religious traditions. The art of engaged listening in dialogue is an essential competency for adolescents to learn in secondary schools. In this way, Catholic secondary school curriculums on “Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues” can provided an important developmental bridge from the second order to the third and by teaching pluralism in a way that nurtures the development of the moral self in adolescents.

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Encounter and/as Pedagogy for Catholic Higher Education in Our Time

Encounter has emerged as leitmotif for the pontificate of Pope Francis. He proposes encounter as a way for Catholics to appropriate the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II, and, in particular, the *Declaration on Christian Education* framing a new theory or philosophy of Catholic education. While addressing students from Jesuit schools of the Italian province in Italy and Albania, he remarked: “School can and must be a catalyst, it must be a place of encounter.”¹ In the apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, Francis locates encounter at the center of the Gospel:

I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.²

In the Pope’s first language, Spanish, *encuentro* is often invoked in spiritual terms indicating a dynamic, decentering interplay between persons. As it regards our relationship with God, Francis emphasizes the divine initiative; we are being encountered.

This essay proposes encounter as a promising pedagogical strategy for a Catholic university in our time. The argument unfolds in three parts: First, I explore Francis’s praxis of encounter in terms of displacement, dialogue, and discernment. These dimensions are illuminative in developing a pedagogy of encounter. Second, I discuss relational pedagogy as an emergent approach to education emphasizing the caring relation as reciprocal in thriving educational communities.³ Nel Noddings, renowned educator and philosopher, grounds relational pedagogy in maternal instinct. She has developed an ethic of care in light of Levinasian encounter and response to the other.⁴ Relational pedagogy may be conceived as a pedagogy of encounter in light of Francis’s witness. Third, I outline the promise of relational pedagogy for Catholic higher education today.

Praxis of Encounter

In a letter to the theological faculty of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, Francis adapts a favored phrase used to describe his vision of Catholic bishops. “Even good theologians, like good shepherds, have the smell of the people and of the street and, by their reflection, pour oil and wine onto the wounds of humankind.” He adds:

Teaching and studying theology means living on a frontier, one in which the Gospel meets the needs of the people to whom it should be proclaimed in an understandable and meaningful way. We must guard against a theology that is exhausted in academic dispute or one that looks at humanity from a glass castle. You learn so as to live: theology and holiness are inseparable.⁵

¹ Pope Francis, *L’Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition* in English, June 7, 2013.

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 8.

³ Charles Bingham and Alexander M. Sidorkin, eds., *No Education Without Relation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

⁴ Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002).

⁵ Pope Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Grand Chancellor of the “Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina” for the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Faculty of Theology*, March 3, 2015.

He also describes theology as “an expression of a Church which is a ‘field hospital,’ which lives her mission of salvation and healing in the world today.”⁶ In this address Francis links displacement with theological education in a way that echoes remarks elsewhere on encounter as “going out of ourselves.” On the Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements he remarked:

In this “stepping out” it is important to be ready for encounter. For me this word is very important. Why? Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others... We must go out to meet them, and with our faith we must create a “culture of encounter,” a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters, in which we can also speak with those who hold other beliefs, who do not have the same faith. They all have something in common with us: they are images of God; they are children of God.⁷

The images of a soiled shepherd and the field hospital indicate that encounter’s displacement is thoroughly embodied and a foil to Gnostic duality. In *Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si)*, Francis further specifies embodied encounter in terms of physical proximity to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

Many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centers of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems. They live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world’s population. This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality.⁸

Francis’s employment of encounter also highlights a dialogic dimension. The displacement into the life of the other is transformative. Dialogic encounter is an antidote to a culture of indifference celebrating mere tolerance, as it emerges from genuine attentiveness and vulnerability. At Aparecida then Cardinal Bergoglio remarked:

To foster encounter the most useful tool is dialogue, to create the capacity for dialogue. When a person enters into an encounter, he begins to dialogue, and dialogue means not simply hearing but listening. One must foster this capacity for listening. The other person, no matter on what side of the street he happens to be ideologically, politically, or socially, always has something good to offer, just as I have something good to offer him. Throughout encounter, into which I carry these good things, is built a creative, fecund synthesis.⁹

That Francis grants primacy to listening in dialogic encounter stems from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius and from his experience as novice master and spiritual director. When a director listens to a directee engaged in the *Exercises*, the focus is on how the Gospel has moved him or her to consolation or desolation – and this is heard in the tone, through the “music” as Francis calls it.¹⁰ While displacement emphasizes the activity of going out of oneself, the attentive listening of genuine dialogue underscores encounter’s anti-Pelagian giftedness. Indeed, the going out of oneself is a response to the prior call of Christ “knocking at the door.”¹¹ This

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements*, May 18, 2013.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 49.

⁹ J.M. Bergoglio, *Conferencia en la XII Jornada de Pastoral Social*, September 19, 2009.

¹⁰ Diego Fares, SJ, *The Heart of Pope Francis: How a New Culture of Encounter is Changing the Church and the World* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2015), 54-55.

¹¹ Francis, *Vigil of Pentecost*.

dynamism of reciprocal gift exchange is more pronounced in the Spanish term *encuentro*. In the *Joy of the Gospel* Francis calls for “a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them.”¹² Our encountering God and others is cooperation with a divine initiative.

Encounter’s discernment is eminently practical in denouncing ideas and practices that deny the other’s inherent dignity and therefore impede or rule out the possibility of encounter. Conversely, discernment encourages situations and structures which promote inclusion, entirety - the flourishing of human (and non-human) living. Francis notes the daunting particularities of current global conditions:

Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a “mystique” of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing a supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage.¹³

Encounter resists the overwhelming tide of consumerism and its “throw-away culture” which regards whole categories of people as disposable relative to their social, political, and economic status. Encounter discerns against relationships with others primarily predicated upon self-referential utility. In addition, encounter evaluates the role of virtual presence in fundamentally shaping interpersonal relationships. In *Laudato Si* Francis remarks: “Today’s media do enable us to communicate and to share our knowledge and affections. Yet at times they also shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences.”¹⁴

Displacement, dialogue, and discernment are three integral dimensions of Pope Francis’s praxis of encounter. Going outside of ourselves, attending to the other in mutual mediating conversation, and valuing the intrinsic dignity of others – particularly those deemed disposable – may inform a pedagogy of encounter for our time. The insights of relational pedagogy further elucidate the centrality of interpersonal relationships within the context of education.

Relational Pedagogy

The pedagogy of relation has a genealogy with ancient roots. There is a long philosophical tradition emphasizing relations beginning with Plato and Aristotle. For example, Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium* refigures pedagogical relations in terms of natality, and it portrays education as a potentially “generative encounter.”¹⁵ More recent philosophical accounts of relation include Martin Buber’s “I-Thou,” Gadamer’s game-play dialectic, and Levinas’s face-to-face ethics. Critical pedagogy draws from Paulo Freire in highlighting the interplay between social determinism and interpersonal relations. Educational theorists advocating a communicative approach also belong to relational pedagogy.¹⁶ Nel Noddings, the focus in this essay, provides relational thinking a significant voice in the mainstream of American educational theory today. Along with forerunners Carol Gilligan and Jane Ronald Martin, Noddings employs feminist thought to displace the dominant Western model of the autonomous individual subject enshrined in the Enlightenment philosophy of Immanuel Kant. In place of prescriptive teaching

¹² Francis, *Laudato Si*, 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵ Rachel Jones, “Re-reading Diotima: Resources for a Relational Pedagogy,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 183-201, at 183.

¹⁶ Charles Bingham and Alexander M. Sidorkin, “The Pedagogy of Relation: An Introduction” in *No Education without Relation*, 1-2.

practices for managing the daily occurrences within the classroom, the concern here is to introduce an educational theory.

Rachel Jones outlines relational pedagogy in three key features. First, relations are not viewed as merely a means to an end, such as the teacher more effectively transmitting knowledge to students or students acquiring a skill. Rather, relations are the “constitutive and always embodied site of education understood as an ongoing and open-ended process.” Second, the multiple relations constituting the teaching-learning event (including previous “educative encounters”) do not depend on prescribed or static roles, but constitute its participants as both learning and teaching as relational activities. Third, this pedagogy focuses on the relations constituting the teaching-learning event and the “encounters that foster them,” rather than on individual outcomes of the participants considered apart from those relations.¹⁷

In recent years relational pedagogy has received heightened attention in response to ongoing efforts at school reform that center on teacher and administrator accountability, reflecting a narrow view of education as the effective transmission of content. According to this view, methods, curricula, and high-stakes testing overshadow the human relationship between teacher and student that relational pedagogy theorists place at the heart of educational events. Economic models borrowed from the world of business, however, may not reap dividends when applied to education. And ironically, once the relational basis of school organization is seriously injured, it becomes more improbable to achieve high academic standards.¹⁸

In contrast to pedagogy for high-stakes testing, relational pedagogy illuminates interpersonal relationships as foundational to learning. Nel Noddings’s groundbreaking work *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984) is an enduring contribution to an ethic of care applied to relational pedagogy. Noddings remarks, “When we see the other’s reality as a possibility for us . . . , when I am in this sort of relationship with another, when the other’s reality becomes a real possibility for me, I care.”¹⁹ Noddings underscores the significance of receptivity and mutuality in the caring relationship. The one caring (for example the teacher) is receptive to the cared-for (the student), and the cared-for receives the caring. An essential element of caring is the ability to sustain the reciprocal relationship over time. Noddings models teacher-student caring on the reciprocal caring dynamic of a mother for her diverse family. “Infants contribute significantly to the mother-child relation, students to the teacher-student relation, and patients to the physician-patient relation.”²⁰

That caring precedes learning heralds an important feature of relational pedagogy: learning occurs within and through relationships. Care ethicists look to establish the conditions and relations that support moral ways of life. This emphasis distinguishes care ethics from a virtue ethics approach to character education in that care is fundamentally relational rather than individual agent-based. Care ethicists prioritize caring relations with the expectation that virtues will develop naturally through these relations.²¹ Noddings succinctly states the *telos* of the ethic of care: “Our main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people.”²² This aim is based on the recognition that all people everywhere want to be cared for – even if manifestations of care differ across times, culture, and even

¹⁷ Jones, “Re-reading Diotima,” 185.

¹⁸ Bingham and Sidorkin, *No Education without Relation*, 2.

¹⁹ Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 14.

²⁰ Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1-10.

²² *Ibid.*, 94.

individuals.²³ For an ethics of care, moral life is the main goal of education. It supplies the firm foundation for intellectual development and academic achievement.²⁴ For example, in a study sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation, Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider examined the school reform efforts in Chicago across the decade of the 1990s.²⁵ They arrived at “relational trust” as the factor holding the greatest explanatory power. A school that had high relational trust and/or a leadership core that worked on trust-building had a roughly five-out-of-seven chance of better serving students over a decade.

Noddings argues that dialogue is the most fundamental component of the care model. Paulo Freire describes true dialogue as open-ended; it is not a mere formality aimed at a foregone conclusion. Both interlocutors speak, and both listen. While there is a shared originating topic, it may shift as the exchange unfolds. The participants attend to each other in addition to the topic at hand. The emphasis on dialogue reflects the basic phenomenology of caring. A carer attends to or is engrossed (at least momentarily) in the cared-for, and the cared-for receives the carer’s efforts at caring. This reception is also a form of attention. Noddings remarks: “Caring requires staying-with, or what Ruddick has called ‘holding.’ We do not let our friends fall if we can help it, and if they do, we hold on and pull them back up.”²⁶ Simone Weil described the connection between caring and attention in this way: “The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: ‘What are you going through?’ ... This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.”²⁷ Dialogue is central to moral education because it implies the question: What are you going through? Recognizing Levinasian alterity, the carer remains open and attentive to what the encounter discloses rather than arriving with preconceived assumptions.²⁸ Noddings comments, “The recognition of relation, not a fixed ideal of teaching, steers the teacher’s choice of methods.”²⁹

Noddings offers five directives for enacting a mission of care in education. (1) Be clear and unapologetic about the goal of education to produce “competent, caring, loving, and lovable people.” (2) Take care of affiliative needs. This includes legitimatizing time spent on building relations of care and trust. (3) Relax the impulse to control. This includes encouraging teachers to learn new materials with their students. Relaxing the impulse to control may also entail encouraging self-evaluation and teaching students how to do it competently. Moreover, involve students in governing their own classrooms and schools. (4) Dedicate time to themes of care. This involves giving students the opportunity to practice caring in the classroom. Teachers can help students understand how individuals and groups create rivals and enemies. Students should be encouraged to extend care to the environment as well. (5) Teach students that caring in every domain implies competence. Caring entails accepting the responsibility to work continuously on competence so that the recipient of care is enhanced.³⁰

Caring is fraught with fragility. Relationships of care are complex and can be difficult, particularly when they span differences of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender. That

²³ Ibid., 21.

²⁴ Ibid., 99.

²⁵ Parker J. Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 46.

²⁶ Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 98.

²⁷ Simone Weil, *Simone Weil Reader*, ed. G. A. Panichas (Mount Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Limited, 1977), 51.

²⁸ Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 149.

²⁹ Nel Noddings, “Foreword” in *No Education without Relation*, vii.

³⁰ Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 99-101.

Noddings grounds her notion of care on a sense of intimate relationships at home has become a point of multicultural criticism of her work. Audrey Thompson’s Black feminist treatment of caring literature argues that “love and caring do not step back from the world in return to innocence, but step out in the world in order to change it.”³¹ Cris Mayo rejects the basis of “home” or “domestic relations” for the basis of relational pedagogy. Instead, Mayo proposes a guiding metaphor of vertigo as a “state of discomfort that is aware of the fearful familiar that has been repressed.”³² She advocates for an unapologetically disquieting and interruptive approach to education. Mayo explains: “In short, these homeward trends in education forestall precisely the sort of alienation toward ourselves and others that would better facilitate an examination of power relations and undergirding racialized subjectivity and race relations.”³³ Mayo worries that the focus on care may trap educators in one-on-one therapeutic relations with their students rather than education for political action born from relationship struggle.

That both Pope Francis and Nel Noddings center their approaches on interpersonal relationships suggests that relational pedagogy may contribute richly to pedagogy of encounter. While Noddings employs the term encounter less frequently than Francis, she understands it as integral to the aim of education inspiring relational pedagogy. She comments, “Despite sometimes irresolvable differences, students should not forget the central aim of moral life – to encounter, attend, and respond to the need for care.”³⁴ Noddings favors encounter over the ambiguity of community which by its very nature is both inclusive (“us”) and exclusive (“them.”) She invokes Levinasian encounter in which caring arises out of the need of the other. The face presents a desire for a loving response. Noddings comments: “Caring is not confined to a group with identifiably common features. It recognizes the community of those who have nothing in common. We should be able to respond to the pain of strangers as well as friends.”³⁵ Noddings’s linking of encounter and caring here echoes the commitments of Pope Francis. Francis’s praxis of encounter as displacement, dialogue, and discernment resonates with Noddings’s relational pedagogy.

Pedagogy of Encounter and Catholic Higher Education

The application of relational pedagogy to higher education may immediately appear as an insurmountable task. A pedagogy of encounter calls for a reconfiguration of deep-seated educational notions in our day. There is the deeply entrenched individualist thinking that undergirds discourses, practices, and philosophies of education. For example, the highly influential Tyler Rationale is beholden to an ideal of students learning as disconnected individuals without regard to their relation to others. Tylerism insists on Objectives, Content, Method, and Assessment with the assumption that students learn curriculum as atomistic individuals.³⁶ It is the guiding rationale for much of higher education pedagogy. Standardized testing also reflects an individualistic view of education in which each student is assessed individually by comparing to other individuals without regard for the relational context where the ability is measured.

There is the commodification of higher education buoyed by the cult of “meritocracy” which reduces education to another object to be consumed among others. William Deresiewicz

³¹ Audrey Thompson, “Rejoinder: Listening and its Asymmetries” *The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education* 33, no. 1 (2003), 79-100.

³² Cris Mayo, “Relations are Difficult” in *No Education without Relation*, 122.

³³ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁴ Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁶ Ralph W. Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

updates John Henry Newman’s critique of vocational education in light of the neoliberal capitalist reduction of college education to merely learning marketable skills.³⁷ Students facing tens of thousands of dollars of debt upon graduation are reasonably concerned about utilitarian education for the marketplace. Initiating and sustaining caring relationships takes time, and the modern corporatized university values efficiency and productivity above all. The authors of *The Slow Professor*, Barbara Seeber and Maggie Berg, observe: “The values of productivity, efficiency, and competition have time as the common factor. Productivity is about getting a number of tasks done in a set unit of time; efficiency is about getting tasks done quickly; and competition, in part, is about marketing your achievements before someone else beats you to it. Corporatization, in short, has sped up the clock.”³⁸ By attending to the quality of relationships, a pedagogy of encounter runs against the grain of the commodified academy which views education as primarily transactional.

Our “virtual identities” present another challenge for a pedagogy of encounter in higher education. Sherry Turkle notes how the ubiquitous presence of smart phones fundamentally alters the very nature of conversation.³⁹ Personal electronic devices present a steady deluge of entertainment and informative stimuli that constantly tempt us into a flight from attentive, face-to-face conversation. We turn to our phones at the first hint of boredom and thus atrophy the capacity for attentiveness. Resultantly, we are easily bored. The dictionary now includes the term “phubing,” which means texting while maintaining eye contact.⁴⁰ It comes as no surprise that conversations held while multitasking tend towards superficiality; divided attention naturally results in keeping content light. Turkle argues that the cost of less attentive and demanding conversation is a lost practice in the “empathic arts – learning to make eye contact, to listen, and to attend to others.”⁴¹ Turkle’s research indicates a 40 percent decline in the markers for empathy among college students in the past twenty years, with the greatest drop in the past ten years.⁴² Researchers attribute this decline to the emergence of digital communications. To be clear, Turkle is not anti-technology but pro-conversation. “Conversation is on the path toward the experience of intimacy, community, and communion. Reclaiming conversation is a step toward reclaiming our most fundamental human values.”⁴³ A pedagogy of encounter may aid in this task. Norm Friesen, researching relational pedagogy and internet technology, argues that the space on the screen can be a site of meaningful educational relationship although its world is marked differently than the embodied place of the classroom. Creating the conditions for interpersonal encounter on the screen requires more deliberate and skilled creation of tone and mood than in the case of our more spontaneous face-to-face interactions.⁴⁴

Each of these profound challenges is also an opportunity for a pedagogy of encounter to enable Catholic higher education to realize its mission more fully. Moreover, there is hopeful evidence that a relational approach to education can play a decisive role in determining a

³⁷ William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014).

³⁸ Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 8.

³⁹ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁴ Norm Friesen, *The Place of the Classroom and the Space of the Screen: Relational Pedagogy and Internet Technology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

student’s collegiate success. In *How College Works*, Daniel Chambliss and Christopher Takacs conclude that long-lasting friendships with fellow students and sometimes teachers are a major result of the college experience.⁴⁵ According to their research, personal relationships play an integral role in learning and are often the central mechanism and daily motivators of the student experience. Alumni frequently report that friendships are the most valuable result of their undergraduate years. Chambliss and Takacs comment: “This pervasive influence of relationships suggests that a college – at least insofar as it offers real benefits – is less a collection of *programs* than a gathering of *people*.”⁴⁶ Programs matter, to be sure, but friends matter more. Friendship is crucial for students, but having a large number of friends is not. Most students need only two or three good friends, and one or two great professors to have a rewarding and even wonderful college experience.⁴⁷ The extensive research of Chambliss and Takacs conducted at Hamilton College, a small, rural, and elite liberal arts college in New York, confirms the monumental role of education’s interpersonal dimension. Their research can be summed up in a single sentence: “[W]hat really matters in college is who meets whom, and when.”⁴⁸ College is most effective when it is not primarily about program or technology but about meaningful human interaction that can shape student choices, increase motivation, and lead to more overall satisfaction with the college experience. College “works” when people are committed to learning together. “People, far more than programs, majors, or classes, are decisive in students’ experiences of college.”⁴⁹ While the idyllic and cloistered context of Hamilton College does not stand in for all of contemporary higher education, Catholic or otherwise, the research suggests that the role of caring relations may be at the heart of successful education everywhere.

Newman underscored the crucial role of friendship in learning within a liberal arts education.⁵⁰ Michael Buckley places that insight within an explicitly Christian and Catholic context:

Academic exchange in thought and collaborative inquiry formally constitute the specifying activity of any university. The only spirit that can further specify any community as Christian is charity, that love of friendship for God and for other human beings that bespeaks the influence and teaching of Christ. To the degree that the university’s characteristic interchange is permeated by a love of both the truth to be explored and for the human beings who are to come to know it...a love found in the concern that human beings share so great a good as that of sacred and profane knowledge, of reason and of revelation and that by their influence, especially teaching, they make this same development possible to others – is that university Catholic in spirit.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Daniel F. Chambliss and Christopher G. Takacs, *How College Works* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 4-5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵⁰ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Martin J Svaglic (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 111-112.

⁵¹ Michael J. Buckley, S.J., *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom* (Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1998), 142.

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When does Religion Count in Conversations about Diversity? The Inadequate Discourse about Religion in Multicultural Education

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Abstract

Attention to diversity is essential in today's classrooms. But what identities count when we talk about diversity? Multicultural education has worked to better recognize diverse students, reduce prejudices, and build empowering school cultures. However, religious diversity is frequently left out of discussions of diversity in education. This paper presents a literature review of the treatment of religion in multicultural education journals from 2002-2016. The review then serves as a starting point for reflections on the importance of recognizing religious diversity in multicultural education.

Introduction

Students, teachers, and the public continually receive mixed messages when it comes to religion in U.S. public schools. Some common misperceptions say that the First Amendment and the separation of church and state require schools to be religion-free zones (Pew Research Center, 2010). At the same time, various groups campaign to return to an earlier era when the unofficial Protestant establishment dictated daily prayers and Bible reading in public schools. The media alternately touts the United States' unique position as highly religious when compared to other industrial nations (WIN - Gallup International, 2012) and both celebrates and bemoans the increasing numbers of non-religious Americans. Recent political discourse is filled with religion-related topics, from the ban on immigration from Muslim majority countries to the resurgence of White Christian Nationalism. A survey conducted in the early months of 2017, the first months of the Trump presidency, found that a quarter of Americans believe that Muslims are a danger to their physical safety (Froese, 2017). About half of Evangelicals believe that Atheists' values are inferior to their own and that Muslims want to limit their religious freedom. At the same time, about half of Jews and almost two thirds of Americans with no religious affiliation see their religious freedom threatened by conservative Christians (Froese, 2017). Within this complex religious culture, teachers are seeing more students from minority religious traditions than they have in the past.

Yet despite this complex religious landscape, teachers receive little to no preparation regarding religion in the public school classroom, from the basics of the legal frameworks that govern religion in U.S. public schools and how to teach about religion academically, to how to respond to religiously diverse students (Aronson, Amatullah, & Laughter, 2016; J. R. Moore, 2009). In turn, students are given few, if any, opportunities to learn about religious diversity. However, without a better understanding of religion, in the United States and around the world, and how to live in a religiously diverse society, classrooms and communities can easily be pulled apart. Students are unable to understand the experiences of their religiously-different classmates and are limited in their ability to interpret the religion-related elements of complex socio-political issues, including reproductive rights, climate change, school choice, and immigration.

The mindset, tools, and resources of multicultural education are one possible starting point for developing a better understanding of religious diversity in public schools. With an emphasis on values of inclusion and respect and goals of prejudice reduction, recognition of diverse identities, challenging dominant social structures, and creating empowering school cultures (Banks, 2004; Bennett, 2001; Gay, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1987), multicultural education should be a natural home for conversations about religious diversity. However, religious diversity has not received substantial attention in the field of multicultural education. While scholars in the field have acknowledged the heavy emphasis on racial and ethnic diversity due to the origins of the field (Sleeter & Grant, 1987), there have also been acknowledgements of the expansion of the purview of multicultural education. Ladson-Billings (2004) writes,

What we now call multicultural education is also a composite. It is no longer solely race, or class, or gender. Rather it is the infinite permutations that come about as a result of the dazzling array of combinations human beings recruit to organize and fulfill themselves....The variety of ‘selves’ we perform have made multicultural education a richer, more complex, and more difficult enterprise to organize and implement than previously envisioned” (p. 50).

For many people, religious identity is one of their central “selves” and is certainly a key element in how individuals and communities “organize and fulfill themselves.” Given the current landscape of religious diversity in the United States is deeply mired in tension and distrust, it is critical that students and teachers are provided with the tools to navigate that landscape.

This review begins from the observation that the multicultural education literature is largely silent when it comes to topics of religion. While religion is frequently listed among other identity categories such as race, gender, and ability, it is not given much attention beyond those initial mentions. Through a detailed review of five multicultural education journals between 2002 and 2016 and a broad review of foundational texts of the field, such as the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks & Banks, 2004), this review both maps the existing, if sparse, discourse about religion in the field of multicultural education and analyzes the ways in which religion is conceptualized by these authors. While there is a fairly limited amount of literature to review, it provides a valuable starting point to understand what religion-related topics scholars of multicultural education have recognized as being in relation to multicultural education and how they portray the relationship of religion to multicultural education. With this understanding, there are opportunities to work toward better understandings of religious diversity in public schools.

Background

Multicultural Education

For the purposes of this review, I am defining multicultural education very broadly. This review includes literature addressing various approaches to multicultural education as defined by Banks (2004) and also related to concepts such as culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) and other forms of culturally relevant education that have developed out of multicultural education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Although these different strands of work have different and important outlooks, purposes, and approaches, this review seeks to understand how religion is discussed in the broad context of multicultural education and too much focus on specific definitions, approaches, or desired outcomes of multicultural education has the potential to paralyze the conversation (Appelbaum, 2002). However, it is still valuable to outline some of the major definitions of multicultural education and widely used frameworks.

Banks and Banks (2013) characterize multicultural education as “an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process” (p. 3), reinforcing the idea that this is a

multifaceted field that draws on multiple disciplines and methodologies while also seeking a variety of outcomes primarily centered around educational equity for diverse students. Banks (2004) identifies five dimensions of multicultural education: (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure. The dimensions represent increasingly sophisticated integration of diversity and difference in curriculum and pedagogy. Alternatively, Sleeter and Grant (1987) identify five approaches to multicultural education that describe a range of ways of thinking about difference and approaches to pluralism in the school setting. These dimensions are (1) teaching the culturally different, (2) a human relations approach, (3) single group studies (4) multicultural education, and (5) education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Both of these typologies demonstrate the many approaches to multicultural education and the literature in this review draws on these and other scholars' approaches to multicultural education.

Locating Religion in U.S. Public Schools

There is substantial misunderstanding about religion in public schools, both regarding the legality of teaching religion as an academic subject and the expression of religious identity, beliefs, and practices. Because the vast majority of the literature reviewed in this article deals with public education in the United States, and because over 90 percent of students in the U.S. attend public schools (McFarland et al., 2017), it is critical to be clear about the relationship between religion and public education before further discussion of religion in multicultural education.

The four domains of knowledge regarding religion in public schools are (1) legal literacy (2) religious literacy (3) pedagogical content knowledge and (4) socio-cultural knowledge (Gardner, Soules, & Valk, 2017). The first two, legal and religious literacy, are somewhat prerequisite for the second two as they provide the foundational legal framework and content knowledge to enable teachers to deliver academically sound instruction about religion and be able to create classrooms that are responsive to students' diverse religious identities.

Legal Framework

Both the Free Exercise and No Establishment clauses of the First Amendment govern the study and practice of religion in public schools. However, the application of these clauses in schools is widely misunderstood. For example, a 2010 survey of religious knowledge among U.S. adults found that only 36% of respondents knew that public schools could legally offer a comparative religions class and only 23% knew that public school teachers could read from the Bible as an example of literature (Pew Research Center, 2010). To the contrary, the Supreme Court has made it clear that even rulings on the unconstitutionality of school-sponsored prayer do not negate the importance of the academic study of religion. In the landmark case, *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), a case often blamed for "kicking God out of the public schools" (DeFattore, 2004; Laats, 2012), the Court ruled that daily Bible reading and the

recitation of the Lord's Prayer in public schools was unconstitutional as a violation of the Establishment clause of the First Amendment. However, in the majority opinion, Justice Thomas Clark stated, "It might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization." (*School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, 1963). The academic study of religion, discussed in more detail below, is, therefore, not only permitted but encouraged by the courts. While school sponsored, endorsed, or promoted religious activities violate the Establishment clause, individual religious practice as well as accommodations for religion, such as modifications to a dress code, are protected by the Free Exercise clause. While this review is not the place for an extended treatise on the legal frameworks surrounding religion in U.S. public schools, this is an area where educators at all levels could benefit from greater understanding.

Unfortunately, a number of the articles discussed in this review do not appear to have a strong grasp on the application of the First Amendment and recommend or discuss classroom practices that could be interpreted as in violation, such as leading second grade children in Buddhist meditation (Cowhey, 2008) or inviting religious leaders or practitioners as guest speakers¹ (Hossain, 2013; Huber-Warring & Bergman, 2007).

Religious Literacy

Before one can get to the pedagogical content knowledge discussed in the next section, a foundation of content knowledge, in this case religious literacy, is necessary. Religious literacy is, of course, much more complex than simply being able to name the 10 Commandment or the 5 Pillars and various scholars have offered useful definitions (Marcus, Forthcoming; D. L. Moore, 2007; Prothero, 2008). This knowledge required for domain, along with the socio-cultural domain, will be highly contextual, particularly depending on an individual's role in the school and the religious make-up of the community. For example, a kindergarten teacher in a predominantly Jewish community and a high school history teacher in a predominantly Catholic community with a growing Muslim population will each need different knowledge based on what and who they teach.

Academic Study of Religion in Public Schools

There is substantial agreement among scholars and practitioners in religious studies, law, and education that the academic study of religion in schools is an important part of both students' understandings of both historical and contemporary events and of their learning to navigate difference (American Academy of Religion, 2010; Haynes & Thomas, 2011; National Council for the Social Studies, 2014). This agreement has been demonstrated through consensus

¹ While inviting guest speakers is not necessarily in violation of the First Amendment, depending on the content of the speaker's visit, a school could be seen as endorsing religious speech or practice, especially if the speaker takes a particularly partisan stance (Wertheimer, 2015). Teachers should be cautious when turning to religious leaders or practitioners as primary sources for the classroom (Haynes & Thomas, 2011).

documents endorsed by dozens of wide-ranging religious, civic, and educational organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, the National Association of Evangelicals, People for the American Way, and the National Education Association (Haynes & Thomas, 2011). Additionally, the National Council for the Social Studies recently adopted a Religious Studies Supplement as an appendix their *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (2013). The C3 Framework “emphasizes the disciplinary concepts and practices that support students as they develop the capacity to know, analyze, explain, and argue about interdisciplinary challenges in our social world” (p. 6) and the addition of the Religious Studies Supplement reaffirms the importance of the inclusion of religion in that learning process. Despite this consensus in the scholarship and jurisprudence, there is wide-spread confusion in the public, including public school teachers and administrators, about what constitutes appropriate and legal study of religion in America’s public schools.

In light of these misunderstandings and the increasing role religious diversity has taken in American society, it is important to differentiate between the devotional study of religion and the nonsectarian, academic study of religion. The devotional study of religion generally occurs within religious communities and is intended to instill belief and adherence to a particular religious tradition. Also referred to as confessional religious education, devotional study of religion is often led by religious leaders and practitioners, and while it may include the study of other religions, the purpose is to pass on beliefs and traditions to the next generation and build community within a particular tradition. The academic study of religion, on the other hand, introduces students to approaches for thinking about and studying religion from an objective stance and exposes students to different religious traditions. Constitutionally sound education about religion “strives for student *awareness* of religions, but does not press for student *acceptance* of any religion...may *expose* students to a diversity of religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view...it does not *promote* or *denigrate* religion... [and it] *informs* students about various beliefs; it does not seek to *conform* students to any particular belief (Haynes & Thomas, 2011, p. 45). This can also be understood as education *about* many different religions rather than education *for* a particular religion. While a not bright-line rule to determine if a particular topic or lesson cross the line from academic and constitutional to devotional and sectarian, these distinctions provide a general guide to the legal inclusion of religion in the public school curriculum.

Socio-Cultural Knowledge

The final domain recognizes that religion does not get left behind when student and teachers walk into their classrooms each day. This domain is particularly relevant to multicultural education and multicultural educators would do well to focus their energies on developing an understanding of the lived religious experiences of student. Beyond an understanding and recognition of the legal rights surrounding religious identity and expression in schools, the recognition or denial of students’ religious identities can have significant impacts on their experiences of school (Dallavis, 2011; Skerrett, 2014; Webb, 2000). Religious identities can

be invisible, making it easy for teachers, staff, and other students to be dismissive of or disrespectful towards religious students without realizing it. The hidden curricula and underlying structures of public schools can also make it non-Christian students feel marginalized, as discussed in more detail later. While much of the discourse regarding religion and education has been about religion in the curriculum and religious literacy, religious identity and expression has also been long overlooked and can be a substantial part of a student's experience of school.

Public Schools' Longstanding Challenge of Religious Diversity

Each of these four areas of knowledge about religion in public schools is interconnected and the emphasis placed on each will vary in different schools and communities. However, it is clear that all four have been largely neglected through the history of American public education. While religious diversity has been present and influential throughout the history of the United States (Gaustad & Schmidt, 2002; Manseau, 2015), public schools and their predecessors have often created structures to suppress that diversity. One of the earliest education laws, the 1647 "Old Deluder Satan Law," was in part intended to make sure that children were able to read the Bible and thus resist the influences of the "saint-seeming deceivers," that is, Catholics (Fraser, 2016). The Common Schools of the 19th century were built on a foundation of pan-Protestant theology and values, a compromise to appease the diverse Protestant denominations, but were unwilling to expand that compromise to include Catholics (Fraser, 2016). An extensive system of government supported boarding schools took Native American children away from their families and systematically deprived them of their native traditions while indoctrinating them into Christianity (Adams, 1995). The court cases of the mid-20th century reveal the various tactics that were employed to limit diverse religious expression in public schools, including punishing students for refusing to say the Pledge of Allegiance (Ellis, 2005) and daily Bible reading and prayers (DeFattore, 2004).

While court cases continue to arise to fight for religious freedom in public schools, or against the inappropriate intrusion of religion, public schools today are more open than they have ever been to religious diversity. The question remains, however, if they will take the necessary steps to ensure that religious diversity is recognized and supported rather than pushed aside, or even push out, as is often has been in the past.

Methods

While the formal review looks at literature published in journals, it is also important to take note of how religion and related topics are treated in some of the foundational literature on multicultural education. Reference books and textbooks often serve as an entry point to a field of study and outline the major questions and directions for research. The treatment of religion in these sources is likely to be a significant influence on how religion is treated in other writing on multicultural education. The absence of religion in this foundational literature is telling of what is found in the journals as well.

The second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks & Banks, 2004) has 49 chapters and not one chapter specifically about religion. There are only 22 entries in the index for religion-related terms. Of these, almost half refer to historical discussions and another 5 are the names of religious organizations. There are 4 references to a section on a single religious school which is, as far as I can tell, the only extended discussion related to religion and the focus is on a private Christian school and its role in building an ethno-racial identity (pg. 173-176).

The popular and commonly cited *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Banks & Banks, 2013), now in its 9th edition, does include a chapter on religion. In the first through fourth editions, this chapter (Uphoff, 2001) included discussion of definitions of religion, contemporary religious demographics and the significance of religion in U.S. society, and a substantive discussion of the educational implications of religious diversity. Unfortunately, starting with the fifth edition, this chapter has been replaced by a chapter written by Charles Lippy (Lippy, 2013) which is almost entirely historical in focus, concentrating on the history of religious diversity in the United States not discussing contemporary issues of religious diversity in schools. While this history is important for a thorough understanding of the contemporary issues, the pre-service teachers that this book is marketed to also need to understand the present landscape of religious diversity, the educational implications of changing religious diversity, and how this influences the relationship between religion and multicultural education.

On a more encouraging note, the *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education* (Banks, 2012) includes 34 entries on “Religion in Society and Schools,” which is one of 16 topical areas that make up the encyclopedia. These entries include “Anti-Semitism in Schools and Society,” “Christian Privilege in Schools and Society,” “Religion, Cultural, and Education in the United States,” “Religion, Teaching about in Schools,” and “Religion, the Courts, and Public Schools.” These entries cover pedagogical approaches and curricular issues, as well as the major legal cases and guidance regarding religion in public schools. The positioning of religion as a unique topic in this encyclopedia signifies that religion is a valid form of diversity and is worthy of attention.

So far I have been focusing on the relative silence about religion in the multicultural education literature. But this silence is not only within multicultural education, the problem is part of the broader landscape of educational research. A search of all past issues of the *Review of Educational Research* (RER) returned no articles with the word ‘religion’ in the title, the abstract, or the keywords associated with the article. Further, a broader search of the journal’s archives did not return any articles on religion and education from the past two decades, including any discussions of faith-based education. In fact, the most substantive discussion of religion in *RER* was found in an article from 1961 that examined the questions, “What place, if any, has religion in the public schools? And what position should the American people take toward parochial schools?” (Stanley, 1961, p. 91). Much has changed in both the educational and religious landscapes since 1961 and, while these remain important questions, we need to come up with new answers.

Further, Nelson's (Nelson, 2010) investigation of the presence of religion-related terms in the six journals published by the American Education Research Association (AERA) between 1931 and 2000 also revealed a very limited number of articles with mentions of religion-related terms in either titles or abstracts. This study was limited because it did not review the content of the articles identified in the search and thus could not comment on the approach to the discussion of religion in these articles. However, even within those limitations, this research demonstrates the dearth of research on religion related topics. While the previous section demonstrated the long history of religious diversity in schools, the gatekeepers of educational research, such as AERA and NAME, do not appear to have recognized the religion in schools as a significant strand of research, either in general or in relation to multicultural education.

In this overview of foundational literature as well as the journal articles reviewed below, I have not found any instances in which authors explicitly stated that religion should be excluded from the purview of multicultural education. The absence of religious appears to the result of ignorance, unintentional or intentional, about the place of religion in the school context. However, there is also some evidence of the reluctance to include coverage of religion in both educational research and practice. A study of social studies teacher educators found that only 23% of participants agreed with the statement, "Multicultural education should include exposing students to religious ways of thinking" (Zam & Stone, 2006, p. 96) as well as other evidence of the marginalization of religion. Regardless of the motivations behind the exclusion of religion from multicultural education, the failure to name religion as an important aspect of cultural and identity and give it substantive attention alongside other forms of identity also sends a message about what identities are considered worthy of attention by multicultural education scholars and practitioners. In addition, this silence about religion makes it more challenging to establish and maintain rigorous research agendas, resulting in disconnected and incomplete discussions of religion in multicultural education, as will be demonstrated in this review. Without coherent and targeted lines of inquiry that investigate how multicultural education can attend to religious identity alongside other identities such as race and gender, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers will continue to lack the tools and knowledge to address the increasingly complex religious diversity in U.S. classrooms. From this survey of the foundational literature, I now turn to the review of the literature published in in relevant journals between 2002 and 2016.

Literature Selection

The events of September 11, 2001 significantly impacted U.S. awareness of religion and the consequences of not understanding religion and produced a shift in the conversation about religion in schools and education about religion (Albright & Woodward, 2006; Duckworth, 2014; Nash & Bishop, 2009; Waggoner, 2013). Given this turning point, I chose to begin this review with literature published in 2002. I identified eight multicultural education journals from the ERIC list of indexed journals. For each journal, I ran searches on 15 religion-related terms (*religion, faith, spiritual(ity), sacred, interfaith, multifaith, god, Christianity, Jew, Judaism, Hindu(ism), Muslim, Islam, Buddhist/Buddhism, Sikh(ism)*) and through reviewing titles and

abstracts initially yielded just over 100 articles. Closer screening of these articles a final set of 36 articles from five journals: *Intercultural Education*, *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *Journal for Multicultural Education*, *Multicultural Education*, and *Multicultural Perspectives*. For articles to be included, they had to be about K-12 schools, curriculum, teachers, or pre-service teachers or teacher educators in the United States. Both empirical and conceptual work was included. Articles that were primarily focused on higher education or did not include a substantial discussion of religion. Because many of the religion-related terms used for the search criteria can also appear in descriptions of populations or as non-religion related descriptors, many articles that appeared in the initial search were ultimately excluded for not having a substantial focus on religion. Finally, while literature on religion in U.S. schools frequently differentiates between public and private schools due to the complex restrictions on religion in public schools, this review includes work on both public and private schools as the issues are relevant in both settings and the two studies based on private education both have implications for the broader conversation about religion and multicultural education.

Findings

This review is just as much about reviewing what is discussed in the literature as it is about revealing what is not discussed. While I conducted this review in response to my suspicion that there was a lack of discussion about religion in the multicultural education literature, there is obviously a small body of work that has addresses the topic. This limited body of literature provides some insight into how multicultural education scholars are thinking about religion, even in this limited fashion, and provides a starting point for looking toward possible future research trajectories. I will begin with a brief discussion of the themes and topics that *are* present in the literature before turning to a discussion of what is missing from this literature and the implications for multicultural education.

The 36 articles that I identified for this review represent a very disjointed picture of religious diversity in U.S. public schools and in relation to multicultural education. The vast major of the work was theoretical rather than empirical and the authors did not draw on common theoretical or conceptual frameworks. These characteristics made it challenging to develop a meaningful organizational framework to analyze the literature. Ultimately, I categorized the articles based on the major topic of inquiry or discussion, resulting in the division of the literature into the categories of (1) curriculum, (2) teachers, and (3) students. While there are some articles that deal with more than one of these categories, those articles were grouped based on the primary focus or with other pieces that took a similar approach or had similar conclusions.

Curriculum

Over 60 percent of the articles dealt with the curriculum in one form or another. These include critiques of curricular materials (David & Ayouby, 2005; Eraqi, 2015; Fontaine, 2010), informational pieces intended to provide teachers with content knowledge (Al-Hazza & Lucking,

2015; Callaway, 2010), and a series discussing Christian privilege and its implications in schools (Clark, 2003, 2003; Clark, Vargas, & Schlosser, 2002). There are also several articles that directly comment on the relationship between religion and multicultural education. These include some very well done articles that should be models for others writing on this topic (Aronson et al., 2016; J. R. Moore, 2009) to those that only serve to further confuse the issue (DeSantis, 2011) or suggest that attention to religious and spiritual identities could somehow compromise a commitment to multicultural education: “How do we, who are multicultural educators, think about and respond to these spiritual and religious aspects of our students’ (and our own) identities but still abide by principles of pursuing justice, advocating inclusion, affirming difference, and ensuring quality education for all?” (Lisi & Rios, 2006, p. 1). Of course, a counter question should be, how can multicultural educators pursue justice, advocate inclusion, and affirm difference *without* thinking about and responding to the spiritual and religious aspects of students’ identities?

A common theme in this group of articles, and in the reviewed literature overall, is a focus on Islam and discomfort around Islam. All but one of the pieces on curricular materials was about resources for teaching about Islam or the Arab world and all of the informational pieces take teachers’ lack of knowledge about Islam as their starting point. While it is not entirely unexpected given the political climate and international events of the last decades, this emphasis on Islam makes it seem like teachers are already familiar and comfortable with other religious traditions, which we know they are not, or that other religions, since they are not at the center of global conflict, are not worthy of attention. The few pieces that do focus on other traditions, including two pieces that address non-Western traditions (Hendry, 2003; Ho’omanawanui, 2010), are refreshing, but they also generally do not discuss interactions between religious traditions.

Teachers

The literature that is focused primarily on teachers can be grouped into those articles on teachers encounters with religion in the classroom, those on the intersections of religious identities and other identities, and those exploring topics of spirituality in relation to being a multicultural education. When religion shows up in the classroom, teachers may have negative reactions and take a deficit view of religious minority students (Taggar, 2006) or they may become intrigued by the questions themselves and seek out more information to bring back and share with the class (Cowhey, 2008). However, with only two articles on this issue, it is hard to make any generalizations about how teachers will respond when they encounter religion in the classroom.

Teachers are responsible for much more than the delivery of academic content and this group of authors recognize that the many other aspects of teaching, especially those that involve the guidance and care for students, can be draining. It is important to recognize these aspects of teaching that are in the realm of caring and shepherding students and to consider broader definitions of the teacher’s role in both the classroom and the community (Whitfield & Klug, 2004). Bruna Richardson (2010) sought out a religious community whose beliefs and priorities

mirrored her own as a multicultural educator. She deliberately works to cultivate a radical openness and ethic of practice, drawing on her religious and spiritual foundation, that helps her consider challenging questions. Other authors (Wong & Fernández, 2008) include spirituality as one of several dimensions of personal and professional life that multicultural teacher educators should attend to in order to reduce burnout and the negative effects of the resistance to multicultural education that they often encounter from pre-service teachers. Wong and Fernandez (2008) recommend that teacher educators pay attention to how the work of multicultural education impacts their lives and take case to nurture their intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, and ethical well-being. These authors recognize that these dimensions will have different levels of significance for different educators and at different times, but that they are interconnected in helping maintain balance and “good health” while dealing with the challenges that can accompany multicultural education. This article is a good example of the seamless integration of religion and spirituality as an aspect of identity and experience. While the authors (Wong & Fernández, 2008) note that spirituality “was perhaps the most elusive and difficult to articulate of all of the dimensions” (13), they still recognize its role in a holistic approach to well-being rather than singling it out as a separate topic of discussion.

The small set of articles discussing teachers’ religious identities in relation to their racial identities is the only substantial discussion of intersectionality within this literature. This group of articles also is the most diverse in the traditions represented—it includes discussions of Christianity (Lee, 2012), Judaism (Blumenfeld, 2006; Singer, 2008), and Native American (Lajimodiere, 2013) traditions. Compared to the extensive focus on Islam in much of the other literature, there is almost not attention given to Islam in the literature on teachers and none about teacher identities.

Students

The literature on students is the smallest group within this literature. All five of the articles on students focus on Islam, although there is some minor differentiation—one piece focused on Arab American students (Tabbah, 2016), another looks at female Somali immigrant students (Oikonomidou, 2010), one gives a personal account of misunderstanding and discrimination as a Muslim immigrant student (Shatara, 2007), and two look more broadly at the experiences of Muslim students in U.S. classrooms (Merchant, 2016; Sabry & Bruna, 2007). The findings of these studies are unsurprising. Students experience discrimination and bullying from other students. Girls in particular are singled out and subject to assumption and misunderstandings. And beyond the social aspects of school, many of the students studied also experienced a curriculum that was either completely silent about their culture or religion or grossly misrepresented it. Students were often singled out in class to speak on behalf of an entire religion. While the number of studies looking at students is very low, it is clear that there is a great need for more attention to student experiences as religious minorities, which may also include Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, and various Christian groups depending on the community context.

Discussion

This review set out to discover how the multicultural education literature was talking about religion. From both the low number of articles that I found and the content of those articles, it is clear that this has not been a sustained conversation in the field of multicultural education. There are many topics that were simply absent from this literature including a full range of religious diversity—religious traditions beyond the Abrahamic traditions, conservative Christianity, and atheism, agnosticism, and humanism are almost entirely absent. There is also very little empirical research represented in this literature and what is there is mostly small interview studies or single case studies. This literature could also benefit from more attention to intersectionality and the interactions between religious traditions.

The importance of recognizing religious diversity in multicultural education cannot be understated in today's schools. When religious identities are not recognized or welcomed, students can feel isolated or devalued in the classroom, dramatically impacting their experience of education and even their perceptions of their own worth or the value of their religious tradition (Webb, 2000). Just as much as past and ongoing injustice around race in our school systems is a form of oppression, a lack of recognition of religious identity is harmful and a form of oppression (Taylor, 1994). If multicultural education is to be truly living up to its goals, it must attend to religious identity along with race, gender, sexuality, and all of the other rich identities that students bring to school.

The Way Forward

There is little doubt that religion is an essential part of culture and that public schools in the United States need to be better prepared to address religion both in and outside of the classroom. While significant progress has been made on the academic front, particularly with the inclusion of the Religious Studies supplement in the C3 framework, much more needs to be done to include attention to religion as part of the complex identities that students bring to schools. Students and teachers need opportunities to learn how to speak about religion and deeply personal beliefs through civil dialogue. The long silence about religion in public schools has left teachers and administrators without the tools or knowledge to begin conversations about religion. Multicultural education is already present as a field of study and in the pedagogy of many teachers. Drawing on these resources and better integrating religion into conversations about diversity has the potential to make a significant difference in the experiences of religiously diverse students in today's schools.

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