

5-8 July
Online in Zoom

REA Annual Meeting 2022 Proceedings becoming good ancestors

Courageously Co-Creating

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





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Becoming Good Ancestors: Courageously Co-Creating



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Vulnerable as we are
walking together
Resilient in dialogue

The divine is co-creating
Listening to resilient generations

Our transformation
Learning Ancestor
Courageously co-creating
Transforming life

Be Courageous, resilient, alive
Making
Learning
Practicing
Finding
Co-creating

Celebrate ascending into the future
Departing, rejecting, holding, releasing
Breathing, honoring

Repeat
Celebrate ascending into the future
Departing, rejecting, holding, releasing
Breathing, honoring

Resilient transformation
Bring art in Balance
The ancestors
Are storytelling.



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Living Water Year 11-12 Senior RE Praxis Course: Overview and Implementation

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Abstract

An area of considerable interest in the current discussion of religious education (RE) in Australian Catholic schools is the place of RE in senior high school (Rossiter 2021). The wider context of these discussions is premised on changes in the wider culture along with a need to make religious education more engaging. This paper will examine a new course designed for senior school students in Catholic schools in the Toowoomba Diocese. This paper will be in two parts. The first section aims to give some background and rationale for the development of the new course, Living Water (LW). In this section of the paper some contextualization on the place of religious education in contemporary Catholic education will be examined. In response to new cultural challenges the outline of the new course will be offered and some of the goals, expectations and aspirations of the new course will be explained. The second part of the paper reports on an empirical examination of the implementation of the course in some Toowoomba Catholic schools. This examines responses of teachers, school based RE leaders and students to the new course and sets a platform for the final part of the paper. This gives some recommendations on the future role and implementation of LW.

Living Water: An Overview

In June 2020, Toowoomba Catholic Schools (TCS) published Living Water, a Senior RE praxis course intentionally designed to provide Year 11 & 12 students with opportunities for practical application of Catholic beliefs and values through experiential service learning. LW emerged as a response to several challenges and critical questions faced by secondary colleges. It was a particular time of changing senior schooling expectations in Queensland within the midst of growing cultural and religious plurality. The time was right for developing a 'new' way of engaging senior students in a practical form of RE, which would allow them to understand and interpret the Catholic faith in the world around them.

Dr Pat Coughlan, Executive Director: Toowoomba Catholic Schools stated that,
"Catholic schools are charged with the challenging mission to make the Reign of God a reality in the lives of all students...The Living Water program ensures that Religious Education remains an essential component of a student's life at school and gives each

student the opportunity to experience and practice the values, knowledge and qualities that will form their identity for life after formal education” (Living Water, 2019, p.3).

With data and recommendations derived from the Catholic University of Leuven, Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) online survey instruments, insight was provided into the spectrum of belief of stakeholders within the communities and into the teaching and lived out student experiences of religion. As a system of schools, TCS used this opportunity to act on the research and recommendations from the Catholic University of Leuven to create opportunities and experiences which recontextualise the faith tradition whilst encouraging dialogue and developing a post-critical faith understanding. Serendipitous changes to senior education in Queensland also catalysed this project by suggesting senior RE programs could engage students more and assist in drawing from the Catholic Christian tradition and connection to the reality of the world around them.

Context of Toowoomba Catholic Schools

Toowoomba Catholic Schools (TCS) comprises 31 schools and the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office (TCSO), providing quality Catholic education and care to families in Toowoomba, the Darling Downs and across south-western Queensland. School contexts vary from city schools to rural and remote. TCS includes five P-12 schools and four secondary colleges 7-12.

The mission of TCS is that schools are exemplary places of learning and faith where all students experience academic success within a distinctive Catholic environment. The theoretical and practical components of the LW program is premised on the reconceptualist approach, an approach which operates from an educational framework, which incorporates and enhances the academic knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the Diocesan Religious Education Curriculum (Elliott, Stower & Victor (eds.), 2020).

Educational Changes to Senior Schooling in Qld 2019

The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) decision in 2016-17 to develop a senior secondary schooling system to better support young people in the transition to further education, training or work became the catalyst for discussions about what this would mean for RE in the senior years of secondary in Catholic schools and colleges.

As a result of the QCAA recommendations, the new Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) was introduced in 2019, starting with Year 11 students. Key features include:

- new and redeveloped senior syllabuses
- external assessment in general subjects
- new quality assurance processes to strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessment
- the introduction of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), (Qld Gov, QCAA).

A Diocese of Toowoomba approach to educational reform

Senior educationalists in the Queensland Dioceses began discerning what the changes to senior schooling would mean for schools, staff and students. Within the Toowoomba

Diocese initial discussions drafted possibilities for new and revitalising options for RE for senior students.

A subsequent taskforce reviewed the current requirements of senior students for the study of Religious Education in the Toowoomba Diocese and made recommendations to the Diocesan Bishop, which included a 'Praxis' component. The Bishop commended this approach and commissioned the deliberation and provision of an insightful and practical enhancement to options available to senior students. A smaller working party of school and office personnel developed the suggested format and course detail for the 'Praxis' component. The results and insights from the ECSI surveys influenced the program writers to focus on the student's openness to opportunities to engage in social justice and issues of diversity, whilst ensuring there was connection to the Catholic tradition and worldview through a post-critical and dialogical lens.

An alternative option – Living Water

The 'Praxis' course was named '*Living Water*', as exemplified in the Scripture of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42). The biblical passage was selected for its thought-provoking message which requires both an understanding of the original context and an interpretation of going out into the world as the living presence of Jesus.

In practical terms developing the LW course meant that secondary schools could offer more RE options to senior students. LW would provide an experiential form of RE, as well as allowing for more study time in Yr 12. The course would not require as many timetabled lessons as regular religion classes, thus ensuring students had ample time to meet the demands of the new senior secondary schooling requirements.

The combined ***Religion and Ethics/ Living Water*** model would be implemented over 3 years of senior schooling. In this iteration, students complete the *Religion and Ethics* course and obtain the necessary points towards a QCE. The *Religion and Ethics* component of the course is in line with QCAA requirements. The *LW* component is monitored and requirements signed-off by each school. Both components (the ***Religion and Ethics*** and the ***Living Water***) are undertaken within a three-year timespan. Each school is responsible for time allocation of both components. Some examples of what this looks like are:

- a) Both components spread evenly across the 3 Years, that is, ***Religion and Ethics*** completed in Years 10 and 11 and ***Living Water*** in Year 12
- b) 4 lessons of ***Religion and Ethics*** in Year 10, 2 lessons of ***Religion and Ethics*** and some ***Living Water*** in Year 11 and 2 lessons of ***Religion and Ethics*** and some ***Living Water*** in Year 12

The decision about the delivery model is made by each school to fit within staffing and timetabling restrictions. Study of Religion is also an option for students in Years 11 and 12. The importance of developing the program was acknowledged by the ongoing support of the Diocese of Toowoomba Secondary Principal Association (DOTSPA) and the active participation by principals and APREs in the writing of the program.

The vision and rationale of Living Water

Students who complete the LW Year 11-12 Senior praxis course of study will have enriched their knowledge about and experience of the Catholic faith by listening and responding to the call of their Christian vocation through prayer, liturgy, social justice, reflection, advocacy and Eucharistic celebration.

Service learning is founded in the Gospels, with its importance enlivened through various Papal encyclicals and Bishops' statements published by the Church. Catholic Social Teachings which draw from Scripture, tradition, reason and experience to address issues of social, economic and ecological justice underpin this service learning program (Cornish, n.d.) Students participating in the course come to understand and experience the key elements of service learning - recognising the innate dignity of all people as children of God; the meaning of relationship; an attitude of service and authentic communication and connection with others, through rich and real-life opportunities. Various models for service learning were utilised in the development of the course including Kolb's model of Experiential Learning (Kolb,1984, p.42); Service-Reflection-Learning Framework (Green, 2006, p.68); Recurring stages of student reflection in a service learning course model (Green,2006, p.220) and the Spiral model of service learning (Price, 2008).

Course structure

The course integrates five key components: -

- Models of service learning
- Theology
- Church teachings on social justice
- Scripture
- Preparing to serve

Four core social justice teachings which are paramount to the course are charity / action; social justice / solidarity; advocacy and immersion/ awareness. In the foreword, Most Reverend Bishop Robert McGuckin acknowledged the importance of incorporating the Catholic social teachings of the church into the program,

"The Catholic Church teaches that each person is a sacred being, created by God, with a unique calling. The Living Water praxis course encourages students to reflect on who they are and who they can be, as an individual and member of community in relation to the world in which they live" (McGuckin, 2019, p.3)

At a practical level the course requires a minimum of 110 hours to complete. This includes whole group intensive days; retreat experiences; service learning experiences (40 hours); reflection and journaling; twilight reflection sessions; preparing and facilitating prayer, liturgical and retreat experiences; advocacy, Yr 12 retreat and concludes with a final retreat ritual and reflection. Timetabled lessons also form part of this experience.

Staffing

The selection of staff to lead the LW program in the school was critical to its success. In this service-learning course, teachers are actively engaged in bringing students sensitively into experiences of life which may disrupt their experience of the world and cause them to think at a deeper level on their own sense of self, that of others and connections to their spirituality. The ability to engage in dialogue, ask critical questions and respond to students' experiences requires staff who epitomize the 'witness, specialist, moderator' skills and continue to reflect on their own sense of self, their connections with others and the world in a post-critical belief mode (Pollefeyt, 2008). The teachers' own struggles to make meaning of life and the world makes them well-suited 'guiding companions', in the LW journey.

LW was launched in the Diocese in 2019 and is now a key component of the religious life of six secondary schools and colleges in the Diocese of Toowoomba. The course materials include an extensive teacher resource book, course overview and structure manual and a student workbook. These books are available online to TCS schools through the TCS intranet in writable PDF form for students ease of engagement.

Implementation of Living Water: An Empirical Study

The focus of the evaluation was a broad examination of how well the LW course, as an integrated curriculum drawing on Catholic social teaching and opportunities for wider practical engagement, was being implemented. Three sources of data were used in this study. Sixteen teachers and APRE's involved in the LW curriculum responded to a survey. The survey comprised eleven questions both open ended and Likert scale response questions. The questions focused on participants perceptions of the new course and its implementation. The survey was conducted online, and responses were anonymous. The median age of participants was in their forties, and eleven (69%) of participants had postgraduate qualifications in education. The median number of years teaching RE was ten.

Eleven teachers were interviewed using the survey results as a departure point. All interviews were conducted via zoom. The zoom interviews followed a semi structured pattern beginning with the question, "What has been your experience of the LW course?" Several funnel questions probed: amount of support offered for teachers; students' perceptions; opportunities, challenges and features of the course. As a semi structured interview protocol was followed there was large scope for participants to respond to questions in different ways and concentrate on their experiences and the issues that these raised. After each interview major response categories were identified, and these shaped the next interview.

Twenty-nine students responded to an invitation to take part in a survey that examined their general attitude to LW, favoured topics and areas that could be improved. The survey was short and focused involving seven questions. Three questions were on a Likert rating scale and four of the questions were open ended. Students completed the survey online and had the option to remain anonymous.

Findings

Overall response to the course

In both the teacher surveys and in the interviews, teachers expressed overall satisfaction with the program and enthusiasm for it to continue. Two survey questions addressed teachers' general response to the course and its implementation. The first asked about implementation of the course and on a scale of 0-10 where 10 represented extremely successful implementation the average rating was 7.9. When asked about their confidence in teaching the course, again on a 0-10 scale, the average rating given in survey responses was 8.3. Both results support the contention that LW was seen as being well implemented and teachers were confident in their ability to teach the course. Comments on the survey also supported the notion that there was a high degree of satisfaction with the course. Some indicative quotes follow which underline this contention. One teacher noted, "All schools should take this on, it is the living (pardon the pun) example of doing Christ's work." Another remarked, "keep it." There were many comments such as, "it's working well" or "I enjoy teaching it."

In interviews with teachers, further information was gathered which elaborated on the data from the teacher survey. This information, generally, supported the contention that teachers were satisfied with the course and the way it was being implemented. The sense from many of the interviews was that teachers saw LW as a significant development in how religious education was conceptualized and delivered in Toowoomba Catholic schools. One teacher noted this when she commented, "I really like the praxis course as it tells us where we are going as a school and how we are responding to student needs, that's a big tick for me." Another teacher remarked, "Despite being new it's good for the future and I enjoy teaching it." In a similar vein, several teachers noted that it had improved the quality of religious education in senior high school. One teacher noted, "RE now had a clearer direction."

The confidence of teachers can be better understood by at least two considerations. Firstly, participants in the study reported high levels of support both at a school and a system level when teaching LW. At a school level support was centred on the relational aspect of working with an APRE who was able to understand the demands of the new curriculum and guide and mentor teachers. At a systems level teachers found that the course was well planned and materials such as teacher books provided practical support, especially, for the classroom aspects of LW. Secondly, it is worth noting the skills and experience of the teachers involved in this new course. The median age of participants was in the forties, and many had extensive experience as teachers and leaders in school-based RE. The participants spoke of their commitment to RE and how they were tasked to help deliver the LW program as it was new and needed the special attention of skilled practitioners. A recent study noted this tendency to align highly skilled practitioners as the "only she can teach it" phenomenon (Rymarz and Starkey, 2021). This refers to the successful implementation of a new course in senior school RE requiring considerable planning and support for the course and also, at least initially, excellent teachers. This is a natural reaction to a new curriculum as such programs tend to attract teachers with the necessary set of skills.

Student responses to LW

When asked in the teacher survey how well students had responded to the new course the average rating of teachers was 7.7 out of 10. In interviews teachers commented on the overall favourable response from students. Some teachers contrasted this response with their perception of student engagement with the previous course. As one participant put it, “it’s much better than what we were doing, some ‘bedding down’ issues but more student engagement for sure.” In interviews the diversity of the student body doing LW was also noted. Some of the students, for instance, were in the high quartiles for academic achievement and already had sufficient courses and grades for university credit. For them LW was a means by which they could reduce the academic pressure on themselves. As one teacher remarked, “..... are really capable students, it’s a bit hard to engage them with the content but they really enjoy the service part.”

The student survey contained three Likert questions which gave an indication of students’ response to the new course. When asked how the new course compared to what they did last year, remembering last year they were not doing LW, the average rating given was 6.9, where a score of 10 represented that LW was very much superior to the previous offering. When asked if they had learnt much in the new course the average student rating was 6.3. Finally, students gave the new course an overall rating of 6.4 out of 10. These responses are lower than teachers’ perceptions of students’ response to the course, but they need to be considered as indicative of a well-established trend. Low student evaluations of RE is a perennial issue not just in Catholic schools but when RE (or similar) is taught in the public system such as in large parts of Europe. The seminal work on student evaluation of RE in Catholic schools in Australia was conducted by Marcellin Flynn. Over 25 years Flynn found that student evaluations of RE were consistently poor and this was especially so in senior high school. So much so that he recommended not teaching RE in senior high school! The argument is that student’s evaluation in the range of 6.4-6.9 are comparatively quite high. To reiterate, when students compared LW with their previous experience, the average score here was 6.9 and this seems to be a strong preference for the new course or at least the style of the new course.

Students also had the option of writing comments in the survey, and several did this. These comments give another perspective on the course and can be read alongside the other findings in this report. Students, for example, noted the difficulty with “finding the hours” a challenge noted by teachers that will be reported later. One student commented, “Hard to manage 40 hours of praxis during exams, more school-based opportunities.” Another made a similar remark, “lessen the amount of community service hours maybe more practical learning activities.” When asked for their favourite part of LW, however, by far the strongest response were the praxis, variously described, aspects of the course. Fourteen students nominated praxis, service, outreach and community involvement or similar terms as their favourites. Students also commented positively on the rationale for the praxis aspect of the course.

Students also made some perceptive comments on the course content, and this indicated that for some the content of the course was engaging. As one student remarked when asked what they liked about the course, “Learning about Catholic social teachings, adhering to the see, judge, act formula and learning about how we can help others within our community.” In a similar vein, another student noted, “[I liked the] emphasis

on biblical stories that give examples of what LW means.” These comments draw attention to the content of the course, which will be covered in more detail in the next section, and the positive reaction from some students. It is one of the recommendations of this study that further work be done on how best to convey the course content of LW in an engaging fashion.

Students also remarked on other positive aspects of the course such as running retreats, “Being able to run retreats and liturgies, being able to go out and see the world through charity's eyes and being able to learn about countries less fortunate than us and taking that to advocate for them.” There were also several comments from students about enjoying facilitating liturgies and working with younger students. Comments such as these indicate that the broad goals of the LW program are being met. When asked explicitly about three aspects of the course that could be improved there were a wide and divergent range of responses. One of the major categories that emerged was a desire to see more diverse opportunities for service. As one student put it, “More community involvement, rather than just school-based activity. Another issue that students raised was that greater attention be given to how to properly and proactively journal. One student noted, “Journaling questions could have been more flexible/insightful.

Teaching the content

To conclude the presentation of findings, attention will be drawn to two areas that came up as strong response categories across all data gathered. The first of these are comments related to the content of LW. In speaking of their experience of teaching LW most participants drew a contrast between the teaching and what was variously described as, “the service.” It is interesting to note that with very few exceptions when teachers were referring to the new course, they invariably described it as, “the praxis course.” On several occasions I drew participants attention to this description and pointed out that the new course was, in fact, called, Living Waters. I think this description gives us some insight into how teachers approach LW, especially, in terms of what they saw as its key components.

When teachers described the new course in general terms often their point of departure was how the course was designed to engage students and the chief vehicle for this were the parts of the course they described as praxis orientated. As noted, this term praxis often became a *de facto* term for the course. The praxis element involved all service hours, the activities that took the students outside the classroom and into the wider community. Praxis involved activities such as mentoring other students, planning liturgies and involvement in retreat programs. The challenges involved in the praxis components of LW will be discussed in more detail in the next section, but it is important to note the participants saw this aspect of the course as, “front and centre.”, the core aspect of LW. Once again, the contrast was made between the new course and what had preceded it not just at senior school but also in earlier years of RE. One teacher made this point when she commented, “in the past we have had a very ‘top heavy’ approach to RE, lots and lots of stuff to learn. With the praxis course the emphasis has changed.”

When asked about the content of the course which was often referred to as the ‘classroom aspects’ of LW, teachers were less forthcoming but did not dispute that this was an important part of the course. In the survey, for instance, when asked about how well the social justice teaching part of LW was being implemented the average response score was 8.3, where 10 represented extremely well implemented. Teachers also found the workbooks and accompanying support material very helpful. One participant noted, “the resources books were written by someone who knows how to teach.” In terms of teaching the content a major advantage of LW is it that arises out of a well-planned curriculum. It will be suggested that a way to encourage further consideration of how to better integrate and present the content of LW is to consider it as an “integrated praxis model.”

One specific content issue that was addressed in the teacher survey was how well Catholic social teaching, identified as social justice themes, was covered in LW. Teachers gave an average 8.3 Likert rating when asked about their satisfaction about how well social justice themes were covered. Social justice is, perhaps, the foundational concept in the LW curriculum and represents a bridge between the conceptual and practical aspects of the course. While teachers were generally satisfied with how well social justice was covered many of their comments in this specific area reflected their remarks on the content of the course in general. The level of support offered was seen as satisfactory and, in particular, resources such as the handbook were acknowledged and appreciated. It was, however, the “nitty gritty” as one teacher put it that could be more thoroughly investigated. What then is the “nitty gritty” of teaching social justice themes. One indicative comment was on how best to integrate complex ideas that were more than just generic moral perspectives. One teacher put it. “it’s great to go out and do all these things, but why do we do them? It’s not enough to say that’s what Jesus would do.” The challenge of covering Catholic social teaching can be seen as a good illustration of the broader, longstanding issue in religious education, namely, how is complex content covered in a way that is both engaging and rigorous.

Finding the hours

A second major response category that emerged, especially from interviews with teachers and APRE, was finding enough activities for students to engage with that met the demands of the praxis aspect of the course. To encapsulate this point one teacher spoke of what her school, was doing to assist students in this regard. She noted, “we have homework clubs, blood drives, Meals on Wheels, working with primary school students, preparing prayer and liturgies and help planning and running retreats, I think that’s all!” There are several aspects of this, “finding the hours” that will be commented on here.

The first has been covered in earlier comments about the demands of the course and that the balance can be seen to shift to the service component as this is the one that is seen as the characteristic feature of LW. One of the more specific challenges about finding activities for students was an acute one. This relates to the restrictions placed on students in times of Covid. Even though there were not widespread outbreaks of Covid in the Toowoomba diocese as a precaution there were many restrictions placed on when and where students could engage with the wider community. The most obvious example of this were visits to aged care facilities. In time, it is hoped that these Covid restrictions will become much less onerous.

Conclusion

The goal for LW to be a leading example of a praxis approach to senior school RE is on track to be realized. Teachers involved in LW expressed enthusiasm and satisfaction with the course and its implementation. There was support for the integrated nature of LW with course content on Catholic social teaching and a clear emphasis on opportunities for wider practical engagement. The existing curriculum is supported by teachers and teachers felt supported at school and system level. There was evidence for student satisfaction with the course, certainly in comparison to other courses and general reaction to RE in senior high school.

On the basis of the contextualization of LW provided in part 1 of the paper and the empirical examination of its implementation a number of recommendations can be tentatively offered with a view to the future of LW as an example of an integrated praxis model for religious education in Catholic senior high school. Consideration be given to expanding the teacher base who can well engage with the LW curriculum. A mentoring approach where experienced teachers could induct new teachers is one suitable model. In future planning of the course and related professional development, the skills, expertise and enthusiasm of those currently involved in LW be utilized by using collaborative professional learning communities.

There is a need to begin preparing future cohorts to teach LW. This is mindful of the current teachers exhibiting high levels of skills and engagement with the course. A further study could be conducted in the future that will focus on how teachers cover the content of LW with a view to better understanding and supporting effective pedagogical strategies. Further consideration be given to referring to LW as an integrated praxis model, one that combines Catholic social teaching and an explicit emphasis on service and lived experience. Finally, offering teachers targeted workshops on pedagogical approaches that could enhance student engagement should be explored.

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Spiritual Formation for the Burnout Generation: With an Asian Spiritual Perspective

Abstract

Numerous studies have revealed that the younger generation, in particular, is at a higher risk of burnout. Moreover, the pandemic over the past two years has stopped our daily lives but has not slowed down the pace of life. This study examines the possibility and necessity of spiritual formation with the Asian spiritual perspective for people living with mental, physical, and spiritual strains and crises. In the end, this paper elaborates on the meaning of *Huesik* and suggests it as a means of spiritual restoration as well as resistance to burnout.

Introduction

“Professor, I just can’t take it anymore. There have been a lot of things happening at work and family matters lately. Could you please give me an extension to finish my final paper?”

Students have often contacted me in the final weeks of the semesters since the pandemic began. It was mostly understandable that students who work and serve in ministry settings, along with studying in a seminary, could not fully focus on their classes physically or psychologically. Even though the situation seems much better now after two years of the pandemic, the student’s quality of life has not yet returned to normal. Indeed, we need to stop talking about the “normal” until we define it first. Although anxiety, depression, and stress accumulated since the beginning have yet to be resolved, we are carrying another burden to imagine and build a new reality.

The term burnout is not unusual for people living in this strange era. Since its definition was introduced by a German American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in 1974, burnout has been studied extensively.¹ World Health Organization’s 11th International Classification Standard classified burnout as a syndrome as an occupational problem phenomenon in 2019.² It has been shown that despite not being medically defined, intensive psychological and physical phenomena that occur in connection with occupational activities - associated either with employment or unemployment - need special attention.

As we live in a society that emphasizes overworking and overachieving, we are encouraged to work more than care for our emotional and spiritual well-being. In light of many recent studies showing that young people are more likely to burn out, Petersen argues that “Millennials live with the reality that we’re going to work forever, die before we pay off our student loans, potentially bankrupt our children with our care, or get wiped out in a global

¹ Thomas M. Skovolt and Michelle Trotter-Mathison, *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout Prevention and Self-Care Strategies for Counselors, Therapists and Health Professionals*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2

² Jonathan Malesic, *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022), 69; World Health Organization. 11th International Classification of Diseases. <https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2fid%2fentity%2f129180281>

apocalypse.”³ Additionally, we have been affected by the pandemic for the past two years, but the pace of our lives has not slowed down. As the pandemic has exacerbated burnout syndrome, it now looms over the next generation as well. These individuals experience emotional drain, physical fatigue, and a lack of spiritual growth.

Therefore, in this paper, I will analyze the emotional and spiritual status of the generations who are mostly experiencing burnout and explore spiritual responses as a holistic approach to resiliency. The goals of this research are: 1) to connect with the burnout generation and to understand the current culture, 2) to reconnect with spiritual practices from my faith and ethnic and cultural practices, 3) to create a meaningful conversation between the two, particularly through the practice of *Huesik*, for the spiritual yearning and thirst of the burnout generation.

The Burnout Culture: Definition, Causes, and Solutions

Christina Maslach, a distinguished scholar and professor of psychology, defines burnout in her book, *Burnout: The Cost of Caring*. She explains “Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people-work’ of some kind. It is the response to the chronic emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly when they are troubled or having problems.”⁴

People cope with emotional and physical stress in different ways. As such, the degree to which they feel burned out may be different. Jonathan Malesic, formerly a tenured professor of Theology and Ethics and currently an adjunct faculty, refers to it as the “burnout spectrum” and explains it by saying, “We don’t know where the line is, on the Maslach Burnout Inventory or some other measure, between ‘burned out’ and ‘not burned out,’ because there isn’t one. Different experiences of burnout severity blend into each other, just as the colors we call ‘red’ gradually become more orange in a rainbow.”⁵ When you exceed your physical and mental limits, your body will be stressed out and eventually burnt out. Michael P. Leiter and Christina Maslach, in their book, *Banishing Burnout*, also clarify that “Burnout is far more than feeling blue or having a bad day. It is a chronic state of being out of sync with your job, and that can be a significant crisis in your life.”⁶

When a person is burnt out, they often feel emotionally fatigued or indifferent toward colleagues, congregants, or patients. The more ineffective they feel, and the less unnecessary they feel, the more doubt they have about their values. They can be less productive at work, react cynically, and lack the desire to achieve on a personal level. It is possible that they will lose their passion for continuing pursuing their career and eventually leave their job.⁷ Individuals and organizations

³ Anne Helen Petersen, *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation* (San Francisco: Mariner, 2020), 19.

⁴ Christina Maslach, *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* (San Jose: Malor, 2003), 2

⁵ Malesic, *The End of Burnout*, 77.

⁶ Michael P. Leiter and Christina Maslach, *Banishing Burnout: Six Strategies for Improving Your Relationship with Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 2.

⁷ Malesic, *The End of Burnout*, 68; Leiter and Maslach. *Banishing Burnout*, 3.

will not benefit from burnout in the long run. Burnout can also lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and drug and alcohol abuse.⁸

Then, what causes us to feel burned out? Anne Helen Peterson, in her book, *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation*, gives a good overview of the job status in the United States in 2020, in a pre-pandemic era. A shrinking middle class, stagnant wages, a lack of government or corporate support for dual-income parents, overwork, outsourcing, and anxiety are felt by many people in an era of endless layoffs and restructuring are just a few of the factors contributing to burnout. Peterson focuses on how millennials are uniquely influenced by all of these factors. She notes,

We were raised to believe that if we worked hard enough, we could win the system — of American capitalism and meritocracy — or at least live comfortably within it. But something happened in the late 2010s. We looked up from our work and realized, there's no winning the system when the system itself is broken. We're the first generation since the Great Depression where many of us will find ourselves worse off than our parents. The overarching trend of upward mobility has finally reversed itself, smack dab into the prime earning years of our lives. We're drowning in student debt — an estimated \$ 37,000 per debtor — that's permanently stunted our financial lives.⁹

She also makes it clear that other generations are also struggling in these challenging times. I agree with that very point. Burnout is a problem that affects across generations. During the pandemic, social change was accelerated, and the ground was shaken. It appears that the firewood accumulated over time is burning younger generations and even beyond. Microsoft's Work Trend Index for 2021 contains some interesting information. The report notes that, on average, 42 percent of the global population feels overworked, and 39 percent feels exhausted.¹⁰ Moreover, Gen Z — the younger generation after the Millennials, between 18-25 — is at risk and needs re-energizing.¹¹ This fact poses a dilemma for all of us in this society because the young generation should have the most energy just as they are entering the workforce, yet they are already feeling exhausted.

In his book *The Burnout Society*, Korean German philosopher Byung-Chul Han critiques the society of the 21st century that is hyperactive, achievement-driven, and success-driven.¹² In this society, where success is valued, we tend to over-compete and participate in as many activities as possible.¹³ During the 21st century, neoliberalism transformed and forced labor, producing hyperactive, multitasking, and excessively exhausted individuals. People are always pressed for time, constantly on, and never really rest. Since there's no clear reward for all that,

⁸ Michael Musker, "These 9 Jobs are Most at Risk of Workplace Burnout," *Inverse*. June 4, 2019. <https://www.inverse.com/article/56412-world-health-organization-job-burnout-signs-you-have-it-who-s-most-at-risk>.

⁹ Peterson, *Can't Even*, 18.

¹⁰ "Microsoft 2021 Work Trend Index: Annual Report," *Microsoft*, March 22, 2021, https://ms-worklab.azureedge.net/files/reports/hybridWork/pdf/2021_Microsoft_WTI_Report_March.pdf, 8; Leiter and Maslach, *Banishing Burnout*, 3; See also Melinda Wenner Moyer, "Your Body Knows You're Burned Out," *New York Times*, May 13, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/15/well/live/burnout-work-stress.html>.

¹¹ "Microsoft 2021 Work Trend Index: Annual Report," 11-12.

¹² Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, translated by Erik Butler (Stanford, CA: Stanford Briefs, 2015), 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13, 30.

they feel burnt out. Therefore, Han views modern life as a completely exhausted one. As neoliberalism tells us all to be homo-economics, we are forced to work until we are exhausted and crushed into dust.¹⁴ Jonathan Malesic adds his insight to this burnout culture in his book *The end of Burnout*. He says:

We burn out when what we actually do at work falls short of what we hoped to do. Those ideals and expectations are not only personal, but cultural. In the cultures of wealthy nations, we want more than just a salary from our jobs. We want dignity. We want to grow as persons. We might even want some transcendent purpose. And we don't get these things, in part because work has become emotionally more demanding and materially less rewarding over the past several decades.¹⁵

According to Michael P. Leiter and Christina Maslach, modern society promotes burnout for a variety of reasons. According to them, modern society has lost its humanity in the workplace. In addition to the United States, the corporate world has grown bigger than ever, reducing humans to tools or targets for profit-seeking.¹⁶ The technology and smartphones that develop every day give us convenience and have become an essential part of our daily lives. They can, however, disrupt our sleep patterns, interrupt our solitude, and overturn the way we recover – physically and emotionally – unconsciously.¹⁷ As a social factor driving burnout, they also cited terrorism and violence, as well as attacks of the deadly virus.¹⁸ Among the examples cited in their study are September 11, 2001, and SARS, but these can be easily substituted by the various issues of continuous violence and COVID-19 even after 15 years of the original research.

It has been shown in many studies that burnout is interconnected with the workplace, living environment, and socio-cultural factors. The study of burnout revealed the key symptoms from individual efficiency and passion to exhaustion, cynicism, inefficiency, and sense of helplessness. In today's challenging world, it's understandable that work, and survival itself, are becoming tenser. We are all grappling with increasingly complex social, economic, and ethical issues.

Sam Musguin-Rowe, in his blog "15 Things every leader needs to know about burnout", argues that burnout is not simply a syndrome that individuals experience; it is a culture and embedded values that devalue human dignity.¹⁹ Sam continues, "Often it's systemic issues that really contribute to burnout. While there might be great policies in place for annual leave, or

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵ Malesic, *The End of Burnout*, 79.

¹⁶ Leiter and Maslach, *Banishing Burnout*, 4.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6

¹⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁹ Sam Musguin-Rowe, "15 Things every leader needs to know about burnout," *Unmind*. March 22, 2022.

https://blog.unmind.com/15-things-every-leader-needs-to-know-about-burnout?utm_source=adwords&utm_medium=ppc&utm_campaign=USA+%7C+CampaignSpec+%7C+Demo+%7C+Wide&utm_term=what%20is%20burnout&hsa_tgt=kwd-375265443797&hsa_grp=138530955794&hsa_mt=p&hsa_cam=14476126978&hsa_ver=3&hsa_src=g&hsa_net=adwords&hsa_kw=what%20is%20burnout&hsa_acc=7186539462&hsa_ad=592673852531&gclid=EAIAIQobChMIjM-i6df09wIVkcmUCR2bJA7gEAMyAAEgINxID_BwE

workload, if we're not paying attention to the patterns of systemic workload pressures, that's when people experience more burnout."²⁰ We need social salvation beyond individual cures.

In order to end the burnout culture, we first need to determine what is causing this cycle. Burnout is commonly associated with chronic stress, but chronic stress can be caused by multilayered factors and then lead to many other problems, such as financial difficulties, relationship problems, and caregiving responsibilities.²¹ Therefore, it is critical to first and foremost understand the underlying issue.

Once you have identified the problem, it is necessary to get away from it and try to see yourself and your situation objectively. Getting out of high tensed and stressful situations is helpful, even temporarily. The best solution is to become a better person by learning various skills, practicing relationship skills, and managing stress. Another solution is to change the workplace culture that causes burnout. You can attempt to change yourself, or you can try to change your workplace's culture and policies. If it is not possible to do this, you can try to find a new job.²² Ultimately, any of these solutions will require a collective effort beyond the search for a personal resolution. To change the culture of a community, which ultimately results in burnout, we need to seek solutions at the organizational level.

Confronting violence and discrimination and finding ways to implement social justice are great ways to deal with the polarization of society's economy and power and combat social burnout.²³ It is also essential to seek effective ways of ensuring fair social distribution and reforming the health care system.²⁴ Universal Basic Incomes could be seen as a minimal social security system to protect the human right to rest and the right not to work.²⁵

In order to prevent burnout from being regarded as an individual problem, it is essential to recognize and consider that many of our colleagues and neighbors in the community may suffer burnout in various forms. As a result, we can begin to practice solidarity within a burnout society.²⁶ Then we must continue our institutional/community-wide open dialogue toward transformation.²⁷

Sabbath: Radical Break

In light of this, how do we, Christians, cope with burnout? It sounds like a cliché but saying no to work further is okay. In a hypercompetitive society where people are constantly required to achieve, saying no is practically very difficult. It has become increasingly difficult for Christians to obey the commandment to rest on Sabbaths. So it often requires significant practice.²⁸ In his book, *To Hell with the Hustle*, Jefferson Bethke emphasizes the importance of keeping the Sabbath as a spiritual practice.²⁹ He argues, "As a culture, we're losing ritual, and we

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Moyer, "Your Body Knows You're Burned Out."

²² Leiter and Maslach, *Banishing Burnout*, 12-13.

²³ Malesic, *The End of Burnout*, 222.

²⁴ Ibid., 228-229.

²⁵ Ibid., 216.

²⁶ Ibid., 229.

²⁷ Ibid., 229-230.

²⁸ Ibid., 215.

²⁹ Jefferson Bethke, *To Hell with the Hustle: Reclaiming Your Life in an Overworked, Overspent, and Overconnected World* (Nashville: Nelson, 2019), 85.

are losing rhythm. We're losing rootedness and depth and anchored-ness. Because time and rhythm and ritual, these things are no longer external forces that we must submit to."³⁰

For people in a success-driven society, keeping the Sabbath can give them the impression that they are wasting time without any purpose. However, the Sabbath has a completely different value since God distinguishes the holy nature of this time. In order to make the other days more effective, we must observe the Sabbath. Han's discussion of the usefulness of uselessness is noteworthy in this regard.³¹ He elaborates that "The Sabbath, too — a word that originally meant stopping [aufhören] — is a day of not - to; speaking with Heidegger, it is a day free of all in - order - to, of all care. It is a matter of interval [Zwischenzeit]. After He created it, God declared the Seventh Day holy. That is, the day of in - order - to is not sacred, but rather the day of not - to, a day on which the use of the useless proves possible."³²

During this slow and silent day, you will discover that your old self begins to fade away and your new self begins to grow and mature. God's truth slowly starts to fill you with your reestablished and re-corrected new identity.³³ Bethke emphasizes, "It's not about being selfish or weird or introverted. It's about creating a life centered around priorities we care about most, making sure they don't fall by the wayside."³⁴ In that sense, The Sabbath should be seen as a radical break from the current culture, not simply as a cliché-like rest period. Malesic also discusses a radical break as a countercultural measure against burnout culture. Malesic argues, "We need a radical break with burnout culture. In my effort to understand what that break would be like, I feel drawn to the cultural fringes, to people whose lives appear unusual or 'unsuccessful' by our current standards. Those standards are part of a culture that has to change. We can't eradicate burnout without also ending the culture of total work."³⁵

This notion of the Sabbath as a radical break and practice of it leads us to dream of a recovery in the Jubilee. Bethke describes it as a "society-wide reset button." He explains,

It was an enormous, society-wide reset button. This happened even more during the Jubilee, which happened every seven sabbath years and during which even the slaves were set free. They reset the land, the debts, the hierarchy, and the poverty ... When I think of how incredible this would be today – to cease production, let our work rest for a year, and give away what we naturally or accidentally produce for free – I see how implausible it is – and in our system, maybe even unjust.³⁶

A concept like resting or taking a Sabbath is nothing new. It shouldn't be. We already know it well. Well enough. We already have hopes and visions that have been given since ancient times. The ancestors of our faith, as well as biblical grounds, have guided us in this direction. Unfortunately, the same fundamental changes and resets have not been practiced in modern society since the Bible era. The spiritual exercises we practice each day, every week, help us regain our rhythm and the breath of life. They serve as the driving force behind our desire to reform society beyond the individual. Further, spiritual formation should be practiced

³⁰ Bethke, *To Hell with the Hustle*, 44.

³¹ Han, *The Burnout Society*, 33.

³² Ibid., 33.

³³ Bethke, *To Hell with the Hustle*, 85

³⁴ Ibid., 101.

³⁵ Malesic, *The End of Burnout*, 196.

³⁶ Bethke, *To Hell with the Hustle*, 104.

by practicing a variety of methods and training for the restoration of the relationship with God. The next step is to consider how spirituality formation may be approached in various ways.

Toward Spiritual Restoration

Forming one's soul, spiritual formation, has traditionally been defined as conforming oneself to Christ's image for the sake of others.³⁷ For a tired soul in a burnout society, it is essential to restore the divine image and relationship and firmly establish the deep roots of existence in it. Gary Thomas, the author of *Sacred Pathways*, suggests that we are all unique. Each of us has our own unique personality, gift, passion, and way of connecting with God.³⁸

According to Thomas, many faith formation models in the Western church attempt to connect the soul to God through Bible study, praise, and prayer, but fail to create an effective spiritual link by excluding the various other methods.³⁹ Even though I disagree with his strictly Christian evangelical perspective, which is based on his racial and heteronormative theology, I find it to be an effective and widely applicable methodology for connecting with God. Thomas offers nine soul pathways: naturalists, sensates, traditionalists, ascetics, activists, caregivers, enthusiasts, contemplatives, and intellectuals. Individuals who study spiritual pathways are reminded that there are multiple ways to connect to God, both internally and externally, and develop their path or paths in a way that suits them. The faith community plays a critical role in the process. He notes, "It is neither wise nor scriptural to pursue God apart from the community of faith. Our individual expressions of faith must be joined to corporate worship with the body of Christ."⁴⁰

One of the nine spiritual paths is that of the naturalists. These people find God more deeply in nature than in reading religious books in a building. They experience God in nature more deeply than in reading theology books inside a building. They are similar to contemplatives, but they are more moved by creation.⁴¹ The second path is for sensates. Sensate Christians enjoy worshiping with all their senses. Thomas describes, "When these Christians worship, they want to be filled with sights, sounds, and smells that overwhelm them. Incense, intricate architecture, classical music, and formal language send their hearts soaring."⁴² Third, traditionalists connect to God through rituals, symbols, sacraments, and sacrifices. For them, other less structural ways seem outside the boundaries.⁴³ The fourth path is that of the ascetics. They feel deeply connected to God when they experience solitude, simplicity, and prayer. Ascetics are often constrained by complex programming and active projects. They feel deeply connected to God when in a simple and quiet environment.⁴⁴

³⁷ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to A Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, Expanded by Ruth Haley Barton (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 12; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

³⁸ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Nine Ways to Connect with God*, Updated and Expanded (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 216.

³⁹ Gary Thomas, Kevin Harney, and Sherry Harney, *Sacred Pathways: Nine Ways to Connect with God, Study Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 31.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 7.

⁴¹ Ibid., 14.

⁴² Ibid., 15.

⁴³ Ibid., 16-17.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17

Fifth, activists serve the God of Justice and often focus on justice or oppression of marginalized groups. They see action and confrontation as means of worship.⁴⁵

The sixth pathway is the caregiver's path. Caregivers like to provide physical and emotional support to others. It is through this service that they experience and practice God's love. Caregivers often view other pathways as selfish.⁴⁶ Seventh, there is the path of the enthusiasts. In the same way that sensates love beauty and intellectuals are inspired by understanding, enthusiasts are enthralled by joyous celebrations.⁴⁷ Thomas also adds, "these Christians are cheerleaders for God and the Christian life."⁴⁸ In the eighth path, there are contemplatives. They adore and revere God and often call God their lover. They don't like public attention or seek to be in the spotlight.⁴⁹ Those who follow the ninth spiritual path are intellectuals. They wrestle with ideas and concepts in order to get to know God better. In their view, spiritual experiences such as faith, doubt, and conversion are concepts to be understood as much as experienced. When they learn something new about God, they will feel closer to the Divine.⁵⁰ However, this path may be considered less spiritual than others.

In addition to illustrative figures, each path comes with various biblical verses, praises, activities, and questions. Such guidelines help individuals find the path that best suits them and enriches their spiritual formation. As he also notes, no one uses only one approach. By experimenting with various approaches, we can build an overall healthy spirituality.

The next thing that I will discuss is the method of spiritual rest found in my Korean culture.

Huesik: Holy Rest, Holy Breathing

I was eventually led to realize the significance of rest as a result of my research on burnout. Rest is essential for recharging at both a psychological and physical level. In today's hyper-competitive and hyper-achieving society, rest also has a meaning of resistance. Spiritually, people are able to escape from the burning-you culture, rekindle their relationship with God, and reestablish their connection within the community. We discussed the meaning and method of holy rest, as well as various approaches to restoring the divine relationship above. In this regard, I focus on the concept of a Korean-Chinese etiology, *Huesik*.

휴식, "休息" (pronounced as Huesik in Korean) means to stop what you're doing and take a break. It consists of two words, "休(휴, hue)" meaning "rest" and "息"(식, sik) meaning "breath" or "stop." The first word, "休(hue)," is composed of "人" (person) and "木" (tree). This word represents an image of an individual resting near or under a tree. Throughout history, trees have been regarded as holy and living creatures that communicate energy from the sky and earth. A Dangsang tree is a symbol of worship in Korean folk culture, and Buddha's tree is another example.⁵¹ Therefore, "hue" can be understood as a person who takes refuge under the shade of a

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17-18.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18-19.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 19-20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁵¹ Dangsang Tree refers to a deified tree that is enshrined as a guardian of a village because it is believed that God is in it. The village guardian tree is the object of faith and the center of the village community. 한국민속대백과사전. [Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture] <https://folkency.nfm.go.kr/kr/topic/detail/1927>; See "The Bodhi Tree."

tree. In addition to the simple understanding of the meaning in this letter, it can also mean a connection with the divine energy of heaven and earth through a sacred tree.

The next word, “息(식, sik; meaning breath)” is composed of “自”(self) and “心”(heart or mind). It represents one focusing on the mind. Ancient people believed the “mind” or the “soul,” the subject of managing one’s body, resides in the heart. Thus, “sik: (息, breath) refers to self-reflective breathing focused on the mind or heart, which is the center of the body.

Together, “休,” (hue) and “息” (sik) form the meaning of breathing under the tree. In this way, *Huesik* is a momentary pause between work and pursuing heavenly energy under a tree. Through *Huesik*, you restore your connection with the Creator as well as experience the Creator’s world.

Conclusion: *Huesik* as a Resistance to Burnout Culture

As part of this paper, I examined the definition, symptoms, and social factors of burnout. Then, I reviewed social-psychological solutions to overcome burnout and spiritual approaches to restoring tired souls. As a result, I noted that keeping a Sabbath and spiritual practice is both a way of resisting the rapidly developing and ever-changing culture, as well as maintaining the priorities of mind and soul. I, therefore, propose the concept of rest based on the Korean concept, *Huesik*, to serve as a method of spiritual formation. When we take a moment away from our daily works, which are constantly connected to the world through technology, and when we take a mindful breath, we regain a sense of balance in the mind and soul and connect with the Creator in the natural world. Taking a break is not a futile or ineffective pause but an opportunity to resist the burnout culture in a holy and valuable way.

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Weaving Ancestral Wisdom: Communicating the Power of Sumbanese Women's Resistance to the Next Generation

Abstract

As an artistic activity, weaving traditions have been passed down by women weavers from generation to generation. Weaving has a particularly important socio-religious meaning in the life of the people of Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. When life's difficulties are experienced, weaving becomes a beneficial activity for women to survive, find strength, and face challenges. Women in East Sumba can express their resistance to an oppressive situation through aesthetic engagement using handwoven textile motifs. Interestingly, there are also motifs related to woman's resistance to the Dutch colonialization of Sumba in the past. Based on the research analysis, the presence of these motifs today is related to the ongoing influence of colonialism. While most of the population in East Sumba—whose weaving motifs will be studied in this research—are also Christians, it is important to see how Christianity is connected with the values inherited from the colonial period. In reality, complex injustices still happen in Sumba society today. This paper argues that the motifs of resistance in Sumba handwoven textiles are an important element that can support an arts-based liberative pedagogy in religious education as part of the struggle against grand narratives of colonial legacy. Such a pedagogy enriches church educational ministry through three steps of *exploration*, *integration*, and *collaboration*, especially in the context of colonial heritage churches in Indonesia.

Introduction

My great-grandmother comes from Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), East Nusa Tenggara, the same province as Sumba Island. She collected handwoven textiles, a famous product of NTT, which have been passed down in our family from generation to generation. Unfortunately, when my family faced economic crisis, my grandmother sold the textiles. None are left in our family, but the handwoven textiles helped the family to survive. The same reality also exists in Sumba. In February 2021, data showed that East Nusa Tenggara Province was the third-poorest of all provinces in Indonesia.¹

Poverty is part of the complex injustice in Sumba society today. This injustice is dual in nature, coming both from outside Sumba Island and the Sumba community itself. From outside Sumba (in the global context), the imitation of Sumba weaving and its motifs using machine-made factory weaving and chemical dyes has captured the attention of the international market because its price is much lower than that of the original weaving. The selling price on machine-woven textiles can be twenty times cheaper than the original handwoven textiles. Indonesian government law no. 28/2014 on copyright has not succeeded in providing a legal umbrella that guarantees and protects the rights of Sumba women as weavers. These imitations are a denial of the experiences and lives of Sumba women as shown in the handwoven textiles.² From the Sumba community, Sumbanese women are particularly vulnerable to these multiple oppressions due to the multi-role responsibilities of household life (e.g., mother, wife, weaver, farmer, breeder) in a patriarchal society that is still influenced by the colonial values of the past.³

¹ Akbar Bhayu Tamtomo, "Infografik: Daftar 10 Provinsi dengan Angka Kemiskinan Tertinggi," February 18, 2021, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2021/02/18/201900865/infografik--daftar-10-provinsi-dengan-angka-kemiskinan-tertinggi>.

² Irene Umbu Lolo, "Menyuarakan Keadilan bagi Perempuan Penenun: Berteologi dari Konteks Sumba," in *Perdamaian dan Keadilan dalam Konteks Indonesia yang Multikultural dan Beragam Tradisi Iman*, eds. Yusak B. Setyawan, Nancy Souisa, Steve Gaspersz and Ratnawati Lesawengan (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2017), 288.

³ One example of the oppression experienced by Sumba women today is the tradition of *kawin tangkap* that still occurs in Sumba to this day. *Kawin tangkap* is "a long-established, controversial practice that still occurs on the small island of Sumba in Indonesia. *Kawin tangkap*, or bride kidnapping, is carried out when members of the man's family kidnap women they have selected as their wives...After all, if the women leave the forced marriage, they are ridiculed by their villages and told they would never have a husband or children. On the other hand, if the women stay, they have no decision and remain in the marriage for the remainder of their lives." Elizabeth Misnick, "Women's Rights Activists Celebrate the Abolishment of Bride Kidnapping in Indonesia," July 29, 2020, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://catalyst.cm/stories-new/tag/Kawin-tangkap>.

Sumba's injustice reality (poverty and gender inequality in the patriarchal culture and colonial legacy) creates a "purpose gap" for the next generation.⁴ However, when women weavers in East Sumba can express their voices of resistance through handwoven textile motifs (weaving as an *alat ungkap* or expression tool), it shows that they have a vital role in society, although their contribution remains unrecognized. In this space, women weavers become subjects and "close the gap," which results in the formation of identity born from a strategy of defending against the dominant culture (deconstructing power).⁵ In becoming subjects, their lives pass down great wisdom to the younger generations, their families, and their communities.

This paper argues that the motif of resistance in Sumba handwoven textiles becomes an important aspect that supports an arts-based liberative pedagogy in religious education as part of the struggle against grand narratives of colonial legacy. It describes a religious education analysis of Indonesian women's efforts of resistance that can contribute to religious educators, practical theologians, practitioners, and scholars interested in arts-based liberative pedagogy. The argument in this paper is in four stages: (1) an explanation of the current context of women weavers in Sumba, (2) an academic study of postcolonial imagination that is connected with narratives of resistance in the motifs of East Sumba handwoven textiles, (3) insights from developmental and religious educational values, and (4) illustrating the arts-based liberative pedagogy framed by the three steps of *exploration*, *integration*, and *collaboration* that enriches the church educational ministry as part of the struggle against grand narratives of colonial legacy, especially in the contexts of colonial heritage churches in Indonesia.

This paper seeks to answer the primary question: *what is the form of arts-based liberative pedagogy which gives space to explore the meaning of resistance from East Sumba handwoven textiles?* A qualitative methodology through narrative inquiry in an arts-based genre is used to support the research and data collection process. This methodology can serve a liberating role in faith education by helping people become aware of alternate perspectives in light of the experiences of marginalized persons.⁶ According to Jeong-Hee Kim in her book *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, narrative inquiry can be divided into autobiographical, biographical, and arts-based genres.⁷ Helen T. Boursier, in her exploration of arts-based research in practical theology, argues that "ABR [arts based-research] is a formal academic discipline that connects the arts, in the broadest possible sense, with traditional research methodologies to collect, disseminate, and creatively represent data."⁸ The study of the motifs and the meaning of resistance from handwoven textile motifs as it relates to the narratives of the lives of women weavers are closely associated with a visual-based narrative inquiry as part of arts-based research.⁹

⁴ The concept of the purpose gap is based on the explanation by Patrick Reyes in his book entitled *The Purpose Gap: Empowering Communities of Color to Find Meaning and Thrive* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 3, 5-8, Kindle.

⁵ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, "Building Intercultural Churches with the End in Sight," in *Intercultural Ministry: Hope for A Changing World*, eds. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jann Aldredge-Clanton (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2017), Chapter 4, Kindle.

⁶ In her article entitled "Narrative Inquiry: A Spiritual and Liberating Approach to Research," Elizabeth McIsaac Bruce highlights some of the distinctive features of narrative inquiry-based research in religious education, including its emphases on experience, relationships, participation, subjectivity and consciousness-raising, commitment and resistance, ethical engagement, and claiming voice and power. As a method for qualitative research, narrative inquiry is also a way to read, listen, and understand research participants' narrative histories. Elizabeth McIsaac Bruce, "Narrative Inquiry: A Spiritual and Liberating Approach to Research," *Religious Education* 103, no. 3 (2008): 323.

⁷ Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (California: SAGE, 2016), chapter 4, Kindle.

⁸ Helen T. Boursier, *Art As Witness: A Practical Theology of Arts-Based Research* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2021), chapter 1, Kindle.

⁹ To explore the narratives behind the motifs, I established informal communication with women weavers from my first encounter when I came to Sumba in 2016. I also engaged with women weavers through my female pastor friends in Sumba. Special appreciation goes to Suryaningsih Mila, who became one of my friends, for helping me build a connection with the women weavers and explaining the meaning of the woven motifs. When the pandemic hit, I continued the research communicating by phone and WhatsApp, especially with the weavers of the *Paluanda Lama Hamu* ("hand in hand towards a good direction"), a weaving group in Kambara, East Sumba. I validated the meanings I recorded through re-confirmation with the weavers and assisted by literature on the meaning of Sumba handwoven textile motifs and the culture of the Sumbanese people, including those written by female theologians from Sumba as well as researchers and collectors of NTT woven fabrics. The approach taken is dialogue, including exploring passed-down oral wisdom. This process shows the strong role of women who are able to pass on the values of life to the next generation, including the value of resistance, to the next generation. This educational model does not only extend to girls, but to boys as well. When they grow up, they get involved in the art

Women Weavers in Sumba as Identity Custodians and Sustainers of Life

In 2016, I taught as a guest lecturer at a theological school in East Sumba owned by *Gereja Kristen Sumba* (The Sumba Christian Church), abbreviated as GKS. I received Sumba handwoven textiles as a gift at that time, as well as bought some from women weavers I met. I admired the motifs, enjoyed their distinctive smell, was captivated by the strong texture, and saw the high quality of the handwoven cloth. I have some handwoven textiles in which, between the patterns, there are several long white hairs. Based on my conversation with a woman weaver, I know that the hair of an old woman weaver gets caught in the textile when she is weaving. In this, I am reminded that women have to weave amid their busy domestic duties in the patriarchal society of Sumba. In that case, I can say that a piece of handwoven textile was born from an extraordinary struggle. This was when I began collecting and studying the meaning of the motifs in East Sumba handwoven textiles. I feel strengthened through the stories of resistance and the meaning of the motifs, especially when facing challenges in life, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

East Sumba's handwoven textiles can tell stories about women's resistance. They are also related to religious values and the history of the Sumba people through their motifs and manufacturing processes. The uniqueness of the Sumba handwoven textiles also lies in their storytelling motifs. Narrative is an inseparable part of the lives of women weavers. Weaving, therefore, is not just a piece of textile: it represents the experience and identity of its woman weaver and the people of Sumba. Weaving becomes an archive of women's lives with an intertwined religious context.¹⁰ This is related to the term reflexive self, as "self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives."¹¹ Additionally, its techniques are traditionally transmitted from mothers to daughters before they marry.

The weaving and the weaver's body are bound to each other.¹² Weaving requires much sacrifice, and women require months or even years to produce a natural handwoven textile. Unsurprisingly, East Sumba's weaving quality is among the best globally and has a considerable role in supporting the economy of families and communities in Sumba.¹³ Women give their bodies in the weaving process, starting from the skin on their fingers that thins out due to continuous contact with the loom and the skin color of their hands that become dark because of the way in which they mix natural dyes.¹⁴ Women weaver's bodies are a social text in the weaving process, forming something through their ability to be resilient in their life responsibilities.¹⁵ Women become able to expand their care, feed their families, and send

of weaving by making their own resistance motifs creatively. In the research, it also appears that female pastors in Sumba with feminist liberation play an essential role in the creation process of motifs in handwoven textiles.

¹⁰ Siti Maimunah, *Weaving, Guardian of Identity: Weaving, the Commons, & Womanhood* (Jakarta: Perkumpulan Terasmitra, 2017), iv.

¹¹ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991): 244, quoted in Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, & Theologians: A Postmodern Critique* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), chapter 5, Kindle.

¹² 42 procedures must be completed in a manual manufacturing process that takes months or even years. These processes require a great deal of time, patience, and effort from the weaver. If the weaver is overwhelmed by feelings of anger or uneasiness, the thread can get caught or break, causing unsatisfactory results. Based on the interviews with a weaver in Pau, East Sumba. Irene Umbu Lolo, "Menyuarakan Keadilan bagi Perempuan Penenun," 288.

¹³ Sumba handwoven textiles are currently collected in world-renowned museums, such as the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Ethnology Museum in Rotterdam, and the British Museum in England. The cultural museum in Basel has approximately 65 Sumba weavings, and the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco curates the highest-quality antique Sumba textiles. The National Gallery of Australia and the National Textile Museum in Malaysia have also exhibited their Sumba weaving collections. 40 Sumbanese artistic works are stored in various forms on the Yale Art Gallery website. There are also many books written in English to explain Sumba weaving to the international community, for example, Jill Forshee's book entitled *Between the Folds: Stories of Cloth, Lives and Travels from Sumba* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2001). Etty Indriati, *Tenun Sumba: Membentang Benang Kehidupan* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2019), 15-17.

¹⁴ Irene Umbu Lolo, "Perempuan Penenun: Menelusuri Pengalaman Perempuan Penenun di Sumba dari Sudut Pandang Teologi Keindahan menurut John Navone," *Indonesian Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (2018): 29. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v6i1.16>.

¹⁵ Siti Maimunah, *Weaving, Guardian of Identity*, iv.

children to school through their incomes as weavers. Women weavers also care for nature and culture through their weaving. Concerning nature, weaving makes women learn to cultivate cotton and plants to be processed into natural dyes (for example, noni root for red or turmeric for yellow).¹⁶ The cultural connection is created when women's imaginations enter into dialogue with the narratives of life that lie before them, including stories of ancestral heritage. Women transfer the wealth of the narratives of their lives in the weaving process.

Postcolonial Imagination: Exploring Narratives of Resistance in East Sumba Handwoven Textiles

In the context of injustice reality (poverty and gender inequality in the patriarchal culture and colonial legacy) faced by women weavers in East Sumba, this study can be explored in the postcolonial imagination and feminist theology. Postcolonial imagination thinking opens a critical horizon for seeing the holistic picture of women weavers and their context more deeply.¹⁷ Postcolonial imagination refers to "a desire, a determination, and a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome, which takes many forms and guises."¹⁸ To imagine itself means "to discern that something is not fitting, to search for new images, and to arrive at new patterns of meaning and interpretation."¹⁹ Postcolonial imagination is related to historical, dialogical, and diasporic imagination.

Historical Imagination: A Narrative of the Motif of Queen Sumba

In the historical imagination, remembering is a part of survival. Thus, it opens the window of history to be explored more thoroughly. As Kwok Pui-Lan, author of *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, states, "historical imagination aims not only to reconstitute the past but also to release the past so that the present is livable."²⁰ In the context of women weavers in Sumba, historical imagination is studied by deepening women's narratives from their life stories, the effects of colonialism, and the patriarchal culture in Sumba.

The suppression of patriarchal culture and the silencing of women's voices in Sumba's traditions are closely related to Sumba's colonial history. The first Europeans who set foot on Sumba were the Portuguese, followed by the British and the Dutch. Slavery became inevitable because the Sumbanese were considered to have good qualities for serving as slaves. The slave trade was familiar to the Sumbanese, especially during the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) era. The VOC did not try to improve the lives of the people of Sumba.²¹ In the context of Sumba, women can be enslaved because of the caste system that exists in Sumba society. This caste system divides the people of Sumba into aristocrats (*maramba*), free people (*kabihu*) who are co-workers of aristocrats, and servants/slaves (*ata*).²² In addition, the system of giving *belis* as a dowry from the man to the woman often makes women negate the rights of a woman in a man's family.²³

¹⁶ Women also become ambassadors for preserving nature through woven motifs that depict vital natural elements (humans, animals, and plants) and profound meanings, such as horses as symbols of prosperity and leadership. Ancient animal motifs are also found in the handwoven textile of East Sumba. Siti Maimunah, *Weaving, Guardian of Identity*, iv; Etty Indriati, *Tenun Sumba: Membentang Benang Kehidupan* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2019), 30 & 33.

¹⁷ Studies of postcolonial imagination thinking and feminist theology as it correlates with religious education have been made previously in different contexts in Annie A. Lockhart-Gilroy, "A Way Forward: Nurturing the Imagination at the Intersection of Race, Class, Gender, and Age," *Religious Education* 111, no. 4 (2016): 415-429. DOI: [10.1080/00344087.2016.1185769](https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2016.1185769).

¹⁸ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 30.

²⁰ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 37.

²¹ F.D. Wellem, *Injil dan Marapu: Suatu Studi Historis-Teologis tentang Perjumpaan Injil dengan Masyarakat Sumba pada Periode 1876-1990* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2004), 20-22.

²² F. D. Wellem, *Injil dan Marapu*, 34; Rambu Ana Maeri, "Women's Crisis Centre Pandulangu Angu dan Pendampingan Pastoral bagi Para Korban Perdagangan Manusia di Sumba," in *Menolak Diam: Gereja Melawan Perdagangan Orang*, eds. Mery Kolimon, Hans A. Harmakaputra, Toar B. Hutagalung and Rappan Paledung (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2018), 205.

²³ Rambu Ana Maeri, "Women's Crisis Centre Pandulangu Angu," 207.

Handwoven textiles save the collective experience of women weavers from the effects of time and pass down knowledge and wisdom from generation to generation. Based on the narrative of a textile woven by Mama Ina from Kambera, East Sumba, while under colonial domination, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands appears in the motif of a handwoven textile of East Sumba. This image comes from a golden coin. However, when the Sumba people's ancestors saw that the Queen of Sumba, together with the King and the community, had played a role in fighting for independence, the weavers also “fought” by creating the Queen Sumba (*Maramba Kawini*) motif, a strong message of resistance. This motif adopts the same pattern as that of Queen Wilhelmina but with a creative reversal of meaning. The Queen of Sumba is depicted wearing the typical Sumba *mamuli* (a symbol of the woman's womb/fertility). There are also motifs of *habak*, *matahutar*, *kaka*, and *patola ratu* (a symbol of a queen whose majesty and beauty are born from persevering in hard work and being a blessing to her family in the spirit of togetherness and rejecting colonialism and domination). Weavers try to give their best for this motif by soaking thread with noni roots for two years to produce a beautiful red color.



Picture 1. The motif of Queen Wilhelmina (left) and Queen Sumba (right)²⁴

The motif of Queen Sumba is still used today to voice the complaints of the weavers in East Sumba because, despite Indonesia's independence since 1945, colonialism still exists today. From this, it can be seen that the imagination of women weavers connects the reality of past colonialism with present hopes for the future through this motif of resistance. This woven motif created by Sumba women is imitated by the textile industry, which produces woven textiles quickly using a machine (although with a different quality from the original weaving) and offers it at a much lower price. When I heard the narrative behind the motif, I felt sad, regretful, and annoyed. I regret that some of the woven fabrics I had purchased turned out to be imitations and promised not to buy any more replications of Sumbanese woven motifs.²⁵

Dialogical Imagination: A Narrative of the Motif of Jesus and the Sumbanese Woman

Dialogical imagination attempts to provide an ongoing dialogue involving continuous communication among religious and cultural traditions. The purpose of its use here is to explain the complexities, multidimensional links, and different levels of meaning that surround the present task of relating the Bible to Asia.²⁶ Kwok Pui-Lan states that “Dialogical imagination attempts to bridge the gaps of time and space, to create new horizons, and to connect the

²⁴ The photo of the handwoven textile with the motif of Queen Sumba was given to me from a weaver in Kambera, East Sumba through WhatsApp message on May 17, 2022. The picture of the Queen Wilhelmina motif is from Etty Indriati, *Tenun Sumba*, 98.

²⁵ This can only happen on a greater level when the public-at-large can be educated about this issue, including how to distinguish genuine and imitation weaving—something which is not difficult to do.

²⁶ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 38.

disparate elements of our lives into a meaningful whole.”²⁷ Using this framework, this section will discuss the traditional Sumbanese belief of *Marapu* and the motif of Jesus the Redeemer in the context of the women weavers in East Sumba.

Marapu is a belief in the highest God, ancestral and other spirits, and magical powers.²⁸ The highest divine expression is conveyed in terms of the equality of men and women: the united essence of man and woman (*Ina-Ama*) or Mother and Father in parallel, understood as neither male nor female alone.²⁹ In the *Marapu* belief of respecting ancestors, women’s dignity is also reflected in the Sumba people’s term for their island, *Tana Humba*, which means the Land of Sumba. This name comes from Humba, the wife of one of the ancestors of the first people who inhabited Sumba. Her husband, Uumbu Walu Mandoku, immortalized her name for the island to signify his joy and love for her.³⁰

There are also symbols in *Marapu* belief that pay respect to women. One of them is *mamuli*, a symbol of female fertility shaped like the omega symbol.³¹ When I came to Sumba, a woman weaver from Melolo said that this symbol was also related to the woman’s womb. Another symbol related to the woman’s womb is *karihu*, the form of the letter “x” as two wombs which symbolizes the beauty of a woman as divine motherhood, fertile in her role of giving birth. This symbol embraces the understanding of a woman in her motherly role as part of God’s breath for life.³²



Picture 2. *Mamuli* symbol (left) and *Karihu* symbol (right)³³

In the encounter with Christianity brought by *zending* (the Dutch protestant mission), the people of Sumba were seen as “primitive,” infidels, and impoverished. This condition is related to their *Marapu* belief.³⁴ Therefore, a sharp separation was drawn between *Marapu* and Christianity. Paternalistic attitudes were powerful in the *zending* environment, especially fostered by a feudal and hierarchical work system.³⁵ Empowerment of the natives had no place. Thus, Christianity in Sumba is linked to two parties: the *zending* and Sumba people. However, with the colonialism presented by history, it can be seen that the original culture and beliefs of the people of Sumba (*Marapu*) were rejected and had no place in Christianity. The life narratives of the indigenous people of Sumba—which were passed down from their ancestors for survival—were shifted by “whiteness domination.”³⁶ Christian Sumbanese women show courage and resistance

²⁷ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 38.

²⁸ F.D. Wellem, *Injil dan Marapu*, 42.

²⁹ F.D. Wellem, *Injil dan Marapu*, 43.

³⁰ F.D. Wellem, *Injil dan Marapu*, 15.

³¹ Etty Indriati, *Tenun Sumba*, 35.

³² Chandra Kirana Prijosusilo, *Karya Adiluhung Pendorong Ekonomi Lestari: Menguk Spiritualitas dan Simbolisme di Balik Seni Tenun Ikat Pewarna Alam Sumba Timur* (Jakarta: Sekar Kawung, 2017), 50; Etty Indriati, *Tenun Sumba*, 32.

³³ I took photos of these two motifs while visiting Waingapu, East Sumba on November 10, 2016.

³⁴ F.D. Wellem, *Injil dan Marapu*, 166, 168 & 196.

³⁵ F.D. Wellem, *Injil dan Marapu*, 237.

³⁶ Asnath Niwa Natar, a female theologian from Sumba, once stated that the symbol of the *Marapu* house is particularly contextual in Sumba as one that is open to women. This is different from the church architecture in Sumba today which only follows existing buildings in the West and has no relevance to the cultural context of the

when they sacredly engage traditional weaving motifs of *Marapu* with their faith that Jesus is present at the center of Sumba culture and accepts Sumba people as they are.³⁷

This understanding is shown in the narrative of a textile motif woven by Mama Ata from Kampera, East Sumba, who is now 71 years old. This handwoven textile was made in 1992. The motif of Jesus the Redeemer was born in a Sumbanese portrait, from the perspective that Jesus did not come as “a white Jesus” but as “Jesus in color.” Jesus the Redeemer accepts people as they are, despite a lack of respect in society for slaves or victims of oppression. The center of this handwoven textile motif is women in domestic activities and the *patola ratu* symbol, which indicates women who are respected in life. It shows the redemptive work of Jesus, which also applies to women. Even the legs of Jesus, who was crucified, curve in the motif to form a *mamuli*. This respect for women becomes very meaningful in the context of gender inequality. Mama Ata’s value of equality continues to be lived by her children and grandchildren. Her daughters and sons are still actively promoting Sumba weaving and continue to remember the importance of gender equality through their mother’s weaving motifs. Women weavers can become mentors not only to their daughters but also to sons amid patriarchal society and its colonial grand narratives.



Picture 3. Jesus’ feet forming the *mamuli* symbol as a motif in a handwoven textile³⁸

I was stunned by the motif of this cloth. I had never seen this motif before, specifically Jesus’ legs curving to take the shape of a *mamuli*. I feel that this motif says a lot about the meaning of weakness and challenge, which is turned into a spirit of strength through salvation and not running away from obstacles. In the context of colonial legacy and patriarchal culture, Jesus’ portrait as Redeemer in the woman weavers’ perspectives is essential because “redemption comprises, therefore, not only personal and spiritual reconciliation with God, but also liberation from bondage, the opportunity to develop one’s potential, the well-being of one’s family and community, the freedom from warfare and other forms of violence, the availability of

people of Sumba. Asnath Niwa Natar, “Arsitektur Gereja Sumba yang Terbuka terhadap Perempuan,” in *Perempuan Kristiani Indonesia Berteologi Feminis dalam Konteks*, ed. Asnath N. Natar (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2016), 153.

³⁷ Christian religious motifs are difficult to find in the Sumba handwoven textiles. *Marapu* motifs and acculturation with other cultures in the past (China and India) are more numerous and easy to find nowadays. This shows that *Marapu* traditions and beliefs strongly influenced the Sumbanese. Christian teaching with a colonial legacy is more difficult to “blend” with the culture and mindset of women weavers in Sumba. However, extraordinary Christian motives are still born (although rare) as a deep dialogue of faith between women, their culture, and their identities as Sumbanese people. Irene Umbu Lolo, “Menyuarakan Keadilan bagi Perempuan Penenun,” 290.

³⁸ The photo of the handwoven textile was given to me from a weaver in Kampera, East Sumba through WhatsApp message on July 16, 2021.

a life-sustaining eco-system and a sense of hope and security for the future.”³⁹ This is related to the meaning of incarnation. It shows that a woman weaver can avoid a life that is centered only on a “single story” which would only make her closed off from complete relationships with God, nature, and others. From this understanding, it can be seen that this woman weaver built her theology through the image of Jesus, which is integrated with the narrative of her life.

Diasporic Imagination: A Narrative of the Motif of the Peace Dove

The postcolonial world is always “diasporic in relation to what might be thought of their cultures of origin. The notion that only the multi-cultural cities of the First World are ‘diasporia-ised’ is a fantasy that can only be sustained by those who have never lived in the hybridized spaces of a Third World, co-called ‘colonial’ city.”⁴⁰ This definition refers to efforts to cross existing boundaries related to the center and periphery constructions.⁴¹ Diasporic imagination recognizes the diversity and similarities of diasporas and honors their different histories and memories.⁴² This understanding has a strong correlation with intercultural concepts and feminist theology. Kwok Pui-Lan states, “I believe that feminist theology is not only multicultural, rooted in multiple communities and cultural contexts, but is also intercultural because these different cultures are not isolated but intertwined with one another as a result of colonialism, slavery, and cultural hegemony of the West....this intercultural approach allows us to theorize identity, experience, agency, and justice through a cross-cultural lens.”⁴³

Right now is a time when people need to think beyond boundaries. Sometimes people build a theology based only “from and for” its context. We need to make an effort to cross beyond the “boundaries” so that this struggle becomes a collective communal struggle and even becomes a transregional (national) struggle.⁴⁴ This is so there is not an undue burden on the local context alone. With this thinking, women weavers’ struggles in East Sumba become not only a concern of Sumba people, theologians, or churches in Sumba but also in the expanded context.⁴⁵

The spirit of diasporic imagination is shown in the narrative of a textile motif woven by Mama Ida from Kampera, East Sumba. A peace dove motif was born based on a dialogue with a female pastor in Sumba who is active in the interfaith community, especially focusing on the Christianity-Islam relationship for the sake of global peace. The hope behind this motif is a strong collaboration between religious people from different contexts to deal with conflicts and challenges amid the realities of diversity. A dove motif was created juxtaposing Arabic calligraphy about love and compassion with the *mamuli* symbol, therein showing that women weavers play an essential role in giving birth to life through peace and love. I admire the openness and enthusiasm for learning of women weavers, who continue to enrich themselves by learning about the meanings of motifs from different traditions. Although they could actually be called “experts,” they still want to learn from others.

³⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2000), 81.

⁴⁰ Stuart Hall, “When Was the ‘Post-colonial’? Thinking at the Limit,” in *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (1996): 250, quoted in Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 44.

⁴¹ In colonial construction, groups that have power are groups that usually occupy the main position in the “center.” The colonized, marginalized and oppressed are on the “periphery.” Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 45.

⁴² Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 49.

⁴³ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 21.

⁴⁴ Kwok Pui-Lan, “Global Christianities: Perspectives, Methods, and Challenges,” October 4, 2019, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tP8eGjRYbM>.

⁴⁵ The Sumba weaving motifs are enriched by other cultural motifs from encounters in the past, such as relationships with Indian traders who gave birth to the *patola ratu* motif.



Picture 4. The motif of the Peace Dove⁴⁶

Women's Narratives of Resistance in Faith Development and Decolonial Values

The meaning of resistance in the motifs of East Sumba handwoven textiles becomes significant in the perspective of postcolonial imagination and feminist theology. Weaving becomes the third space for women weavers working in the spirit of resistance.⁴⁷ Weaving motifs depict the patterns of women's faith development. Nicola Slee suggests that one of the basic strategies in the development of women's faith is narrative faith. The role of narrative is crucial because it can pave the way for the expression of faith. Even religious identity is formed through narrative. In addition, the narrative of joy and sorrow in human life is considered meaningful to this process.⁴⁸ The hope is that the narratives of resistance in the woven motifs of East Sumba are meant not only for women weavers but also for younger women and others, especially those struggling with gender inequality in the contexts of colonial heritage churches in Indonesia.⁴⁹

In relation to religious educational values, Mariska Lauterboom offers her decolonial imagining of Christian Religious Education in Indonesia, which explicitly provides a place for the narratives of local cultures (*adat*) that are particularly rich in Indonesia as part of the sacredness of the encounter with God, as well as body narratives that have been marginalized in educational practice.⁵⁰ In the ministry of colonial heritage churches in Indonesia, the scope of learning can occur not only in the classroom (e.g., worship rooms, Bible study, Sunday schools, etc.) but also outside the classroom (e.g., interactions in friendly rooms in churches, outside churches, etc.).⁵¹ The postcolonial imagination perspective makes the intercultural process an inseparable part of encounters with women weavers. It is also a calling to build a connection between our past, present, and future generations to feel the robust connectivity of women's struggles and play a role in preserving handwoven textiles, including the noble meanings contained in them.

Exploration into Liberative Pedagogy and Aesthetic Teaching

This section seeks to embody the idea of liberative pedagogy, which provides a place for the narrative of resistance that emerges from the handwoven textiles of East Sumba. It also

⁴⁶ The photo of the handwoven textile was given to me from a weaver in Kampera, East Sumba through WhatsApp message on April 9, 2021.

⁴⁷ The "third space" is related to the explanation of the "in between" space in postcolonial theory. Kwok Pui-Lan, "Postcolonial Study of Christianity and Christian Mission," November 6, 2020, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6Zf7eqM42M>.

⁴⁸ Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (England: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 68-69.

⁴⁹ Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes*, 68-69.

⁵⁰ Mariska Lauterboom, "Dekolonialisasi Pendidikan Agama Kristen di Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Theology* 7, no. 1 (2019): 105. <https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v7i1.8>.

⁵¹ Mariska Lauterboom, "Dekolonialisasi Pendidikan Agama Kristen di Indonesia," 105.

explores the aesthetic dimension of the beauty of Sumbanese weaving as works of art that have artistic value. These two perspectives, combined with the analysis in the previous section, lay the foundation for me to offer an arts-based liberative pedagogy in the next section.

Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy

Paulo Freire's idea of problem-posing education positions a person to become fully human in a liberating educational process. This critical pedagogy answers one of the main problems Freire discusses in his book, the dehumanization of the oppressed. The problem-posing method of education provides space for us to walk *with* the oppressed, not just *for* them.⁵² By presenting problems for the oppressed that are "familiar" problems for the oppressed through an interdisciplinary team working on the "thematic universe" and generative themes, the oppressed can participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation with critical awareness (*conscientização*). In a dialogical process that pays attention to the importance of praxis, the problem-posing method of education differs significantly from the banking concept of education, wherein education becomes "an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor."⁵³

Generative themes are "codified."⁵⁴ Analysis of codification is carried out by parsing codified themes into disaggregated states and reshaping them (decodification taking into account the codified situation).⁵⁵ It does not just stop there—Freire's concept of education ends with the stage of cultural action, the "praxis" stage where the actions of each person or group become a direct part of reality. Those who carry out cultural action integrate with society and are in opposition to the power that dominates society. The narratives and symbols in Sumba handwoven textile motifs become a generative theme that can support the codification/de-codification process for the struggle to prevent and reject colonial discourse in all its forms.

Maria Harris' Invitation to Imagination and Aesthetic Teaching

In her book, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, Maria Harris explores the role of imagination in the teaching-learning process. Based on the metaphors of incarnation, revelation, power, and re-creation, Harris suggests that the estuary of teaching as an activity of religious imagination is to transform the universe in an interconnection. Problems that occur in one place need to be approached with the cooperation realized by a global context.⁵⁶ The cries heard in Sumba could happen elsewhere and are not just a problem for Sumbanese women. The picture of Jesus as Redeemer in the context of Sumba frames the concepts of incarnation, revelation, power, and re-creation in the spirituality of women manifested through the handwoven textile. The meaning of resistance displayed is meaningful not only for Sumba but in a broader context.

The call to religious imagination is a calling for togetherness in creativity. The power to resist, including refusing the uniformity of perspectives on life (mainly if carried by the oppression and injustice of colonial heritage). According to Harris, "resistance is refusal to accept the way things are because things could be different."⁵⁷ She claims that "the activity of teaching, when viewed as a religious imaginative act, is able to save and redeem."⁵⁸ Notably, Harris' ideas about resistance were heavily influenced by Freire.

Harris then connects her liberative views with Mary Anderson Tully's pedagogical ideas about the importance of aesthetic elements in teaching. From her experience as Tully's student,

⁵² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th-anniversary ed, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York, London: Continuum, 2005), 67.

⁵³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 72.

⁵⁴ Codification is a method that uses visual aids such as pictures, portraits, films, posters, slides, and readings related to certain themes. These forms can be understood by the individuals whose themes (representing certain existential situations) are being studied. These themes are then presented as a problem that can be discussed. In this process, a dialogue method is used to achieve awareness and questions are given to help develop a critical attitude. Paulo Freire, *Politik Pendidikan: Kebudayaan, Kekuasaan dan Pembebasan* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1999), 161-165.

⁵⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pendidikan sebagai Praktek Pembebasan* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1984), 128-129.

⁵⁶ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers), 86-87.

⁵⁷ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 92.

⁵⁸ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 3.

Harris sees this aesthetic element as closely related to the sensory exploration of visual symbols in three crucial ways: the language of arts (verbal and beyond), environmental preparation in teaching, and engagement with feeling and experience.⁵⁹ In the aesthetic, there is an experience of seeing *something that was not seen before* (a widened visual experience) through imagination, creativity, discovery, and reflection. The aesthetic elements of teaching show a pedagogical model illustrating the difference between knowing about and knowing: "we were doing what we were studying."⁶⁰ This is similar to Freire's idea of the process of reading the word and the world. John Dewey also discussed this in his book *Art as Experience*, stating that "an aesthetic quality must be felt in all experience."⁶¹ Aesthetic teaching becomes a part of liberative pedagogy when there is a process to "mediate the grace of power to human subjects as they engage in the work of re-creating the world."⁶² This is in line with Herbert Marcuse's statement that art is a part of the practice of resistance.⁶³ Sumba handwoven textiles also engage life's religious and educational dimensions as an arts-based cultural form.

What's interesting about Harris's idea is that "one does not need long years of training in art to bring the aesthetic to educational work: One needs only desire and the conviction that as teachers we are all artists, creating forms that enable our students to see and to live at deeper and more profound levels, levels that might accurately be called religious."⁶⁴ Harris also explains the artistic model in religious education. Within this model, there is room for teachers and students to explore multiple possibilities of interpretation as well as opportunities for recording impressions (e.g., through journaling). This understanding is related to the three conceptual poles in aesthetic teaching: word (not only discursive but also presentational), world, and wisdom. Harris then invites each teacher to use their imagination through five criteria (or paths): taking care, taking steps, taking forms, taking time, and taking risks. Harris develops this idea in an article entitled "Art and Religious Education: A Conversation," in which she integrates art and religious education in three models. In the third of these models, Harris offers an invitation to incorporate arts into the teaching-learning process of religious education, including personal and public lives.

Communicating the Power of Resistance of Sumbanese Women to the Next Generation: An Arts-Based Liberative Pedagogy in Religious Education

The implementation of Freire and Harris' ideas and the analysis presented in this paper form the basis for me to offer an arts-based liberative pedagogy in religious education using traditional handwoven textiles from East Sumba. The three narratives discussed show a connection between the past, present, and future. In this connection, engagement with our ancestor's wisdom and next-generation is built. The pedagogy can be carried out in three steps: exploration, integration, and collaboration.⁶⁵

Exploration

Exploration opens up opportunities for encounters with the resistance narratives behind the motifs of East Sumba handwoven textiles. To further this process, supporting information can be provided from relevant sources. In this, there is an ability to build a connection between the past (history/ancestor), present (context), and future (hope) of women weavers, which are depicted both implicitly and explicitly in the handwoven textiles. For example, by exploring the meaning of women's narratives within the context and history of Sumba, the process of creating handwoven textiles can be carried out through sensory experiences (e.g., touching and inhaling

⁵⁹ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 126.

⁶⁰ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 130.

⁶¹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934): 38, quoted in Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 141.

⁶² Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 141.

⁶³ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), ix.

⁶⁴ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 144.

⁶⁵ In defining these three steps, I was heavily inspired by Maria Harris's idea in "Art and Religious Education: A Conversation." However, I put more emphasis on the connection to the past, present, and future and an invitation to imagination at each step. Maria Harris, "Art and Religious Education: A Conversation," *Religious Education* 83, no. 3 (1988): 471-472, DOI: [10.1080/0034408880830311](https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408880830311).

the scent of natural dyes or seeing and experiencing the process of natural coloring and weaving directly) as part of the “codification/de-codification.” Engagement with the feelings and experiences of women weavers is created here. The process that emerges is not only *know about* but *know it* itself. It is an invitation to imagine and *see something that was not seen before* (widen visual experience) through aesthetic exploration of the artistic dimensions of woven fabrics. Women weavers become “mentors” through exploring the meaning of the motifs of their handwoven textiles. We can explore the question of “*what matters most to her?*” It is hoped that critical awareness will arise when this stage opens a space for encountering colonial discourses in women’s lives (the problem-posing method).

Integration

Integration is an attempt to dialogue the “findings” of the exploration stage with our narratives. As Ernst Barlach says, “Two are needed for every art, one who makes it and one who needs it.”⁶⁶ In this section, women weavers become “mentors” who guide us through their wisdom using the spirit of resistance shown in the handwoven textiles’ motifs. Our life narratives are explored through connections with past experiences (history/ancestor), present (context), and future (hope) through our “text of life,” biblical text, or other sources. In their book, *The Image of Life*, Brenda Lealman and Edward Robinson state that “the act of creation does not finish with the work of the original artist..it is not their [artists] that matter most now. They have done their work; now it is up to us if that work is to attain full stature.”⁶⁷ The generative themes that appear in the exploration stage (for example, the theme of resistance) are then correlated with the personal and social narratives that we face ourselves, including our experience of colonial discourse (a culture of obedience, shame, and silence). Here, there are opportunities to reflect and answer “*what matters most to me?*” Through this process, reflexivity, aesthetics, and creativity are present in lamentation and hope. We are invited to use our imaginations to express the results of reflection in a work of art (symbol/metaphor/sign/etc.) representing “my narrative of resistance.” We can share the meaning of our reflection/expression with other participants in the teaching-learning community.

Collaboration

Collaboration is the “praxis” stage in solidarity because everyone is part of the community. Collaboration seeks to engage our feelings and experiences as a form of resistance to the reality of the injustice born of colonial grand narratives in various forms. A communal narrative includes past experiences (communal history/ancestors), present experiences (communal context), and future experiences (communal hope). It is an invitation to imagine our future as a community. We are allowed to answer the question “*what matters most to us?*” This process opens a space for reflexivity and the creativity to express imagination through collaborative art projects in communal symbolic actions.⁶⁸ This brings us to actual action in the public sphere as a form of advocacy against every form of colonial discourse that shackles women, including women weavers. It encompasses these struggles so that women weaver’s experiences can be recognized in society and their rights as weavers are protected by law. Communal collaboration can also be manifested in other forms—for example, art exhibitions including exhibitions of weaving, painting, eating special menus together, writing poetry, journaling, making posters, or various other possibilities.⁶⁹ We can also display creative collaborations in the digital space through social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, podcasts, blogs, or websites), for example, digital storytelling.⁷⁰ This process aims to build communal awareness, including intergenerational connections.

⁶⁶ Ernst Barlach [...] quoted in Brenda Lealman and Edward Robinson, *The Image of Life* (London: Christian Education Movement, 1980), 4.

⁶⁷ Brenda Lealman and Edward Robinson, *The Image of Life*, 4-5; I have chosen this book because I agree with Maria Harris’ view that this book contains “extraordinary teaching power as art objects...I have also chosen them, as I noted in the beginning, because they are exemplars of work educators might move toward repeating on their own.” Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 470.

⁶⁸ Clare Louise Radford, “Creative Arts-Based Research Methods in Practical Theology: Constructing New Theologies of Practice,” *Practical Theology* 13, no. 1-2 (2020): 60-74, DOI: [10.1080/1756073X.2020.1727626](https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2020.1727626).

⁶⁹ Helen T. Boursier, *Art As Witness*, chapter 2, Kindle.

⁷⁰ Digital storytelling interaction is “the means through which one’s story is identified, refined and told; it turns from a memory to a digital story ready to be shared with others.” Mark Dunford and Tricia Jenkins, “Form and Content in Digital Storytelling,” in *Digital Storytelling: Form and Content*, eds. Mark Dunford and Tricia Jenkins

Conclusion

For women weavers, weaving is a valuable way to find strength in the face of life's difficulties. They have space to survive in life through the spirit of resistance found in handwoven textiles. When space is given to the woman weaver, her theology, story, and woven cloths can be displayed in the public space in both local and global relations.

Arts-based liberative pedagogy can strongly impact the transregional (national) approach to intercultural ministry and religious education. Advocacy is one of the goals of this process. When churches in the context of colonial grand narratives assume that the sources of knowledge in the congregation are always male pastors or leaders, church educational ministries can be carried out together with women weavers as the mentors who can pass down wisdom from generation to generation. The role of female pastor in Sumba is also essential in this process. As the larger community becomes involved in the spirit of postcolonial and intercultural relations, giving women weavers communal attention, encountering diversity can create a more permissive open-endedness of spiritualities. In this process, people can see that women have a significant role as a source of wisdom in life.

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(London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 3; I myself have written some information, reflection and interpretation of the meaning of the Sumba handwoven textiles together with other Indonesian heritage textiles (for example *batik*, *sarita*, *lekak*, *iban*, etc.) in the form of "digital storytelling" through an Instagram account @swara.wastra.nusantara since June 2021.

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Finding Mentors in the Communion of Saints: The need for diverse role models for young adult Catholic women

Abstract

This paper engages how religious educators can better cultivate belonging and create mentoring opportunities for young adult Catholic women. It first argues for an understanding of an expansive spiritual home where there is room for young women to question, doubt, and grow in their faith. It then argues for the importance of viable networks of belonging and exposure to diverse role models in the process of faith development. Finally, this paper argues that young adult women must be able to see themselves reflected in the sacred, historical, and present-day narratives of the Church. This can happen through a re-imagining of the communion of saints as a dynamic network of belonging that can highlight and honor a diversity of faith experiences and encourage participation.

Vignette 1: Joy was a rising senior whom I had known since she came to university as a freshman. She enthusiastically attended every retreat and activity the Catholic ministry put on and regularly served as a lector at Mass. She grew up in what she described as a deeply religious household and often shared how her grandparents had met on a Catholic retreat and now basically “ran her whole parish.” One day as she helped clean up after Sunday dinner, she quietly approached me and said that she was really nervous. We sat down to talk and she shared that she was struggling with her sexuality. She believed she might be queer and felt relief and excitement in sharing this news. Then with tears streaming down her face she earnestly looked at me and said that she didn’t want to have to leave her spiritual home, her beloved community because of this news. She was scared of disappointing her family, her community and disappointing God.¹

Vignette 2: Marjorie had a deep devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and often prayed the Rosary, in Spanish. She would go to the local parish whenever they had adoration and always invited other students to join her. She had a strong commitment to social justice that she attributed to Catholic Social Teaching and was planning to join the Jesuit Volunteer Corps once she graduated. She shared with me her anger with the Church at the lack of women’s leadership and often felt frustrated at Mass, and angry that women could not be priests. She had begun to join her friends down the road at the United Church of Christ church for service, but each time she went, it “just didn’t feel like home.”

Vignette 3: I received an email from Charlotte, a student at a nearby university who wanted to meet to talk. When we met, she shared that she was considering coming back to the church after years of being away. She said she had a few things to tell me first then she nervously blasted a laundry list: She was pro-choice, living with her Jewish boyfriend, and didn’t really understand how the heck Mary was actually a virgin. When she was done with her list she took a deep breath, and with teary eyes confessed, “but I miss Mass and the Eucharist, I miss praying in a community, I miss the connection Catholicism gave me to my ancestors, and my grandmother, I miss my spiritual home.”

¹ These stories are an amalgamation of encounters I have had over the years as a college chaplain. The names and specific details have been intentionally altered in order to respect the confidentiality of the students’ experiences.

In these vignettes, the young women were all struggling with components of the institutional Church and trying to figure out if they could stay in their spiritual home with integrity. The women all expressed a tension with feeling that they were somehow becoming separated from their spiritual home because of their solidifying values, beliefs, or identity exploration. This process was one rife with grief, as they questioned whether they could belong within their beloved spiritual home.

Religious educators must help young adults realize that nobody actually fits neatly into a church box nor that belonging is synonymous with uniformity. The role of religious educators is not to convince young adults to “stay” in the Church or “come back” if they have rejected the tradition in the past, but to provide affirmation and models that reveal that there is a wide spectrum of belief and practice within the faith community. The point is to help young adults to move past feeling caught in a dualistic mindset where they see the options are to reject/or be rejected from their spiritual home or to not question or stay silent at inconsistencies they see in the vision and mission of the Church.

This paper explores how religious educators can better cultivate belonging and create opportunities for the shaping of spiritual identity and religious imagination of young adult women. This paper has two sections. The first section argues for the importance of understanding an expansive spiritual home where there is room to question, doubt, and develop a critical faith. This section explores faith development in the context of young adulthood. The second section focuses on the importance of having mentors and relatable role models for one to feel at home within the Church. The first part of section two asserts that the role of religious educators is to foster mentoring communities and accompany young adults in their faith development. The second part of section two argues for the re-imagining of the communion of saints as a specific and powerful resource for exposing young adult women to a dynamic and diverse network of belonging.

Feeling at home in the Church: An expansive understanding of belonging

Religious educators can help young adults feel at home in the Church, not by convincing them that they can stay despite their questions or struggles with the institution, but to affirm they are at home because of their struggles and questions. It is important to help them notice that it is a false choice of needing to leave the community of faith just because one disagrees or feels frustrated by aspects of it. In fact, life is filled with being involved and enmeshed in institutions and groups where there is no perfect uniformity. In the novel *Finnegans Wake*, Irish author James Joyce cleverly asserts that Catholic means ‘Here Comes Everybody.’ He is not far off. The community of faith is more diverse than anyone could imagine it to be. Religious educators must refute and complicate the assumption that there is a narrow definition of who is in and who is out of the Church community. This section looks at cognitive developmental theories to better understand the potential to evolve in one’s relationship with their spiritual home.

Understanding of belonging in the context of faith development

Seeking, doubting, and questioning belonging are all healthy parts of faith development that are particularly acute during young adulthood. Students, like those in the vignettes at the beginning of the chapter, would often share with me a sense of grief of not feeling at home anymore in the Catholic community that once felt comfortable and nurturing. As I would sit with

these students, my goal was to help them comprehend that they did not necessarily have to grow apart from their spiritual home, but they were growing into a new relationship with their spiritual home. Growing into a new relationship with one's spiritual home is in fact, part of a healthy process of faith development. Faith development is ultimately about transforming the way we know and understand the world and our place in it. Developmental theorist Sharon Daloz Parks explains, "The growth of the self and the development of faith may be understood as transformation of the boundaries that have defined home."² One does not need to leave but must rearrange their relationship with their home. The goal for religious educators in helping young adult women feel at home within the Church is beyond just creating an affirming environment, it is about supporting them in this transformation of their relationship with "home." For young adult women to feel at home they must comprehend an expansive understanding of belonging, realizing the Church as something dynamic, beyond a stagnant institution or uniform community.

Sharon Daloz Parks argues that "Faith is a dynamic phenomenon that undergoes transformation across the whole life span, with the potential for a particularly powerful transformation in the young adult years."³ Those years are a time where meaning-making is constantly happening, and individuals are often wrestling with big questions regarding faith, vocation, and identity. Parks articulates four *Forms of Knowing* within the possible faith development of an individual across the young adult and adult years (authoritative, unqualified relativism, commitment in relativism, and convictional relativism). Within commitment in relativism she expands this form to include two different periods: *probing commitment* and *tested commitment*.⁴ Parks argues that "the probing commitment of the post-adolescent is a serious, critically aware exploration of the adult world and the potential versions of a future and what it offers."⁵ These explorations often are short-term and varied during which she explains that "One explores many possible forms of truth, as well as work roles, relationships and lifestyles and their fittingness to one's own experience of self and world."⁶ Parks also aligns *Forms of Knowing* with *Forms of Dependence*. Young adults start forming what she coins their *inner dependence*. She explains that "The developmental movement into *inner dependence* occurs when one is able self-consciously to include the self within the arena of authority. In other words, other sources of authority may still hold credible power, but now one can also recognize and value the authority of one's own voice."⁷ This interplay shifts solely trusting external authority to cultivating an internal authority.

Parks argues that young adulthood is often a time that is filled with vulnerability and uncertainty as young adults begin to learn to trust their internal authority as they ask questions such as "Where and with whom do I belong?"⁸ As young adults begin trusting their inner voice, there is often a process of seeking, asking big questions and needing to push back against outer authority. This again should not be seen as negative but a step at exploration in understanding what is credible authority to them and what is not. An individual who can value both trusted

² Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 51.

³ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 16.

⁴ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 69.

⁵ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 67.

⁶ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 67.

⁷ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 77.

⁸ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 34.

authorities and their own internal authority can better define their own sense of belonging in a community as they transform their relationship with their spiritual home.

Towards self-authorship

Developmental theorist Robert Kegan offers additional insights into faith development as a process of re-ordering a relationship with home. His most helpful contribution to this conversation is his subject-object theory which describes the process of assessing the shifting meaning-making capacity of an individual as one moves through childhood-adolescence-young adulthood-adulthood. Kegan's theory attempts to explain how development takes place as one can comprehend more complex systems of mind.⁹ Kegan's theory stresses the importance of paying attention to what the individual holds as object, what they have control over, and what is subject, what is fixed or beyond one's control. According to Kegan's theory, growth occurs when the individual "dis-embeds" from what they were subject to, so that it becomes object. Kegan introduced his theory of self-evolution in his book, *The Evolving Self* (1982). In his later book, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (1994), he presents a revised version of his theory. He argues that growth involves movement through five progressively more complex ways of knowing, which he refers to as stages of development in 1982 and orders of consciousness in 1994. The orders are Stage 1 — Impulsive mind (early childhood), Stage 2 — Imperial mind (adolescence), Stage 3 — Socialized mind, Stage 4 — Self-Authoring mind, Stage 5 — Self-Transforming mind. Kegan argues that the age period of twelve to twenty is often a gradual transformation of mind from the second order to the third order.¹⁰

Kegan argues that each developmental "order" is a reorienting process.¹¹ According to Kegan, most traditional college-age students are coming to the university in a late second order or early third order of consciousness.¹² Within second-order consciousness, the world is one of "durable categories." This reordering begins a classification process of objects, people, or ideas as separate from the individual. Kegan reflects that in this order, "rules, sets of directions, and dualisms give shape and structure to one's daily activity."¹³ Thinking in terms of durable categories makes group association very concrete and dualistic as well- you are either in or you are out - you are either with us or against us.

In the third-order of consciousness, there is a move to awareness of self-consciousness and noticing internal authority. In third-order, one can recognize that the groups one is affiliated with have shared meaning and purpose, and values associated with belonging. One can now independently choose "loyalty and devotion to a community of people or ideas larger than the self."¹⁴ In light of Kegan's theory, in an article co-written with Theresa O'Keefe, we claimed that "it requires at least third-order capacity to knowingly affiliate or disaffiliate based on a

⁹ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 9.

¹⁰ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 37.

¹¹ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 32.

¹² Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 47.

¹³ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 4.

¹⁴ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 32.

conception of belonging that is beyond pure circumstance or self-interest.”¹⁵ In the third order, one develops the capacity for intentionally choosing one’s affiliation, as affiliation becomes “object.” As they mature into third-order, they have the capacity to understand they are no longer their beliefs and begin to have a capacity to analyze and question the beliefs they hold and choose to affiliate or disaffiliate with groups that share their beliefs and values. Prior to third order, choices to affiliate with a group are based on “limited perspective of self-interest or circumstance and less on the more complex awareness of and choice for or against association.”¹⁶ In third-order, one chooses to affiliate with a group by internalizing and aligning with the values of a group. As young adults shifting from second-order to third-order wrestle with identity and belonging, it is crucial to help them understand that because they disagree with specific aspects of the tradition, they should not feel isolated, nor feel as an outcast, nor that they don’t belong. If they don’t receive affirmation of their struggles from within the community, they may continue to understand “the Catholic Church” as a rigid, unchanging structure “over there” that they want nothing to do with and knowingly will walk away. At third-order there becomes a choice to intentionally affiliate or disaffiliate, but these are still limited in aligning with values of an already established group. To align, you either agree with the perceived shared values or you feel you need to leave. The hope is that as younger adults go through this developmental shift, they can come to understand Catholicism as more than just an “institution” that is separate from them (second-order consciousness), but that they come to understand Catholicism as a diverse and dynamic community with underlying values that they share, and they can be at home within (third-order consciousness).

Kegan calls the shift to fourth-order, a shift towards self-authorship in which an individual can value both trusted authorities and their own internal authority in their meaning making process. In fourth-order one can see the complexities of a group *and* commit to holding in tension their own authority and their individual beliefs. Remaining at home within a community does not mean one needs to agree with everything, but one can disagree with aspects and has the agency to voice these disagreements as an active participant of the group. He explains with self-authorship one can,

coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer *authored by* them, it *authors them* and thereby achieves a personal authority.¹⁷

Someone in fourth order comprehends that there is such a thing as objective knowing where one can understand institutions and relationships as separate from self. This separation does not imply a physical separation from other individuals or communities, but a re-ordering that is more authentic.¹⁸ One also has moved beyond dualistic thinking and can embrace paradox. Kegan

¹⁵ TA O’Keefe and E. Jendzejec, “A New Lens for Seeing: A Suggestion for Analyzing Religious Belief and Belonging among Emerging Adults through a Constructive-Developmental Lens,” *Religions*. 11(11), (2020): 573.

¹⁶ O’Keefe and Jendzejec, “A New Lens for Seeing,” 573.

¹⁷ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 185.

¹⁸ Marcia B. Baxter Magolda “Three Elements of Self-Authorship,” *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(4), (July/August 2008): 269-284, 270.

argues that for adults to function well in society today, they must develop fourth-order consciousness to see systems as objects outside of themselves and how these systems are at play with one another.¹⁹

While Kegan argues that most people do not reach fourth-order until their early 30s, there are immense opportunities to offer bridging opportunities to begin the process of moving students towards self-authorship. Marcia B. Baxter Magolda is helpful in her research in exploring this transition towards self-authorship in relation to college student development. She describes self-authorship as, “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations.”²⁰ Baxter Magolda’s work nuances Kegan’s in explaining that there are three elements toward self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments.²¹ In her 21-year longitudinal study she identifies four phases of development of self-authorship (External Formulas, Crossroads, Becoming Author of One’s Life, Internal Foundation), but notes that External Formulas and Crossroads were most common during college for her participants.²² External Formulas are when one relies on others for their definition of values and expectations. Crossroads is when one begins to realize the need to establish a sense of self in terms of what one values and believes in. She argues that while none of the participants in her study reached self-authorship in college, “enabling this capacity should be a key focus of a college education.”²³

It is also crucial to point out Baxter Magolda’s assertion that “self-authorship is more complex and nuanced than a simple linear trajectory.”²⁴ Development towards self-authorship is not the same for everyone and can be heavily dependent on context and varying identity factors.²⁵ Culture, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class can all affect both the pathways towards developing self-authorship and the necessary supports needed to nurture growth. While the participants of her study moved towards self-authorship by the end of their thirties, all took differing paths, and no specific journey nor time frame was the exact same.

In each of the three vignettes shared at the beginning of the chapter, the young women exhibit being in a Crossroads phase. There are seeming tensions of conflicting identities and values that these college students are wrestling with as they feel they need to come to terms with

¹⁹ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 10.

²⁰ Baxter Magolda, “Three Elements of Self-Authorship,” 269.

²¹ Baxter Magolda, “Three Elements of Self-Authorship,” 269.

²² Marcia Baxter Magolda, Elizabeth G. Creamer, Jessica Yue, “Preliminary Evidence of the Reliability and Validity of a Quantitative Measure of Self-Authorship,” *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(5), (September/October 2010): 550-562, 550.

²³ Baxter Magolda, “Three Elements of Self-Authorship,” 282.

²⁴ Baxter Magolda, “Three Elements of Self-Authorship,” 281.

²⁵ Jane Elizabeth Pizzolato, Tu-Lien Kim Nguyen, Marc Johnston, Sherry Wang, “Understanding Context: Cultural, Relational, & Psychological Interactions in Self-Authorship Development,” *Journal of College Student Development*. 53(5), (2012): 656–679; Roberto C. Orozco, Lara Perez-Felkner, “Ni de Aquí, Ni de Allá : Conceptualizing the self-authorship experience of gay Latino college men using *conocimiento*,” *Journal of Latinos and Education*. 17 (4), (2018-10-02): 386–394; Jane Elizabeth Pizzolato, “Developing Self-Authorship: Exploring the Experiences of High-Risk College Students,” *Journal of College Student Development*. 44 (6), (2003): 797–812; Vasti Torres, Ebelia Hernandez, “The Influence of Ethnic Identity on Self-Authorship: A Longitudinal Study of Latino/a College Students,” *Journal of College Student Development*, 48 (5), (2007): 558–573.

a decision of whether to “remain” in their spiritual home. They point to the struggle of trying to make complex life choices in relation to religious belonging. *Can I be Catholic AND feminist? Can I be Catholic AND Queer? Can I be Catholic AND Pro-Choice?* These women’s questions reflect a conflict that holds the potential for developmental growth in bridging towards self-authorship. They are naming that the “values” that the differing groups and identities that they align with are seemingly clashing and contradicting, while they are also beginning to trust their own internal voice and authority.

For one to feel at home in a community where they comprehend that there is tension and contradiction (and most communities contain this!) one needs a capacity to hold paradoxes of loving and critiquing simultaneously. How does one begin to understand that navigating this complexity is possible? Baxter Magolda argues that “Success in promoting developmental capacities is possible when educational practice is developmentally sequenced to foster increasingly adaptive ways of making meaning of one’s beliefs, identity, and relationships so that students grow away from authority dependence and move toward self-authorship.”²⁶ Parks and Kegan suggest that providing viable networks of belonging and relatable role models can provide bridging opportunities and scaffolding for this developmental growth to take place. We turn our attention to these practices in the next section.

Who shares this home with me? The importance of exposure to diverse networks of belonging

While religious educators can preach diversity and say that all are welcome, young adults won’t believe it until they experience it for themselves. If they don’t see anyone like them, how can they believe it is a community for them? Young adult women must be able to see themselves reflected in the sacred, historical, and present-day narratives of the Church. The need for positive and diverse mentors and role models for young adults in general has never been greater. Multiple and conflicting voices are constantly telling them who they should be and where they should belong, but little intentional space is given or cultivated to help them discern and listen for themselves to determine which voices are authentically speaking truth to them. This section looks to the role of religious educators and the communion of saints as access points for mentorship, role models and creating dynamic networks of belonging that support developmental growth and encourage participation.

The Role of the Religious Educator

The role of religious educators is to assist and accompany young adults in their faith development. If religious educators make room for a young adult’s doubt, critique and questioning, there is the possibility that those young adults can emerge with a deeper, more mature and committed faith and sense of belonging. Religious educators should help move students towards a faith that reflects a meaning-making capacity that values both trusted authorities and one’s own internal authority.

Parks stresses that young adults need mentoring communities and networks of belonging to cultivate and nourish alternatives to buying into consumeristic values or inauthentic

²⁶ Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, Patricia M. King, Kari B. Taylor, Kerri M. Wakefield, “Decreasing Authority Dependence During the First Year of College,” *Journal of College Student Development*, 53(3), (May-June 2012): 418-435, 419.

communities. Mentoring relationships help move young adults towards what Parks names as *confident inner dependence within a tested commitment*. This names the ability to trust both one's inner authority and external authorities and intentionally choose to affiliate with groups due to this interplay. There is an obligation and opportunity for religious educators to cultivate networks of belonging in more effective and supportive ways that inform and nurture young adult faith and identity formation. Parks asserts that, "Faith is a patterning, connective relational activity embodied and shaped not within the individual alone but in the comfort and challenges of the company we keep."²⁷ Our values are also largely shaped by the company we keep and in turn shape us into who we are. Therefore, it is important to think about how the Church can provide networks of belonging that relay Catholic values and encourage practices that support these values.

When cultivating networks of belonging to develop a critical faith it is imperative that young adults are exposed to a diversity of ways of experiencing belonging. Parks explains that,

Images, symbols, stories, insights and theories that create durable, widening and open-ended patterns, systems and networks of connection and meaning enlarge the mind and expand the heart. They enable young adults to compose and anchor an increasingly trustworthy faith that, in spite of immediate circumstances, makes it possible to become at home in the universe.²⁸

The Catholic Church is ripe with over two thousand years' worth of images, symbols and stories that have the potential to enlarge the mind and expand the heart.

Better utilizing the Communion of Saints: The need for diverse role models

One particular treasure trove of stories and role models within the Catholic Church is the tradition of the communion of saints. As a network of belonging the communion of saints has the potential to offer dynamic and rich narratives. While there is no true replacement for face-to-face relationships and networks of belonging, I think there is also an important role in providing role models that go beyond the everyday people that young adults interact with. Parks herself argues that a network of belonging does not need to be a physical group of people or even in a physical space. She explains that a role model mentoring relationship could be "a strong sense of identification with an historical figure one has never met but who nevertheless serves as a touchstone for one's life and values."²⁹ The communion of saints has a plethora of historical figures that could provide touchstones for young adults. The communion of saints has the potential to nurture young adult faith formation and act as a network of authentic and realistic belonging. In third order, identification with authority is crucial in understanding what groups we want to align with. Providing authorities like members of the communion of saints for young women to be able to relate to, provides access points to not only feel welcomed, but encouraged to participate. There is then the possibility that religious educators can create a bridge to fourth order by showing how these authorities navigate belonging as critical believers. These role models can serve as dynamic and relatable company and support throughout the various stages of faith development.

²⁷ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 89.

²⁸ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 153.

²⁹ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 90.

Cultivating the communion of saints as a network of belonging, can provide access to role models for female young adult Catholics but first we must challenge the long-standing meta-narratives of the communion of saints that often leave women on the margins, or put them on unreachable pedestals. While I was growing up, reading about the lives of saints was captivating, particularly learning about the female saints. Mary, mother of God, Saint Teresa of Avila and Joan of Arc were some of my favorites to read about. Their stories were fascinating—Mary, a virgin who had a kid— (that one was hard to understand but really interesting), Teresa, a feisty woman religious who worked for change from within the Church, and Joan of Arc, who led an army and was burned at the stake. All were incredible stories, but the way they were presented to me were models of a Catholic identity to which I could not relate, nor found realistic.

This inaccessibility to relate is not unique to my experience with the saints. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson better articulates this often disconnectedness with the actual lives of the saints in her book, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (1999). She laments, “Traditional saints stories are filled with ‘titanic acts’ such as martyrdom” she then goes on to argue that, “telling [these stories] within a tradition of holiness interpreted along the lines of hierarchical dualism serves to reinforce the ‘un-saintliness’ of those who do not measure up to these epic proportions.”³⁰ This reinforcement leaves saints in prayer books, and within church halls, with little ability to truly access them as models for living faith.

So how do we make the saints more accessible so that they can be role models and help cultivate networks of belonging for young adults? First, we must expand and re-interpret our concept of sainthood. Johnson argues that “In reclaiming the communion of saints as company of friends of God and prophets, allows us to see the ‘creative fidelity in the midst of everyday life.’”³¹ In Robert Ellsberg’s book *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time*, he stretches the canonical definition of sainthood. He explains,

Saints are those who, in some partial way, embody -- literally incarnate, the challenge for faith in their time and place. In doing so, they open a path that others might follow...saints are not perfect humans, but in their own individual fashion they became authentic human beings, endowed with the capacity to awaken that vocation in others... to call someone a saint means that his or her life should be taken with the utmost seriousness. It is a proof that the gospel can be lived.³²

Utmost seriousness does not mean it does not need to be creative. In fact, it has been detrimental to the Church to present saints to adolescents and young adults as people in the past put on pedestals that they cannot relate to at all. This not only isn’t a good pedagogy for religious education, but it also misses the opportunity to provide relatable role models for young Catholics. The communion of saints in general could be better utilized to provide role model opportunities for young adults in the Church.

³⁰ Elizabeth Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*, (New York: Continuum, 1999), 229.

³¹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 229.

³² Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time*, (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 6.

Turning back to my own story, to help illustrate how this could work, while I admired Teresa, Mary, and Joan greatly, none were presented as models of a Catholic identity to which I could relate. It wasn't until college that new names began to accompany the Catholic heroines of my childhood—M. Shawn Copeland, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elizabeth Farians. I wrote my MDiv thesis on Elizabeth Farians and began to explore the narratives of these pioneering Catholic feminist theologians. In my research I explored the contributions of Catholic feminists and learned about how during the 1960s and 1970s, post-Vatican II, they changed the Catholic Church forever as discussed in former chapters. While their theological pursuits changed the Church, so did their very physical presence and vocations since before the 1960s it was stereotypically suggested that Catholic women should either be mothers or nuns. At this intersection of secular and church transformations, Catholic feminists were not only challenging constructs of gender and sexuality, but also creating new vocational opportunities for Catholic women.

My own sense of vocation and commitment to my Catholic faith were deepened by reading about these fascinating Catholic feminists. They were women I could relate to, who struggled in their personal lives and with their faith, all the while grounded in commitment to the gospel values of social justice and inclusivity. The examples of the first Catholic feminist theologians in the United States is only one example of a group of women who devoted their lives to the Church and made major contributions to the life of the community yet remain obscure and not well known outside of academic circles. Within the pews, within faith formation curriculum, and within church halls their names and contributions continue to be at best unknown, at worst intentionally ignored.

The little-known history of the stories of Catholic feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, is part of a larger problem in the Catholic Church, which has excluded the voices and narratives of women from the common historical narratives and within the canon. Johnson laments that,

The exclusion of women from the public culture of the church has resulted in an official memory that has erased a good part of the history of women's discipleship, giving to the communion of saints a largely male face both in heaven and on earth. This erasure has never been wholly effective, however, and feminist hermeneutical methods now bring to light women and the contributions they have made in licit and illicit ways. For ecclesial practices of memory to be liberating to women, to poor women, to women of color, to lay women, to married women everywhere, deliberate attention must be turned to their stories. Their absence must be noticed, missed, criticized, and corrected. It is not just a matter of adding women to what remains a patriarchal master narrative. The challenge, rather, is to reshape the church's memory so as to reclaim an equal share in the center for women and thereby transform the community.³³

An important point Johnson makes is that just telling their stories is not enough. The stories of female discipleship have the potential to be transformative for not only women to hear the stories, but for the entire Church community to live more authentically into the reality of how the Body of Christ has, does, and will continue to function in the world.

This is not the only benefit to an exploration of sharing these narratives and claiming them as part of the Catholic tradition though. Focusing on these stories of female discipleship

³³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 234.

affirms a theology that is inclusive and celebratory of women's bodies and experiences as sacred. When thinking of role models for young women in the Church, it is also important again to think about the underlying shared and passed on values. The ultimate hope is that young women experience and see themselves as sacred and beloved with the God-given right to be on a path of holiness. Johnson argues,

It becomes ever more clear how women's exclusion from the church's public culture has led to one-sided definitions of exemplary character, holiness and spiritual paths, The result is an official ideal that disvalues the different paths to holiness taken by all saints.³⁴

In order to be an inviting and dynamic network of belonging, different paths to holiness cannot be excluded but embraced and exemplified. More explicitly, the diversity of paths that women have taken to holiness need to be explored, valued, and celebrated. Johnson continues to explain that "Women form a piece of 'living Christology,' drawing from traditional and conciliar teaching that all the saints are images of Christ."³⁵ Female saints can encourage and attract young females on pathways of holiness, but they also can help young adult females see the image of Christ within themselves.

The communion of saints expanded upon by Elizabeth Johnson helps create an opportunity to delve more deeply into the lineage of Catholic women in order to bring to light role models for young adult Catholic women today. As they navigate the complexity of their worlds, access to the communion of saints can be a positive network of belonging that has the potential to transform and nourish their faith lives. Saints as role models for how we are to live, as human beings, complete with faults, all striving to live lives of holiness and meaning. Realistic role models can't be left up to the tropes oftentimes associated with female saints portrayed as compliant, obedient, virginal.³⁶ It is critical that religious educators challenge these often limited and sometimes harmful (and sometimes false) depictions of female saints.

Through engagement with the communion of saints there is potential for young adult Catholic women to form relationships with these Catholic women of the past and present. The hope is that these relationships help them cultivate a strong *inner-dependence* enabling a confirmation within a *tested commitment*, that one can be at home within the Catholic tradition. Elizabeth Johnson validates the potential role of the communion of saints in this necessary work of young adult faith formation when she proclaims, "Cheered on by the great, richly varied cloud of witnesses, learning their lessons of encouragement, protesting their pain, catching their hope, standing their shoulders, the church today takes its own steps on the path of discipleship as legacy for future generations."³⁷ There is a strong need to better utilize and make accessible the great cloud of witnesses of Catholic women, so that future generations of young adult Catholic women can hear the cheers and find belonging.

³⁴ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 230.

³⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 226.

³⁶ Oliva Espín, "Female Saints: Submissive or Rebellious? Feminists in Disguise?" *Innsbrucker Gender Lectures*, (Universität Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2012), 135-161, 136.

³⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 234.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that religious educators can encourage faith development for young adult women by helping them comprehend an expansive understanding of a spiritual home. The hope is for young adult women to be able to embrace the paradoxes of their faith, to be critical believers, and to feel at home within the context of a dynamic and diverse community. To do this, religious educators must provide welcoming networks of belonging and viable mentoring communities. Finally, I argued that a re-imagining of the communion of saints can highlight a diverse and dynamic lineage of Catholic women who can serve as relatable role models for young adult women today.

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Inter-contextual Model of Religious Education in the Tanzanian Context

Abstract

The study investigates the right model of religious education in Tanzania today, Tanzania is a two-way merger namely mainland Tanzania and the Islands, Tanzania has gone through four periods which are pre-colonial, post-colonial, or independence and now the globalization phase, which has various challenges in all areas. I have understood that in each of the four eras Tanzania has gone through, there was a distinctive approach to education. So religious education has also gone through those periods and the teaching systems were used according to its time, such as inculturation or contextualization which continued to be used, those served that time. They cannot stand the situation we have in today's diversified world.

Inter-contextual model is a specific approach designed to facilitate teaching and learning in Tanzania today because it responds to the needs of the people of the current generation by integrating various environmental approaches, the current situation can still be supported by context as well. It is stitched to the world. If one can just focus on his/her own context, he/she will be left behind. If we want to survive, we must look at what is happening in other places without forgetting ours. Hence, inter-contextual model is the right approach in delivering religious education in Tanzania

Historical Background of Religious Education in Tanzania

The United Republic of Tanzania is a union of two sovereign states, namely, Tanganyika on the mainland, which got peaceful independence on December 9th, 1961, and the Zanzibar, which covers all islands, which gained independence through revolution on January 12th, 1963. Both parts of the country received Christian religious education from Germany and British Missionary Societies. On the island there was severe opposition from the Arabs because in 1840 the Oman Sultan, Seyyed Said, shifted his capital city from Oman to Zanzibar, while in the mainland the Germany Missionary Societies¹ were unhindered. These missionaries laid a foundation of religious education in Tanzania through an approach which focused on three areas: general education, health, and conversion to Christian religion. The Tanzanian government still honors or respects their tireless efforts of building the foundation of religious education, and the government recognizes the Christian Social Services Commission (CSSC) as one of the outstanding bodies in curriculum review and harmonization in Religious Education and Health. The body includes members of Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.

Religious Education today

Currently, Religious education in Tanzania is either lagging or distorted, contrary to the foundations started by our ancestors. Theologians and other religious education facilitators are aware of the fragmenting of religious education. Most theologians and

¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, <https://elct.or.tz/about.php>, retrieved on March 25, 2022.

facilitators believe that religious pluralism, multiculturalism, socioeconomics, and political changes are some of the factors that shake the structures of religious education in Tanzania.² For example, the changes caused by globalization are responsible for the instability of religious education in Tanzania since the political and economic systems determine the nature and character of the state policy. Tanzania still follows both Platonic and Aristotelian systems. On the side of the Platonic, the Republic and Philosopher King notions still prevail, while on the Aristotelian, the education system is controlled by the state. In Tanzania even today they follow the version of this foundation which insists that education should be controlled by the state and people should be graded according to performance appraisal through state controlled examinations.³ Moreover, both the Platonic and Aristotelian in the sense that both models were cultivated in ancient Greece, particularly in Athens which is known as “Athenian model which focuses on a process of “cultivating the soul,” schooling as “character formation” is the heart of education.”⁴ Therefore, the state policy affects and controls religious education policy. The state sets the standards for the curriculum and syllabus of religious education. However, due to the lack of good preparation in navigating the waves of globalization, the churches and her religious education institutions have not been able to overhaul the curriculum to keep pace with current times.

Kazu Haga asserts that globalization brings many changes and challenges which religious organizations need to be aware of them and the rationales behind what is happening today in this era of globalization. Religious education institutions should not stand akimbo as if nothing is happening, but rather, should be conscious of changes, whether they are for good or for bad. Also, every dimension of human social life is an outcome of what people do together. People should sacrifice time, energy, money, and personal freedom to help each other, rather than subscribing to “me-first religion.”⁵ Religious education in Tanzanian secondary schools is mostly conducted with denominational interest, as every denomination or religious sect takes students and indoctrinates them according to their religious affiliation. This is done every Friday in all schools in Tanzania. This tendency causes disunity between religious sects and makes it impossible to deal with challenges facing the country and the world in general. Baraka Ngusa and Lazarus Makweva advise that, “The government of Tanzania and other related agencies should train more Christian Religious Education teachers as the increase of CRE teachers will make it possible for the subject to be taught across secondary schools.”⁶

² Daffa Abdallah, “Evaluating the Teaching and Learning of Religious Education in Tanzanian Secondary Schools: A Case of Selected Schools in Ilala Municipal Council” (A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Social Sciences in Partial Fulfilment for the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in Education (MA-ED) of Mzumbe University 2019), 52.

³ Baraka. Manjale Ngussa, and Elizabeth. Mendoza Role, “*The Paradox of Religious Education in Secondary School Curriculum: An Exploratory Study in Mara Region, Tanzania*” Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (DOI: 10.21276/sjhss.2016.1.4.5) 137-139,

⁴ Ludwig Frieder, “How Do We Teach across Cultural Diversity? Teaching the Face of Cross-cultural Conversation,” in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts*, ed. Mary E. Hess, Stephen D. Brookfield (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2008), 142.

⁵ Kazu Haga, *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2020), 14-15.

⁶ Baraka. Mwanjale Ngussa, and Lazarus. Ndiku Makweva, *The Role of Christian Religious Education on Secondary School Student Discipline in Lake Zone, Tanzania*, Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education, March 2018), 6. retrieved on May 5, 2022, website: www.jriie.com

The government can control well the validity of teaching and learning conducted in religious education in Tanzania. Also, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MOEVT) and other relevant authorities should treat Christian Religious Education like any other core academic subject

in the process of selection for Higher Education, rather than continuing treating it as one of the optional subjects. However, religious subjects are excluded in academic point-count, and they are not considered with the same weight or the same way they treat other academic subjects- “combinations”.⁷ In Tanzania, the term “combination” means special subjects that higher education students select to study as an area that he/she specializes in.

Religious education systems suffer from institutional dilemmas and church membership loss due to a failure to recognize approaches that can be fruitful in contemporary settings. For instance, one of the problems which could make Tanzanian church schools lose their identity is to abandon religious and moral teaching in their schools.⁸ Church mission schools should continue teaching morality, remain as planned, and seminaries should remain as seminaries, as liberalization or secularization of religious education institution or seminaries will lead them to be like other agencies and their goal of preparing church ministers will be lost. This might be one of the ways of honoring the ancestors who laid the religious education foundation in Tanzania.

Research reveals that when the church mission schools are secularized, it is difficult to keep Christian doctrines and traditions, and might be chaotic. This assertion is supported by H. Daniel Friberg, who cautioned the Lutheran Church in Tanzania on the danger of over-secularizing religious education institutions, while on the other side he was criticized by Mr. A. Luahasi, who did not see a problem on over-secularization of religious education institutions. However, in 1985, the late Bishop Judah Kiwovele cautioned on the danger of secularization of religious institutions, insisting that religious institutions should maintain their identities and integrity through having a defined approach like contextualization or inculturation, which will enable them to have sound religious education with a focus.⁹ The ongoing laziness behavior of some the entrusted facilitators in conducting teaching and learning in religious education is one of the factors that fuels moral erosion to students in religious owned schools in Tanzania. When students join religious institutions, they want to get something exceptional which is missing in secular educational training institutions, but the tendency of secularization has led religious institutions to have few students because these students do not believe they are getting something unique or new, something for which they were longing.

⁷ Baraka. Ngussa and Lazarus Makweva, 6.

⁸ Hansjorg Dilger, “*Embodying Values and Socio-Religious Difference: New Markets of Moral Learning in Christian and Muslim Schools in Urban Tanzania.*” (Freie Universitat: Berlin, 2017), 515-532. August 2017, retrieved on May 5, 2022. DOI: [10.1017/S0001972017000092](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972017000092),

⁹ Lutheran World Federation, Department of World Mission, *Marangu*: a record of the All-Africa Lutheran Conference, Marangu, Tanganyika, East Africa, (November 12-22, 1955), 97.

Another challenge seen in Tanzanian and many other African churches is an approach that neglects the work of mercy and instead gives people laws and orders, which is purely spoon feeding. The theological colloquium of heads of Lutheran theological colleges in Tanzania held at Tumaini University in 2022 asked the church to change her approach in indoctrinating students. They should use a friendly approach rather than just giving admonitions. They asserted that they vehemently disagree with the tendency of uttering commands, which they said was adapted from some of African traditions which practiced chiefdoms, like the Hehe, Nyamwezi, Sukuma, and pastoralists like the Maasai. They asserted that most of the students and other people do not see any difference of doctrines between the religious institutions and the traditional religions. African religious leaders appear not to be ready to accept such challenges, seeing themselves more as African chiefs than Christians; likewise, heads of religious education do not accept challenges and criticisms, as they are “infallible” in all matters, and they come with decisions without giving room for other perspectives.¹⁰ However, some of the students and teachers at Kidugala Lutheran Seminary admitted that they are afraid of asking and offering constructive criticisms to the Diocesan and Seminary authority because when they are asked to respond to doubtful information, instead of dealing with the issue presented, they attack the person who gives alternative ideas and suggestions. Those who offer challenges to the leadership authorities are either suspended or excommunicated and declared heretics. Hence, a substantial number of students decide not to join religious institutions due to maltreatment under the auspice of church authority.¹¹

Theologians are asking questions like “Has Africa lost Christ?” or “What is the problem in the church today?” Africans have neither lost Christ nor religious education, and they need religious education that suits their context and content.¹² One example is that religious education facilitators during their meeting at Ihemi Christian education center asserted that there is a need of inter-contextualization to enable African Christianity to be rooted in the African context and other parts of the world contexts.¹³ They blamed the theological institutions and Universities for relying on copying and pasting whatever comes from missionaries, which in turn enables Christians and Christianity to be materialistic. Overall, inter-contextualization might enable the church to emancipate itself from the tension between cultural imperialism, cultural nationalism, and traditionalism. Inter-contextualization develops contextual competence and new perspectives for global religious education.¹⁴ The intermingling of traditional and global contexts could enable the religious education facilitators to make a thorough selection of the best curriculum materials after making intelligent contextual comparative analysis.

¹⁰ Meeting held at Tumaini University, Makumira University College, Meeting of Heads of Zonal Lutheran Theological Colleges, it was about Curriculum Review and Harmonization on February 9-10, 2022.

¹¹ Statistical data of Kidugala Lutheran Seminary 2010-2021 (unpublished materials).

¹² Lutheran World Federation, Department of World Mission, *Marangu*, 97.

¹³ Christian Education Facilitators at Ihemi center of Iringa Diocese on March 24-26, 2021, Unpublished document, a Diocesan document-ELCT, Iringa Diocese.

¹⁴ Ludwig Frieder, “How Do We Teach across Cultural Diversity? Teaching the Face of Cross-cultural Conversation,” in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts*, ed. Mary E. Hess, Stephen D. Brookfield (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2008), 142-143.

Such an inter-contextual approach on religious teaching and learning could perfectly suit religious education today, due to the fact that the world is full of multicultural and multifaith phenomena.

This writer is in favor of such an approach because it will broaden minds and attitudes when facing challenges. Inter-contextualization is inevitable, but we must ask ourselves what is to be inter-contextualized, how, why, to whom, and who is responsible in inter-contextualization, and for what purpose. We can inter-contextualize for a certain interest group to meet their desired goal rather than for the benefit of the entire curriculum of religious teaching and learning. For example, for a long time, women and youth in Tanzania were not given equal access in attending religious education. The ordination of women was prohibited until the late 1980s, and the first woman was ordained in 1991 at Iringa Diocese in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.¹⁵ This author believes the best approach for liberating women from traditional shackles is to intermingle together different contexts from various parts or continents, which this paper calls the “inter-contextual model.”

Mai-Anh Le Tran, on the role of the church, asserts that “the church should be a transformative community since the postcolonial era needs expertise in biblical hermeneutic, that is multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural.”¹⁶ Religious Education Institutions should not just maintain the status-quo, but rather, should be aware of changes, needs of learners, and their audiences so that they can search for genuine truth demanded in the contemporary time.

This brief survey reveals that, previously, religious education in Tanzania was indoctrination approach which prevented questions from learners. It shows how the churches have failed in their doctrinal teachings, preaching, and practices. There are several indicators on this failure to educate the student well, one of them being students’ dropping out of religious education studies, since religious institutions have the least number of students since the 1980s-1990s.¹⁷ For that matter, the church decided to use an inter-contextual model in which students are briefed on different world contexts, whereby they become conversant and equipped with various clues fits in the contemporary time.

Research Question and Methodology

One of the most disturbing questions that needs to be answered in Tanzania is how long a traditionalist- or locally oriented approach will continue to frame religious education at all levels, given the pressing challenges in the world today. How are we to conduct religious teaching and learning in multicultural and religious pluralistic societies today? How can we invite youth who feel forgotten to find room, welcome and belonging in church?

¹⁵ Hoyce. Lyimo-Mbowe, *Old Testament in Africa (Tanzania) in the Context of the Office Held by Debora I Judges 4 and 5*. (Logos Verlag Berlin: GmbH, 2015), 103

¹⁶ Mai-Anh Le Tran, *Reset the Heart: Unlearning Violence, Relearning Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 26.

¹⁷ *The National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) Annual Report*. November 30, 2020

The parochialism and “infallible” methodologies used by the mainline churches in developing religious education in Tanzania, approaches which stick to outdated and western missionary traditions, have failed to recognize global challenges in a pluralistic society.¹⁸ The approach has been infective, inefficient, and static. This approach could be labelled “traditionalism.” It cannot stand and survive in the face of different social dynamisms in the world today. This so-called conservative or traditional approach is very rigid and does not allow challenges and transformation, while the world is undergoing several changes in every aspect of life due to demands which it is facing, as is the church, which is also undergoing a period of socio-economic changes.

Tanzania is not an isolated island. Tanzania has undergone various changes in at least four eras. For example, pre-colonial education exhibited the age-set system and a clear gender imbalance. Education followed a person's age and gender. Education was inherited through storytelling or oral tradition. Thus, people learned by imitating what the elders did. This system relied heavily on the type of activity that the tribe concerned was engaged in at the time. Religious education focused on how to keep ethical values, norms, mores of the society, veneration of ancestors, rituals, and cultural identity.

The second era can be labelled the colonial one, whereby all kinds of education offered were for the interest of the colonizers. They taught people how to read and write. Due to racial segregation Black and/or indigenous graduates were to serve lower jobs, while higher office positions were given to the Whites. Black Africans were not given the best quality of education, and there was no room for creativity and technological innovation. Indigenous Africans continued being indoctrinated and taught religion without being given time to question and challenge doubtful issues. On the side of religious education, it can be strongly said that whatever is African was interpreted in a negative way like being pagan (or associated with paganism), witchcraft and hooliganism, while European versions of religion were the right and absolute religion. Most of the people followed this kind of Christianity in good faith, but in ignorance. Some associated it with imperialism and missionaries were seen as agents of colonialism. The missionaries used three approaches, namely, secular education, health, and later, religious education.

The third era was the post-colonial or independent time, between the 1950s-1970s, when most African countries achieved independence. All education systems insisted on nationalism, patriotism, and liberation struggles. Religious education systems insisted on inculturation or contextualization of their theologies and philosophies. Religious institutions insisted on a contextual model to be applied in religious education which relied on the context of a particular society.

The fourth era can be labelled the modern era, which is controlled by waves of globalization. Churches are facing several challenges from every part of the globe. Churches are experiencing dropout of members who attend church worship services and

¹⁸ Tim and Sue. Muldoon *Religious Disaffiliation and the Domestic Church* in McGrath Institute for Church Life, Church Notre Dame. retrieved 25, January,2022

institutions, and the enrollment of students in religious education is declining.¹⁹ There are several other challenges facing religious institutions in this era that need to be answered in order to help people feel that religious education is concerned with them. They need the church to answer their problems holistically rather than just standing akimbo as if there is not enough time and space to deal with those critical issues around the globe. People need religious education that will enable them to respond to their challenges and especially to their time and needs. Also, nowadays you need a new teaching system and not like the old one-man system, assuming it has all the answers, but a participatory system for all people and all groups of people, like debates, discussions, and colloquia which allow their responses in studies or involvement in their needs. Young people face many challenges due to being able to see different things around the world and having a need for religious education that can help them in their lives while in various parts of the world. Thus, this inter-contextual system is the system needed at this time in religious education in Tanzania. As I said earlier, Tanzania is not an island that can stand alone in the world, but Tanzania needs and cooperates with various nations in the world and needs capable religious education conforming to those contexts.²⁰

Frieder Ludwig offers some glimpses of what a contemporary religious education approach to use in conducting teaching and learning in religious education today could be. He gives some clues as to how to teach in a society or world with cultural diversity. He shows how teaching and learning in theology and religious approaches are affected by an Athenian model, a Berlin model, or a United States model. The Athenian model focuses on a process of culturing the soul, schooling as character formation, and is the heart of education, while the Berlin model focuses on critical inquiry, being more one-sidedly emphasized in popular theological faculties in Germany, a system focusing much on producing scholars and researchers very well versed in their areas of concentration, and contextual theology as critical reflection on church practices. On another side, the United States model is influenced by the European approaches which emphasize introductory-level, foundational, ground-laying, praxis-oriented aspect of the topics under consideration, and theological education which directly focuses on preparing and nurturing excellent pastors, and educating leaders for service.²¹ In reality, you can begin to realize that the only approach needed in religious education is the use of a combination of different models or contexts—here what I am labelling an inter-contextual model. Frieder Ludwig himself admits that he had a German approach to his students at Luther Seminary, and after studying the faces of his audience, he realized that he had to change the monotonous approach used for him to another approach proper to the US students. He did so deeply aware of the diverse cultures present in Minnesota, particularly due to the presence of reasonable numbers of Liberian, Ethiopian, Tanzanian, Nigerian, and Kenyan

¹⁹ Noel. Julius Ntawigaya and Tuntufye Anangisye Mwenisongole, “The Influence of Religious Education in Building Moral Generation Through Investing on Students in Tanzania,” (TJIS, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (June 2021), 42.

²⁰ Arata Miyamoto and Paul O. Ingram (eds), *Embodied Cross: Intercontextual Reading of "Theologia Crucis"* (University of Hawaii Press: Buddhist-Christian Studies Vol. 32 (2012), pp. 164-167

²¹ Frieder. Ludwig, “How can we teach across cultural diversity? Teaching in the face of cross-cultural conversation,” in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts* (Krieger, 2008), 142-43.

communities.²² Today, I believe that no one can talk about Minnesota communities without the inclusion of the native Dakota, ancient Norwegian, symbols or traditions and icons of the Vikings, and the presence of Oromo Christians and Somali Muslims.

Inter-contextual Model of Religious Education in Tanzania

An inter-contextual model can be used to answer the question “What does it mean to be a good ancestor?” particularly if that question is aimed at developing religious education that meets the needs of current youth. I would like to differentiate between contextual and inter-contextual approaches. Stephen Bevans briefly describes six models of contextual theology, its importance, advantages, and its application in the field of contextual theology. He asserts that, “Models of Contextual theology make the point that theologies that want to engage seriously with their context need to be creation centered in their orientation.”²³ He concludes that “each one of these models is a valid one, so none can claim hegemony.”²⁴ Each model can be applied according to its demand in a particular context. One can consider the application in the Indian context: In India, given both historically and culturally oriented classes of people, this approach of contextualization will continue promoting classes and subordination of the poor. This is one reason behind Vebjørn Horsfjord favoring an inter-contextual approach, as he argues “that it is exactly the serious engagement with a particular context which reveals the polyvalence of cultural and religious expressions and the hybridity of most contexts. This forces choices on the theologian whose responsible answers can only be found in inter-contextual dialogue.”²⁵ The term “inter-contextual” refers to the process of intermingling together different contexts in the globe like Western, Asian, Eastern, and African (Southern) contexts with respect to their individual integrities. The inter-contextual model is the best approach in the global today, since all social groups in the world could be granted effective education that will liberate their thoughts, ideas, attitudes and even how to understand and interpret various world situations and contexts.

This author proposes that an inter-contextual model of religious education offers at least one way to recover from these pitfalls. I will conclude with a set of guidelines to be used to overcome these challenges in my specific Tanzanian context because the model helps to build their capacity to cope with their environment and solve their challenges. While I believe a contextualization system binds a person to think only of their own environment and culture, an inter-contextual system enables a student to have a broader understanding of how to live and survive well with different societies in the world due to understanding their contexts and different life systems.

The research conducted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania revealed that religious education institutions are likely to miss students, theologians, and other

²² Frieder. Ludwig, “How can we teach across cultural diversity? Teaching in the face of cross-cultural conversation,” in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts* (Krieger, 2008), 146.

²³ Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York, Orbis, 1997), 16.

²⁴ Stephen Bevans, *Model of Contextual Theology*, 139.

²⁵ Vebjørn L. Horsfjord, *Challenging Contexts: A study of two contemporary Indian Christian Theologians and a reflection on the need for inter-contextual dialogue*, (Studia Theologica, 200155:1, 41-57, DOI: 10.1080/713800040), 44-46.

scholars, unless they can be flexible in their approach to meeting these challenges. Curricula and syllabi must consider all the contexts of the learners in each setting, and an inter-contextual approach is fruitful to that end.²⁶ The church decided to have a task force which surveyed the current state of the church and the measures to be taken. Research revealed that theological colleges have a shortage of students and even cause religious education not to be properly taught in colleges, schools, and even in various groups. It should be noted that the population of Tanzania is growing, and their demands are increasing, but teachers and theologians are declining rapidly. Thus, the church identified a great need to revise its curriculum, to find a curriculum that is more up to date. Also, the church has done research and found that for a long-time the colleges have taught a system called “inculturation” or “contextualization,” a system that makes one less inclined to defend one's culture while at the same time accepting without question the demands of a global economic system. Thus, the right system now to save the church from losing believers and to get students to college is an inter-contextual system, as this system helps the student and the scholar to be able to take different contexts and integrate them into a system that integrates diverse cultures and environments. In this way we hope that facilitators of religious education are enabled to adapt to all the environment in the world due to its breadth in its understanding.

Moreover, the church needs to evaluate the system that had led to the continued decline in the provision of religious education, as people want doctrines that respond to the challenges of their lives. Hence, the inter-contextual model is the best approach in facilitating teaching and learning in religious education as it takes various contexts in the global and appreciate them to local, that is, take the global contexts and integrate to the local or glocalization. But it is more than globalization. It is known as an inter-contextual model, which refers to the integration of different contexts in the world such as from America or the West, Europe, Asia, South America, the Middle East, and Africa and puts them together to form a coherent structure from that context.

In conducting the teaching and learning of religious education, this writer argues that the church in Tanzania needs to use a competent approach where the views and attitudes of students are respected. The inter-contextual system responds to the needs of society for the modern world, which embodies cultural diversity.²⁷ This system enables the church to continue to recognize the various challenges facing the church in the world and how to solve them using a combination of its solutions. A competence based educational method grounded in inter-contextual frameworks will be articulated here. The term “competence-based” refers to a learning-centered approach in religious education teaching and learning methods.²⁸ Examples will be drawn from the Tanzanian context.

²⁶ The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, *Call for Theological Curriculum Review and Harmonization* (Unpublishes material August 8-9, 2019) at Tumaini University, currently is University of Iringa

²⁷ Johannes Habib Zeiler, *Crafting Lutheran Pastors in Tanzania: Perceptions of Theological Education and Formation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania*, (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2018), 46-84.

²⁸ Jane Kathryn Vella. *Learning to listen, learning to teach: the power of dialogue in educating adults*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002

Inter-contextual Model of Religious Education in Tanzanian Context is the right approach

I believe that an inter-contextual model of Religious Education in Tanzania is the right approach due to the following: I discussed earlier that Tanzania has undergone four eras of changes in both secular and religious education. First was oral transmission of knowledge limited to a particular ethnic group. For example, some of societies were farmers or iron smiths, and others engaged in hunting and gathering. It was informal education. The second era is the colonial era. This period brought a great deal of confusion and some misunderstanding by Africans due to the nature of their way of life, but some really brought about religious education accordingly, such as preparing African religious teachers and even being able to translate the Bible into African languages even in Tanzania. The third era is a post-colonial or independent era, yet this time the country still followed the education system implemented during the colonial era with slight changes due to the political and economic changes religious education institutions which is well-organized or structured started during this time. They offered Sunday school, catechumens, candidates for marriage, youth, women, and adults. The religious education model used was contextual and was a teacher-centered approach. Teachers facilitated teaching and learning, while students were just listening to the experts and asking few questions wherever they were given time. The religious education institutions and thorough model of religious system in Tanzania was initiated by European missionaries who brought both Christian and education and foreign culture. Luckily, indigenous people realized that they are taking both religious education and European traditions. They even failed to make the right dichotomy between Christian religious education and European moral conduct. Both the Catholics and Protestants in Tanzania continued using a European approach since all the religious education and training institutions received support or grants from Europe. Tanzanian theologians and other education facilitators began to recognize that they need to change from a traditional contextual approach focused on inculturation and contextualization that is not appropriate anymore because of multiculturalism, and to move to a pluralistic approach. Hence the inter-contextual approach is the right model in religious education today.

Why is an inter-contextual model the right approach in delivering religious education? All over the world, there is a rapid dropout of church members, church attendance and even an alarming disappearance of youth in the church. According to the research conducted by Rich Melheim and his friends, they observe that “[the vast majority of] children in American mainline churches are opting out of congregational life completely by age 22. Although they may return briefly as young parents for a dedication, christening or baptism to keep grandma happy, most are not returning to an active role in the life of the church.”²⁹ This research suggests that the church in America needs to transform her approach in dealing with the demands of people to suit them. This tendency is not only observed in America alone, but also all over the globe. The research

²⁹ Rich. Melheim & Friends, *Let's Kill Sunday School (and Birth Cross + Gen Ministries) Volume 2*. Faith Inkubators Stillwater, MN, n.d), 19

revealed that the church is experiencing the same problem in Germany, Scandinavian countries, Asian and African countries. Also, Melheim reveals that,

The largest Protestant denominations in the US are in the midst of a 50-year decline. In a recent study, my own faith tribe led the top seven Protestant denominations with a 5.9% annual membership decline. At least we're leading something. Four years ago, the research department of my church body published a graph (showing decline trend from 1990-2010), showing an alarm decline in Sunday school attendance. In its 20-year history, the ELCA dropped from over a million to 400,000 participants. And how did the leadership of the church respond? (Yawn.) Not a single conference was held to address the crisis. If any company in the country had an 18-year training program and upon graduation all but a few of the trainees quit and never came back, they would cancel the program, fire the managers and question absolutely everything they are doing. Everything. Or they would go out of business. . . . Sunday school as we know it is going to die on our watch whether we acknowledge it and choose to create a preferable replacement for faith formation or not.³⁰

The study done by two-second year students at Kidugala Lutheran Seminary revealed a similarly indistinguishable situation, that there are drastic dropouts of children attending church services in the Southern and Iringa diocese. They admitted that there is a similar situation of dropouts being experienced in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.³¹ The church should be aware of the situation and find means of rescuing the situation. Tanzanians need religious education that is rooted in the life of people, which means teaching and learning which answers their challenges, one can say it is a holistic type of approach. An inter-contextual model will deal with the entire life of people and can prepare well experts who can offer religious education to people.

Shoki Coe shows that “contextualizing theology takes the concrete local context seriously, it is rooted in a concrete, particular situation. He insists on reading the text and reflecting to the context.”³² One of the weaknesses of contextualization is this: it only focuses on a particular context. This tendency of perceiving people just in a single context was suitable during those past time. Currently the world is pluralistic in all systems, with digital technologies increasingly sharing ideas and contexts across all borders. Religious education should not just stand akimbo without being conscious of these challenges happening. People need a broader system which is not short sighted or narrow-minded. Today, due to rapid development in science and technology, there is no culture that can stand on its own, and there are intermingling of cultures due to free movement of people, free market economy, free labor movements. And the area of religious education is not left aloof; it faces those global challenges. Hence, the Tanzanian Church decided to make what they call a “paradigm shift” in religious education from the traditional inculturation or contextualization to the inter-contextual

³⁰ Rich. Melheim & Friends, 19

³¹ A research paper submitted at Kidugala Lutheran Seminary, as a partial fulfillment of Diploma in Theology Course 2000. Unpublished Material at Kidugala Lutheran Seminary, 2000. Church

³² Shoki, Coe, “Contextualizing Theology,” *Mission Trends No. 3 Third World Theologies*, edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P. (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 22-23

model, where theologians and religious educators move into different continents for studies and research. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania sent several theologians to study in Europe at the University of Oslo, Bergen, and Stavanger Mission in particular, to explore how to apply the inter-contextual theology model in Tanzania. The studies were granted under a Quota Program Scheme from 1999 to 2021.³³ Also, an inter-contextual model in religious education enabled facilitators to conduct teaching and learning from different contexts like Europe, the West, Asia, and Africa.³⁴ They make comparative analysis of those contexts and train students who can work in all parts of the globe. Religious education trainees are thus invited to reflect on different contexts and to study the organizational behavior of diversities of contexts.

The importance of an inter-contextual model in religious education today requires religious education that can suit both the North and the South at the same time, honoring the foundations laid by the ancestors. This was supported by Dietrich Werner on the Ecumenical meeting in the World Council of Churches, who saw the importance of inter-contextuality in theological education in preparing ministers in the contemporary era in the world who can maintain the North-South theological education relations. Dietrich Werner asserts that after making a thorough study of the development of theological education in the global South he realized that the inter-contextuality is one of the key imperatives for reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement and a new challenge for theological formation at the 21st century:

It has become clear that contextualization alone will not answer sufficiently the new demands and challenges of theological education at the beginning of the 21st century while at the same time remaining a crucial and important component in many regions concerned. But at the same time the pressing needs for more inter-contextual exchange and the whole dimension on inter-contextuality in theological education is gaining a new importance.³⁵

He explains further that a new method was needed for theological education, because the world connectedness is increasing, hence an inter-contextual approach will be helpful. He does not ignore a contextual approach because it is the important key for understanding, it sets the foundation of bridging different theological contexts in the globe. It is true that there is not anything which comes out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), contextuality laid a foundation, it works as a point of departure in inter-contextuality. Werner defends his assertion that:

The question of inter-contextuality in theological education is one of allowing oneself to be exposed to more than just one realm of conceiving the world, God, and theology. It becomes ever important that theologians are bi-lingual- not only

³³ University of Oslo: Duo Research Achieves, Browsing Intercontextual Theology by Title, retrieved on May 9, 2022.

³⁴ Willem Fourie, and Hendrik Meyer-Magister, "Contextuality and Intercontextuality in Public Theology: On the Structure of Churches' Public Engagement in South Africa and Germany" in *International Journal of Public Theology* 11 (2017) 36–63

³⁵ Dietrich. Werner, *Ecumenical Learning in Global Theological Education-Legacy and unfinished tasks of Edinburgh 1910 Or: Contextuality, Inter-Contextuality and Ecumenicity as key mandate for ecumenical theological education in the 21st century* 10 historical and systematic aspects, A paper originally presented as a lecture to the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies at the Ecumenical institute of Bossey on 9. November 2007.

the literal sense, but also bi-lingual in terms of their capacity to react and communicate at least two different settings of the world-view, cultural mentalities and different forms of spiritual and denominational traditions as well in order to give flesh to the understanding a church and ministry which truly is multi-faceted and “Pentecostal” in the original sense of the word, that is guided by the spirit enabling the understanding of a totally different mindset in the spirit of love and truth of Christ.³⁶

In Tanzania there are more than 120 ethnic groups and different religions. Christians are about 65%, whereas there are Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, and independent Ministries. All the above-named Christian denominations favor the inter-contextual model in religious education simply because they all relate with other partners or companions outside Tanzania. The contextual approach might suit the Tanzanian context alone, while the inter-contextual will enable them to relate with others in the other parts of the world and it offers an integrated approach in dealing with socio-economic and spiritual problems.

Given the understanding of various parts of the world, Tanzania now has people in and from various parts of the world and is aware of varieties of contexts. Also, the Church has managed to send its scholars to study these contexts and to be able to put them together and prepare an inter-contextual model.

This model is different from the old one. The old model or approach was teacher-centered, whereas the teacher is the one who knows everything for the most parts or the expert. It was believed that the role of the teacher is to deliver seventy-five percent of the materials in the study course, while students had to find only twenty-five percent of what was needed in study. But the current approach the teacher’s role is to facilitate, and his/her function is to initiate teaching and learning, or to moderate discussions and students are required to analyze different environments and contexts and relate to them by making a reflection of their experiences. Hence, they call this system a new paradigm which follows the inter-contextual model. It really helps to bring people back to religious education, whereas it honors the roots of the ancestors who initiated religious education in Tanzania. What has changed is only on the approach or model of teaching which touches the demands of the audience without ignoring the global demands. You will find that a good example of efficiency and effectiveness of the inter-contextual model is the presence of a strong Tanzanian community that worships every Sunday at Holy Trinity Minneapolis church.³⁷ Also, we can see that the Tanzanian diaspora in the United States is sensitive in keeping their traditional identity and cautious in relating with other cultures, they have some uniqueness in relating and maintaining their faith, which is quite

³⁶ Dietrich. Werner, Ecumenical Learning in Global Theological Education-Legacy and unfinished tasks of Edinburgh 1910 Or: Contextuality, Inter-Contextuality and Ecumenicity as key mandate for ecumenical theological education in the 21st century 10 historical and systematic aspects, A paper originally presented as a lecture to the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies at the Ecumenical institute of Bossey on 9. November 2007.

³⁷ "<https://htlcmpls.org/our-partners>", Swahili services at Minneapolis, Minnesota.

different from other African immigrants in the United states.³⁸ Here you will see how the inter-contextual system is able to attract and strengthen them in religious education. In the United States now, Tanzanians can have numerous places where they conduct their worship services, like in Columbus, Chicago, Washington DC, New York, and other cities. This inter-contextual model system helps them even in their relationships with the synods or dioceses of the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Conclusion

The Tanzanian churches have strong and wonderful established partnerships with other churches in all parts of the world. Religious education teachers are skillful in studying both in and about different contexts, and the churches are sending scholars and missionaries outside of Tanzania. The churches receive foreign scholars and missionaries from different countries, and in doing so they realized that they need to change the religious education approach without altering the intended goal in delivering religious education. The inter-contextual model is an approach that fits many contexts in the world. The contextual approach of the Germany/Berlin model was preparing researchers or scholars who were fit for European theological faculties. The Athenian contextual model, in contrast, focused on culturing the soul or character formation. And the American contextual model, influenced by European models, focuses on forming excellent pastors and educating leaders for service.³⁹ The Tanzanian churches, in promoting and maintaining religious education while honoring the ancestors, decided to take all of the global models (namely, Berlin, Athenian, European, Asian and African), appropriate them for a Tanzanian context and in the process came up with a model for inter-contextual religious education. The hope is in this model Tanzanian religious education scholars have knowledge of all contexts and are not bounded with a single context, but rather, inter-contextual.

The inter-contextual model of religious education in Tanzania is the right approach due to intermingling or movement of people in the world today and Tanzanians cannot claim to live in isolation, therefore they need a religious education model that suits them and to have an ability to interact with other people outside Tanzania.

An inter-religious model of religious education is here proposed as one of the best approaches to attract youth who may feel that they are considered in the church. It is hoped that this approach will bring back youth and other social groups who have felt that they were abandoned by the church. We hope this approach will attract more congregants, and religious training institutions will get more members who can help the church to maintain her identity, to keep the foundation laid by the ancestors, and to cope with global changes. Research has shown that, to keep up with the times in being able to touch the emotions, desires and needs of the current generation the right system is an inter-contextual model.

³⁸ Grant. B Miller, Thesis of Doctor of Philosophy in Intercultural Studies “*Uamsho, Uhuru na Umoja (Revival, Freedom, and Unity): The Transnational Faith and Identity of Tanzanian Christians Negotiating Diaspora life in the United State*,” (Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016), 6-8.

³⁹ Frieder. Ludwig, “How can we teach across cultural diversity? Teaching in the face of cross-cultural conversation,” in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts* (Krieger, 2008), 142-143.

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Remember: Tis the Ancestor's Breath When the Fire's Voice is Heard

Abstract

A 2018 Pew Research Study found U.S. adults challenged to distinguish between verifiable facts and speaker opinions. Such findings suggest intentional miseducation and necessitates a corrective that religious educators must provide. *Sankofa*, from the Akan people in Ghana, means to go back and get, or literally, it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot. In an attempt to go back and get that which can serve as a corrective to hegemonic miseducation, and encouragement to persons under siege (e.g., Ukrainians) by imperialist powers, I examine U.S. slave narratives through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to suggest religious education curriculum reflecting survival, resistance, resilience, community and productivity as exhibited by these ancestors who built churches, schools, and a thriving community known as Black Wall Street.

Introduction

As a child, my immediate family opened gifts on Christmas Eve. On Christmas Day we visited the homes of extended family to eat, exchange gifts and listen to our parents, aunts and uncles tell stories of their childhood. After years of engaging this family tradition, my siblings, cousins and I knew these stories, yet looked forward to this annual gathering of fellowship and laughter because these tales told us of our heritage – who we were, what had been endured, overcome and yet to accomplish as descendants of our parents, grandparents, foster grandparents (all confederate state born) and countless other foreparents whose lives had been informed by the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Jim/Jane Crow that only ended, on paper at least, in 1964.

My current Christmas Eve ritual is to watch the 1951 adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. As he prepares to end his time with Ebenezer Scrooge, an old miserly capitalist, the ghost of Christmas present reveals two starving children hiding under his cloak, clinging to him for protection. Upon seeing the two children, Scrooge inquires, "Spirit are these yours," to which the ghost responds, "they are man's [sic]. This boy is ignorance and this girl is want. Beware of them both, but most of all beware of this boy."¹

This scene from the holiday classic offers a visual for the analysis I undertake herein between the U.S. as a settler colony still ruled by hegemonic forces overwhelmed by want and ignorance and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the appropriate corrective in religious education to counter the expressed longing for the way things were, and between the voices of my ancestors

¹ Brian Desmon Hurst (Director). *A Christmas Carol*, Black & White, 1951.

speaking to the living, reminding us to go back and get what enabled them not only to survive in this strange land, but to thrive in this colonial space that is not our home. With this objective in mind, I take a mixed methods approach to propose religious education curriculum for the Church, with comparable applicability for any religious space. I first review historical data including slave narratives to establish facts and to draw conclusions about past events influencing contemporary beliefs and behaviors. I then employ CRT, which is also grounded in an historical context, namely as Edward Taylor notes that the U.S. political, legal and educational system is based on Whites having certain unalienable rights to property and capital that American Indians, Africans and other immigrants have provided via land and labor.² I employ this methodology to speak to a particularity (e.g., Ukrainians) now dominating the news cycle and ultimately to suggest CRTs relevance in religious education in the U.S.

Each year I watch the black and white version of the movie with Alistair Sim, I am struck that young, inexperienced, frail children symbolize powerful, dangerous and deadly forces. Want or rather want more, also known as greed, generated colonial expansion that led to atrocities like settler colonialism and the displacement of indigenous people in what is now the United States, the carving up of Africa among European powers via the Berlin Conference resulting in theft of great wealth, and the 2022 Russian attack on the Ukrainian nation causing many to flee their homeland. The childlike imaging of ignorance is equally deceitful. As an educator, I especially detest willful ignorance – that is knowledge and information withheld or denied by the law of the land, by the high cost to acquire quality education or by a myriad of other ways the hegemony have miseducated the masses including, but not limited to: the universal speak of traditional theological discourse, the silencing of particular voices, stereotypic code words and visual (mis)representations, disinformation, alternative facts, and revisionist history. Yet, this is us – America, Americans – a nation where 54% read at or below a 6th grade level, a nation unable to distinguish verifiable facts from speaker opinions, a people so conflicted about the nation’s discriminatory practices and polarizing socio-political engagement that certain elected officials legislate the teaching of uncomfortable aspects of our history despite photos, and miscellaneous information documenting broken treaties, public lynchings, protective services around Ruby Bridges, the Little Rock Nine and countless other blacks attempting to “integrate” public schools, and Bloody Sunday. On the one hand, there seems to be fear, embarrassment and concern about discriminatory practices of any type, but on the other hand, there seems to be pride, desire and calls to return to the days of old when ill-treatment toward black and brown people was without accountability (e.g., make America great again). Still, I am encouraged by the warning of the Spirit, “beware,” which not only images crossover engagement between two worlds similar to ancestors speaking to this present generation that I believe is possible, but suggests humanity’s co-creative power with a Divine Being to intervene in the course of human history. As a nation that routinely rehearses our pain, December 7, 1941 and September 11, 2011, we may do well to remember, recall, retrieve, go back and get words of wisdom, direction and instruction from our personal and national ancestors so that we can too can change/abandon

² Edward Taylor. “The Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education: An Introduction.” In *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education* edited by Edward Taylor, David Gillborn, and Gloria Ladson-Billings (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 7.

destructive pathways, and instead leave a legacy of love that people will celebrate at family gatherings (or in film).

An Inconvenient Truth

The original 13 states of this country were British colonies, settled by Pilgrims and Puritans in search of a new religious identity. According to Womanist Theologian Kelly Brown Douglas, these religious settlers considered themselves an Anglo-Saxon remnant – that is contemporary Israelites in God’s master plan planting a colony for the glory of God.³ Settlers occupy inhabited land, desecrate sacred ground, impose their culture (e.g., language, religion, ways of being, knowing and doing) upon indigenous and other colonized people. These self-proclaimed chosen ones were no different. The result – America is the most sweeping, most violent, and most significant example of settler colonialism in world history.⁴

Settler colonialism is the physical takeover of inhabited lands either by conquest or by immigration. Both land and people are exploited. Settlers establish boundaries of access to (e.g., education, healthcare) and opportunities (e.g., housing, employment) for themselves and for the newly dehumanized and disenfranchised “other.” The settler culture is presumed to be superior, and becomes the norm for all people groups to emulate. Yet despite this demand to assimilate, the “other” never fully integrates into mainstream settler culture. In fact, settler colonialists have no intention of or incentive for sharing the privileged world of their own creation or of leaving the country built for the protection and promotion of their self-interests. Settler immigrants continue to come to this new world, shedding the culture of their homeland, and adopting the ethos of the original settler colonialists. Having establish authority over colonial space through mass migration, laws and violence, settlers defend them violently at all cost.⁵

Historical distortion and denial are endemic to settler colonies, thus legitimating stories are created and persistently affirmed as a means of naturalizing a new historical narrative to replace the indigenous past.⁶ To justify the theft of indigenous land, Native Americans were labelled “savages.” These same European settlers likewise justified the theft of persons, personhood and labor by labelling the people of Sub-Saharan Africa heathens and claiming them to be the descendants of Noah’s son Ham, cursed to serve his brothers according to Genesis 9:20-27 text. However, it was Noah’s grandson Canaan who was cursed in that text, not Ham. Once dehumanized by these labels, the colonizers claim to be on a soul-saving mission for the Lord. So instead of being land grabbers and kidnappers, these European invaders become divine deliverers on a mission to save and to civilize. This misinformation campaign and misrepresentation of facts and of flesh translated into loss of human identity, personhood and legal disenfranchisement of black and brown bodies still evident today as reflected in statistically significant differences across an array of measures (e.g., education, imprisonment, wealth, life expectancy) and the perception of white/whiteness as positive and sun-kissed skin as pejorative.

³ Kelly Brown Douglas. *Stand Your Ground Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 9.

⁴ Walter L. Hixson. *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

⁵ Hixson, 7.

⁶ Hixson, 11.

Rooted in settler colonialism, “the vision of America as a White supremacist, patriarchal, settler society is alive and well today and ignoring this reality is no longer an option.”⁷

The Ancestor’s Breath

Below are excerpts from stories told by the enslaved and/or their descendants that speak to survival, resistance, resilience, community and productivity of the black community since being forced onto “cargo ships” for transport to this New World:

The Funniest Things: Charlie could make up songs ‘bout de funnies’ things. One day Charlie saw ole Marsa cuttin’ ‘cross de plowed field, de ole mule slipped an’ Marsa come tumblin’ off...Marsa say, “Come ere, Charlie, an’ sing some rhymes fo’ Mr. Henson.” Don’t know no new ones, Marsa,” Charlie answered. Come on, you black rascal, give me a rhyme fo’ my company – one he ain’t heard. So Charlie say, “All right, Marsa, I give you a new one effen you promise not to whup me.” Marsa promised, an’ den Charlie sung de rhyme he done made up in his haid ‘bout Marsa: *Jackass rared, Jackass pitch, Throwed ole marsa in de ditch*. Well, marsa got mad as a hornet, but he didn’t whup Charlie, not that day anyway...when Marsa wasn’t ‘roun’ we’d swing all roun’ de cabin singin’. Charlie had a bunch of verses: *Jackass stamped, Jackass neighed, Throwed ole Marsa on his haid...Jackass stamped, Jackass hupped, Marsa hear you slave, you sho’ git whupped*.⁸

Patrollers: In dese meeting’s ole Jim Bennet, de preacher, didn’t know a letter in a book, but he sho’ could preach. Dar wasn’t no Bible in dem days ‘cept what de white folks had, an’ dey wan’t gwine let no slave see it even if he could read...patterollers was mostly atter de preacher ‘case he was de leader o’ de meetin’. Was a terrible lashin’ comin’ to him dat got caught...well, sir dey tell me to step out f’m de woods an’ let ‘em see me. I does, an’ de paddyrollers dat was on horse back come a chasi’ arter me, jus’ a-gallopin’ down de lane to beat de band...I jus’ ducked into de woods. Course de paddyrollers couldn’t stop so quick an’ kep’ on’ roun’ de ben, and den dere came a-screamin’ an’ cryin’ make you think dat hell done bust loose. Dem old paddyrollers done rid plumb into a great line of grape vines dat de slaves done stretched ‘cross de path. An’ dese vines tripped up de horses an’ throwed de ole paddyrollers off in de bushes. An some done landed mighty hard, cause dey was a-limpin’ roun’ an’ cussin’ and’ callin’ fo’ de slaves to come an’ help dem, but dem slaves got plenty o’ sense. Dey lay in de bushes an’ hole dere sides a-laughin’, but ain’t non o’ ‘em gonna risk bein’ seen...So after ole paddyrollers go on limpin’ back to de town, we gon to de woods an’ hold our meetin’...After dat, ole paddyrolelrs come creepin’ thew de woods on foot...Den dey would rush in an’ startwhippin’ an’ beatin’ de slaves unmerciful... say, If I ketch you her servin’ God, I’ll beat you. You ain’t got no time to serve God. We bought you to serve us.”⁹

Henry Bibb: *Dr. Samuel Cartwright published a theory suggesting a disease called drapetomania caused Negroes to run away, and was so powerful no concoctions could prevent*

⁷ Natsu Taylor Saito. *Settler Colonialism, Race, and the Law* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 2.

⁸ Milton Meltzer (ed). *In Their Own Words A History of the American Negro* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 47-48.

⁹ Meltzer, 49-50.

*it. Here is Henry Bibb's response to his former owner who discovered his whereabouts in Canada – I thank God that I am not property now, but am regarded as a man like yourself, and although I live far north, I am enjoying a comfortable living by my own industry...Think not that I have any malice against you, for the cruel treatment which you inflicted on me while I was in your power. As it was the custom of your country, to treat your fellow men as you did me and my little family, I can freely forgive you....*¹⁰

Lucretia Alexander: The overseer was just a poor white man. He had a whip called the BLACKSNAKE. One time they caught a man named George. They put him in the stocks. The stocks was a big piece of timber with hinges in it that had a hole in it for your head, hands and feet. Then they would shut it up and they would lay the whip on your naked body and you couldn't do nothin' but wiggle and holler. When they'd let that man out, he'd run away again.¹¹

Lorenzo Ezell: I say, You one dem Klu Klux...When dey seed I ain't gwine to tell, dey never try whip my daddy or kill Uncle Bart no more...I ain't never been to school but I just picked up reading'. With first money I ever earn I buy me a old blue-back Webster. I carry dat book where I goes. When I plows down a row I stop at de end to rest and den I overlook de lesson.¹²

Wylie Nealy: Liberty and freedom was all I ever heard any colored folks say dey expected to get out of de War and mighty proud of dat. Nobody knowed they was going' to have a war till it was done broke out and they was fightin' about it. Didn't nobody want land, they just wanted freedom.¹³

Frederick Douglass: Mr. Gore once undertook to whip one of Colonel Lloyd's slaves... He had given Demby but a few stripes, when, to get rid of the scourging, he ran and plunged himself into a creek and stood there at the depth of his shoulders, refusing to come out. Mr. Gore told him he would give him three calls, and that if he did not come out at the third call, he would shoot him. The first call was given. Demby made no response, but stood his ground. The second and third calls were given with the same result. Mr. Gore then raised his musket to his face and in an instant poor Demby was no more...When asked why he resorted to this extraordinary expedient. His reply was that Demby had become unmanageable. He was setting a dangerous example to the other slaves, which if suffered to pass without some such demonstration would finally lead to the total subversion of all rule and order upon the plantation. Douglass notes that killing a slave or any colored person in Talbot County Maryland is not treated as a crime either by the courts or the community.¹⁴

Tommie (Top) Fears: Tommie Fears sharecropped on the Lenoir Plantation in Mississippi. During WWII, he was able to purchase his own land, build a house for his family from donated wood, and leave the cotton plantation to farm for himself. When the white male

¹⁰ Meltzer, 100.

¹¹ Norman R. Yetman (ed). *Voices From Slavery 100 Authentic Slave Narratives* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), 12.

¹² Yetman, 115.

¹³ Yetman, 234.

¹⁴ Frederick Douglass. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: A Signet Classic, 1997), 38-39

plantation owner became aware of this situation, he drove to the new home, pulled out his shotgun and announced that he had come to kill Top. But the man was unable to shoot, left and never bothered Top again. His failure to kill has been attributed to salt that had been poured around the gate of the property. According to the story, P. Lenoir stopped just as the front of his truck got over the salt.¹⁵

Black Wall Street: Despite racism, this Black community was self-sufficient...they had nice homes, Black churches, schools, doctors, lawyers, dentists, movie theaters, clothing and grocery stores, beauty salons and so on. White Tulsans believed these Black Tulsans had become too prosperous...On May 31, there was an attempt to lynch a young Black man for assaulting a white woman. As the white mob, totaling 1,500 to 2,000 gathered with their guns to take Rowland from the courthouse, Black World War I veterans assembled to protect the man. The massacre lasted about 17 hours, killing countless people, burning all Black businesses and most of the African American residential community...An estimated 10,000 Blacks were left homeless, forcing them to spend the winter of 1921 in tents...The Massacre was omitted from Oklahoma's approved history books, classrooms, and private conversations for decades.¹⁶

These few excerpts demonstrate that despite threats, beatings and other acts of physical, psychological and spiritual violence, Blacks remained convinced of Divine rights, committed to freedom often and acted on these convictions by whatever means available. Blacks employed various mechanisms for survival including, but not limited to: humor, faith, determination, bartering, maintaining secrets, physical escape, strategic planning, self-defense, education, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, forgiveness and salt or African spirituality. In African spirituality, salt is used to repel evil spirits. These few highlighted situations from the nation's slaveholding past also provide evidence that Blacks are viewed in similar light in the current socio-political climate, again including but not limited to: entertainers, property designated to particular spaces, something to be managed or controlled lest we "forget" our place, sick, and disposable. Laura Ingraham, for example, telling LeBron James to shut up and dribble¹⁷ sounds very much like Marsa telling Charlie to entertain him. Convicted killer Travis McMichael describing his encounter with jogger Ahmaud Arbery who he described as refusing to answer his question about what he was doing and "looked very angry"¹⁸ sounds both like Mr. Gore's description of Demby as "unmanageable," and the plantation owner expectation that my grandfather would remain in a particular place, as sharecropper not property owner. Cries of Make America Great Again translate to return to the days when "killing any colored person is not treated as a crime either by the courts or the community." Florida's 2022 "discomfort bill" that limits how schools and employers can teach about race and identity so particular attendees are not made to feel guilt or shame about past collective actions of their race or sex sounds a bit like Oklahoma prohibiting the teaching a about the Black Wall Street Massacre, a black and U.S.

¹⁵ Family story told about my paternal grandfather as told many times over the years.

¹⁶ Jerrolyn S. Eulinberg. *Remembering 100 Years A Lynched Black Wall Street A Womanist Perspective on Terrorism, Religion and Black Resilience in the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre* (Eugene: Cascade, 2021), 1-2.

¹⁷ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/19/587097707/laura-ingraham-told-lebron-james-to-shutup-and-dribble-he-went-to-the-hoop>

¹⁸ <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/17/1056585780/travis-mcmichael-testifies-murder-trial-ahmaud-arbery>

history fact. Such legislative changes are reminiscent of Jim/Jane Crow laws of the past that determined where folk could sit, eat, swim, relieve themselves or be buried, and begs the question: where was the concern for black and brown persons in these same educational spaces when our contributions to the march of human history were misrepresented, overlooked, or ignored? According to educator and activist Carter G. Woodson, the oppressor teaches that the Negro has no worthwhile past, that his race has done nothing significant since the beginning of time, and there is no evidence that he will ever achieve anything great.¹⁹ Given these historical and contemporary realities, employing CRT in religious education will prove insightful in countering the gross misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the methodology as an attack on white/whiteness, as a revision of U.S. history and race relations, and as a white/black binary.

Critical Race Theory, What It Is, What It Isn't

CRT is currently under attack by both the ill-informed who misunderstand the work of CR theorists, also known as Crits, engaged in advocating for racial equity and by the well-informed who misrepresent the scholarship as anti-white for election purposes. CRT began as a movement in the 1970s, with lawyers, legal scholars and activists discouraged by the slow implementation, even rollback of Civil Rights legislation examined the law (e.g., speech codes, affirmative action, sentencing) for racial biases. Now CRT has spread to other disciplines (e.g., gender studies, education, political science, healthcare), where Crits continue to examine the racial disparities and power dynamics.

CRT is not taught in K-12, but is taught in graduate, primarily though not exclusively, law schools. CRT is not anti-white, but according to Edward Taylor, does take seriously the distinctive experiences of people of color and challenges the experiences of White as the standard.²⁰ Narrative, therefore, is a key component of CRT research. CRT rejects hegemonic assertions of objectivity, neutrality, meritocracy and colorblindness, and specifically interrogates assertions of impartiality in a country that legally defined personhood, access and opportunities based upon race, and then simultaneously claim to ignore, disregard or not see race or skin color in legal matters and in other areas of decision-making (e.g., hiring). How, for example, can a school claim to make a neutral admission decision with no regard to race between persons who have had access (white legacy) versus persons who have been denied access to education based upon race (Blacks)?

While there is no canonical set of beliefs to which all Crits subscribe, there are some fundamental tenets or themes to which all CR theorist agree. Racism is endemic to U.S. society, the normal way of doing business, the common, daily experiences of people of color. According to CRT pioneers Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, “by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of color, including holders of high-echelon jobs. Police-community encounters are daily reminders that this continues to happen, and studies show that

¹⁹ Carter G. Woodson. *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc.), 192.

²⁰ Taylor, *The Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education*, 8.

Blacks and Latinos who seek loans, apartments, or jobs are much more apt than similarly qualified whites to suffer rejections, often for vague reasons.”²¹

Crits also agree that racism is not merely individual acts of aggression, but is institutional – embedded in the varied and interrelated systems operating across the nation – including but not limited to: educational, judicial, financial, medical, government, business, housing industries. According to Richard Rothstein, for example, segregation by intentional government action is *de jure*, segregation by law and public policy.²² Federal, state and local laws combined with public policies like “redlining” adversely impacted home ownership and property values for black people. This coordinated effort impacted not just physical location, but property value of black residents, which in turn impact the property taxes available for public school funding and consequently resources for schools in black communities.

For Crits, racism is difficult to dismantle. Whites benefit from the system; thus, whites have no incentive to dismantle a system that privileges them over people of color. In fact, according to Law Professor Ian Haney López, whites are more likely to entrench white identity and privilege rather than to allow its destabilization.²³ Rich whites benefit materially either financially or politically whereas low- and middle-income whites benefit psychologically (at least I’m not black). Whites will, however, tolerate civil rights advancement for people of color if doing so benefits them. This tolerance, termed *interest convergence* by CRT father and founder Derrick Bell Jr. who argued the true beneficiaries of Civil Rights Legislation were white people, namely white women whose work outside the home financially benefitted the white family, and the U.S. image abroad, as national leaders sought to curb communism around the world and needed images of dogs and police attacking kids off the nightly news. Statistics repeatedly show white women as the largest benefactor of anti-discrimination legislation in hiring and school admission, yet among its fiercest opponents.²⁴ Delgado and Stefancic highlight the work of legal historian Mary Dudziak who proved right Bell’s claim regarding the true benefactors of civil rights legislation. When the Justice Department intervened on behalf of the NAACP, it was responding to a flood of secret cables and memos outlining the United States’ interest in improving its image in the eyes of the Third World.²⁵

Crits also acknowledge that race is a social construct, not a biological reality, and is therefore fluid. In other words, races are categories society invents, manipulates or retires.²⁶ Prior to Bacon’s Rebellion (1676), when poor blacks and poor whites fought together against the wealthy in Virginia, only landowning persons of British descent were considered white. Recognizing their dependence upon taxes and military protection from these persons of European descent, forced hegemonic elites to extend the “white” designation to this non-

²¹ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 12.

²² Richard Rothstein. *The Color of Law A Forgotten History of How Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), vii.

²³ Ian Haney López. *White By Law The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 139

²⁴ <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/25/11682950/fighner-supreme-court-white-women-affirmative-action>

²⁵ Delgado and Stefancic, 24.

²⁶ Delgado and Stefancic, 9.

landowning group with the same skin color. At another time in U.S. history, neither Irish, Italian or Jewish people were considered white, and as a result, many doors of employment were closed to them.

CRT is not restricted to a black-white binary as is commonly assumed. For example, by equating Christianity with European-American culture, and by claiming Christianity superior to all other religions, European-Americans made European culture superior to all ethnic/cultural identities. As a result, multi-ethnic persons of the Jewish and Islamic faiths have been denied rights, access and opportunities in this country even though Judaism and Islam are religions not races, and thus cannot be reduced to a racially split white-black binary. In addition, we are now witnessing the president of Russia claim Ukrainians to be Russians to justify his unprovoked invasion of a sovereign nation. The Ukrainians, however, profess an identity of their own thereby making the basic principles of CRT equally applicable to investigating the power dynamic at play in this region of the world among what can be considered two “white” nations.

While CRT scholarship focused initially on matters stemming from the black civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s, the pioneers were multi-ethnic and multi-racial. Now splinter groups have formed under the CRT umbrella that focus on matters specifically affecting the different communities of color. For example, LatCrit and AsianCrit scholars focus on language and immigration for the Latinx and Asian American Asian Pacific Island community. QueerCrits focus on marriage and inclusion for LGBTQIA community and DisCrit investigates racism and ableism concerns of disabled community. This cross-ethnicity/cross-racial again suggest a non-black-white binary.

For me, racism is power plus privilege (e.g., military, economic, judicial, legislative, etc.) plus privilege. While many Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) enjoy places of socio-political privilege (e.g., gender, sexuality, class), the majority of the decision-making seats (e.g., CEOs, judges, legislative) are still held by whites. So, while there is no denying that BIPOC can be prejudice, we cannot be racist simply because we do not hold mass institutional power positions in the system to enforce any biases we may hold. We can, however, internalized anti-black racism and uphold white supremacy. Non-blacks do not like to be clumped into the black category and I suspect that we (BIPOC) are too many and our concerns are too varied to unite in a single anti-anyone, two more reasons CRT is not a black-white binary.

CRT was, however, the first scholarship to connect race to notions of property rights.²⁷ Legal scholar Cheryl Harris convincingly argued that in the absence of any tangible assets (e.g., jewelry, land, houses), white skin became a property right providing personhood, freedom and access to resources and opportunities not afforded to Blacks who were property, chattel, and thus, denied personhood, freedom and access to education, home ownership, voting, testifying in court, etc. This investment in white skin is understood and evidenced by a classroom experiment by Andrew Hacker. When White college students were asked what sort of compensation, they expected should they have to endure the remainder of their lives as Black, the majority asked for

²⁷ Gloria Ladson-Billings. *Critical Race Theory in Education A Scholar's Journey* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2021), 4.

\$50 million, \$1 million for each being black year.²⁸ The student responses support Harris' assertions of white skin as valued property and Gloria Ladson-Billings belief that the United States is founded on property rights, not human rights.²⁹

Racism, like any other form of oppression is not bereft of theological undergirding.³⁰ In fact, as previously noted racism in this settler colony has been informed by theological language (e.g., savages, heathens) and assertions (Curse of Ham), and religious education. For example, enslaved blacks were taught that God and the white man were the same.³¹ This theological miseducation combined with Carter's observation, Negroes were taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton and to despise the African,³² necessitates religious education that takes both theological accountability and intervening action to engage responsibly race and race relations. If religious education begins with the basic human need to make sense,³³ how can one make sense of the human experience in the U.S. without an account of race. CRT, as a methodology rooted in narrative, provides such a framework for critical socio-political analysis and critical faith-based praxis.

Going Back and Bringing Forward

As the ghost of Christmas present advised, beware of want, as want can manifest in oppressive and deadly ways (settler colonialism, Russian war in Ukraine), and beware of ignorance lest as we have been warned elsewhere, we perish by lack of knowledge. Persons committed to "setting the captives free" must retrieve the "mother wit" of a people who survived the Middle Passage and beyond in the same way that contemporary hegemonic elites have retrieved the tools of their ancestors to legislate and to propagate misinformation and misrepresentation that ill-inform the masses. These survivors of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and their descendants not only built the wealth of a nation through free labor, but through hard work, resistance and resilience, built thriving communities, churches and schools that still stands.

What shall be our legacy as we watch legislation pass that does not make the hegemony uncomfortable? Similar laws will be passed to restrict teaching and learning in our institutions of higher learning and in our religious institutions on race and gender and other subjects that the elite find "uncomfortable," and who will write our Barmen Declaration or where shall we escape for refuge? We simply cannot stand by and witness the hard-fought wins (e.g., 14th and 15th Amendment, Brown v. Board of Education, 1965 Voting Rights Act, Roe v. Wade) of a people continuously get reversed, thereby taking us back to the era of chains. This coordinated plan of hegemonic disenfranchisement leads to death and destruction as seen via race-based mass shootings in our schools, malls and businesses, and police shootings of unarmed men and

²⁸ Lopez, 140.

²⁹ Ladson-Billings, *Critical Race Theory in Education A Scholar's Journey*, 7.

³⁰ Eleazar S. Fernandez. *Reimagining the Human Theological Anthropology in Response to Systemic Evil* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 142.

³¹ Jacquelyn Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood." In *A Troubling in My Soul Womanist Perspectives On Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 211.

³² Woodson, 1.

³³ J. L. Seymour, M. A. Crain & J. V. Crockett, *Educating Christians. The Intersection of Meaning, Learning and Vocation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 11.

sleeping women without accountability. The circumstances demand intervention in ways our ancestors employed to survive and thrive, to build churches, schools and a Black Wall Street, in other words, a covert-overt effort.

First there was a resistance to unhealthy hegemonic teaching. Not every black person did not try to emulate or assimilate. We too must discern and resist miseducation. I, therefore, propose religious educators do more than just teach the faith, books of sacred text, names of the prophets, and for Christians, Jesus saves. During U.S. chattel slavery, the enslaved taught themselves basic skills – reading and writing. This thirst for education continued after the Civil War, when Black Churches continued to teach the people to read and write. We need a functional skills ministry/curriculum in our sacred spaces that instruct attendees in some of life's basic skills – reading and writing (adult or children) and other tutoring our youth may require as students in under-resourced, overcrowded schools or in homes lacking the needed skillset. We should teach other basic survival skills that are not taught in our public schools too focused on teaching to the test to receive federal dollars, namely budgeting (how else does a sharecropper buy land), job search (e.g., resume/cover letter writing, interview techniques, social media posting), police encounter techniques (to stay alive), healthy eating, self-defense, sex education, exercise, and coping skills (e.g., techniques and therapy). Daughters should know how to change a tire, sons should know how to sew a button, and both should know how to cook a meal. The spirit of Nannie Helen Burroughs and Mary McLeod Bethune, both of whom opened schools for girls, cry out with encouragement.

As black bodies are routinely policed for adherence to comfortability and conformity to standards of dominant cultural ideals of behavior, beauty, and even place in so-called “white spaces,” the result is often young black kids being disciplined for hair styles, clothing choices and age-appropriate behavior. A 2017 report by Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality revealed an anti-Black bias against young girls. In the Georgetown report, a mostly white female participant group perceived Black girls ages 5-14 as more adult and thus less innocent of the same childhood activities as their white peers. This age misperception known as “*adultification*,” assumes Black girls are older than their actual age. Implied in this age misperception is the assumption that Black girls “know better,” which somehow justifies more frequent and even harsher punishments for actual age-appropriate behaviors. As such, Black girls can end up with an expulsion or arrest record for simply engaging in age-appropriate activities. Similarly, calls to police (e.g., Starbucks, NY birdwatcher, Barbeque Becky) and/or and a “stand your ground” shooting (e.g., George Zimmerman, Travis McMichael, Michael Dunn) if/when Blacks do not respond to unwarranted questions from random strangers about our comings and goings or playing of music. Thus, the fundamental tenets of CRT should also be taught in these sacred spaces as well to explain these circumstances. As a I listen to people express outrage over CRT, or CRT in K-12, when asked to explain, they cannot. there is silence. Therefore, an understanding of this analytical framework would better explain the circumstances our youth face. Or to paraphrase my seminary ethics professor, to refute a theory, you have to know the theory. Here too is a good place to add courses on U.S. history and race relations.

A course highlighting black (and or non-dominant) presence in sacred text should be a standard course offering. As a confessing Christian, I will only speak for my tradition, but I find that many people believe Jesus was a long-haired, blue-eyed blonde even at an HBCU. By

comparison, as a hospital and hospice chaplain, I find persons of Jewish and Muslim faith well-versed in the history and doctrine of their traditions. Yet in all my chaplain encounters since 2007, I have found one patient knowledgeable of Christian church history and the patient was not Christian, just a translator of theological texts.

When the Fire Is Heard

A well-educated populace threatens the cultural dominance and economic interests of the hegemonic elites in this settler colony, yet is beneficial not only for personal formation and development, but for national interest as well. “Low literacy prevents millions of Americans from fully participating in society and lies at the core of multigenerational cycles of poverty, poor health, low educational attainment, contributing to the enormous equity gap that exists in our country. Investing in adult literacy is absolutely critical to the strength of our nation, now and for generations to come.”³⁴ As noted herein, the hegemony have controlled content, access, and pedagogical methods via legislation and policy in public and in religious education thereby ensuring the maintenance of power, ill-informed support and perpetuation of settler colonial cultural and economic agendas. History, both here and abroad, has revealed devastating consequences of an ill-informed populace and unchecked power. Pastors and teachers who did not support the Third Reich were arrested, killed or forced to relocate. More recently, the Central European University was forced out of Budapest into Vienna by the nation’s autocratic leader.³⁵

Despite dehumanization, denial of formal education, religious miseducation and sociopolitical disenfranchisement, these national ancestors leave a legacy worth emulating. They learned and taught others to read and write. They secured physical freedom on earth for themselves and others. They rejected the white man as God and created black folklore, the Invisible Institution, Negro Spirituals and the Black Church. They used humor, faith, bartering, African Spirituality, outright determination and absolute resistance to survive a country hostile to black presence since arriving on these shores in chains. Nevertheless, if we beware and gather to tell the stories like a family tradition, then we too can offer glean from their wisdom life-affirming and life-sustaining words to make sense of faith in a settler colony consumed as Dwight Hopkins says by an obsession with race that is deeply embedded in the concept of being human.³⁶ These national ancestors will come, like Moses and Elijah, to strengthen us for the journey.

³⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelnietzel/2020/09/09/low-literacy-levels-among-us-adults-could-be-costing-the-economy-22-trillion-a-year/?sh=66da25c24c90>

³⁵ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/soros-founded-university-opens-new-vienna-campus-after-hungary-forces-it-out/>

³⁶ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 118.

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Becoming Good Ancestors for People With Intellectual Disabilities: Accessible and Inclusive Futures in Theological Education

Abstract

Opportunities and challenges exist for religious and theological educators to create space in their curricula and pedagogies to more equitably welcome people with intellectual disabilities. This paper argues for expanding this welcome via greater accessibility and inclusion within theological education. Toward this end, this paper reviews recent scholarship that creatively addresses this topic, expands upon this work via the theory and practice of Universal Design for Learning, and draws upon this concept to provide further practical proposals for access and inclusion.

Introduction

In this essay, I suggest that one way to honor the call for a “bold co-imagining” within the Religious Education Association’s 2022 Annual Meeting, one way to broaden “the imagination of our collective voices” toward becoming good ancestors, is to (re)consider the ways we engage people with intellectual disabilities in theological and religious education. I argue for an expanded sense of accessibility and inclusivity within theological and religious education. This requires taking account of the insidious nature of ableism within academic settings. Theological and religious educators must attend to the possibility that ableism can upend our careful efforts to foster equity and inclusivity as it creates and maintains hegemonic able-bodied and able-minded normativities that constrict or foreclose the possibility of theological and religious education to people with intellectual disabilities. The principles and practices of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offer a powerful and practical resource to counteract ableism by centering access and inclusion as crucial pedagogical considerations. I consider practical proposals for the application of UDL that can serve to reinforce the resolve to challenge ableism and positively center intellectual variability within theology and religion classrooms.

The call to become good ancestors invites the grounding of this present essay in the work of ancestors who have gone before and opened access and inclusion for people with disabilities within the teaching and learning of religion and theology, those whom we hope to honor in our own work. For a Christian theology of disability, one of the pioneering ancestors is Nancy Eiesland and her groundbreaking *Disabled God* from 1994. There Eiesland wrote, “persons with disabilities must gain access to the social-symbolic life of the church, and the church must gain access to the social-symbolic lives of people with disabilities.”¹ To fail to create this “two-way access” is not only exclusionary and unjust, but leaves the church bereft and incomplete.² Teachers and scholars of religion and theology have Eiesland, and a host of ancestors who have

¹ Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberation Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 20.

² Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 20.

built fruitfully upon the foundation Eiesland laid, to turn to for inspiration and guidance in their own efforts to create accessible and inclusive curricula and pedagogical practices. In what follows, I provide some suggestions for fellow theologians and religious educators to situate their work among these ancestors by foregrounding attention to people with intellectual disabilities in their scholarship and teaching practice.

Challenging Ableism In Theological and Religious Education

Defining Ableism

Prejudice against people with disabilities exists in societies and cultures around the world. This ableism most certainly exists in the academy writ large, and far too often it shows up even in the scholarship and teaching of those of us who recognize a religious or theological mandate for ethical relationships and community. Fiona Kumari Campbell, a scholar of ableism, defines ableism as “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human.”³ Further, Kumari Campbell calls ableism the “ideological hypervaluation of ableness.”⁴ This corporeal standard and its hypervaluation of ableness leads inevitably to what Tobin Siebers similarly names as the “ideology of ability,” in which, amongst many other “ideas, narratives, myths, and stereotypes about disability” is a baseline belief that “the lesser the ability, the lesser the human being.”⁵

How has ableism infected the way we conduct theological and religious education? Particularly in a higher education setting, our curricula and pedagogical approaches might reflect the way “academia powerfully mandates able-bodiedness and able-mindedness, as well as other forms of social and communicative hyperability.”⁶ This notion is confirmed, in part, through a 2014 study by Naomi Annandale and Erik W. Carter in which they surveyed the way disability is addressed in theological schools in North America. Across 118 graduate programs accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), Annandale and Carter found that only 22.9% of those schools enrolled students with intellectual disabilities and only 5.9% employed people with intellectual disabilities.⁷ Relatedly, 46.9% of surveyed schools reported that accommodations were needed but had not yet been made, or only partially made, in “flexibility in class/curriculum requirements and practices.”⁸ While the figures uncovered by Annandale and Carter are not all attributable to ableist prejudice, it is nonetheless clear that there is much room for theological and religious education to grow toward a more robust sense of accessibility and inclusion for

³ Fiona Kumari Campbell, “Inciting Legal Fictions: 'Disability's' Date with Ontology and the Ableist Body of the Law,” *Griffith Law Review* 10 no. 1 (2001): 44.

⁴ Fiona Kumari Campbell, “Ability,” In *Keywords For Disability Studies*, edited by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 13.

⁵ Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 9-10.

⁶ Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 7.

⁷ Naomi H. Annandale and Erik W. Carter, “Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study,” *Theological Education* 48 no. 2 (2014): 91.

⁸ Annandale and Carter, “Disability and Theological Education,” 92.

people with intellectual disabilities and to provide a powerful countermand to ableist tendencies within higher education.

Ableism is an important place for me to begin an essay calling for greater access and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities in theological and religious education given that I am not someone who currently identifies as - or would likely be identified as - a person with intellectual disabilities. To be very clear, I'm not presuming to know or understand anyone's personal experience of ableist prejudice and oppression, and I am increasingly uncomfortable trying to make any statement about disability in my own work. Yet, I remain convinced that there is a valid place for a nondisabled scholar to work toward an opening for people with intellectual disabilities in theological and religious education (a point I will return to below). Ableism is perhaps the most appropriate starting place, then, because if I am completely honest, I'm as guilty as anyone of ableist mindsets and practices - or, at the very least, of unjustly benefitting from how I conform to cultural norms of intellectual and physical ability. So this paper is a part of the ongoing work of excavating and converting my own ableist theological and anthropological assumptions and to invite colleagues, especially those who also benefit from conforming to norms of hyperability and hyper-intellectualism, to work toward a more *anti*-ableist and inclusive approach to the scholarship and teaching of theology and religion.

Stating My Position Relative To Disability

My conviction that a non-disabled scholar might contribute to the conversation about accessibility and inclusion in theological and religious education is rooted in friendship. Simi Linton, a disability studies and educational theorist who works at the intersection of disability justice and the arts invites us to consider our relationship to disability and to state our position relative to disability.⁹ This is especially important, Linton notes, for scholars without disabilities who are writing on topics related to disability. It is critical that nondisabled scholars “pay particular attention to issues of their own identity, their own privilege as nondisabled people, and the relationship of these factors to their scholarship.”¹⁰ As I do this, I also note that many of my dearest friends and colleagues are people with intellectual disabilities with whom I have lived and worked alongside for several decades within the communities of L'Arche.

It's true that the lives and experiences of my friends might indeed reflect some of the aspects of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities definition of intellectual disability as a human difference marked by “significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior” as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills.¹¹ However, it must also be said that such a thin definition wildly misses the mark in describing the complex and unique humanity of each of my friends, a humanity no more or less whole than anyone else. But part of my friends' lived experiences are very real challenges they face in a culture that consistently manifests the “ideology of ability” that Siebers names, and persists in ableist prejudice and practice. However, I believe that if theological and religious educators could further open the “two-way access” called for by Eiesland, people with

⁹ Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 153

¹⁰ Linton, *Claiming Disability*, 152-153.

¹¹ “Defining Criteria for Intellectual Disability,” American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. <https://www.aaidd.org/intellectual-disability/definition>.

intellectual disabilities would contribute much to transforming our faith communities and cultures in highly positive ways.

This essay, then, is one articulation of my hope is to bring my friends along with me into the theological and religious education classroom - broadly construed - and to advocate alongside them for an ever-more meaningful embrace of learner variability within these spaces, and for a greater commitment to ensuring that disability and accessibility are not simply afterthoughts or specializations within the teaching and learning of theology and religion. I am particularly interested in how institutions of higher education that attend to theological and religious education, such as graduate programs, theologates, and seminaries, might take up this work and create more robust encounters and places for people with and without intellectual disabilities to teach, learn and research theology and religious education together.

Recent Scholarship Challenging Ableism in Theological and Religious Education

There has been a recent surge in interest in precisely this work of challenging ableist tendencies within theological and religious education and providing constructive counter-proposals. Among some of those proposals is a Spring 2021 special issue of the *Journal of Disability & Religion* (Vol. 25 no. 3) addressing the topic of “Disabling Theological Education.” The collection of articles there considers how “disabling” the theological curriculum and classroom is at the very least a practice of “acknowledging and addressing ableist biases and the ways they work to filter out disabled bodies and minds from theological institutions.”¹² Further, and in a more proactive and positive manner, disabling theological education also means “including the gifts, challenges, and perspectives of persons with disabilities in all areas of seminary life and allowing their embodiment and epistemological advantages to play a part in shaping theological formation.”¹³ The collection of articles serves as a set of thorough thought-starters for scholars, teachers, and practitioners hoping to resist ableism in their own work.

Additional articles in this special issue of the *Journal of Disability & Religion* provide nuance and depth to the concept of “disabling” theological and religious education, rounding out a necessary call to reconsider the manner in which we approach our curricula and pedagogies. Several contributions resonate particularly well with my hope to bring people with and without intellectual disability together in theological and religious education classrooms, including Erik Carter’s suggestions to approach how disability issues are drawn into ministerial formation with the intentionality required to make theological schools leaders in building more inclusive faith communities;¹⁴ fostering access and inclusion in theological schools through a careful audit of accessibility that is animated by weaving a disability justice framework with “a Christian theological framework of justice;”¹⁵ and an enlightening case study in how Princeton

¹² Benjamin T. Conner, “Special Issue Introduction: Disabling Theological Education.” *Journal of Disability & Religion* 25 no. 3 (Spring 2021): 239, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2021.1895029>.

¹³ Conner, “Special Issue Introduction,” 239.

¹⁴ Erik W. Carter, “Equipped for Inclusion: Western Theological Seminary’s Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry.” *Journal of Disability & Religion* 25 no. 3 (Spring 2021): 261-278, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2021.1895022>.

¹⁵ Sarah Jean Barton, “Access and Disability Justice in Theological Education.” *Journal of Disability & Religion* 25 no. 3 (Spring 2021): 280, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2021.1895025>.

Theological Seminary resisted ableism by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities in a common theology course.¹⁶ The special issue also contains an article in which Sue A. Rozeboom reads John Calvin's theology of divine accommodation alongside the teaching and learning accommodations within the UDL framework. Rozeboom concludes that "the invitation to the Church, then, is, not to 'invent' a Universal Design for Worship, but instead, at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to accommodate further the accommodating provisions God has already set forth."¹⁷ Rozeboom opens one potential avenue toward discerning a theological mandate for incorporating UDL.

In a similar vein to the *Journal of Disability & Religion* special issue, the *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* collected several articles in the "Forums" section of its March 2021 (Vol. 2 no. 1) publication that address the teaching and learning of theology and religion through a disability hermeneutic. The thread of UDL runs through the articles. For instance, Emily O. Gravett explores how UDL can help professors to take careful stock of - and attempt to mitigate - the barriers that the assignment of an ethnographic site visit in a religion course might present to students with disabilities.¹⁸ Another article in the series urges both faculty and administrators in the context of Catholic higher education to attend to the fact that there is a wide variability in the cognitive abilities of students on any given campus already.¹⁹ The same article also expands the "learning" ambit of UDL by noting that inclusive pedagogy in a Catholic context can touch upon "spiritual, intellectual, and personal formation," all with a goal of "uplifting a person or community of persons."²⁰ Another article in this series explores a case study of a pastoral care and ethics course at Duke Divinity School in which the author and a colleague recruited a number of local residents with intellectual disabilities to take the course alongside degree-seeking students in the divinity school.²¹ This case study will be explored in more detail below as a potentially replicable practical application of UDL for theological and religious educators.

Disability Addressed in the Journal Religious Education

While the two series of articles touched upon here are only a fraction of the work currently being done at the intersection of theology and disability, they are significant for their shared emphasis on the teaching and learning of theology and religion across ability variability.

¹⁶ Erin Raffety and Stuart Carroll, "From Charity to Classroom Co-Learning: Togetherness in the Spirit as a Model for Experiential Education with People with Disabilities." *Journal of Disability & Religion* 25 no.3 (Spring 2021): 312-328, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2021.1895027>.

¹⁷ Sue A. Rozeboom, "From Universal Design for Learning to Universal Design for Communion with the Living God." *Journal of Disability & Religion* 25 no. 3 (Spring 2021): 339, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2021.1895024>.

¹⁸ Emily O. Gravett, "Revisiting Site Visits through the Lens of Disability Studies." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 2 no. 1 (March 2021): 3-13. <https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v2i1.1608>.

¹⁹ Alicia L. Brienza and Devon Sprague, "The Spirit of Inclusion: Facilitating Dialogue and Developing Strategies for Inclusion in Catholic Higher Education." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 2 no. 1 (March 2021): 15, <https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v2i1.1943>.

²⁰ Brienza and Sprague, "The Spirit of Inclusion," 19.

²¹ Sarah Jean Barton, "Expanding the Theological Classroom: People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities as Theological Learners." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 2 no. 1 (March 2021): 31-48, <https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v2i1.1704>.

Additionally, many of these recent articles directly address intellectual variability in the theological and religious education classroom and take up aspects of UDL in their response to that variability. One question that remains for members of the REA, perhaps, is to what extent the guild's peer-reviewed journal, *Religious Education*, addresses disability. A survey of the past fifteen years reveals that the theological and religious education of people with disabilities is an issue that appears only infrequently in the pages of that journal. This does not imply that members of the REA or contributors and readers of its journal are not proactively and effectively engaging with this issue in their own research and pedagogical practice. Indeed, disability has been a through-line of sorts in many articles in *Religious Education*, if often named in the background. It appears where authors have explored various facets of human difference and diversity and worked at exposing and resisting hegemonic normativities in ways that parallel work done by disability scholars and activists. It is also important to note that there are likely members of the REA, as well as contributors and readers of its journal, whose own lived experience of disability informs their work toward more accessibility and inclusivity. Additionally, the proceedings of the REA's annual meeting have also included plenaries and presentations addressing the theological and religious education of people with disabilities.²² However, explicit attention to the lives and experience of people with intellectual disabilities in theological or religious education is minimal in the survey-sample of the journal.

A sampling of articles in the pages of *Religious Education* since 2007 include a call by Eric J. Kyle to reframe the practices, definitions, and symbolic expressions we utilize in religious education in light of the lived experiences of people with disabilities.²³ An article by Chris J. Antal and Kathy Winings addresses the disabilities that are acquired by veterans, particularly noting the role of religious educators in creating the space for veterans to heal from moral injury.²⁴ The spiritual lives of teachers in special education settings with students with emotional disturbances is the subject of a 2016 article by Elizabeth Madson Ankeny and Matthew Maruggi. This article also touches on the lives of the students with emotional disturbances in the study, noting how attending to the spirituality of both the teachers and students can be supported through the "cultivation of liminality, where structure is suspended and hierarchies are leveled. These are threshold moments, intentionally created to include the learning outcomes of humankindness and solidarity."²⁵ In each of these articles, the notion of increased access and inclusion appears in one form or another as a crucial aspect of theological and religious education. Two book reviews addressing accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities

²² For instance, Thomas Reynold's portion of a plenary session in 2017: <https://religiouseducation.net/resources/videos> (30:04-46:52)

²³ Erik J. Kyle, "Re-Envisioning Religious Education in Light of Persons with 'Disabilities'." *Religious Education* 108 no. 5 (2013): 515-528, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2013.835649>.

²⁴ Chris J. Antal and Kathy Winings. "Moral Injury, Soul Repair, and Creating a Place for Grace." *Religious Education* 110 no. 4 (2015): 382-394, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2015.1063962>.

²⁵ Elizabeth Madson Ankeny and Matthew Maruggi, "Cultivating Liminal Spaces: The Spiritual Lives and Classrooms of Teachers of Students with Emotional Disturbance." *Religious Education* 112 no. 4 (2017): 392, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2016.1152453>.

also appeared in the journal over the fifteen year period I surveyed and deserve note here as well.²⁶

Focusing on theological and religious education for and with people with intellectual disabilities further narrows the selection of articles in *Religious Education*. In an article from 2019, Talitha Cooreman-Guittin writes from the perspective of religious education in France and provides a practical theological approach to interpreting the Bible. Cooreman-Guittin argues for a “capacitating” reading of biblical texts in which a person with disabilities can approach God via the text “with all she/he is, wholly and fully,” in a recognition that “vulner-ability is an ability too.”²⁷ Cooreman-Guittin’s article has broader application than solely religious education of people with intellectual disability, but the article also explicitly notes how this work can be particularly helpful in opening space for people with intellectual disabilities. I also include my own two contributions to *Religious Education* in this part of the survey. In articles I authored in 2018 and 2019 I brought the wisdom of the communities of L’Arche, and the members of those communities with intellectual disabilities, to investigations of how to do this work not on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities, but in a way that opened space for their gifts to inform the teaching and learning of theology and religion as well.²⁸

This brief review of recent scholarship on disability within theological and religious education demonstrates a hopeful development and an encouragement to members of REA to continue their own inquiries into this field. Despite this recent progress, the impacts of ableism on theological and religious education still poses important questions. Particularly in foregrounding the lives and experiences of people with intellectual disabilities, theological and religious educators must continue to ask how we can teach in a manner different from the hyper-rational/hyper-cognitive, in a manner that moves us away from the mandated hyperability noted by Jay Timothy Dolmage above as a hallmark of higher education. This question becomes a theological imperative when we profess to teach from and for a religiously-inspired ethic wherein both those with and without intellectual disabilities are afforded the same intrinsic human value and the same offer of accommodation from God. I contend that taking up the principles and practices of UDL is one way theological and religious educators can begin to address this imperative.

²⁶ Thom Bower, Review of *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations*. By Erik W. Carter. *Religious Education* 103 no. 4 (2008): 494-495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080802250818>.

César “CJ” Baldelomar, Review of *Inclusive Religious Education: International Perspectives*. Edited by Bert Roebben and Katharina Kammeyer. *Religious Education* 115 no. 4 (2020): 452-453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2020.1737774>.

²⁷ Talitha Cooreman-Guittin, “Growing in Humanity: On Vulnerability, Capacitation, and Encounter in Religious Education: A Christian Practical Theological Approach.” *Religious Education* 114 no. 2 (2019): 150, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1560582>.

²⁸ Thomas N. Murphy, “Learning compassion through practices of encounter in l’Arche.” *Religious Education* 113 no. 3 (2018): 339-347, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1457296>. Thomas N. Murphy, “Vulnerability and Community: Unprecedented Itineraries Beyond the Buffered Self.” *Religious Education* 114 no. 3 (2019): 303-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2019.1608657>.

Universal Design for Learning

Principles and Practices of UDL

The principles and practices of Universal Design for Learning can help theological and religious educators center intellectual variability, access and inclusion as crucial pedagogical considerations. Additionally, the emphasis within UDL on flexibility - in how information is presented, how students demonstrate learning and knowledge, and how students engage in the teaching/learning environment - can open new inclusive ground in our curricula and pedagogies. The fundamental truth at the heart of UDL is simply that “variance across individuals is the *norm*, not the exception ... therefore, the curriculum should be adaptable to individual differences rather than the other way around.”²⁹ There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to teaching and learning. Or, to put it another way, “traditional curricula have the ‘disability,’ because they only work for certain learners.”³⁰ This belief that curricula and pedagogy need to be adjusted for learners, not the other way around, provides a lodestar for accessible, inclusive and truly humanizing theological and religious education.

The capacity of UDL to open up the learning environment lies in both its theoretical convictions that diversity is the human norm and variability in learning is predictable, as well as within its three grounding practical principles. According to these principles, curricula and learning environments must provide (1) multiple means of *engagement* to “stimulate interest and motivation for learning,” to provide flexibility in *why* students are learning something; (2) it must provide multiple means of *representation* to “present information and content in different ways,” providing flexibility in *what* students are learning; and (3) multiple means of *action and expression* must be provided to “differentiate the ways that students can express what they know,” thus providing flexibility around *how* students learn.³¹ In each case, the UDL principles aim toward flexibility and creating access for the broadest spectrum of learners possible.

Thinking through an example helps to demonstrate the application of UDL in practical terms. For instance, one very basic starting point for a more inclusive lesson or learning module, and one that many teachers likely already utilize, is to provide a visual outline or typed notes to supplement a lecture. This is practicing the UDL principle of providing multiple means of representation (both verbal and written) and allows for multiple options for perception of what is being taught/learned. A student who cannot hear will still have access to the lecture via the notes provided. And, the inverse is also true. A student who cannot read the notes will have access to the lecture as they listen to it. Or, thinking about a UDL perspective on building the interest and motivation of students (the “why” of learning), a teacher might consider the role of feedback in increasing accessibility and inclusivity. Rather than confining assessment to a mid-term/final structure, a UDL approach would call for multiple means of engagement with course material. One way to do this is providing more frequent feedback and corrective opportunities, including “mastery-oriented feedback ... rather than a fixed notion of performance or compliance.”³² These brief examples and the more in-depth discussion below on practical application of UDL all

²⁹ Tracey E. Hall, Anne Meyer, and David H. Rose, *Universal Design for Learning in the Classroom: Practical Applications* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 4.

³⁰ Hall, Meyer, Rose, *Universal Design for Learning*, 4.

³¹ “The UDL Guidelines,” CAST. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

³² “The UDL Guidelines, Checkpoint 8.4” CAST. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

serve to demonstrate the enhanced access that is at the heart of UDL's potential to "transfer the burden of adjustment from students to the materials and methods they encounter in the classroom."³³

This transferal of the "burden of adjustment" from student/learner to material and method is a fundamentally crucial mindset for accessible and inclusive theological and religious education. There is the obvious and immediate benefit of opening accessibility and fostering inclusivity in a particular classroom engagement or assignment, but there is a deeper upending of a power differential that can help theological and religious educators set their teaching into a larger drive toward a more just and equitable world. As the burden of adjustment shifts and access opens up, the curriculum loses some of its capacity to exclude or define a learner as incapable or inadequate. As this power shifts, learners are now in the position to define the pedagogical material and methods and the curriculum as "successful" or "rigorous" when it proves that it can provide "genuine learning opportunities for all" and that it is responsive enough "to adjust to the needs and interests of all."³⁴ If done well and consistently, a UDL approach to theological and religious education will be a move toward shaping a community of learners for the church and world that is less and less defined by the barriers built along an exclusionary abled/disabled binary. It can make theological and religious education a means to Eiesland's call for "two-way access" noted above.

Cautions About UDL

While UDL has proven a powerful tool to build access and inclusion into learning environments, it is not without valid critique. For instance, writing on Universal Design (UD) in the built environment, Aimi Hamraie has noted that the rhetoric of universal benefit common to both proponents of UD in the built environment and proponents of UDL can be problematic. The argument that UDL raises the level for all students with or without disabilities dilutes the focus on the particularity of the experience or needs of people with disabilities. Hamraie notes, "terms such as 'everyone' give the impression that legible belonging in a population is unmediated by historical, political, or social ways of knowing."³⁵ Although proponents of UDL rightfully contend that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching and learning is not helpful, there is still a real possibility that it can lead to claims about access and inclusion that reinforce a "disability-neutral discourse" that reinforces "imperatives for normalization and assimilation."³⁶ In other words, this mindset leads to the notion that people with disabilities can only receive the benefits of universal design because it also benefits 'everyone' – the very same 'everyone' who has continually resisted including people with disabilities within its scope.

Another caution related to UDL, according to Dolmage, is that it could simply become a "neoliberal buzzword."³⁷ Dolmage notes that this is a particularly acute danger in higher

³³ Anne Meyer, David H. Rose, and David T. Gordon, *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice* (Wakefield, MA : CAST Professional Publishing, 2014), 128.

³⁴ Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*, 128.

³⁵ Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 11.

³⁶ Hamraie, *Building Access*, 12.

³⁷ Dolmage, *Academic Ableism*, 141.

education where UDL could easily become nothing more than a marketing tool that masks a system in which people with disabilities are forced to manage their own academic access while the university escapes responsibility to its students with disabilities under the guise of universally designed campuses and courses.³⁸ In this way, UDL becomes a tool of exclusion or injustice as a hollow or false promise of inclusion. As both Hamraie and Dolmage make clear, UDL is not a panacea or a means to break down all barriers that exclude people with intellectual disabilities from learning communities. However, when taken up in good faith, UDL can challenge ableist mindsets and prompt real action on behalf of accessibility and inclusion. It is to some of those practical suggestions that I now turn.

Practical Application of UDL To Teaching Theology and Religion

Overcoming some of the astute critiques of UDL noted just above and creating a learning community that can resist ableism requires a deliberate and ongoing approach to creating access and inclusion. Just as UDL proposes there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching and learning, it is important to note that access is not a standardized or invariable practice either, but rather more of a creative and iterative process. I offer these suggestions for the application of the principles and practices of UDL not in a directive manner, but more as generative ideas and encouragement to those teaching theology and religious education to endeavor toward ever more access and inclusion in their own curricula and pedagogical practices. I also offer them somewhat in order as a range from the more basic application to the more intensive use of UDL, recognizing that theological and religious educators are likely spread across that range in their own understanding and application of UDL and inclusive pedagogies.

UDL And A Plus-One Approach

One concept that I’ve found most easy to adopt in my own practice of trying to create access in teaching and learning environments is what Thomas J. Tobin and Kirsten T. Behling call a “plus-one approach” to UDL. Tobin and Behling invite teachers to consider how they can structure their courses with student learning variability in mind and provide “just one more way that you can help keep learners on task, just one more way that you could give them information, just one more way that they could demonstrate their skills.”³⁹ This plus-one approach maps onto the UDL guidelines of providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression, encouraging educators to add one more way in each of these spheres. I find this approach helpful because it balances any tendency to approach access as a daunting all-or-nothing concept. It also provides an impetus to make access and inclusion an ongoing process by continually adjusting course material and teaching and learning activities. The plus-one approach is also helpful because it can be readily applied across teaching and learning activities from syllabus creation through final course assessments and everything in between.

UDL And Accessible Classrooms

If adopting the plus-one approach is perhaps something that every educator can commit to in their own way, there are yet other means to apply UDL to the teaching and learning of

³⁸ Dolmage, *Academic Ableism*, 140.

³⁹ Thomas J Tobin and Kirsten T. Behling, *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone: Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2018), 134.

theology and religion in even more expansive ways. The examples noted above of courses at Duke Divinity School and Princeton Theological Seminary draw on the principles and practices of UDL to build learning communities across ability variability in particularly deliberate ways. In both cases, UDL is utilized to assess and remove barriers to people with intellectual disabilities in a graduate-level theological course, thus opening space for people with intellectual disabilities to be full and active participants in those courses.

The Duke Divinity School course that serves as a case study in Sarah Jean Barton's 2021 paper in the *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* is perhaps the more explicit use of UDL of the two examples. In a 2018 Christian ethics course that addressed pastoral care and disability, Barton and faculty colleague Warren Kinghorn set out to create a learning community comprised of Duke Divinity graduate students who were both disabled and non-disabled and local community members with intellectual disabilities, or emotional regulation, or social-relational difficulties, all of whom were affiliated with a local community center.

Barton writes of how the course design was guided by the principles of UDL, including how it "laid out clear roadmaps and goals for each of these course sessions, delivered material in interactive and multimodal avenues, allowed ample break times throughout course sessions, solicited real-time feedback on course content, format, and delivery, and finally, maintained a classroom with maximal space for free movement with clear and accessible exits."⁴⁰ Additionally, the participants in the course sat in a circle to allow for multiple means of representation, including: "maximal access to visual and auditory information and modes of engagement,"⁴¹ each course meeting "included orienting questions to assist students who benefited from increased structure and the ability to work ahead," and a variety of pedagogical approaches were utilized, such as "posting short lectures for access before course meetings, in-class engagement of audiovisual materials, large and small group reflections, communal close-reading exercises, and collaborative project development."⁴² The instructors also provided transcripts of all auditory course materials and all written course material for students to engage with on their own time and devices, again providing multiple means of representation of course content and multiple means for students to engage with that content.⁴³ Finally, the final project for the course provided multiple means for expression and action of what students had learned via "multimodal performances of shared preaching, original song composition and singing, storytelling, presentations of original visual art, as well as dramatic readings and enactments of Scripture."⁴⁴

The example of the Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS) course relies on principles and practices of UDL no less so than the Duke Divinity course, even if it's not as explicitly stated. In this example, a course in "Disability and Christian Ministry" brought together students from PTS with "Career and Community Studies students" with intellectual disabilities from the nearby The

⁴⁰ Sarah Jean Barton, "Expanding the Theological Classroom: People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities as Theological Learners." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 2 no. 1 (March 2021): 38, <https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v2i1.1704>.

⁴¹ Barton, "Expanding the Theological Classroom," 39.

⁴² Barton, "Expanding the Theological Classroom," 39-40.

⁴³ Barton, "Expanding the Theological Classroom," 39-40.

⁴⁴ Barton, "Expanding the Theological Classroom," 40.

College of New Jersey.⁴⁵ A clear link to the principles and practices of UDL is evident in the way the course designers describe a “dynamic, experiential, and collaborative learning process [that] encouraged students to take greater shared responsibility for their learning in the classroom.”⁴⁶ Additionally, the co-professors for the collaborative course who also co-wrote the case study note how an inclusive classroom “requires supportive mentoring and academic coaching, but it also requires undoing structures of prejudice that have made that classroom inaccessible or even off limits in the first place.”⁴⁷ Here, a link to the UDL ethos of removing barriers is clearly evident as well as a concurrent attitudinal shift strengthened by practicing UDL. Through increased access and inclusion, the creation of collaborative teaching and learning across ability difference is more likely to happen. The PTS case study makes clear that when this occurs, teachers and students are better prepared to identify and undo the ableist structures of hyper-intellectualism that can too often mark theological and religious education.

UDL And Inclusive Co-Researching

As a final instance of practical application, and perhaps the most intensive along my suggested scale, UDL can serve to prompt and support our research in the direction of a participatory research model in which people with and without intellectual disabilities work together to identify research topics and methods within the scholarship of theology and religion. In this regard, a helpful example is a participatory research project in which researchers John Swinton and Elaine Powrie at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland teamed up with a group of people with intellectual disabilities, care providers, and family members of people with intellectual disabilities to design a study on the spiritual lives of people with intellectual and learning disabilities. Together, the varied-ability research group uncovered a number of key themes and theological questions, particularly around the relationship of hospitality and friendship to the spiritual lives of people with intellectual disabilities.⁴⁸

While the results of this study pose important questions and challenges to the study of theology and religion, perhaps most germane to fostering accessible and inclusive theological and religious education is the methodological approach of this study. In particular, the manner in which the principles and practices of UDL show up in this methodology provides a helpful example for study and emulation. Here, the primary expression of UDL is the removal of barriers to people with intellectual disabilities so that they can be *subjects* of research and *co-researchers*, rather than *objects*.⁴⁹ Toward this end, the research team designed its work “to recognize the possibility of ... hidden power dynamics and to enable people with learning disabilities to retain their autonomy and power and to gain the opportunity of articulating their experiences clearly and openly with as little cultural bias as possible.”⁵⁰

The methodology for this group to work together involved an initial advisory group of people with and without disabilities to help guide the goals and objectives of the study. The advisory group incorporated UDL into their meeting in such a way that “the information

⁴⁵ Raffety and Carroll, “From Charity to Classroom Co-Learning,” 314.

⁴⁶ Raffety and Carroll, “From Charity to Classroom Co-Learning,” 314-315.

⁴⁷ Raffety and Carroll, “From Charity to Classroom Co-Learning,” 326.

⁴⁸ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research: Second Edition* (London: SCM Press, 2016), 226.

⁴⁹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 212.

⁵⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 217.

presented and the ideas and feedback that were collected were ... accessible to those within the group who had learning disabilities.”⁵¹ When it came time to collect data for the study, interviews with people with intellectual disabilities were conducted with flexibility of length depending on “people’s concentration spans and willingness to engage in extended conversation,” sometimes necessitating more than one interview meeting to ensure that participant’s “perspective could be fully grasped, understood and properly communicated.”⁵² These interviews were also conducted using multiple means of representation and multiple means of action and expression wherein participants utilized “verbal and non-verbal modes of communication” such as “pictures, symbols, coloured pens and paper” as well as “singing, drawing, writing or just looking at pictures.”⁵³ And, finally, the impact of such inclusive methods is evident in the shifting attitudes and understanding of the researchers. Swinton and Mowat note that within this accessible and inclusive methodology “the participants deeply challenged the way that research should be done and precisely what researchers should take seriously as meaningful and valid data.”⁵⁴

Conclusion

Perhaps this essay and its emphasis on practical application of UDL has appeared less a text in theological or religious education and more like something a university’s student affairs office or disability services might create, or something you might come across from your institution’s center for teaching excellence. However, it is precisely the dearth of attention to the teaching and learning of people with intellectual disabilities in the fields of theological and religious education, particularly within higher education settings, that warrants this contribution to REA’s annual meeting. In the end, my hope is that this essay contributes to building a community of scholars, teachers, practitioners, and people with intellectual disabilities who want to find a suitable methodology to work together on shared goals of increasing accessibility and inclusivity for people with intellectual disabilities, and benefitting from their contributions within the teaching and learning of theology and religion. This would truly be one powerful way toward *becoming good ancestors*.

⁵¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 218.

⁵² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 220.

⁵³ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 221-222.

⁵⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 222.

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Theological Education as an Ethical Practice

Abstract: Christian theological education should be concerned with forming persons towards having ethical relationships. This paper engages the influence of postmodern thought on the theological works of Mayra Rivera and David Tracy that tackle the ethical concern given the plurality of religions and oppressive systems in society. These works call for a liberating and decolonizing pedagogy engaged in interreligious and intercultural dialogue and spiritual practices, such as contemplation, in speaking about and encountering the Absolute Infinite that orients us towards responding to the Other.

To propose an ethical practice of theological education, this first section of this paper explores how postmodern philosophers Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida conceive of ethical relations and how they have served as critical interlocutors for theologians Mayra Rivera and David Tracy in their works that discuss the ethical response in light of cultural and religious diversity and marginalization in society. In the second section, I place these theological developments in conversation with the vision of a liberating and decolonizing pedagogy seen in the works of Paulo Freire and Christine Hong to argue that practicing an ethical practice of Christian theological education engages in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The third section further addresses the need to dispose persons for dialogue by turning to the spiritual practice of contemplation in the Carmelite tradition that orients us towards responding to the Other.

I. The ethical turn of postmodern theology

Emmanuel Lévinas's assertion that "ethics is first philosophy" and ethics understood "as a relation of infinite responsibility to the other person" has been influential in the ethical turn in the humanities and the social sciences.¹ This concern for ethics has also made waves in theology as it engages postmodern thought. Lévinas conceives the ethical relation with the other as a "face-to-face relation."² The "face" is how I recognize the other as irreducibly other.³ Lévinas speaks of "the transcendence on the face of the Other."⁴ Lévinas critiques ontology as it "reduces the other to the same" through comprehension or understanding.⁵ We see this in the act of totalizing the other through categories and in doing so commits violence by rejecting the radical alterity of the other. To render the other faceless, as seen in historical atrocities such as the Holocaust, is, as Simon Critchley writes, the "failure to acknowledge the humanity of the other."⁶ An ethical relation with the other is not one of contemplating on or comprehending the other but one of

¹ Simon Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lévinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5–8.

² Critchley, 8.

³ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 50.

⁴ Lévinas, 24–25.

⁵ Lévinas, 42.

⁶ Critchley, "Introduction," 13.

conversing with the other, that is, I am responding to the presence of the other.⁷ Lévinas writes, “Conversation, from the very fact that it maintains the distance between me and the Other, the radical separation asserted in transcendence which prevents the reconstitution of totality, cannot renounce the egoism of its existence; but the very fact of being in a conversation consists in recognizing in the Other a right over this egoism, and hence in justifying oneself.”⁸

The face of the other obliges us and demands a response from us.⁹ This assertion challenges the notion of freedom embedded in Heideggerian ontology, which Lévinas critiques for presenting “the primacy of freedom over ethics” and where freedom is understood as “maintain[ing] oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other to ensure the autarchy of an I.”¹⁰ The underlying anthropology in this ontology is an independent sense of self that is developed apart from one’s relationships. For Lévinas, ethics is precisely the face of the other challenging my spontaneity.¹¹ The prophetic word “Here I am” is the called for response to the epiphany of the face.¹² The exercise of one’s freedom is not impeded by the other’s imposition in their destitution; instead freedom flourishes in one’s goodness, the desire for the Infinite in the other.¹³ The privilege of the other is moderated by the call to respond to others and therefore to be responsible for the responsibility of the other.¹⁴ Here lies the justice that we seek to foster in society. Though Lévinas has been criticized for being unable to provide a concrete set of moral norms or theories for the political realm, the irreducible ethical demands governing interpersonal relations that he proposed serve as a linchpin of any theory of justice.¹⁵

Lévinas’s conception of ethical demands that govern interpersonal and social relations has influenced theology. Mayra Rivera writes, “If God is to be found in the Other, in ‘the presence of the untouchables,’ if God links us to the Other and embraces the very otherness of the Other, ethics becomes a central concern of theology. Theology shall help us develop the habits of the mind that will prepare us for the coming of the Other. It shall call us to transform our bodies so that they become capable of embracing without grasping . . .”¹⁶ While Lévinas asserts that ethics entails “a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality,”¹⁷ Rivera does not rely on radical separation nor exteriority to maintain difference. Rivera modifies Lévinas’s understanding of transcendence to say, “Transcendence designates a relation with a reality irreducibly different from my own reality without this difference destroying this relation and without the relation destroying this difference.”¹⁸ For Rivera one can touch the other without totalizing the other and, thus, one’s identity and subjectivity “is produced in relation to the transcendence of the other.”¹⁹ As a corollary of this understanding of ethical relation, Rivera

⁷ Critchley, 12.

⁸ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 40.

⁹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 97.

¹⁰ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 45–46.

¹¹ Lévinas, 43.

¹² Lévinas, 213.

¹³ Lévinas, 50; Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, 92.

¹⁴ Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, 90, 96.

¹⁵ Critchley, “Introduction,” 24–28.

¹⁶ Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 138.

¹⁷ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 41.

¹⁸ Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God*, 82.

¹⁹ Rivera, 82.

explores “the sociopolitical significance of otherness” by focusing on our relationships with those othered and oppressed in society.²⁰

Rivera opts to replace the “face” with the “flesh” of the other to pertain to the “incarnate transcendence” of persons, which is characterized not only by the dynamic of obligation but also by wonder in desiring the other.²¹ Rivera questions the patriarchal nature of Lévinas’s notion of insatiable desire for the other as “metaphysical desires [that] is strictly opposed to the needs of the body” and the judgment of sexual love as an act of totalizing the other and as such does not belong to ethical relations.²² As feminists of color have pointed out, sexuality and intimacy are part of what it means to be embodied humans and our discourse on these aspects of the human experience have interpersonal but also social and political implications.²³ Rivera asserts, “the encounter between bodies opens up a more complex spatio-temporality and a richer ground for this model of relational transcendence. . . . The multiple relations (and their markers) that constitute the person are of particular interest for feminists of color, as our experiences of racial/ethnic marginalization are inextricable from our experiences of the body.”²⁴ To encounter others in the flesh, that is to touch without grasping their totality, opens up more possibilities for welcoming and being present to the other, particularly the wounded and marginalized bodies who struggle to have a voice in most discourses in society. Consequently, this turn to the flesh of the other leads to greater awareness of the social and material experience of the other and imaginative possibilities towards responding to the concrete demands of the irreducible relation with the other. For Rivera, to touch the transcendence of another in an interpersonal relationship necessarily opens us to a being in touch with the multitude in the cosmos.²⁵ Through this interhuman transcendence, we experience the transcendence of God, not as distant but that which is simultaneously immanent.²⁶ The anthropology underpinning Rivera’s proposed “incarnate transcendence” of persons is one of the person being inherently in relations with others without reducing nor subsuming them and being in relation with God in and through these relationships.

The ethical turn of postmodernity in philosophy and theology offers both challenges and life-giving possibilities for Christian theology. Amidst this turn, Tracy describes the dual task of theology to draw from the particularity of Christianity and to speak of its public character by speaking of theological classics inherited from traditions as “frag-events.”²⁷ Tracy explains that frag-events “negatively shatter or fragment all totalities, even as they are positively open to Infinity. Fragments, therefore, can play an important role in a world still largely trapped in oppressive economic, social, political, and even cultural (including religious) totality systems that oppress whole peoples—especially the poor in all societies. . . . [T]hey simultaneously open one to difference and otherness.”²⁸ Tracy proposes two key frag-events, namely, “classical responses to suffering” and “the category of Infinity.”²⁹ For Christian theology to attend to the

²⁰ Rivera, 59.

²¹ Rivera, 83, 97.

²² Rivera, 85–88.

²³ Rivera, 95.

²⁴ Rivera, 94–95.

²⁵ Rivera, 97.

²⁶ Rivera, 135–37.

²⁷ David Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, vol. 1, Selected Essays (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 14–15.

²⁸ Tracy, 1:2.

²⁹ Tracy, 1:9.

ethical demands of relations requires engaging both these frag-events and how they are challenged or enriched by the experiences of marginalized bodies, the suffering of the innocent.³⁰

Due to the plenitude of interpretations arising from religion and how it has historically participated or perpetuated the violence of totalizing the other, it calls for employing both hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval in theology, particularly in approaching the classics and norms of tradition.³¹ The hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval applies Jacques Derrida's practice of deconstruction.³² Deconstruction rests on recognizing that all concepts find themselves within the chain of signification in relation to other concepts.³³ Thus, meaning is always deferred and never totally grasped.³⁴ Derrida's analysis of binary opposites in language that he refers to as "the dangerous supplement," which functions to produce exclusion and hierarchy among beings, highlights the ethical implication of deconstruction.³⁵ We can draw parallels between deconstruction and negative theology since both recognize the slippage in naming that refers to the inability to totalize and completely grasp the other, where the latter is directed towards God while the former includes all that is, all of reality.³⁶ Though Derrida distances himself from negative theology as he critiques it for assigning God as the transcendental signifier, which is located outside the chain, John Caputo argues for the importance of deconstruction for theology as it "saves negative theology from closure."³⁷ For Caputo, the two share a similar passion: "Like deconstruction itself, this voice of negative theology has to do with an affirmation, a desire, a passion for the possibility of this impossibility."³⁸ This hermeneutics of retrieval and suspicion, which employs deconstruction, will inevitably open the tradition to multiple interpretations that should be encouraged due to an awareness that every interpretation is but a fragment. However, the practice of this hermeneutics should not devolve into mere tolerance; instead, it should be situated in the context of, as Tracy argues, "a community of inquiry and commitment" that seeks "to work out the most relatively adequate, mutually critical correlations between Christian message and contemporary experience."³⁹

Theological education as a space to do and learn theology should be committed to fostering a learning community that responds to the ethical demand characterizing postmodern thought. The concept of fragments and hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval applied to the classics of the Christian tradition opens us to responding to the irreducible other, whether the other belongs to this tradition or not, and to encountering the other flesh to flesh. To encounter the other in the flesh entails recognizing that bodies are marked by socio-political relations and that we are called to pay closer attention to broken and marginalized bodies. This listening to

³⁰ See: Tracy, 1:158–59.

³¹ Tracy, 1:132–36, 159.

³² Tracy, 1:177.

³³ Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 11.

³⁴ Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:177.

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Corrected Edition (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 141–64; Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:178–80.

³⁶ Mary-Jane Rubenstein, "Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology after Ontotheology," *Modern Theology* 19, no. 3 (2003): 388, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00228>.

³⁷ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, Religion without Religion (Indiana University Press, 1997), 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2005rjr.13>.

³⁸ Caputo, 51.

³⁹ Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:141–43.

inform and refine our interpretation of Christian tradition can happen through engaging in dialogue.

II. Theological education as a space for interreligious and intercultural dialogue

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue is one kind of dialogue that is crucial for Christian theological education. This ethical call is particularly urgent in light of, what Christine Hong identifies “a crisis of conscience” as it faces its collaboration with “white supremacist, settler-colonial, and Christian hegemonic histories and practices.”⁴⁰ Enrique Dussel traces the historical development of Christendom, a triumphant Christianity that “became the hegemony of the empire.”⁴¹ According to Dussel, “From the fourth century to the beginning of the seventeenth century, Christendom fetishistically replaced the philosophical and theological foundations of the Hellenistic-Roman Empire. . . . [This Christendom gradually spread to become the Latino-Germanic Christendom, around the 11th century, and was succeeded by a colonial Christendom that dominated] the oppressed colonies [beginning in the Americas] in the name of the gospel of the Crucified One . . . It crucified the indigenous in the name of the one who was crucified.”⁴² Today, despite the establishment of the sovereignty of countries that were historically colonies, coloniality pervades our global reality. Nelson Maldonado-Torres defines “coloniality” as “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism.”⁴³ The history of colonialism and the ongoing coloniality reflects how culture and religion are intertwined. Hong asserts, “Culture is and can be what flourishes between those intersections of life with all its identities, nationalities, ethnicities, beliefs, embodiments of religion and spiritualities, and everything else that makes us who we are.”⁴⁴ The ethical practice of theological education entails recognizing how Christianity has been dominated by hegemonic cultures to uncover how it can be more liberating, and how it can resist totalizing every other. As such, it needs to practice the hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval.

This history of hegemonic Christianity calls for the decolonization of theology and, similarly, theological education. Educators in Christian theology worldwide should heed this call considering how this ideology is intertwined with neoliberal capitalism as the dominant economic system experienced through globalization.⁴⁵ The status quo and the systems that perpetuate it will continue to oppress and objectify people if we do not recognize the call and the possibility of changing it. The dominant banking model of education contributes to maintaining the status quo as it conceives of learning as unidirectional, where the expert deposits knowledge to the learner, and since the expert is seen as the sole source of knowledge, learners are

⁴⁰ Christine J. Hong, *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 1.

⁴¹ Enrique Dussel, “Epistemological Decolonization of Theology: Revisiting the Theology and Social Vision of Shoki Coe,” in *Wrestling with God in Context*, ed. M. P. Joseph, Po Ho Huang, and Victor Hsu (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media; Fortress Press, 2018), 49.

⁴² Dussel, 49–53.

⁴³ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contribution to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–23 (2007): 243, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>.

⁴⁴ Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 35.

⁴⁵ See: Antonia Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315560779>.

effectively asked to disengage from their social and material reality to learn in this model.⁴⁶ This model has the underlying assumption that the expert has the privilege of teaching the truth about the Absolute Infinite, which is in itself an act of totalizing or reducing the Infinite. It also promotes a notion of learning as a solitary and individualistic endeavor undertaken by the individual learner as opposed to doing so as members of a learning community. This kind of learning is consistent with the self-sufficiency and autonomy prevalent in modernity and was criticized by Lévinas and Rivera. Thus, despite being well-meaning, teachers in theological education participate in perpetuating the status quo when they practice the banking education model. The flourishing of epistemes arising from diverse cultures cannot happen in the banking model of education that has perpetuated the epistemicides within the interlocking phenomena of modernity, colonialism, and hegemonic Christianity. Instead, this can only be encouraged through a liberating pedagogy centered on a dialogical process.

The practice of theological education ought to engage in a pedagogy that reflects the ethical commitment to listening to and responding to the other. In his seminal work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the educator Paulo Freire proposes a pedagogy that facilitates *conscientização* among participants for the simultaneous humanization of persons and society.⁴⁷ For Freire “*conscientização*” is “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality . . . [and it is an] awakening of critical consciousness . . . [to see] the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process of transformation.”⁴⁸ Interpreting Paulo Freire’s work, Ana Maria Araújo Freire explains that we are called to take the leap and try the *inédito viável* (untested feasibility), which refers to “the possibility of doing something that has not been tried before.”⁴⁹ Freire’s liberating pedagogy envisions everyone in the learning community, both teacher and students, generating knowledge of the Infinite as they bring their lives and embodied selves, who belong to communities, to the conversation.⁵⁰ Heeding Freire’s call to encourage students to bring their whole selves, including all their faculties and their relationships with various communities, into the classroom, educators should recognize that the efforts and commitment to decolonization in the classroom are set within hegemonic, totalizing structures and systems of society. By paying attention to bodies and how social and material conditions shape them, this pedagogy enacts Rivera’s conception of the ethical response of encountering others in the flesh. Thus, the ethical practice of theological education should employ a liberating pedagogy in facilitating the learning of a theological classic or category. This pedagogy entails a dialogical process at the heart of Freire’s proposed pedagogy.⁵¹ It is committed to, as Antonia Darder asserts, “decolonizing, and reinventing reality through its emphasis on dialogue, critique, and transformative action.”⁵² This liberating pedagogy enables theological education to foster epistemic flourishing and interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

The task of providing a space for interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the classroom requires more than simply asking students to discuss a topic in theology with one

⁴⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York/London: Continuum, 2009), 71–72.

⁴⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

⁴⁸ Freire, 35–36, 83.

⁴⁹ Ana Maria Araújo Freire, “Paulo Freire and the Untested Feasibility,” *Counterpoints* 209 (2002): 8; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 49.

⁵⁰ See: Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79–81.

⁵¹ Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire*, 90–91.

⁵² Darder, 91.

another. This dialogical process should uncover how these oppressive systems have shaped and continue to define discourse in theological education.⁵³ It requires interrogating how coloniality has shaped how we understand the concept of learning, intelligence, and knowledge production and how students participate in this dialogue as members of communities, whose bodies are marked by power relations in society.⁵⁴ Hong challenges the understanding of intelligence in colonizing theological education, wherein mastery and competency are understood as “perfection comprehension” that “presumes whiteness and Christianity as normative.”⁵⁵ Hong notes that the partnership between white supremacy and hegemonic Christianity also promotes other forms of oppression, namely, “patriarchy, cis-gendered heteronormative privilege, ableism, and American exceptionalism.”⁵⁶ In this model, nonnormative cultures, religions, and peoples are treated as foils or to serve as tokens of diversity that do not become part of or change the canon.⁵⁷ Dialogue in this model will continue to fuel the hegemonic systems of society while purporting the illusion that our systems have become more inclusive.⁵⁸ To make structural changes towards liberation, Hong argues that theological institutions and educators should decenter the white, Christian normativity to encourage persons of minoritized identities to participate in naming and sharing of truths.⁵⁹ Since this liberating model values every participant’s contribution to knowledge production, the intelligence it entails from them is not one of perfect comprehension. Thus, Hong proposes a reconceptualization of “intercultural and interreligious intelligence as a posture for teaching and learning. . . . Intelligence framed as posture does not seek mastery over knowledge in order to wield it against others but aims for openness to the new. . . . [It] at its core is about curiosity, the desire to know and be known.”⁶⁰ This notion of intelligence is more likely to incline participants to be open to learning with and from one another and to appreciate being part of a community where knowledge is generated communally.⁶¹

After establishing some necessary presuppositions to encourage dialogue, we are more prepared to engage in dialogue in the theological classroom. Tracy asserts that dialogue works as a dialogue (and not an exercise in self-aggrandizement) only if the other is allowed—through the dynamic of the to-and-fro movement of questioning—to become in the dialogue itself a *genuine* other, not a *projected* other. A projected other is an unreal ‘other’ projected upon some real other by the ego’s need or desire to define itself. . . . [D]ialogue must involve a willingness to put one-self and one’s tradition(s), or the fragments of a tradition, at risk.⁶²

This risk is hinged on the ethical demand to encounter the other as irreducibly other and the possibility of being formed as the called for response to the other.⁶³ Dialogue is not coming to the table empty-handed; instead one enters into dialogue carrying the meaningful fragments of one’s religious tradition.⁶⁴ It will involve participants offering questions and positions in a back-

⁵³ See: Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 17.

⁵⁴ Hong, 17–19.

⁵⁵ Hong, 17–18.

⁵⁶ Hong, 43.

⁵⁷ Hong, 45.

⁵⁸ See: Hong, 46–48.

⁵⁹ Hong, 45.

⁶⁰ Hong, 16, 22–23.

⁶¹ See: Michel Elias Andraos, “Engaging Diversity in Teaching Religion and Theology: An Intercultural, De-Colonial Epistemic Perspective,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 15, no. 1 (January 2012): 12.

⁶² Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:147.

⁶³ Tracy, 1:158.

⁶⁴ Tracy, 1:148.

and-forth engagement with the other because such critical engagement is necessary for the shared commitment to the truth, the Infinite that is beyond our grasp.⁶⁵ Dialogue is undertaken to recognize that we all benefit from learning from one another. Darder offers another helpful description of dialogue as “a collaborative phenomenon, with an underlying purpose of building community through participants who focus communally on critical engagements of similar, differing and contradictory perspectives, in order to discover ways to understand the world together and forge collective social action in the interest of democratic life.”⁶⁶ Conflict can arise from dialogue and educators will need a nuanced approach to it. On the one hand, they should not make the classroom inhospitable to opinions that differ from theirs nor should they avoid conflict.⁶⁷ Both acts prioritize the preservation of their ego rather than acting the commitment to the truth.⁶⁸ On the other hand, they should be mindful that students from marginalized communities are at greater risk of experiencing violence in these conflicts and should provide their students the support, resources, and opportunity for critical engagement while not becoming victims of violence.⁶⁹ Dialogue as critical engagement should not presuppose a consensus as an outcome.⁷⁰ At times, to force a consensus is an act of assimilating the other and therefore totalizing the other. Despite the lack of consensus, genuine dialogue can bring us more meaningful and liberating understandings of the fragments we hold.

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue can aid us in our practice of the hermeneutics of retrieval and suspicion towards our best fragments or, more accurately, the best interpretations we have of these fragments. These theological classics, a term Tracy uses to refer to these interpretations, in the Christian tradition continue to be meaningful and life-giving yet should be reinterpreted beyond Eurocentric, hegemonic perspectives.⁷¹ In Christianity, Scripture is recognized as the Word of God and, therefore, an enduring and privileged resource for how we are called to live in the world. Dialogue, particularly ones that privilege marginalized voices and bodies, offers a lens for our practice of deconstruction in interpreting Scripture.

Let us take the example of our dialogue with indigenous spiritualities and cultures that calls for the practice of deconstruction on the Christian doctrine of the One Triune God. Jojo Fung proposes a deconstruction of this doctrine in dialogue with shamanic pneumatology. Fung asks, “[A]re the spirits of the primal religions the idols that the Bible speaks of? [Consequently,] does communication with the spirits make the indigenous shamans idol worshippers, or are they intermediaries of God?”⁷² Turning to the book of Hosea (4:4-5:7; 7:13-16; 8:1-14), Fung argues that idolatry was problem among Israelites because it became a means for political leaders and other Israelites to practice immoral behavior, often abusing and oppressing the poor and weak in their society.⁷³ In contrast, according to Fung, shamanic practices by “reputable women/men shamans who play various acclaimed mediatory roles between the community and the Creator Spirit—as well as with the ancestral and nature spirits—during the ritual celebrations,” such as those of the Karen indigenous community in Thailand, have contributed to personal and

⁶⁵ Tracy, 1:133–34, 146–47.

⁶⁶ Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire*, 93.

⁶⁷ Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 51–52.

⁶⁸ See: Hong, 51–52.

⁶⁹ Hong, 52–53.

⁷⁰ Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:152.

⁷¹ Tracy, 1:132–36.

⁷² Jojo M. Fung, *A Shamanic Theology of Sacred Sustainability: Church in Dialogue with Shamans for Liberative Struggle in Asia* (Manila: Jesuit Communication Inc., 2014), 47.

⁷³ Fung, 48–54.

communal healing among their people and with creation.⁷⁴ Furthermore, more recent biblical scholarship shows that the texts in Hebrew Bible assert the incomparability and uniqueness of YHWH without disregarding the presence of other gods and that the “YHWH alone” theology should be understood considering the socio-political development of the Israel as a nation.⁷⁵ The ethical call requires recognizing that this theology has been used to justify violence and hegemonic practices in asserting ascendancy over other nations in the Bible and other religions, particularly indigenous spiritualities and religions, in the history of Christianity.

Theological educators drawing from the Christian tradition should speak of the God of Christianity in a way that does not subsume indigenous spiritualities under Christianity and to see how this interreligious dialogue offers more life-giving directions for Christianity.⁷⁶ From the Christian perspective, Fung proposes principles for approaching indigenous belief in spirits and the Creator Spirit: “The first presupposes the participation of the shamanic spirits in the sacred power of the Creative Spirit. The second is a theological understanding of Yahweh as governing creation in collaboration with the other spirits in sustaining and sacralizing the cosmos.”⁷⁷ Christians should not presume that those with whom they dialogue share their understanding of spirits; however, as a fragment it allows them to be more respectful of the beliefs of the other. This shamanic spirituality characterized by an intimate connection with kindred spirits and all the created world prompts Christianity to retrieve its marginalized tradition of deep relations with creation, to develop a global solidarity.

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue often does not arrive at a clear consensus among its participants; instead, it often leads us to the limits of dialogue, to silence before the Infinite that is beyond our grasp.⁷⁸ When dialogue reaches this point, Tracy proposes that we ought to take a different approach, that is, to “wait attentively” to receive the Infinite, the Incomprehensible not through our effort but as an epiphany.⁷⁹ To receive this gift we need allow ourselves to be caught up in and shaped by the committed and critical engagement in the dialogic process that ultimately orients us to encounter the other.

III. The spiritual practice of contemplation for dialogue

Drawing from the thought of Lévinas and Rivera and the Christian tradition, the Other pertains both to God and every other that is irreducibly other.⁸⁰ The best spiritual practices that orient us to the Other join the mystical and prophetic strands of Christian tradition.⁸¹ In contrast to a historical gap made between theology and spirituality, there have been scholarly efforts to retrieve and demonstrate how the turn to contemplative and mystical spiritual practices such as those seen in the life and works of Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, Simone Weil, and

⁷⁴ Fung, 22; Jojo M. Fung, “What Christians Can Learn from Shamanic Pneumatology,” in *Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives*, ed. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia and Francis X. Clooney (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 121–23.

⁷⁵ Fung, *A Shamanic Theology of Sacred Sustainability*, 57–58, 66–68.

⁷⁶ See: Fung, 69–71.

⁷⁷ Jojo M. Fung, “What Christians Can Learn from Shamanic Pneumatology,” in *Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives*, ed. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia and Francis X. Clooney (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 124.

⁷⁸ Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:161–62.

⁷⁹ Tracy, 1:162–64.

⁸⁰ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*; Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God*.

⁸¹ Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:166, 291.

Constance Fitzgerald foster and cannot be separated from an ethical personal and social engagement with other.⁸²

I propose exploring how contemplation, particularly its practice in the Carmelite tradition, can dispose persons so that they are open to being formed in dialogue and navigating the limits of dialogue. In the work of Constance FitzGerald, contemplation is the process of surrendering oneself to God, who is encountered as loving Mystery.⁸³ It is consistent with the ongoing assertion that an ethical practice of theological education speaks of God in fragments characterized by humility. Contemplation requires the bodily practice of solitude not limited to a physical withdrawal from the world in monasteries but understood as forming an inner disposition where one encounters God in the midst of the world.⁸⁴ Though not belonging to the Carmelite order, the Jesuit Jojo Fung's reflection conveys the epiphany he received from seeking solitude:

In reflecting on [Christian doctrine on God and shamanic pneumatology] and in praying on the mystical insights of St. John of the Cross, I came to the awareness, in the words of Pope Francis . . . 'the mystic experiences the intimate connection between God and all beings, and thus feels that 'all things are God.' It was only after a month of praying . . . in front of a tree that I fully understood what this insight meant. My journal entry indicates that praying on 'all things are God' had led me to the personal conviction that 'all things are truly God,' which then led me to also realize that Theo-en-passim (God in all things) and panentheism (all things subsist in God) are but two sides of the same coin. . . . This 'compenetrative presencing' is crucial to understanding the unfathomable and even controversial belief in the pantheon of Asian deities . . .⁸⁵

In Fung's experience, the fruit of participating in interreligious dialogue in doing theology is received through an ongoing commitment to contemplation in daily life. For FitzGerald contemplation is a transformative encounter with God as Sophia Wisdom who disrupts and expands our knowing of God, our self-perception, and our understanding and relationship with every creature in the cosmos.⁸⁶ It offers a space to depart from colonial images of God to make space for and engage more life-giving images of God revealed in prayer. For Christians, the image of God is connected to the image of the self. Mindful of this connection feminists have

⁸² See: Maria Clara Bingemer, "Christic Mysticism and the Exodus of Self," in *Simone Weil*, trans. Karen M. Kraft, 1st ed., Mystic of Passion and Compassion (The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 65–93, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt19705b5.10>; Beverly Lanzetta, "Contemplative Ethics: Intimacy, Amor Mundi and Dignification in Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5, no. 1 (2005): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1353/scs.2005.0012>; Constance FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," in *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, ed. Joann Wolski Conn, 2nd ed. (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996), 410–35.

⁸³ FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," 420.

⁸⁴ Beverly Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 30–31.

⁸⁵ Fung, "What Christians Can Learn from Shamanic Pneumatology," 125–26 citing Francis, Encyclical on Care for Our Common Home *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015) §234, at The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudatosi.html.

⁸⁶ Alex Mikulich, "Contemplative Transformation in Sophia-Wisdom: A Way of Decolonizing Faith and Society," in *Desire, Darkness, and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse: Engaging the Thought of Constance FitzGerald, OCD*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), 323.

sought feminine language to speak about God and persons of color have asserted ways to speak about their embodied existence as no less an image of God than the white male person.⁸⁷

The practice of contemplation affirms the inherent dignity of the person and the interdependence of the self to the multitude in the cosmos. In a feminist reading of women mystics in Christianity, Lanzetta describes solitude “as an inner state of consciousness which women protect and preserve the integrity of the self from unwanted intrusion. . . . It provides an inner resiliency and power that grows from the core of women’s self-integrity. It is the antidote to patriarchy and the liberation that overcomes bondage, disclosing the wide expanse of joy that is a woman’s true self.”⁸⁸ Contemplation provides a space for experiencing dignification for women and all persons who have been devalued by interlocking systems of oppression. This experience affirms every person’s capacity to speak about God, self, and creation in creative and liberating ways instead of simply being on the receiving end of hegemonic interpretations in theological education.

Dignification happens not apart from but through the surrender of the self to God that becomes a process of unselfing. FitzGerald calls for an admittedly unsettling notion of the dispossession of the self that refers to “the deconstruction of even healthy forms of autonomy that no longer represent the deepest possibilities of the person herself and the human with God nor the radical need of the human community for a deeper synergy. . . . [I]t is that radical interdependence can, must, and indeed does co-exist with individuals’ power to act.”⁸⁹ A healthy sense of autonomy is insufficient for responding to the dark side of modernity and coloniality, supported by the concept that the ideal self is characterized by self-certainty and self-possession. In contrast, contemplation facilitates the purification of one’s desires and will to be more attuned to God’s will for oneself and creation.⁹⁰ Such personal transformation is reflected in their bodies that, as Lanzetta writes, “assumed and internalized the care and suffering of the world.”⁹¹ As the person grows in union with God, one shares in God’s deep love and compassion for creation.⁹² In other words, contemplation fosters a mystical ethic of love of the world derived primarily not from an external imposition of a “should” but from an experienced intimacy and union with God who lovingly creates and saves the world.⁹³ The recognition that solidarity with all of creation is not simply external to one’s sense of self but is central to an understanding of oneself and one’s way of being in the world, akin to Rivera’s anthropology of incarnate transcendence, is key for responding to modernity’s destructive notion of self-sufficiency.⁹⁴ It is also a recognition that is particularly sensitive to the suffering of the other and, as such, can be more responsive to the oppression in society. This growing recognition of interdependence orients persons to engage in dialogue that is not single-mindedly preoccupied with one’s agenda but with a view of the inseparability of responding to the ethical demand to respond to the other, particularly those who

⁸⁷ See: FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night”; M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

⁸⁸ Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*, 169.

⁸⁹ Constance FitzGerald, “From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis of Memory,” in *Desire, Darkness, and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse: Engaging the Thought of Constance FitzGerald, OCD*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), 448.

⁹⁰ Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*, 199; FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 419.

⁹¹ Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*, 167.

⁹² Lanzetta, 201.

⁹³ Lanzetta, 200.

⁹⁴ Lanzetta, 197; Andrew Prevot, “Grace in a Violent World: Constance FitzGerald’s Reading of Edith Stein,” in *Desire, Darkness, and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse: Engaging the Thought of Constance FitzGerald, OCD*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), 373–74.

are suffering and marginalized, to one's sense of self-integration. To respond to other recognizes that the other is a mystery, and that God is encountered and known through receiving and responding to the other in the flesh.

Conclusion

Christian theological education's engagement with postmodern philosophy and theology inspires an ethical turn. Drawing from the work of Lévinas and Rivera, this turn is understood as orientation to and responding to the other as opposed to totalizing and, thus, committing violence to the other. This orientation to the Other encompasses both interpersonal and social relationships, therefore, demanding attention and attending to the broken and marginalized bodies in society. In theology, we listen to and heal these bodies by approaching the classics, our best inheritance from our religious traditions, and our interpretations of these through the concept of fragments, recognizing that they are meaningful and valuable yet incomplete.⁹⁵ Thus, we are called to practice the hermeneutics of retrieval and suspicion inspired by Derrida's deconstruction in doing theology to recognize the ways our interpretations, particularly in the form of narratives and norms, have been destructive toward more life-giving interpretations.

Theological education can practice this hermeneutics by engaging in a liberating pedagogy, which Freire advocated for, that employs a dialogical process towards greater consciousness of the possibility and call for change in society. Considering Christianity's collusion with the hegemonic systems of colonization and coloniality, it should participate in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. To participate in this decolonizing pedagogy assumptions regarding education, learning, and knowledge imposed by hegemonic perspectives should be challenged and a disposition of openness to learning from a community is fostered among participants.⁹⁶ Dialogue entails bringing one's fragments and one's interpretations while being open to listening and receiving the perspective of another. It is a resource for our practice of the hermeneutics of retrieval and suspicion that offers decolonizing and liberating possibilities and, therefore, refines our interpretation towards deepening our ethical commitment. Since theological dialogue does not always conclude with an agreement between participants, theological education needs to engage resources that enable it to us to move beyond the present impasse in dialogue.⁹⁷

In the face of an impasse to dialogue, theological education can draw from the spiritual practices of Christian tradition that join together its mystical and prophetic strands. The practice of contemplation in the Carmelite tradition is one such practice that facilitates person's growth in the disposition to be receptive to listening and being shaped by dialogue. In contemplation, God is encountered as Mystery thus offering the possibility of transcending old and even colonial images of God that are no longer life-giving towards more creative ways of speaking about God. We also recognize the self and the other as mystery that is beloved and called to speak about their personal encounter with God. This dignification of persons is valuable for facilitating dialogue that encourages marginalized voices to speak. In contrast to privileging the self-sufficiency and self-possession of persons that dominates modern thought, contemplation forms persons to become more attuned to the inherent interdependence of the self with every other in the cosmos. This conception of the self orients persons to be more attentive and receptive to the other in dialogue. By engaging in such practices that make space for dialogical discourse and

⁹⁵ See: Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:2.

⁹⁶ Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 16, 22–23.

⁹⁷ Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, 1:161–62.

moments to receive an epiphany from the Absolute Infinite, theological education orients participants to respond to the Other.

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Reading the Bible, Learning Ourselves: Ingredients for Biblical Study with Culturally Hybrid Youth

Abstract: If religious texts should be read and taught in culturally adaptive ways, what does it look like to read the Bible with culturally hybrid youth? This paper offers five pedagogical “ingredients” for such readings: a specific reading community, a communal approach to learning, a contextual approach to interpretation, attentiveness to lived experience, and biblical texts that resonate with that experience. The paper is grounded in the author’s work with a group of transnational youth (who self-identify as “Third Culture Kids,” or TCKs) and their shared reading of Lamentations.

If you want to ask the students with whom I work a vexing question, ask them where they are from. They find the question vexing because most have no straightforward answer. I work with culturally hybrid young adults: what to you may be a question of biographical data (perhaps of simple geography) is to them a question of their very being. Most spent their formative years in more than one country (or back and forth between them), and their passports often do not reflect the ways they think or the languages they speak or the relationships they nurture.

It is a vexing question for me, too: I was raised not only in two countries and two cultures but also with two different ancestries. When you ask me where I am from, what goes through my mind are not only cities and houses and airports but also languages and lineages and loyalties. It is vexing because I am both brown Filipino and white US American—my ancestors are Ilocano rice farmers and Oklahoma schoolteachers. Like the students I work with, *where* I am from is not just a place or people. I am—we are—from plural places and peoples.

If religious texts should be read and taught in culturally adaptive ways, what does it look like to read the Bible with a culturally hybrid community like mine? I ask this question as a culturally hybrid person myself. It is a question I wish the youth pastors and religious educators I grew up with (both here and there) had asked. I see much of myself in the young adults I work with, so I have a real stake in the answer.

Many answers are possible, of course, and I want to propose mine by way of analogy. My Filipino ancestors cooked (my family still cooks) a dish called adobo. The term comes from Spanish (meaning “sauce”) but the dish is indigenous. Regional variations abound; there is no one way to cook it. Filipinos do not ask what adobo *is*—they know that much, even if it is hard to define.¹ Instead, they ask about ingredients: “What’s in *your* adobo?” This paper is my particular recipe, the specific answer I propose to the question of what biblical study with culturally hybrid youth entails.

Before listing the ingredients that make up my recipe, I should first clarify the terms that make up this pedagogical dish. By “biblical study,” I mean the practices of reading and interpreting a religious text—in this case, the Christian Bible—as well as naming its significance

¹ Joyce del Rosario, “Did You Eat? What Filipino/a/x American Theology Brings to the Table,” *Faith & Leadership*, January 26, 2021, <https://faithandleadership.com/joyce-del-rosario-did-you-eat-what-filipinoax-american-theology-brings-the-table>.

for the readers' own lives.² By “culturally hybrid youth,” I mean young people who have “grown up with two or more cultural, racial, and/or ethnic elements in their life that others generally perceive as being distinct from one another.”³ Further, I should note that the “recipe” I outline in this paper is rooted in the specific culturally hybrid community that I work with and is based on both the practice of reading the Bible with them as well as on my own theoretical and theological reflection on that practice. While this recipe is unabashedly local and specific, my hope is that it offers a helpful case study for work with other culturally hybrid readers.

In the rest of this paper, I discuss five pedagogical “ingredients”: (1) a specific reading community, (2) a communal approach to learning, (3) a contextual approach to interpretation, (4) attentiveness to lived experience, and (5) biblical texts that resonate with that experience.

First Ingredient: A Specific Reading Community

This recipe for biblical study was not developed for culturally hybrid communities in general (or in the abstract) but for a particular one. When religious educators teach the Bible or read it with others, the people we read with are always located in specific times, places, cultures, bodies, and so on. We who teach and facilitate must attend not only to how the text affects the readers but also to how the readers affect the text (or at least its interpretation). To this end, we must attend to the particularities and quirks of the specific readers or reading community that we work with.⁴

My own reading community is a group of young adults who attend or live near a Christian liberal arts college in the US Midwest, the majority of whom grew up as transnational youth. Most in this group self-identify using the term “Third Culture Kid” (or its abbreviated form “TCK”), which denotes a specific type of transnational migrant: “[A] person who spends a significant part of [their] first eighteen years of life accompanying parent(s) into a country that is different from at least one parent’s passport country(ies) due to a parent’s choice of work or advanced training.”⁵ Because of the role of parents’ work in this definition, the people most commonly identified (and who self-identify) as TCKs are those who grow up as children of transnational workers, such as missionaries, international businesspeople, diplomats, or military personnel.⁶

The TCK framework is deeply important to my reading community—and to me personally since I, too, self-identify as a TCK—because it gives expression to personal identity. Sociologists first coined the term “Third Culture Kids” in the 1960s to describe “children who accompany their parents into another society,” designating the “third culture” (i.e., not the expatriates’ passport culture or the host culture) as “the styles of life created, shared, and learned

² John M. Bracke and Karen B. Tye, *Teaching the Bible in the Church* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 128-34.

³ Anne Carter Walker and Peter H. Cariaga, “Mixed (Up) and Messy: Culturally Hybrid Proposals for Vocational Exploration,” *Religious Education* 116, no. 5 (2021): 496, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2021.1989562>.

⁴ Walker and Cariaga, “Mixed (Up) and Messy,” 500-1.

⁵ David C. Pollock, Ruth E. Van Reken, and Michael V. Pollock, *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017), 27 (emphasis added).

⁶ These transnational backgrounds, of course, do not reflect the full breadth of childhood and adolescent cross-cultural experiences. Recognizing this gap, TCK researcher Ruth Van Reken later developed a framework for what she calls “cross-cultural kids” (CCKs), which accommodates many types of cross-cultural upbringings, including children from immigrant, minority, and/or indigenous families. TCKs are thus a subset of CCKs. See Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*, 43-52.

by persons who are in the process of relating their societies, or sections thereof, to each other.”⁷ The term gained wider attention through the work of David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken (and later Michael Pollock), whose definition of a TCK, quoted above, has been singularly influential on all subsequent literature about TCKs.⁸

Similarly influential is Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock’s account of characteristics that they argue are both common among TCKs and tend to draw TCKs toward one another.⁹ In this account, mobility across and between geographical and cultural borders *during a person’s formative years* is an identity-defining experience, the effects of which persist into adulthood.¹⁰ It is an experience that these migrants share regardless of the particulars of their parent’s work or where they have lived. This experience of mobility, along with common characteristics such as a bicultural or multicultural identity and a sense of being “both/and” as well as “neither/nor,” is what characterizes “TCK” as a cultural identity marker, rather than the usual bounds of a common history, language, or place. Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock’s account thus offers “an emotionally powerful insider construct that narrates identity and belonging” for TCKs, creating an “imagined community” bounded by shared experiences and mutual intelligibility.¹¹ When I or the young adults I work with self-identify as TCKs, we are invoking that imagined community.¹²

We also make up a concrete instantiation of that community. We regularly read the Bible together as a communal practice, as well as share stories from our cross-cultural lives. Sometimes our readings prompt reflection on experiences of mobility, including the challenges that come with transnational migration. In these moments we learn from each other, interpreting our own lives through the stories of those with whom we have a shared experience. We may be reading the Bible at these times, but in doing so we learn ourselves.

Second Ingredient: A Communal, Embodied Approach to Learning

A recipe for a culturally hybrid community also needs an appropriate pedagogical approach for the group. Reading the Bible together naturally entails learning in community, so the pedagogy must be communal. Further, it is important for culturally hybrid youth—and TCKs in particular—to inter-reference (i.e., using the life stories of others within an imagined

⁷ Ruth Hill Useem, “Third Culture Kids: Focus of Major Study—TCK ‘Mother’ Pens History of Field,” *NewsLinks—The Newspaper of International Schools Services* 7, no. 3 (January 1993): 1. Electronic version hosted by TCK World, <http://www.tckworld.com/useem/art1.html>.

⁸ See Esther C. Tan, Kenneth T. Wang, and Ann Baker Cottrell, “A Systematic Review of Third Culture Kids Empirical Research,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 82 (May 2021): 81-98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.03.002>.

⁹ See chapters 7-12 of Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*.

¹⁰ Ann Baker Cottrell, “Educational and Occupational Choices of American Adult Third Culture Kids,” in *Military Brats and Other Global Nomads: Growing Up in Organization Families*, ed. Morten G. Ender (Westport, CT: Praeger Publications, 2003), 245.

¹¹ Danau Tanu, *Growing Up in Transit: The Politics of Belonging at an International School* (New York: Berghann Books, 2017), 9, 11-12.

¹² Admittedly, the term “TCK” is not without its issues. It is not a universally recognized term for those who grow up transnationally; other terms, such as “global nomad,” are used in some expatriate communities and segments of the literature on transnational youth. Moreover, the idea of a “third culture” reflects essentialist assumptions about culture, and its value as an analytical concept is debatable. As such, I use the term “Third Culture Kid” in this paper as an emic (or insider) term, one that insiders in my group use frequently to refer to ourselves. On the analytical value of the term “TCK,” see Danau Tanu, “Toward an Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Diversity of ‘Third Culture Kids,’” in *Migration, Diversity, and Education: Beyond Third Culture Kids*, ed. Saija Benjamin and Fred Dervin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 13-35.

community as reference points for one's own life) with one another,¹³ so the pedagogy must favor knowledge that comes from lived experience. There are currently no ready-made religious pedagogies for culturally hybrid youth, so practitioners like me must craft our own.

The pedagogy for this recipe is a compound ingredient, much like the coconut milk used in some regional variations of Filipino adobo,¹⁴ and draws on the work of two religious educators. The first is Thomas Groome, whose approach to religious education begins and ends with the experience of the learning community. He refers to this approach as “shared praxis” in his earlier works and more recently as “a *life to Faith to life* approach,” in which the educator and learners put their lived experience into conversation with the resources of faith.”¹⁵ This emphasis on lived experience is not merely a hook for catching learners’ attention in order to draw them into the “real stuff” of religious content, but rather treats experience as a co-equal conversation partner with the resources of faith.¹⁶

Groome’s approach involves five “movements,” a term he prefers to “steps” since each can fluidly slide into the other and back again: (1) naming participants’ present action or current experience, based on a generative theme for the learning event; (2) critical reflection on participants’ experience; (3) accessing the Christian Story (i.e. scripture and tradition) and Vision (“the demands and promises that this faith makes”); (4) dialectical exchange between Story and Vision and the lives of both individual and community; and (5) movement toward response.¹⁷ The end goal is a pedagogy that takes seriously both lived experience and the resources of Christian faith.

The second religious educator whose work infuses my recipe is Dori Baker, whose “girlfriend theology” calls for close attention to lived experience. She focuses on and epistemologically privileges the experiences and perspectives of marginalized persons, especially young women whose voices are silenced, missing, or “footnoted.” For Baker, marginalized voices and stories form the crux of her approach:

“[Girlfriend theology is] a method of religious education that begins with the voices and life stories of adolescent girls. It engages those stories with the stories of adult women who have found voice, and translates the resources of women’s theological thought into the context of female adolescence. [...] It is a relational model of producing meaning.”¹⁸

Baker’s method is a four-step process that begins with one participant sharing an autobiographical story. A facilitator, usually an adult woman, then invites others in the group to name their points of connection with the story. The process continues with the group exploring resonant theological themes, passages of scripture, and Christian practices. It then ends with

¹³ Walker and Cariaga, “Mixed (Up) and Messy,” 501-3. The concept of inter-referencing is adapted from Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 222-23. Chen himself focuses on the macro-levels of nation states and people groups, but Walker and I propose that his concept can be scaled down to the level of individuals.

¹⁴ Coconut milk (*gata* in Filipino) is made from coconut water and the oil of grated coconut meat.

¹⁵ Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 261-62, emphasis original.

¹⁶ Groome, *Will There Be Faith?*, 285

¹⁷ Groome, *Will There Be Faith?*, 68; see further 299-338. See also *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

¹⁸ Dori Grinenko Baker, *Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 17.

participants naming the implications of these faith resources for their lives.¹⁹ In Baker's pedagogy, a particular kind of experience—that of young women and their stories—is the focus, and adult women who are part of the learning community act as “translators” (to use her term) of faith resources. Yet the method of “girlfriend theology” is not exclusive to adolescent girls; its overall goal is to turn the narrated lives of ordinary participants (those with no formal theological training) into the site of theological meaning-making.²⁰ Baker's method can thus be adapted for those who are not young women, and in such cases she refers to her method as “story theology.”²¹ Together participants produce interpretations of their experience that are useful to the reading (or storytelling) community, guided by scripture, tradition, and relevant fields of research.²²

Taken together, Groome and Baker provide a pedagogical approach that holds rich promise for a reading community like mine. A mode of biblical study that moves from life to Faith to life and a “story theology” focus that lifts up the experiences of TCKs as theologically meaningful are just what my reading community needs. The combined approach gives us the chance to reflect critically on matters of faith as well as on our own lives.

Third Ingredient: A Contextual, Critical Approach to Interpretation

This reading recipe requires more than an appropriate pedagogical approach for a culturally hybrid community. It also needs an appropriate interpretive approach to the Bible, one that takes seriously both the readers' context as well as the realities of the biblical text.²³ Religious educators who read the Bible with others must be aware of the ways they themselves and the other readers are interpreting the Bible, in addition to being knowledgeable about the biblical text itself and its basic interpretive issues. Paying attention to contemporary context, biblical text, and interpretive methods all at once is a tall order, but a necessary one for reading together well.

While there are no established interpretive approaches that are calibrated for culturally hybrid communities (much less TCKs specifically), there are some contextual reading approaches within the academic field of biblical studies that can offer a way forward.²⁴ One such approach is Contextual Bible Study (CBS), an approach to reading the Bible that first developed in Latin America and has featured prominently in discourse among biblical scholars in southern Africa.²⁵ Here I specifically engage with the form of CBS associated with South African biblical

¹⁹ Baker, *Girlfriend Theology*, 186-88.

²⁰ Baker acknowledges (*Girlfriend Theology*, 35-36) that her approach has much in common with that of both Groome and, importantly, Anne Wimberly, who fuses the personal stories of African American youth with biblical narratives and stories from African American history. See Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).

²¹ Baker, *Girlfriend Theology*, 6, 179-80.

²² Baker uses ethnography and adolescent development to help reflect critically on participants' experience (*Girlfriend Theology*, 18).

²³ Bracke and Tye, *Teaching the Bible*, 107-10.

²⁴ By a “contextual reading” of a biblical text, I mean a cluster of interpretive practices that explicitly center the cultural, social, and (often) religious contexts and interests of an interpreter or interpretive community. Contextual approaches to the Bible have become increasingly common in the last forty or so years of biblical scholarship, and include those focused on gender and sexuality, regions with shared histories, and minoritized peoples.

²⁵ For a brief history of similarities between Latin American and African CBS, see Gerald O. West, “Reading the Bible with the Marginalised: The Value/s of Contextual Bible Reading,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015): 235-61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2015.v1n2.a11>.

scholar Gerald West and his colleagues at the University of Kwazulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.²⁶

In West's formulation, CBS calls for readers trained in critical methods of biblical interpretation to read the Bible with those who do not have such formal training, whom West refers to as "ordinary readers."²⁷ While this is what many trained readers (like pastors, professors, and religious educators) do anyway, West envisions a de-centered role for trained readers that repositions them from being experts on whom others depend to resource persons who serve the reading community's interests. The trained reader does not simply "listen to" untrained readers or, when it comes to sharing interpretation, only "speak for or on behalf of" them, but instead reads *with* them.²⁸ This means that when trained and untrained readers come together, the untrained readers' task is to set the agenda and read texts closely with their own needs and interests in mind, while the trained reader's task is to bring insights from critical study that are useful to the reading community.²⁹

CBS's focus on the reading community means that context and experience are the starting point for interpretation. Like the pedagogical approaches of Groome and Baker, CBS taps into the experience of the community, inviting readers to not only name their experience but to also do social analysis of their context. West is deliberate about foregrounding context because he sees CBS as a form of liberation hermeneutics,³⁰ and he is clear in virtually all of his CBS-related publications that he and his colleagues read the Bible *with* marginalized communities in South Africa to facilitate both social analysis and concrete action.³¹ Like other forms of contextual reading, CBS "uses the people's conceptual frame of reference, its culture, as it reflects their concerns and values, as a resource for interpretation."³²

²⁶ See Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 1993). West is also the uncredited main author of a manual on CBS produced at a community engagement center at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, where he is professor emeritus. See The Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, *Doing Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Ujamaa Centre, 2015), http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/RESOURCES_OF_UJAMAA/MANUAL_STUDIES.aspx.

²⁷ Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 10-11. West identifies "ordinary" readers specifically as those "who are poor and marginalized" (10), though the general meaning of "untrained" is still present. I will comment further on this in the main text below.

²⁸ West, *Academy of the Poor*, 49-54. He later writes, "The contextual Bible study process is not simply a naive and romantic 'listening to,' nor is it a paternalistic and marginalizing 'reading for'; it is a process in which we 'read with' each other, where we vigilantly foreground our respective subject positions and where we become explicit concerning the power relations implicit in the reading process" (135-36).

²⁹ Crystal Hall notes that "an epistemological privileging of ordinary readers" is at the heart of the CBS process (*Insights from Reading the Bible with the Poor* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019], 92). It is important to note, however, that just because readers might be untrained in the critical methods taught in Western institutions and seminaries, this does not mean that they are not skilled and critical "readers" of their own social context or written texts. See Godwin I. Akper, "The Role of the 'Ordinary Reader' in Gerald O. West's Hermeneutics," *Scriptura*, no. 88 (2005): 8-11, <https://doi.org/10.7833/88-0-990>.

³⁰ See Gerald O. West, "Locating 'Contextual Bible Study' within Biblical Liberation Hermeneutics and Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 1-10, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2641>

³¹ A recent publication about CBS notes that he and his colleagues have been invited by a South African shack-dwellers movement to facilitate a CBS workshop on "Unemployment, Gender, and Land," using 1 Kings 21:1-16 as their text; see Gerald O. West, "Forging Tools, Framing Theory, for Faithful African Interpretations: A Response to Judith McKinlay," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 15, no. 1 (2019): 24-25.

³² Israel Kamudzandu, *Abraham as Spiritual Ancestor: A Postcolonial Zimbabwean Reading of Romans 4* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 21.

CBS also takes biblical texts as seriously as it does context. West's approach is based on the "three worlds of the text" (or three dimensions) approach, which keeps readers returning to the text even as they also look beyond it.³³ Beginning with the world *in front of* the text (its contemporary dimension, i.e., the present reading community and its interests), trained readers help other readers formulate and answer questions about the world *within* the text (its literary dimension), and sometimes *behind* the text (its historical dimension), before all return to the world *in front of* the text.³⁴ The trained reader need not be a passive, walking commentary but can intervene when interpretations stray far from the text or are potentially harmful to others.³⁵ Thus the community continually returns to the text, and the trained reader remains a vital, though non-dominant, part of the reading community.

West's vision of CBS fits well with the pedagogical approach described in the previous section because CBS is geared primarily toward praxis. In fact, its structure bears remarkable resemblance to Groome's "life to Faith to life" approach. Each CBS reading session consists of five steps: (1) community members identify a theme relevant to their lived experience; (2) they select a biblical passage, sometimes in consultation with a trained reader; (3) trained and untrained readers formulate and explore questions about both the biblical text and their own social context; (4) participants articulate their own interpretation of the passage based on their analysis of the text, their context, and solicited input from the trained reader; and (5) they develop an action plan to move their interpretation to a form of practice.³⁶ As one CBS manual summarizes, "Contextual Bible Study begins with the reality, experience and resources of the community; in-between we re-read the Bible, slowly, carefully and closely using the resources of biblical scholarship; and [it] ends with the reality, experience and resources of the community."³⁷

One challenge of appropriating CBS for my particular reading community, however, is that swapping out West's (African) "ordinary readers" for TCKs is potentially problematic. Many TCKs not only often come from more economically privileged backgrounds³⁸ but may even be "semi-trained" readers of scripture (such as the college students I work with). Fortunately, West and other CBS practitioners are not exclusivist. One CBS manual explicitly states that the method is for "any and every one who wants to read and understand their own experiences and context in the light of the Bible," including those from "more privileged sectors of society."³⁹ Further, one of West's colleagues, Sarojini Nadar, admonishes that *every* reading community has a social context in need of transformation (including those with the economic and social privilege that many TCKs have), and, in order for transformation to take place, "CBS

³³ The "three worlds" framework is well known within biblical studies. As one example, see Christian E. Hauer and William A. Young, *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds*, 8th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2011).

³⁴ Ujamaa Centre, *Doing CBS*, 10-12. The manual refers to the literary dimension as "on the text" (11).

³⁵ One of West's former students offers an insider's critique of CBS on this point: "The uncritical acceptance of indigenous knowledge appears as almost sacrosanct [in CBS], without an acknowledgement that the community can themselves be in possession of destructive and life-denying interpretations, which may be exposed, interrogated and ultimately transformed!" (Sarojini Nadar, "Beyond the 'Ordinary Reader' and the 'Invisible Intellectual': Shifting Contextual Bible Study from Liberation Discourse to Liberation Pedagogy," *Old Testament Essays* 22, no. 2 [2009]: 393, <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/ote/v22n2/09.pdf>).

³⁶ Ujamaa Centre, *Doing CBS*, 9-13.

³⁷ Ujamaa Centre, *Doing CBS*, 12.

³⁸ Though not uniformly. See Tanu, *Growing Up in Transit*, 2, 26.

³⁹ With the caveat that facilitators "shar[e] with the more privileged group the kinds of contextual readings that have emerged from less privileged sectors of society" (Ujamaa Centre, *Doing CBS*, 5, 19).

cannot be only for the poor and the marginalized.”⁴⁰

CBS thus provides an appropriate interpretive approach for a TCK reading community that also fits well with the combined pedagogical approaches of Groome and Baker. Its social analysis of the community’s context and critical engagement with the biblical text allow reading communities like mine to explore both the Bible and ourselves.

Fourth Ingredient: A Critical Attentiveness to Lived Experience

In addition to appropriate pedagogical and interpretive approaches, this recipe requires critical analysis of the cultural context and lived experience that the reading community brings to the text. When religious educators facilitate discussion of the community’s experience and context, the group benefits from thoughtful unpacking of experience and critical reflection on context. This is especially the case for culturally hybrid communities like a group of TCKs, who may not identify with a singular cultural context and whose members do not share a common language, history, or place of origin.

In line with my pedagogical approach (beginning with a generative theme or a participant’s story) and my interpretive approach (proceeding from the needs and interests of the community), I focus on the experience of migration-related loss and grief, which is common among the TCKs I have worked with as well as in the literature on TCKs. Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock give particular attention to the “unresolved grief” that results from TCKs’ high mobility upbringing in which they and/or others close to them frequently move.⁴¹ Other social scientific research confirms grief as a major theme and shared experience among TCKs.⁴²

To critically explore this aspect of my reading community’s life—which I, as a TCK myself, have also experienced—I offer here an autoethnographic exploration of TCK loss and grief. Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research that utilizes the researcher’s personal experience as the primary data for ethnographic study.⁴³ For this autoethnography, I use my own experiences, stories from TCKs I know, and a collection of written laments by TCKs I have worked with,⁴⁴ interwoven with theories of grief, to explore three themes: hidden losses, wrecked narratives, and disenfranchised grief.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Nadar, “Beyond the ‘Ordinary Reader,’” 394.

⁴¹ Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*, 81-96.

⁴² See especially Kathleen R. Gilbert, “Loss and Grief Between and Among Cultures: The Experience of Third Culture Kids,” *Illness, Crisis, & Loss* 16, no. 2 (2008): 93-109. See also Tan, Wang, and Cottrell, “Systematic Review,” 92-94.

⁴³ This footnote will briefly explain my research methods, which I based on Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008). After designing a research plan and protocol, I collected self-data by writing down specific memories of migration-related loss and grief. I also reviewed a variety of external data sets that represent the shared lifeworld of TCKs: artifacts from my adolescent years, poems and prayers written by other TCKs, and records of TCK interviews that I made some years ago for another project. As I wrote down self-data and reviewed external data sets, I also made self-observational notes on my experience of interacting with the data, especially the memories my writing prompts or artifacts evoked and my emotional responses throughout the process. For analysis and interpretation (which took place concurrently with data collection), I identified themes within and among data sets (including my self-observational notes) and grouped quotes, narrated memories, and other elements of the data according to those themes.

⁴⁴ This collection of anonymous laments is available upon request (please email peter.cariaga@oc.edu).

⁴⁵ The terms I use in the first and third themes are straightforward: by “loss” I mean meaningful attachments to persons, places, things, and even intangible experiences that have been severed, and by “grief” I mean a person’s individual responses to loss (which may also reflect and contribute to collective responses).

Hidden Losses

Contemporary grief theory affirms that loss isn't always about a loved one's physical death. Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson discuss types of non-death losses at length in their seminal book on loss, grief, and ministry, including losses of material possessions, one's roles or functions, and relationships and ways of relating to others.⁴⁶ For Mitchell and Herbert, the grief that comes with these losses is no less real than death-related grief. Indeed, as another grief researcher asserts, the idea that only death can elicit real grief is a widely held but untrue "myth" about grief.⁴⁷

For TCKs, these non-death losses are myriad, and they include both the tangible and the intangible. My own transition-related losses include ones as concrete as my family's kitchen in the Philippines, the mango trees in our front yard, the friends I had on both sides of the ocean. Others are less material but no less real, such as the loss of my "system identity"⁴⁸ as a missionary kid and my sense of belonging with local Filipino friends. Like other TCKs, though, my losses didn't stem only from a single, major move from the Philippines but were incurred over the course of nine international moves. In this sense, TCK losses are myriad not only because there are many specific losses but also because "the same *types* of loss happen again and again," creating a compounding effect each time the loss recurs.⁴⁹

Besides being myriad, TCKs' losses are also often hidden, both from others and even from themselves. One TCK's prayer-form lament describes an instance of hiding: "I'm so alone, Lord, and I'm so afraid. My [mission] team; my family; it's far, far away, and I get the awful feeling that I can't talk to them about my real feelings. Anyone looking in from the outside would see a girl who's normal, okay and has no regrets or remorse, but it's not right. I am still in so much pain, and I hate that I can't place it."⁵⁰ In other cases, TCKs' losses are hidden because parents, teachers, and peers don't acknowledge their non-death losses as "real" loss. As Pollock, and Van Reken, and Pollock note, "what [TCKs] loved and lost in each transition remains invisible to others and often unnamed by themselves."⁵¹

Wrecked Narratives

Sociologist Arthur Frank offers the term "narrative wreckage" for disrupted stories. He writes, "The conventional expectation of any narrative, held alike by listeners and storytellers, is for a past that leads into a present that sets in place a foreseeable future. The [disrupted] story is wrecked because its present is not what the past was supposed to lead up to, and the future is scarcely thinkable."⁵² This concept is helpful for framing the sorts of disruptions TCKs face.

⁴⁶ Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Alexander, *All Our Losses, All Our Griefs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 35-46. Their claims are reaffirmed in Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 7-8.

⁴⁷ Kenneth J. Doka, *Grief is a Journey: Finding Your Path through Loss* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2017), 7, 23-24.

⁴⁸ For an in-depth treatment of TCKs' identity within an organizational system (e.g., a missions agency or the US military), see Lois J. Bushong and Ruth E. Van Reken, "The Powerful Impact of Systems on the Globally Mobile," in Lois J. Bushong, *Belonging Everywhere & Nowhere: Insights into Counseling the Globally Mobile* (Indianapolis: Mango Tree Intercultural Services, 2013), 212-13, 234-37.

⁴⁹ Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*, 87 (emphasis original).

⁵⁰ TCK Individual Lament 19.

⁵¹ Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*, 86. See also the discussion on "existential losses in Gilbert, "Loss and Grief," 102-6.

⁵² Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 55. It is worth noting that the kind of disruption that Frank is concerned with is illness, though

Narratives can be disrupted because of international moves. When I was 12, my family left the Philippines for the US thinking it was for good, and I was living out the narrative of missionary kid who “returns” to the passport country. Less than two years later we were moving back to the Philippines and I was back in an MK-on-the-field narrative, yet one with pieces of the foreclosed return narrative jutting out of it.

Narratives of the self can also be disrupted. One study of college-age TCKs found that the students struggled not only with cultural differences (e.g., trying to enact the cultural “scripts” for friendship among those who follow different scripts) but also with social roles and personal identities.⁵³ Some who had not fit in with their host country/ies also found they were not fitting into that of their passport country; others “proposed that they no longer belonged anywhere [. . .], cut off from their former selves as represented in the host culture and yet unable to put down roots and assimilate into the new.”⁵⁴

TCKs’ disrupted narratives are often marked by resentment and anger, sometimes expressed in theological terms. One TCK that I interviewed said she cultivated an ideal missionary kid persona during a stint in the US, but inwardly harbored anger that God had put her family in that situation. Another’s striking lament, written in prayer form, voices both loss and anger in the wake of a wrecked narrative: “It hurts, it [*expletive*] hurts to be the only one, to be alone, to be years & years of miserable. To have nothing to offer and to be needed by no one and it hurts and it hurts and it hurts and it hurts and it hurts and it hurts and it hurts and it hurts and it hurts and I DO NOT FORGIVE YOU.”⁵⁵

Disenfranchised Grief

Kenneth Doka’s notion of “disenfranchised grief” offers a helpful framework for the kind of grief that TCKs often experience. Doka defines disenfranchised grief as “grief that results when a person experiences a significant loss and the resultant grief is not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly mourned.”⁵⁶ The “grieving rules” in a given society and/or particular subculture or people-group determine what “counts” as grief, as well as how it can be expressed and who can express it.⁵⁷ These grieving rules can further be internalized by individuals who might self-censor their expressions of grief or not acknowledge their reaction as grief per se.⁵⁸ Doka puts it bluntly: “we can disenfranchise ourselves.”⁵⁹

Disenfranchised grief is in line with the kind of grief that many TCKs experience.⁶⁰ In some cases, so-called grieving rules can be overt. When I was 16, a move to the Philippines was

by utilizing his framework I am not equating migration (specifically as TCKs experience it) and illness.

⁵³ Virginia J. Smith and Kerri S. Kearney, “A Qualitative Exploration of the Repatriation Experiences of US Third Culture Kids in College,” *Journal of College Student Development* 57, no. 8 (2016): 963-66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0093>.

⁵⁴ Smith and Kearney, “Repatriation Experiences,” 964.

⁵⁵ TCK Individual Lament 11.

⁵⁶ Kenneth J. Doka, “Disenfranchised Grief in Historical and Cultural Perspective,” in *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*, ed. Margaret S. Stroebe, Robert O. Hansson, Henk Schut, and Wolfgang Stroebe (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 224, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/14498-011>.

⁵⁷ Doka, *Grief is a Journey*, 188.

⁵⁸ Doka, “Historical and Cultural Perspective,” 228-29. Doka cites Jeffrey Kauffman, “The Psychology of Disenfranchised Grief: Liberation, Shame and Self-Disenfranchisement,” in *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges and Strategies for Practice*, ed. Kenneth J. Doka, 61-78. Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2002.

⁵⁹ Doka, *Grief is a Journey*, 189.

⁶⁰ Gilbert, “Loss and Grief,” 96, 107.

particularly hard on me, and I was informed by my parents that my angry tone and reluctance to leave my room was making their own transition harder. In other cases, TCKs might pick up on and respond to the social cues about expressing grief, as depicted in the poem “Mock Funeral”:

There was no funeral.
No flowers.
No ceremony.
No one had died.
No weeping or wailing.
Just in my heart.
I can't . . .
But I did anyway,
and nobody knew I couldn't.
I don't want to . . .
But nobody else said they didn't.
So I put down my panic
and picked up my luggage
and got on the plane.
There was no funeral.⁶¹

Apart from what TCKs may pick up from wider society and/or their family of origin, another major factor for regulating grief is a TCK's sending or sponsoring organization. TCKs' mobility is tied to their parents' work, which is usually part of a larger organizational system, such as a missions agency or military.⁶² Migration-related losses and grief are often seen as “part of the territory” or a “necessary sacrifice” for the good of the organization's mission, if it's even acknowledged at all.⁶³ “[W]hen parents are serving noble causes,” Pollock, and Van Reken, and Pollock observe, “[. . .] how can a child admit grief or fear?”⁶⁴ One TCK's lament encapsulates a disenfranchising system identity and perhaps some internalized denial of grief: “I'm so freaking tired / but I will play this / role.”⁶⁵

These three themes of hidden losses, wrecked narratives, and disenfranchised grief collectively serve as a major ingredient in my reading recipe, focusing my pedagogical and interpretive approaches on something that matters to the community. Lifting up these themes not only lets us read the Bible with more clarity—it also helps us read ourselves.

Fifth Ingredient: A Selection of Texts That Resonate with Experience

What completes the recipe I have outlined so far is a biblical text or collection of texts that reflect or share in some aspect of the community's experience. This may be the element that a religious educator builds their learning events around, often because the educator and/or their community finds a text that resonates with the community's experience.

For this specific recipe, I focus on the book of Lamentations. Its searing poetry testifies to

⁶¹ Alex Graham James, “Mock Funeral,” in Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*, 85.

⁶² Kathleen A. Finn Jordan, “Identity Formation and the Adult Third Culture Kid,” in *Military Brats and Other Global Nomads: Growing Up in Organization Families*, ed. Morten G. Ender (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 212-13.

⁶³ Bushong and Van Reken, “The Powerful Impact of Systems,” 212-13, 234-37.

⁶⁴ Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*, 92.

⁶⁵ TCK Individual Lament 22.

the destruction of Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, by the Babylonian Empire in 587 BCE and the exile (or, perhaps better, forced migration)⁶⁶ of a portion of its inhabitants to Babylon. Significantly, this event—as the single most traumatic and identity-altering one in Israel’s history—involves migration. My goal here is to identify what Gerald West calls “lines of connection,” points of resonance between the lived experience of ordinary readers and the texts they read.⁶⁷ With the contemporary dimension firmly in place—a reading community of TCKs exploring migration-related grief—I offer aspects of the historical and literary dimensions of the book that relate to the three themes of grief identified above.

The Historical Dimension

Material and Symbolic Loss

Judah’s losses are myriad. External evidence for Judah in the sixth century is notoriously sparse,⁶⁸ but what we do possess attests to significant losses. The king of Babylon records that he looted Jerusalem’s treasures after it became his vassal in 597 BCE.⁶⁹ The later destruction of Jerusalem was “on a massive scale” based on investigations of debris, and what settlement there was in the city after 587 “was small and grew very slowly.”⁷⁰ Indeed, the lack of sources and slow resettlement are themselves marks of a “post-collapse society,”⁷¹ testifying to the magnitude of loss. The losses behind Lamentations are quite different from the hidden losses that TCKs experience, but the fact that there is not much external evidence for the events of 587 BCE means that these losses are, in a real sense, hidden.

The Wrecked Narrative of Exile

The exile was also not a standalone occurrence but a “serial event.”⁷² Three separate forced migrations of Judahites by Babylon occurred in 597, 587, and 582 BCE, each with different numbers and demographics of migrants.⁷³ Each time, these migrations had major, lasting effects on those who migrated. John Ahn argues that each wave of Judahite migrants (who would become Judeo-Babylonians) should be seen as immigrants who experienced all the

⁶⁶ See the discussion in favor of this term in John J. Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations: A Sociological, Literary, and Theological Approach on the Displacement and Resettlement of the Southern Kingdom of Judah* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 27-34.

⁶⁷ Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 77.

⁶⁸ Deirdre N. Fulton, “The Exile and the Exilic Communities,” in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 230; Miller and Hayes, *Ancient Israel and Judah*, 479.

⁶⁹ James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 564; Fulton, “The Exile,” 231.

⁷⁰ Kirsi Valkama, “What Do Archeological Remains Reveal of the Settlements in Judah during the Mid-Sixth Century BCE?” in *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and Its Historical Contexts*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 51-52.

⁷¹ Valkama, “Settlements in Judah,” 56-59.

⁷² Robin A. Parry, *Lamentations*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 5.

⁷³ The number and makeup of migrants in each of these instances is a contested issue. Biblical accounts in 2 Kings, Jeremiah, and 2 Chronicles do not agree, nor do extra-biblical accounts of the exile. The contested details are not germane to my discussion here, however, and there is broad agreement that a substantial portion of the population was indeed forcibly relocated. For a thorough discussion of the issues, see Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations*, especially chapter 1.

hardships and griefs that immigrants everywhere face.⁷⁴ Ahn goes on to note that those of the “1.5 generation,” who migrated as older children or adolescents, would have faced challenges particular to their “in-between” generation, not fully rooted in the place their parents called home but also not fully at home in the place they are now planted.⁷⁵ Whether it was those forcibly displaced or left behind in Judah, each forced migration—each iteration of exile—wrecked the narratives of everyone involved. This makes a line of connection with TCKs from a variety of experiences, from those who are constantly being left to those who are always leaving.⁷⁶

Grief in the Shadow of Empire

We do not know what Babylonians thought of expressing grief (especially in migrant communities), but we do know what they thought about their empire’s success. The Babylonian metanarrative (the story an empire tells about itself) is rooted in the status of its patron god, Marduk, as creator of the cosmos and ruler of all peoples.⁷⁷ Thus, Babylon’s kings could make statements like, “Marduk [. . .] entrusted me with the rule of the totality of peoples, Nabu [. . .] placed in my hands a just scepter to lead all populated regions aright and to make humanity thrive.”⁷⁸ Such statements were likely connected with the imperial policy of relocating conquered peoples to Babylon (so they might “thrive?”), which aimed at “multi-cultural integration [. . .] while allowing for some cultural identity and diversity.”⁷⁹ Favorable as this may sound for Judahites holding onto their worship of YHWH, the imperial metanarrative was pervasive, perhaps even for those who were left behind in Judah.⁸⁰ The grief expressed in Lamentations is therefore, in part, a repudiation of the Babylonian metanarrative: Lamentations insists that it is YHWH, not Marduk, who is responsible for the exile, even if that means shattering received understandings about YHWH. In this sense, Lamentations bears witness to a people who insist that their expressions of grief are valid—no matter what the empire and its culture says. For TCKs whose own grief is disenfranchised, such validating witness can be a line of connection.

The Literary Dimension

Imagery of Loss

While Lamentations does contain some straightforward descriptive language, it more often uses images to convey loss. Lamentations 1, for example, portrays a woman—Jerusalem personified as “Daughter Zion” (בת־צִיּוֹן/*bat-ṣiyyôn*)⁸¹—whose world comes undone. She is “a

⁷⁴ Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations*, 38.

⁷⁵ Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations*, 109, 111.

⁷⁶ Both cases are very common in international schools. See Douglas W. Ota, *Safe Passage: How Mobility Affects People and What International Schools Should Do about It* (London: Summertime Publishing, 2014), especially chapter 1.

⁷⁷ Leo G. Perdue and Warren Carter, *Israel and Empire: A Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism*, ed. Coleman A. Baker (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 72-73. Marduk’s role as supreme god can be seen in the Old Babylonian creation epic “*Enuma Elish*” and “The Laws of Hammurabi.”

⁷⁸ Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 4 72 (Nbk 1=Zyl III,3) I 11-14, quoted in Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 73.

⁷⁹ Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migration*, 155.

⁸⁰ Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 81-83.

⁸¹ The Hebrew phrase בת־צִיּוֹן/*bat-ṣiyyôn* is often translated as “Daughter Zion” in scholarship on Lamentations, but it can also be translated as “Daughter of Zion.” I follow the more common convention in this thesis. For a case for the latter translation, see Michael H. Floyd, “The Daughter of Zion Goes Fishing in Heaven,” in Boda, Dempsey, and Flesher, *Daughter Zion*, 177-200. See also the discussion in Adele Berlin, *Lamentations*,

princess” (שָׂרָה/šārāh) who has become “a forced laborer” (לָמָס/lāmas; 1:1), she has “gone into exile” (גְּלוּה/glh; 1:3) and endured “homelessness”⁸² (מָרֹד/mārūd; 1:7), her “nakedness” (עֶרְוָה/erwāh)⁸³ is seen (1:8), and she has “none to comfort her” (1:9). Her losses are compounded by seeming confusion over whether to seek help for suffering that God has inflicted on her (1:9, 12, 16, 20) or to declare God as being “in the right” and herself as having “rebelled” (1:18).⁸⁴ Such equivocation could also be a kind of loss in itself—the way she understands the world and her place in it is shattered. Again, Judah’s losses are myriad, but attending to the imagery of loss in Lamentations shows more fully how the book gives expression to those losses. If TCKs experience tangible and intangible losses, so do the literary personas of Lamentations, and therein is a potential line of connection.

Structures for Wrecked Narratives

The things that hold Lamentations together are tenuous at best. Within the text of Lamentations itself, there is seemingly nothing that connects one verse to another, at least in languages other than Hebrew. Even in Hebrew, though, the structures seem tenuous: the only thing containing the poems are the acrostic patterns to which their contents adhere. Lamentations presents “the most chaotic sort of human experience via the most tightly structured available poetic form”—it is “a story of chaos in [. . .] a literary straitjacket.”⁸⁵ These seemingly tight structures do not hold up, though; after reaching a peak in chapter 3 (66 verses with each line beginning with an acrostic letter), chapter 4 diminishes (22 verses with 2 lines each) and chapter 5 virtually collapses (22 verses with 1 line each, no acrostic pattern).⁸⁶ It is as though the book itself “struggles [. . .] to contain and control the chaos of unstructured pain.”⁸⁷ These literary features may hold lines of connection for TCKs whose narratives are in the middle of being wrecked, perhaps like the one who laments, “Not even having enough time to adjust, I moved again. Why God?”⁸⁸ Even those who have gotten some distance from the chaos of a move may find a line of connection in feeling that their disrupted stories (lives?) are ordered by only the most rudimentary of structures, like a timeline of moves or stamps in a passport.

Witnessed Grief

In addition to the “story” of the diminishing capacity of acrostics, there is another that

Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 10-13.

⁸² This term is somewhat unclear and some commentators do not think the verb is fitting for a city, though I believe it fits for a personification. See R. B. Salters, *Lamentations: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 56-58.

⁸³ The noun can also refer to the genital area of both sexes (e.g. Gen 9:22 and Lev 18:6-18). Another, more blunt translation could be “they have seen her crotch exposed.” In the ancient world, to have one’s genitals exposed to others would be a soul-crushing social disgrace that a person could virtually never recover from. See Salters, *Lamentations*, 61; Parry, *Lamentations*, 51-53.

⁸⁴ While Lamentations as a whole is vague about the details of these transgressions and rebellions, they are almost certainly acts and systems that the prophetic books warn against, including not only worship of gods besides YHWH but also taking economic advantage of vulnerable groups. See D. N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003).

⁸⁵ Mark W. Hamilton, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 310.

⁸⁶ Parry, *Lamentations*, 13.

⁸⁷ Kathleen M. O’Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 12.

⁸⁸ TCK Individual Lament 19.

involves the book's multiple "voices" or literary personas. Several biblical scholars offer similar accounts of this story-like progression, in which the voice of a lamenter⁸⁹ (Lam 1-2, 4) distantly describes the suffering of Daughter Zion, but by witnessing her suffering (Lam 1-2) is drawn in as a participant in her pleas to God. The voice of a lone man (Lam 3) comes in, attesting to his own suffering, and is joined by the voice of the community (Lam 4-5).⁹⁰ As Elizabeth Boase observes, the voices progress from distant description to speaking together as a community.⁹¹ For Kathleen O'Connor, though, this progression is not only about listening to and gaining empathy for one another. It is about finding a witness. This, she says, is all Zion seeks: "for God, for someone, anyone, even strangers passing by—to see, pay attention, hear, to look at her. [. . .] Only a witness who understands her world can begin to comfort her."⁹² For O'Connor, the effect of the book is that it itself functions as a sort of witness. "Because Lamentations articulates and honors pain," she writes, "it can be a companion for people living in enforced silence."⁹³ Ultimately, it is experiences like loss and grief that draw the lines of connection with Lamentations: "We are no longer alone in our suffering because it is called forth, acknowledged, and named, no matter how indirectly, no matter how veiled by the text's metaphors and images."⁹⁴ It is here, perhaps, where lines of connection to TCKs and their experiences of disenfranchised grief are strongest.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have offered my answer to the question of what it looks like to read the Bible with a culturally hybrid community. I have done so by way of analogy, outlining a recipe for communal reading, and doing so with local ingredients specific to my context. While I have focused on a the particular community of Third Culture Kids with whom I work, and a very specific shared experience of migration-related grief, my hope is that the elements of this "recipe" are helpful to other religious educators who work with culturally hybrid communities. I think especially of the young people who have become cultural hybrids because of present-day forced migrations: the children of Latin American migrants whose grief was and is disenfranchised by both US government policy (including separating them from parents and caging them) and white supremacist culture that dehumanizes them, documented or not; the Middle Eastern and North African youths whose narratives were wrecked by displacement and, in some cases, by tragedy as they fled to Europe; the young adults of Ukraine whose myriad losses are both on display in the ruins of cities like Mariupol *and* hidden in the desperation of evacuation and the crush of daily news cycles. Perhaps reading Lamentations with young people from these communities might offer them a witness for their suffering—and, like TCKs, learn themselves as they read the Bible.

⁸⁹ I agree with Bier, who argues that this is not a "narrator" (an epithet used in several commentaries) because Lamentations is non-narrative poetry and the lamenting voice is deeply involved in Daughter Zion's situation. See Miriam J. Bier, "*Perhaps There is Hope*": *Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony of Pain, Penitence, and Protest* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 41-43.

⁹⁰ Bier, "*Perhaps There is Hope*," 217-20; Elizabeth Boase, "Fragmented Voices: Collective Identity and Traumatization in Lamentations," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 58.

⁹¹ Boase, "Fragmented Voices," 60.

⁹² O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 98.

⁹³ O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 90.

⁹⁴ O'Connor, *Tears of the World*, 94-95.

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Is Youth Merely the Next Generation? Reclaiming Youth Agency in the Korean Canadian Churches through Counter-Narrative

Abstract

This research argues that this single story— youth as “less than”— told by people in power in the church only undergirds youth marginalization within the church and encumbers youth’s agency and their yearnings to participate in meaningful ministries today. This research further revisits the lived experience of doubly marginalized youth in the multicultural Canadian context. While investigating the role of youth ministry played into youth agency this research lifts up the voices of youth to counter narrate the prevalent narrative that are told about youth, for a better representation of youth, particularly within the context of the Korean Canadian church.

Introduction

“Our desire is to not only see adults and parents engaging in youth ministry and make their contributions to the growth of generations to come. We want to see spaces created where we can come to serve, worship, and fellowship.” This was the answer one youth member gave to my question, “What do you want to tell the church?” In their answers and throughout my experience in youth ministry, I could see youth yearning to belong, to be given opportunities to serve, to be real and authentic, and for church to be a place where they can participate as agents. However, in many Korean North American church contexts, it is uncommon to see youth representation in the whole congregation. Outside of youth ministry, and sometimes even within youth ministry, youth are rarely seen or heard. One of the reasons for the neglect of youth in Korean Canadian churches is the neglect of youth agency and the tendency to understand youth as “still growing” and as “delinquent,” and thus in need of adult guidance in faith education to become mature Christians. Through critically assessing the concept of “adolescence” from a decolonial view point, this research plans to counter argue one of the identities that are imposed to young people that they are somehow “less than” and “not yet,” thus not yet “real” people. This research argues that this single story— youth as “less than”— told by people in power in the church only undergirds youth marginalization within the church and encumbers youth’s agency and their yearnings to participate in meaningful ministries today. This research further revisits the lived experience of doubly marginalized youth in the multicultural Canadian context. While investigating the role of youth ministry played into youth agency this research lifts up the voices of youth to counter narrate the prevalent narrative that are told about youth, for a better representation of youth, particularly within the context of the Korean Canadian church.

Stories We Have Heard About Youth

Adolescents as Incomplete

The current concept of adolescence was invented as a psychosocial concept in the early 20th century as many countries transitioned into an urban-industrial society. Several youth scholars concur that transitioning into industrial society had the effect of privatization and pacification of adolescence. Robert Epstein, author of *The Case Against Adolescence*,

corroborates that “it wasn’t until the turn of the twentieth century that adolescence was identified as a separate stage of life characterized by ‘storm and stress.’”¹ Kenda Dean, a prolific writer and eminent scholar in youth culture and faith formation, affirms how the Industrial Revolution shaped the current notion of adolescence. She writes,

Adolescence is an invention of the Industrial Revolution, a social pattern devised to keep young workers out of the factories so as not to displace older employees. By the twentieth century, thanks largely to access to public education, the ‘moratorium’ associated with adolescence had become widespread. The resulting age-stratification of American society (which allowed advertisers to target youth as a ‘market’) created the crucible in which the American ‘teenager’—a post-World War II youth with free time and disposable income—was born.²

This extension of childhood benefited a large number of new businesses and industries. Marketers noticed this youth group as potential consumers and valued their “enormous access to and influence over discretionary spending.”³ Ironically, as consumer culture has thrived, marketers have attempted to blur the line between youth and adults. Dean et al writes that, sometimes marketers even sell “youth-like lifestyles to adults” and sell the idea of maturity to youth.⁴ However, when youth want to be something more than mere consumers, they are immediately neglected. Elizabeth Corrie articulates the situation of youth in the following powerful words. She writes that the job of youth “is to become economically productive adults – and *then* (maybe) we’ll listen to them. Until then, they are to keep shopping but remain silent.”⁵ As depicted in Corrie’s argument, current adolescents are relegated to being mere consumers.

Katherine Turpin references historian Thomas Hine who describes the life of young people during the Industrial Revolution. With the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, young people between ages eleven and fifteen could not win against adults in the competition for factory jobs and by the mid-nineteenth century those young people were not only excluded from work but also were not in school. In big cities, youth started to find jobs they could do, such as provide delivery and courier services, or engage in retail counter jobs.⁶ Living on the urban streets also meant that youth were becoming increasingly involved in gambling, theft, and other criminal behaviours.⁷ The American high school, the YMCA, and Sunday schools then emerged to keep youth safe and engage them in more constructive activities. Although these adult-sponsored youth organizations saved young people from the streets, this salvation inadvertently

¹ Robert Epstein, *The Case Against Adolescence: Rediscovering the Adult in Every Teen* (Sanger, CA: Quill Driver Books/Word Dancer Press, 2007), 23.

² Kenda C. Dean, *Almost Christian : What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford ;: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

³ Corrie, *Youth Ministry as Peace Education*, 9.

⁴ Roland D. Martinson and Kenda Creasy Dean, *OMG: a Youth Ministry Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 25.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Katherine Turpin and Anne Walker, *Nurturing Different Dreams: Youth Ministry Across Lines of Difference* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 37

⁷ Ibid.

had negative impacts on youths by defining those who were “good” adolescents. David F. White, who offers a succinct summary for a contemporary understanding of adolescence writes,

‘good’ adolescents became identified with roles of education or ‘preparation’ for adult work and future social significance. While this shift left them without social significance, it provided many with leisure time and discretionary dollars—opening them to exploitation by marketers and their current role as consumers of fashion and entertainment commodities. In one generation that came of age in the 1930s and 1940s, the role of young people shifted from helping to provide for their families to draining their families’ income on commodity purchases.⁸

“Adolescence” was understood as a period in which “to grow up or to grow into maturity”⁹ and as a time of storm and stress, where all the constructive activities designed for adolescents set them aside from the larger society. This process was the “domestication of adolescence.”¹⁰

This process of domestication continues in current youth ministries and schools. Various youth programs provide with peers and shelter them in religion, hoping youth will grow into faithful Christian adulthood.¹¹ Tim Van Meter and Katherine Turpin claim that current youth education aims to pacify youth, keep them away from public life, and cultivate a vision focused on economic ascendancy. As a result, rather than asking youth to respond with “the fullness of their agency,” many educational models simply impose the vision of a desired finished product upon young people.¹²

Adolescents as Primitive

For the most part, adolescents are grouped together by the single criterion of age. Scientific research, such as recapitulation theory and developmental theory on adolescents, defines them solely on the basis of physiological and biological traits and excludes the complex lived experiences of their everyday lives. For instance, based on traditional stream in developmental theory, being between ages 12 and 17 determines their identity despite their race, culture, economic status, or any sociohistorical influence on adolescence. Since the beginning of the study of adolescents, even after a century has passed, the negative understanding of adolescence is still prevalent in society and churches, and it controls youth and youth educators’ views and how educators conduct education. What theories have been shaping our conceptualization of adolescents to see them as immature and irresponsible, theories that have been used to justify the neglect of adolescents?

⁸ David F. White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth: A transformative Youth Ministry Approach* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 17.

⁹ Elizabeth D. Hutchison, ed., *Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2015), 225.

¹⁰ Turpin and Anne Walker, *Nurturing Different Dreams*, 37.

¹¹ Kenda C. Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998), 38.

¹² Tim Van Meter and Katherine Turpin. “No Longer Guests: On the Dynamics of Agency and Formation in Ministry with Older Adolescents,” *Journal of Youth and Theology* 1, no. 2 (2002): 18. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24055093-90000099>.

G. Stanley Hall initiated the scientific study of adolescence in the United States when the concept was a popular topic in Europe. He could be deemed a pioneer in adolescent studies who produced noteworthy scholarly work in the early 1900s; however, his theory set a vicious cycle in motion as he defined adolescents as irrational, conforming, and emotional beings who are less valued than the Euro-American adult male.¹³ Nancy Lesko, a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, interprets Hall's theory as "ingeniously combined pieces of recapitulation theory,"¹⁴ which puts animals, savages, and children in parallel. Recapitulation theory put men and civilization at the top of the pyramid as the most developed forms of life, in terms of a historical schema. A "baby" is equal to pre-human life, the "child stage" indicates a tribal period, the "boy" reflects a medieval period, "adolescent" is labelled the monarchical period, and "man" is civilization.¹⁵ Lesko argues that Hall "aimed to improve the white race by identifying and harnessing the savage energies available at adolescence to create manly men capable of domination and civilization of others."¹⁶ Adolescents were deemed inferior to adults due to their age and their period of time was interpreted as pivotal in determining whether a youth will develop into a superior being with white male characteristics or remain in a savage state.¹⁷ This deterministic viewpoint naturally separated youth from adults by age and spread the analogy of youth-as-primitive.

Recapitulation theory was used to justify colonialism and racism, but it also greatly affected the social location of children and adolescents. Lesko argues that in child-raising manuals, children were deemed as "lower-order beings: they are animal-like, lack civility, discipline, and sexual restraint; their instincts are base, they are too close to nature, they are, like racialized others, not fully human beings."¹⁸ Seeing adolescence in this way is understandable if we understand Hall's social context that most of the youth he encountered were those on the streets of Baltimore. Epstein argues that Hall's context misled him to think youth only as a time of turmoil.¹⁹ On his way to work to Johns Hopkins University, where he was a professor for six years from 1882, he passed the streets that had been taken over by immigrant and working-class poor youth. Scholars do not deny that there were troubled teens. However, the scholars referenced in this research do argue that his concept of adolescence is biased and his data on adolescents could have been interpreted as a problem of his times. Hall gives lengthy anecdotes of troubled adolescents in his book published in 1904. While not denying that troubling incidents occurred—such as a duel between two boys, a boy killing his siblings out of jealousy, or a boy stabbing a strange girl who refused him²⁰—it can be questioned if this is solely a teen problem or should be interpreted as general human problem.

¹³ Nancy Lesko, "Past, Present, and Future Conceptions of Adolescence," *Educational Theory* 46, no. 4 (1996): 461, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1996.00453.x>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nancy Lesko, *Act Your Age!: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 28.

¹⁶ Lesko, "Past, Present, and Future," 461.

¹⁷ Ibid., 460.

¹⁸ Lesko, *Act Your Age!*, 29.

¹⁹ Epstein, *The Case Against Adolescence*, 121.

²⁰ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence; Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (London: S. Appleton, 1905), .

Inevitably, Hall's presentation of his concept became the norm for understanding adolescents. Lesko brings in a helpful quote from Ann L. Stoler, a historical anthropologist, to elaborate on how the analogy of youth-as-primitive contributes to the maltreatment of adolescence. Lesko emphasizes this understanding:

For becoming adult and bourgeois meant distinguishing oneself from that which was uncivilized, lower-class, and non-European.... In rehearsing repeatedly what a child must shed to become an adult, these verbal and written injunctions also rehearsed a social hierarchy and racial taxonomy of libidinal desire and uncivilized habits that bourgeois children would have to shed to become fully human, adult, and European.²¹

Equating adolescents with *primitives* created a structural hierarchy and labeled who was the norm. Not only did this analogy marginalize adolescents, but it also completely dehumanized adolescents of color.

Double Marginalization of Korean Canadian Youth in the Canadian Multicultural society

Along with societal and historical reasons for perceiving youth as “less than,” Korean Canadian youth are doubly marginalized not only because of their youth but because of their origin. In current transnational society, Korean Canadian youth are living in between two worlds: Canada and Korea. Extensive scholarly work points out that subsequent Korean generations in North America experience difficulties being in between the mainstream society and their own immigrant communities. Unlike some inter-cultural societies, Canada blankets itself as a “multicultural” or “mosaic” country. It encourages all ethnic groups to root their identities in their own backgrounds and come together as Canadians.²² Although Canada conveys the message that Canada is a multicultural society and everyone is welcomed, due to the colour of their eyes, hair, and skin and the way they speak, eat, and dress, ethnic minorities will always stand out as different from mainstream white Canadians. Himani Bannerji, a Bengali Canadian writer, describes how the current Canadian multiculturalism paradigm in fact becomes the very vehicle for racialization. She writes that Canada “establishes Anglo-Canadian culture as the ethnic core culture while ‘tolerating’ and hierarchically arranging others around it as ‘multiculture.’” Despite its ideal of multiculturalism, what defines the “multi” is still “the ethics and aesthetics of whiteness.”²³ Marianne S. Noh powerfully echoes Bannerji's point in her dissertation about the second generation Korean Canadian experience.

More so than Americans, the Canadians in the sample are expressing a greater sense of belonging to Canadianness such that the Canadian national identity proclaims multiculturalism and an immigrant, diverse, and multiethnic society. At the same time, they experience frustration over the ambiguity in the meaning of being Canadian because

²¹ Ann L. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's history of sexuality and the colonial order of things*, in *Act Your Age!* by Nancy Lesko, 29.

²² John Murray Gibbon et al., *Canadian Mosaic: the Making of a Northern Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited Publishers, 1938).

²³ Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2000), 78.

dominant group messages of Whiteness and Anglo Saxon ideals as purely Canadian are still prominent. Although there was a common tendency to perceive Canadianness to mean Whiteness, there were also explicit and conscious messages that Canadian referred to tolerance for diversity. Canadian respondents appeared to reveal stronger national identity through the use of multicultural rhetoric, which implies a tolerance for diversity. However, Canadian experiences included exclusion, racism and discrimination from and within mainstream social settings, similar to American experiences, which prevented second gens from fully integrating into the multicultural Canadian model.²⁴

In schools, youth are also visible yet invisible. An interesting anecdote by Dawan Coombs, Hye-Young Park, and Bob Fecho on reveals the social position of Asian students in high schools. The research reveals that schools may not overtly introduce policies to marginalize Asian students, but “courses weren’t created, literature wasn’t included, and culturally influenced ways of learning and transacting weren’t brought to bear in any collected and official way. The lack of cultural variety in the school perpetuated the prevalence of the dominant culture.”²⁵ While one example cannot be generalized, it directs us to an interesting racial dynamic taking place in schools.

According to the most recent Census Portraits conducted by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) in 2018, 36% of the students identified themselves as being of Asian descent and 14% identified as East Asians, while 29% of students identified themselves as white.²⁶ TDSB is one of the school districts that contains a racially diverse student population. As seen by the percentages, the population of Asian students is highly visible. But despite the a significant number of Asian students, there have not been many resources available to inform teachers regarding racism and microaggressions. Only in 2021, after the Atlanta shooting and with the rise of the anti-Asian hate movement, did TDSB finally release a new document for teachers on how to address racism.²⁷ In a news article on the subject, Terri Chu, who researches anti-Asian racism in Canada, explains that racism and marginalization of people of color have worsened to a point where “people don’t always perceive racism for what it is because it has become so commonplace.” Yet, as mentioned above, Canada tends to hide behind the magic term “multicultural society” and hesitates to address Asian Canadian marginalization.

Asian students were also stereotyped as less comfortable answering questions, speaking up, or participating. A report conducted by TDSB in 2011 entitled “Census Portraits: Understanding Our Students’ Ethno-racial Backgrounds” examines that “East Asian students are less confident about many of their skills, including their communication, reading, and writing

²⁴ Noh, Marianne S. “Contextualizing Ethnic/racial Identity: Nationalized and Gendered Experiences of Segmented Assimilation Among Second Generation Korean Immigrants in Canada and the United States” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008), 127.

²⁵ Dawan Coombs, Hye-Young Park, and Bob Fecho, “A Silence That Wants to Be Heard: Suburban Korean American Students in Dialogue with Invisibility,” *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 17, no. 2 (2014): 244, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.725038>.

²⁶ Toronto District School Board, “Student & Parent Census,” November 2018, last accessed October 28, 2021, 3, <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Search/Search?q=student%20census>.

²⁷ CBC News, “Teachers Get New Resource to Address Anti-Asian Racism in Toronto Public Schools,” posted February 9, 2021, last accessed October 30, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-district-school-board-elementary-teachers-federation-ontario-anti-asian-racism-resource-1.5906406>.

skills, social skills, problem-solving skills, and leadership skills.” However, an interesting result the report shows is that “more East Asian students meet or exceed the provincial standard (Level 3) on Gr. 6 Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) Reading and Writing tests, and many more meet the standard on the Gr. 6 EQAO Math test” than students of other races. This discrepancy between how Asian students are portrayed and the results they produce shows the stereotypes Asian students experience. In Toronto, supposedly one of the most racially diverse places, diversity is visible yet invisible.

Many Korean Canadian youth tend to be doubly marginalized from the mainstream society and also from their own immigrant communities due to their hyphenated identities. First-generation Koreans who immigrated to Canada tend to wish that subsequent generations would not abandon their Koreanness. Yet an interviewee from Song et al.’s research captures a different sentiment when she says, “Now we’re second generation, you can’t expect us to have that same thing because we grew up in a different culture and a different world and different time.”²⁸ To the first generation, the subsequent generations are never Korean enough.

Korean Canadian youth’s lived experiences of in-betweenness are not only related to being in two worlds but also to the concept of age. Youth are considered to be out of childhood but not fully adults. Youth need less protection from their primary caregivers and are expected to be more independent. At the same time, they are considered as mere kids with few rights and privileges. They are expected to take some responsibility, yet still must listen to the words of authorities, such as parents and teachers. For many immigrant households, adults even rely on their children to be the literal and cultural translator due to their lack of English skills. Those children become caregivers of the household because they filed necessary documents on behalf of their parents. Yet in the household and in churches, adults retrieve the caregiver role they lent to their children. Youth are placed in the liminal stage, which is the in-between of not being fully adults nor being little kids.

This betwixt-and-between space may make youth anxious that they will remain irrelevant in the eyes of adults and insignificant in the eyes of mainstream Canadian culture. Yet, Fumitaka Matsuoka writes, “A person in a liminal world is poised in uncertainty and ambiguity between two or more social constructs, reflecting in the soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions.”²⁹ It is in this in-betweenness where youth can exercise their agency by being intensely alert and refusing to accept easily what is regarded as common sense.

Youth are taught to maintain dominant white adult subjectivity. However, rather than subverting the center and creating another hierarchy, youth agency based on interstitial integrity³⁰ does not occur by abasing the other but goes beyond the center/youth dichotomy. Youth’s internalizing their status leads them to project that neglect onto others, but a youth agent

²⁸ Nam Soon Song, Ben C. H Kuo, Dong-Ha Kim, In Kee Kim, and Greer Anne Wenh-In N., *People of Faith, People of Jeong (Qing): The Asian Canadian Churches of Today for Tomorrow* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 3.

²⁹ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1995), 54.

³⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock coined the term interstitial integrity and defines it as an ability not only to cope with the experience of being liminal and peripheral, but also to make meaning out of the multiple worlds one is experiencing by refusing to disconnect from any one of them, while not aligning with a singular one. Rita Nakashima Brock, “Cooking without Recipes: Interstitial Integrity,” in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women’s Religion and Theology*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock, Jun Ha Kim, Kwok Pui Lan, and Seung Ai Yang (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 191.

with interstitial integrity knows that it is dehumanizing to build one's agency on neglect of the other. They enter deeply into the oppressive system, yet rather than staying passive in the system, youth can act and transform it. Although youth agency is confrontational, it acknowledges the center's fear that they might lose control when affirming youth agency. Youth as insiders and outsiders of their traditions will be able to construct a new space, a space in which their well-being and voices are considered seriously.

The Role of Youth Ministry in Youth Agency through Counter Narrative

The story most often told about youth describes them as delinquents, as still becoming, and of their trials in storm and stress. This is the popular image created by the media and by those in power. Too many young people internalize this single and negative story. A well-known Ted Talk entitled "The danger of a single story" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie may help us see the impact of emphasizing a negative concept of youth. In her talk, Adichie said: "show a people as one[-sided] thing, as only one[-sided] thing, over and over again, and that is what they become."³¹ When the people in power start the story that youth are troubled, instead of addressing their real struggle in their lived experiences, that is how young people become delinquent. When the single story starts from how youth are risky instead of adventurous, young people are labeled as dangerous. Despite the great variation among young people, a single story becomes the story of youth. In this single story, no room is made for youth to be agents, just like adults who hold power. It inhibits the possibility of encompassing the complexity of the lived experience of youth and instead flattens their experience. This negative single story becomes the representation of all youth. Adichie points out the danger of the negative single story as creating a stereotype. She asserts, "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."³²

This research does not deny that youth do behave recklessly and have troubles of their own, yet this research strongly argues that that is not the sole aspect of youth. As we explored in the previous sections, youth are more than mere troubled souls who have much to tell about themselves. What if the people in power within the church knew about all of the profound life struggles and theological struggles that youth experience? What if the youth who cannot see themselves as agents heard of other youth who were participating in peace-building and making changes in their communities? What if people of all ages were exposed to stories about youth who were in solidarity in each other's pain because of the injustice that is occurring at schools? This calls for a counter-narrative.

Counter-narrative as a Way to Reclaim Agency

Youth can see themselves as agents through hearing and telling agential narratives. Humans are storytelling beings. These stories can take various forms, such as folk tales, movies, novels, or even lectures. Daniel Solózano and Tara Yosso, educators and critical race theorists,

³¹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en#t-1068158, 9:17.

³² Ibid., 12:49.

corroborate the idea that counter stories can be delivered in various forms.³³ There are many other ways in which we can make sense of our world; however, stories are a primary way to understand ourselves and others. For youth, hearing and telling different narratives beyond those that diminish them helps them to see beyond what society tells them they are. Thus hearing and telling counter-narratives is imperative in order for youth themselves to value their experiences and for the church congregation to recognize the voices of youth. Youth narratives in which they name themselves as agents can start with counter-narratives.

Counter-narrative has recently emerged as a teaching tool for a form of diversity-sensitive pedagogy. It also opens up the possibility for youth to understand themselves as agents and for others to listen to their lived experiences. This research describes the counter-narrative with traits of critiquing the norm, challenging the presumed conceptions, and countering what is considered normal, as seen in the works of the following scholars. Jessica T. DeCuir and Adrienne D. Dixon, scholars in culturally sensitive pedagogy, define counter-storytelling as “a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. The use of counter-stories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups.”³⁴ Richard Delgado, one of the founding members of the Conference on Critical Race Theory and Jean Stefancic, author of leading articles and books, define counter-storytelling as a method that “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority.”³⁵ They argue that culture influences what the norm is and it impacts the outcomes of laws.³⁶ Although they explain counter-storytelling in the setting of law practice, it can be applied to youth agency since culture does not only influence how laws are carried out but also is one of the primary factors that influence a person’s story.

When one tells a story, it does not come from a vacuum but comes from within a context that already interprets life experiences. Culture heavily influences how our stories are told. Depending on the cultures we live in, stories reflect different gender roles, class structures, and power dynamics.³⁷ If it is a culture open to gender equality, people’s stories and their understanding of themselves will reflect that value. Korean Canadian youth are positioned in a culture that constantly conveys to them a message that they are not part of the dominant group. A church that pushes youth to its boundaries communicates that youth are not ready to be agents just yet. Not only are people’s stories affected by culture, but for Christians, their Bible or faith stories can become prominent sources of the values people use to construct their own narratives.³⁸ In a high Christological church context, which describes most South Korean

³³ Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso. “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 32–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103>.

³⁴ Jessica T. DeCuir and Adrienne D. Dixon, “‘So When It Comes Out, They Aren’t That Surprised That It Is There’: Using Critical Race Theory as a Tool of Analysis of Race and Racism in Education,” *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 5 (2004): 27, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033005026>.

³⁵ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), Apple Ebook, 172.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁷ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, 1st ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), 323.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

churches, the identity of the individual alters to fit the culture. This misperception makes it harder for young people to find their place in their own story. The major narrative tends to silence the experiences of the young.

Despite the fact that the Bible was written within a human context in an age that is distinct from this current time, we can learn from the Bible that being young should not stop believers from participating in God's work. The best-known example is Paul's letter to Timothy. Timothy doubts his ability to accomplish God's work because he is young.³⁹ Paul encourages him by saying, "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders" (1 Timothy 4:12-14, NRSV). Paul's encouragement to Timothy clearly demonstrates why being young should not hinder anyone from participating in ministry. Christian youth ministry rather needs faithful adults who encourage and walk along with the youth in their life circumstances.

The Bible assures us that the Gospel is not only for adults but also for young people. The most famous verse regarding respect for young people would be Jesus' word toward his disciples in Mark: "People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:14, NRSV). As Jesus suggests that young people are well-suited to hear and understand God's words, he also proclaims in Matthew 11:25 that his message will be revealed to children. The scripture not only cherishes young people and justifies their part in God's kingdom, but it takes the idea a step further and tells us that these children will be the leaders when their day comes.

Isaiah prophesied that a child shall lead: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:9, NRSV). The Bible even shows through David how God calls a young person to fight the good fight for the nation. David is depicted as a "boy" who was too little to fit into a suit of armor. Scholars assume that he was in his mid-teens.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, God calls the boy and asks him to participate in God's plan. Another example is Daniel and his four friends. They were in their early adolescence and they refused to eat anything coming from the king's table. According to Daniel 1, God gave them wisdom and strength and stationed them in the king's court.

In addition to where the Bible explicitly recognizes the value of young people, it always shows its heart towards the vulnerable and the marginalized. Jesus started his ministry with this proclamation: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 14:18-19, NRSV). In Luke, Jesus is found teaching in the temple as a twelve-year-old boy. Luke writes "and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47, NRSV). The traditional interpretation of this passage is that people were in awe because it was the

³⁹ Dean, *The Godbearing Life*, 38.

⁴⁰ Mark Senter, Wesley Black, Chap Clark, and Malan Nel, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church: Inclusive Congregational, Preparatory, Missional, Strategic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2001), 13.

teaching of Jesus, the son of God. However, it could also have been Jesus' interstitial experiences that informed Jesus's way of interpreting the Word. A boy's unique experience could have been seen from a different theological perspective. Although we have seen adolescents being liminal because they are not fully adults but also not children, the Gospel invites them to make a difference in this world. Although we have seen adolescents being liminal because they are not fully adults but also not children, the Gospel invites them to make a difference in this world. Hearing these stories can empower youth to identify themselves not as mere consumers of religion but people being called to God's ministry.

Sharing Counter Narratives

As youth tell their stories, it serves the function of inviting and challenging the adults in the center to rethink youth. Counter stories open the opportunity to celebrate the uncelebrated members of the community. Asian North American theologians turned their marginalized experience into a story and continuously shared their lived experiences with the public, which created a crack in the major narrative and made more room. Youth sharing their lived experiences, their faith journey, and how they have been exercising agency not only opens up the possibility for youth to understand themselves as agents but for others to acknowledge youth as agents. Most North American youth ministry platforms and curricula are informed by viewing white cultural experience as the norm. However, focusing on Korean Canadian youth's interstitial experience can result in a youth ministry that reflects their cultural home. Sharing youth's faith story can be a powerful tool as a counter-narrative and it creates space for youths' voices to be uplifted. As youth hear counter-narratives in the Scripture and explore how their Koreanness and hybrid experience can be a source of counter-narratives, they construct an alternative image of themselves as agents of their faith rather than accepting the traditional narrative that depicts them as passive recipients.

Youth sharing their faith testimonies with others can challenge the prevalent misconception of youth and help people to unlearn their prejudice toward youth as mere *next-generation*. Hearing the stories of youth gives adults an opportunity to learn and adopt broader attitudes towards youth. For instance, one of the youth at Vaughan Community Church shared her experience after coming from a mission trip. She started with saying "Earlier this year, I signed up for the Ahousaht mission because I wanted to break out of my comfort zone of serving, usually in Hi-C through leading praise and leadership. I wanted to serve God in a different way, in a more uncomfortable and challenging way, and I wanted to push my limits." This shows how she has been actively participating in God's work and has further yearnings to make change. By sharing this story, listeners can have an alternative image of a youth and see how being taken serious is crucial to their agency. For churches that are comprised of immigrants and are struggling with language and cultural discrepancies between the first and subsequent generations, it is crucial to listen to each other's stories and acknowledge their differences because churches can create various ways of believing in God in that intersection of differences.

Conclusion

This research started with a yearning for better representation of youth in ministry and dissatisfaction with how youth are conceptualized in society and churches. One of the starting assumptions of this research was that youth need to be acknowledged as agents and youth ministry that empowering youth as agents could invoke a change. First, this research observed

that youth have mostly been presumed to be somewhat lesser than adults (youth-as-primitive), not yet ready (becoming), and in storm and stress (youth in angst), all of which have been informed by deficient historical ideas. Then, while dismantling traditional understandings of youth in North American contexts, this research argued that it is crucial to understand Korean Canadian youth's *betwixt-and-between* social location and the need to envision an agency that is exercised despite their in-betweenness. Korean Canadian youth agency is an agency from within, and that the emphasis should be placed on the concrete lived experiences of today rather than seeing the value of youth as limited to the future. Third, this research revealed that hearing and sharing stories is a powerful tool that allows youth and other church congregations to acknowledge youth as agents. As much as individual narratives are crucial to cultivate agency, a church having an alternative narrative is crucial for a church that employs ministry with youth. It is time to acknowledge youth agency to make change and extend the same tolerance for failure and experimentation that we grant adults.

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Imagining Religious Education in Indonesia beyond 2045

Abstract

The Indonesian national curriculum from Grade 1 to university has religious education as compulsory. In addition to six religions acknowledged (i.e., Islam, Christian, Catholic, Buddhism, Hinduism, Kong Ho Cu), indigenous religions have finally acquired their legal standing. Considering the current condition where living together with people of different faiths is getting more common, equipping each student with some understanding of other religions instead of only one's own is now a must. The basic argument for this is that everyone has a right to know not only about his own religion but also the basic teachings of other religions. This will help the society members to live peacefully and be tolerant of each other while reducing the tendency to become radical. The findings show that most participants do show awareness of the new incoming condition and the need to develop religious education that consists of more interfaith views. The study can contribute to the development of religious leaders and teachers' realization concerning the more complicated and multi-faceted society that emerges between the present time and the year 2045.

Keywords: awareness, Indonesia, religious education, vision 2045

Introduction

Several issues that challenge the existence of Indonesia as a nation are related to the uniqueness of Indonesia as a nation and its people. Geographically, Indonesia is located in the ring of fire or Circum- Pacific Belt that spreads along 40,000 km of the Pacific Ocean. It is very common to have volcanic eruptions now and then with 127 active volcanoes¹ in addition to earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, forest fires and floods with the last two caused by humans. Strictly speaking, Indonesian people should live harmoniously with natural disasters that can come unexpectedly.²

¹ Aeni, Siti Nur (2022). 127 gunung aktif di Indonesia berdasarkan tipenya. (127 active volcanoes in Indonesia according to its type). <https://katadata.co.id/sitinuraeni/berita/61fa533de8da/127-gunung-aktif-di-indonesia-berdasarkan-tipenya>. Accessed May 2, 2022.

² Indonesia-investments.com (2018). Natural disasters in Indonesia. <https://www.indonesia-investments.com/business/risks/natural-disasters-item243>. Accessed May 21, 2019.

Indonesia is also rich in terms of culture, ethnic groups, traditions, as well as natural resources. Since the fifth century, the Indonesian area had been visited by many foreign traders who exchanged Indonesian crops with materials not produced by Indonesian local people. Several nations have captivated Indonesia and even colonialized most of Indonesia's area. Even though Indonesia, as a nation had gained its independence since the year 1945, building this big nation as one solid society as dreamed by its founding fathers, has not been easy. Attempts by several groups to take over the nation had started as early as 1948.³

The year 2045 becomes the catchword in vision formulation and discourses about the future world. In Indonesia, the vision consists of a dream that the nation will become a sovereign, just, developed, and wealthy one.⁴ As a pluralistic nation, the dream needs many prerequisites to be fulfilled, among others are factors related to religions. Thus far, the major religions in Indonesia including the indigenous beliefs manage to live together. However, the new geopolitical constellation and the dream indicate the need for interfaith understanding, appreciation, or even synergy. As a preliminary study, this article explores the religious leaders or teachers' educational paradigms mainly the topics that students have to undergo to make their future dream comes true. Through, questionnaires and interviews as the follow-up, the article tries to explore the participant's awareness of the new cultural, political, and social contexts that are emerging in this decade until 2045 and their impacts on the religious education topics and processes.

In February 2012, there was an international congress entitled "Global Future 2045-A New Era for Humanity." The initiative was derived from Itskov, a Russian entrepreneur. In May 2019, the Indonesian government also proclaimed the Indonesian Vision of 2045. In 2021, Vietnam also formulates its quest to become a developed country by 2045. In the same year, there was a Vision 2045 Summit attended by the Petra Group which is a diversified global conglomerate group⁵.

The formulation of the Vision of Indonesia 2045 took two years to come into existence. Many decision-makers of the executive, legislative, and judicative bodies worked together with the academia and business leaders to formulate the dream and the roadmap. To manifest the dream, they formulated four pillars of the Vision⁶ as follow:

1. Excellent Indonesian citizens who own science and technology mastery;
2. Sustainable economic development;
3. Even distribution and inclusive holistic development; and
4. Good governance, democracy, and Stabilization of National Defence.

Considering the richness of Indonesia in terms of religions and beliefs, traditions, cultures, and ethnic groups, the founding fathers, had agreed that *Pancasila* should be the foundation

³ Kompasiana.com (2021). Mengingat Kembali Sejarah Singkat Konflik Ambon: Latar Belakang, Akar Permasalahan dan Penyelesaian. (Remembering a short history of Ambon conflict: Background, the roots, and resolution). <https://www.kompasiana.com/umi03508/61b9641c06310e49655b7192/mengingat-kembali-sejarah-singkat-konflik-ambon-latar-belakang-akar-permasalahan-dan-penyelesaian>. Accessed May 25, 2011.

⁴ Muhyiddin, Muhyiddin (2019). Future challenges to Indonesia's vision 2045. *The Indonesian Journal of Development Planning*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.36574/jpp.v3i1.63>

⁵ Star (2021). *Petra Group participates in the Vision 2045 Summit*. Accessed January 15, 2022.

⁶ Muhyiddin, iv

for the nation. *Pancasila* (meaning five foundations) is as the following:

1. Belief in the one and only God;
2. Just and civilized humanity;
3. The unity of Indonesia;
4. Democracy is guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives; and
5. Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia.

Pancasila has been regarded as foundational if we want to keep Indonesia as a pluralistic multicultural nation. During the reign of Suharto (from 1966 to 1998) there have been periods where Pancasila was given to every university student before they started their first semester, and to every government employee around Indonesia. But since Suharto was overruled, these kinds of activities were not applied any longer.

Nevertheless, conflicts among religious believers in Indonesia had happened several times where each believed that the other believer was forcing his/her belief toward oneself. Two such conflicts were worth mentioning in more detail. First, a conflict in Poso, middle Sulawesi, started in December 1998 as fights among local youth groups but then changed into fights between Muslims and Christians⁷. Altogether 577 were killed, 384 were injured, and 7.932 houses added 510 public facilities were destroyed. Not until December 2001 that the conflicts could be ended by governmental intervention. Second, a conflict that happened in January 1999 in Ambon, Maluku island, between Muslim and Christian believers⁸. A similar conflict also occurred in Halmahera, also one of the Maluku islands between those two religious believers.^{9,10} Reports said that more than 5000 had been killed in the Maluku wars, both by Muslim and Christian believers. What was surprising is that children as young as 10 years old had killed several people of a different faith.¹¹

Data released by the Indonesian Ministry of Home Affairs on December 31 of 2021 show that those who are Islam reach the amount of 237.530.000 believers. This makes Indonesia a nation with the highest number of Muslims in the whole world. No wonder terrorism had been addressed by several people and/or organizations. The objective is to change Indonesia from a pluralistic multicultural nation to an Islamic nation.^{12, 13}

⁷ Kompas.com (2021). Konflik Ambon 2001: Latar Belakang, Dampak, dan Penyelesaian. (Ambon conflict: Background, impacts, and resolution). <https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2021/07/30/110000479/konflik-ambon-2001-latar-belakang-dampak-dan-penyelesaian?page=all>. Accessed May 26, 2022.

⁸ Kompas.com (2021). Konflik Ambon 2001

⁹ Duncan, Christopher R. (2003). *Apa yang Terjadi Setelah Berhentinya Perang? Masa Depan Pengungsi Maluku Utara di Sulawesi Utara*. Conflict Management and Democratic Dialog in Indonesia Website. Southeast Asian Studies Program, Ohio University. Accessed December 3, 2012.

¹⁰ Manuputty, J., & Watimanela, D. (2004). Konflik Maluku. In Trijono, L., Azca, M. N., Susdinarjanti T. Cahyono, M. F., & Qodir, Z. (Eds), *Potret Retak Nusantara: Studi Kasus Konflik di Indonesia*. (pp. 77 – 170). Yogyakarta: Center for Security and Peace Studies dan Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network.

¹¹ Nurdin, Endang. (2018). Saling bunuh, saling bakar sampai... 'sayang kamu semua': Mantan tentara anak Islam dan Kristen Ambon (Killing each other, burning each other until ... 'love you all' Ex child soldiers of Ambonese Muslims and Christians). <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-43207033>

¹² Damayanti, Angel (2010). Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Indonesia. *Jurnal Sociae Polites*. repository.uki.ac.id. Accessed May 1, 2022

¹³ Munip, Abdul. (2012). Menangkal Radikalisme Agama di Sekolah (Opposing religious radicalism in schools), *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 1(2), December, 159 – 181. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2012.12.159-181>

Azis¹⁴ argues that the Indonesian government should do something to prevent Indonesia become split into several smaller independent nations. The arrests of several prominent figures who act as intellectual actors behind all these terrorisms are good, but not enough. Azis¹⁵ also recommends using education to increase understanding among younger generations of the importance of maintaining a solid nation based on Pancasila is much more important. This way, religious teachers play crucial roles in implementing the first principle of belief in one and only God is not only according to Islamic doctrine because Indonesia has been home to various religions and indigenous beliefs even though the believers are not as many as Islam believers.

Thus far, mass media have already communicated the issues that already arose or will be more urgent in the incoming decades: intolerance and radicalism, LGBTQ, ecology threat, conflicts among countries, and nuclear threats. Through content analysis, it is evident that the roadmap or pillars of the Indonesian Vision 2045 do not include any topic related to religions and religious education although most of the citizens that number around 275.25 million belong to one of seven major religions.¹⁶

Sanaky¹⁷ and Habaehan¹⁸ state that the role of religious education in shaping and developing the attitude of tolerance in the context of Indonesia's diversity of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion is significant. In a multi-religious nation, education should provide an overview and moral ideals of religion contextually instead of maintaining rigid and less humanist religious doctrines that have been held so far in some communities. Education has a significant role to play in fostering early attitudes, not only in accepting the existence of other religions but also in appreciating those who have different beliefs or religions. Educational design should accommodate appreciative and tolerant attitudes. It means that learning materials and teachers' attitudes play a decisive role.

Zuhdi and Sarwenda¹⁹ stated in their study that one of the most crucial issues in public education is the issue of religion in the classroom. Since the beginning, the education system in Indonesia has recognized the religious diversity in its public school students. Each student should receive religious education according to his/her own religion taught by the respective religious education teachers. Therefore, local governments often created various policies and

¹⁴ Aziz, Abdul (2016). Memperkuat kebijakan negara dalam penanggulangan radikalisme di lembaga pendidikan. (*Strengthening government policy in overcoming radicalism in educational institutions*). *Hikmah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 12(1), 29-58. [https://journal.alhikmahjkt.ac.id/index.php/](https://journal.alhikmahjkt.ac.id/index.php/HIKMAH/article/view/55) HIKMAH/article/view/55 Accessed January 21, 2020.

¹⁵ Azis, 40

¹⁶ O'Neill, Aaron. (2021). Total population of Indonesia. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/294100/total-population-of-Indonesia>. Accessed May 20, 2022.

¹⁷ Sanaky, Hujair. A.H. (2017). The role of religious education in forming tolerant individuals. *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies*, 1(1), 77-89. <https://ijiis.or.id/index.php/ijiis/article/view/54>

¹⁸ Habaehan, S. (2021). Upaya mengatasi intoleransi dan radikalisme melalui pendidikan agama yang moderat (*Efforts to overcome intolerance and radicalism through moderate religious education*). *ESENSI: Jurnal Manajemen Bisnis*, 24(3), 436-445.

¹⁹ Zuhdi, Muhammad, & Sarwenda (2020). Recurring issues in Indonesia's Islamic education: The need for Religious literacy. *Analisa Journal of Social Science and Religion*, 5(1), 1- 8. <https://blasemarang.kemenag.go.id/journal/index.php/analisa/article/view/1038>

actions to maintain the mutual relationships among the believers of different faiths. The introduction of various religious beliefs in the classroom has been part of the schools' curricula for quite a long time. Unfortunately, in many cases, the adherents of the religious majority in that areas receive more attention, budget, and privilege. Teachers often lead other adherents to join the class that is intended for the majority. This makes it difficult for students to understand and respect other religious beliefs.

Furthermore, Zuhdi and Sarwenda²⁰ also mentioned that recently, the effectiveness of religious education in Indonesian classrooms had been challenged by the occurrence of several conflicts among the Indonesian population that has exacerbated religious sentiment. The main targets of these manifestations were religious symbols, such as places of worship, holy books and religious leaders. This implies a lack of respect for some people toward other religions and beliefs.

Asrori²¹ stated in his study that a new concept of religious multiculturalism and the theory of religious education are needed to face the challenge of religious multiculturalism. It is necessary to understand the models of religious education: from within, at and beyond the wall. Religious education "in" the wall shapes an exclusive religiosity; while religious education "at" and "beyond" the wall contributes to shaping an inclusive multiculturalistic model. The last two models are beneficial in Indonesia to face the challenge of multiculturalism, because both of them help students to accept, respect, and value religious differences.

Thus far, there has not been any study on the awareness of religious leaders about the new paradigm that is needed to achieve the Indonesian Vision 2045, mainly in the development of the inter-religious or inter-faith healthy relationships in a multi-religious society. This article will explore the religious teachers' and leaders' awareness of the future needs and challenges in religious education.

The research questions for this study are:

1. Have the religious teachers taken into account the challenges faced by Indonesia?
2. What issues do the religious teachers regard as crucial and worth being taught in the year 2045 and beyond?
3. What approach to religious education is regarded as appropriate to address students with these issues?
4. What content of religious education is regarded as relevant?

²⁰ Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 'Recurring issues...6-9

²¹ Asrori, Achmad (2016). Contemporary religious education model on the challenge of Indonesian multiculturalism. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 10(2), 261-284.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2016.10.2.261-284>

Methods

Participant's characteristics and recruitment. Participants were recruited from the researchers' acquaintances who have been working in religious education for years or even decades. Sixteen people (four are females) participated in this study: nine are Christians, four are Muslims, while Catholic, Hindu and indigenous believers are each represented by one. The age of the participants varies from 28 to 64 years old with the mean age being 48.53. All but four have a theological background and 9 have a doctoral degree or being a doctoral student.

Data collection techniques. Data were collected through the use of an open-ended questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaire asks questions related to religious education such as:

- a. Will religious education still be needed in the year 2045 and beyond and why do you think so?
- b. To whom, where, when, and by whom the religious education will be given?
- c. What challenges will be faced by religious education then?
- d. What is the overall objective of religious education?
- e. What is the curriculum content and what is the pedagogical approach for such religious education?

Data analysis. Data were analyzed qualitatively, looking for similarities and differences among different participants.

Results

Whether religious education will still be needed in the year 2045 and beyond and for what reason. All agree that religious education will still be needed in the year 2045 and beyond. The reason is that every child needs guidance through religious education so that he/she will know how to live accordingly.

To whom the religious education will be given. Fourteen participants agree that every child needs religious education since he/she starts school in Grade 12. Six also even agreed that every child needs religious education since they were born. One only wants to provide the education until children finish elementary school and another one until finish junior high school (equals to Grade 9). Four suggest that tertiary level students should also be equipped with religious education.

When and where this kind of religious education should take place. All but three agreed that religious education should take place first in each home and taught by parents to their children. Two Christians reserve parents exclusively as religious educators for their own children. For them, religious education is only delivered at home, not at school. But others say that schools should also deliver religious education. Three participants (two are Muslims and one is a Hindu believer) say that religious education should take place in a special place devoted to religious teaching in addition to schools.

The overall objective of religious education. Most participants state that the future needs inclusive religious education in which students learn to appreciate differences and can see

humanity above religion. In short, to prepare the younger generation to become good citizens not only in Indonesia but in the whole world.

The challenges of religious education by the year 2045 and beyond. Most participants mentioned that there will be a need to address and introduce the issues of radicalism, gender equality and LGBT, conflicts among nations including nuclear threats, and ecology.

The pedagogical approach for such religious education. All agree that doctrinal teaching of one respective religion will not be sufficient. Instead, religious education should empower students to be critical, inclusive, open-minded, and able to live harmoniously with believers of different faiths. All participants agree that the approach should not be doctrinal, but student-centred and life-centred. This way, students are equipped to interact peacefully with whoever comes in their path regardless of the differences they might have. Knowing one's own religious teaching would be useless if it does not help them to realize that the world is full of differences and that the differences should be celebrated, not eradicated. Tolerance is possible if humanity is above religious fanatic understanding that put the believers of one faith in isolation from believers of other faiths. A team teaching of one Islamic and one Christian religious lecturer uses quite a unique approach for the first-year university students of different faiths. They ask each student to present their respective religious understanding regarding a certain issue and learn about the similarities and differences among their understanding. The students also learn about prejudice, bias, stereotyping, and other matters that make people maintain their own opinion regardless of the differences they face in daily life. Furthermore, the students also learn that religious understanding might need to be modified when enough scientific discoveries provide evidence that the religious teaching is not accurate. For instance, the earth is circling the sun instead of the other way around. Concepts of God should not be contradictory with scientific understanding.

The content of religious education. In general, most participants stated that the content of the religious education should be contextual, meaning that it should be relevant for that time and many issues might come up that we never predict early enough at this moment. More importantly, all agree that the content should not be limited to one's own religious doctrines. Instead, students should learn about the uniqueness of other religions. This way, the religious education is more like religious studies where one learns not only learn about one's own religion but other religions as well. Issues like LGBT, inter-faith marriage, or radicalism should be introduced early so that the students realize they are realities that should be handled appropriately. However, one Hindu adherent suggests that the issues relevant for the context of 2045 and beyond are discussed first by each religious adherent in their community before being brought up to the top governmental level in the Ministry of Religions. One representative from indigenous beliefs argues for the future need for moral education instead of religious education in Indonesia. By focusing on morals and ethics, all religions can take part and dialogue to develop ethics and morality based on humanity.

Who will conduct such religious education? All but two from Islamic backgrounds agree that parents should teach religion to their children. To do so, parents should have rich life experiences and have enough understanding of their own religion. On the other hand, teachers for religious education should have credentials, at least equal to undergraduate academic background. Besides this, some also add more requirements like having a close relationship with God at a personal level, or pluralistic meaning that he/she can act inclusively, as Indonesia is a nation of various ethnic groups and various religions/indigenous

beliefs. Teachers will play a prominent role since they have to be flexible, fluent, and open-minded to see that humanity is much more important than strict religious doctrines.

Discussion and Future Research

In general, the participants view that religious education is still needed. However, the approach should be flexible, relational, and less dogmatic. The learning process of one education should include other religious views and can be attended by anyone although they do not come from a similar faith background.

The emphasis of education on values of humanity, unity, and social justice should become the objectives of the education process. The students of the education process will learn to recognize biases, negative stereotypes, and prejudice. They should also understand, accept, and even appreciate the differences in various religious views including the view of the Divine.

That Indonesian youth experience religious identity confusion had been identified in Syafrudin and Ropi's study.²² Their participants were more than 6,000 final year Muslim undergraduate students who express their intolerance attitude to people of similar faith background but of different movements or sects. It seems that the religious teachings they follow in social media contribute to this religious identity confusion. More specifically, they pay attention to religious leaders who are regarded as radical but popular among the young people. These religious leaders also direct any dissatisfaction to the Indonesian government regardless any issue they face even though they did not mention that they wanted to overrule the Indonesian government.

Learning from this study, it is important to prepare religious education as raising critical and inquisitive mind to see things from global perspective that making it impossible for anyone to live harmoniously with others of different race, religion, etc.

The majority of the participants mentioned that the place of education seems are school-centred and religious community-based. The role of a home might be difficult since not all parents have enough understandings of their respective religious teachings. However, being open-minded should first of all be taught and modelled by parents to their own children, since parents are the first figures a child meets in his or her early life.²³

One intervention to reduce intolerance and exclusivity that function as roots for radicalism has been tried with Maluku war survivors.²⁴ Youths from both Islam and Christian faith backgrounds were put together for several weeks. It took place more than years after the war

²² Syafruddin, Didin, & Ropi, Ismatu (Eds.) (2018). *Gen Z: Kegagalan Identitas Keagamaan. (Gen Z: Religious Identity Confusion)*. Jakarta: PPIM Universitas Islam Negeri

²³ Santrock, John W. (2016). *Essentials of life-span development* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Shoda

²⁴ Nurdin, Endang. (2018). Saling bunuh, saling bakar sampai... 'sayang kamu semua': Mantan tentara anak Islam dan Kristen Ambon (Killing each other, burning each other until ... 'love you all' Ex child soldiers of Ambonese Muslims and Christians). <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-43207033>

ended. In the beginning, they listened while the opponents shared how they reacted when they first learned about the war, who instructed them to get into war, and how they felt after they ‘succeeded’ in killing their enemies of a different faith. One surprising thing in common was that they did not feel happy after doing that; instead, the faces and the cries of their victims haunted them for years. They also felt confused, not knowing how they should live in the same places where they did the killing and met people with similar faces and faith as their victims. This uneasiness was discussed, and they were taught that the true religious teaching should be of appreciating life and not erase it. What is more important is, that living together with people of different faith brings lots of understanding about fellow human, their strengths and weaknesses. This intervention and the story of how the children soldiers tried to be at peace again with their opponents were filmed as *Luka Beta Rasa*²⁵ and *Beta Mau Jumpa*.²⁶ The spirit is that Indonesia as a nation should be kept above all differences.

In the year 2019, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs published a book titled *Religious Moderation*²⁷ as a justification for the proper religious education in Indonesia. This book explains why Indonesian society needs religious moderation and how it should be carried out in all schools. However, from the researchers’ experiences and conversations carried out with other religious education teachers, not all of them know about this book, let alone apply the principles in their religious teaching. It will be a long way to evaluate whether the Religious Moderation book and its ideas make difference in the lives of Indonesian people in the way they encounter differences, especially differences in faith.

Based on the results, this study concludes that education cannot become only a content-transfer process, but more of experiential learning. While learning about the multi-faith and diverse religious views or practices, the students and the educators (either teachers or parents) should recognize their core faith. Psychologically they should feel secure when dealing with others or diversity. Otherwise, there will be rampant confusing syncretism. With a future context that gives open access to information, space for expression, collaboration, and innovation, the exposure to diversity and multi-religious views or convergence of concepts, some people can adapt to such contexts, while others might become extremist and seek to destroy the social system that causes such phenomenon appears. The role of education at home, religious bodies, and education institutions is undeniably vital for 2045 and beyond

²⁵ Media Indonesia (2020). *Luka Bela Rasa*. <https://mediaindonesia.com/humaniora/293451/dokumentasi-luka-mantan-kombatan-anak-konflik-ambon>. Downloaded 21 Juli 2021

²⁶ Unika.ac.id (2020). *Film Beta mau jumpa (I want to meet movie)* <https://news.unika.ac.id/2020/03/film-beta-mau-jumpa-ungkap-perdamaian-di-balik-konflik-ambon-1999/>

²⁷ Kementerian Agama (Ministry of Religion) (2019). *Moderasi Beragama (Religious Moderation)*. Jakarta: Kementerian Agama

²⁸ Syafruddin, Didin, & Ropi, Ismatu (Eds.) (2018). *Gen Z: Kegagalan Identitas Keagamaan. (Gen Z: Religious Identity Confusion)*. Jakarta: PPIM Universitas Islam Negeri.

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Inclusive Christian Religious Education in Schools in Indonesia

Abstract

Religious Education is a compulsory subject in schools in Indonesia, which is taught in all levels of school, including in inclusive schools. Therefore, there is a need to develop inclusive Christian Religious Education (CRE) that dialogue general CRE with theology of disability, and inclusive education. Through research on CRE in inclusive schools of *Sekolah Tumbuh* and *Bosa* high school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, it was clear that CRE had been done with a disability perspective, but there was a need to develop it deeper. Teachers needed to be prepared to teach inclusive CRE through theological schools they attended before they became teachers. It means in theological school curriculum there must be subjects on CRE, theology of disability and inclusive education, which support inclusive CRE.

Key words: inclusive Christian Religious Education, inclusive education, students with special needs, students with disabilities, Indonesian schools

Introduction

UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) defines inclusive education as "an education system that includes all students, and welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements. This means making sure that teaching and the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets are appropriate for all children at all levels. Inclusive education means all children learn together in the same schools."¹ Through inclusive education there is no segregation between general and special schools. Students with and without disabilities or special needs learn together in the same classes. In Indonesia, there are some inclusive schools as well as special schools.

This paper focuses on Christian Religious Education (CRE) in inclusive schools and a general school that has a student with disability. Using qualitative method, namely, observation and interview, this study aims to describe and analyze the practice of CRE in inclusive schools, the impact of CRE in improving the involvement of students with disabilities in communities, and the development of interdisciplinary CRE in inclusive schools.

Inclusive Education and Religious Education in Indonesia

For a long time, in Indonesia education for persons with disabilities has been done in special schools (*Sekolah Luar Biasa*, SLB), which are divided into SLB section A (for the blind), SLB section B (for the deaf and speech impaired), SLB section C (for persons with intellectual

¹ UNICEF, *Inclusive Education: Including children with disabilities in quality learning: what needs to be done?* September 2017. https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org/eca/files/IE_summary_accessible_220917_brief.pdf

disabilities), SLB section D (for persons with physical disabilities), SLB section E (for persons with mental disabilities), and SLB section G (for persons with more than one disability). Until now, SLB are still available. National education system law no. 20/2003 article 32 states: “Special education is education for students who have difficulty in participating in the learning process due to physical, emotional, mental, social disorders, and/or have the potential for special intelligence and talent.” The existence of SLB shows the segregation in education.

Since 2009, however, inclusive education has been developed. Minister of National Education Regulation no. 70 /2009, article 1, states: “Inclusive education is a system of education that provides opportunities for all students who have disabilities and have the potential for intelligence and / or special talents to take part in education or learning in an educational environment together with students in general.”² The existence of inclusive schools shows the integration in education.

Therefore, in Indonesia, both special and inclusive schools exist together. 2017 data showed there were 32,000 inclusive schools and 2,070 special schools. The number of schools was not enough for 1.6 million children with disabilities or special needs. There were many children with disabilities who did not have access to education.³

Regarding inclusive education, there were some researches showed some problems and challenges faced in Indonesia. For example, adequate academic qualification of the teachers to teach children with special needs, the readiness of public schools to become inclusive schools that offer inclusive curriculum, assessment, as well as teaching and learning methods and media.⁴ Another research showed the teachers’ positive perception on inclusive education, but they concerned about the need to expand teachers’ academic training to include inclusive education, the improvement of the school system to become inclusive schools, and the availability of inclusive educational resources.⁵

In Indonesia, Religious Education is a compulsory subject in, which is taught in all levels of school, including in inclusive schools. Indonesian law on National Education System no. 20/ 2003 article 12 verse 1 states, “Every student in each educational unit has the right to: (a) get religious education in accordance with the religion he/she adheres to and taught by educators of the same religion.”⁶ Based on this regulation, public schools offer religious education in accordance to the religion of the students, regardless of the number of the students in that school. For CRE classes there may be only a few students, even in some classes there is only one student, because in most parts of Indonesia Christians are in small number. Or, in some cases, Christian students are asked to get CRE from the church.

² Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia no. 70 tahun 2009 tentang Pendidikan Inklusif bagi Peserta Didik yang Memiliki Kelainan dan Memiliki Potensi Kecerdasan dan/atau Bakat Istimewa. (Indonesian Minister of National Education Regulation no. 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs and Students with Special Intelligence/Talents).

³ Johanes Waldes Hasugian et.al. *Education for children with special needs in Indonesia*. 1st International Conference on Advance and Scientific Innovation (ICASI), IOP Conf. Series: Journal of Physics: Conf. Series 1175 (2019), 3.

⁴ Johanes Waldes Hasugian et.al. *Education for children with special needs in Indonesia*, 4.

⁵ Sowiyah and Ryzal Perdana. *Inclusive Education in Indonesia: Teachers’ Perceptions*. WSEAS Transactions on Environment and Development, Volume 18, 2022, E-ISSN: 2224-3496.

⁶ Undang-undang Republik Indonesia no. 20 tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional. (Indonesian Law no. 20 year 2003 concerning National Education System).

Christian Religious Education as an Interdisciplinary Subject

CRE is itself an interdisciplinary subject. Sara Little, as cited by Jack Seymour, writes, “Education is recognized as a field requiring interdisciplinary collaboration. It is public. It is diverse. It is dependent on a living religion for vitality.”⁷ In this paper, the disciplinary characteristic of CRE is shown in the dialogue between CRE, theology of disability, and inclusive education. From this dialogue emerges an inclusive Christian Religious Education.

Theology of Disability. Theology of disability is a relatively new branch in theology. It began to bloom at the beginning of the XXI century and developed rapidly. Theology of disability is a way of doing theology from a disability point of view. It departs from the realization that disability is not a deficiency or imperfection or abnormality. Rather, disability is a variation of God's perfect creation. Disability shows that each creation is unique, different from one another, but equal. Theology of disability fights for equal rights and dignity for all people. It rereads traditional church teachings and dogmas, which use the standards of ableism, normalcy, and perfection, and develops teachings and dogmas with disability perspective.

Amos Yong writes, “an ecclesiology of weakness would resist conventional ableist marginalization of people with disabilities as weaker, less respectable, or less-than-necessary members of the church with little to contribute.”⁸ Everyone, with and without disabilities, can contribute to the community, in accordance with their gifts and talents. Yong concludes, “From a disability perspective, then, people with disabilities are by definition embraced as central and essential to a fully healthy and functioning congregation in particular, and to the ecclesial body in general.”⁹ In church life, a person with a disability is not a target for charity that deserves pity, which makes them dependent on others. Persons with disabilities are actually people who have abilities and independent, so they can contribute and fully participate in community.

Inclusive Education. The 1994 UNESCO document (*The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*) no. 7 states about inclusive education as follows: “The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school.”¹⁰

Inclusive education is part of multicultural education. James Banks, an African American educator, stated, “All students, regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as those related to gender,

⁷ Jack L. Seymour, ed., *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997, 7.

⁸ Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011, 93.

⁹ Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*, 95.

¹⁰ UNESCO. *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*, 1994.

ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion, or exceptionality, should experience educational equality in the schools.”¹¹ Multiculturalism includes not only ethnic diversity, race, cultural symbols, language, etc., but also socially constructed categories: gender, social class, religion, and exceptions (meaning: persons with physical and mental disabilities). So, culture does not only include crafts, food, music, but includes values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish groups of people from others, based on social construction categories. Multicultural education must make schools inclusive. Persons with disabilities have the same rights as those without disabilities. Multicultural education takes part in the fight for equal rights. So the existence of inclusive schools, which promotes multiculturalism, embodies this struggle for equality of rights for all people.

Christian Religious Education. Jack Seymour defines Christian education as “a conversation for living, a seeking to use the resources of the faith and cultural traditions to move into an open future of justice and hope.”¹² He maps four approaches to Christian education, namely transformation, community of faith, spiritual growth, and religious instruction. The transformation approach emphasizes education that carries out social transformation. The faith community approach emphasizes the growth of individual faith that takes place in the community, which balances inner life and social service. The spiritual growth approach emphasizes the growth of individual spirituality through silence, to listen to the voice of God. Religious instruction approach emphasizes the learning process in the classroom with a family atmosphere (homemaking). A church can map itself using these approaches: which approach is strong and which one is weak.

Later, in his newer book, Seymour shows three approaches that must be carried out simultaneously. Just as Jesus did, Christian education begins with forming a community of faith. After the community is formed, they are instructed and then are sent to spread the good news through social services. All three approaches, namely the faith community, religious instruction, and mission, are done simultaneously.¹³

I use this dialogue of CRE, theology of disability, and inclusive education as a theoretical framework in research on the practice of inclusive Christian Religious Education in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

The Practice of Inclusive Christian Religious Education in Schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

I did research on Christian Religious Education in inclusive elementary schools of *Sekolah Tumbuh 1, 2, 4*, as well as in a Christian school that did not declare itself as an inclusive school, but had a student with special need, Bosa high school (*SMA Bosa*). The research was conducted in August 20-22, 2019, using qualitative method, namely observations in the Christian Religious Education classes, and interviews with Christian Religious Education teachers after class.

The objectives of this research were to:

¹¹ James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds., *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2001, 25.

¹² Jack L. Seymour, ed., *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*, 18.

¹³ Jack L. Seymour, *Teaching the Way of Jesus: Educating Christians for Faithful Living*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014.

1. Get an overview of the implementation of Christian Religious Education in inclusive schools.
2. Know whether inclusive Christian Religious Education can increase the involvement and participation of students with disabilities in school, family, religious communities, and society.
3. Find out whether in the implementation of Christian Religious Education in inclusive schools there is a dialogue between disability theology, inclusive education and Christian education.

The implementation of Christian Religious Education in inclusive schools

For the first objective I did class observations in CRE classes in inclusive elementary school *Sekolah Tumbuh 1*, inclusive high school *Sekolah Tumbuh 4*, and in general high school, *SMA Bosa*. In the first CRE class there were three students, one of them was a student with autism. In the second CRE class there were three students, two of them with special needs (deaf and slow learner). The third CRE class was quite different from the other two, due to the fact that *SMA Bosa* high school was a Christian school. Here all students attended CRE class, regardless of their religions. Therefore, there were more than 30 students participating in the CRE class, one of them was deaf. In general, all classes went well. Only in the first CRE class there were interruptions done by the student with autism, who could not concentrate on the subject for a long time. The teacher used pictures when she told biblical story, which could gain his attention for a while. Several times his classmates helped him to regain his attention to the subject, but finally he left the classroom and played by himself. The third CRE class went well, and the deaf student could present very well in the group presentation. It seemed he did not have any problem in the process of study, because he could do lip reading and communicate very well.

When I interviewed the teachers, they explained that for students with autism the best teaching method was visual, like using pictures. It could help the student concentrate on the subject. Besides, the teachers also had different standards and targets for students with special needs. They modified questions for students with autism, for example, there were only two choices in multiple choice questions; and question sentences were made shorter.

Inclusive Christian Religious Education and the involvement and participation of students with disabilities in school, family, religious communities, and society

In the first school, the student with autism sometimes said dirty words or hit a friend when he was in a bad mood. His classmates tried to make him understand that they did not like what he did. It seemed he understood, but sometimes he could not control himself. The teacher constantly tried to convince him to behave good and speak good words, which was in line with people's expectations. By so doing, he would be able to participate in the daily life of society.

Teachers in inclusive schools helped students to find and improve their own talents or abilities. For students with special needs this finding and improvement were important as preparation for their future carriers. For example, there were students who were talented in cooking and painting. These talents needed to be developed towards marketing. Thus, CRE helped students find their strengths that were useful for them to live independent life in society.

Dialogue between disability theology, inclusive education and Christian education

All teachers said that they did not learn about theology of disability and inclusive education in their academic training in seminaries. They learned only CRE in general. When they were accepted to teach in the inclusive schools, they were asked to attend short training to become inclusive teachers. Here they learned how to deal with students with special needs. After that they learned from experiences how to modify curriculum for students with special needs.

When I asked whether students ever asked why their friends had disabilities, or why God did not cure them, teachers in inclusive schools said they did not ask so. They naturally accepted their friends who had disabilities as they were. Moreover, they were friends since early childhood, before they learned classification. For them disabilities were part of life, not a disease that needed to be cured. Only one time there was a student asked, and the teacher explained that everyone has strengths and weaknesses; what he or she needed to do was to improve his or her strengths and abilities. A teacher said that she needed to prepare herself to answer that kind of question, as an anticipation if a student asked.

Different from inclusive schools, in public schools some students privately asked their teacher why their friend had disability, and why God did not cure him like what Jesus did. They relate this question with their church's teaching on miracle. Because the teacher did not learn theology of disability, she only said that God knew everyone's heart; not all persons with disabilities were cured.

This research showed CRE in inclusive schools involved students with and without disabilities, which needed modifications in the educational process. Teachers had been prepared with CRE in their formal education, and then with inclusive education in their informal training. What lacking was theology of disability, which they did not learn during their formal and informal trainings. CRE teachers realized the need to learn theology of disability, because CRE and inclusive education were not enough in developing inclusive CRE.

Inclusive Christian Religious Education

Inclusive CRE can be developed with three simultaneous approaches: the faith community, instructional, and missional approaches.¹⁴ In the faith community approach, inclusive CRE emphasizes the formation of an inclusive community, consisting of persons with and without disabilities, where everyone is accepted as he/she is. In the faith community, each individual can grow as a whole person. To be able to grow, the community must learn. So, the instructional approach provides an opportunity for individuals to read the Bible, and learn Christian teachings and dogmas from disability perspective. Community of faith serves others, to bring good news to the world, especially in the context of disability issues. Inclusive CRE promotes the acceptance of persons with disabilities in families, communities, and societies. Inclusive CRE enables Christians to be actively involved in the struggle for equal rights of persons with disabilities in education, health access, public facilities, employment, etc. in daily living.

¹⁴ Jack L. Seymour, *Teaching the Way of Jesus: Educating Christians for Faithful Living*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014.

I would like to analyze the result of the research using the three simultaneous approaches to inclusive CRE. *First, the Community of Faith approach.* CRE in inclusive schools of *Sekolah Tumbuh* was offered to all Christian students in every level in the same classes, regardless of the disabilities that some students had. In the class all students became a community, where every student and the teacher knew and helped with one another. Students without disabilities helped their friends who had disabilities, and reminded them to concentrate on the subject they were learning. Likewise, in *SMA Bosa*, a student with special need, namely deaf, learned together with other students. He was part of the community, where he could express himself as he was.

Second, the Religious Instruction approach. In *Sekolah Tumbuh*, there were teaching and learning innovations for students with disabilities, which were done in accordance with the condition of students with disabilities. Also, teachers brought different standards of assessment for students with and without intellectual disabilities. All teachers admitted that they did not learn disability theology as well as inclusive education when they were studying theology in colleges. Therefore, they learned by doing in teaching inclusive Christian Religious Education. They hoped that all theological schools taught disability theology and inclusive Christian Religious Education to prepare their students to become teachers in inclusive schools.

Third, the Missional approach. Students with disabilities became more self-confident to be involved and participate in community lives in schools, families, communities, and religious community (church). This happens as a result of the whole inclusive education in schools, not only of the CRE classes. Also, in inclusive schools they could find out and develop their talents, as preparation to be involved in society life, where they could be economically independent.

In detail, inclusive CRE has the following components:

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students form an inclusive faith community, both persons with disabilities and not, and grow in it. 2. Students learn about disability theology, so that they have an inclusive understanding and attitude. 3. Students play an active role in society to fight for the equal rights of persons with disabilities.
Students	All people, both persons with disabilities and those without disabilities
Teachers/facilitators	Those who have inclusive perspective in education and theology
The educational process	Through direct experience in forming an inclusive faith community, learning disability theology, and carrying out transformative actions in the community
Context	Inclusive education takes place in school, church, family, community, and society

As an interdisciplinary subject, which put CRE, theology of disability, and inclusive education in dialogue, inclusive CRE needs to deepen itself with theology of disability, especially ecclesiology. Inclusive CRE includes persons with disabilities, and give them the opportunity to fully participate in the life of the church, family, and society. Brett Webb-Mitchell emphasizes that persons with

disabilities are not objects of study or charity, but have a place, role, and function in the Church as the body of Christ, in accordance with their gifts, talents, and services.¹⁵ They can serve fellow members of the body of Christ creatively and imaginatively. An inclusive church is a church that provides opportunities for persons with disabilities to fully participate in the faith community.

The word “inclusion” has its roots in the Latin word which can be translated “to be shut in” or “enclosed”. Persons with disabilities have the same right to be included, “locked up”, and “closed out” in the faith community, along with persons without disabilities.¹⁶ Thus, persons with disabilities are not considered as a distinct group or a special group, but as an integral part of the church, just like any other. So, Webb-Mitchell developed the term “co-creation” as an important part of this inclusion.

Being included is more than just entering the church, being counted in the statistical data of church members, or being well received in the church, but being treated as equals with other members of the congregation, connected and related, so that they can have the opportunity to be involved in worship, prayer, education, fellowship, and service to others.¹⁷ Therefore, the church has to adapt, rethink, re-imagine, and reconsider what is considered “normal” in worship, prayer, fellowship, education and ministry, to make room for people with disabilities.

The first step to become an inclusive church is building access to accept the presence of persons with disabilities in the church, with hospitality or wholeness. For example, providing a curriculum or worship that is accessible to persons with disabilities. Second, providing opportunities for persons with disabilities to worship, receive education, pray, and serve, in fellowship with other church members. Thus, the church is open to persons with disabilities to participate or take part in various areas of ministry, where everyone listens to one another, builds true friendships, respects one another, restores justice and provides forgiveness. Persons with disabilities are not only given access to worship, but are fully accepted, and can participate in the life and ministry of the church.

Inclusive CRE also needs to deepen itself with inclusive education, which is also interdisciplinary between education, psychology, neuroscience, medicine, information technology, etc. For example, for students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), inclusive CRE needs to include neuroscience and information technology in the teaching and learning process.¹⁸ New discoveries in neuroscience research are blessings for students with disabilities, which can be implemented in inclusive CRE. Likewise, games, which are attractive for most children and adolescents, can be developed in inclusive CRE, as a learning medium. Through children with ADHD, Christian spirituality can be fruitfully developed.¹⁹

¹⁵ Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Beyond Accessibility: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, New York: Church Publishing, 2010, 9-10.

¹⁶ Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Beyond Accessibility: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, 18.

¹⁷ Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Beyond Accessibility: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, 20.

¹⁸ Maria Agustini, *Development of Instructional Media Based Game Bible Warriors Adventures for Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*, Dissertation, Jakarta State University, 2021.

¹⁹ Mercer, Joyce Ann. “Attending to Children, Attending to God. Children with ADHD and Christian Spirituality.” In Roebben, Bert and Katharina Kammeyer, eds. *Inclusive Religious Education: International Perspectives*. Zurich: LIT Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2014, 63-88.

Inclusive CRE has to become pedagogy and theology of otherness.²⁰ Persons with and without disabilities are different, as everyone is actually unique. Accepting persons with disabilities in inclusive education means willingness and readiness to be together with the others. In inclusive CRE there is formation of the self that is unique, and learning in differences. Inclusive CRE implements inclusive theological anthropology, which accepts diversity and vulnerability. In biblical words, everyone is created in the image of God – imago Dei – as stated in Genesis 1:26-27.²¹ Accepting otherness in hospitality and inclusion is an important foundation of inclusive CRE.

Conclusion

Inclusive CRE had been naturally implemented in some inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, through “learning by doing” process. Inclusive CRE can increase the involvement and participation of students with disabilities in school life, family, community and religious communities through the development of their self-confidence. But there is still a need to intentionally develop inclusive CRE that dialogue general CRE, theology of disability, and inclusive education.

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²⁰ Roebben, Bert. “Living and Learning in the Presence of the Other. Defining Religious Education Inclusively.” In Roebben, Bert and Katharina Kammeyer, eds. *Inclusive Religious Education: International Perspectives*. Zurich: LIT Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2014, 13-32

²¹ Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network, *A Church of All and for All*. Geneve: WCC Publications, 2003, no. 22-32.

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REA annual meeting, July 5-8, - *Becoming Good Ancestors*

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Good Ancestors Practicing a Holistic Vision for Ecological Conversion

Abstract

Since the publication of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical, *Laudato Si*, there has been a robust discussion among religious educators concerning the notion of ecological conversion. Drawing on this rich scholarship, this paper strives to move from the "what" of ecological conversion" to the "how." That is, how communities of faith might foster ecological conversion in holistic, integrated ways while honoring the breadth and depth of this important process of transformation.

Introduction

My five brothers and one sister were raised hiking the majestic mountains and hills of New Hampshire. Our summer visits to my grandparent's house near Mt. Chocorua included many days where we would wake up to that all familiar announcement of my mom, "Mountain Day!" In pulling down the covers and peering outside, our senses were greeted by a clear blue sky, the fresh smell of the pines and (often pancakes on the griddle), and the sounds of activity in the kitchen – water canteens being filled, clunky old back packs being emptied and re-packed, and lively chatter about the ruggedness of the trails and the quality of the views on top. We were climbing a mountain, no questions asked. In the course of these memorable days, some of us took the rapid route, hiking up and running down a peak in record rate; others hiked with mom, who, especially in her later years, taught us to stop, be silent, listen, look, and wait. "You never know what you will see or hear," she admonished us, often with a grin on her face and a sparkle in her eye.

Mom instilled in us a sense of wonder, such a critical quality, that Jennifer Ayres (2019) lifts up as she proposes a religious education for ecological inhabitation. "Despite environmental challenges, human beings live in a world of wonder and creativity, a world with the power to evoke human awe, bemusement, joy, curiosity, grief, love, imagination, and longing."¹ For Ayres, the sensibility of inhabitation involves truly knowing and loving a place fully with one's heart and mind.² And to cultivate inhabitation, according to Ayres, an intentional pedagogy is needed that is replete with embodied, affective, and reflective practices.³ Ayres's scholarship along with that of Omerod & Vanin (2016), Hanchin (2020), and Hearlson (2020 & 2021) centers around the timely and problematic issues of understanding and fostering ecological conversion, a notion introduced in ecclesial contexts in the writings of St. Pope John Paul II (2001)⁴ and so passionately

¹ Jennifer Ayres, *Inhabitation: Ecological Religious Education* (Waco, Tx: Baylor University Press, 2019) 47.

² Ayres, 3.

³ Ayres, 43.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Catechesis 17 (January, 2001).

emphasized in Pope Francis' bold encyclical, *Laudato Si* (2015).⁵ While exploring this scholarship concerning ecological consciousness and conversion, this paper considers a holistic approach to education for ecological conversion inspired by Maria Harris' (1989) five forms of religious education curriculum: koinonia, leiturgia, didache, kerygma, and diakonia.⁶ The author's experience both as a college professor and an executive director of a retreat and conference center committed to care of the earth also contributes practitioner engagement with this topic.

Understanding Ecological Conversion

In a recent NY Times editorial Margaret Renkl (2022) mourns the illegal cutting down of a 250-year old black walnut tree that actually stood several feet outside the property line of the perpetrator's land, as claimed by the Cuyahoga county prosecutor.⁷ "It's ours. I just don't understand any of this," was the response of the brother and sister charged with grand thefts, falsification and felony crimes. While Renkl recognizes that these siblings had some serious financial struggles and thus needed the \$2,000 profited from the sale of the wood, she also laments their attitude towards the nature world, one that is all too common. Renkl confirms the need for ecological conversion when she says, "To truly protect trees, we need to make a profound paradigm shift that transcends politics. We need to stop thinking of trees as objects that belong to us and come to understand them as long-lived eco-systems temporarily under our protection. We have borrowed them from the past, and we owe them to the future." Renkl reflects in many ways the thought of Thomas Berry (1999) who beckons all to embrace "the great work" of our time. For Berry, the great work of the current era is multi-faceted: it involves a halt to the rapid devastation of natural resources and the over-dependence on fossil fuels.⁸ Berry also eschews a "radical discontinuity" between the human and non-world view, an attitude that assumes that humans have rights and non-humans only have rights in so far as they relate to the human.⁹

Berry and Renkl are calling for a new way of imagining and relating to the natural world. And so too is Pope Francis (2015) who likens our common home to a beloved family member when he says, "this sister now cries to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life."¹⁰ Many, though, do not hear this "sister crying out" nor might they share Renkl's grief at the cutting of a black walnut tree. How might this change? How might a

⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: Care of our Common Home* (Vatican, 2015).

⁶ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989).

⁷ Margaret Renkl, "How Do You Mourn a 250-Year-Old Giant?" (*New York Times*, January 6, 2022).

⁸ Carl Procario-Foley, *The Teaching of Solidarity in Catholic Higher Education: Engaging Hearts, Transforming Lives, Changing Society* (UMI Dissertation Services, May 2011) 105.

⁹ Ibid, 106.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, 2.

paradigm shift occur, a type of conversion that effects an ecological consciousness? Pope Francis understands this conversion as a change of heart, a capacity “to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own suffering (19).” He does not mince words when he cautions against a “superficial ecology which bolster complacency and a cheerful recklessness.”¹¹ In other words, for Pope Francis, the ecological crisis of our time is not one that technology can easily solve through any number of innovations such as the creation of carbon removal devices to ease global warming or the production of de-salinization plants to produce potable water. As useful as these technological advances may prove to be, they alone cannot nurture the ethical and spiritual conversion needed, according to Francis, “to turn” the depth of suffering in this world “into our own suffering.” Nor can shifts in public policy be the sole solution to the ecological crisis, according to Pope Francis, who laments a “numbing of conscience” by those who distance themselves from the poor yet claim to adopt a “green rhetoric.”¹² And finally a healthy ecological approach to the world cannot be nurtured in environmental education classes, as Ayres (2019) warns, if ecological education is understood only as a specialist area, a sub-topic of biology, not an area integral to all other areas of studies.¹³

Technological innovations, public policy shifts, and environmental education, while valuable on their own, may fall under the general rubric of “superficial,” and may not spark the depth of ecological conversion, as Pope Francis envisions, needed to transform the world. Maria Teresa Davila (2017) argues that the Church’s “option for the poor” is the hermeneutical key for understanding the core message of Pope Francis’ encyclical.¹⁴ The words, “excluded,” “vulnerable,” and “poor” are cited 65 times, almost as much as the word, “creation,” itself. The “cry of the poor” and the “cry of the earth” are inextricably bound together for Pope Francis. In speaking about access to potable water, he says, “Our world has a grave debt toward the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.”¹⁵ As Pope Benedict (2009) asserted before Francis, there is a symbiotic relationship between human interaction and the status of the environment.¹⁶ The poor and vulnerable of the earth bear the brunt of the decisions of the powerful that reap destruction on the planet. Unless people understand the plight of the poor they can not truly grasp the grave environmental state of the earth. Such depth of understanding can only be grasped by a genuine ecological conversion.

¹¹ Ibid, 59.

¹² Ibid, 49.

¹³ Ayres, 45.

¹⁴ Maria Teresa Davila, “The option for the poor in *Laudato si*: Connecting care of creation with care for the poor,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si*, ed. Vincent J. Miller (New York: Bloomsbury. 2017), 145-159.

¹⁵ Pope Francis, 30.

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Vatican City, 2009) 51.

Fostering Ecological Conversion

Christine Lang Hearlson (2021) reinforces this point by emphasizing how ecological conversion, especially in the dominant U.S. context of privilege, needs to be coupled with a “deconversion from consumerism as a faith system.”¹⁷ Drawing on the work of Kate Turpin and James K.A. Smith, Hearlson explores how exposure to visual images could introduce new narratives that may offer alternatives to consumer culture. She cites the example of a film about plastics in the ocean and their negative impacts on seabirds.¹⁸ Viewing such a film might help people appreciate affectively the pain that these birds suffer; in so doing these visual images “authenticate” the ecological disaster of plastics. The “saturation of images” that extol materialism can have such a numbing effect on people; so much so, these images are aptly coined a “formation system” as Turpin demonstrates in her examination of the influential factors that shape adolescent development (131).¹⁹ In my many years of international mission work as a campus minister, I witnessed again and again college students, even after having immersed themselves for ten days in a barrio in Lima or slum in Kolkata, will spend literally hours in the airport, with a wide-eyed expression staring longingly at the tax free “things” they could purchase. The lure of consumer culture is compelling and deconversion is no easy venture. In our “alternative breaks” at the Center at Mariandale (Ossining, NY), we invite college students into the inter-connectedness between the “cry of the poor” and the “cry of the earth” as they work in the organic garden that grows nutritious food for those who experience food insecurity while also serving these same recipients through distributing food or developing healthy menus.

What might be other ways to promote ecological conversion? Some might suggest that frightening people into action may be the most effective method given the state of the world’s crises: forest fires that burn out of control, rising ocean waters, extreme storms and flooding, and famine due to ever-increasing parched land. This “wake-up call” approach might advocate the viewing of apocalyptic films such as “Don’t Look Up,” which tells the story of the destruction of the world due to a comet collision with the earth, one that is predicted by scientists but denied by world leaders. The subtext of this film is the threat of the climate crisis and the failure of global leaders to comply with greenhouse gas emission standards as agreed upon at numerous environmental summits. Ayres warns against such doomsday approaches which only serve to scare people, provoke anxiety and possibly lead people to inaction due to their state of fear.²⁰ The topic of climate change anxiety is a growing one, and coupled with the pandemic, can be a cause of significant mental health concern. Having recently organized an “environmental summit” among colleges and universities in my region, I was consistently warned of the challenge of sparking environmental activism on

¹⁷ Christine Lang Hearlson, “Converting the Imagination through Visual Images in Religious Education,” *Religious Education* (V. 116, 2) 129-141.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 137.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 131.

²⁰ Ayres, 47.

campuses due to students' simply trying to cope with the emotional and physical challenges of completing college in the pandemic.

The fear tactic, while perhaps triggering action for some, will likely not engender the depth of conversion called for by Hanchin and Hearlson (2020) who propose an “ecstatic pedagogy” for ecological conversion.²¹ By “ecstatic,” Hanchin and Hearlson mean a mystical connection with the earth, involving one’s whole being in relationship to the earth, a union mirroring that of the Trinity. In this context, eco-conversion becomes a process in which our beings transform from an alienated, mechanistic view of the earth to a wholistic communion with the sounds, sights, patterns and texture of the natural world. Omerod and Vanin (2016) break down the phenomenon of conversion further through their helpful overview of the four dimensions of conversion according to Bernard Lonergan and Robert Doran.²² They begin by clarifying Lonergan’s insistence that conversion can not be equated with development nor can it be thought of as a series of developments.²³ Rather conversion is an “about-face,” or a “transformation of the subject and his world.” There are four distinct categories of conversion. Religious conversion connotes an “other-worldly falling in love,” a dramatic shift in one’s life from ignoring the transcendent to an embrace of the “holy other” as part of everyday life.²⁴ Through a religious conversion, one could begin to understand God’s love for oneself and for creation as inter-connected. Moral conversion relates specifically to genuine shifts in the ways one goes about making decisions; Omerod and Vanin describe it as “an initiation into a life of moral authenticity.”²⁵ Intellectual conversion, the rarest according to Lonergan, concerns the shedding of myths and theories that one previously considered as absolute truths.²⁶ Psychic conversion, as proposed by Doran, involves raising up from the unconscious ideas and approaches to life that have, for whatever reason, been repressed. As one undergoes this conversion process, one considers these previously repressed notions with intentionality and authenticity.

Ecological conversion, Omerod and Vanin posit, can involve each of these four types of conversion, contributing some role to changing how one relates to the natural world in response to the current planetary crisis.²⁷ At the same time, to experience an ecological conversion, according to Omerod and Vanin, one need not be religious or have a profoundly religious experience; after all, Pope Francis specifically addresses his encyclical to all people of good will, not just that of believers. There could be an everyday life experience that “triggers” a conversion process which manifests itself through one’s moral decisions and/or intellectual approach to environmental issues: the

²¹ Timothy Hanchin and Christine Lang Hearlson, “Education for Ecological Conversion: An Ecstatic Pedagogy for Christian Higher Education amid the Climate Crisis,” *Religious Education* (V 115, N.3, 2021) 255-268.

²² Neil Omerod and Cristina Vanin, “Ecological Conversion: what does it mean?” *Theological Studies* (V. 77, N. 2, 2016) 328-352

²³ Ibid, 330.

²⁴ Ibid, 331.

²⁵ Ibid, 331.

²⁶ Ibid, 330.

²⁷ Ibid, 332.

price of gas and realization of the world's shortage of oil might provoke one to not drive a car and rely on public transportation; a more informed education about the impact of methane on the production of green house gasses may cause one to limit or even boycott eating meat; a personal tragedy due to a forest fire or hurricane could be the "call to action" that inspires one to consider concretely their relationship with the earth.

Ecological conversions could be provoked by such "trigger" experiences, which Stephen Brookfield (1987) has identified as critical to the transformative process.²⁸ James Loder (1981) believes that transformative knowing starts with a conflictual situation and leads eventually to insight.²⁹ In the course of this process, one often goes through an "interlude for scanning," a constructive "act of imagination," a "release of energy," and finally an "interpretive step" when one makes connections and comes to understand their own course of action.³⁰ Conversion is a process and the implications of an ecological faith take time to integrate into one's lifestyle, moral decisions, and spiritual practices. Loder's schema for transformation suggests that the process of an ecological conversion could only be enhanced and nurtured in communities of sustained dialogue and integrated learning. In these contexts, one can experience the support and challenge of others who could indeed serve as the catalysts for a more profound commitment to an "integral ecology." What might such communities look like? How might religious educators promote ecological consciousness and conversion in communities of faith?

Toward Religious Education for Ecological Conversion

Ayres (2019) likens ecological religious education to the forming of persons of virtue and character. She contends, "It is perhaps already apparent that this kind of ecological transformation requires something more than a good lesson plan on endangered species or a sermon series on land stewardship."³¹ Instead, Ayres calls for an integrated vision of religious education, one that is part of a "deliberate process of formation for the whole person- indeed, for whole communities." Such a holistic schema calls to mind the creative work of religious educator Maria Harris (1989), who expands the notion of curriculum beyond the boundaries of schooling to include every aspect of the life of the faith community: community, worship, proclamation, teaching, and service. Such a schema has the potential to foster integrated learning weaved through the entire curriculum of a faith community. Harris is also careful to note that teaching happens in and through a curriculum that is explicit (what is actually taught), implicit (the patterns and structures allowing the explicit to be taught), and the null curriculum (what is not said).³² Harris' approach is geared towards the formation of whole communities.

²⁸ Stephen Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989) 25.

²⁹ James Loder, *The Transforming Moment* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1981) 18.

³⁰ Idid, 32-33.

³¹ Ayres, 41.

³² Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989) 68-69.

Let us consider how each of these forms of curriculum could indeed foster ecological consciousness and conversion.

Community

The notion of “Koinonia” or community is essential to most every religious tradition and certainly key to the Biblical tradition. Harris emphasizes that the “initial” way a faith community ministers to others is through its very sense of community.³³ In his paper on the theological anthropology of *Laudato Si*, Daniel Castillo (2017) argues that Pope Francis expands the notion of Christian love to include God, one’s neighbor, and the non-human world.³⁴ When he speaks of the Book of Genesis, Pope Francis speaks of “human nature as grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself.”³⁵ Many houses of worship and organizations with a religious mission prize the word, “community,” in their very mission statements. Do they intend to connote an understanding of the earth as a constitutive dimension of their understanding of community? Such an understanding of community would shape the way houses of worship approach the trees, flora, and fauna on the land they inhabit and throughout the region. A sense of reverence for the earth would permeate the entire community. How many religious communities identify themselves according to their geographical terrain? Mountainous regions, valleys, deserts, watersheds, prairies, rivers – these topographic features of the land serve as constitutive dimensions of communities and their missions. This entire discussion on land, in fact, raises the question whether land should be considered a category unto itself in Harris’ schema.

Another key component of community is the “communion of saints” that are unique to each locale. The “communion of saints” connects believers with the past, brings them into the present, and ushers them into the future. “It binds us to our heritage,” Harris notes.³⁶ To what extent are the indigenous people who lived on the same land noted among the communion of saints? It has become more and more common for colleges and universities to draft land acknowledgements but certainly less common among houses of worship. Communities that support their land acknowledgement efforts by striving to build relationships with indigenous communities demonstrate an even stronger commitment to fostering inclusive communities that seek to heal the deep wounds of genocide and discrimination towards native peoples. In the Catholic community many women’s religious communities have made great efforts to cultivate friendships and partnerships with indigenous communities. One example is the

³³ Ibid, 75.

³⁴ Daniel Castillo, “To praise, reverence, and serve”: The Theological Anthropology of Pope Francis, in the *Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si*, ed. Vincent Miller (New York: Bloomsbury)

³⁵ Pope Francis, 13.

³⁶ Harris, 78.

Shinnecock Nation and the Sisters of St. Joseph who are collaborating to promote kelp farming in Hampton Bay, off Long Island.³⁷

Worship

The frequently quoted refrain of liturgists, “lex orandi ut lex credendi” speaks to the potential of prayer to feed, shape, form, and transform communities. Initiated by the World Council of Churches, the “Season of Creation,” beginning September 1 and lasting through the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, October 4, establishes a designated time for the ecumenical Christian community to pray in thanksgiving for the Creator and all of creation, as well as to pray for the healing of the earth. The 2022 theme focuses on listening to the voices of the earth; the symbol of the burning bush has been selected as a pivotal theme for the 2022 celebration. As Harris says, “the curriculum is in the praying.”³⁸ The Season of Creation provides an ideal time to promote ecological conversion through all the elements of liturgy: environment, prayers, music, preaching.

In the realm of personal prayer, ecological spirituality is emphasized at many retreat houses of diverse denominations. Eric Jensen (2020) believes that the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius can guide participants through a process of deepened commitment of seeing and serving God in creation. Jensen notes that “the Exercises are meant to lead to a decision, to an ‘election’, usually near the end of the Second Week, so also at the end of the Exercises, the “Contemplation to Attain Love” could lead to an *ecological election*, to a decision to serve the Creator in serving creation out of love for all that God has made.”³⁹

Teaching

Once again, Harris implores religious educators to consider the explicit, implicit and null curriculum. When communities of faith do not recycle, compost or conserve energy, a null curriculum suggests that whatever might be said about care for the earth, the words do not match the practices. In May 2022 municipalities, schools and houses of worship in many areas are practicing “No Mow May,” an intentional effort to avoid cutting grass so as to allow the higher grass to cultivate pollinators, promote biodiversity, and reduce the damage of pesticides and gas-run movers. Such a practice contributes to the implicit curriculum providing a teachable moment for education to occur outside the realm of the classroom, the traditional context for teaching. An institution’s use of renewable energy sources, such as solar or wind, constitutes another example of an implicit curriculum.

³⁷ Greenwave blog, “Indigenous Farmers Turn to Kelp to Restore Waters and Reclaim Cultural Practices,” at <https://www.greenwave.org/blog-who-farms-matters/shinnecock-kelp-farmers>

³⁸ Harris, 98.

³⁹ Eric Jensen “Ecological Conversion and the Spiritual Exercises,” in *Thinking Faith* (Jesuits in Britain, 2020) <https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/ecological-conversion-and-spiritual-exercises>

Hanchin and Hearlson (2020) advocate for teaching pedagogies that are geared towards encounter and ones that promote “connected knowing.”⁴⁰ Encounter projects could involve visiting a waste dump or habitat restoration projects. In my own context, encounter opportunities include direct visits and educational sessions with advocacy organizations that protect the Hudson River. “Connected knowing” happens when learning honors the head and the heart, allowing for participants to process information in the fullest sense. When learners are able to express their feelings about environmental degradation, they can more easily utilize their anger and fear in constructive ways.

Community gardens provide another excellent context for “connected knowing.” Serving in such gardens allows people to learn how to grow food, nurture the soil, and care for the hungry of the community. Such gardens bring together diverse people of all ages with one common goal: growing food. Young people can make practical connections between care for the earth and issues of food insecurity. Gardens build community by allowing neighbors to work side by side; in urban centers, they provide green space and oxygen to counteract the negative impacts of concrete and congestion. Communities of faith are well-positioned to be active partners in furthering community gardens in neighborhoods.

Proclamation

The preaching of the Word is delivered not only from the pulpit but also through the lives of the faithful who proclaim the Gospel through acts of compassion and justice and through lives of simplicity and truth. The notion of kerygma comes from the prophetic tradition as the calling to speak the word of God as a “dynamic entity”.⁴¹ The Catholic Climate Covenant provides many resources for homilists to preach on themes of *Laudato Si*.⁴² Sadly, in my experience, the sacredness of the earth and the paramount need to care for the earth, is rarely preached about from the pulpit. Yet there are so many opportunities to do just that. Hearlson (2020) elaborates on one important scripture passage that is preached on every liturgical year in Ordinary Time; that is, Jesus’ injunction (Mk. 10:15) “to receive the kingdom as a child,” issuing a two-fold mandate so apt in this time of climate crisis.⁴³ First, this scripture challenges adults to do all they can do to save the planet and thus future generations of children; but second, this command of Jesus is a call to recover one’s childlike nature: one’s openness, receptivity, humility, and love of the small things in life. This dual demand calls adults to mature, ethical action and also to complete conversion in becoming childlike. For Hearlson, this Scripture captures well the depth and radicality of ecological conversion, as envisioned by Pope Francis (2013). For insight into this second charge, Hearlson draws on the work

⁴⁰ Timothy Hanchin and Christine Lang Hearlson, 255-268.

⁴¹ Harris, 129.

⁴² <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

⁴³ Christine Lang Hearlson, “Ecological Conversion as Conversion to the Child: Becoming Caregivers, Becoming Childlike,” *Horizons* (v. 47, College Theology Society, 2020) 232-255.

of Friedrich Schleiermacher who expounds on the child's capacity to live fully in the present, always embedded in relationships of mutuality and inter-dependence.⁴⁴

Once again proclamation does not just happen from the pulpit. Many take up the charge to proclaim justice for the earth through political advocacy. Swedish teenage activist Greta Thunberg, Bill McKibben's 350.org, Catholic Climate Covenant, the environmental martyrs of Latin America – these prophetic witnesses for the earth deserve study and attention in communities of faith.

Service

The notion of service or diakonia has deep Biblical roots, expressed throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament. The early Church, as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles was one in which the needy were taken care of and no one went away hungry. In today's world food insecurity, malnourishment and famine are all too frequent occurrences. Communities of faith often respond generously to serving the hungry and finding shelter for those in need through acts of compassionate charity and commitment to social justice. Pope Francis urges people of good will to embrace the intersection of the needs of the earth with those of the poor when he says: "we have to realize that a truly ecological approach always becomes a social approach: it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."⁴⁵

Young people throughout the globe complete hours of service as they prepare for Confirmations or Bar and Bat mitzvahs. How might they be encouraged to consider both a social and ecological approach? Environmental ethicist, Erin Lothes, challenges communities of faith to eat less meat, use public transportation whenever possible, and to divest in fossil fuels.⁴⁶ Many universities and religious communities have taken the lead in divestment practices. Some progressive parishes have well-developed environmental discussions, practices and actions. But many people in the pews might consider such actions as too political and not part of the religious realm. Lothes invites believers to understand divestment not only as a prophetic act of advocacy but as a sacramental one – a symbol of solidarity with creation. If faith communities engage youth from a very young age, in a "deliberate formation" as Ayres says, in care of the earth and care of the poor, there becomes greater opportunity to cultivate on-going ecological conversion into maturity.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 246.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, 49.

⁴⁶ Erin Lothes, St. Catherine of Siena Environmental Summit, keynote address delivered at the Center at Mariandale, April 24, 2022.

Conclusion

Kieran Scott (2016) proposes that church-based education might hold in tension the sacramental and prophetic in a creative, imaginative space as the “life-giving dynamic needed at the center of teaching and learning in the church.”⁴⁷ Harris’ five forms of curriculum provide a holistic container for the sacramental and prophetic dimensions of ecological education to take root and to expand in many dimensions of faith and life. The insights above under each of these five forms are only the beginning of what could be an extensive and thorough religious education that provides the fertile ground for ecological conversion. Religious educators can not control how conversion might take place; that is rightly the work of the Spirit. As Tom Groome (1981) has explained, conversion can indeed be a sudden, life-changing or “come to Jesus,” experience or a more gradual, process of formation and nurture.⁴⁸ Or even a combination of both. It could not be more timely for religious educators to develop diverse curricula and integrated pathways conducive for such conversions to happen.

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How Food Teaches and Why It Matters for Religious Education

Abstract:

This paper makes the case that food (systems, cultures, and practices of eating) is a significant site of cultural, political, and identity formation to which religious educators can pay attention, not only in a critical sense—to be “readers” of culture—but also as a potential path of creative engagement and re-formation—a way to become “cultural producers.” It draws on two claims from food studies scholarship to help lay groundwork for a religious educational approach to food. The first claim is that “*eating is a pedagogical act*,” which points to contributions from the emerging disipline of “food pedagogies.” The second claim is that *food systems are racial formation projects*, which prompts a survey of critical food justice scholarship that foregrounds questions of race and racism in understanding the politics of food at not only macro scales, but also the scales of culture and bodies. Finally, the paper sketches out how these two claims might inform a religious education based on a formational, embodied, aesthetic, playful, and consciousness-raising approach to food, and that draws on sacred wisdom to help learners imagine “countercurricula” of food to open up nonviolent possibilities for being and living together.

Introduction

Food is having a cultural moment—and has been for some time now. The emblematic images have become cliché, meme-worthy: avocado toast, craft brews, DIY sourdough bread, artisanal anything—all photographed exquisitely for sharing on social media. *Foodie*, a descriptor that once contained a hint of snobbery,¹ is now a self-claimed identity by half of those in the Millennial and Z generations.² Food is a hobby, a lifestyle, a part of pop culture. At the same time, we are achingly more aware than ever of the fragility of our ecosystem (our planetary home) and the links between industrial food systems and climate crisis.³ Some cultural trends in food seem responsive to this link, like interest in local and organic produce and small-batch artisan creations, while others (sorry, avocado toast) seem to move in the opposite direction from

¹ De Solier, *Food and the Self*, 7.

² Turow-Paul, *Hungry*, 2.

³ See Jennifer Ayres’s succinct and informative “Primer on the Global Food System” in Ayres, *Good Food*, p. 13ff.

sustainability.⁴ And just beneath the surface is the reality that foodie culture remains—despite the frequent puzzling over younger recession-plagued generations spending more on, say, speciality coffee than on retirement savings⁵—a significant venue for the construction of classed and racialized distinction.⁶

There are few things more literally formative of persons than food. As Elspeth Probyn reflected two decades ago:

[Food culture] now seems to spill into every nook and cranny. Love, sex, relationships, family, economics, comfort, obsession, pleasure, control, desire, shame, disgust, fear, hatred, work, leisure, sickness, death, birth—the list could go on and on. All of these disparate aspects of life are at different times touched by food, given meaning through eating. Intensely social, boringly mundane, simple or complicated, at times eating seemingly connects to the very core of our selves, at others it is just a drudge activity necessary to keep body and soul together.⁷

My basic claim for this paper follows from food's ubiquity in culture, identity, and politics: namely, that food is a significant site of formation to which religious educators can pay attention, not only in a critical sense—to be “readers” of culture—but also as a potential path of creative engagement and re-formation—a way to become “cultural producers.”⁸ In approaching these topics from the context of religious education, I am drawing insight and inspiration from Jennifer Ayres's focus on educational practices in her practical theology of food (*Good Food*, 2013), as well as her more recent formulation of a critical *paidia* oriented toward the capacities needed for an ecological *Inhabitation* (2019). My approach is also shaped by religious educators' engagement with public pedagogy, in that I understand the intricate interactions of food systems, food cultures, and eating to constitute a curriculum that teaches, forms, and habituates all of us as we participate in it. As Tran does in *Reset the Heart* (2017), we do well to read critically and name parts of this curriculum that foster disimagination and violence. Further, along with Annie Lockhart-Gilroy and other contributors to *From Lament to Advocacy* (2020), we can draw on sacred wisdom to help learners imagine “countercurricula”⁹ that open up other possibilities for being and living.

In this paper, I draw on two claims from food studies scholarship to help lay groundwork for a religious educational approach to food. The first claim is that “*eating is a pedagogical act*,”¹⁰ which points us to contributions from the emerging disipline of “food pedagogies.” The second claim is that *food systems are racial formation projects*, which prompts a survey of

⁴ Kishore, “9 Food Trends That Are Destroying the Environment.”

⁵ Turow-Paul, *Hungry*, 7.

⁶ On food, taste, and class distinction, see Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

⁷ Probyn, *Carnal Appetites*, 1.

⁸ Giroux, “Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of Intellectuals,” 68.

⁹ Wimberly, West, and Lockhart-Gilroy, *From Lament to Advocacy*, 232.

¹⁰ Sumner, “Eating as a Pedagogical Act,” 36.

critical food justice scholarship that foregrounds questions of race and racism in understanding the politics of food at not only macro scales, but also the scales of culture and bodies. Finally, I begin to sketch out how these two claims might inform a religious education that seeks less to form ‘good people’, but rather more to form people with the capacities to co-inhabit our common home nonviolently and imaginatively; or, to put it differently, how eating—producing, procuring, preparing, and consuming food—might contribute to “becoming *inhabitants*.”¹¹

Claim One: “Eating is a Pedagogical Act”

While by no means news to religious folks or religious educators, this riff on the poet Wendell Berry nicely captures an area of scholarship that I want to highlight in this paper. Jennifer Sumner, who is a central contributor to the growing discipline of “food pedagogies,” borrows from and extends Berry’s claim that eating is an agricultural act: “Eating is not only an agricultural act. It is also a social act, a political act, a cultural act, an economic act and an environmental act. And it is, above all, a pedagogical act.”¹² Food studies has increasingly made most of those claims, but what Sumner draws attention to in this statement is the emerging application of theories of adult education and learning to the understanding of food systems and foodways. As a religious educator interested in the relationship between moral/spiritual formation and political engagement, I am drawn to such a project. Particularly, I am intrigued by brining teaching and learning questions to the ways that everyday, ordinary eating intersects with larger structures and systems—the “interminglings of the cultural, the culinary and the corporeal.”¹³ Eating, Sumner argues, can be a practice through which we “adapt to a dysfunctional industrial food system,” but also one through which we can “learn to think, to resist and to build an alternative future.”¹⁴

There are, of course, echoes in these claims from food pedagogy scholars of what religious wisdom has known for millennia: food teaches. Ask any youth pastor, whose praxis includes a wealth of finely tuned intuitive embodied practical know-how about pizza, or the many religious believers whose faith is lived out, in part, through decisions about what to eat, what not to eat, and when to eat or not. Further, food has been the subject of rich theological thinking¹⁵ and practical theological reflection.¹⁶ But what is distinctive about the recent work of food pedagogies scholars—and of potential interest to religious educators—is their foregrounding of theories of adult learning and critical and public pedagogies in understanding food. They zero in on *how* food teaches, as well as *who* is teaching and *what kind of learners* the teaching aims to shape, in the multiple arenas of production and consumption, growing, cooking, eating and talking about food. As Flowers & Swan write in the introduction to their foundational edited

¹¹ Ayres, *Inhabitanace*.

¹² Sumner, “Eating as a Pedagogical Act,” 36.

¹³ Probyn, *Carnal Appetites*, 4.

¹⁴ Sumner, 36.

¹⁵ Montoya, “Theology of Food”; Wirzba, *Food and Faith*; Beck, *Unclean*; Bacon, *Feminist Theology and Contemporary Dieting Culture*.

¹⁶ Ayres, *Good Food*; Bass, “Eating.”

collection *Food Pedagogies* (2016), food pedagogies “reproduce culturally circulating ideas about healthism, ‘doing good’ and ‘being good’ through food . . . [and] affect how we feel about what we eat and drink: from disgust to shame, pleasure, aspiration, pride and anger.”¹⁷

Further, many of these scholars draw on robust critical work from food studies’ attention to race, gender, and coloniality, while foregrounding questions of pedagogies, both formal and informal, public and private. The pedagogical sites to which they attend also range from formal classroom teaching and learning (using food to teach about other subjects, for example), to the teaching of celebrity chefs on TV and YouTube or government nutrition programs, to the more subtle public pedagogies of culinary trends and tastes, aligning with the familiar typology of formal, informal, and incidental pedagogies.¹⁸ This resonates with religious education’s long-held interest in society’s formational impact, an interest that goes back to George Albert Coe and Harrison Elliot,¹⁹ and is further developed with recent interest in public pedagogy as a frame for religious education, exemplified beautifully by Mai-Ahn Le Tran’s *Reset the Heart* (2017) and essays in Anne Streaty Wimberly, Nathaniel West, and Annie Lockhart-Gilroy’s *From Lament to Advocacy* (2020).

What I propose is that food pedagogies scholarship offers one particular route to this broader project of developing the religious imagination necessary to unlearn violence, as well as offering engaging sets of questions and forms of analysis that enrich religious education’s use of pedagogical frames and theories for understanding its task of nourishing “‘a lifelong and lifewide’ commitment to active, peaceful, nonviolent living.”²⁰

I will highlight two modes in which food pedagogies scholars operate. The first relates to the public pedagogical analysis just mentioned; it represents two of the founding scholars of food pedagogies, who analyze qualitative interviews with three food activist-educators. The second represents a teacher who uses food as a teaching *medium* in her university courses.

Public and Cultural Food Pedagogies

As compared to food studies more broadly, food pedagogies writers’ interaction with educational theories leads them (like religious educators) to bring distinct kinds of questions that can be posed once we understand various sites of food contestation *as moments of teaching and learning*. For example, who is doing the teaching and what ‘problems’ are they trying to solve for learners—and most interestingly, what are the assumptions embedded in their pedagogical problematization. Flowers & Swan put forward a framework that investigates four “pathways” that they relate to other models of adult education.²¹ The first pathway, *problematizations*, focuses on the ways a ‘problem’ is named, such as how a health educator assumes a population does not know how to cook healthy food on a limited budget. The use of the verbal form ‘problematize’, however, highlights that problems are not simply discovered, but they are

¹⁷ Flowers and Swan, *Food Pedagogies*, 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹ Moore, *Religious Education as Social Transformation*.

²⁰ Tran, “To Set One’s Heart in a Violent World,” 358.

²¹ Flowers and Swan, “Pedagogies of Doing Good”; the pathways are an application of Nikolas Rose’s work in social theory and construction of the self.

constructed, often by educators themselves. The second pathway, *technologies*, is akin to describing teaching methods, except that it expands the view of what is pedagogical to include “more indirect and everyday ways through which people intervene in their own ways of acting, being and living”—in essence, “mechanisms of self-discipline.”²² In this frame food labels—whether nutritional data or ‘ethical’ marks like organic or fair trade—are pedagogical, as they are technologies that operate not through coercive power, but by inviting individuals to exercise agency in ‘choosing’ the kind of food they desire to consume, and hence the kind of life they want to live. An interesting point Flowers & Swan make is that thinking about teaching methods in this frame blurs an easy binary between methods that are ‘empowering’ (and good) and those that are not.²³

The third pathway, *authorities*, examines the process by which someone is afforded the position to teach something, in this case about food. Authority may take the form of expertise, “wisdom, virtue, experience and practical judgment,” but in the case of food activist-educators, it is often the sense that one is ‘doing good’ that underlies their claimed legitimacy.²⁴ Implicit in this critical frame, of course, is the notion that well-meaning activism is not necessarily unquestionably good—a point that I will expand in the next section of the paper. The point here is that the pedagogical frame helps to investigate the claims to and assumptions about authority that operate in these spaces where ‘good food,’ broadly, is the subject matter for teaching and learning.

Finally, the fourth pathway, *teleologies*, focuses on the aims of educational programs, but the emphasis here (and one that will resonate with religious educators) is on the kinds of selves that the teaching envisions; for example: the ‘health-conscious citizen who heeds dietary guidelines’; ‘ethically conscious consumer who cares about the sustainability of the environment’; or ‘creative and cosmopolitan food adventurer.’²⁵ As suggested already, these selves are “forms of life” to which authorities seek to direct learners through the use and promotion of various technologies of the self—put very simply, to overcome problems by converting bad behavior into desirable and good behavior. Importantly, although this analysis enables thick description of the ways that ‘teachers’ (food activists, government agencies, celebrity chefs) engage power, it also invites reflection on the ways ‘learners’ resist, refuse, or “perhaps half-heartedly or intermittently inhabit these forms of life.”²⁶

Attention to technologies and teleologies bring into view two important questions: how is food teaching, and to what aim? One of the contributions of many food pedagogies scholars is their nuanced attention to various ways of utilizing the notion of pedagogy in a cultural sense. Importantly, while they note the influence of Giroux’s *public pedagogy*, their desire to understand the personal, bodily, sensual, and affective experiences of food prompts them to note where Giroux’s theory perhaps over-emphasizes the socializing forces of culture at the expense

²² Ibid., 547–48.

²³ Ibid., 547.

²⁴ Ibid., 553–54.

²⁵ Ibid., 558.

²⁶ Ibid., 561.

of attention to the agency of learners in their “affect, bodies, and desire.”²⁷ Instead, they draw on complementary theories of “cultural pedagogy” that aim to understand “the processes by which cumulative changes in ‘how we act, feel, and think’ are produced using concepts of ‘capacitation, habituation and embodiment.’”²⁸ In this vein, Flowers & Swan highlight projects that explore “taste education”—programs in schools or communities intended to form appreciation for ‘healthy’ eating—and critically analyze the political ways in which such tastes are “classed, gendered, and racialised.”²⁹ A “sensory food pedagogy” can use these critical insights to push for a conception of health that avoids “narrow and moralistic food teaching.”³⁰ With this careful attention to theorizing the intersection of bodies and cultural formational projects, food pedagogies scholars help to address a broader concern about the analyses of systemic power more broadly, with which I will link up again in the next section.

Narrative Food Pedagogies

Meredith Abarca has found in food narratives pedagogical resources for teaching other subjects that are more theoretical and abstract, such as critical theory, feminist theory, and postcolonial theory. Her sources include literary and cinematic food scenes, as well as students’ own experiences of and reflections on food. She frames this use of food as a mode of engaged pedagogy, which introduces new theoretical knowledge to students by beginning with something that is already familiar.³¹ Her aim, consistent with critical pedagogies broadly, is to develop a critical social awareness—what she specifically calls an oppositional “food consciousness.”³² In short, a food consciousness represents a kind of embodied praxis, in which reflection about food is inseparable from transformed relationships with food and through food. With reference to Freire’s claim that all people have an “ontological vocation to be more fully human,”³³ Abarca places her food pedagogy within the critical education tradition: “To not be critically conscious of how cooks (and by extension food) shape societies, technologies, the arts, religions, politics is to ignore a significant part of ‘becoming more fully human’.”³⁴

This example is, of course, an instance of formal pedagogy and the work of a very thoughtful teacher. What stands out to me is her use of food both as subject matter and as a means through which to teach other subjects. In this sense, food makes good company with other aesthetic approaches to teaching. In fact, my interest in food *as* pedagogy began to emerge more distinctly during my experience as a teaching assistant to Courtney Goto in her course “Teaching Theology Aesthetically” at the Boston University School of Theology, in which one of the

²⁷ Flowers and Swan, *Food Pedagogies*, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁰ Rich and Evans, “Where’s the Pleasure? Exploring the Meanings and Experiences of Pleasure in School-based Food Pedagogies.”

³¹ Abarca, “Food Consciousness,” 217.

³² *Ibid.*, 219.

³³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 74.

³⁴ Abarca, “Food Consciousness,” 218–19.

modes of aesthetic theological reflection involved the learning about, preparing for, cooking, and eating of a meal (all by Zoom, given that this was August 2020!).

A part of Abarca's argument is that food's accessible material and sensory nature is one way of developing resistance to "inscribed knowledge"; in other words, food communicates in ways beyond the reading and writing of texts.³⁵ This relates to the aesthetic emphasis in Goto's course, a privileging of and playing with ways of knowing beyond cognitive abstraction. Midway between nonverbal communication and a focus on texts is something like the *charlas culinarias* (culinary chats) Abarca engaged as a method for her earlier work. These informal conversations around kitchen tables revealed for Abarca the ways in which the Mexican and Mexican American women whom she interviewed narrated (against patriarchal erasure) an "autobiographical self" through their cooking and their talking about cooking.³⁶

These narrative approaches demonstrate food's ability to make strong connections between the aesthetic, the personal, and the political. They underscore Freire's insistence that education is never neutral—that the teaching and learning that happens through food, whether formal or informal, is not neutral.³⁷ In the next section, I deepen this claim by asking about the ways in which we learn (consciously or not) about race through food.

Claim Two: Food systems are racial formation projects

This claim may at once seem obvious to those who are accustomed to understanding the structural pervasiveness of racism and white supremacy, but also challenging to unpack in detail. It is, after all, more common to associate food with less charged categories of "culture" or "ethnicity"—designations that usually intend a neutral, even pluralistic/cosmopolitan, value judgment. In this depoliticized view, food certainly marks difference, but those differences are a representation of cultural identities, and thus a voluntary and celebratory demonstration of diversity.³⁸

However, to bring food into the realm of racial formation and racism ups the ante. Critical food studies, in general, supports this perspective. The globalized U.S. food system is a racial project, in that it participates in "political and economic undertakings through which racial hierarchies are established and racialized subjectivities are created."³⁹ To preview where I am headed, then: If food teaches—that is, if food is formational—and if food is also a racial formational project that participates in the perpetuation of white privilege and power, then religious educators have urgent interest in attending to food's forming and habituating role in learners' lives. But how are food systems racial formation projects? Though a full answer

³⁵ Ibid., 219.

³⁶ Abarca, *Voices in the Kitchen*, 165.

³⁷ Sumner, "Learning to Eat with Attitude," 203).

³⁸ Slocum and Saldanha, *Geographies of Race and Food*, 4.

³⁹ Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, p. 5; The authors are drawing on Omi & Winant's well known theory of racial formation. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*.

deserves more space than I can give it here, towards a response one can look at three different “scales” of food—food regimes/systems, foodscapes/foodways⁴⁰, and bodies.⁴¹

Food Systems

That global food regimes and systems are implicated in colonizing racism is not an unfamiliar point to make. After all, as Michael W. Twitty puts it, “[s]lavery began with food”—citing as one example that an estimated “80 percent of all captives brought to the Americas were brought to regions where sugarcane was the main cash crop.”⁴² Without being reductive, it is sobering to recognize the extent to which colonial systems of extraction (sugar, cacao, bananas, pineapples, coffee, spices, and on and on) operate/d on “the politics of keeping white, Western consumers satisfied.”⁴³ Further, even the notion of ‘farming’ as the appropriate relationship to land was at the root of *terra nullius*, the colonizing and genocidal doctrine that ‘uncultivated’ or unfarmed land in the Americas was free for the taking by colonial settlers.⁴⁴

The way that food systems contribute to racial projects can be understood in terms of *access* and *sovereignty*.⁴⁵ A racialized and racializing distribution of access to healthy food is apparent in the familiar discussion of ‘food deserts’ (or “nutrition deserts,”⁴⁶ or “food apartheid”⁴⁷), a term that denotes communities with little presence of grocery stores compared to high instance of fast-food retailers. Though the discourse around ‘food deserts’ is fraught, in part because of its focus on corporate grocery chains as potential fix,⁴⁸ there is a case to be made that, in an industrial food system that tasks consumers/eaters with “storing in our bodies the excess calories produced” in an overheated and subsidized farming market, it is not a stretch to suggest that such a task is unevenly and racially distributed.⁴⁹

However, an emphasis on the notion of *food sovereignty* pushes food justice to account for the agency of communities in defining their own notions of what is healthy and culturally appropriate.⁵⁰ Sovereignty brings to the fore ways in which groups are racialized through the illegitimization of their cultural food practices. For example, when Karuk fishermen in Northern California are repeatedly cited for fishing without a license on their ancestral waterways in the

⁴⁰ The term “foodway” is common in food studies and refers to “beliefs and practices that govern consumption.” Dallam, “Introduction”, p. xviii.

⁴¹ Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco, *Food and Place*, ebook chapter 2.

⁴² Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*, 143.

⁴³ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁴ Probyn, “Afterword,” 332.

⁴⁵ Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, 8.

⁴⁶ Kurtz, “Linking Food Deserts and Racial Segregation,” 248.

⁴⁷ Penniman, *Farming While Black*, Kindle loc. 374.

⁴⁸ See Ayres’s helpful discussion in note 32, p. 172. Ayres, *Good Food*, p. 172.

⁴⁹ Kurtz, “Linking Food Deserts and Racial Segregation,” 259.

⁵⁰ A frequently cited source for the notion of food sovereignty is the *Via Campesina* movement, <https://viacampesina.org/en/>. See Ayres, *Good Food*, p. 104; Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, p. 8; Slocum and Saldanha, *Geographies of Race and Food*, p. 8.

Klamath River, the fact that they are given ‘access’ to food through canned government commodities does not account for the ongoing violation of their food sovereignty. Such practices participate in the history of violence against native peoples that offers assimilation as the only legitimate way forward. Norgaard, Reed & Van Horn argue that the Karuk have “become hungry” through distinct racial projects involving food.⁵¹

Or, when Hmong immigrant micro-farmers in California, who commonly depend on communal family assistance in farming tasks, run afoul of farm labor requirements to carry insurance, such an occurrence could be dismissed as an unintended consequence of well-intentioned farm labor protection laws. However, Minkoff-Zern et al point to a larger pattern of farmland dispossession of Asian peoples in California—including the barring of Japanese land ownership in the early 20th century and the Chinese exclusion Act in the century prior.⁵² Their point, in part, is that without a robust racial theory, these farm laws can be understood as having no racist “intent”; however, a critical understanding of racial formation projects recognizes intent as irrelevant, and highlights the racializing effects “through which racial hierarchies are established and racialized subjectivities are created.”⁵³

Foodways

One risk of a focus on the formational power of systemic racial projects is losing sight of the agency of people engaged in creative resistance to such forces, as well as subversive and oppositional uses of racial identities.⁵⁴ Thus, in addition to keeping macro systems and their effects on bodies in mind, a focus that moves down-scale to matters of culinary life is necessary—a focus on what Twitty calls “culinary justice.”⁵⁵ Specifically, he is addressing the right of people—especially cooks and chefs of color—to benefit from the contributions their food traditions, knowledges, and tastes make to culinary culture. He is taking aim at, among other things, the oft-noted habit of white chefs benefiting from the ‘discovery’ and ‘mainstreaming’ of foods and techniques developed in other, often minoritized, communities: in short, cultural appropriation—akin to what bell hooks decades ago called, “eating the Other.”⁵⁶ To be sure, such conversations about cultural ‘borrowing,’ especially in culinary terms, are messy and complex, and in their less helpful versions can devolve into rigid essentializing about who can cook (and eat) what. However, that is not to miss the deep critique that Twitty and others are making about the ways that cultural discourse and practices around cooking and eating can and do conspire to perpetuate a division between cuisines that are exotic other (ethnic, which is actually racial) and those which are simply ‘normal’, mainstream, non-ethnic/non-racial (read: white). This is especially apparent in the prevalence of “fusion” restaurants, in which a cuisine is

⁵¹ Norgaard, Reed, and Van Horn, “A Continuing Legacy.”

⁵² Minkoff-Zern et al., “Race and Regulation.”

⁵³ Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, 4.

⁵⁴ On the racial identities as a source for developing oppositional resistance to racism and whiteness, see especially chapter 4, “Real Identities” in Alcoff, *Visible Identities*.

⁵⁵ Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*, 409.

⁵⁶ Hooks, *Black Looks*, 21–39.

“elevated” by being brought closer to the techniques and recipes of French cuisine, which continues to form the core curriculum of major culinary institutes.⁵⁷

Bodies

In a mode analogous to food pedagogies’ nuancing of public pedagogy above, a focus on food in understanding racial formation pushes toward an emphasis on sensory, affective, and material transmission of identity alongside discursive and representational ones.⁵⁸ So, beyond the symbolic and economic forms of appropriation that are a concern for culinary justice, one can extend the analysis of racial formation to taste itself. In some accounts, whiteness is (also) formed at the level of taste. There is, of course, the more blatant kinds of othering that happens when defining what food is disgusting, offensive, or which smells are ‘unappetizing.’ However, there is also the subtle but equally pernicious mode of formation in which whiteness is constructed as a cosmopolitan culinary sensibility. “Food adventurers”⁵⁹ build up an identity by being courageous in trying, and maybe developing *a taste for* many kinds of ‘strange’ food; but, that demarcation of strange and not-strange is simply a (barely) veiled form of Orientalism where “the authenticity of the self co-emerges with the authenticity of the other.”⁶⁰ One could say that, if part of the project of becoming a good white person is to learn to ‘embrace’ difference, then the food offers an alluring invitation, since “[t]he ability to navigate through the multicultural world in a less problematic way is one of the important characteristics of whiteness.”⁶¹ However, the futility of this project is evident precisely in the incessant need to establish the (racialized) “authenticity” of the culinary other. “After all,” as Hirose and Pig quip, “what could be a worse consumer experience than purchasing a ‘fake product’?”⁶²

Again, relative to the glaring crises of climate change, mass incarceration, police violence, food insecurity or the exploitation of farm laborers, a focus on culinary justice and culinary appropriation might seem to lack urgency. However, as black veganism activist and scholar Syl Ko argues, “decolonizing work is more than just attending to the literal ways in which certain beings have been excluded from moral, social, political, and legal domains. Decolonizing work is fundamentally about removing the threads that hold together narratives that underpin those domains.”⁶³ I agree. In other words, those underpinning narratives are not resisted only at systemic levels, but also at the level of culture—in this case, culinary culture that, to bring these first two sections together, teaches through food.

⁵⁷ Janer, “(In)edible Nature.”

⁵⁸ Swan and Flowers, “Potatoes in the Rice Cooker,” 49.

⁵⁹ Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*.

⁶⁰ Hirose and Pih, “‘No Asians Working Here,’” 1487.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1497.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1488.

⁶³ Ko and Ko, *Aphro-Ism*, 117.

A Gustatory Religious Education

My final task, then, is to bring the religious lens to these first two contributions from food pedagogies and the intersection of food and race. One particular path I will follow is related to self-reflexive work as a white religious educator writing and thinking about race. I take my cue from Shannon Sullivan, who names a deep spiritual work “good white people” need to engage that involves getting beneath⁶⁴ forms of being that lead to paralysis rather than disrupting whiteness. She points to a sober earnestness that often characterizes white people’s approaches to matters of race and racism. This seriousness may seem appropriate, but it too often derives from an “overheated sense of goodness,” an evocative phrase meant to capture the misdirected affective investment in a *sense* of being good.⁶⁵ It is not that white people should not take racism and white supremacy seriously; rather, her point is that this earnestness manifests as a focus on affects like shame and guilt, along with the othering of working class white people and white ancestors, as if those affects and othering were *themselves* markers being ‘good’. Needless to say, such investment does little to disrupt racism.

It is interesting to me that those who bring a critical race lens to the work of food justice tend to critique much of the ‘mainstream’ alternative food movement for—as the editors of *Cultivating Food Justice* wryly put it, irony intended—its “monoculture” of whiteness.⁶⁶ (See also Guthman’s evocative title and analysis, “If Only They Knew: The Unbearable Whiteness of Alternative Food.”)⁶⁷ To be sure, even critiques about the ‘whiteness’ of a movement can perform a problematic second erasure by ignoring the presence of people of color who *are* already actively and creatively engaged in alternative food movements and practices;⁶⁸ however, the partial truth of these concerns about the structures, cultures, and discourses of the movement suggests a connection to Sullivan’s concern about good white people. These two seem related. The same temptation toward overheated ‘goodness’ is present, I would argue, in many ‘ethical’ approaches to food—and religious versions thereof are no exception.

In *Whitebread Protestants* (2000), the well-known exploration of white Protestant religious approaches to food, Daniel Sack reveals something along these lines. Aware of the way that food and religion are often theorized around identities that are obviously ethnic, Sack argues that white U.S. Protestants’ religious and moral approaches to food also constitute a particular ethnic-religious foodway. Though he does not make too much of this, it is a quite useful move in pushing back against the invisibility of whiteness, the ‘white comfort’ of not have race or ethnicity—just being ‘normal’. Sack’s unifying theme through several angles on food in U.S. mainline churches is what could well be described as a (white) Protestant earnestness toward food, whether in terms of social reform, potlucks, health, or ‘global hunger’. In one chapter, he draws on the 19th-century food reform movements that featured John Harvey Kellogg and fellow Seventh-day Adventists, and compares that with the 1970s “lifestyle” movement, in which

⁶⁴ Moore, “Disrupting White Privilege.”

⁶⁵ Sullivan, *Good White People*, 147.

⁶⁶ Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, 2.

⁶⁷ Guthman, ““If They Only Knew”.”

⁶⁸ Ko and Ko, *Aphro-Ism*, 13.

Protestants were encouraged to address the global hunger crisis by, among other things, eating less meat. Though he suggests neither of the Protestant movements made much impact, he manages to draw out a particular way that (religious) people approach the formation of a kind of moral good self through good food. Having been deeply shaped by Seventh-day Adventist communities and traditions, I recognize and concur with point that Sack is suggesting about an earnest investment in a sense of goodness and a sense of self that are pursued specifically through food.

Such moral self-construction is present in alternative food movements, as well, which themselves carry a quasi-religious approach to proselytization and conversion.⁶⁹ But while both of these approaches contribute important analyses of systemic issues of food injustice (especially around access and hunger), they tend to leave under-explored the kinds of selves and communities that are being formed by these moral approaches to food. Though Sack himself does not push this question very far in his book, it would be generative to extend his work to explore how the white Protestant foodway he surfaces, with its moral(izing) approaches to food, not only constitutes a white ethnic foodway (the point he does make), but also how it might participate in the formation and perpetuation of whiteness, a racial project.

My broader point here is to make a cautionary note about one form that a gustatory religious education could take—a primary focus on developing ‘good selves’ through moral(izing) approaches to all things food. Instead, I wonder if a gustatory religious education could contribute to formation/spirituality for transformation by opening up other ways of being that are less invested in a *sense* of being good, and more invested in being authentic, honest, vulnerable, courageous, and playful—and aimed always at disrupting systems of keep supremacies in place.⁷⁰ Such an approach to food could come in many forms, but I conclude with a few signposts garnered from wise religious educators:

A “curriculum of eating”: As Tran engages Giroux’s public pedagogy to bring to consciousness the pedagogy of violence that operates, not only in U.S. culture, but also in practices of religious education, she suggests that Christian offers a “curriculum of eating” as part of developing a capacity for “communicability.”⁷¹ Such a curriculum would, following Giroux, aim at learners’ not only becoming critical “readers” of (food) culture but also “producers” of (food) culture.⁷² In that sense, it is a “counter curriculum” of food.⁷³

Capacities for ecological inhabitance: If energy needs to be redirected from an investment in a sense of being good, it could instead be invested in developing the kinds of capacities necessary for, in Ayres’s evocative imagery, *ecological inhabitance*. Inhabitanace evokes a spiritually grounded, deep settling into one’s place as home, coming to know the web of relations that are fundamental to existence. I find myself wondering how a focus on food’s affective and

⁶⁹ Zeller, “Quasi-Religious American Foodways”; for virtue formation in alternative food movements, see Snow, “Food Virtue’.”

⁷⁰ Brookfield and Hess, *Becoming a White Antiracist*, 33-34.

⁷¹ Tran, *Reset the Heart*, ebook chapter 4.

⁷² Giroux, “Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of Intellectuals,” 68.

⁷³ Wimberly, West, and Lockhart-Gilroy, *From Lament to Advocacy*, 232.

aesthetic materiality might take shape when directed towards the capacities she names: wonder/awe, eros, grief,⁷⁴ hope, and a critical (food) consciousness of systemic injustice.

Playing with food: Goto's play-ful approach to religious pedagogy aims to provide "safe-enough"⁷⁵ learning communities in which learners (and teachers) can take risks in "experimenting with ways of being and being together that have not yet become habitual."⁷⁶ Playing aesthetically with food may also be a way to open up possibilities of playing with identities and the histories, communities, and structures in which identities are embedded. It may just be food's "camouflage of mundanity"⁷⁷ that offers an oblique enough angle by which to get at such weighty subject matter, while also resisting a resort to a somber sense of goodness. And to be sure, food just might play back, offering surprising encounters and revelatory experiencing.⁷⁸ As Harris would remind us, the subject matter is not an inert object on which we impose a teaching method, but is itself alive and contributing to the revelation of its form.⁷⁹

With these signposts, I am pointing toward something like a formational, embodied, aesthetic, and consciousness-raising approach to food as a way of not only taking matters of justice head on, but also obliquely, "on the slant,"⁸⁰ perhaps playfully, as a way to begin to lay aside false selves of overheated goodness and imagine being together—and eating together—including how and what we eat. Are there ways that reflecting together on food stories, narrating ourselves through food, eating together, and perhaps playing together *with* food can open up possibilities for diving beneath not only "inscribed knowledge"⁸¹ but also scripted identities, scripted ways of being, those malnourished forms of embodiment inscribed by whiteness and other supremacies of violent disimagination? As I write this conclusion, such violence is in the headlines again. Yet another school shooting, in Uvalde, Texas, only ten days after a gunman sought out and murdered black grocery shoppers in Buffalo, New York. The impetus for religious educators to engage imaginative pedagogies that unlearn violence and help dream up new forms of being and being together is as urgent as ever. I admit, however, that a focus on food—especially food culture and eating—feels trite. Still, I also know that such violence is not new, nor was it created overnight—and that in the ongoing struggle to be and to live *otherwise*, we reach for every resource possible: certainly not by food alone, but also not without good food and good eating.

⁷⁴ See also Wimberly's call for religious educators to identify spaces where culture is grief-averse and facilitate practices of lament. *From Lament to Advocacy*.

⁷⁵ The term "safe-enough" comes from Adams & Bell, who, like Goto, draw on Winnicott's notion of "good enough" mothers and the holding environments they create for baby's to develop a sense of self. (Adams and Bell, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, ebook chapter 3)

⁷⁶ Goto, *The Grace of Playing*, 128.

⁷⁷ Mehta, "I Chose Judaism but Christmas Cookies Chose Me'," 169.

⁷⁸ Goto, *The Grace of Playing*, 3.

⁷⁹ Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*.

⁸⁰ Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*, 4.

⁸¹ Abarca, "Food Consciousness," 219.

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Educating a Community about Lament and Practicing it for Co-creating Liturgical Tradition with Marginalized Narrative of Women's Suffering from Recurring Violence

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ABSTRACT: This study challenges the adequacy of the response of the faith community and its liturgy to the violence that is being inflicted on women. Through the suffering of women caused by violence in today's world as well as the world of the Bible, it explores how lament has worked as a way that women have traditionally dealt with their individual and communal suffering. This study is aware of the meaning of lament and the importance of practicing lament within the liturgy to participate in and to pursue recovery from women's suffering in everyday personal and global violence. Lament can generate a dynamic that operates in tension with the limited liturgical traditions that have for centuries neglected or minimized the experience of women's suffering caused by repeated violence against them, while reshaping the language of the gospel with women's suffering.

Intro: Is It Nothing to You?

Millions of women and girls worldwide experience and bear the consequences of violence every day.¹ According to an estimate of the World Health Organization in 2021, 30% of women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.² As women's exposure to violence increases due to the lockdowns and social and economic impacts during today's Covid-19 pandemic, racial hatred has also exacerbated existing violence and has created new forms of violence.³ However, the awareness of the violence and its causes is dim in many religious groups and traditions.⁴ How the church is responding to the violence and whether the church is a safe place for women's sufferings to be heard has been challenged. In a world where the threat of violence is rampant, from domestic violence to group conflict, speaking the right language and initiating the best practice in response to the experience of loss and suffering is part of the challenge facing education and ministry today.⁵ Women and other oppressed groups need to use language that does not exclude or perpetuate stereotypes.⁶ I propose that the community response to the violence inflicted on women can be properly implemented through education and by practicing intentional lament within the context of broader educational endeavors. Lament can be a way to name and address violence, suffering, and injustice long endured by individuals and communities.

My approach to lament is narrative, practical, theological, and empirical as a way to deal with suffering. This study explores lament from the perspective of memory, resistance, and caring for

¹ G. Brooke Lester, "Psalms of Lament," *Bible Odyssey*, <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/%20passages/related-articles/psalms-of-lament>.

² "Violence against Women," *World Health Organization*, March 9, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

³ Lester, "Psalms of Lament."

⁴ Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Denise Ackermann, *Tamar's Cry: Re-reading an Ancient Text in the Midst of an HIV/AIDS Pandemic* (London, Catholic Institute for international Relations, 2002), 35.

women's suffering by mirroring, witnessing to, and participating in the suffering caused by violence against women. First, I look at the tradition of biblical lamentation involving women in Jeremiah 9 and Judges 11. This is because painful literary experiences can provide a mirror that reflects the true reality of our lives. The importance of lament to deal with modern and biblical violence against women suggests the necessity of the educational and practical roles of lament in Christian liturgy. Lament has an important place in ritual because women's story of suffering is part of God's story and lament paves the way for a process of healing and restoration. Next, I consider how lament can contribute to Christian worship to create a co-tradition. Bringing into the liturgy the stories of violence that women have suffered acknowledges the history of women's suffering. It senses, questions, challenges, and exposes the link between power and knowledge, and it can create a space for both hope and pain in all their complexity, including the intense emotion women experience as they suffer profound losses. Also, the openness to the tension not to jump to a hasty proclamation of hope or healing. In addition, understanding and using the image of a lamenting God may offer an alternative image of divine presence in suffering.

It is primarily through the work of lament that women's experiences and the liturgical sensitivity that reflects those experiences can explore women's history and their roles as co-creators of tradition. Becoming educated in the practice of lament as a communal act in Christian liturgy is important because the liturgy opens a space for weeping, awakens a feeling of sorrow, and reveals the paralyzed spirit caused by severe suffering.

A Tradition of Communal Lament in Jeremiah 9 and Judges 11

Images of women in the Bible vary, they are presented as both good and evil in metaphorical contexts, but the text seldom invites us to look at the material from the point of view of a historical woman.⁷ As Kwok Pui-lan argues, it is necessary to rethink how narratives of such a dominated identity were constructed.⁸ In particular, it is necessary to critically reflect on how women's participation and experience were rejected or distrusted in the formation of the Christian meta-narrative.⁹ Gayatri Spivak argues we need to find the mark of vulnerability which makes us share our vulnerability and participate in that, rather than to create the perfect narrative.¹⁰ The identity formed by the Christian meta-narrative may silence the narrative of 'different' which is seen as an act of distinguishing and separating oneself from others or as an act of creating boundaries.¹¹ These authors show that the Christian narrative is not a single ideological narrative, but rather reveals the tension created by narratives that have been silenced, suppressed, or ignored. Thus, the voice of suffering as a crucial voice resists the absolutization of a structure's unchallenged tendencies and creates tension in dominant narratives by refusing to be included in that structure.

1. Jephthah's Daughter and Lament in Judges 11

⁷ Corrine L. Carvalho, "The Challenge of Violence and Gender under Colonization," in *Hebrew Bible: Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Fortress Press), 108.

⁸ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 27, 31.

¹¹ Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.

In the narrative of Jephthah's daughter, there is no mention of who she was, who her friends were, what they mourned, or how the community reacted. Most interpretations do not care about her fear and suffering, but consider only whether Jephthah's oath is wrong, whether God accepts it, whether vows with evil consequences are to be kept, or whether she has truly suffered a literal sacrifice. In this limited and oppressive situation, the demand of Jephthah's daughter is to reach out to her friends and lament with them in the last days of her life (Jud 11:37-40).¹² Her lament may have served as a channel for expressing sorrow for her own life and death, protesting against injustice, and further sympathizing with and regretting her father's cruel oath. Although it is rare in the Bible for a childless woman or a woman who is not the wife of a famous man to be remembered in the Bible, Jephthah's daughter is remembered, which leads to the lament of Israeli women.¹³ The narrative of her life and death and her will to mourn are not forgotten, and what commemorates her sacrifice is resistance to amnesia and denial.¹⁴ Also, the story of Jephthah's daughter often mirrors domestic violence. Amid the harshness of justice, lament as resistance reflects human dignity.¹⁵ Lament exposes violence that has already been committed, and can express anger and the strong will not to allow potential violence. Lament empowers the wounded to respond against the power that is wielded against them. The dignity of the daughter who has been violated by force is restored to some extent through their lamentation.¹⁶ Recognizing this way of reading urges us to consider how the violent Bible needs to be interpreted in order to reveal the oppression within texts and communities that embrace and produce oppressive beliefs, and to expose the sufferings bestowed through patriarchal misogyny.¹⁷

Additionally, painful literary experiences can provide a space that mirrors the true reality of our lives (for self and the world).¹⁸ Radical imagination can envision violence and fear¹⁹ which “are the necessary barb acting against the temptation to minimize or ignore repressive and destructive violence.”²⁰ Such visions produce the courage for women and society as a whole to face this pain and say “never again.”²¹ Lament permeates these texts and faces paralyzing sadness, resists social injustice and divine silence, begins to open their mouths in acknowledgement of their own pain, promises to remember their pain and calls those who want to take part in the pain to testify.

¹² Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022), 104.

¹³ Ibid., 106.

¹⁴ Cheryl Exum, “On Judges 11,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1993), 132.

¹⁵ L. Juliana Claassens, “Female Resistance in Spite of Injustice: Human Dignity and the Daughter of Jephthah,” *Old Testament Essays* 26, no. 3 (2013): 607-622.

¹⁶ Ibid., 615.

¹⁷ Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, “Lament as Womanist Healing in Times of Global Violence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Susanne Scholz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 143.

¹⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 244.

¹⁹ Eliana Ah-Rum Ku, “Lament as Resistance and Rage: An Asian Woman Immigrant’s Reading of Psalm 137 in the Light of Anti-Asian Hate Crimes of North America” *The Journal of Asian American Theological Forum* 8, no. 1 (2021): 11.

²⁰ Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 75.

²¹ Trible, *Texts of Terror*, xv.

2. Mourners in Jeremiah 9

Lament in Jeremiah is the truth-telling of what happened and calls together communities who have suffered severe losses to grieve and participate in survival.²² In Jeremiah, despite a male-dominated perspective, several images are revealed that give us a glimpse into the real lives of women in the past — as wives, prostitutes, divorced women, mourners, mothers, worshipers, victims of war, sisters and daughters around the world.²³ These images violence haunt the painful history of women and call for a different future.²⁴

In Jeremiah 9, lament is a community response in the face of extreme trauma, and women who weep show the community how to respond appropriately in light of the circumstances. The scene shows the tradition of educating people about lament as part of women's wisdom and politics; it also reveals the multiple and unstable images/metaphors about God.²⁵ In times of death and loss, women have traditionally acted as professional mourners, and their tears were official. This was to drive the tears of the community and to help express that sadness.²⁶ The role of a weeping woman was a job that required training.²⁷ The tradition of weeping women uses sadness as a therapeutic remedy for individuals and communities, and is a powerful symbol of survival for the wounded, so that they can experience catharsis through expressions of wailing fused with words and emotions.²⁸ The weeping women recount the terrifying reality of grievous destruction. These violent images offer a means of entry into reality, making survivors' wounds open and accessible by describing death and suffering.²⁹ This is because the witnessing power of language allows us to evoke experiences of suffering, even if not directly or explicitly. In this sense, the wailing women's vocation contributes to forming meaningful bonds by enabling the community to come together amid tensions and strife.³⁰ Its ability to connect the suffering of individuals and groups ultimately opens up the possibility of healing or remediation.³¹

Furthermore, the lament in Jeremiah chapters 8 and 9 shows an intriguing image of God. The first-person verb in this text identifies God and the daughter Zion, when she is broken, God is also broken, and God is hurt by her wounds.³² The distance between her and God closes, as God participates in her misfortune and becomes emotionally attached.³³ Lament in Jeremiah unites YHWH with the personified Zion (8:18-9:2) and the weeping people (9:17-22). Then, God, the

²² L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 29.

²³ Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Jeremiah," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 272.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kathleen M. O'Connor, "The Tears of God and Divine Character in Jeremiah 2-9," in *Troubling Jeremiah*, eds., A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Louis Stulman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 387.

²⁶ O'Connor, "Jeremiah," 273.

²⁷ Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, "Traces of Women's Texts in the Hebrew Bible," in *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1996), 84.

²⁸ Tova Gamliel, "'Wailing Lore' in a Yemenite-Israeli Community: Bereavement, Expertise, and Therapy," *Social Science and Medicine* 65, no. 7 (2007): 1507.

²⁹ Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 34.

³⁰ L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Calling the Keeners: The Image of the Wailing Woman as Symbol of Survival in a Traumatized World," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 71.

³¹ Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 122.

³² O'Connor, "The Tears of God," 398.

³³ Ibid.

keener, directs women to teach lamentations. Since an act of lament requires tremendous energy and courage that victims of a tragedy may not perform it all themselves, those who lament let the community see a devastated world through calling, sending, coming, and speaking.³⁴ As a weeping woman in the community, God evokes a response in tears and teaches the community to see the wounds of victims of social violence:

When considering the ethical implications of the tears of the God who weeps as embodied in the wailing women of the community, it is important to consider that the tears of the Divine Mourner included the victims of the social injustice perpetrated and the devastation caused by the Babylonian Empire...The tears of God and the wailing women challenged the Judean community at the time of the exile—and communities ever since—to have the same broken heart as God and to work for change wherever change is possible.³⁵

All women in Israel, not just trained ones, are called to weep. Their mourning is not exclusive. God is calling all women in the community to expand their professional and passionate roles.³⁶ The calling suggests a communal response to mourning and its importance. The mourners create a space for members of the community to express their feelings, to break the silence and find the first word to tell what happened to them.³⁷ Weeping women, who do not escape the violence and death inflicted upon them, find their name and lead the community in the first steps of their long journey towards healing and restoration.³⁸ The lamenting women will weep for them until the community can face paralyzing sorrow. In this situation, “grieving is a moral act. It involves living in the present with knowledge of the self and of the world as they are. It engages present reality, the only place from which the communal rebuilding can begin.”³⁹

The narratives of Jephthah's daughter and lamenters in Jeremiah resonate with the experiences of modern women's suffering, as well as reveal the stories and experiences of women who have been overlooked in the Bible and look at what women have done to deal with and survive their sufferings. Biblical lament denounces and resists the stories of violence in our realities and lets us see how the union of women works to counter that violence. Lament does not change the outcome of the narrative, nor does the lamentation itself bring hope. Nevertheless, women's lamentations, sung in solidarity against any pressure and fear, are sufficient to lead the mourning of the entire community, restoring and maintaining women's identity.⁴⁰ Thus, becoming educated in the practice of lament as a communal act is important because it makes the space for weeping, awakening a feeling of sorrow, and revealing the paralyzed spirit caused by severe suffering.⁴¹

Through the biblical narratives of suffering and the women's lament tradition, which were caused by violence against women, I present lament as a tradition of women's remembrance, resistance, and care in their solidarity. The lament tradition based on this interconnection suggests that women are agents of speech and action, they are not helpless victims. Lamenting

³⁴ Kathleen M O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 67.

³⁵ Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 36.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁹ O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 68.

⁴⁰ Claassens, “Female Resistance,” 615.

⁴¹ O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 68.

has created a space where sorrow can be heard and a space where one can resist the prevailing power structures.⁴² It opens up insights into gender, violence, and human dignity.

Becoming Educated in the Practice of Lament as Remembrance, Resistance, and Care in Solidarity

The important task of religious education as a theological endeavor is to lead people from passive suffering to active possibility, by deriving narratives from their wounds, sorrows, and mourning and bring those to the surface. Lament can function as the “language of critique and possibility.”⁴³ It is because lament reminds us that social structures are predatory and dysfunctional and offers to realign social views. Lament can stop the denial, bring the truth to the surface, and allow us to overcome the paralysis caused by trauma, oppression, and abuse. Lamentation is not only dedicated to God, questioning God's justice and God's action for suffering creation, but also reflects the wickedness and injustice of the world, including war, rape, violence, deportation, and destruction of homes and cities. Lamentation has been used as a language for pastoral care and managing global, personal, and communal sorrows and losses.⁴⁴ In this sense, educating a community about lament aims to get women and the powerless to act and think critically, as well as to contribute to the return of the lost tradition of lament in Christian liturgy. Thus, lament is expected to change a community and society as a whole and to change the way people think and act.

We can imagine that the prophet Jeremiah may have seen his mother's lamenting in the tradition of Jephthah's daughter and its power—the tears of women bringing change and repentance where prophecy and sacrifice had failed.⁴⁵ Mourning for Jephthah's daughter caused mourners to weep for violence against women, and those who did mourn eventually wept for themselves and wept for their daughters, teaching their daughters and the community to mourn.⁴⁶ Today's mourners are also inspired by the dating violence that surrounds us, the family of a woman burned to death by her boyfriend who forced her to have an abortion, and the story of an elderly husband who shot his wife in the head three times because she had Alzheimer's disease.⁴⁷ We as mourners see this violence resonate with the violence in the Bible.

In this sense, educating a community about lament may function as a way of generating a co-tradition by declaring the importance of women's experiences of suffering that have been ignored or silenced so far, and by participating in defending them, and bringing the experiences of lost women back into Christian liturgy.⁴⁸ It includes critical reflection on traditional formulations of God and being open to different ways of recognizing God's presence.⁴⁹

1. Remembrance

⁴² Claassens, “Female Resistance,” 614.

⁴³ Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, “Religious Education and Lament: Inviting Cries from the Heart, Guiding the Way Forward,” in *From Lament to Advocacy: Black Religious Education and Public Ministry*, eds. Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, Nathaniel D. West, and Annie Lockhart-Gilroy (Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry Books, 2020), 3.

⁴⁴ Kirk-Duggan, “Lament as Womanist Healing,” 142.

⁴⁵ Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationship in the Bible* (New York: Warner Books, 2005), 73.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁸ Wimberly, “Religious Education and Lament,” 3.

⁴⁹ Claassens. *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 91.

The real tragedy of the biblical tradition is that the violence experienced by women is incidental to the point of the story. To recognize it, the stories of the suffering experiences of women that have been told before deserve to be told again.⁵⁰ The lament tradition in Jephthah's daughter allows us to remember women's resistance to pain, lost agency, and patriarchal oppression, and to see what happened to her and what is happening to women today. It also interferes with the dominant discourse geared to Jephthah's vows. Lamenting as a remembrance invites us to look critically at and makes it visible how women, the powerless, those who have no choice, those of whom obedience is demanded, and those who are oppressed, occupy a significant place in the religious tradition and in the history of God. Practicing Lament extends and reconceptualizes traditional storylines by remembering muted voices.⁵¹ In other words, remembering is a device that can enable us to avoid repeating the history of tragedy, an accusation of a history of injustice and suffering, and giving a name to those who have lost their name. Lament can save women's suffering and story from oblivion and silence.⁵²

Lament as remembrance changes the way we think about relationships, thinks alternatively of the presence of God, and enables women's memories to be a source of hope, by recalling painful memories and stories of resistance and survival.⁵³ This is because lament can lead us to transcend pain and begin to see the new possibilities of life that are now given to us, helping us to imagine liberating possibilities that provide an alternative to the world of pain, oppression and injustice.⁵⁴ The courage to remember and our sincere connections to others allow us to face fears and threats and to experience the power of change.⁵⁵

2. Resistance

Lament has the character of strong resistance when it encounters violence. The narratives of the Judges and Jeremiah as well as many of the nonviolent resistance movements in history demonstrate this nature of lament. Lament as resistance presents anger that John Hill calls "the prophetic wrath." It is not anger that leads to bitterness, hatred, violence, or despair, but it is anger that insists on prophetic action, change, telling the truth, and taking courageous risks for the present.⁵⁶ The lament of the weeping woman in Jeremiah resists the power of the Babylonian Empire that devastated everything even in the face of little real power to change the situation, by refusing to accept the current situation, contributing to the will to survive.⁵⁷ Weeping women challenge the many social injustices that threaten women's lives and serve as God's advocates as the conscience of those who protest the wrongs of the world.⁵⁸ The text of Jephthah's daughter has been interpreted to reflect the rape, enslavement, and murder of women in conquered countries during the war. It also reflected adolescent girls whose ownership passed from father to husband, that is from one by male power to another that was capable of abusing and exploiting

⁵⁰ Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 78.

⁵¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 161.

⁵² John Lee Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 104.

⁵³ Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 91.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 150.

⁵⁶ Johnny Bernard Hill, *Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 7.

⁵⁷ Claassens, "Calling the Keeners," 73.

⁵⁸ Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 30.

them.⁵⁹ Lament resists adding a divine element to one's destiny, or reverent self-sacrifice, observance of vows, or the glory of the following destiny.⁶⁰ The practical lens of lament as resistance sees women discovering themselves in situations where their values have been violated. In this action, despite the domination of men and of the patriarchal system, and rejecting the humiliation that has come upon them.⁶¹ Learning and practicing lament can provide readers with critical interpreters of biblical texts which can be presented as an important perspective because lament also reveals violence and promotes a resistant dialogue about a culture of violence against women.

3. Care

Sadly, 60-70% of rape and sexual assault cases go unreported, and more than 200,000 women are raped by intimate partners each year. The reason these cases are not reported to the police is the fear of retaliation, in addition to a lack of counseling and advocacy, lack of education on the subject of rape, and lack of laws protecting human rights and the information of victims.⁶² Victims are also reluctant to report because of feelings of shame, remorse or guilt, humiliation, or fear of being criticized. It means that much of the pain is vague, unresolved, and unhealed. Many live at the crossroads of ancient calcified sorrow.⁶³ This demonstrates the importance and urgency of care in dealing with violence. Lament is a way to create a venue where narratives of suffering can be told without turning a blind eye to the suffering of the world. A lament is not worthless when there is no one to listen to it, or there is no one who will respond effectively. If both the listener and the participant are necessary for effective lament to exist as a form of caring for the wounded, then surely communal lament in Christian liturgy or in the community has this power.

The Bible portrays violence against women in a variety of situations, but women's actions in response are very rare. Thankfully, the narratives of Jephthah's daughter and Jeremiah offer a model that is not ashamed of deep disappointment and pain. Thus, teaching the biblical lament given to women's stories, voices, and women's practices makes us realize that we need each other's care and that every sorrow deserves to be mourned. It is about turning our attention to the other person, cultivating the custom of being open to mutual vulnerability and mourning for each other. Lament as caring is possible because empathy for the other person can be the starting point.⁶⁴ To do this, Nusscaum says that we need to cultivate the ability to imagine other people's experiences and participate in their suffering.⁶⁵ Lament cannot be forced, and cannot be forced to take out someone's vulnerability for mutual sharing and participating in. However, from the moment people realize that we are connected, mutual lament can become possible.⁶⁶ Thus,

⁵⁹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New interpretation of Their Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 114.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Claassens, "Female Resistance," 607.

⁶² Denise M. Ackermann, "Tamar's Cry: Rereading an Ancient Text in the Midst of an HIV/AIDS Pandemic," in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, eds. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 107.

⁶³ Kirk-Duggan, "Lament as Womanist Healing," 146.

⁶⁴ Ackermann, "Tamar's Cry," 101.

⁶⁵ Nusscaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 426.

⁶⁶ Claassens. *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 92.

educating a community about lament and participating in mourning are both rooted in nurturing and conserving love; together they open the way to devotion to life for all.⁶⁷

These characteristics of lament need to be based on mutuality as the Bible portrays women's solidarity with the characteristics of voluntary, reciprocal, and equal relationship, including emotional bonding, trust, and goodwill.⁶⁸ In particular, the loyal response to disasters shown in the biblical narratives above shows that women have learned that lament has a comforting aspect and thus women have practiced lament together in times of crisis as a social norm and have found the benefit of emotional unity. This experience of solidarity can be understood not as a concept of the exercise of common power, but as a specific way in which groups exercise their ability to remember that is lost, to resist oppression, and to care by acting together for an agreed-upon purpose of challenging and overthrowing the system of domination.⁶⁹ Therefore, educating a community about lament and practicing it is not only an ethical requirement, but it also makes it possible to recognize women as beings with strong agency who have the will to choose, to participate in life and to co-create meaningful tradition.

How to Include Lament in Christian Liturgy as Co-creating Tradition

The meaning of tradition is ambiguous, and that ambiguity is dynamic. This dynamic is not about destroying and subverting tradition, but about co-configuring that tradition by including excluded lost voices, rediscovering the richness of voices, and bringing powerful revisions and fresh perspectives to the surface. Thus, this study poses a challenge to how the Christian linguistic tradition that includes the gospel can be co-formed when women's suffering narratives interpenetrate the linguistic tradition of the liturgy that has ignored or minimized the suffering narrative of women. This study offers lament as a receptacle for holding this tension. Lament in ritual is a form of direct speech about realistic beliefs that include the extremes of human life and human experience.⁷⁰ At the same time, lament is stepping into a healing process:

Public rituals testify and bear witness to loss, pain, and death which moves us to engage grief, creating a safe space to face memories we would rather forget, empowered to hold the memories with God, in grace, and then letting them go. Rituals help people heal, as they experience in- tense emotions in honesty, and provide a space for experiencing consolation, as they engage lament language to make present deep wounds of pain and loss, amidst communities where they can know divine restoration and creation's redemption.⁷¹

1. Bringing Together Women's Suffering Experiences

Given that the biblical narrative is male-dominated in content and purpose, women's religious memory can extend beyond texts because continuity of tradition is maintained not by an adherence to a particular text, but by "an ongoing process of communal traditioning."⁷² This

⁶⁷ Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 98.

⁶⁸ Saul M. Olyan, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2017), 85.

⁶⁹ Amy Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 127.

⁷⁰ Claus Westermann, *Praise and lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 11.

⁷¹ Kirk-Duggan, "Lament as Womanist Healing," 154.

⁷² Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 101.

includes noticing how the narrative is structured as a memory of the community, and how women's participation has been rejected or discredited in the formation of the narrative.⁷³

Educating a community about lament allows them to see human facts that can only be seen remotely; this is done by expanding their empathy with all people.⁷⁴ Nussbaum believes that literature allows exercises that encourage awareness of pain with new sharpness and forms habits of empathy and guesswork.⁷⁵ For instance, the ancient Greek tragedy makes suffering narratives morally important in a way that enables one person to care for another who suffers something the caregiver has never experienced, and that makes clear the depth and importance of suffering and the losses that trigger suffering.⁷⁶ Nussbaum argues that being educated in regard to tragedy calls a young male audience to look at the suffering of human life from the perspective of a young woman who has been raped, a queen who cannot fully live or die due to her gender, and a sister who has to die.⁷⁷ Thus, lament brings the biblical story of women's suffering and of violence against women into today's liturgy so clearly that we remember, resist, and care by calling on the congregation to participate. The language of sorrow can be a spontaneous reaction that remains under a woman's control, even in the most helpless moments of a rape, during enslavement, etc.⁷⁸ Therefore, the language of mourning plays an important role in bringing the story of women's suffering back into the liturgy.

The place where suffering narratives are most effectively revealed in the liturgy is in pulpits. Preaching raises voices from oblivion, making audible in history the inaudible groaning voices of women in pain.⁷⁹ In addition to the stories of Jephthah's daughter, numerous stories of violence in the Bible—rape and murder of an unnamed woman (Jud 19), incest and rape against Tamar (2 Sam 13), and the rape against Dina (Gen 34)—are voices that we have ignored or have not recognized in our daily lives. In preaching with lament, these painful stories resonate with the voices of millions of women who suffer from rape and abuse.

2. Openness to Creating Tension

Although Creation, disobedience, downfall (repentance), and salvation, which are part of the Christian meta-narrative, include many variations, this narrative has occupied the interpretation of suffering in the Bible and people's lives. The limited understating of Christian meta-narrative can make those in suffering doubt the presence of God, minimize the cause of suffering personally or spiritually, and respond passively to suffering.⁸⁰ Lament doesn't romanticize the story of suffering as fatalistic, eschatological, or the way to salvation. Instead, it argues that the meta-narrative doesn't work amid suffering, and claims that not all suffering results in judgment-repentance. Thus, lament can provide a setting that allows the reader to ask more questions and to bring the violence into the conversation.⁸¹ However, this characteristic of lament does not exclude a space of hope, but rather holds both the suffering experiences and hope: “By plunging

⁷³ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 47.

⁷⁴ Wimberly, “Religious Education and Lament,” 17.

⁷⁵ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 427.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 428.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 430.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 161.

⁸⁰ Eliana Ah-Rum Ku, “The Importance of Lament and the Ethical Implication of Its Practice in Preaching,” *Preaching Korea* 15 (Spring, 2020): 11.

⁸¹ Kirk-Duggan, “Lament as Womanist Healing,” 143.

its readers deep into memories of disaster, it acknowledges them and brings them into the light...these hard words make room for hope to reside, to set up house and do its work of rebuilding.”⁸² Six years ago, in 2016, a misogynistic crime took place at Gangnam Station, Seoul, Korea. In 2022, a feminist union worship was held to commemorate that hate crime. The theme of this worship service was “Hot indignation seizes us” (Ps 119:53).⁸³ The lament communal prayer used by this worship shows the benefits of retaining this tension. This prayer holds hope while enduring the discomfort of the reality of suffering.

Representative 1: We are angry and weep, but with this strength, we again give our voice to the world.

Together: Lord, we are gathered here. We lament the patriarchy and sexism which are so strong that it will never be broken, the backlash that swallows our language, and the sexual violence which has often been covered up and neglected. Thank you for letting us support each other with new strength without being swept away by them.

Representative 2: Their fire extinguishes existence, but our fire is the fire of life. Here the sparks are gathered.

Together: We will renew and choose to live, not destroy. Our fire will finally burn injustice.

Representative 1: Jesus comforted those in the deepest of despair, expressing the wrath at the political and religious leaders who were exploiting the powerless.

Together: We too, will not hold back the anger we deserve at unjust violence and discrimination, lift each other up and take another step forward.

3. The Image of Lamenting God

The metaphor of a weeping God who sheds tears on the violence against women facing the community, participating in the suffering of violence, showing solidarity with those who have been hurt, and being present as part of the community.⁸⁴ In Jeremiah 9, divine lament can open new possibilities for liberation and provide new perspectives on God's nature, offering the image of God with sufferers in their desolation instead of an indifferent or incompetent God, even in the absence of immediate relief for violence.⁸⁵ In Jeremiah, people's tears merge with God's tears: “The image of the God who weeps, with its associations of solidarity with God's people as well as the inherent power of God's tears to effect change, speaks to people in a way that few others images are able to.”⁸⁶ God is one of those weeping women.⁸⁷ God's tears were shed earlier than the tears of weeping women. The lament of God teaches us to see the wounds of victims of violence and shows that God teaches the community how to lament without giving up on it.⁸⁸

The image of a lamenting God working for life amid suffering can be revealed through the lament language in various hymns. One of the United Methodist hymnals, *God weeps*, shows the image of God who is not separated from human suffering and responds to and participates in

⁸² Kathleen M. O'Connor, “Rekindling Life, Igniting Hope,” *Journal for Preachers* 30, no. 2 (Lent 2007): 31.

⁸³ Feminist Union Worship for 6th anniversary of misogynistic crimes at Gangnam Station (May 24, 2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skeqQALiDjk>

⁸⁴ Claassens. *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 33.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 36.

human suffering. The absence of an Amen in this hymn is symbolic and it harbors earnest hope in the midst of sorrow.

God weeps at love withheld at strength misused, at children's innocence abused, and till we change the way we love, God weeps.

God bleeds at anger's fist, at trust betrayed, at women battered and afraid, and till we change the way we win, God bleeds.

God cries at hungry mouths, at running sores, at creatures dying without cause, and till we change the way we care, God cries.

God waits for stones to melt, for peace to seed, for hearts to hold each other's need, and till we understand the Christ, God waits⁸⁹

Thus, awareness of a lamenting God includes a call to serve as a companion of our weeping God who laments for a deeply wounded world.⁹⁰

Conclusion

Violence leads to the erosion of God-given convictions in those who suffer, and it leads to a sense of separation from God that is the much deeper pain of abandonment that goes beyond loss and despair. This change of state causes an ontological change along with a loss of identity. This powerful sense of loss and abandonment calls for concrete and participatory lament. If there is no education about and practice of mourning, and if these moans are not publicly addressed in the liturgy, people may be stuck in the absence of God amid chaos, or they can easily turn their eyes from whatever suffering they witness in others around them and finally they will block it from their attention. Being educated in lament and practicing lament can contribute not only to comforting or treating those who experience violence, but also allows others to stand with those who suffer, and to feel, speak, and resist with them. Since lament continues to be challenged by stigma and exclusion even while it creates an environment of vulnerability and mutual participation that can lead to acts of caring for those who struggle with the loneliness of suffering, it is essential to co-create a tradition that will adequately deal with women's sufferings caused by violence.

⁸⁹ Shirley Erena Murray (words) and Carlton R. Young (music), "God Weeps" in *The Faith We Sing* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Company, 1996), #2048, https://hymnary.org/text/god_weeps_at_love_withheld.

⁹⁰ Claassens. *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 20.

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**Provisioning Stones and Snakes:
Constructing an interdisciplinary heuristic of childhood religious trauma and abuse in the
American Christian context**

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing awareness of child abuse, little academic research examines religious abuse and trauma during childhood. This paper constructs an interdisciplinary and intersectional heuristic of childhood religious trauma and abuse (RTA) from the American Christian perspective. It does so by weaving together psychological and theo-philosophical literature with Rebecca Nye's theory of childhood spiritual development. The paper argues RTA distorts a child's relationship with God leading to lifelong effects. It describes how America's prejudice against children further facilitates religious trauma and abuse and outlines needed theological and structural changes from the perspective of religious education.

Francis, a baptized Catholic, lay dying in a hospital bed. His mottled skin strained thin each time he attempted to breathe. No noise could disturb his slumber. Loretta, Francis' wife of fifty years, sat at the bedside, holding his hand. The chaplain offered to arrange the Sacrament of the Sick; Loretta declined, stating a priest would disturb Francis. Tearful, Loretta explained how a priest 'hurt' Francis as a child. The mere sight of a priest or collar made him panic. Now years after the abuse, Francis' religious trauma haunted him, stealing one final moment of comfort and grace.

With the cultural shifts of the twentieth century and Judith Herman's revolutionary text, *Trauma and Recovery*,¹ American society grew increasingly aware of child abuse and trauma. The child trauma field attempts to prevent multiple types of childhood abuse (i.e., sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological). Additionally, theological disciplines respond to and advocate against forms of abuse and trauma.² Yet, Francis' story illustrates the silencing of abuses and traumas connected with religion. Scholars' attempts to define religious trauma gain little traction because proposed definitions are not interdisciplinary and give little credence to

¹ J. L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992).

² For example, see: Nicholas Peter Harvey and Linda Woodhead, *Unknowing God: Toward a Post-Abusive Theology* (Cascade Books, 2022); Ashley E. Theuring and Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Fragile Resurrection* (Cascade Books, 2021); Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross, *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture & Church in Critical Perspective* (La Vergne: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2020); Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018); Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017); Elaine A. Heath, *We Were the Least of These: Reading the Bible with Survivors of Sexual Abuse* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos, 2011); Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, 3rd Printing edition (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom*, 1st edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Rita Nakashima Brock, "Ending Innocence and Nurturing Willfulness," in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune, 1st Edition (New York: Continuum, 1991), 71–84; Rita Nakashima Brock, "And a Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (Pilgrim Press, 1989), 24–61.

children's spiritual development. Children like Francis often receive support for sexual/physical abuse, but spiritual harm may go unnoticed without better-defined language and understanding across disciplines.

This paper advances religious abuse and trauma conversations by combining psychological and theo-philosophical research with Rebecca Nye's theory of childhood spiritual development. From a Christian theological perspective, I argue religious abuse and trauma is fundamentally a *misappropriation of religious power by adults, systems, and communities against children*. I craft an interdisciplinary and intersectional heuristic of childhood religious abuse and trauma, which I refer to using the acronym RTA, situated in the United States context.

Due to the relational nature of children's spirituality, RTA wounds a child by warping perceptions of God, causing spiritual difficulties and other post-traumatic symptoms into adulthood. Furthermore, prejudice against children further enables RTA in American society. Consequently, tending to RTA calls for the continued development of childhood theologies and interdisciplinary cooperation. Religious education's attentiveness to childhood theology, multidisciplinary approach, and investment in theological education positions religious educators as ideal interventionists to end childhood RTA.

Psychological and theo-philosophical definitions of religious abuse and trauma

Academic fields address aspects of RTA; however, no field offers an interdisciplinary child-centered definition of RTA. Creating such a definition from the myriad of terms used by scholars and practitioners to describe the phenomenon and a lack of cross-disciplinary contact proves difficult. Presently available descriptions fall loosely into two categories: Psychological and theo-philosophical perspectives.

Psychological perspectives of religious trauma and abuse

Psychological perspectives address childhood RTA concurrently with other forms of abuse. Scholars in this camp utilize a variety of terms like religious-based abuse, abuse perpetrated in the name of religion, and physical-based religious abuse. These studies use legal data sets to typically highlight parental or clergy abuse where children typically experience physical harm. Bette Bottoms' research on religious abuse spans two decades of publications.³ She describes religion-related child maltreatment as 'sexual and other abuses perpetrated by persons having religious authority,' 'medical neglect motivated by caretakers' religious beliefs,' and 'physical abuse perpetrated by adults because of their literal interpretations of religious writings, such as ridding children of evil by beating them.'⁴ Rebecca Murray and Michael Nielson's congruent definition adds the invocation of God during any form of abuse to Bottoms' definition.⁵

Other forms of psychological scholarship discuss religious abuse more broadly without specific attention to childhood. For instance,⁶ Dr. David Ward formulates a definition of spiritual abuse in adults. His small qualitative study describes spiritual abuse as a 'psycho-social

³ Bette L. Bottoms et al., "Religion-Related Child Maltreatment: A Profile of Cases Encountered by Legal and Social Service Agencies," *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 33, no. 4 (2015): 561–79; Bette L. Bottoms et al., "Religion-Related Child Physical Abuse: Characteristics and Psychological Outcomes," *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 8, no. 1–2 (2004): 87–114; Bette L. Bottoms, Philip R. Shaver, and Gail S. Goodman, "An Analysis of Ritualistic and Religion-Related Child Abuse Allegations," *Law and Human Behavior* 20, no. 1 (February 1, 1996): 1–34; Bette L. Bottoms et al., "In the Name of God: A Profile of Religion-Related Child Abuse," *Journal of Social Issues* 51, no. 2 (1995): 85–111.

⁴ Bottoms et al., "Religion-Related Child Maltreatment"; See also: Gail S. Goodman et al., "Correlates of Multiple Forms of Victimization in Religion-Related Child Abuse Cases," *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 2, no. 1 (April 8, 1998): 273–95.

⁵ Rebecca Murray and Michael Nielson, "Child Abuse, Religion-Related," in *Encyclopedia of Applied Developmental Science*, ed. Celia B. Fishner and Richard M. Lerner (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005).

⁶ Marlene Winell, *Leaving the Fold: A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Leaving Their Religion*, 2007 Edition (Berkeley, CA: the apocryphile press, 2007); Marlene Winell, "Religious Trauma Syndrome," *Journey Free* (blog), January 31, 2011, <https://journeyfree.org/rts/>.

process.’⁷ Ward maintains spiritual abuse as a distinct phenomenon while acknowledging its propensity to intersect with multiple forms of abuse, denoting emotional, social, and spiritual consequences. Like psychologist Marlene Winell, other scholars focus on adults *leaving* abusive religious communities and classify the difficulties individuals experience following their departure as Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS). Winell’s book, *Leaving the Fold*, and website, JourneyFree, appear significantly more popular with survivors and laity than the academy.⁸

Simonič, Mandelj, and Novak move beyond the individual adult experiences of religious abuse to describe religious-related emotional abuse within family systems. They draw upon theologian Donald Capps¹⁰ and psychologist Edward Cumella¹¹ to formulate a six-pronged definition that highlights spiritual harm as a potential outcome of emotional abuse.¹² More recently, therapists Craig Cashwell and Paula Swindle described clinical cases of adult manifestations of religious trauma. They define religious trauma as ‘mental, physical, sexual

⁷ David J. Ward, “The Lived Experience of Spiritual Abuse,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 14, no. 9 (November 1, 2011): 899.

⁸ Marlene Winell, *Leaving the Fold: A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Leaving Their Religion*, 2007 Edition (Berkeley, CA: the apocryphile press, 2007); Marlene Winell, “Religious Trauma Syndrome,” *Journey Free* (blog), January 31, 2011, <https://journeyfree.org/rts/>.

¹⁰ Donald Capps, *The Child’s Song*, 1st edition (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

¹¹ E.J. Cumella, “Religious Abuse,” *The Remuda Review: The Christian Journal of Eating Disorders* 4, no. 2 (2005): 17–20.

¹² Barbara Simonič, Tina Rahne Mandelj, and Rachel Novsak, “Religious-Related Abuse in the Family,” *Journal of Family Violence* 28, no. 4 (May 1, 2013): 32–33. The six prongs of the definition include, “(a) in the framework of a religious institution, place, or context (e.g., sexual abuse by a priest); (b) in the form of literal or distorted interpretations of religious writings (e.g., a child’s poor behavior condemned as the doings of the evil spirit possessing him or her); (c) if the victim is the one who is in a position of religious or spiritual authority (a congregation may join in ridicule and abuse of their pastor); (d) coercive spirituality (e.g., in totalitarian cults); (e) authority figures may abuse their prominent position (e.g., a dignitary or other religious authority, priest, catechist, etc.) to fulfill their own selfish interests by manipulating their believers into performing certain tasks; and (f) religious beliefs, generally pure and pleasant in themselves, may be distorted and incorporated into abusive rationalizations.”

and/or emotional abuse that occurs within a religious context setting, with results that can be traumatizing to the individual.’¹³

Overall, the psychological perspective of childhood RTA tends to connect religious abuse with other forms of maltreatment. Scholars studying RTA as a distinct phenomenon examine its presentations in adults or families. Children’s experiences of RTA as a specific form of abuse and its consequences remain largely unaddressed.

Theo-philosophical perspectives of religious trauma and abuse

The theo-philosophical perspective claims RTA causes physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual pain. Theologians and religious leaders have discussed spiritual abuse¹⁴ and utilized adjacent terms like ‘harmful religion’ since the 1990s.¹⁵ Capps arguably wrote the first work, *The Child’s Song*, on the religious abuse of children.¹⁶ Contending that childhood religious abuse includes teachings and concepts (hell, eternal damnation) that scare, confuse, and promote shame, Capps builds on historian Charles Greven’s framework.¹⁷ Greven links Christian religious doctrine (such as original sin) and corporal punishment to the problem of child abuse in America.¹⁸

¹³ Craig S. Cashwell and Paula J. Swindle, “When Religion Hurts: Supervising Cases of Religious Abuse,” *The Clinical Supervisor* 37, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 183.

¹⁴ David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse, The*, Reprint edition (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House Publishers, 1991).

¹⁵ Lawrence Osborn and Andrew Walker, *Harmful Religion: An Exploration of Religious Abuse* (London: SPCK, 1997).

¹⁶ Capps, *The Child’s Song*; See also: Donald Capps, “Religion and Child Abuse: Perfect Together,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31, no. 1 (1992): 1–14.

¹⁷ Philip Greven, *Spare The Child: Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physic*, 1st edition (New York: Knopf, 1991).

¹⁸ Philip Greven, “Religious Rationales,” in *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse*, (New York, NY, US: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 43–93.

Since the 1990s, memoirs,¹⁹ blogs,²⁰ and social media hashtags (#religioustrauma, #spiritual abuse) highlight a growing awareness of religious trauma amongst the public. Philosopher Michelle Panchuk, noticing this trend, describes religious trauma as a ‘Ballung concept’ to avoid limiting survivors’ experiences to a singular definition.²¹ Still, Panchuk sketches an outline of religious trauma as, at minimum, an experience one perceives as transformational ‘caused by the divine being, religious community, religious teaching, religious symbols, or religious practices,’ which may diminish religious capacity.²² However, only Panchuk’s later work discusses the religious trauma of children as a form of hermeneutical injustice.²³

The theo-philosophical perspective, in contrast with the psychological, does address religious abuse as a distinct phenomenon in the lives of children. However, beyond Capps, little research has continued studying childhood RTA. More recent works embrace the correlation between religion and trauma but do not flesh out how RTA explicitly impacts the development of children’s spirituality.

The missing link: Children’s relational spirituality

Both the psychological and theo-philosophical perspectives contain insights for defining childhood RTA. The psychological perspective illustrates the intersectional and complex nature

¹⁹ Jamie Lee Finch, *You Are Your Own: A Reckoning with the Religious Trauma of Evangelical Christianity*, 2019; Linda Kay Klein, *Pure: Inside the Evangelical Movement That Shamed a Generation of Young Women and How I Broke Free*, First Touchstone hardcover edition (New York ; London: Touchstone, 2018).

²⁰ “Dare to Doubt | Religious Trauma Syndrome,” daretodoubt.org, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.daretodoubt.org/religious-trauma-syndrome>.

²¹ Michelle Panchuk, “The Shattered Spiritual Self: A Philosophical Exploration of Religious Trauma,” *Res Philosophica* 95, no. 3 (2018): 516.

²² *Ibid.*, 516–17.

²³ Michelle Panchuk, “Distorting Concepts, Obscured Experiences: Hermeneutical Injustice in Religious Trauma and Spiritual Violence,” *Hypatia* 35, no. 4 (2020): 607–25.

of RTA. On the other hand, the theo-philosophical view highlights RTA as potentially independent from physical or sexual abuse and uplifts spiritual pain as an outcome of this type of abuse. Both perspectives fall short in considering how children's spiritual development interfaces with RTA.

Christian anthropology generally understands all persons as capable of transcendence and communion with God, creation, and others. Though endowed with these religious capabilities, children's relationships and ecological environments shape their faith lives and images of God. Rebecca Nye titrates the tension between nurture and grace in her relational theory of childhood spiritual development. She describes children's spirituality as 'relational consciousness.'²⁴

Children's spirituality is an *initially natural capacity* for awareness of the sacred quality of life experiences. This awareness can be *conscious* or *unconscious* and sometimes fluctuates between both, but in both cases can affect actions, feelings, and thoughts. In childhood, spirituality is especially about being attracted towards 'being in relation,' *responding to a call to relate* to more than 'just me'--- i.e., to others, to God, to creation, or to a deeper inner sense of Self. This encounter with transcendence can happen in specific experiences or moments, as well as through imaginative or reflective activity (thoughts and meaning-making).²⁵

Nye's theory articulates children's spiritual development as vulnerable and porous. The psychological and theo-philosophical perspectives fail to explicitly acknowledge how power differentials between adults and children can cause harm to a child's spirituality.

Insights from neurology and attachment theory further confirm how the quality of children's relationships with adults impacts their spirituality. As children interact with others in their environment, their brain develops neurological pathways.²⁶ Child trauma expert Bruce

²⁴ Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), 6.

²⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁶ Bruce Duncan Perry and Maia Szalavitz, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog and Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook ; What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us about Loss, Love, and Healing*, (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 25-27.

Perry refers to neurological pathways as ‘memory templates.’²⁷ Perry illustrates the concept of memory templates by relaying the story of his patient Tina.²⁸ Tina was routinely sexually assaulted by her mother’s boyfriends. On Tina’s first visit to Dr. Perry’s office, she gently climbed on his lap and attempted to unbutton his pants. Tina’s experiences with her mother’s boyfriends formed a memory template that connected adult males with sex. She assumed Dr. Perry, being an adult male, would expect the same things as her mom’s boyfriends.²⁹ Her brain adapted to best navigate and survive in her domestic ecology.

Just as Tina learned to respond to adult males through patterned interactions with her mother’s boyfriends, children conceive of God through interactions with others. The ‘who’ and ‘what’ children relate to and how the ‘who’ and ‘what’ relate to children profoundly shape their spirituality for better or worse. Indeed, research suggests that child-caregiver attachment relationships influence children’s perception and relationship with God and their religiosity.³⁰ Especially in early childhood, children project attributes of caregivers onto God by drawing upon their lived experiences. Healthy attachments to adults often establish a caring and present image

²⁷ Perry and Szalavitz, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog and Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist’s Notebook*, 25.

²⁸ Bruce Duncan Perry and Maia Szalavitz, “Tina’s World,” in *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog and Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist’s Notebook ; What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us about Loss, Love, and Healing* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 1–28.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Pehr Granqvist and Phillip R. Shaver, *Attachment in Religion and Spirituality: A Wider View*, 1st edition (New York: The Guilford Press, 2020); Pehr Granqvist, Mario Mikulincer, and Philip R. Shaver, “Religion as Attachment: Normative Processes and Individual Differences,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, no. 1 (2010): 49–59; Pehr Granqvist and Jane R. Dickie, “Attachment and Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence,” in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Eugene Roehlkepartain et al. (Thousand Oaks, California, 2006), 197–223; Angie McDonald et al., “Attachment to God and Parents: Testing the Correspondence vs. Compensation Hypotheses,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24, no. 1 (2005): 21–28; Jane R. Dickie et al., “Parent-Child Relationships and Children’s Images of God,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 1 (1997): 25–43; Bradley R. Hertel and Michael J. Donahue, “Parental Influences on God Images among Children: Testing Durkheim’s Metaphoric Parallelism,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 2 (June 1995): 186–99.

of God.³¹ A child's initial conception of God expands to contain attributes beyond or apart from the caregiver as children learn to differentiate between human and divine relationships. As children age, their ecological environments broaden, introducing alternative depictions of God. God often serves as a vital attachment figure fulfilling children's needs in the process of self-differentiation and maturation.³² How might Nye's theory, combined with the psychological and theo-philosophical perspectives, better shape present understandings of childhood RTA?

Towards an interdisciplinary understanding of childhood religious abuse and trauma

Merging the psychological and theo-philosophical perspectives maintains contributions from both disciplines while creating a shared understanding to increase the likelihood of cross-disciplinary communication and intervention. Nye defines what children's spirituality is and how it develops. Given that children develop spiritually through a relational consciousness, RTA must somehow interfere on a relational level. Neurology and attachment theory hint at how children may experience RTA. Jennifer Baldwin's *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma*³³ defines the misuse of relational power as original sin.³⁴ Though Baldwin refers to trauma broadly, the notion of mismanaged power captures the root causes of RTA in

³¹ Granqvist, Mikulincer, and Shaver, "Religion as Attachment: Normative Processes and Individual Differences"; Granqvist and Dickie, "Attachment and Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence;" Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Religion, Spirituality, and Attachment," in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality (Vol 1): Context, Theory, and Research*, APA Handbooks in Psychology® (Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association, 2013), 139–55. Granqvist and Dickie posit that insecure caregiver attachments may result in compensational attachments to God as a coping mechanism.

³² Dickie et al., "Parent-Child Relationships and Children's Images of God," 38; Annette Mahoney, *The Science of Children's Religious and Spiritual Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 52. Mahoney reviews most of the literature regarding children's images of God and attachment. She notes a need for more research incorporating children's perceptions to better understand the relationship between God and attachment.

³³ Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 115.

³⁴ Ibid.

both the psychological and theo-philosophical perspectives while also integrating Nye's relational theory of childhood spiritual development.

Therefore, childhood religious trauma and abuse refers to the *misappropriation of religious power by adults, systems, and communities against children*. Like Panchuk,³⁵ I acknowledge the need for early RTA scholarship to provide boundaries while remaining flexible as new information about religious abuse develops. Rather than a formal definition, the following acts as an interdisciplinary and intersectional heuristic to generate a conversation between disciplines without totalizing the phenomenon of childhood RTA:

A phenomenological event(s) or complex ecology wherein adults, systems, and communities levy religious beliefs, practices, doctrines, systems, textual interpretations, and social teachings against children, causing them to feel overwhelmed, unsafe, and unable to escape danger. RTA also may refer to childhood experiences of abuse, maltreatment, or implicit or explicit harm related to religion and spirituality between the ages of 0-25. RTA may intersect with other forms of abuse and trauma, impacting religious functioning and dynamics between God, self, and others. Dysregulation, pain, and developmental truncation to the whole child may occur. A child's spiritual wellbeing may be significantly impacted well into adulthood.

Examples of childhood RTA include, but are not limited to:

- Disrespect, disregard, and discrimination for a child's gender and sexual identity, race, ethnicity, and cultural background based on religious beliefs and practices³⁶
- Use of religious doctrines, beliefs, and techniques to scare, manipulate, punish, and control children's behavior which causes them torment³⁷
- Subjecting a child to religious practices to rid them of evil or sin or for acculturation purposes

This heuristic brings together the strengths of each perspective while integrating Nye's understanding of childhood spiritual development. Rather than helping children flourish, RTA acts as spiritual *mal*-formation interfering with children's relational consciousness through misappropriated power. How does RTA impact a child's relationship with God and the world?

³⁵ Panchuk, "The Shattered Spiritual Self," 516-17.

³⁶ Connie L. Kvarfordt, "Spiritual Abuse and Neglect of Youth: Reconceptualizing What Is Known Through an Investigation of Practitioners' Experiences," *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 29, no. 2 (2010): 146.

³⁷ Capps, *The Child's Song*, 51.

Impacts of childhood religious trauma and abuse

Limited comprehensive research exists on the impacts of childhood RTA. Available research suggests childhood RTA creates associations or memory templates between God and abuse. Children may conflate God with the abuser or think God approves of their abuse. Evidence suggests RTA causes harm to the whole child, including spiritual woundedness that persists into adulthood.

Capps demonstrates how children's relational consciousness causes them to conflate God with forms of abuse or their abuser. He argues, 'through experiences of physical punishment, children learn to associate religion and love; in being reconciled to the punishing parent, the child learns what it means to a loved child of God.'³⁸ Capps' work indicates that RTA creates a memory template associating abuse, relationships, God, and love. Children with these memory templates feel loved when hit or spanked because the brain connects love and acceptance with abuse and punishment. Because of these associations, children needing love and affection from their caregivers and God may "provoke" disciplinary action to feel a corrupted form of intimacy with their caregiver and God.³⁹ Adults who respond with further abuse reinforce children's connections between abuse and God, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle. Associations between maltreatment and love may cause issues in their relationships later in life.

Believing that God is against them because of supposedly inherent brokenness, RTA causes children to feel betrayed and alone. Additionally, children may identify God as perpetrating or condoning abuse by those with spiritual authority leading to self-blame and mistrust.⁴⁰ For example, one study reveals survivors of clergy sexual abuse feel guilty for

³⁸ Capps, *The Child's Song*, 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁴⁰ Katherine Kusner and Kenneth I. Pargament, "Shaken to the Core: Understanding and Addressing the Spiritual Dimension of Trauma," in *Trauma Therapy in Context: The Science and Craft of Evidence-*

causing the clergy to ‘sin.’⁴¹ Others experience a spiritual bind fearing admittance of the abuse will lead to punishment or damnation.⁴² In other words, children are more inclined to perceive themselves as to blame for RTA rather than spiritual authorities. Having been robbed of using spirituality as a coping mechanism, children struggle to experience ‘spiritual emotions, draw on spirituality as a resource, or look to organized religion for solace.’⁴³

Overall, current research indicates that RTA impacts children’s memory templates of God. God mirrors the actions and dispositions of adults becoming unsafe and cruel from whom the child desires unrequited love. The sense of self shrinks or inadequately develops as children internalize the actions of adults as God’s feelings towards them. They may experience a lack of transcendence and an inability to identify a life purpose leading to feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and despair.⁴⁴ These experiences only serve to reinforce beliefs of intrinsic brokenness. Instead of discovering religious language and feeling safe enough to explore existential topics (i.e., death, illness, finitude), children in situations of RTA cope by repressing, splitting, and withdrawing from the present reality.⁴⁵ Ultimately, Bottoms concluded that religion-related abuse has significantly more ‘negative implications for its victims’ long-term psychological wellbeing’ than non-religion-related abuse.⁴⁶ Indeed, RTA impacts the child’s whole self, including physical, social, and emotional wellbeing.⁴⁷

Based Practice, ed. Robert A. McMackin (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012), 213.

⁴¹ Danielle M. McGraw et al., “Consequences of Abuse by Religious Authorities: A Review,” *Traumatology: An International Journal* 25, no. 4 (December 2019): 249.

⁴² Kusner and Pargament, “Shaken to the Core: Understanding and Addressing the Spiritual Dimension of Trauma,” 214-15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁴ Bottoms et al., “Religion-Related Child Physical Abuse,” 107-8.

⁴⁵ Capps, *The Child’s Song*, 52.

⁴⁶ Bottoms et al., “Religion-Related Child Physical Abuse,” 87–88.

⁴⁷ See: Panchuk, “The Shattered Spiritual Self”; Teresa B. Pasquale and Richard Rohr, *Sacred Wounds: A Path to Healing from Spiritual Trauma* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2015); Alyson M. Stone, “Thou Shalt Not: Treating Religious Trauma and Spiritual Harm With Combined Therapy,” *Group* 37,

Minimal research suggests the consequences of RTA persist well into adulthood. Two of the leading experts on treating religious trauma, Cashwell and Swindle, note that even adults struggle to untangle God from their abusers when coping with religious trauma in their clinical work.⁴⁸ Their adult clients also believe God abandoned them.⁴⁹ Further research needs to ethically uplift the voices of childhood RTA survivors across developmental stages and identities to explore the long-term outcomes of RTA. Other continued investigations of RTA will benefit from using a complex trauma lens. Complex trauma, abusive ecological environments, or multiple compounding traumas impinge upon the development of the self and relational functioning.⁵⁰ RTA may act as a complex trauma given the all-consuming nature of some religious systems. Still, available research indicates adult misappropriation of religious power negatively shapes how children relate to God, themselves, and others. Without intervention, children may suffer throughout their lives.

The American prejudice against children

Given that many of the relationships discussed, i.e., parents, clergy, and trusted adults, intend to nourish children spiritually, why does RTA exist in American society? How do adults, often without malintent, level Christian religiosity against children? Elisabeth Young- Breuhl's concept of childism offers insight into how American society enables and usually allows RTA to remain easily hidden.⁵¹ Young- Breuhl coined the phrase childism while researching the growing

no. 4 (2013): 323–37; Winell, *Leaving the Fold: A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Leaving Their Religion*. These authors note a correlation between religious trauma and PTSD highlighting its wholistic complications.

⁴⁸ Cashwell and Swindle, “When Religion Hurts,” 185.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Marie-Thérèse Proctor et al., “Christians with Chronic Complex Trauma and Relationally Focused Spiritual Difficulties: A Conversational Model Perspective,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 21, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 79-84.

⁵¹ Elisabeth Young-Breuhl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children*, Reprint edition (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2013).

population of incarcerated American youth. She defines childism as a ‘prejudice against children based on a belief that they are property and can (or even should) be controlled, enslaved, or removed to serve adult needs.’⁵² Young- Breuhl argues childism ‘is a belief system, not a knowledge system,’ which remains highly operative in the United States.⁵³

Childist beliefs lay at the core of RTA. Though Christianity deems children inherently spiritual, in the process of RTA, adults attempt to indoctrinate and control children to meet adult religious agendas. For instance, clergy sexual abuse preys upon a child’s religious convictions, such as the minister’s closeness with God, to groom a child and achieve sexual satisfaction. So-called biblically-based corporal punishments attempt to control children’s behavior by supposedly enacting the will of God. In other words, prejudice against children fails to honor the child’s innate spirituality and connection with God. Rather than nurturing this connection, adults, despite meaning well, misuse relational power to control a child’s understanding of and relationship with God and the religious.⁵⁴

Childist beliefs interface with Christianity in several ways, including two prominent examples in the United States context. First, childism undergirds the ecclesial polity of two

⁵² Young-Breuhl, *Childism*, 37.

⁵³ Ryan Stollar,” *Patheos* (blog), April 7, 2016 quoted in Craig L. Nesson, “Attending to the Cries of Children in Liberation Theologies,” in *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2021), 3. Nesson draws upon the blog post of Stollar to argue for a liberative theology of childhood. Stollar asks, “How have our theological concepts been grounded in *adultism*—the viewing of theological concepts from the vantage point of adults rather than the vantage point of children... How do we elevate the voices of children themselves?”

⁵⁴ Janet Pais, *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse*, 1st Edition/1st Printing (New York: Paulist Pr, 1991), 16 as quoted in Craig L. Nesson, “Attending to the Cries of Children in Liberation Theologies,” in *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2021), 3. Nesson also quotes Pais to describe the power dynamics between adult and children in situations of abuse. I too find Pais summation compelling. She writes, “Children do not have the education or the resources necessary to speak for themselves or, having spoken, to effect any change. In fact, their plight is worse than a lack of education or resources. An outstanding feature of their oppression is that their feelings and perceptions of reality are often denied; abused children are often denied the ability to know what is happening to them or that it could possibly be any other way.”

predominant and influential Christian traditions, Evangelical Protestantism and Catholicism.⁵⁵ Canon 1024 of the Roman Catholic Church limits ordination to baptized males.⁵⁶ While Evangelical Protestant polity varies, the largest denomination among Evangelicals, the Southern Baptist Convention,⁵⁷ also restricts ordination to males.⁵⁸ Catholic and Southern Baptist ecclesiastical structures rely upon ‘a view of persons that demands a hierarchical structure, a dominant and a subordinate.’⁵⁹ Theologian Carol Bohn calls these types of ecclesial structures ‘a theology of ownership.’⁶⁰ However, Bohn fails to extend the ‘theology of ownership’ to show how these structures harm children. Yet, the same literalist hermeneutical of the Household Codes that promote patriarchy also enables the spiritual ownership of children.

The Household Codes found in the Epistles⁶¹ instruct all members of the Greco-Roman household (wives, children, enslaved and free persons) to submit to the patriarch as the husband, father, and master of the home.⁶² Patriarchal ecclesial systems interpret the codes to subordinate women and children to adult males in the home and church. Children exist at the bottom of these patriarchal hierarchies. The status of little boys elevates as they develop, while little girls’ access to power remains minimal throughout their lives.⁶³ Not all children in the Southern Baptist

⁵⁵ Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study” (Washington, D.C: Pew Research Center, 2014), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/>.

⁵⁶ The Vatican, “The Code of Canon Law,” 1024.

⁵⁷ Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study.”

⁵⁸ Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On Ordination And The Role Of Women In Ministry” (Annual Meeting, Kansas City, June 1, 1984).

⁵⁹ Carole R. Bohn, “Dominion to Rule: The Roots and Consequences of a Theology of Ownership,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (Pilgrim Press, 1989), 113.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶¹ See Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:1, 1 Timothy 2:1-15; 3:1-16; 5-6:2a, Titus 2:1-10, and 1 Peter 2:13-3:7.

⁶² Jerry L. Sumney, “Household Codes,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Oxford University Press, 2015), 143.

⁶³ Guidepost Solutions LLC, “The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee’s Response to Sexual Abuse Allegations and an Audit of the Procedures and Actions of the Credentials Committee” (Washington, D.C, May 15, 2022), 134-35. On May 22, 2022, five days prior to the due date of this paper, Guidepost Solutions released its independent investigation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Convention and the Roman Catholic Church experience RTA; however, these traditions form children to maintain male-dominated ecclesial hierarchies. These systems manipulate the child's relational spirituality and self-understanding to preserve a specific status quo that serves the interest of adults and the institutions they protect.

Secondly, childism in American Christianity exploits the constitutional right of religious freedom and the value of American individualism to condone abusive caregiving practices. Childism views children as property of their caregivers, affording them the 'right' to parent with abusive practices cloaked in religious doctrines and practices. For instance, Bottoms et al. discovered that parents are the most common perpetrators of physical religious-related abuse.⁶⁴ Risk of religious abuse increases in families associated with fundamentalist belief systems, including those that use religious doctrine to justify abuse.⁶⁵ Even some Christian beliefs can substantiate abusive parenting practices like corporal punishment⁶⁶ and violent rituals to rid children of evil.⁶⁷ In cases of clergy or religious leader sexual abuse, caregivers may disbelieve their children's allegations or participate in an ecclesial cover-up to hide the abuse.⁶⁸ Furthermore, parents expose children to religious abuse due to ignorance and long-held familial and cultural practices. Examples include snake handling as a mandated faith practice,⁶⁹ denying lifesaving blood transfusions, corporal punishment as a biblical mandate,⁷⁰ and strict purity

The report revealed that reports of sexual abuse and child molestation by clergy were concealed and silenced. It states, "During our investigation, many of the survivors we spoke with were sexually abused as children, both boys and girls, who were of varying ages at the time of their abuse." At least nine clergy persons accused of sexual abuse are presently involved in ministry within the SBC and other denominations.

⁶⁴ Bottoms et al., "Religion-Related Child Physical Abuse," 89.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁶ Capps, *The Child's Song*, 37–39.

⁶⁷ Bottoms et al., "Religion-Related Child Physical Abuse," 90.

⁶⁸ McGraw et al., "Consequences of Abuse by Religious Authorities," 248–49.

⁶⁹ Allen Breed, "Twice Bitten: For Snake Handlers' Orphans, Custody Battle Pits Faith against Welfare," *The Associated Press*, December 6, 1998.

⁷⁰ James C. Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970).

cultures.⁷¹ Without evidence, i.e., bruises, broken bones, lash marks, etc., RTA perpetrated by parents continues undetected.

Prejudice against children in American society reinforces and permits adults to misappropriate religious power against children. Seemingly benign things like ecclesial structures and parenting habits become instruments of religious abuse against children. Not all children subjected to childist religious practices experience trauma; however, having their spirituality co-opted causes deep woundedness for many children. What response and interventions do survivors of RTA need, and who will assume responsibility?

Religious educators as disrupters of childhood religious trauma and abuse

An antagonistic attitude towards Christianity will not prevent childhood RTA. On the contrary, in non-abusive scenarios, Christianity *can* foster supportive relationships and healthy identities to nurture children in connecting with God, self, neighbor, and the planet. Still, this article reveals a gap in acknowledging and addressing childhood RTA. Ironically, early Sunday school campaigns raised concerns about children's quality of life.⁷² The present American Christian context beckons further awareness of how prejudice against children enlivens religious abuse and trauma with effects lingering into adulthood. Will today's religious educators move to do likewise by raising awareness of how discrimination against children livens RTA with effects lingering into adulthood?

Religious educators' skills and positionality uniquely equip them to address and disrupt RTA for three reasons.⁷³ First, ending RTA in America requires a more robust theology of

⁷¹ Klein, *Pure*.

⁷² Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (Westford, MA: Yale University Press, 1988), 8-9.

⁷³ L. Callid Keefe-Perry and Zachary Moon, "Courage in Chaos: The Importance of Trauma-Informed Adult Religious Education," *Religious Education* 114 (May 17, 2018): 1–12. Keefe-Perry and Moon describe necessary shifts to create trauma-informed adult religious education. They do not specifically

childhood and advocating for children's rights. Underlying misappropriated power stands the notion that adults' more sophisticated use of religious language permits the manipulation of practices, beliefs, and doctrines to dominate children. Fortunately, religious educators have a long history of advocating for children and altering damaging theological narratives. For instance, volumes compiled by religious educators like *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Perspectives*⁷⁴ combines the work of scholars from across the globe to re-center the child in the Christian community. Other scholars continue to advocate for children's rights, including their right to develop spiritually.⁷⁵ Children's less formal and institutionalized religious language does not preclude a relationship with God or spiritual epistemic incapability. Children's spiritual nurture requires care, agency, and safe relationships. Identifying and stopping RTA demands continued resolve to transform understanding of power relations between adults and children within Christianity.

Furthermore, as suggested by the postulated heuristic, recognizing RTA necessitates an increased interdisciplinary commitment from scholars and practitioners. Interdisciplinarity lay at the heart of religious education. Survivors of RTA require trauma-responsive spiritual formation, including spiritual practices sensitive to triggers that remind them of past abuse. Survivors need space to deconstruct and reconstruct loving images of God and exposure to safe faith communities. As practical theologians committed to communities of practice, religious educators

discuss children or religious trauma and abuse; however, their suggestions may aid religious educators in the work of ending RTA.

⁷⁴ Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (ORBIS, 2021).

⁷⁵ Brendan Hyde, "Silenced by Performativity: The Child's Right to a Spiritual Voice in an Age of Neoliberal Educational Imperatives," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 26, no. 1–2 (April 3, 2021): 9–23; Helena Stockinger, "Developing Spirituality – an Equal Right of Every Child?," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24, no. 3 (August 2019): 307–19; Sturla Sagberg, "Taking a Children's Rights Perspective on Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 22, no. 1 (2017): 24–35.

can move between the academy and faith communities to implement RTA interventions and preventative protocols.⁷⁶ For example, religious educators may creatively merge interventions like Gil's child self-initiated post-traumatic play therapy⁷⁷ with Godly Play, a Montessori-based approach to spiritual formation equipping children with religious language to make meaning of their experiences.⁷⁸ Acting as a bridge between the academy and faith communities generates a reflective praxis model allowing religious educators to investigate further questions: How does childhood RTA vary based on context, religion, and culture? How do children describe experiences of RTA? Are there circumstances in which childhood RTA does not truncate a child's spirituality? If so, what acts as a mediating factor?

Thirdly, religious educators' investment in theological education engenders better preparation of mental health practitioners, clergy, and spiritual leaders to assist in addressing RTA. Seminaries and schools of theology increasingly offer dual degrees in ministry and mental health. However, mental health education narrowly discusses religious beliefs as positive or harmful coping mechanisms without acknowledging the potential for abuse and trauma.⁷⁹ Graduates of mental health programs report feeling uncomfortable or ill-equipped to discuss

⁷⁶ Simonič, Mandelj, and Novsak, "Religious-Related Abuse in the Family"; Stone, "Thou Shalt Not." The limited available research does not recommend interventions for wellness specifically for religiously abused and traumatized *children*. Simonič, Mandelj, and Novsak's journal article is the only exception. It proposes Relational Family Therapy (RFT) as a possible intervention for families with children amid religious abuse and trauma. Still, their study does not offer incontestable data that RFT is the best form of therapy for religious abuse, and it does not specifically address children's needs from a developmental lens. Furthermore, there is not a plethora of research on how to help children rebuild or reconnect to religiosity and spirituality. This is unfortunate considering, according to Stone, adults want spiritual connection following religious abuse and trauma; perhaps children share this longing.

⁷⁷ Eliana Gil, *Working with Children to Heal Interpersonal Trauma: The Power of Play*, ed. Lenore C. Terr, Illustrated edition (The Guilford Press, 2013).

⁷⁸ Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995).

⁷⁹ Simonič, Mandelj, and Novsak, "Religious-Related Abuse in the Family," 339.

religious issues with clients.⁸⁰ Lack of trauma training in ministry preparation programs may also further render RTA invisible. One of the most common clerical degrees (Master of Divinity) no longer requires pastoral counseling or human development courses.⁸¹ Religious educators should consider advocating for adjustments to the curriculum and discussing RTA in classes.⁸²

As religious educators work at the meta-level, current victims and survivors of RTA deserve support. Minimal research suggests that the number of RTA survivors is more significant than traditionally thought.⁸³ Organizations aiming to address religious trauma and abuse (Room to Thrive, Restoration Counseling, Religious Trauma Institute, The Meadows, Reclamation Collective, Apricity, The Refuge) offer therapeutic services, resources, and connections to survivors of RTA.⁸⁴ However, efforts to intervene in the lives of children experiencing RTA

⁸⁰ Kusner and Pargament, “Shaken to the Core: Understanding and Addressing the Spiritual Dimension of Trauma,” 222.

⁸¹ Commission on Accrediting, “Degree Program Standards” (Association of Theological Schools, 2015).

⁸² Raisuyah Bhagwan, “The Views of Social Work Practitioners with Regards to Religion and Spirituality at the Interface of Social Work Practice with Children and Adolescents,” *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 0, no. 0 (March 8, 2022): 1–23. Scholars may also consider gaining wisdom from the interactions amongst disciplines in other countries. For instance, Bhagwan’s study found that social workers in South Africa frequently use religion and spirituality when working with children.

⁸³ Stone, “Thou Shall Not,” 134; Global Center for Religious Research, “Religious Trauma,” <https://www.gcrr.org/religious-trauma>. The newly founded Global Center for Religious Research aims to advance the clinical and religious study of RTA. On May 21, 2022 an email summarizing some of their present research findings stated, “What we’re finding with our research is that religious trauma is one of the most common types of mental health issues facing people today. It includes things like being abused as a child, having been ostracized by religious or spiritual groups, or even generalized fear and anxiety over certain doctrinal beliefs. Religious trauma can cause a person to feel like they are inherently unworthy of love or that they will suffer eternal torment for minor infractions and natural human thoughts. The damage that comes from religious trauma can be long-lasting.” Though not yet published, their research seems to support Stone’s assertion that RTA is more prevalent than research suggests.

⁸⁴ Brian Peck, “Religious Trauma Therapy & Trauma-Informed Coaching Room to Thrive,” Room to Thrive, <https://www.roomtothrive.com>; Restoration Counseling, “Religious Trauma & Transitions,” Restoration Counseling, <https://www.restorationcounselingseattle.com/religious-trauma-transitions>; “Religious Trauma Institute,” Religious Trauma Institute, <https://www.religioustraumainstitute.com>; The Meadows, “Religious Trauma in Childhood,” *The Meadows of Wickenburg, Arizona* (blog), <https://www.themeadows.com/blog/religious-trauma/>; “Reclamation Collective,” <https://www.reclamationcollective.com/>; Apricity, “Therapy for Religious Trauma and Expats Worldwide,” Apricity Behavioral Health, <https://www.apricitybehavioralhealth.com/religious-trauma>; The Refuge, “Premier Religious Trauma Treatment Center,” The Refuge, A Healing Place, <http://www.therefuge-ahealingplace.com/ptsd-treatment/religious/>.

appear minimal to non-existent. Further research must creatively determine how to screen for RTA and provide quality resources to children in need.

Consider how such an intervention may have altered Francis' final moments. Until his last breath, sacraments triggered panic rather than an awareness of God's grace and presence in the face of death. Hints of Francis' story frequently appear in other stories-- Sometimes as the bodies of unmarked child graves at residential schools, in the cries of a teenager sleeping on the street after coming out to their parents, and on the paddle worn thin from use. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus illustrates God's graciousness by reminding the crowd that they who are 'evil' know how to give good gifts to their children (Matthew 7:11). Yet, the prevalence of RTA indicates children come to faith communities and their caregivers asking for bread and, in return, receive stones and snakes. Can we re-learn how to give children good spiritual gifts? Will we work to transform stones and snakes into spiritual nourishment?

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HUMANKIND AS THE IMAGE OF GOD: A COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC APPLICATION OF GENESIS 1:1-2:3 IN THE CLASSROOM¹

ABSTRACT

Searching for new methods to start a narrative dialogue in secondary school classrooms, cognitive semantics was used. The research focused on examining relationships between the exercises ‘exegetical reading’, ‘mystery’ and ‘concepts to work with’ and acquiring and applying the religious concept ‘image of God’ in Gen. 1:1-2:3 and, by means of writing an essay, entering into a narrative dialogue regarding this concept; five lessons in seven classes were analyzed in a qualitative cross-case analysis. During the exercise ‘essay’ the majority of the students entered into a dialogue with the text, while the minority changed their opinion about the question of life ‘Who is humankind?’. Due to the support of the teacher, the students were able to do the exercises.

KEYWORDS

Design research, teaching and learning in the classroom, secondary school, dialogical pedagogy, cognitive semantics

Introduction

‘Madam, have you read the whole Bible?’ Behind this question, which was recently asked in the first author’s class, lay the wonder why someone would read the Bible. The Netherlands is a pluralistic, multireligious, and secularized society. Many pupils within Dutch secondary schools are not raised religiously at home and are not familiar with religion and religious texts. For example, surveys conducted by Van Dijk-Groeneboer in 2017-2018 show that 43% of 2302 secondary school students, states to be ‘no member of church or religion or have a philosophy of life’. Twelve percent call themselves atheist. Thirty-four percent state they are Christian or belong to a specific Christian denomination. Two percent designate themselves as Muslim, 1% as Humanist, 1% as Jew and 1% as Hindu. In addition, this survey and similar research from 2012 show that students who indicate they have a religious background are not always practicing. For example, in 2012, 3% of Catholic students (235 of the total students surveyed) indicated that they read the Bible (very) often, compared to 16% of Protestant students (281 students). Of Muslim pupils (46 in total), 20% read (very) often in the Quran.²

However, this does not mean that young people aren’t interested in religion or don’t have their own questions about life. Nevertheless, for most adolescents, it is hard to

¹ This research is part of a doctoral thesis: Cornelia Jacoba Maria Melisse, “De mens als beeld van God. Een cognitief-semantische studie van Genesis 1:26-27 en van Kolossenzen 1:15; 3:10 en naar het gebruik van Genesis 1:1-2:3 in de klas.” PhD. diss. Tilburg University, Enschede: Ipskamp Printing, 2020.

² Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer and Bernice Brijan, *Kerk uit zicht? Jongeren inspireren!* (Tilburg: Tilburg University, 2013), 4-6, 11, 15. Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer and Briene van Herpen-de Regt, “Jongeren en hun waarden,” *Religie & Samenleving* 14, 2 (2019): 146-150, 155, 157.

understand why religion and its manifestations, such as texts and rituals, can be meaningful for people. The question about the Bible, which was a genuine and sincere question, is an example of this lack of familiarity with religion.

A meaningful biblical text is Genesis 1:1-2:3. Gen. 1:1-2:3 describes the creation of the world by God. In Gen. 1:26 God proposes to make humankind ‘in our image (*tzelem*), after our likeness’. Subsequently, he creates humankind ‘in his own image’ (verse 27). The meaning of the word *tzelem* can be studied by means of Cognitive Grammar³ in relation to exegesis, which can be called cognitive semantics. The term ‘cognitive’ is used to indicate that language should be regarded as an integral part of a person’s ability to know and think.⁴ Our interaction with and in the world we live in, takes place on the basis of the information structures in our thinking ability. Language plays an important role in this process: language ensures that the information we receive, is ordered, processed and interpreted. The meaning of words is determined by their users and depends on their own context, namely the world they live in and how they interpret this world (their cognitive worldview).⁵ A word should be regarded as a mental idea or concept. It is a principle to classify, to make distinctions.⁶

The word *tzelem* in Gen. 1:26-27 can be translated with ‘image’: humankind has a characteristic which connects him to God; he is his image. The preposition which precedes the word *tzelem* can be translated as ‘in the image of God’, or ‘as the image of God’. In fact, the Genesis text uses the latter interpretation: God does not need an example or model to create man, so humankind is not created in his image, but as his image.⁷ Gen. 1:1-2:3 is part of the Priestly source (P)⁸ and was probably written down during or shortly after the Babylonian exile, i.e. in the same time when the ban on images was imposed.⁹ Within the then cognitive worldview, cult images were considered to be the representation of the deity depicted, in which he/she was really present. The statue represented the physical, anthropomorphic form of the deity.¹⁰ In Israel’s polemic against cult statues, man stated that the divine was not present in an image and images were meaningless and without power.¹¹ Gen. 1:26-27 should be understood against this background: the text clarifies that the image of God is no longer formed by a wooden or metal statue, but by humankind: humankind is the image of God.

In religious education (RE), Gen. 1:1:2-3 can be used as example to illustrate why a biblical text can be meaningful. Moreover, the text can be used to discuss the question of life

³ See, for example, J.R. Taylor, *Cognitive Grammar*. Oxford Textbooks in Linguistics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁴ Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens, “Introducing Cognitive Linguistics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics* (Oxford Handbooks, ed. Hubert Cuyckens and Dirk Geeraerts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3-4.

⁵ E. Van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition and Context* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 23, 34-35, 53-54.

⁶ Taylor, *Cognitive Grammar*, 42-43.

⁷ See for example: Ute Neumann-Gorsolke, “Reigning within the limits of creation: A contribution to Old Testament anthropology using the example of Psalm 8, Genesis 1 and related texts” (PhD. diss., Eberhard-Karls-Universität, 2002), 193-196; Ernst Jenni, *The Hebrew Prepositions, Volume 1: The Preposition Beth* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne: W. Kohlhammer, 1992), 71, 79, 84.

⁸ See for example Phyllis A. Bird, “Theological Anthropology in the Hebrew Bible,” in: *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Leo G. Perdue; Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 259-261.

⁹ Silvia Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder: Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament* (OBO 74; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1987), 12-13.

¹⁰ Angelika Berlejung, “Geheimnis und Ereignis: Zur Funktion und Aufgabe der Kultbilder in Mesopotamien“, in: *Die Macht der Bilder* (ed. Marie-Theres Wacker and Günter Stemberger; JbTh 13; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999), 109-111.

¹¹ Berlejung, “Geheimnis und Ereignis,” 141-142. Jill Middlemas, *The Divine Image: Prophetic Aniconic Rhetoric and Its Contribution to the Aniconism Debate* (FAT 2 Reihe 74; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 28, 43.

‘Who is humankind?’. In order to reduce the unfamiliarity or foreignness that students possibly experience while reading the text, cognitive semantics can be used to explain the context in which the text is written and how the text can be interpreted.

Design research

Design principles

Design principles can be used as directives to design lessons. Based on theological and pedagogical insights, we have discerned four design principles for RE.¹²

In RE, two of the main approaches are learning about religion and learning from religion.¹³ Which approach is most suitable, depends on, for example, the subject and objective of the particular lesson. Learning about religion is important because, as already been mentioned, most Dutch adolescents don’t have knowledge about religion in itself and about religious traditions. However, this knowledge is needed, among other things, to participate in the pluralistic and multireligious society.¹⁴ By means of learning about religion, students gain more insight in the religious world views of others, which hopefully leads to more understanding and respect for these views. Furthermore, they learn what it means to be religious or to be brought up that way, which challenges them to see the world from a different perspective. The acquisition of religious (meta-)concepts and of religious thinking skills is an example of learning about religion.¹⁵

Learning from religion is aimed at ensuring that students do not merely become acquainted with religious traditions, but (learn to) see the value of these traditions for the development of their own view.¹⁶ Thus; students are considered as active subjects who construct their own world view.¹⁷ Learning from religion requires students to have an involvement, albeit minimal, in their own tradition (learning in¹⁸) which they dare to examine and question. They must also have knowledge of other religious traditions (learning about).¹⁹ Learning from religion can be achieved by reading the life stories of other people in order to

¹² See: Jan van den Akker, “Curriculum Design Research,” in *An Introduction to Educational Design Research* (eds. Tjeerd Pomp en Nienke Nieveen; Enschede: SLO, 2009), 37, 43, 45. Tjeerd Pomp, “Educational Design Research: An Introduction,” in *An Introduction to Educational Design Research* (eds. Tjeerd Pomp en Nienke Nieveen, Enschede: SLO, 2009), 9, 13, 15, 17, 19-20. Susan McKenney, Nienke Nieveen, Jan van den Akker, “Design research from a curriculum perspective,” in *Educational Design Research* (eds. Jan van den Akker et al., London: Routledge, 2006), 72-73.

¹³ See for example: M. Grimmitt, “Religious education and the ideology of pluralism,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 16 (3) (1994): 133-147. M. Grimmitt, *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice*. Great Woking: McCrimmons, 2000.

¹⁴ Markus Altena Davidse et al, “Religie en levensbeschouwing: rationale voor een kerncurriculum vo,” *Narhex* 1 (2017): 19.

¹⁵ Paul Vermeer, “Meta-concepts, thinking skills and religious education,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 3 (2012): 333-347.

¹⁶ E.T. Alii, *Godsdienstpedagogiek: Dimensies en spanningsvelden* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2009), 111.

¹⁷ Michael Molenda, “Historical Foundations,” in *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology* (ed. J. Michael Spector, 3rd ed., New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008), 15-16.

¹⁸ See also M. Grimmitt, “Religious education and the ideology of pluralism,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 16 (3) (1994): 133-147. M. Grimmitt, *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice*. Great Woking: McCrimmons, 2000.

¹⁹ Bert Roebben, “Interreligieus leren op school: Een tussentijdse godsdienstpedagogische balans,” in *Religieus opvoeden in een multiculturele samenleving* (red. Bert Roebben, Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2000), 94-95. Bert Roebben, *Inclusieve godsdienstpedagogiek. Grondlijnen voor levensbeschouwelijke vorming* (Leuven: Acco, 2015), 63-64.

challenge the students to examine their own story. As a consequence, a narrative dialogue is started.²⁰

This leads to two design principles. Firstly, lessons of RE must be aimed at learning about and/or from religion; depending on the objective of the lesson. Secondly, within learning about religion the acquisition of basic knowledge, religious (meta-)concepts and of religious thinking skills are important. A key element within learning from religion are exercises that aim at entering into a narrative dialogue.

The third design principle relates to how students learn. This can only succeed if the students are motivated and supported by their teacher by means of scaffolding.²¹ We follow the six intervention strategies that are mentioned by Van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen, namely feedback, hints, instructing, explaining, modelling and questioning.²² Feedback involves the direct evaluation of students' behaviors, whereas hints entail providing clues regarding a given topic (or the deliberate withholding of a complete solution); instructing encompasses requesting a specific action or supplying information so that students understand what to do and how. Likewise, explaining involves providing information concerning how and why. Modeling encompasses demonstrating a behavior for the purpose of imitation; questioning entails prompting students to think, or to request a specific reaction.²³

Based on the revised taxonomy of Bloom, Anderson and Krathwohl, six thinking skills can be distinguished.²⁴ 'Analyse', 'evaluate' and 'create' are higher order thinking skills, whereas 'remember', 'understand' and 'apply' are lower order thinking skills. In RE, all of these skills are important and students should be given opportunities to develop them. For example, learning about religion takes place if students are able to apply religious (meta)concepts in order to understand and reflect on religious phenomena (thinking skills: 'analyse' and 'evaluate'). To enter into a narrative dialogue, higher order thinking skills are indispensable. Students should be open to the stories and visions of others, and must be able to analyse these stories in order to evaluate whether elements of them can enrich their own vision. If this is the case, a renewed vision is created.

Moreover, learning from religion, especially participating in a narrative dialogue, is only possible if adolescents feel safe to examine their own position, to question it or to let it be questioned by others, and to communicate about it. A safe learning environment is therefore indispensable and can be regarded as the fourth design principle.

Teaching material, based on Cognitive Grammar

In searching for new methods to start a narrative dialogue in lessons of RE in senior grades of Dutch secondary education,²⁵ we have developed teaching material on Gen. 1:1-2:3, in particular the meaning of Gen. 1:26-27 and the question of life 'Who is humankind?'. Starting

²⁰ Roebben, "Interreligieus leren op school", 94-95. Roebben, *Inclusieve godsdienstpiedagogiek*, 63-64.

²¹ See Natascha Kienstra, Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer and Olav Boelens, "Religious-thinking-through using bibliodrama: An empirical study of student learning in classroom teaching," *Religious Education* (2018): 3-4.

²² Janneke van de Pol, Monique Volman, Jos Beishuizen, "Patterns of contingent teaching in teacher-student interaction," *Learning and Instruction* 21 (2011): 51, 56. Janneke van de Pol, Monique Volman, Jos Beishuizen, "Scaffolding in Teacher-Student Interaction: A Decade of Research," *Educational Psychology Review* 22 (2010): 277.

²³ Kienstra, Van Dijk-Groeneboer and Boelens, "Religious-thinking-through using bibliodrama," 2.

²⁴ David R. Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," *Theory into Practice* 41, no. 4 (2002): 212-215.

²⁵ The senior grades of secondary education prepare pupils for studies at a university or a university of applied sciences.

point of this teaching material are the four design principles for RE above mentioned, namely learning about and from religion, the importance of thinking skills and scaffolding, and of a safe learning environment. Starting from these design principles, the teaching material is primarily focused on the acquisition of the religious concept ‘image of God’²⁶ as this emerges in Gen. 1:1-2:3 (learning about religion) and subsequently at the opportunity that students enter into a dialogue with the text (learning from religion). The teaching material includes several exercises in which higher order thinking skills can be reached in a safe learning environment, in which the students are supported by their teacher. Cognitive semantics is used in several ways in the teaching material. In the first place, it is used to define the meaning of Gen. 1:1-2:3 and 1:26-27 in particular. Secondly, by explaining the context in which the users of the text live and speak about humankind as the image of God, the students obtain a better understanding of the word. This can reduce the unfamiliarity experienced when reading the text and result in more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text. The purpose is to create more openness to the text, in order that students will actually enter into a narrative dialogue with the story. Cognitive Grammar introduces the students to the principle of hermeneutics, which can be regarded as an important religious thinking skill. They experience that when they study biblical texts, they automatically interpret these texts on the basis of their cognitive worldview, whereas the biblical text represents the interpretation of the author, based on his cognitive worldview.

Four higher order thinking skills exercises were included in the teaching material that was executed in five lessons. Table 1 provides an overview of the exercises within the lessons, the approach of the exercise, the intervention strategies which can be used and the level of the revised taxonomy of Bloom, Anderson and Krathwohl that can be reached.

Table 1. RE exercises mapped against approach, scaffolding and thinking skills.

Exercise	Lesson	Approach	Scaffolding	Thinking skills
exegetical reading	1 and 2	about	instructing, feedback, hints, questioning	understand and analyse
mystery	3	about	instructing, feedback, hints, explaining	analyse
concepts to work with	4	about and from	instructing, hints, questioning	understand, apply and evaluate
essay	5	from	instructing, feedback, hints, questioning, explaining	evaluate and create

In the exercise ‘exegetical reading’ the students read and interpret Gen. 1:1-2:3 by reading the text, indicating its structure and answering some questions. They acquire a first/preliminary meaning of the concept ‘image of God’. The exercise ‘mystery’ focusses on the question why humankind is called the image of God in the story. The students solve this mystery by arranging cards with information about the historical context in which the story

²⁶ For example, Clive Erricker calls *Tzelem Elokim: in the image of God* a type C concept. These concepts belong to a particular religion. Clive Erricker, *Religious Education: A conceptual and interdisciplinary approach for secondary level* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 113, 116.

was written. The expectation was that by means of this exercise the students would experience that if they know more about the context in which the story was written, they could (further) acquire the different meanings of the concept 'image of God'.

The application of the concept 'image of God' and the relating concepts 'prohibition to make graven images and 'worship of images' is being practiced in the exercise 'concepts to work with'. Students are asked to answer a number of questions. These questions relate to forms of contemporary religious practises and our contemporary society. Since the students are asked to give their own opinion in the final question of the exercise, the required thinking skill for this last question is evaluate. Moreover, this question marks the transition from learning about religion to learning from religion.

By means of writing the essay, the students are entering into a narrative dialogue with Gen. 1:1-2:3 regarding the concept 'image of God'. They are given the task to write their version of the creation story, considering the original story. They can adopt, adapt or omit items of the original story and must be able to explain their choices.

Research question

The research question is: what is the relationship between the exercises 'exegetical reading', 'mystery' and 'concepts to work with' (cognitive semantics: Cognitive Grammar in relation to exegesis) and acquiring and applying the religious concept 'image of God' in Gen. 1:1-2:3 (design principle: learning about religion) and, by means of writing an essay, entering into a narrative dialogue regarding this concept (design principle: learning from religion)? In addition to this research question, two supplementary questions are asked, namely: 1. In which way does scaffolding contribute to acquiring and applying the religious concept 'image of God' and to pursuing a narrative dialogue regarding this concept? 2. Which thinking skills are obtained by acquiring and applying the religious concept 'image of God' and pursuing a narrative dialogue regarding this concept?

Method

The developed teaching material has been tested in seven Dutch senior grade classes preparing pupils for studies at a university of applied sciences. To conduct this research, permission has been granted in 2019 by the Ethics Review Board of the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology of Tilburg University. All data were used pseudonymously and the available facilities of Tilburg University are used for the data storage.

The teaching material concludes of five regular fifty-minute lessons. In lessons 2 to 5, the last ten minutes of the lesson are set aside to complete the questionnaires about the executed exercises. A total of thirty-five lessons are taught; by the regular teachers. There are four teachers: three teachers teach two classes each, the fourth teacher the remaining class. Classes range in size from nineteen to thirty students. In total, there are one hundred and seventy-five pupils.

The data consists of separate words and texts²⁷, and are the primary and secondary reflections of the students and the reflections of the observers (e.g. the participating teachers, not executing the lesson they are observing). Since it is studied whether during the lessons the students go through a development from the acquisition of a certain religious concept to the

²⁷ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3d. edition; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2014), 10-11.

conducting of a narrative dialogue, and the students are compared with each other, the design is a case study.²⁸ Each student is a case and these cases are compared with each other in order to make statements about the possible use of cognitive semantics within RE. From each class six students are selected: two students with the highest grade point average (GPA) for RE, two students whose GPA is average and two students with the lowest GPA. As a consequence, the total number of cases is 42.

Questionnaire

The execution of the exercises can be considered as the primary reflections of the students, the completed questionnaires their secondary one. Students were asked whether they understood Gen. 1:1-2:3 better by indicating the structure of the text and/or by answering questions about the story. Students were also asked whether they were able to answer the questions in the exercises ‘exegetical reading’ and ‘mystery’ about the meanings of the concept ‘image of God’ and whether they were able to apply this concept in the exercise ‘concepts to work with’. Besides, they were asked whether doing the exercises ‘exegetical reading’ and ‘mystery’ resulted in more sympathy for (the meaning) of Gen. 1:1-2:3. Moreover, they were asked whether they entered into a narrative dialogue with the text and whether they changed their opinion about the question ‘who is humankind?’. Finally, they were asked how their teacher supported them in doing the exercises and which thinking skills they obtained in each exercise. Observers were asked whether the students were able to do the exercises ‘exegetical reading’ and ‘mystery’ and as a consequence acquired the meanings of the concept ‘image of God’. Observers were also asked whether the students were able to apply the concept ‘image of God’. Furthermore, they were asked how the teacher supported the students, which thinking skills were reached by the students and how the support of the teacher contributed to this.

Initial analysis: Individual results

Descriptive findings for all 42 participants are available in Table 2 (topics are presented in questionnaire order). According to the table, 30 of 42 students were able to acquire the principle of Cognitive Grammar that the meaning of a word is determined by its users. Furthermore, a large group was able to acquire the different meanings of the concept ‘image of God’ and the related concepts ‘the worship of images’ and ‘the prohibition to make graven images’ fully or partly by executing the exercises ‘exegetical reading’ and/or ‘mystery’. Most of the students were able to apply the obtained concepts correctly to the mentioned religious world-views by doing the exercise ‘concepts to work with’. Part of the students could apply them to our culture. When they were asked to give their own opinion, one student made use of Gen. 1:1-2:3.

Approximately half of the students stated that a better understanding of the creation story was achieved through noting the structure of the text or answering some questions about the story in the exercise ‘exegetical reading’. One third of the students declared to have more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text as a result of doing the exercises. During the exercise ‘essay’ the majority of the students entered into a dialogue with the text. Eleven of 42 students changed their opinion about the question of life ‘Who is humankind?’. The explanation of one

²⁸ See Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (5th edition; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2014), 16-17.

of the students shows, however, that he changed his mind about another element of the story. Moreover, of these 11 students, six declared to have entered into a dialogue with the text, whereas five declared they didn't enter into a dialogue.²⁹

Table 2. Descriptive data matrix.

		students																				
	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
acquisition CG, concept																						
Exegetical Reading worksheet	Cognitive Grammar	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	-	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
	concept image of God	1	0	-	1	1	0	1	1	-	1	0	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Exegetical Reading questionnaire	Cognitive Grammar	1--	1	1	1--	0+	-	1	-	1	1#	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
	understanding: structure	1	1	0	1	0	-	0	-	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
	understanding: questions	0	1	-	1	1	-	0	-	-	1	0	1#	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Mystery worksheet	1-3 meanings of concept	1	0,5	0,5	1	0,5	-	1	1	0,5	1	-	0	1	1	1	0,5	1	1	0	0	0
applying concept																						
Concepts to work with worksheet	1-3 applying concept	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	1
	applying our culture	1	1	-	1	0	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
	using Gen. 1:1-2:3	0	0	-	0	0	-	-	0	0	1	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	0	-	-	0
narrative dialogue																						
Essay	describing creation	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1
	describing creation humankind	1	1	0	1	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	1	0	1	1	-	1	1	1
Essay questionnaire	understanding by ER, M	0	0	1	1	1	-	0	-	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	-	1	1	0
	entering dialogue	1	1	1	1	1	-	0	-	1	1	1	0	1	1	0*	1	0	-	0	0	1
	change of opinion	0	0	0	1	1	-	0	-	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	-	1	1	0
		</																				

Note: - = Variable is missing; * = Discrepancy answer closed question and explanatory note of the student; # = Student has answered question about (part of the) exercise he did not do; + = Student states he did not understand the principle of Cognitive Grammar, worksheet exercise shows otherwise; -- = Student states he understands the principle of Cognitive Grammar, worksheet exercise shows otherwise.

Comparative case study

As said before, 11 of the 42 students changed their opinion about the question of life 'Who is humankind?'.³⁰ Ten out of these 11 students were able to acquire the concept 'image of God' in the exercise 'exegetical reading'.³¹ Six of them outlined that both indicating the structure of the text and answering the questions, led to a better understanding of the text.³² The total number of students who hold this opinion was 12, which means that half of them have changed their opinion about the question 'Who is humankind?'. Eight out of 11 students were able to acquire one or several meanings of the concept 'image of God' by doing the exercise 'mystery'.

Five out of 11 students stated that they have gained more sympathy for (the meaning of) the creation story. The total number of students who gained more sympathy was 13, which means that a relatively large group who has more sympathy, has changed its opinion.

²⁹ However, one of these five students clarified that he has thought about the story. In the questionnaire, entering into a dialogue is described as thinking about the story.

³⁰ As explained before, one student changed his mind about another element of the story.

³¹ The remaining student noted the concept after doing the exercise. The acquisition of the concept took place later.

³² However, one of the students didn't answer the questions about the text.

However, two out of 11 students declared that they gained a better understanding of the text by doing the exercise 'exegetical reading' and also gained more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text by doing the exercises 'exegetical reading' and 'mystery'.

Results supplementary questions

Several higher order thinking skills could be reached by doing the exercises. Table 3 presents an overview of these thinking skills and which were actually reached.

Table 3. Exercises mapped against intended and attained highest thinking skills

Exercise	Highest thinking skill which could be reached	Results
Exegetical reading	analyse	Understand: 25 v/d 42 Analyse: 16 v/d 42
Mystery	analyse	Analyse: 35 v/d 42
Concepts to work with	evaluate	Evaluate: 23 v/d 42
Essay	create	Create: 30 v/d 42

The expected thinking skills could actually be attained by doing the exercises and almost all the students reached that specific thinking skill that was required in order to do the exercise properly. Only with the exercises 'mystery' and 'essay' some pupils didn't achieve the relevant thinking skill. The students who indicated that by doing the exercises 'exegetical reading' and 'mystery' they gained more sympathy for (the meaning of) the creation story, always achieved the thinking skill needed to do the exercise well. This also includes the pupils who indicated that their opinion on the question 'Who is humankind?' has changed. In both cases there is one exception, as there was one pupil who didn't come to an analysis during the exercise 'mystery'.

Due to the support of the teacher, the students were able to do the exercises. Some intervention strategies were used more often than others by the teachers, and some strategies were used specifically for certain exercises. It is also striking that 11 of the 18 observed lessons involved scaffolds that had not been established prior to the study. In 10 cases this concerned: student questioning. There is, however, no relation between the scaffolds offered and gaining more understanding of (the meaning of) the text and/or revising one's own opinion. The pupils to whom one or both of these aspects apply, received no more or less support than the other pupils.

It was also investigated how the scaffolds contributed to the highest thinking skill reached. With the exercise 'exegetical reading' the students understood the text better, because the teacher asked questions to the students and/or answered questions from the students. This enabled the students to analyse the text more effectively. Teacher's support was necessary for the exercise 'mystery' to make the step from categorising the given information to formulating an answer. There were also students who needed support with categorising. We conclude that the teacher's help was necessary to be able to solve the mystery and reach the level of analysis.

Discussion and conclusions

It is noteworthy that, despite the attempt to discuss the historical and cultural context of the creation story, a number of students, according to the completed questionnaires, don't see the text as a particular human product from a particular time, but as a text to be taken literally. Thus, they may not be familiar with the value religious texts, to which we referred to in our introduction. This seems to correspond with the second stage of faith that James Fowler distinguishes. At this stage, referred to as Mythic-Literal Faith, stories and symbols are taken literally.³³ This can explain why these students don't enter into a dialogue with the text on their own: they reject it in advance, as they don't see its value.

Since the exercise 'essay' was designed to bring about a narrative dialogue, most students actually entered into a dialogue. Therefore, learning from religion was achieved. However, the students didn't start this dialogue on their own and the text didn't exhort to reflect upon its meaning, although the students had read and discussed the text extensively in the exercises that were done earlier. Thus, there seems to be no relation between the questions of life of the students and the possible answers given by the text. Nor did any student indicate that reading the text has led to any new questions. This contradicts Roebben's conviction that there is not only a relation between the questions asked by the students and the answers given to these questions by the religious text, but that new questions and new spiritual experiences also arise in young people when they read a religious text.³⁴ A possible explanation for this could be that some students didn't have enough comprehension for the text; since approximately one third of the students had more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text due to the exercises 'exegetical reading' and 'mystery'.

In the questionnaires, two students refer to their religious background, Christianity and Islam, respectively. Because of their affinity with religious texts, one might expect more sympathy for the text from these students. However, this is not the case. Furthermore, both students kept their own vision. The student with a Christian background replied to the question whether the exercises had led to more sympathy: "I am a believer, my father is a pastor and theologian, so my view of Bible in general is fixed." The student entered into a dialogue with the text and noted: "I have changed almost nothing, because that is not allowed by my religion, I have just transcribed the story in modern language." The student who designated herself as Muslim, didn't gain more sympathy for (the meaning of) the creation story: "I didn't learn many new things." Instead of writing an essay, she submitted the creation story from her own tradition, while stating: "I have chosen this creation story because I am a Muslim myself and I would rather not make up a creation story myself. So this is the creation story that I believe in myself." This is in line with one of the perspectives distinguished by Carl Sterkens in relation to interreligious learning, namely auto-interpretation of a religious tradition other than one's own.³⁵

Based on the results, the conclusion can be drawn that, since a large group of students was able to acquire the principle of Cognitive Grammar, the principle of hermeneutics as religious thinking skill can be addressed in RE. Furthermore, the concept 'image of God' and the

³³ Cornelia Gijsberta Maria Vergouwen, "Een hemelsbrede gelijkenis: Geloofsopvoeding in godsdienstsociologisch perspectief" (proefschrift Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, Kampen: Kok, 2001), 86-88.

³⁴ Roebben, *Inclusieve godsdienstpedagogiek*, 34, 42, 43.

³⁵ Carl Sterkens, "Multireligiositeit als voorwaarde voor effectief interreligieus onderwijs? Empirische resultaten vanuit een sociaal-constructivistisch perspectief," in *Interreligieus leren op de basisschool: Perspectieven op vakontwikkeling en schoolontwikkeling* (red. Chris A.M. Hermans, Budel: Damon, 2005), 70.

related concepts ‘the worship of images’ and ‘the prohibition to make graven images’ are suitable to discuss in class.

In the exercise ‘exegetical reading’ students have interpreted the creation story using exegetical principles. There is a positive influence of the use of exegesis here, since about half of the students stated that indicating the structure of the text or making questions about the text, resulted in a better understanding of the story. However, 12 students rated both elements as positive. It is unclear why this number of students is relatively small. The expectation was that by means of cognitive semantics the students would have more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text and thus would enter into a dialogue with the text more easily. Approximately one third of the students declared to have more sympathy for the text. On the one hand this result is disappointing as we would have liked more sympathy of all of the students, but on the other hand it can be argued that the principle of *Cognitive Grammar* is a religious thinking skill that can be of importance in the context of learning from religion.

As said before, 11 of 42 students changed their opinion about the question of life ‘Who is humankind?’.³⁶ Twelve students declared that both indicating the structure of the text and answering the questions, led to a better understanding of the text.³⁷ Of six of them, their opinion about the question ‘Who is humankind?’ has been changed. Moreover, 13 students claimed to have more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text by doing the exercises. Five of them have changed their opinion about the question ‘Who is humankind?’. This suggests coherence, as we see that changing one's mind about the question ‘Who is humankind?’ is relatively more often preceded by the opinion that through exegesis one has a better understanding of the creation story and/or has more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text as a result of cognitive semantics. However, there is a contradiction, since five out of 11 students outlined that they didn’t enter into a dialogue into the text, although their exercise ‘essay’ shows otherwise. Why they have indicated this, can’t be explained by the data available.

This empirical research shows that due to implemented exercises, especially developed for in the classroom, a biblical text can be meaningful for adolescents. In line with Gruber³⁸ we corroborate that instead of searching for the one correct interpretation, a spatial rereading of the reception history of *Dei Locis Theologicis* offers an analytic tool to show that “[ecclesial] practices are at work everywhere”.³⁹

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³⁶ As explained before, one student changed his mind about another element of the story.

³⁷ As said before, one of the students didn’t answer the questions about the text.

³⁸ See Judith Gruber, “The maps and tours of theological knowledge: reading Melchior Cano’s *Dei Locis Theologicis* after the spatial turn,” in: *Contested spaces, common ground. Space and power structures in contemporary multireligious societies* (eds. U. Winkler, L.R., Fernandez, O. Leirvik, Leiden: Brill, 2017), 71.

³⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 121.

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YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE MAKING OF AN ANCESTOR

(A Biblical-theological exploration of young people in the shadow of ancestors)

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Abstract: Ancestors leave a legacy. How does a legacy get its shape, especially when there is not only the good, but also the bad and the ugly in the lives of ancestors? What is the role of young people in the life and defining moments of the ancestors, and what is their place in the recounting of history? In this paper I share findings of a Biblical-theological research on the role of young male characters in Biblical narratives and their impact on key decisions of so-called Biblical heroes. I focus on the role of the *na'ar*, the Hebrew young male adolescent who represents a God-perspective and a young individuality in the course of events, especially in the stories of Hagar's son (Genesis 21) and Jether (Judges 8,20).

1. Young people in the shadow of ancestors

The shaping of an ancestor comes about through the words and acts of a real person in anticipation and response to events that turn out to be defining moments, through which a legacy forms and by which an ancestor is remembered and honoured. In the shadow of those events young people occur, and they play a role that is not always remembered or recognized. This is also the case in Biblical narratives. For example, the story in 2 Kings 5 is known as 'The Healing of Naaman', but if it was not for a young anonymous Israelite slave-girl who mentioned the prophet in Samaria, there would not be a healing, let alone a story.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews you can find a chapter that sings the praises of – predominantly – men who became ancestors, because they received approval for their faith: 'the assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen' (Hebrews 11,1-2). The author describes the faith acts of a number of ancestors that are important in the history of Israel and the Christian tradition, with the words 'by faith' as an entrée for again another remarkable faith act that shaped the collective memory. In 11,32 the author excuses himself that he fails the time to tell the stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah and others. This is puzzling, because these characters may have been heroes in the eyes of Israel and the Church, but when you read their stories in the Book of Judges, you may wonder what the reasons were for including them into this Hall of Fame for Faith Heroes. Gideon may have liberated his people and was responsible for forty years of peace, meanwhile facilitating the return of idolatry, and after his death chaos struck again, with his children paying the price. Samson beat the enemy by a suicide-action, taking the boy assistant with him in his death. Jephthah liberated his people, but his daughter paid the price of his vow.¹ These stories are part of their legacy as well, and the authors of the *Tanakh* deserve credit for not hiding or condoning the darker sides of their characters. There is the good, the bad and the ugly, but

¹ Barak did not have a dubious ending that impacted young people, but when you read his story, it makes more sense to praise Deborah and Jael for faith and courage than Barak.

the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews limits himself to acts of faith that have stood the times.

Young people had their part in the shaping of what eventually became the legacy of ancestors. In my search for a Biblical-theological understanding of youth,² I explored characters in Biblical narratives who are demonstrably young, in their teens. I focused on the role of the *na`ar*,³ which usually refers to a young male, indicating his adolescent youth, but in several cases to the assisting or serving role of a male. One of my conclusions is that the use of the *na`ar* is connected to raising the expectation that something is about to happen: an interruption in the expected course of events, something that creates a God-perspective in what is going on. In this paper, I explore how the occurrence of the *na`ar* in two specific Biblical narratives (Hagar's son and Jether) influences the shaping of the ancestor. My starting question is: *'How do young people, who lived in the shadow of ancestors, impact the decisions ancestors made, and what does it mean for young people in the light of God?'* For an answer to this question I use a literary approach, which focuses on specific words for youths. I also use a narrative approach, which focuses on the story development and the roles of the characters in the story.

2. The sending away of Hagar and her son⁴

The author of the Epistle of the Hebrews writes about ancestor Abraham:

By faith, with Sarah's involvement, he received power of procreation, even though he was too old, because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore'. (*Hebrews 11,11-12 NRSV*)

This 'power of procreation' may be a result of faith, but it has a downside for Hagar's son. In the following I explore what the role is of Hagar's son in the shaping of the ancestor Abraham.

2.1 The story and the situation (Genesis 21,8-21)

The story starts at a celebration of the weaning of Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah. Sarah observes an incident between Isaac and the slave-woman Hagar's son. She realises that Hagar's son can become an heir of Abraham, and therefore a threat to Isaac. Therefore she insists that Hagar and her son are sent away, which distresses Abraham deeply, as Hagar's son is his son too. God tells Abraham to listen to his wife and do as she demands. He also tells Abraham that his lineage will continue through Isaac, not through Hagar's son. Concerning Hagar's son: God promises that out of him will grow a nation. Next, Abraham

² Ron Becker, *Reading The Young Testament. A Search for a Biblical Theology of Youth*, scheduled for autumn 2022.

³ There is also a female version of *na`ar*, the *na`arah*. Although there are similarities between the *na`ar* and the *na`arah*, I have not integrated this in my research. Main reason for that is that it also requires a research on the *bethulah* ('virgin') and how that relates to the *na`arah*. I hope to explore that in the future.

⁴ The name of Ishmael is not mentioned in this story, neither by Sarah, nor Abraham, nor Hagar, nor God, nor the narrator. Although this provokes discussions among the commentators, I have no reason to assume that with Hagar's son someone else than Ishmael is meant. Nonetheless, I will follow the use the narrator's use of 'Hagar's son'.

sends Hagar and her son away, into the wilderness. When they run out of water, Hagar cannot watch her son die. An Angel of God calls Hagar, tells her not to be afraid, repeats the promise of God concerning her son, and opens her eyes so that she sees a well with water. The story ends with mentioning that God was with the boy and a short description that he grew up and got married.

2.2 Keywords and their perspectives

In this story several perspectives on who the boy is and how the characters think he should be seen are in conflict. This is expressed in the four different words that the author / editor used for Hagar's son. In the following I present these words and their implications.

2.2.1 *The perspective of yeled: belonging by birth*

The relation between a child and his parents can be expressed by the Hebrew word *yeled*; a noun, used in the *Tanakh* with the basic meaning 'child'. In most cases it means 'male child'. Other references are 'boy', 'son' or 'young one'. *Yeled* is a noun derived from the verb *yalad*, a word that by its manifold conjugations can refer to key elements in the process of procreation;⁵ the verb is used for 'to beget', 'to bear' or 'to give birth' to a child, and also for 'to be born'.⁶ Also, in some cases 'to give breastfeeding' is derived from *yalad*.⁷ These connections show that the word *yeled* is used in relation to genealogical descent, which means that the language expresses that a *yeled* can hardly be seen and understood on his own, like a solitary unit.⁸ In other words: *yeled* implies a connection of the child to his parents, which is biological, genealogical, social and relational. So when Isaac is introduced as a *yeled*, he is introduced with the implicated questions: 'Who is his father? Who is his mother?'⁹

⁵ *Yalad* occurs 497 times in the *Tanakh*. In Genesis and in 1 Chronicles an exuberant use of *yalad* can be found in the several genealogies. *Yeled* occurs 89 times in the *Tanakh*.

⁶ The actual state of being pregnant of a woman, from the moment conception has taken place, is described with the word '*harah*'. It occurs 43 times. Cf. Genesis 38,24-25, Exodus 2,2; 1 Samuel 1,20; 2 Samuel 11,5.

⁷ Ernst Jenni & Claus Westermann, *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testamentes, Band I*, 4. Auflage, München/Zürich 1984, pp.732-735. Not only *yeled*, but also the word *toledoth* ('generations') is derived from *yalad* and this one too refers to descent. *Toledoth* occurs 39 times, especially in Genesis, Exodus, Numbers and 1 Chronicles. A typical example can be found in Numbers 1,20-42 where a genealogical registration takes place. The word *moledeth* ('kindred', 'birth', 'offspring') is also derived from *yalad*. *Moledeth* occurs 22 times, and is used to express where one's roots, one's origins lie. Cf. Genesis 11,28; 12,1, Ruth 2,11, Esther 2,10.20, Jeremiah 22,10.

⁸ The words share the root *yld*, therefore it makes sense to assume an etymological connection. The shared root of *yalad* and *yeled* expresses the connection between parents and the child: the father begets, the mother gives birth, the child is born. Interestingly enough, the noun *yeled* is seldom used in connection to the verb *yalad* in the same sentence; the words *ben* (son, child) and *bath* (daughter) are used instead. Ironically, a *yeled* is literally seldom being born; mothers usually give birth to a *ben* or a *bath* and not to a *yeled*. Nevertheless, by its linguistic nature the word *yeled* is related to the pro-creational acts of a father and a mother and sustains the concept of genealogical descent in a verbal way.

⁹ *Yeled* and *yalad* provoke the questions: 'To whom do you belong? Whose are you?'. It explains why, for example, Daniel and his friends are called *yeladim* (Daniel 1,4.10.13.15.17), while it would make sense to use other Hebrew words; it serves to emphasize that they are Hebrew youths. This is also the case in the story of The same is the case with the story of Moses' birth and adoption: *yeled* is used to emphasize that he is 'one of the children of the Hebrews' (Exodus 2,3.6-9).

2.2.2 The perspective of *ben*: descent

The word *ben* ('son') is used more often than *yeled* in the *Tanakh*.¹⁰ It is more specific than *yeled* and emphasises the family-relationship with the parents;¹¹ when *ben* or *bath* ('daughter') is mentioned, mostly fathers – and less often mothers – are mentioned by name. *Yeled* expresses the bond of any kind between parents and child, based on physical and biological connection, *ben* and *bath* take this connection further, into family, clan, tribe and nation, and back into ancestry.¹² Sarah uses *ben* as part of the phrase '*ben* of the slave-woman', not only to hint at his descent, but also as an imminent threat.

2.2.3 The perspective of *zera*: offspring as blessing and fulfilment

The word *zera* means 'seed' of 'offspring' and is used to refer to progeny. It usually refers to children and descendants as a legacy. It is the word that Abraham uses in this story, as he refers to his descendants as a fulfilment of God's promise.

2.2.4 The perspective of *na`ar*: God's way with the boy

The *na`ar* ('boy', 'youth') is used to refer to a young male who is not a child anymore, but has not yet reached adulthood and maturity. It is an adolescent with promise and potential. When a *na`ar* comes to the stage, whether as protagonist or in a supporting role, something is about to happen that disrupts the (expected) course of events in a decisive way. Not seldom a disruption caused by a *na`ar* or a *na`arah* creates discontinuity in the course of events, but continuity with God's purposes for his people. In this story God / The Angel of the Lord uses *na`ar* to speak of Hagar's son.

2.3 Colliding perspectives in the story

The story of the sending away of Hagar and her son is a story in which the words *na`ar* and *yeled* play a part in describing an adolescent boy, and in which *ben* and *zera* have their part in colouring the context in which *na`ar* and *yeled* can be understood. Each word represents a perspective from which the characters, but also the audience, look at Hagar's son. In the following I bring in these perspectives in the story by the words that carry the reference to these perspectives.

The events in the story start at a feast to celebrate the weaning of Isaac. Most likely he must have been somewhere between a few months and four years old.¹³ It means that in this story, Hagar's son must have been somewhere between fourteen and eighteen years old (cf. Genesis 16,15-16; 21,5). Isaac is the first *yeled* that is mentioned in the story; he is

¹⁰ The word *ben* occurs 4932 times in the *Tanakh*.

¹¹ Jenni & Westermann, *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testamentes I*, p.733. However, there are exceptions, like Naomi's sons in Ruth 1,5 and the widow's sons in 2 Kings 4,1 who are called *yalde'* (plural).

¹² For example, *benim*, the plural for *ben* is used for describing the people of a nation; Israelites are *benim Jisrael*, 'sons' or 'children' of Israel.

¹³ Von Rad writes that 'only after about three years were children weaned in ancient Israel'. He only refers to 1 Samuel 1,23f. (which has no reference in time) and to 2 Maccabees 7,27, which describes a woman saying to her son she has nursed him for three years. Van Selms writes 3 or 4 years old, referring to R. Patai, *Sex and family in the Bible*, 1959, pp.192-195. A. Van Selms, *Genesis deel II* (De prediking van het Oude Testament), Nijkerk 1967, p.10.

growing and the day of his weaning is celebrated (vs 8). The narrator describes that Sarah observes 'the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham' (vs 9). The word *ben* for son is used for Hagar's son and the verb *yalad* occurs ('had borne'), the verb to which the noun *yeled* is related. The narrator uses *ben* and *yalad* and it creates an emphasis in Sarah's observation. Not only is she not pleased how Hagar's son behaves towards her son Isaac, but she also becomes aware that he one day may become a rival and a threat to her son Isaac. Therefore, Sarah urges Abraham to send Hagar and her son away. She is determined and says that 'the son of the slave woman' – an expression used twice by her – shall not inherit with her son, with Isaac (vs 10). Again, the word *ben* is used, twice for Hagar's son and once for Isaac, 'my son'. The narrator then describes the distress of Abraham, because of 'his son' (again the word *ben*, vs 11). Both *yeled* (used for the weaned Isaac) and *ben* make clear what is at stake in this story: who will be the heir, who will take Abraham's place as patriarch, who will be the real *yeled*, who will be the real *ben*? It is the question that comes up, forced by Sarah's demand. Sarah acts to secure her son's future and status, but also her own; Sarah has only a future in her son, while for Abraham there is a future through both his sons.¹⁴

Then God shows up in the story and tells Abraham not to be distressed 'because of the boy and your slave woman' (vs 12). It is the first time the word *na`ar* is mentioned in this story and it is used by God for Hagar's son. God confirms the position of Isaac: 'It is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you'. For offspring the word *zera* is used, literally 'seed'. Also, the position of 'the son of the slave woman' is confirmed, because he is Abraham's *zera* as well – a nation will be made of him (vs 13).

Hagar and the child are sent away and they end up wandering in the wilderness. It is a scene in which circumstances become desperate for Hagar and her son. They have run out of water and Hagar suspects her son will die. She keeps her distance, because she cannot look at the upcoming death of her child. She lifts her voice and weeps (vs 14-16). Three times the child is called *yeled* in this scene (vs 14.15.16); twice by the narrator and once from the lips of Hagar, when she says to herself that she cannot look at the death of her child.

Then God returns to the scene: 'God heard the voice of the boy' (vs 17). The word *na`ar* is used again for Hagar's son, and from then on it is the only word used for him (five times in this scene). The Angel of God calls him a *na`ar* twice, in his address to Hagar, in which the promise of God of him becoming a great nation is made (vs 17-18). The narrator describes that Hagar's eyes are opened by God. She notices a well and she gives the *na`ar* a drink (vs 19). The story ends with the narrator telling that God was with the *na`ar* and how he develops (vs 20-21).

¹⁴ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 2. Teilband Genesis 12-36* (Biblicher Kommentar Altes Testament), Neukirchen – Vluyn 1981, p.415. Wenham brings in that Sarah is disturbed that Hagar's son is in a position, legally to share the inheritance with Isaac. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2), Dallas 1994, pp.83-85. Hagar is called *amah* in this story, while in 16,1-3 she is called *shiphchah*. According to Hamilton, this means that Hagar's social position has advanced, with legal rights for her son to share in the inheritance. 'She is now, in her own eyes, for all practical purposes a second wife. But for Sarah, Hagar is only a lowly slave'. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, chapters 18-50*, (The New Commentary on the Old Testament), Grand Rapids 1995, p.80.

2.4 Understanding the perspectives on Hagar's son

A literary-focused approach shows several changes of perspective. The use of the words *yeled* and *na'ar* are part of these changing perspectives, but also *ben* and *zera*;¹⁵ the perspectives seem to determine which word is used for Hagar's son. What does each of these words bring to the understanding of Hagar's son?

2.4.1 '*Ben*': from intimacy to distance

The word *ben* ('son') is used five times for Hagar's son (and twice for Isaac, vs 8.10). It is used simply for 'the son of Hagar' when Sarah observes him 'scoffing' (vs 9). The narrator does not call him by his name, nor does he call him Abraham's son. Then *ben* is used twice by Sarah: 'this slave-woman and her son' and 'son of this slave-woman'. Both times the language expresses annoyance about him and his mother. By calling him 'son of the slave-woman', and not by his own name, Hagar's son, or even Abraham's son, distance between both sons is created, but also between Hagar's son and Abraham. Only in relation to Abraham's concerns he is called *ben*, with a pronominal suffix pointing to Abraham to indicate whose son he is. When God shows up, God first calls Hagar's son *na'ar* (vs 12), but after that, he also calls him 'the son of the slave woman' (vs 13), albeit without the demonstrative pronoun. As he tells Abraham to listen to Sarah's voice, it seems easy to conclude that God confirms Sarah's view on Hagar's son. However, without the demonstrative pronoun, God seems to merely confirm his status as 'son of the slave-woman'. Nevertheless, in this way the use of *ben* primarily to 'the slave-woman' serves to loosen Abraham's ties with his son. As Sarah makes it clear, the reason for casting out 'the son of this slave woman' is the possibility that Hagar's son would inherit with her son Isaac (vs 10). The inheritance is a consequence of descent. Therefore, at stake is whether Hagar's *ben* will be recognized as Abraham's *ben* alongside 'the real *ben*', Sarah's *ben*: Isaac. Hagar's son may be Abraham's son, but he is primarily positioned as Hagar's son, the slave-woman's son. Where usually *ben* can express intimacy, it now expresses distance. Where *ben* usually expresses connectedness and proximity, it now has become a reason for expulsion.

2.4.2 '*Zera*': the issue of continuity

Although Hagar's son's sonship of Abraham is minimized by calling him the woman-slave's *ben* and the tangible relationship of father and son is about to be broken, God points at an enduring connection. The word *zera* ('seed', 'offspring') is used by God to define the relationship. It already became clear that the boy's status is 'son of the slave-woman' and not 'son of Abraham'. Abraham's 'official' offspring that will carry his name, comes through the

¹⁵ Most commentaries are silent about the use of different words used for Hagar's son. Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, Old Testament Library, Louisville 1981 (5th print of revised edition 1972), pp.230-237; A. Van Selms, *Genesis deel II*, (De prediking van het Oude Testament), Nijkerk 1967, pp.17-20; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary, New English Bible), Cambridge 1979, pp.84-87; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 2. Teilband Genesis 12-36* (Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament), Neukirchen – Vluyn 1981, pp.412-421. Hamilton explores the use of *na'ar* and *yeled* and its consequences in a subparagraph. Some of his observations will return in the following of this paragraph. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p.81. Also, Wenham observes that God speaks of Ishmael as *na'ar*, translated by him as 'lad'. After that, he places a few more remarks on the description of Ishmael as *na'ar*. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2), Dallas 1994, pp.83-85.

lineage of Isaac (vs 12), but Hagar's son is affirmed as his offspring as well (vs 13). God promises that the *na`ar* will be made a great nation, but only Isaac's offspring will be counted as Abraham's descendants. In an ambiguous way Hagar's son is Abraham's offspring, but the boy's future offspring is not. In this way, a word that refers to continuity in lineage, becomes a reason for cutting family ties.

2.4.3 *Yeled: the bond between child and parents*

The word *yeled* is used in the beginning of the story for Isaac (vs 8). Only after Hagar and her son are being sent away, it is used three times (vs 14.15.16.) for Hagar's son, who is thirteen years older than Isaac. So, the term is applied to both infant Isaac and his adolescent half-brother. Usually, *yeled* can be used to indicate that someone is a child, in most cases male. In this way, the child can be described in a relatively neutral, objective way. However, in the context of this story it is mentioned that it is the *ben* that Hagar had borne, for which *yaledah* is used, from the verb *yalad*, 'to bear'. The use of *yeled* suggests a connection, a relationship to parents, a bond with both the father and mother grounded in a biological connection.¹⁶ When *yeled* is used to describe Hagar's son, it creates a reference to the bond between child and parents. Abraham is present when Hagar and the *yeled* are being sent away (vs 14); from the moment of his sending away this bond between Abraham and the *yeled* will be fading and become immaterial at best. After this, Sarah and the *yeled* remain. If *yeled* suggests a bond between a child and his parents, then a tension is created, circling around the nagging question: where is the father?

2.4.4 *Na`ar: opening up promise and potential*

Each time God refers to Hagar's son in Genesis 21, he calls him *na`ar* (vs 12.17.18.20)¹⁷ – except when God confirms Sarah's perspective in verse 13 – and so does the narrator, who usually follows the characters' perspective in the story. After God repeatedly called Hagar's son *na`ar*, the narrator also calls him *na`ar* in vs 19; when God opened Hagar's eyes, she sees the well and the narrator calls Hagar's son *na`ar*. The narrator keeps doing this till the end of the story. The use of *na`ar* brings a perspective of hope and future in this story. When there is conflict and distress about the 'son of the slave-woman', God calls Hagar's son *na`ar* and speaks of the promise on his life (vss 12-13). In the same way, when the *yeled* seems to be dying and despair surrounds Hagar and her son, God shows up and he is called *na`ar* again. God hears the voice of the *na`ar* (vs 17), the *na`ar* is to be lifted up, because there is a promise on his life (vs 18), Hagar's eyes are opened for the well and there is water for the *na`ar* (vs 19), God is with the *na`ar* and he grows up (vs 20) and the promise on his life seems to be getting fulfilled (vs 20-21). Each time Hagar's son is called *na`ar*, there is commitment and involvement from God. The consequence is that God's promises on the boy's life, which were hidden till then, are revealed. Each time when he is called *na`ar*, the perspective of hope and future comes in. It is a perspective that is connected with the opening of Hagar's eyes, so she can discern the well that brings the water for her son, but also the future that God has in store for him.

¹⁶ Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p.81.

¹⁷ Both Hamilton and Wenham make this observation. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p.81; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, pp.83.85.

The different words used for Hagar's son are connected to different perspectives on who he is and how he should be seen. *Ben* and *yeled*, and to a minor extent *zera*, are used in this story to define the relationship between all involved and they denote the biological connections that constitute the relationships in this father's house. Hagar's son is *zera* to Abraham, he is a *ben* and a *yeled* to Abraham and Sarah, but he is a *na`ar* to God.¹⁸ Initially *ben*, *zera* and *yeled* function to make clear who will be the real heir of Abraham: the wife's son or the slave woman's son, but they become part of the constant reference to the complicated family situation, as these words remind everyone involved all over again who is connected to whom genealogically, with consequences for how Hagar's son is viewed. These words, in the sense of what they refer to, keep everyone involved captive in this situation. The word *na`ar* does not have all these connotations and offers a way out to open up the situation. Although the use of *na`ar* by God can be seen as a way to minimize the status of Hagar's son as Abraham's son,¹⁹ it is a word that is connected to God's promises: 'I will make him into a great nation' (vs 18). Therefore, *na`ar* is far more than a minimalization, it is a different way of looking at Hagar's son. Where his being a *yeled* and a *ben* is an apparent threat to Isaac, for biological and genealogical, and therefore lawful reasons, God shows a different perspective and understanding: the *na`ar* that is to be the patriarch of a great nation – independent from his father's house. Descent and position become less important, God's promise for the future more important. God offers Hagar's son a perspective and an understanding way beyond his physical presence and social status, in a prophetic and spiritual way. The eyes of Abraham, Hagar and Sarah needed to be opened for that perspective and understanding, because of their preoccupation with their sons' genealogy. The use of the word *na`ar* functions in this story to bring in this dimension of promise and potential for the boy. It is the language that is used by God, it is the language that Abraham and Sarah lack, it is the language that Hagar learns when her eyes are opened.

2.5 The ancestor

The drama of the sending away of Hagar and her son is that in the shaping of Abraham as ancestor there is no place for them, in spite of every thinkable relation they have. The origin of Abraham's becoming an ancestor lies in the promise of God and the covenant the Lord established with him (Genesis 15+17). The promise of land and descendants constitutes his future 'status' as ancestor. Abraham will become a 'father of many nations' (Genesis 17,4-5). The consequence is that Abraham focuses on offspring, but his wife on lineage and heritage. Apparently, when an ancestor is being shaped, there comes a battle for who can claim him as an ancestor, and who cannot.

The consequence for Hagar's son and his mother is hard and painful; they are not part of the promise. At the same time, there is a promise on the boy's life, that apparently only can be fulfilled when he is away from his father's house. Hagar's son will become an ancestor too, but that is only possible when the ties with his father are broken.

There is a promise on the life of Hagar's son, but it only becomes imaginable when God mentions his promise for the *na`ar*. It is something that Abraham, Sarah and Hagar were not able to grasp till then, because their perspectives on the boy were limited to offspring, progeny and heritage, and not on what promise God had for the boy. Abraham's,

¹⁸ Hamilton, *Genesis 16-50*, p.81.

¹⁹ Hamilton, *Genesis 16-50*, p.81.

Sarah's and Hagar's perspectives on the boy kept him captive; he had to be released from them to live out God's promise on his life, and become an ancestor himself.

3. The Jether story

The question '*How do young people, who lived in the shadow of ancestors, impact the decisions ancestors made, and what does it mean for young people in the light of God?*' is in the Gideon narrative a tough question, as it comes about in a story of murderous violence. Gideon is famous for his willingness to go into battle with only three hundred men, in spite of his fear. For his actions he had to rely on what God told him (Judges 6,1-7,23). Probably this is what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had in mind when he referred to Gideon as one of the persons who 'through faith conquered kingdoms [...] were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight' (Hebrews 11,32-34). It is not the task of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews to give a complete and nuanced picture of Gideon. In my research for young people in Biblical narratives, I focused on his oldest son Jether, who played a crucial role in Gideon's choice to turn down the offer to start a dynastic rule over Israel – in fact becoming the first king of Israel. In the following I will

3.1 The Jether situation

In the story of Jether several motifs of the Gideon converge. Jether, Gideon's firstborn son, only occurs in one verse (Judges 8,20) in a small, but dramatic scene (8,18-21). He is confronted with a situation in which he is ordered to execute two captive kings. His father brings him in this position. Gideon has become a national hero in a short period of time, responsible for the ending the Midianite oppression, also for opening a new era for the Israelites. Jether is asked to bring this oppression to a definite end and seal the liberation and victory by taking the kings' lives. All eyes are on him. But Jether does not draw his sword. He is afraid. He is young, still a boy.²⁰ Jether hears the Midianite kings shout to his father. His father draws his sword and finishes them off. This scene impacts the course of events dramatically: Gideon is offered a dynastic reign, but with the scene in mind in which his oldest son withdrew, he declines.

3.2 Key motifs

In the Gideon narrative several leading motifs occur, which impact the characters. In the following I present three of them: the role of fear, the presence of God and the dynastic temptation.

3.2.1 Fear

Jether's response to his father's request to kill two captive kings seems unexpected: he withdraws out of a fear that is rooted in his youth (8,20). There is no comment, no judgement on Jether's withdrawal, except from the victims, but in his fearful reaction, Jether reflects

²⁰ The NRSV translates: But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. (Judges 8,20).

every kind of fear that Gideon had left behind. Although in the beginning of the narrative the Angel of the Lord called Gideon 'you mighty warrior' (6,13), the narrator repeatedly mentions Gideon's fear or actions that have to do with fear (6,12.25-27.36-40; 7,10-15). However, fear disappears in relation to Gideon in Judges 8; he is bold and decisive in confrontations during the chase of the Midianites beyond the river Jordan (vs 2.3.7.9). After the destruction of Baal's altar and the sacred pole his father stood up for him (6,30-32), but now he stands up for himself. Once the enemy has been beaten for the first time, there seems to be no reason for any diffidence and restraint anymore. So, when the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna are taken captive, judged and sentenced by Gideon, there is no hesitation or fear to take their lives. It is exactly that kind of fear and restraint Gideon left behind, but makes young Jether withdraw (8,20-21). In withdrawing Jether reminds his father how he used to be, before the Lord called him.²¹

In the Jether story fear and youth are related. The Hebrew word *na`ar* is used twice in the verse, first in the meaning of 'boy' as a noun, and as the adjective 'young' that explains his fear: his fear is rooted in the fact that he is young. Losing the fear to kill would mean losing something that is innate to youth, but also to humanity. After the narrator's description of Jether's withdrawal and the explanation, there is no comment or condemnation or extra exhortations of any kind. 'Being young' is enough to leave Jether for who he is and what he does; it seems to be valued.

It is human to fear to take a life. Apparently, it is human to cross that line too. In this narrative, the fear to take a life that comes with being young has a specific role. In not crossing that line Jether preserves what is innate and inherent to his youth, the awe for the sacredness of any human life. Losing that awe would mean losing youthfulness and its innate vulnerable strength. Youth as such has a place in this narrative. It does not save the lives of Zebah and Zalmunna, but it does save Jether's awe for human life and it mirrors to Gideon, the bystanders and the reader that taking a life – even if it is an expression of justice or justified retribution – violates something in a person that is worth protecting. Youthful fear to kill is a precious shield, that is not to be given up too easily. But Gideon, the ancestor crossed that line.

3.2.2 *The presence of the Lord*

In the scene with Jether the Lord is only present in Jether's fear. The Lord is mentioned in this scene in a formula, like in an oath: 'As the Lord lives' (8,19), but it has the appearance of a custom and not so much the intention to invite the Lord to this scene. In all of Gideon's tour of vengeance (from 8,4) there is no reference to the Lord, or his direction. The Lord does not instruct Gideon or Jether to execute the Midianite kings. He simply does not act and he is silent, or even absent. It is a sharp contrast with previous episodes in which the Lord was close, directive, guiding and affirming in a mission that aimed to break the chains of oppression. Even in the Midianite occupation God's hand could be discerned as he sent a prophet to confirm that (6,10). However, in this situation God is completely silent. The presence of the Lord may have been understood by Gideon and bystanders in the fact that their previous oppressors were in their hands and that they were in the position to retaliate: a justified retribution made possible by the Lord. They may have felt it this way, but the narrator does not give any clues to support this vision.

²¹ Cf. Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament), Grand Rapids 2012, pp. 259-260.

It is a sharp contrast with how God's presence was described earlier in the Gideon narrative. In the beginning the Lord was only present in his judgement over the worship of false gods and a prophet confirming this (6,1-10). Next, God's presence is known in an immediate and direct way to Gideon, with an instructing and guiding character, but also in an intimate way that has been unprecedented since Moses. This is followed by something that best can be described as Gideon's presupposition that God's presence is in everything Gideon does, since he knows that Midian is given in his hand by the Lord (7,15). The Gideon narrative ends with the statement that, although there is peace for forty years by what the Lord has done (8,24), the Lord is not remembered, which suggests that he is either absent, or that he does not make himself known.

The use of the word fear (*yare*) for Jether may give more insight in how the Lord can be located in this situation. Fear is a word that can be used in different ways, in English and in Hebrew. It is the fear for people and situations, but the dimension of the fear of the Lord is always close and perhaps even suggested. Jether's fear to kill these men can be seen as a way to the fear of the Lord, but also the other way around: his fear of the Lord brings him to fear to take these lives.

3.2.3 *The dynastic temptation*

In terms of the main themes of the Book of Judges, but also in the narrative itself, the passage in which Gideon is offered to rule over Israel and the turning down of this offer (8,22-23) is a climax. At stake is who is really king over Israel: a leader, a leader chosen by the people, a leader chosen by the Lord, or the Lord? Gideon gives the answer in this constant thread in the pre-monarchic era in Israel: 'I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you' (8,23). It is a statement and it is a confession. In terms of story-telling: all events were leading to this point of Gideon becoming ruler over Israel. This whole scene of killing Zebah and Zalmunna as display of power and destiny in which his firstborn could participate – in action, credits and honour – was a final and decisive prelude to what would come: the offer to rule over Israel. The people give Gideon – not the Lord – the credits of the deliverance from the Midianites (8,22). His confession that the Lord will rule over Israel and therefore not he, is an expression of devoutness that was absent in previous events since the first win over the Midianites.

Although eventually Gideon turns down the offer to become the ruler of Israel with successive rights for his offspring (8,22-23), he is sensitive to it, and so is his entourage. The scene in which Zebah and Zalmunna are judged and killed is a part in which he moves his oldest son Jether to the front to execute these kings. If Jether had killed Zebah and Zalmunna, his status would have been great in Israel. It would have created the dynamics of a culture in which father and son are heroes and are named in the same context of shaking off oppression and conquer the enemy. Also, it would have communicated the sign that Jether would be Gideon's heir.²² A dynastic culture was at hand. The dragging around of the Midianite kings serves as a way to show Israel the enemy is defeated, but it contributes also to his status of conqueror who shows his trophies.

The only reason why Jether is ordered to kill Zebah and Zalmunna is the fact that he is Gideon's oldest son. It is unknown if he knew what was at stake when his father ordered him and what the consequences could be for him in terms of creating a dynastic culture. Jether's withdrawal is a disruption in the line of events that would have its fulfilment in

²² Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge 2004, p.96.

Gideon's acceptance to rule over Israel and it happens in the scene before this climax. It leads to a different outcome than could be expected: Jether's refusal to kill leads to Gideon's refusal to reign. In this sense Jether's withdrawal – because he was afraid, because he was still a boy – reveals to Gideon what is right. Jether's reaction may have given Gideon the insight that a dynasty is neither the purpose for his son and his family, nor God's purpose for Israel. In this sense, Jether saves himself and his father from creating this dynasty. Jether's fear fuelled by his youth influences thoroughly the course of events and prevents a dynastic culture to grow before it even started.

3.3 *The aftermath*

Gideon turned down the offer to rule over Israel – an offer 'to him, his son and his grandson also' (8,22-23). He was explicit in stating that he and his son will not rule. Nonetheless, the mentioning of his many wives and sons and a concubine (8,30-31) show something different – the lifestyle that is associated with rulers and kings. In a passage that is meant to describe that Gideon retreats, retires and passes away, Abimelech is introduced after the 'many wives' and the 'seventy sons'. The man who would not rule over Israel gives the son he begets with a concubine the name Abimelech: 'my father is king' (8,31). Calling the name Abimelech ('my father is king') an 'ironic comment on the contradiction between Gideon's public pronouncements and private practice'²³ is one way to put it, but you can doubt whether irony was on Gideon's mind.²⁴ More likely the name is a statement about Gideon and his power, a power that eventually is to be transferred to his descendants.²⁵ In 'My father is king' the seeds are planted of a striving force in which kingship is not offered, but taken.

In giving this name to one of his sons, who eventually would not become part of his family and clan, is revealed the way Gideon views himself: a ruler, a king, in spite of the statement that he would not rule over Israel. He may not have acted upon it in becoming the king of Israel, but his hidden aspirations are concentrated in his son who embodies the dynastic temptation. After his father's death, Abimelech lives out these aspirations and he really owns them. He is prepared to do anything to become the king, including murdering his brothers. Abimelech kills his brothers, clearly to eliminate possible competitors, but probably also with the purpose that Gideon's legacy and authority can only be transferred to him. Abimelech does not succeed completely; his youngest half-brother escaped the massacre and curses him before he runs off to a life of which nothing is known to us. Eventually Abimelech becomes king, but his reign lasts only three years and is marked by wickedness, division, treason and violence. It ends with his death: a woman crushes his skull by throwing a millstone, and he asks his armour-bearer to kill him to avoid the 'disgrace' of being killed by a woman.

Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament), Grand Rapids, pp.259-260. Also, Eliyahu Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest, An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives (Judg 6-12)* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum Volume 106), Leiden 2005, p.106.

²⁴ It is the narrator and / or editor who positions the name of Abimelech right after the events in which Gideon abstains from ruling Israel. The irony is fully on account of the narrator and the reader.

²⁵ George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges, 18th impression* (The International Critical Commentary), Edinburgh 1966, p.235 and Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (The Anchor Bible), New York 1975, p.163 explore the possibility that the 'father' in Abimelech's name referred to the Lord (JHWH). If so, it would be in line with the claim that the Lord would rule Israel, not Gideon. However, it would mean a turn from the practices around the ephod cult where Israel 'prostituted themselves' (8,27).

3.4 The ancestor

When you look at Gideon's life and his legacy, can you consider him an ancestor. Only one of his children survives and disappears in anonymity (9,21). He established peace for forty years, but after that chaos re-emerged. He was intimate with the Lord, who guided his steps in beating the enemy and destroying the Baal-idolatry, but after his victory he created an ephod, which became a place where 'all Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there' (8,27). So, is there a way to view him as an ancestor? There is a choice in a tradition how to remember our ancestors. Apparently, the memory of Gideon's actions rooted in faith and dependence exceeded his failures at the end of his life. The same is true for his decision to abstain from reigning over Israel, out of a confession that the Lord will rule over them. It took a *na`ar* to bring him to align with God's purposes for Israel.

4. Ancestors and youth

In the lives of Biblical ancestors there is the good, the bad and the ugly. Becoming an ancestor also means facing hardships and making painful decisions. Young people live in the shadow of these ancestors and face the downside of ancestors becoming ancestors. They may pay a price for the ancestors becoming ancestors. Also, they do not always share in the heritage, the legacy. They are not always part of the promise that God gives their ancestors. Young people sometimes need to be released from their ancestors to live out the promise on their lives, to find the God-potential, and become ancestors themselves.

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Honoring our mentors through our craft

Introduction

I am blessed, almost monthly, with the gift of friendship, creativity, presence, and belonging. This gift comes by way of spending time, sharing a meal, relaying stories, cultivating wisdom, and doting on dogs Sarah and Marley, with a remarkable religious educator and former member of REA/APPRE, Dr. Kathleen O’Gorman. We spend our time together sharing a meal, imagining, co-creating, visioning, honoring, remembering, illustrating, and visioning our craft, or the practice of religious education in our midst and with those we encounter, teach, and learn with. While she is beloved by many students and graduates for her prophetic wisdom and commitment to Loyola Institute for Ministry’s (LIM) religion and ecology focus area, she is also the primary religious educator responsible for designing LIM’s Master of Religious Education degree program.

Kathleen is one of the most thoughtful, critical, forward-thinking, and process-oriented religious educators I know. All the while, much of her work and advocacy was, and is currently, spent caring and crying out for God’s creation. Her embodiment of this care for and attunement with creation is illustrate most explicitly through her relationship with the Gulf Coast Doberman Rescue in New Orleans, a non-profit organization run by people just like her: committed, passionate, self-sacrificing individuals devoted to saving the precious lives of “bully-breeds,” as some humans have come to know them as.

She is a prophetic witness to how the natural world serves as our primary religious educator. It is from my conversations with Kathleen that I gained the courage, as a junior faculty member, to take risks in my own teaching and pedagogy, and it is from these experiences that I have been transformed in my own praxis.

This paper draws on the insight and inspiration from my relationship with Kathleen, who embodies the wisdom of her own ancestors, people such as Maxine Greene, Bill Doll, and Thomas Berry, whom she considers her mentors in religious education. Reflections on our friendship and my experiences learning, imagining, and co-creating with Kathleen, have led me to appreciate the beauty of such encounters, as well as the limits of higher education.

It takes more intentional effort and time set aside in a busy work week, day, or hour, to connect with another colleague to dream, imagine, and co-create. Yet, my greatest teaching moments and course inspirations have come from such imaginative encounters with colleagues. Unfortunately, I can only count these moments on one hand. I have yet to engage in a faculty meeting that allows for or creates a space for *Releasing the Imagination* (Greene).

Like Kathleen, am deeply informed and inspired by educators and religious educators who came before me. While they may not all claim the title of educator or religious educator, they include Kathleen O’Gorman, most certainly, and also Bud Horell, Dwayne Huebner, James McDonald, Willie James Jennings, Patrick Slattery, and bell hooks—just to name a few. In my courses, I follow a postmodern approach to teaching and learning similar to Slattery’s, which illustrates an autobiographical, religious, and phenomenological approach to religious education. In my opening remarks to graduate students in my Curriculum Development course, I share this vision:

As Patrick Slattery notes, two of the most important contributions from the reconceptualization of curriculum as a field of study are “attentiveness to autobiographical and phenomenological experience” (66). Stories, histories, experiences, and interpretations of these things matter. They are important for educators as much as for students. As you will begin to notice, Slattery, Courtney Goto and your supplemental authors are just a few examples of religious educators who embody this vision of curriculum design in the presentation of their writing. They write autobiographically and draw out implications for religious educators through the arts and other affective ways of knowing (for a very important reflection on teaching and learning, see Slattery’s autobiographical reflections on his educational experiences in undergraduate school on pp. 73-74). It is from this perspective that I plan to share with you all my own stories as a religious educator on our upcoming synchronous class and invite you all to do likewise.

While I created asynchronous learning activities and synchronous Zoom classes around this invitation, I am still taken aback by my own experience in this process of teaching and learning. In creating an educational space open to revelatory experiencing (Goto), I too was profoundly affected. I believe in my heart that you can never separate teaching from learning, but the actual experience of this deeply held belief is quite different. I experienced a great shift in my spirituality and in my teaching. The process that led to our class discussions even unveiled something within my memory regarding my mother’s way of practicing her faith, that I had not thought of for a very long time, let alone reflected on.

By dreaming, imagining, and co-creating with an expert religious educator, and through similar conversations with colleagues, I believe I participated in my own curricular design to engage in what Courtney Goto calls “revelatory experiencing.” This essay explores my research and scholarship on postmodern curriculum theory through the wisdom and stories of my mentors, and the pedagogical activities I curate for an online course on religious education to show how higher education can become a more viable space for “releasing the imagination” (Greene).

Background

The best way to honor my mentors through my craft is by sharing stories of my experiences with them, their wisdom, and its impress on my practice of teaching and learning. Inspired by Kathleen’s experiences with one of her mentors, Maxine Green, I too find that “a narrative seems particularly appropriate in rendering an account of a woman who created a self and a life that has made a difference in the lives of countless others.” (O’Gorman, 1998a, 229).

I first came to know of Thomas Berry’s work in cosmology through Kathleen when I arrived at Loyola University New Orleans, a place physically situated in the original ancestral homelands of the [Chitimacha Nation](#) (Park and Reyes), held within the planet Earth and sustained in a Universe. We immediately connected over process education, and secondarily over our love of rescue dogs and commitment to their flourishing. Meeting Kathleen was like coming home.

In short time, she shared with me her relationship with Thomas Berry and the impact of his work on her life as a Catholic religious educator in the United States. “No other university,” she recalled to me, “can claim Berry’s impress on the curriculum like LIM can.” He taught for LIM, gave numbers of guest lectures, and spent a tremendous amount of time on the very porch Kathleen and I share meals over today. Berry gave her the language and the wings to fly as the religious educator she was called to be. He helped her interpret the Catholic Tradition from

whole to part, to see the Universe as divine manifestation. She spends her life's work, caring for voiceless creatures discarded by humans, and helping students, faculty, staff, friends, and family experience the transformational power the natural world has to offer us. It is in the natural world where she, and I as well, experiences the lure of the transcendent.

The cosmological connections to the faith tradition can be intellectually, practically, and spiritually challenging at first discovery. Most of my students implicitly or explicitly believe the story of creation begins with the Judeo-Christian scriptural account in Genesis 1:26, the creation of humans, skipping past the first 25 verses when God created the universe, and "let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature... and saw that it was *good*" (*New American Bible Rev. Ed*, Gen 1:24-25). Cosmology and creation are embedded throughout the LIM curriculum; therefore, I pay special attention to how I can help students understand these concepts and bridge some of these intellectual, practical, and spiritual gaps between ecology, cosmology and theology.

Stories

Kathleen assists me at least monthly with an educational and personal understanding of creation in a way that helps me help my students. She unpacked for me Berry's discussion of the three primary principles of the Universe, best described in his book *The Great Work*. They are differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. Diversity or differentiation is built into the order of creation. No one leaf or butterfly is identical, just as no one person is the same. "The universe," according to Berry, "exists in highly differentiated forms of expression...the only security of any life expression on Earth is in the diversity of the comprehensive community of life" (1999, 147).

Subjectivity points to the fact that everything has an interiority, nothing is an object. We did not create the universe; therefore, the universe is primary, it cannot be self-referential. it is the source of all that is. The principle of communion, as with the theology of the Trinity, teaches us that we are never alone; "nothing exists in isolation" (Berry 1999, 147). It has taken me several years to understand, rather, begin to understand, these principles, but with Kathleen's mentoring and my efforts to be vulnerable, take risks, and embody my practice of teaching and learning, I began to turning these understandings into a lived experience. Each one of the following examples emerged from synchronous Zoom classes with graduate students in my religious education courses.

From my commitment to teaching through autobiography, I began discussing with one class my efforts at gardening. A variety of people from colonizing descent, such as myself, have learned beneficial gardening practices that our indigenous ancestors lived by. One such example illustrates well the principle of differentiation, which is how to grow vegetables according to the nutrients and characteristics of their growth. The most common that I am familiar with is the Three Sister's approach, whereby corn, beans, and squash grow and thrive together.¹ I explain to students how large federally subsidized farms and industrial farming companies produce food for mass consumption in a way that does not use beneficial farming practices such as this one. They plow acres of one single crop, such as soybeans or corn to sell on the national and global markets. These mono-crop farming practices bring in a variety of insects and other flora that prevent these crops from thriving (what are often called "pests" and "weeds").

These farming practices lead companies to create pesticides, insecticides, chemical fertilizers and herbicides capable of using without harming the growth of the crop. I segued to

¹ For more information on this gardening technique, see Brooks, Belinda "'The Three Sisters' of Butte Gardens," *Natchitoches Times* 9, May, 2022. <https://www.natchitochestimes.com/2022/05/09/the-three-sisters-of-butte-gardens/>

my memory of watching the documentary, *Food Inc*, which referred to these as “Round-Up ready soybeans” When I was teaching in grade school, I had a weekend job where I worked for the Scott’s company (maker of Round-Up) and the man who trained me advised me not to touch any of the fertilizer bags or pesticide containers without gloves if I ever hoped to have children. Thus, these chemicals run off into the water, poisoning the humans, bees, and other living creatures as well as the surrounding flora and fauna. In sum, by diverging from the principle of differentiation, humans created a toxic environment for all living things.

How is this example instructive to religious educators? In the context of curriculum design, one implication is that there is no single text, no one pedagogy or learning design that fits all people at the same time, in the same space. When we go against the principle of differentiation, we encounter (rather, we create) challenges over equity, inclusion, and access.

The same can be said with spirituality. There is no one path or way to grow in one’s relationship with the divine. Therefore, why would a religious education or ministry program only offer one spiritual tradition, or one practice of faith? Rather, students should be encouraged to explore their distinct spirituality, their unique relationship with God, self, and other. By differentiating instruction, materials, resources, contexts, perspectives, spaces, and more, students learn in harmony with the natural rhythm of creation. They learn to be co-creators with God’s creation and one another towards greater wisdom, transformative insights, or “synthetical moments” as William Pinar calls them.

In another class discussion on the need to include the whole community in the faith development and support of young people (social workers, pastors, parents, individuals, children, teachers, coaches, grandparents, siblings, the awe-inspiring power of the natural world, etc.), I was struck again by what Kathleen and Berry have to say about the principle of communion. In this Zoom class on communal foundations of religious education, I realized, in the moment, that I failed to fully embody my vocation as a religious educator, to practice what I preach, so-to-speak. The universe principle of communion, which Kathleen and Berry taught me so much about, hit me mid-sentence.

I pivoted on the spot and thought about how I might make connections to the natural world. I reflected on my own gardening practices once again. Zucchini, I came to discover, needs some help if it is to become an edible vegetable for me to consume (not so for insects and other bugs). People in gardening groups tell me I need to “hand pollinate” the female flowers with pollen from the male flowers. The sole reason for this is that I do not have enough pollinating insects in my neighborhood to do this naturally. In drawing out the connection between a creation-centered way of approaching religious education and ministry, I realized then and there that my gardening practice was misaligned with the principle of communion that I taught so much about. I thought (like many teachers and ministry leaders who work in silos think), I can do this on my own, I can “hand pollinate” this zucchini for it to produce food for me. In short, this year I created a pollinator garden filled with milkweed, sunflowers, morning glories, and other plants that bees and butterflies love. I rarely hand-pollinate zucchini anymore, but more to the point, I took one step further away from dis-embodied knowing and doing, and another closer to embodiment. Now, I try to make these connections in all aspects of my life so that can be true to my vocation as a religious educator.

I want to share a third and final story that illustrates the sort of “revelatory experiencing” I encountered in my online learning communities (classes, if you will). One afternoon, I talked with Kathleen over the phone about my teaching praxis. I shared with her that I struggle with giving student feedback on discussion board assignments—do I write too much, too little? Am I

effectively supporting their learning in the way I communicate with them through these assignments/posts? She said:

I am standing in front of a fire I created in my yard, which I am very nervous about because I do not want it to spread beyond my control. My neighbor said the best way to get rid of all the debris from Hurricane Ida is to burn it because no one is going to come pick it up-the city is overwhelmed.

Your discussion boards are like this fire. Where does the material come from to get it started? What material do you need to keep it going (kindling, paper, leaves, etc), and what makes it flare into a roaring fire? Is it a big log or a combination of all these materials catching all at once? What is the big log? Where does the kindling come from, and what is its shape? Was there enough kindling to make the fire roar, or is it simply staying lit?

I was speechless and left reeling from the implications. I thought, *wow, how did she do that?* In listening to her embody her praxis, I was lead to see my practice of grading and conversing anew. I now look at our threaded class discussions through this analogy. I take note of the nuances each student brings to a discussion, the way a few might veer off or bring a stick that is damp or too small, the one whose log is just right, and sparks a large burst of flames, or one who puts a big log on the fire, the but almost smothers it. I think of the variety of kindling picked from all over the forest, down the trail, and through the meadow that tries to get the flame going again. Then, I discern where my voice, my wood, might be needed to keep the fire ablaze. Sometimes this is to highlight a students' voice more intentionally, as they supplied just what was needed to keep this fire burning hot. Again, an example of just one way in which the natural world serves as our primary religious educator and this experience serves as one more testimony to the way a religious educator is called to embody their craft.

These stories and reflections come to fruition in my teaching through my commitment to autobiographical, religious, and phenomenological approaches to religious education. From my many conversations with Kathleen, who pulls every story, every idea I have about life and education back to the natural world when she asks, over and over again, *what is this experience teaching you?* Then, she gives a myriad of examples of how I can look to the natural world for insight and wisdom.

There are a multitude of experiences like these that have occurred in my practice of teaching and learning, with students and with myself that I need to document as time goes on. For the purposes of this paper, I will leave the reader with these few stories but there are more "synthetical moments" (Pinar) of "revelatory experiencing" (Goto) that have impact on my praxis. This practice of embodiment brings me a tremendous sense of wholeness that I otherwise would not experience as a religious educator. Marked by an autobiographical approach to teaching and learning, the teacher grows in their understanding of the wisdom and experience students bring and what the educational space can bring to the learning design. In short, when the instructor practices a level of vulnerability by sharing their stories of life, faith, and teaching, students are encouraged to do likewise.

This grows into a true learning community of practice. However, an autobiographical phenomenological approach to teaching and learning goes against the grain of the modern curriculum in higher education. As I have written elsewhere, the dominant modern EuroAmerican curriculum prioritizes empirical wisdom, rational thinking, and objectivity, all the

while downplaying the role of emotions, subjectivity, and the teachers' and students' experiences that arise through a postmodern curriculum (Lamont, 59. See also Slattery, Doll and Jennings). It took me great courage, time, and vulnerability to move into this way of co-creating religious educational spaces.

Highlighting again the wisdom of our mentors and those who came before us, Kathleen used William (Bill) Doll's *A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum* as the primary text in the first iteration of LIM's Curriculum Development course (if my memory serves me, Kathleen met Doll through Maxine Greene). Kathleen's experience of Doll and his scholarship affirmed how she understood Berry's principles of the universe in ways the Tyler Rationale, or dominant curriculum theory and model, fails to do. Today, I use Patrick Slattery's text, *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era* as a primary text in LIM's curriculum course. Incidentally (and poetically, I might add), Doll taught, mentored, and advised Slattery at LSU.

Slattery, in discussing how Doll draws from the natural world of quantum physics as inspiration for postmodern curriculum, affirms the eclectic or differentiated nature of teaching and learning. He writes:

In classical physics, everything is known and can be measured. In quantum physics, uncertainty is built into the metaphysical reality...If the universe on the quantum level and on the cosmic level is not rigid and fixed, why does our vision of curriculum, schooling, and research remain fixated on the metaphor of classical modern physics...?" (275)

The art and practice of teaching and learning, for me, is no longer about presenting information with confidence, worrying about my lack of experience, knowledge, or my ability to respond to any and all questions. It is about modeling vulnerability, sharing my stories, and learning from the natural world by practicing the principles of differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. This is all done by raising up the voices of those who came before me and whose wisdom and inspiration continue to live on in me and those I teach and learn with. When I teach in this way, I learn new stories, new wisdom from my students, those ancestors and mentors who shaped them and whose wisdom they carry through their craft today.

Slattery writes at length about the way in which curriculum theory and design is called to engage in what Christian's refer to as "proleptic eschatology." He states,

The future is viewed as that which brings to completion what has already been set in motion...history is not taught [or experienced] as a series of events on a linear timeline to be memorized. Rather, it is an unfolding story in which each student is an active participant is shaping the meaning of events and in constructing the future course of global communities" (112-113)

Proleptic eschatology is best illustrated through story-sharing and how we select stories from the past, carry them into the present, and allow them, through our conversation partners to co-create the future. It is in the way we select historical resources (oral or written testimonies, memories, stories, data, even geological events and archeological sites), taking note of what remains hidden or lost from human understanding, and bring them to life in the present so that we can envision and co-create hope-filled future.

Conclusion

Kathleen teaches that the natural world is our primary educator and thus embodies it in what she does and says. She is a prophetic voice for living creatures who have no voice in

society. She learns how to be in right relationship with God, herself, and others through her connection to all of creation. In doing so, she never ceases to call on me to be a more reflective, intentional religious educator and human. It is an expectation she holds in her words and in her presence. If only I could be half the religious educator she is...

I firmly believe Kathleen's ability to draw every conversation of ours back to creation as our primary religious educator enabled me to grow in my practice of teaching and learning. It is my hope, that if I can model her inspiration in my teaching, students will be able to do the same. Then, perhaps we will learn to care for our common home once and for all.

To think that Kathleen was largely dismissed by the guild for her "far out there" ideas on creation and cosmology, brings me to raise her up in this annual meeting as one of the most transformative, provocative, practical, intentional, critical religious educators I know.

The Universe: The Context for Everything

The child awakens to
a universe. The mind
of the child to
a world of meaning.
Imagination to a world
of beauty. Emotions
to a world of intimacy.
It takes a universe
to make a child both
in outer form and inner
spirit.

It takes
a universe to educate
a child. A universe
to fulfill a child.

Each generation presides
over the meeting of these
two in the succeeding
generation. Thus our nursery
rhymes. These early rhymes,
these early stories, are
the most profound, most lovely,
most delightful sources
of guidance and inspiration
the child will ever have.

"Star light, star bright"
how memorable, inspiring,
instructive, these verses
of Robert Louis Stevenson

from the later years
of the last century.

So now we write our
own verses, bringing
the child and the universe
into their mutual fulfillment.
While the stars ring out in
the heavens!²

Like a 300 ton log, floating effortlessly down a river, or the ant who appears to carry up to 50 times its weight on its back with ease, remember: “*Whenever you wonder if you can do it, you’ll be carried.*” (O’Gorman, personal correspondence, 2022).

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² This excerpt comes from a talk by Thomas Berry to religious educators, as documented in the LIM course book, *Introduction to Practical Theology*, (pp 246-247).

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REA Annual Meeting 2022—Becoming Good Ancestors**The Impact of Jhon Dewey's Educational Theories on Religious Education:****With a special focus on Jewish Religious Education and the Shaping of a New American Jewish Identity**

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Abstract:

This article presents a newly research of John Dewey (1859-1952), American philosopher, educator, and leader of the progressive movement in education in the United States. It will explore how Dewey helped shape and reform education in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century. Although he shied away from being directly involved with religious education, many of his ideas had a positive influence upon religious education theory and practice. This paper will focus on examining the historical impact Dewey had on the development of progressive Jewish education in the early twentieth century. I will argue that Dewey played a major role in influencing the Jewish educational leaders of that time in developing and implementing a democratic, progressive Jewish education. Most importantly, this paper examines how Dewey's educational theories contributed towards a new transformation of the American Jewish identity in the early twentieth century.

Introduction

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, was certainly the age of liberation of education in the United States as the public school system was developed in order to provide an equal education to all citizens. Religious education also flourished within the Christian and Jewish communities especially in New York City. In 1903, the Religious Education Association (REA), a pluralistic Christian based organization, was established. Its agenda was to nurture the development of a progressive religious education in the United States, to unite the different religious educational groups of Christians in the country, and to seek to work cooperatively with Jewish educational organizations as well.¹

At about the same time, the rapid growth of Jewish educational institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States, led to an urgent need to establish a non-partisan unifying educational agency. This prompted the founding of the Bureau of Jewish Education, which was originally called the Kehillah, meaning

¹ See Stephan A. Schmidt, *A History of Religious Education*, (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1983).

in the Hebrew 'Community Association' in 1910, in New York, to serve as the unifying agency for Jewish education.² In addition, a Hebrew Teacher's Union was established in 1911. However, it lacked the ability to formulate professional standards for Hebrew education, until Dr. Samson Benderly, (1876-1944), a Palestine-born physician, who abandoned medicine for Jewish education during his internship at Johns Hopkins Hospital, became the first head of the Kehillah to lead its Jewish education initiative.³

After settling in New York, Benderly reached out to many Jewish young men and women, inviting them to become Jewish innovative educators for the United State Jewry. He created a successful teachers' training program which later became part of the Teacher's Institute where he succeeded in attracting many young men and women to build their careers in Jewish education. Samuel Dinim, one of Benderly's disciples expressed his praise of Benderly as following, "No single man . . . has done as much as Samson Benderly did in attracting young men to careers in Jewish Education."⁴ Benderly's team of workers at the Bureau in the 1910s, included close to hundred full- and part-time educators at it highest.⁵ Jonathan Krasner in his masterpiece on Benderly, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*, notes that "Although, Benderly's earliest disciples included women as well as men, he called them his "boys" . . . and he liked to think of himself as their "Abba," or father."⁶ The "Benderly Boys" or as they also referred to themselves by the more gender-sutras "Bureau bunch," had devoted themselves to a holy mission to bring about a Jewish national and cultural renaissance within the Jewish community in the United States as Krasner calls it an "hyphenated identity."⁷

Benderly is certainly accredited for pioneering and coining the term "American Jewish education" and his groundbreaking efforts for implementing its new ideological outlook has no equal. Famed historian of American Jewry, Jonathan Sarna affirms that their mission was cantered on creating a new educational model of Jewish

² Alexander M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, 100-128.

³ Ibid., 18.

⁴ Samuel Dinim, "Samson Benderly—Educator," *Jewish Education* 20 (Summer 1949): 33-34. See also Israel S. Chipkin, "Dr. Benderly Reminiscence and reflection," *Jewish Education* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1949): 21-23&52.

⁵ Jonathan B. Krasner, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*, (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press), 5.

⁶ Ibid. See also Winter, *Jewish Education in a Pluralistic Society*, 41. In hindsight, perhaps it is fair to assume that Berderly saw himself as Aba/father figure of the entire Jewish people within the United States, by providing Jewish education to all Jewish children, he thus, carried out the collective fatherly Biblical obligation for the father to educate his children as described earlier in chapter two.

⁷ Krasner, *The Benderly Boys*, 5.

education and Jewish identity where “United States Jews can learn how to live in two worlds at once, how to be both American and Jewish, part of the larger American society and apart from it.”⁸

Benderly not only succeeded in creating a revolutionary model for Jewish education in the United States, he also managed to cultivate a group of the most refined professional educators who later helped shape the future of Jewish education in the United States, among them Issac B. Berkson and Mrs. Berkson (formally Libbie Suchoff), Israel S. Chipkin, Rabbi Barnett Brickner and Mrs. Brickner (formally Rebecca Aronson), Samuel Dunin, Alexander M. Dushkin, Emanuel Gamaron, Jacob Golub, Leo Honor, A. P. Solomon, Mordecai Soltes, David Rudavsky and Devorah Lapson, Samuel Citron and many others who have dedicated themselves to the service of implementing a new revolutionary Jewish education in the United States, Dushkin writes.⁹

Unarguably, one of the major influencers of education in the United State at that time was John Dewey (1859-1952), renowned philosopher and educator, founder of the philosophical movement known as pragmatism, a pioneer in functional psychology, and a leader of the progressive movement in education in the United States.¹⁰ Over his lengthy academic career, Dewey has lectured extensively and published hundreds of books, essays on the topic of philosophy and psychology of education. His master workpiece *Democracy and Education*, demonstrates how democracy is more than a form of political orientation, rather, it is a "mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience," has changed the outlook of education in the United States.¹¹

Dewey’s progressive outlook on education had also influenced (directly and indirectly) the agenda and leadership of the REA as evident that the REA was committed to the principles of progressive education by creating a partnership between religious education and secular public education. “With the leadership of the REA, the curriculum and pedagogy of religious education was transformed, in keeping with the progressive tenor of the times.”¹² Schmidt writes “the institutional history of the REA is the story about the movement, religious education,

⁸ Jonathan Sarna, “American Jewish Education in Historical Perspective,” *Jewish Education* 64 (Winter-Spring 1998): 9-10.

⁹ Alexander M. Dushkin, in his essay “The Personality of Samson Benderly, His Life and Influences,” *Jewish Education*, New York, Summer, 1949, 20, No. 3, 10, lists these names.

¹⁰ James S. Gouinlock, “John Dewey, American Philosopher and Educator,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, britannica.com, updated: Oct 16, 2019, accessed Oct., 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Dewey>, last viewed 05/30/19.

¹¹ Irvin Edman, *John Dewey, His Contributions to the American Tradition* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1955), 21.

¹² Penny S. Gold, *Making the Bible Modern: Children’s Bibles and Jewish Education in Twentieth-Century America*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 80.

the spiritual or religious counterpart of progressive education.”¹³ The early founders of the REA, William Rainey Harper, Albert Coe and its first permanent general secretary, Henry Cope shared a “progressive democratic vision” for the association.¹⁴ It is not surprising that at the first REA convention, it was “none other than John Dewey, the father of progressive education,” who delivered his address “Religious Education as Conditioned by Modern Psychology and Pedagogy,” by encouraging his audiences to join the call for a new development within religious education.¹⁵

It is beyond the scope of this research project to analyze the vast work of Dewey in parallel with religious education. However, this article will explore some direct and indirect influences Dewey had on progressive Jewish religious education by exploring the writings of some of the major Jewish educators of that time. It will examine Dewey’s philosophy of education through the lens and works of some of the major Jewish educators of that time like Berkson, Chipkin, Gamaron, Dushkin, etc.

The Impact of John Dewey on Progressive Jewish Education and Jewish Identity Formation in the United States

Dewey left Chicago to New York in 1904 and taught for the majority of his career at Columbia University in New York City.¹⁶ Benderly and his disciples were directly influenced by Dewey’s progressive teachings as almost all of the Benderly boys were taking their continued studies in education at The Teachers College at Columbia University.¹⁷ It is inevitable that they enrolled in Dewey’s courses as part of their required or selective course assignment within their curriculum.

Benderly himself, although not a direct student of Dewey, was much influenced by Dewey’s educational revelations. His openness to the development of a new Jewish educational model with new experimentation, eagerness to examine every new approach and sought every new idea that would help him modernize Jewish education as Dushkin observed was surely of Dewey’s influence.¹⁸ Rebeca Brickner, a close assistance of Benderly

¹³ Schmidt, *A History of Religious Education*, Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵ *Proceedings of the First Annual Convention, The Religious Education Association* (Chicago: REA Office, 1903), 62-64.

¹⁶ Edman, *John Dewey, His Contributions to the American Tradition*, Ibid.

¹⁷ Krasner, *The Benderly Boys*.

¹⁸ Alexander M. Dushkin, “The Personality of Samson Benderly, His Life and Influences,” *Jewish Education* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1949): 7.

in his early days serving as Jewish educator in Baltimore, made direct references how Benderly experimented the innovating educational theories of Dewey at his laboratory school.¹⁹ Also his fond attitude towards the public-school system and preference for Jewish education as supplementary was very much in coherent with Dewey's democratic mindset for a public school education as Krasner called it the 'embryonic community.'²⁰ Penny Shine Gold concurs Dewey's visibility within the Jewish intellectual writings of the time,

Dewey's work on democracy and on the role of education in democracy, is visible throughout the writings of Jewish intellectuals and educators of the whole interwar period, when he was a dominant figure on the American intellectual scene generally. Dewey thus had direct influence on Jewish education as well as the indirect influence he exerted as the leading intact of the time.²¹

Dewey's philosophical principles were key trends within the writings and works of the Jewish educators in the early twentieth century like Berkson, Chipkin, Dinin, Dushkin, Gamaron and Leo Honor.²² Benderly's protege, Isaac B. Berkson (1892-1975), he served as Supervisor of Schools and Extension Activities of the Bureau of Jewish Education and the former co-founder and director of the Central Jewish Institute.²³ The New York Times wrote about Dr. Berkson after his passing, "He was a founder and first director of the Central Jewish Institute. From 1931 to 1935 he was commissioner of Jewish education of the Jewish Agency for Palestine. From 1935 until his retirement in 1970 he taught educational philosophy at City and Dropsie Colleges."²⁴ Berkson expressed his great admiration towards his mentor Dewey in his doctoral thesis *Theories of Americanisation: A Critical Study With Special Reference to the Jewish Group*, at Teachers College, published in 1920. In his list of acknowledgment he foremost asserts his sincere thanks to his teacher Professor John Dewey, "whose inspiration and encouragement led me to undertake the writing."²⁵ He boldly articulated his fondness of Dewey's philosophy and its implication on

¹⁹ Rebeca A. Brickner, "As I Remember Dr. Benderly," *Jewish Education* 20, no. 3 (1949): 56.

²⁰ Krasner, *The Benderly Boys*, 189.

²¹ Gold, *Making The Bible Modern*, 72. See also footnote 117 in chapter 3, in reference to Dewey's works appearing regularly on reading lists for Jewish teachers and conferences.

²² Leo Honor was director of the Chicago Board of Jewish Education, following Dushkin's lead. Earlier, he had served as Registrar for the Teachers' Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He rounded out his career in Jewish education by serving as the Director of the Department of Education at Dropsie College in Philadelphia.

²³ Berkson has dedicated the final chapter Six of his work about the CJIF, where he describes in detail how the CJI as a model of "prove instructive" for an adjustive Americanization. See also Krasner, *Ibid.*, chapter Nine, 237-267 or a historical analysis of the CJI.

²⁴ *The New York Times*, "Dr. Isaac B. Berkson, 83, Ex-Professor of Education" (March 13, 1975).

²⁵ Isaac B. Berkson, *Theories of Americanization: A Critical Study With Special Reference to the Jewish Group* (New York: Teacher College, Columbia University Press, 1920).

Jewish education in his published essay in the *Shvile Ha-hinukh*, a Jewish educational magazine in 1927, "John Dewey's Ideas and Their Implications for Hebrew Education in America."²⁶ For Berkson, like Dewey, the "quintessence of democracy" was the "pluralistic conception of value, truth, and reality."²⁷ The key element in Berkson's theory was when pluralism extends to the level of the individual, with respect for the personality of the individual being a "supreme belief," the "first and fundamental criterion of democracy."²⁸ He describes his community theory of Americanisation as offering "the greatest opportunity for creation of a free, rich and lofty Personality."²⁹ Berkson goes beyond theory by providing a practical model in combining theories of cultural pluralism and Jewish education. He demonstrates how the Jewish supplementary school (in this case the CJI) had a dual function: to maintain and cultivate a Jewish consciousness while also assist in the adjusting process within the United States environment.

Emanuel Gamaron (1896-1962), one of the Benderly boys himself, (who later on became a religious education guru for Reform Judaism in the United States), a master curriculum writer, who spent his entire career as Director of Education for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, had based his doctoral thesis at Columbia University, which was published in two part book, *Changing Conceptions in Jewish Education*, in 1924, on Dewey's educational philosophy.³⁰ He skilfully articulated how Dewey's progressive ideology was essential in forming a new progressive Jewish education. Gamaron as a master curriculumist incorporated Dewey's progressive ideas in shaping a new Jewish curriculum. For Gamaron the goal of Jewish education was always a dual mission of "conservation" of the Jewish tradition and "Adjustment" of Judaism into its surroundings. Gamaron as director of the Commission of Jewish Education, his main task was to create modern Jewish curriculum and educational textbooks for an advanced curriculum. In his curriculum he emphasized the dual goal of Jewish education in the United States: a) to identify the child with the Jewish people by transmitting Jewish values and heritage, and b) to help the child adjust to the social conditions of the new life in the United States by assuring "the continuous and

²⁶ Isaac B. Berkson, *John Dewey's Ideas and Their Implications for Hebrew Education in America*. "Shvile Ha-hinukh, (New York: Hebrew Teachers Association, 1927), pamphlet 1.

²⁷ Berkson, *Theories of Americanization*, 21-21.

²⁸ Ibid., 24, 71.

²⁹ Ibid., 118.

³⁰ He dedicated his first book "To the memory of his father" while the second book was dedicated "To my teacher Mordecai M. Kaplan, a pioneer in the revolution of Jewish values."

progressive socialization of the child into the Jewish group in harmony with the conditions of the new environment.”³¹

Garon in part II of his book, (which was a direct publication of his dissertation at Teachers College,) clearly articulates Dewey’s theory of individualism vs. socialization and the role of integration of the both for the sake of a democratic society. His whole dissertation thesis on the aim of Jewish education in America is based heavily on Dewey’s theory of socialization where he succinctly outlined Dewey’s four guiding principles concerning democracy and education. They are he wrote:

1. Democracy aims at progress in the direction of the continuous growth of the individual and the group.
2. Democracy demands that each individual have an opportunity for self-realization, provided he does not interfere with similar opportunities for others, and that he accept the positive obligation of helping others to attain self-realization.
3. Democracy demands a continuous and progressive sharing of interests amongst the individuals that compose the group.
4. The democratic society makes possible the contribution of each individual to the welfare of mankind in accord with his unique abilities and puts a premium on such variation as is a condition of progress.³²

For Garon “the first basic principle of the democratic idea” is that “progress for democracy also implies movement in the direction of better states of society.” This progress can only be attained when “provisions is made for the fullest continuous growth of each and all.” Garon concludes that this ideal “cannot be described in term of “being” but rather in terms of “becoming.”³³ According to Garon without “continuous and progressive socialization” there cannot be any progress of becoming.³⁴ He further conjuncts the process of “becoming” with Dewey’s five steps of socialization where both the individual and society are impacted via this process of “becoming.”³⁵ Garon saw the role of socialization process within religious life as significant, he quotes from Kaplan, “Religion is an expression of the collective life of the social group, after it has attained a degree of

³¹ Garon, *Changing Conceptions in Jewish Education*, (The MacMillan Company, 1924), 2:68.

³² Ibid, Vol.1, 1 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), 27-28.

³³ Ibid., 2:25.

³⁴ Ibid., 2:33. See Horell, “Revealing the Image of God,” 2016.

³⁵ For the five steps of socialization, see Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 16-17.

consciousness which is analogous to the self-consciousness of the individual.”³⁶ He identified four key conditions and values of American life and present Zeitgeist, in the adjustment of Jewish education: “the criteria of universalization, a scientific outlook on life, a democratic outlook of life and functionalism.”³⁷ His core value was explicitly based on Deweyian outlook of democracy where the “unique abilities of every individual” via the basis of the progress of the social as a whole.³⁸

Dr. Alexander M. Dushkin (1886-1975), who succeeded Benderly in leading the Bureau of Jewish Education until he emigrated to Israel in 1949 to help found the John Dewey School of education in Jerusalem, being the first one to write his doctorate dissertation on the subject of Jewish education at the Teachers Collage was very much influenced by Dewey’s philosophy of education and democracy. His writings are heavily saturated with Dewey’s democratic ideas of socialization. He writes how “the tendencies in Jewish education can be best understood in the light of the two universal ideas which have profoundly affected all of modern life, mainly, Science as a Method, and Democracy as an aim.”³⁹ He further articulates how democracy has affected the aims of Jewish education profoundly and how the “historic struggle” against the parochial school has been governed by the “fundamental need of a democratic state.” For Dushkin this democratic idea was an essential key of survivorship in the United States by “permitting each of its individual citizens to share his interests and experiences with other citizens, outside of his particular group or class, so as to make possible broad and free choice of individual development.”⁴⁰

His seven core elements for creating a centralized mission of Jewish education and outlining “Common Elements of Jewish Education,” which he launched in 1944, and was finalized in 1950, by Dr. Israel Chipkin (1891-1955), also a disciple of Benderly who succeeded Dushkin in leading the Bureau of Jewish Education until his passing, were crafted with a democratic mindset where the voice of the individual and community intergrade in

³⁶ Mordecai M. Kaplan, “What is Judaism?,” *Menorah Journal* 1, no. 5: 316.

³⁷ Gamaron, *Changing Conceptions in Jewish Education*, 2:101.

³⁸ Ibid., 27 with citation to Dewey.

³⁹ Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

creating a democratic society.⁴¹ Dushkin, like his master Dr. Benderly, believed that if Judaism in the United States was to become truly reflective of the principles of a United States democracy, then Jewish educators and Jewish education had to allow Judaism to develop within the spiritual atmosphere of United States democracy by following the basic democratic pattern, that of “diversity within unity.”⁴²

Dushkin’s writings were heavily encrypted with Deweyan philosophy. He presents the following Deweyan outlook for Jewish education:

No single definition of Jewish education will cover the whole field. It may be best, therefore, to define it objectively from various aspects:

1. *Psychologically*, Jewish education is the process of *enriching* the personality of American Jewish children, by transmitting to them the cultural heritage of the Jews, and by tracing them to share in the experiences of the Jewish people, both past and present.
2. *Sociologically*, Jewish education has two meanings:
 - a. It is the *transmission* of group consciousness by Jewish fathers [and community] to their children, so as to preserve Jewish life.
 - b. It is the mental and social *adjustment* of the American Jewish children, so that by preserving the values of their people, they may be able to live the completest, and, at the same time, the most cooperating lives.
3. *Religiously*, Jewish education may be defined as the training of Jewish children to understand and obey the *will of God* as it expressed itself in the history, literature and laws of their people.⁴³

Dushkin and Chipkin alike strongly believed that “the communalization of Jewish educational endeavor means the reorganization of Jewish schools on a democratic basis.”⁴⁴ They were committed to the centralization of Jewish education and have formulated the seven elements on the key question of the time “how to live a Jewish life in the United States?” Benderly, Chipkin, Gamaron, Dushkin and other educators of their generation truly saw the two worlds of the United States and Judaism as homogeneous in the lens of Dewey’s democracy formula.

Kerry M. Olitzky points out how *The Jewish Teacher* magazine, published by the Jewish Teachers' Association, subsidized by the Bureau of Jewish Education in New York, and edited by Dushkin, in its introductory statement of purpose echoed Dewey's philosophy concerning the role of the school in nurturing the societal development of the child—the notion of the school as a miniature community where independent thinking should be fostered:

⁴¹ Minutes of Discussion on Common elements in Jewish Education, (Fall 1944); Records of the Jewish Education Committee; RG 592; Folder 50, JECP, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY. See also Israel S. Chipkin, “*Jewish Life in America: A Discussion of Some Contemporary Problems*” (1950); Records of the Jewish Education Committee; RG 592; Folder #173; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY.

⁴² See Dushkin’s address “*Pirud un Achdut in der Yiddisher Derzieung—Unity and Diversity within Jewish Upbringing.*” (Fall 1945); JECP, YIVO *ibid.*

⁴³ Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

This magazine is to take part in the solution of the fundamental problem in the creation of a wholesome Jewish life in America—the problem of identifying the Jewish child with the Jewish people, of attaching him in loyalty to it, and of effectively transmitting to him its traditions and ideals. Education has probably even meant as much to the preservation of any group life, as Jewish education means at this moment to the continued life of our people. . . . The home and the synagogue, the communal life and the forces of social control, look to the Jewish school for their vitalization and strengthening. The burden of the world's work is being redistricted, and the school, both the secondary and the religious, must be ready to undertake many functions not hitherto assigned to them.⁴⁵

Samuel Dinin, another one of The Benderly boys, (former Registrar at the Teachers' Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, then executive director of the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education, and finally, prior to his retirement, he was Vice President and Professor of Education and history at the University of Judaism,) testifies of the impact of Dewey's philosophy on Jewish education, for Dewey education was a means for the child's development.⁴⁶ Dewey's greatest contribution in the field of education was the evolution that the function of education was to guide the adjustment of the child. Therefore, for Dewey education including its formulation of curriculum and all else must be child centred. The process of curriculum design and development for Dewey was crucial in shaping the minds of our youth for a cultural survival and ethnic pluralism in a democratic United States.⁴⁷ All these educational elements have infiltrated the arena of Jewish education of that time.

Dewey's Jewish students somehow felt at home with his democratic philosophical ideas. Given that Judaism has always been very educationally centred, much of Dewey's philosophical ideas were very much aligned with their ancient Jewish wisdom regarding education. Therefore, it is not surprising why Dewey was so admired by his Jewish students as well. His call that "Education is the laboratory in which philosophical distinctions become concrete and are tested,"⁴⁸ resonated well with their old Jewish tradition of rabbinic Judaism where the Yeshivah and Beth Midrash was a laboratory for experimentation of the ancient texts and dogmas. His main principle: "Education is life, and not a preparation for life," where the school became a "school of life." Hence, the Jewish school became a "school of Jewish life," in theory, was aligned with their traditional mindset that Jewish education always was and is a source of life for the Jewish people. While in practice, the Jewish school, "strict book learning" was to be coupled with an emphasis on deeds and performance (*mitzvot*). As Samuel M. Blumenfield, (also a Benderly boy),

⁴⁵ The Jewish Teacher I (1916): 1. See Kerry. M. Orlitzky, "The Impact of John Dewey on Jewish Education," *Religious Education* 81, no. 1 (1986): 5-18.

⁴⁶ Samuel Dinin, "The Influence of John Dewey on Some Pioneer Jewish Educators," *Jewish Education* 48 (Spring 1980): 6-7.

⁴⁷ For a complete presentation of Dewey's child-centered curriculum, see John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900).

⁴⁸ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 384.

pointed out how Dewey placed emphasis upon the "deed" rather than the "word," the "experience" rather than the "concept."⁴⁹ This notion of deed vs. word was also deeply rooted in the ancient rabbinic philosophical conundrum recorded in the Talmud the following incident:

Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were reclining in the loft of the house of Nit'za in Lod, when this question was asked of them: Is study greater or is action greater? Rabbi Tarfon answered and said: Action is greater. Rabbi Akiva answered and said: Study is greater. Everyone answered and said: Study is greater, but not as an independent value; rather, it is greater as study leads to action.⁵⁰

Dewey's evolution that the child is at the center of the educational process, is rooted within rabbinic literature as well. As the Talmud states, that the student should be given the freedom to choose the subject and place of study, "But his delight is in the Torah of the Lord" (Psalms 1:2). Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, (Juda the Prince), says: A person can learn Torah only from a place in the Torah that his heart desires, as it is stated: But his delight is in the Torah of the Lord, i.e., his delight is in the part of the Torah that he wishes to study."⁵¹ Dewey also brought about changes in the school in regard to its relationship with its students. Dewey realized that the student did not come to the educational environment as a *tabula rosa*. She or he already had a shaped personality and the school had a responsibility to respond to it through its curriculum. Judaism has a long tradition in encouraging dialogue and questioning the meaning of its secret texts and interpreting them with accordance to the frame mind of the student and current times. This sentiment is best expressed in the following passage of the Talmud:

Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said: Why are Torah matters likened to a tree, as it is stated: "It is a tree of life to them who lay hold upon it" (Proverbs 3:18)? This verse comes to tell you that just as a small piece of wood can ignite a large piece, so too, minor Torah scholars can sharpen great Torah scholars and enable them to advance in their studies. And this is what Rabbi Hanina said: I have learned much from my teachers and even more from my friends, but from my students I have learned more than from all of them.⁵²

Dewey has helped his Jewish students formulate their ancient Jewish wisdom and tradition regarding education into methods of theory of practice. Gold points out that Dewey's outlook on education has guided Jewish educators to place greater emphasis on the development of the formation of the identity of the student. Where in traditional Jewish education, one's Jewish identity could be taken for granted as the emphasis was mainly on the

⁴⁹ Samuel M. Blumenfield, "John Dewey and Jewish Education," *The Chicago Jewish Forum* 8 (n.d.): 2. (Reprint.) See also Nathan Drazin, *History of Jewish Education from 515 BCE - 220 CE* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), 143-147. However, scholars like Barry Chazan, suggest that since Jewish education is textually-based, it is contradictory to Dewey's experiential base. Ronald Kronish, "The Influence of John Dewey on Jewish Education," *Conservative Judaism* 30 (Winter 1976), published by the rabbinical Assembly and The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York: NY, 56.

⁵⁰ TB, Kiddushin 40b.

⁵¹ BT, Avoda Zara 19b.

⁵² TB, Taanit 7a. In Makkot 10a, it is quoted in name of Ravina.

sacred texts. In addition, much attention has been added, due to Dewey's influence, on the shaping and "character building" within Jewish education.⁵³

Irvin Edman points out that, "virtually all of Dewey's Jewish advocates rejected his position concerning God. Dewey was a rationalist and a naturalist. Thus, he rejected the traditional religious notions of deity, as found in Judaism. With the exception of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan who attempted to adopt Dewey's naturalism in his own philosophy of reconstructionism. In Kaplan's form, naturalism became palatable for some Jewish educators. Nevertheless, John Dewey assured them in *Democracy and Education* that philosophical differences only matter when they differ in educational practice."⁵⁴ Moreover, Dewey's bold embrace of Zionist nationalism, in his only published essay in the *Menorah* magazine in 1917, a renowned Jewish publication for college students at that time, sat well with his pro-Zionist students who were seeking to give Zionism credence in a democratic environment of the United States, and it surely earned him great popularity among his Zionist followers. He wrote "there is of each nationality, its right to its own language, its own literature, its own ideals, its moral and spiritual outlook on the world, its complete religious freedom, and such political autonomy as may be consistent with the maintenance of general social unity."⁵⁵ He openly affirmed the right of each individual group to cultivate its own individuality, Dewey went as far as to say:

The cause of Zionism has great claims upon those who are interested in the future organization of the peaceful intercourse of nations because it not only guarantees freedom of cultural development in that particular spot in which the new nation is formed, but because it gives a leverage for procuring and developing cultural nationality in all the other countries which harbor within themselves large numbers of the Jewish folk. Moreover, the Zionistic state would stand forth to the world as an inspiring symbol of victory against great odds, against seemingly insuperable odds, of the rights of nationality to itself.⁵⁶

Jewish progressive educators in the early twentieth century were committed to Dewey's democratic values. Therefore, they foresaw the supplementary school for Jewish education as the main solution for a democratic society

⁵³ Gold, *Making the Bible Modern*, 87-90. See Emanuel Gamaron, "The Jewish Curriculum and Character Education," 29 (1934, 138), 38, S. Wolk, "Character Education in the Synagogue," *RE* 24 (1929), 818.

⁵⁴ Edman, *John Dewey, His Contributions to the American Tradition*, 22-23. For an analysis of Dewey's concept of God, not directly relevant to his educational philosophy but nevertheless important, see Yochanan Muffs, "Dewey on Religion", *Conservative Judaism* 30 (Winter 1976), published by the rabbinical Assembly and The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York: NY: 40-43. Faith is articulated, on the other hand, by Dewey as an expression of identity. See John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), 126.

⁵⁵ John Dewey, "The Principle of Nationality," *The Menorah Journal* (October 1917): 205.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 207-208.

and were oppositional to the parochial system developed by the Catholics.⁵⁷ As Gold points out how “the Catholic system was considered antidemocratic because of its commitment to separatism, which, along with the hierarchical authority structure of the Church, reinforced a perception of the Catholic Church as inconsistent with democratic institutions.”⁵⁸ The progressive Jews unlike the Catholics and their Orthodox Jewish brothers, have attempted to distanced themselves from being viewed as separatists in any shape or form.⁵⁹

Although, all the above highlights the positive influence Dewey had on Jewish education, some scholars like Walter Ackerman, looking back on the early years of Jewish education in the United States, lamented the shift of the focus of the Jewish supplementary school. He saw it as resulting in the “denigration of the intellectual effort and capability required for a true understanding of Judaism.”⁶⁰ He took a more critical stance explaining the obsession with Dewey’s philosophy among his progressive followers by suggesting that Dewey offered them legitimacy, in assimilating into their new environment. However, this researcher prefers to take a more optimistic view, wherein Dewey’s integrative theory where the individual and the community are in constant interplay with each other, resonates with the ancient Jewish concept of K’lal Yisrael, a common classical and medieval Jewish moral terminology, meaning the catholic Israel, coined later by Kaplan in 1942, as “Jewish Peoplehood.” Where the collective community must share with the burden of the individual and how each individual participates in forming the larger collective community. Therefore, it is no surprise why Dewey found much popularity among his Jewish followers.

Finally, and most crucially, Dewey’s democratic ideas called for an adjustment in a democratic society while at the same time giving voice to the individual. Dewey advocated for democracy not simply as a political structure, but as a way of life.⁶¹ According to Dewey, the goal of democratic life was to provide the conditions for the self-realization of all individuals in a society, making equality of opportunity central. Interactivity of

⁵⁷ Dewey’s outspoken attitude in support for the Public School System has alienated many of the Catholics authorities and their many followers. See Mark S. Massa, S.J. *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 59, for further reference on Dewey’s open opposition to Catholicism.

⁵⁸ Gold, *Making the Bible Modern*, 77.

⁵⁹ For a summary of Berkson’s view on parochial education as antidemocratic, see Arthur Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community, the Kehillah Experiment, 1908-1922* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 122-123. See also Walter Ackerman, “The Americanization of Jewish Education,” *Judaism* 24 (1975), 423, reprinted in *JEFW*, 109-113, on the concern to protect the Jewish community from accusations of separatism or disloyalty.

⁶⁰ Ackerman, *ibid*. See also Krasner, *The benderly Boys*, 10.

⁶¹ Gold, *Making the Bible Modern*, 73.

“Community” and “individuality” was the key ingredient for a democratic society for Dewey. These sentiments were very comforting for the newly immigrants in general and especially to his Jewish students who were very concerned how to adjust to the United States cultural lifestyle while at the time to be able to hold on to their old traditions. Dewey wrote in 1917, “The theory of the Melting Pot always gave me pang. To maintain that all constituent elements, geographical, racial, and cultural in the United States should be put in the same pot and turned into a uniform and unchanging product is distasteful.”⁶² These words hit core with his Jewish followers who desired that diversity of cultures within the United States democracy be developed just as the diverse individuals within a society should have the opportunity to develop in a variety of ways.⁶³ Dewey’s Jewish students and advocates were mostly traditional Jews themselves, they were eager to adjust to the new United States life while staying committed to their traditional roots. Therefore, Dewey’s ideas felt very much suiting for them.⁶⁴

Whatever the reason may be behind Dewey’s popularity among his Jewish fans and advocates, was it because they felt his ideas were closer to home for them or they viewed his philosophy compatible with their old biblical and rabbinic traditions, or perhaps his progressive philosophy was supportive with their assimilating agenda? Nevertheless, Dewey unequivocally has impacted Jewish education curricula, many Jewish educators, Jewish identity, and has shown the way for a new philosophy of progressive Jewish education and curriculum. He undoubtedly influenced many Jewish educators of his time.

Conclusion

During the early twentieth century in the United States, much effort was placed into reshaping religious education within the Christian and Jewish community in the United States, especially in New York City. This article is an in-depth study how John Dewey the “maker of American Tradition,” left an indelible imprint on religious education. His emphasis on the interrelationship of child and community was essential for the dynamics of democratic educational development of the individual and community at large. Furthermore, this article argues that Dewey inevitably very much influenced Jewish religious education. According to Dewey’s community theory of

⁶² Dewey, “Principles of Nationality,” 206. This (secular) journal was founded by Jewish students at Harvard in 1915.

⁶³ See Horace Kallen “Democracy versus the Melting-Pot,” *Nation* 100 (February 1915): 192 where he criticizes Jews like Israel Zangwill who supported the notion of a “Melting-Pot.” Zangwill’s play “The Melting Pot” made its’ primer edition in 1908.

⁶⁴ Most of these students were immigrants themselves, Gamaron was born in Belz, Galicia, in 1895 and emigrated to the U.S. in 1907. Kaplan was born in 1881 in Svencionys, Lithuania, and immigrated at the age of nine, Dinin was born in Russia in 1902, Dushkin was born in Poland in 1890 and came to the U.S. in 1901, Honor was born in Russia in 1894, and Chipkin was born in Vilna in 1891 and immigrated to the U.S. the following year. See Gold, *Ibid.*, footnote 92 in chapter 3.

Americanization, both communities, American and Jewish, would interact. Together they could provide the optimal arena for development of the individual and his/her community. Jewish education derived its life force from both Jewish experience and the American experience. With the imprint of Dewey's ideas, his Jewish students and advocates were able to implement a sound system for a new progressive Jewish education, curriculum and Jewish identity in the United States. Dushkin and Chipkin united in pioneering seven core common elements of Jewish education for a centralized Jewish education.

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Gratitude: Forebears and Future Bearers

Abstract:

The paper focuses on gratitude as a way to honor dignity and build a flourishing future. Our world is marked by war, global warming, pandemic, racial injustice, and wanton destruction of peoples and lands, all supported by worldviews and patterns of living that emphasize human gain and undermine compassion. What is missing is appreciation for the sanctity of all creation. Becoming a good ancestor is grounded in gratitude for God, for our forebears, for their resilience, and for the future. This paper invites self- and community-reflection through poetry, theological analyses of gratitude, and projections of a legacy for future generations.

Birthdays at 30, 40, 50, 60 are often moments to reflect on your past and make new decisions. Similarly, retirement is for me an invitation for life review, asking myself questions of whether and how my life has contributed to goodness, who have been guarantors and inspirations in my life journey, what lands and waters and creatures have shaped me, and what do I leave for future generations? I am grateful for a life filled with good memories in a loving family with good friends and many opportunities and adventures. My birth family was generous with love and attention, with protections and opportunities to grow and thrive. Our relationships were complex, but even the hardest days and years and my deepest struggles with self-doubt were held within a steady web of support. Throughout my life, I have been mostly loved and encouraged, albeit in some complicated and often discriminatory ways. Many people are not so fortunate, growing up in families burdened with oppression, physical and economic hardships, and intergenerational trauma, and often bearing the harsh consequences of their family and community histories. For most people, including me, life is a strange mix of beneficent, malevolent, and resilient forces, helping us become the people we are.

Every life aches with loss, sometimes inconceivable, horrible loss, as in recent deadly shootings and global wars: the shootings of people shopping for groceries in Buffalo, New York, and of children and teachers in Uvalde, Texas, and the warring in Ukraine with its still-rising death toll of thousands of Ukrainians and Russians. For gratitude to have meaning, it must relate to these horrors and to the people and communities whose lives have been permanently marked by mass murder, war, and other tragedies. How can anyone express gratitude in a time of devastation for people who have been killed, their families and friends, and the millions who feel more vulnerable than ever before? How can one express gratitude in a time when racist ideologies and socially-fed hatred motivate shooters, as in Buffalo, and demands for power motivate wars on every continent? I cannot answer that question, except to recognize that the experience of loss itself is an awareness of something precious being destroyed. I can also reflect on the funerals and memorials of people who have died, which have themselves been

expressions of gratitude. The victims are remembered for the tragedy of their lives cut short, and they are also remembered as persons who were generous, joyful, kind, funny, wise, or loving. Tragedy and gratitude intensify one another.

Gratitude is a gift that rises in the hardest of times, and we have the option to claim and build upon it. Only in the last half of my life have I begun to learn the importance of gratitude, writing about it in my poetry of the 1980s and 90s, but not in academic work until the 2000s (Moore 2004). I increasingly learn that gratitude is a posture shaped by decisions more than circumstances.

A Proposition

In this essay of prose and poetry, I offer a proposition – *that the postures and practices of gratitude are pathways for honoring the dignity of our forebears (human ancestors, lands, and creatures) and for building a future in which our children and grandchildren, together with the earth, can thrive*. Gratitude is the kind of path that you clear and build as you travel on it. The current world situation is heartbreaking in the face of war, irreversible global warming, a persisting pandemic, racial and economic injustice, resource depletion, and wanton destruction of peoples and lands. These realities are supported by worldviews and patterns of living that emphasize human gain and power over others, both of which undermine spiritual deepening and compassion. *Becoming a good ancestor is grounded in gratitude for God, for those people and trees and mountains who have gone before, and for all who will come in the future*. With that awareness, this paper is far-reaching in scope. It is also personal for me as I ask how I can give thanks for my own forebears while recognizing their sorrows and failures, and how I can leave a loving, hopeful, and faithful legacy for my children and grandchildren.

Giving thanks is a cluster of practices that awakens persons to Holy presence in all of God's creation – the sacred in every tree and leaf, every rock and mountain, every drop of water and gust of wind, every created being. Many ecologists and indigenous peoples have underscored gratitude as a vital human practice (Kimmerer 2013; Wohlleben 2021), as have healers such as Resmaa Makema (2017) who sees the healing potential of gratitude and engagement with memory, including persistent painful memory. Many have also written on compassion and dignity with attention to practices of gratitude (Oord 2022; Rogers 2015, 2016; Thich Nhat Hanh 2015; Sporre 2015). The potential of gratitude to foster genuine care for the dignity of every being and to empower people in repairing our broken world is momentous.

Invitation to a Workshop and Existential Research

I offer the paper in the form of a workshop, inviting people into a posture of gratitude. The flow could be adapted for workshop/seminar settings; personal reflection; and schools and faith communities in which people engage in existential reflection (spiritual, personal, and social). The essay alternates between presentations and invitations for reflection. The purpose is to inspire brave journeys, engaging multiple ways of knowing in looking back on the past and

forward into the future, while recognizing the enormous losses, strengths, and failures of our forebears and ourselves.

My approach is existential, including self- and communal-reflection and expression. Such a method stretches the boundaries of “research” to name existential reflection and expression as research practices. The approach is not new in religious education, but I emphasize here the power of this form of research to open doors to knowing that are not opened as readily through many other approaches; it is an approach that can communicate depths of feeling that are more difficult to communicate in technical language. The method of the essay also embraces more traditional forms of analysis; thus, the approach is not an either/or, but a combination of reflection, creative expression, analysis, and future projections.

In the particularity of this paper, I integrate self-reflection through poetry, theological analyses of gratitude, and hope-filled projections of a legacy for future generations. I will highlight four major aspects of gratitude: appreciation for God, ancestors, resilience, and new generations. The actual poetry draws upon my unique reflections and expressions, but the purpose is to invite readers to reflect on the depths and practices of your lives, communities, and ancestors, and hopefully to discern and embrace the power of gratitude.

Gratitude for Movements of God

In theistic religious traditions, the primal expression of gratitude is for movements of the Holy in creation, visible and invisible, flowing through the most joyful and most difficult situations. Gratitude (or praise) is foundational in most of these traditions, both as a natural outflowing of meditation on the magnanimous work of the Holy and as a way of life. Through meditation, study, contemplation, and prayer, people center on the Holy and draw from the riches of their religious traditions and those of others, thus opening doors into gratitude. These riches are the legacy left to us by our ancestors, whether ancient or present still today. They echo in the words of Genesis 1 in which God declares the goodness of creation seven times.

In Jewish tradition, the Hebrew word for Jewish people is *Yehudim*, which derives from Judah (*Yehuda*), which derives from the Hebrew word *yadah*, meaning to give thanks. Gratitude is foundational to Jewish identity and life practices. In Christian tradition, the theme of gratitude derives largely from Judaism. It is echoed in Mary’s Magnificat, “‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant’” (Luke 1:46-48a, NRSV). Mary expresses gratitude for God’s movements in her life and that of her people (46-55), as in “‘[God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever’” (52-55). Mary’s song proclaims that the works of God are good, even as creation is permeated with the losses of birth and death, and with injustices that need to be righted again and again – injustices marked by dominating power, hunger, and unequal distribution of wealth.

Gratitude sometimes flows naturally, but it is also a discipline and action. Thus, the legacy of religious communities includes practices of thankfulness. Jewish morning prayers, or

Modah Ani, open with giving thanks to God for a new day and for God's faithfulness. The practice of gratitude is a formational practice, grounded in *hakarat hatov*, the Hebrew word for gratitude, which is commonly translated as recognizing the good or discerning blessings, even in the worst situations. Similarly, the legacy of Islam includes the command to be thankful, which includes a posture of thankfulness within oneself as well as the expression of thankfulness in word and deed, all of which requires effort and spiritual intentionality. The Qur'an opens with the word *Alhamdulillah*, which translates as "all praise is for Allah," which is to be repeated throughout each day, but in a way that expresses true acceptance and belief in good times and bad. The emphasis on giving thanks to Allah permeates the whole of the Qur'an (as in 14:34; 16:53; 17:44; 25:62; 26:78-85; 31:12, 31; 35:12; 51:55; 55). Many references express the commandment nature of gratitude, as in: "It is God who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful" (Qur'an 16:78). We see in these multiple references the richness of our religious legacies. The emphasis on gratitude also permeates non-theistic religions. For example, the understandings and practices of compassion meditation in Buddhism are pathways to gratitude (Thich Nhat Hanh 2015), which speak to the greater-than-life in non-theistic forms.

Literature is one of the places where the legacy of gratitude for God comes forth in abundance. Alice Walker describes the "core teaching" of her novel *The Color Purple* as a quote from Shug: "'I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found It'" (Walker 2011, 1982, 14, 180, ebook). Shug's eloquent appreciation for the godness of creation permeates the book, even in the midst of extreme hardship; happiness flows from that sense of God moving in everything. Alice Walker's journal also includes many references to gratitude, as when she concludes a journal entry on August 15, 1990, with "Thank you, Great Spirit of the Universe, for the beauty that is ever in my life" (Walker 2022, 251-252, ebook). In other entries, she addresses the Holy as "Great Beauty" (267) or "Great Goodness of Life" (360), and, throughout her journal, she gives thanks for people, rain, birds, her life and work, healing, a good day, and so much more. Giving thanks to Great Spirit or Great Beauty is endemic to her life.

Many expressions of gratitude flow through the writings of spiritual leaders. In one of his poetic writings, Thomas Merton described dogwood flowers, leaves, lakes, and seas as saints, reflecting and praising God. He concluded the poem with: "The great, gashed, half-naked mountain is another of God's saints. There is no other like him. He is alone in his own character; nothing else in the world ever did or ever will imitate God in quite the same way. That is his sanctity" (Merton 2007, 31). For Merton, the creation praises God by being itself, with each part being its unique self. He describes this as the sanctity of creation. Such praise is a form of thanksgiving – reflecting, appreciating, and extolling God.

Our legacies are ancient in origins and still arising. In this "workshop," I invite you to focus on your unique legacies, born of the ancients and continuing to emerge in your lives and those of your people. I turn now to a few of my poems that express gratitude for movements of God, and the wonder evoked as appreciation explodes in the senses. The poems are born from my inheritance and continuing experiences of God and the world. They are also a legacy for new generations of today and yet to come. I invite you as a reader to receive them as an invitation to reflect on the unique inheritance and experiences of the Holy in your life.

Wandering Wide and Wondering Deep

Come wander with me,
and wonder in the Holy
mysteries of Life.

Sacrament of Creation

Infused with Presence,
earth is Holy Sacrament
of God's love and grace.

Sun and Soul

Sundrops sparkle on the surface of the sea
dancing with abandon
seeping into crevices of my searching soul
touching depths that slumber,
stirring delight so long buried,
waking me to the sparkling universe
and its dancing Creator.
Bless the lord, oh my soul!

Primal Wonder

In the beginning,
primal wonder stirs within
and prayer begins.

Opening the Soul

In luminous stars
and fields of peaches and peas,
rocky canyon walls,
mountain streams,
schools of tuna
swimming in the sea,
pods of whales,
a robin's nest above our door,
the numinous beckons
to my soul.

Whether in personal meditation or in a workshop setting, I invite you to take time to reflect. What is stirred in you about *your* inheritance and experiences in relation to the Holy? When have you experienced a profound moment of wonder or thankfulness? When and how have you practiced gratitude with intentionality, and what different responses have emerged in you as you engage in these practices? These are questions that can guide your educational practice, and you will have others to add as you lead others and yourself to ever-deeper experiences of gratitude.

Gratitude for Ancestors

Another significant form of gratitude is thankfulness for ancestors – people, lands, waters, and creatures of every kind. We see this spirit in Jennifer Ayers, who begins her book on ecological religious education with memories of her father and places that have been dear to her family (Ayers 2019, 14-15). She understands that such deep relationships are the source of inhabitation, or the vocation of living well in and with creation.

To speak of gratitude is not to ignore the difficult and traumatic heritage that we receive from our ancestors, or the rough experiences of each passing year. Howard Thurman wrote *Jesus and the Disinherited* for “people who have their backs against the wall” (Thurman 2022, 1976, 18). He was particularly concerned about what “the teachings and the life of Jesus have to say to...the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed” (20-21). He sought to disentangle the Jesus proclaimed by privileged and powerful people from the Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus who stood with those who are disinherited from the goodness of their legacies. Thurman thus honored the ancestry of Jesus and the ancestry of his African American people, who lived with the ravages of racism.

The practice of recovering ancestry passes on an honest history of struggle and strength; it teaches new generations that they are valued, and that Jesus points a way for them. Howard Thurman continued this emphasis in his daily and yearly life of spiritual practice, often recalling the “ancestors” (my word) with whom he continued to interact. In one of his meditations at year’s end, he expresses appreciation for his encounters of the closing year, even the most distressing ones: “I remember the moments of distress that proved to be groundless and those that taught me profoundly about the evilness of evil and the goodness of good” (Thurman 1981, 1953, 195). His remembering is akin to the Jewish idea of gratitude as recognizing the good. Ancestors teach in many ways.

The very act of giving thanks to ancestors requires practices of taking time and attending. Robin Wall Kimmerer stresses the gifts of her ancestors as she narrates stories of her people and their relation to pecan trees, waters, and black ash. In that writing, she speaks eloquently of gratitude, beginning with the dance of Skywoman on the Turtle’s back to create the earth, “Not by Skywoman alone, but from the alchemy of all the animals’ gifts coupled with her deep gratitude” (Kimmerer 2013, 16). The gratitude expressed in this Potawatomi origins story shapes the way Potawatomi people live. Kimmerer accents this in all her writing: “When we braid sweetgrass, we are braiding the hair of Mother Earth, showing her our loving attention, our care for her beauty and well-being, in gratitude for all she has given us” (17). She expands on

gratitude in her narration of wild strawberries, the gratitude they invoke and the reciprocity they inspire (34-44). The gifts of the earth inspire generosity – thanksgiving and gift-giving with other people and the earth itself. Kimmerer recognizes, however, that such a relationship depends on a human perspective that “makes the world a gift” (42). Our perspectives shape our orientation and ability to give thanks and live in reciprocity, or mutual care. Sherri Mitchell, of the Penobscot people in Maine, offers similar themes as she shares “sacred instructions” of the Penobscot elders who reared her and have encouraged her to share their wisdom with others. Mitchell awakens readers to the “voice of creation” that vibrates in their lives and guides their actions in the world (Mitchell 2018, 21-22). For her and her people, attunement is the way “we will heal the wounds of our shared history and form a more humane pathway forward” (23).

For ecological activists and authors, gratitude runs deep as they give close attention to ancestors in the non-human natural world. One of many examples is Peter Wohlleben’s (2021) appreciative and detailed attention to trees. Many ecological authors write of gratitude as a duty. Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael Nelson describe “our duties of gratitude and reciprocity” as we relate with Earth’s gifts, “freely given – rain, sun, fresh air, rich soil, all the abundance that nourishes our lives and spirits” (Moore and Nelson 2010, 130). They see gratitude as the basis of our caring for future generations: “gratitude for our abundant gifts is the root of our moral obligation to the future to avert the coming environmental calamities and leave a world as rich in possibilities as the world that has been given to us” (ibid.). Gratitude for ancestors of all kinds is at the heart of our ability to live toward the common good. At its best, gratitude embraces the complexities of our ancestors’ lives and our relations with them. It embraces their pain, destructive pasts, wisdom, joy, and much more. These complexities teach us; they help us understand and live in the world with more hope. I turn now to meditations on my ancestors.

Little River

You are my ancestor
as you flow through countless centuries,
carving a path through mighty mountains,
bearing waters of life for thousands
of tiny creatures, catfish, and the flashy
rainbow trout and redeye bass.

You are my ancestor,
welcoming me to play for hours
in your cold currents, plunging
beneath your shining brown surface and
swimming with grace
in your gentle flow.

You are my ancestor,
carrying me as I paddled for miles,
listening to your ripples,
the swish of our paddles,

and the pure joy of traveling in
and against and with your currents,
feeling your movements and mine.

Mama, Do You Remember?

In my earliest memory,
I stood by you as you hung
the wash with wooden pins
on the line beside our home,
where white sheets waved
in thick Louisiana air.
I still see little me
watching, helping, feeling warm.

Mama, do you remember
our summer trips to the Gulf,
living a week in Biloxi
in a small motel,
filling a cooler each day
with tuna fish, oranges,
saltine crackers – yummy lunch
beneath a big umbrella on the sand?

Do you remember when we
flew to the Arizona desert,
years after, on your 50th anniversary,
four years to the day after Daddy died?

I remember it all.

Why do I so often recall
your disappointment in me,
your regret that I was shyer
and far less a lady
than you had hoped?

Beneath a clothesline,
on the beach, in the desert,
you were awash with love,
and I soaked in it.

Patches of Memory

I remember coming home
to tell Mary about my day,
to hear her laughter,
rumbling deep in her throat and
bursting the kitchen quiet.

I remember Mary's stories
of people she knew – black and white,
caught always in awkward settings,
her stories punctuated as we
collapsed in simmering giggles.

I remember Mary calling me Mary Susie
and telling me how lazy I was
when she took me for walks.

I remember the window beside my bed
and how frightened I was
when I awoke from a nightmare
beside that window.

I remember growing a garden in pre-school
and dancing in big circles outside,
until my teacher
took Mother aside, urging
that I skip kindergarten and go
straight to first grade.
Mother was pleased,
but I was a little scared.

I remember sitting in my small
first grade desk as Miss Georgia Jones
walked by, reading our work
with sharp, gentle eyes,
smiling words of praise.

I remember climbing down the railway cliff
in the back of our yard,
picking and eating blackberries all the way down.
On the way back up, I picked blackberries
for our supper, but never enough
for a blackberry pie.

Women Swaying

"The journey is home."

Nelle Morton (1986)

To the Walking, Singing, Dancing God, we pray—
come walk with us as we journey with passion,
come sing with us as passion turns to song,
come dance in the rhythms of compassion
as we listen to the music of our hearts,
music of your Spirit,
music of our foremothers,
sisters and siblings,
music of the ages,
music that can heal
our souls and bodies,
and all our tomorrows!

God, bless this journey,
it is our home!

I invite you now into meditation on your ancestors. Who are the people who have shaped your life? What have been their gifts to you? What legacies of struggle or trauma have they passed to you? What other aspects of creation are ancestors to you? What religious ancestry shapes you, and how? What ancestral qualities do you see in yourself, and how can you select and offer these qualities to future generations? These questions point to an educational one: How might you lead others in gratitude and honest wrestling with the heritage of their ancestors?

Gratitude for Resilience

Our ancestors' legacies are often filled with harshness, struggle, and trauma, so their legacies are fraught and complicated. Even within the harshness, however, one can usually find nuggets of strength, resistance, and resilience, or at least warnings of trouble that we need to be alert to avoid. To engage with our ancestors is to face as much of their heritage as is available to us. As a white, European-American who grew up in the southern United States, my family benefitted from slavery, and from claims of white superiority, even in the poorest parts of my family. I can hardly claim resilience when my own ancestors persecuted others. Burdened by that history, I can see the resilience of others more readily than that of my ancestors. On the other hand, I know that family violence and alcoholism are part of my inheritance, as well as struggles against racism and classism by many of my forebears. I know my grandfather had to support his mother and siblings as a young teenager after his father died. He was left to run their small farm and find ways to make enough money to keep the family alive. Another family member had to escape her husband due to violence. I have ancestors who endured extreme hardships and still made their way through it to ensure a better life for their families. Such tales of resilience evoke gratitude and fortitude; they give assurance that resilience is possible, and that resilience can

contribute to the care of future generations and even, with honest engagement, to a more just social order.

Resilience is the capacity to face legacies of suffering and injustice honestly, and to make a path toward recovery in some form. Resilience emerges from forthrightly facing the horrors that our ancestors endured and/or perpetuated, together with searching for another path toward survival and wellbeing. Resilience is the reminder that suffering and ill treatment are not the last word, but that generational trauma may undergo healing over time. Resmaa Makema makes this point boldly when he addresses the trauma held in bodies of African American people, a trauma that spans and recurs through many generations. He insists that this “bloodline of trauma” is not a sign of defect, but rather “it means just the opposite: something happened to us, something we can heal from. We survived because of our resilience, which was also passed down from one generation to the next” (Makema 2017, 33). He seeks to identify practices that build resilience and then to help people utilize the practices “to recognize the trauma in our own bodies; to touch it, heal it, and grow out of it” (ibid.). He also recognizes that people have inherent resilience that they can tap in the healing process (41). Such healing is needed for all bodies, though he focuses largely on the generational trauma and healing of black and white bodies.

Resilience means that we are not the eternal victims of our ancestors’ or our own sufferings and oppression, nor of the sufferings and oppression we have imposed on others. The legacy of oppressing or being oppressed cannot be blotted out, but the legacy can be transformed over time and through the efforts of many generations. Further, resilience can take many forms, including personal, interpersonal, communal, and societal forms. With this background, I share some of the legacy of resilience that I have received and for which I am grateful.

She Was a Victim

of violence,
a burden she passed
invisibly
to her daughter, who
carried it in her bones
with frightening
feelings of loss.

My great grandmother
was a victim who escaped,
though not unscathed,
a recovering victim,
carried by
determined hope
for herself and her child.

I Confess

Growing up with Mary shaped me
as a person far more sensitive
than I would otherwise have been,
a person who could love and giggle,
and dash to bed
when my parents came home early.

I thought Mary's race
was less than mine,
though I always knew
she was better than me.

The racist structures
we enacted were strengthened
by my family's participation.
I did not condemn
those structures with anything more
than a few probing questions
for a few minutes at a time.

White supremacy
shaped me in my very own home,
even as I whole-heartedly loved Mary
and was powerfully shaped by her love
and by the deep Black culture
she taught me to value
as if it were my own.

My white supremacism
emerged in the same childhood
that taught me to critique it,

slowly, ever so slowly
in early years, but bursting
ever more boldly as I grew,

though I have not
and never will
be free of its taint,
even as I never will
stop trying.

She Was a Little Different

Since she was a child, she was loved
and misunderstood,
defying categories used by others to
“know” people – with words like
average, smart, gentle, gifted.

She was unique, a child
of courage, carving
a path through childhood, using
huge energy to accomplish common tasks
or relate in ways that others
would welcome as “normal.”

She was scorned by adults,
bullied by children and teens,
targeted by scam artists, yet
fiercely determined to fit in,
be accepted, have a friend,
feel worthy. Many avoided her
or spoke a terse greeting
as they passed her by to visit with others.

Sometimes being on the edges
was more than she could take, and sometimes
she made a path to peace within herself,
always with courage. She was far more
than a label, but she carried
many labels on her strong shoulders.

How much others missed by not knowing her,
the goodness hidden by awkward social skills,
the deep hurts and wide-eyed hopes that
made her life real and beautiful.

Why Do I Try?

“You try too hard,”
said my high school teacher
as she circled the room,
telling each student
their major flaw.

A brilliant teacher,
she stretched our minds,
stirred imagination, even as she
spared encouraging words.
With me, she seemed to have a mission,
to help me know the limits
of my mind.

She spoke with me as we neared the end,
sharing her plan to average my As to B
for the final term, so I wouldn't expect
all As in college.
Perhaps she did not know that
grades were never my goal.
I simply loved to learn.

She told our class the graduation plans.
We would not choose a "Most Intellectual"
because we had no idea
who among us was intelligent.
She offered "Most Studious" instead,
a dubious honor that went to me
when my friend broke down in tears
to think that people might choose her
for this insulting honor. The same teacher
chose not to print "Valedictorian"
in our graduation program or speak the word,
though I was allowed to read a few lines.

Was she unaware that I already knew
the limits of my wits? Already knew
I was not smart, not worthy?

So here I am in retirement
writing a book of poetry,
knowing that I am still
not smart, not worthy. Why do I try?
The passion within is
too strong to ignore.
But it may be nothing more
than a character flaw:
I try too hard.

Gratitude for resilience requires reflection on your struggles and those of your people,
small and large. Thus, I invite you to reflect on the struggles and signs of resilience in your own
life and that of your ancestors. What stories have been passed down about your ancestors as they

struggled and sought paths toward some form of recovery over time? Recall a hardship in your own life that cried out for resilience; could you see signs of resilience then and now? As you journey into the future, what forms of resilience do you hope to develop?

Gratitude for New Generations

The final focus of gratitude is for new generations, accompanied by a hope that we can, each in our own way, share a rich and hope-filled legacy with these future bearers, that we can love them into being their best selves. This is a giant challenge. How can we leave future generations a world where they and the whole creation might flourish, one in which they can receive the best of what we have done and build far beyond our humble efforts. One bold expression of this challenge is proffered by Vanessa Nakate, a young climate activist in Uganda:

Change is already happening. My children and grandchildren will grow up on a radically different planet. Their realities and the choices they'll be able to make will be different from ours – and, unless we act now, their options are likely to be much worse and fewer ... We're fighting for our lives for the lives to come (Nakate 2021, 161).

The urgency of Nakate's challenge is an urgency that I feel.

My children and grandchildren, my students and former students, my colleagues and friends, are my legacy. In a more indirect way, my legacy is carried by the strangers whom I will never meet, the social structures that I have sought (and often failed) to reshape, and our shared planet with all its endangered richness. As I experience the most frightening questions about my limited legacy, the new generations are a deep source of gratitude. I feel privileged to have worked with young people all my life, and I know they are the source of my greatest hope for the future. They are already signs of the newness that is being born, even as they reflect some of the heaviest dangers in our current landscape. My deepest hope is that we can leave them paths of compassion, justice, peace, and global thriving, and they will widen those paths for generations yet to come. With that big picture, I share my own gratitude for future bearers.

Dear Cliff

"Even as I hold you/ I am letting you go."

Alice Walker (2004)

I am feeling the pain of your leaving.
I knew it would come,
but secretly hoped it would not.
I have loved you so long –
long before you were born,
so I know I have no choice now
but to let go and watch you fly.
God gives children to parents on loan –
only as long as they need us
and then as we celebrate their flying.

How odd it is that you are doing
what I hoped you would:
You are growing to be strong
and caring and wise;
You are dreaming dreams for your future
and making plans to soar into those dreams.
That is what you need to do,
 what I want you to do,
 but I am going to miss you –
 with love!

My Students and Former Students

are beacons of light,
the reasons I never despair
of a future beyond hope,
without care, without movements
toward justice and repair.

Turning a Page into Retirement

The time has come to let go,
to know that others will carry on
and will do it better than I,
made possible, yes,
by what I have done –
seen and unseen –
but stretching wider,
going deeper,
building strength,
spreading compassion,
multiplying wisdom,
grounded, always grounded, in daring pasts,
guided by the power of prophetic visions,
generating justice.

How good it is to let go,
to let the world
continue to spin without me,
to dwell in the moment,
the fullness of emptiness,
the trust in others,
the calling of silence,

the new beginnings that
break out from
my broken-open heart.

In the concluding reflections of this “workshop,” I invite readers to identify future bearers for whom you are grateful. What in these future bearers gives you reason for hope? What do you hope to leave them as your legacy?

The central proposition of this essay offers guidance for becoming good ancestors: *the postures and practices of gratitude are pathways for honoring the dignity of our forebears (human ancestors, lands, and creatures) and building a future in which our children and grandchildren, together with the earth, can thrive*. Gratitude is a gift and a responsibility as we live in the bounties of this world and live toward a world of promise. Even the hardest of times offers opportunities for gratitude in the sense of the Hebrew *hakarat hatov*, or recognizing the good, even when the good is hidden or greatly overshadowed. The workshop form of this essay underscores the ongoing work of receiving, reflecting on, healing, building, and reshaping the gifts of our ancestors, and the gifts of our own pasts. Equally important is the ongoing work of critiquing that which we have received from our forebears, alongside our own patterns of living, however short or long our lives have been. In this ongoing work, the potential for radical transformation is always alive, and the future bearers are depending on us.

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A PEDAGOGY FOR CULTIVATING WISDOM

Abstract: Wisdom is a concept that is often associated with ancestors. However, wisdom is more than knowledge to be passed down; it is also a disposition toward knowledge and a set of practices that enable one to make thoughtful decisions. By aiming to *cultivate* rather than *impart* wisdom, religious educators can equip the next generation to make wise decisions in the face of uncertainty and an ever-changing world. Drawing from scholarship on Hebrew Bible wisdom literature, religious education, and wisdom studies, this paper posits five pedagogical practices for cultivating wisdom.

We live in a culture that is inundated with information, but gravely lacking in wisdom. In the era of smartphones – theoretically, at least – we have access to any knowledge we desire at our fingertips. And yet we often do not have the skills to discern the true from the false, nor the insight to consider the ramifications of our own words and actions. Many of the habits engendered by social media demonstrate a lack of wisdom: circulating information without taking time to ascertain its truth, firing off instant responses without careful reflection, curating friend lists to silence dissenters and create an echo chamber. In the technological age, we have instant resources at our disposal of which our ancestors could not have dreamed, and yet our relationship with knowledge has become warped and distorted. As educator Parker Palmer writes, we objectify and exploit knowledge for our own selfish ends, rather than seeing the goal of knowledge as the “reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds.”¹ While equal access to information is vital for a healthy democratic society, it has become increasingly clear that information alone is not enough.

In the introductory essay to the *Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom*, wisdom scholar Robert J. Sternberg begins with a plea for the practical necessity of wisdom. Over the course of the 20th century, he points out, the average IQ has risen by nearly 30 points, yet humankind appears no better off than before. Citing a number of ongoing global conflicts, including poverty and climate change, Sternberg concludes, “Higher IQ’s have not brought with them solutions to any of the world’s or the country’s major problems... Intelligence is insufficient for creating a better world.”² Similarly to Sternberg, Parker Palmer’s book *To Know As We Are Known* opens with a vignette about the creation of the atomic bomb, a testament both to humanity’s scientific genius – or intelligence – and, simultaneously, our utter foolishness. According to Palmer, this is the result of a distorted relationship with knowledge rooted in curiosity and control, rather than in love. It is clear that a different relationship with knowledge is needed: one that leads to wholeness and flourishing. American culture, and American churches, need wisdom.

Many religious educators, particularly youth ministers, would agree. In youth ministries across the United States, young people are taught about the importance of making wise decisions – a common topic in youth curricula. For example, in Orange, a popular interdenominational curriculum, “wise choices” is one of six desired outcomes that guide the high-level curriculum planning.³ However, the way in which most youth ministers educate for wisdom is to impart knowledge to young people from outside sources – from older adults and from the Bible – hoping that this wise advice can guide young people toward making good decisions.

However, this approach falls short of its goal of helping learners become wise, because it misunderstands what wisdom is and how one acquires it. It is common to think of wisdom as *what is known* – the lessons, insights, and advice derived from life experience and/or divine revelation. Instead, I argue that wisdom is *a way of knowing*, an orientation toward the pursuit of deeper understanding. Wisdom is an integrative approach toward knowledge that values both cognitive and affective ways of knowing, and that is characterized by a love for learning and

¹ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 8.

² Robert J. Sternberg, “Race to Samarra: The Critical Importance of Wisdom in the World Today,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom*: (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 4.

³ Ashley Bohinc, “How the XP3 Student Curriculum Roadmap was Formed,” April 26, 2018, <https://orangestudents.com/scope-cycle-xp3-student-curriculum-roadmap-formed/>, accessed April 4, 2022. The other “responses” are developing an authentic faith, recognizing and honoring God’s ultimate authority, practicing sexual integrity, experiencing healthy relationships with family and friends, and serving others in their home, community, and world.

desire for understanding. Such an approach toward knowledge enables one to consider the meaning and implications of ideas and events, seeing clearly to navigate complex situations in a way that leads to wholeness and flourishing.

Thus, wisdom is not static content that can be *imparted*; it is a way of engaging knowledge that must be *cultivated*. To speak of wisdom as something that can be imparted implies that learners have no wisdom until it is given to them by someone else – an assumption that naturally leads educators toward direct instruction models, or what Paulo Freire referred to as the “banking model” of education, in which the teacher deposits information into the minds of students.⁴ In fact, educational approaches that impart information to learners as though they were empty receptacles actually stifles wisdom by discouraging creativity, curiosity, and critical thought, deadening students’ love for learning. To speak of *cultivating* wisdom, on the other hand, assumes that learners have resources within themselves that can thrive if their environment nurtures growth. Such an understanding of wisdom demands a different approach to education: one that values the learner’s own capacity for wisdom and facilitates their own engagement with knowledge, rather than merely giving them information. The role of the educator is not to do the thinking for students, but rather to create invitations and craft learning environments in which learners engage knowledge for themselves.

As Robert J. Sternberg and Emily S. Hagen write, then, a pedagogy for cultivating wisdom should not “didactically convey information about wisdom” but rather “encourage [students] to experience various cognitive and affective processes that underlie wise decision-making.”⁵ The cognitive processes to which Sternberg and Hagen refer include skills like logic and reasoning, critical analysis, developing salient questions, and considering processes of cause and effect – skills that help learners effectively assess situations and their implications for others. Affective processes include skills like empathy, imagination, contemplation, and openness – skills that help learners see issues from different angles and imagine ways of responding that promote flourishing. In this paper, I suggest five pedagogical practices for cultivating wisdom that invite young people to experience and practice the cognitive and affective processes that comprise wisdom.

Playfulness

The first practice of wisdom is *playfulness*. As a wisdom-cultivating pedagogical practice, playfulness is more than merely having fun or playing games. Playfulness is about engaging material in creative ways without predetermined outcomes, which opens students up to new ways of knowing.⁶ Three aspects of this definition bear further explanation. First, pedagogical playfulness is about *engaging material* – not as a distraction from or supplement to the “real” teaching, but as the mode in which the content itself is engaged. Second, playfulness is open-ended, *without predetermined outcomes*. Playfulness in religious education should invite creativity rather than conformity. As will be illustrated further below, it is possible to use play as

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), ch. 2.

⁵ Robert J. Sternberg and Emily S. Hagen, “Teaching for Wisdom,” *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 381.

⁶ Both Jerome Berryman in *Godly Play* and Jurgen Moltmann in *Theology of Play* argue that play must be for its own sake. As Berryman writes, “To make play instrumental is to turn play into work, to demand a product from the activity.” Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 12. Moltmann insists that play, in its openness to the future and new possibilities, contradicts rather than upholds the status quo, and as such must not reinforce a predetermined outcome.

a tool in the service of the banking model to reinforce the teacher's point. However, this is a distortion of playfulness as a disposition, which necessarily requires openness to new ideas.

Third, playfulness invites *new ways of knowing*; it helps one to see reality differently and to envision new possibilities. As Grace, a United Church of Christ pastor, put it, "Play engages a different part of our spirit. [Often] when we're trying to find answers and trying to learn, we get very caught up in our brains. Imagination and play bring us back into our bodies and help us lean into mystery." For Matt, a Southern Baptist youth pastor, there is a kind of surprise or vulnerability to playfulness that opens one up to new ways of being: "I think when students are having fun, their walls are torn down a little bit, and when walls are torn down, life change happens." Religious education scholar Courtney Goto theorizes play similarly as a conduit of "revelatory experiencing" in learning, as moments of "little interruptions"⁷ and new insight that allow one to catch a glimpse of an alternate reality, the experience of which transforms one's own. Through imaginative and creative play, one comes to know in a different way than one does in the schooling, or banking, model of education that teaches to the test and emphasizes learning and recalling facts.

Because youth ministry has a reputation for creative object lessons and over-the-top games, it might seem at first blush that youth ministry has already cornered the market on playing in religious education. But while crazy youth ministry games appear to be an example of playful learning, they are actually symptomatic of the deep divide between play and learning. They often function as a bait-and-switch technique to bribe young people for attention, drawing them in with play so that they can settle in and sit through the lesson – a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down! Wes Ellis similarly notes that we often "treat play and playfulness as pesky things we have to do to keep kids interested, the warm-up act to the *real* ministry."⁸ Rather than engaging the material playfully, youth ministers separate the play from the teaching. This separation stems from – and reinforces – the belief that deep, challenging learning is not fun, stimulating, or enjoyable.⁹ When youth ministry activities do bear some relation to the lesson, they often illustrate the lesson, reinforcing its main message. They do not invite students to explore, to imagine, or to see things differently; they do not facilitate the revelatory experiencing of which Goto writes.

The kind of playfulness that cultivates wisdom is not one that gets visitors in the door or makes learning palatable, but one that sees learning itself as a delightful task and engages the material with imagination and creativity. As Moltmann writes, theology should be done not out of obligation or necessity, but from freedom, curiosity, and pleasure, for its own sake.¹⁰ Such an approach to religious education is not without risks. It may make educators feel out of their depth when a simple takeaway is traded for theological debate. Even more risky, it may very well lead learners to ask difficult questions or posit heterodox ideas. However, making even the biblical text off-limits to imagination and play comes with its own risks. Jillian, a United Methodist youth pastor, put it this way:

⁷ Courtney T. Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning into God's New Creation* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 127.

⁸ Wesley W. Ellis, "Ain't Never Had a Friend Like Me: Rethinking Friendship in Youth Ministry," *Delighted: What Teenagers are Teaching the Church About Joy*, by Kenda Creasy Dean, Wesley W. Ellis, Justin Forbes, and Abigail Visco Rusert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 42.

⁹ As bell hooks points out, teachers who promote active learning and joyful engagement in the classroom often gain a reputation as "not as rigorous or without standards." bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 43-44.

¹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 66.

We can't let the scriptures be so dainty and fragile that we can't take them off the shelves and play with them. I had a grandparent who always used to get me these very fragile porcelain figurines for my birthday, and they were the most boring thing ever, because I couldn't take them out of their glass cases and actually play with them. I was always more excited about my other grandparents' gifts to me, because they were things like a jump rope or play dough. Things that I could examine with my hands and mold and put back together again and reuse. And I would so much rather the Scriptures be play dough than a little porcelain figurine, because the figurine is either going to break or collect dust, neither of which feel interesting to me. Whereas play dough may end up all over my clothes, but then I carry the Scripture with me everywhere I go, and isn't that really beautiful?

To cultivate wisdom, religious educators must cede control of the content and allow learners to explore and experiment, even when it gets messy. But engagement of the material must be done for pleasure, for its own sake, rather than to prove a point. It is only in the sheer delight of exploration and discovery that the desire for deeper understanding, for wisdom, is cultivated.

Unhurried Attentiveness

The second practice of wisdom's pedagogy is *deep and unhurried attentiveness*. While unhurriedness and attentiveness go hand in hand, each requires something different. Unhurriedness requires that one slow down and focus on quality of knowledge over quantity. Rather than rushing to cover material, the practice of wisdom dwells with the object of inquiry. It sees the time spent in contemplation as valuable in and of itself, even if it does not immediately yield a marketable insight. In his book *The Nature of Design*, David Orr contrasts Western culture's obsession with "fast knowledge" with the more wisdom-like orientation of "slow knowledge." The culture of fast knowledge, Orr writes, believes that knowledge and information are interchangeable. Profit, not wisdom, is valued as the goal of knowledge: "Knowledge that lends itself to use is superior to that which is merely contemplative."¹¹ Slow knowledge, on the other hand, is the collective wisdom of a culture acquired over time with "thoroughness and patience,"¹² based on the steady rhythms of nature. It is not as flashy as fast knowledge, but its roots are deep, forming us over the course of our lifetimes as we wonder, contemplate, and linger over the questions and ideas that call to us. It is common for religious educators to be more concerned with the efficacy of their scope and sequence than with the unhurried "slow knowledge" that takes time to ponder what seems most fruitful or generative. But it is in those unhurried moments of exploring an important idea together that wisdom can grow and flourish.

Attentiveness requires that one be fully present, undivided and undistracted. In a culture of efficiency and multitasking, attentiveness is rare; young people and adults alike are often not present enough to the world around them to notice all the wonders waiting for their attention. Unhurriedness does not guarantee attentiveness, but it does open up space for noticing and for contemplation. In his book *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, Mark Yaconelli writes about the time when his four-year-old son, tired of being hurried by his parents and preschool teachers,

¹¹ David W. Orr, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 36. Similarly, Brett Bertucio writes that teaching to achieve measurable learning objectives pushes out important affective modes of learning: "Contemplation, wonder, appreciation, or merely *sitting with* an object of study are dismissed as a waste of precious instructional time." Brett Bertucio, "The Cartesian Heritage of Bloom's Taxonomy," *SPE* 36 (2017), 495.

¹² Orr, *Nature of Design*, 39.

announced that he was starting a “Slow Club.” Yaconelli recalls, “He told us about the things he noticed during the day and shook his head at the other children who always seemed too busy to see the marvels and treasures so clearly visible to the patient eye: a piece of wire, a bottle cap, an especially smooth rock, a line of ants.”¹³ Inspired by his son’s contemplative orientation toward life, Yaconelli reflects on the need for youth pastors to cultivate this skill in themselves and in their students:

Like Joseph, those of us who minister among young people seek to be members of Slow Club. We invite youth to attend to their lives; we encourage them not to overlook the signs of God’s presence. Every time we’re among youth, we look and listen with slow eyes and ears. We listen for the deep sounds of God. We look patiently for the little signs of grace. We cultivate wonder. Like Joseph, we walk beside them saying ‘What do you notice? What do you see? How is God present in this moment?’¹⁴

If religious educators model unhurried attentiveness in their pedagogy, they can create a learning environment where learners have the time and space to notice, wonder, reflect, and discuss things that are meaningful to them. Following the students’ interests and the generative topics of discussion is a far more valuable use of time than trying to cover *more* material, or the *right* material. When a conversation goes off-topic, it can be tempting for teachers to try to steer it back on track so that they can cover the material they intended. But to try to control the movement of learning in that way cannot help but fall into the banking method, because it believes that the teacher, not the students, knows what is generative. Instead, educators must be open to what educator Stephen Brookfield calls the ambiguity of teaching – able to go with the flow, listening carefully enough and paying enough attention that we can recognize when “teachable moments arise that cry out for [them] to depart from [their] script for the day,” when an unexpected and off-topic discussion is more fruitful and valuable than what they may have planned.¹⁵

Wonder and Curiosity

The next practice of wisdom is the practice of *wonder and curiosity*. These two terms are distinct yet closely related. Although the two are often used interchangeably, Marina Bazhydai and Gert Westermann seek to differentiate them – where curiosity “drives knowledge acquisition,” wonder is about “affective response, reflection on obtained information, and seeking deeper and broader knowledge.”¹⁶ Similarly, Yannis Hadzigeorgiou notes that curiosity can be satisfied, while wonder cannot – it lingers, experienced just as or even more intensely at the end of an intellectual discovery than at the beginning.¹⁷ What unites the two is that they both evoke a desire for knowledge and draw a learner toward engagement with the object of curiosity/wonder.

¹³ Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 198.

¹⁴ Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, 199.

¹⁵ Stephen D. Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 266-267.

¹⁶ Marina Bazhydai and Gert Westermann, “From Curiosity, to Wonder, to Creativity: A Cognitive Developmental Psychological Perspective,” *Wonder, Education, and Human Flourishing: Theoretical, Empirical, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Anders Schinkel (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2020), 150-151.

¹⁷ Yannis Hadzigeorgiou, “Wonder: Its Nature and Its Role in the Learning Process,” *Wonder, Education, and Human Flourishing: Theoretical, Empirical, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Anders Schinkel (Amsterdam: VU University Press), 200-203.

Wonder is a complex and diffuse concept, but here we will explore two aspects of it that attempt to encapsulate its diversity: wonder is both orientation and disorientation, and it is both cognitive and affective. First, wonder is connected both to experiences in which one marvels at the perfection of order in creation, and to experiences of disorientation and crisis in which that order seems to be turned upside down.¹⁸ Like playing, then, wonder is not always a pleasant phenomenon; it can include a sense of fear and dread.¹⁹ Similarly, Hadzigeorgiou sees the two faces of wonder as *thaumazein* (admiration) and *aporia* (“that is, puzzlement over contradictions, discrepancies, paradoxes”).²⁰ Hadzigeorgiou’s conception of wonder reflects the first aspect – orientation and disorientation – and connects easily to the second: wonder, like wisdom, has both cognitive and affective dimensions.²¹ One *feels* a sense of wonder, and one *wonders about* the precipitating experience. Under this umbrella of wonder’s dual nature as cognition and affect we may also include Hebrew Bible scholar William Brown’s understanding of wonder as awe and inquiry.²² What unifies these diverse aspects of wonder is that, whether one is experiencing joy or fear, marvel or perplexity, wonder evokes a desire for knowledge that draws one closer to the object of wonder to engage with it more deeply.²³

Brown sees that the primary way the biblical wisdom literature cultivates wisdom and shapes character is by evoking a sense of wonder in the student. Scholars have long acknowledged creation theology and character formation to be significant themes in the wisdom literature, even definitive of the genre. Brown explores wonder as the link between the two; wonder arises from the experience of creation and leads to wisdom and the formation of character. Wonder serves as the pedagogical tool of the wisdom literature that leads the student, through awe and desire, toward the object of wonder to engage it, and in so doing, to become wise. The sense of awe that accompanies wonder, however, does not permit one to harness knowledge, to capture it and study it under a microscope, but rather invites one to revere it as a sacred Other. Wonder cannot be objective but is a relational knowing: “to know something in wonder is not to control or use but to know passionately, ever provisionally, and always reverently.”²⁴

How can religious educators cultivate wonder and curiosity in their pedagogy? As an experience that often takes one by surprise, a sense of wonder is difficult to create. However, educators can create conditions that make it possible by facilitating encounters in which students might experience *thaumazein* and *aporia*. Practicing unhurried attentiveness helps make space for such experiences of wonder. Hadzigeorgiou suggests that an educational implication of wonder is “starting with the ‘richness’ of an object or phenomenon (e.g. a tree leaf, a waterfall, a flash of lightning) through attentive observation...and ‘letting them speak to us’ (i.e. moving away from cognitivism).”²⁵ Laura D’Olimpio suggests that the arts can provide an opportunity for students

¹⁸ Celia Deane-Drummond, as described by William P. Brown in *Wisdom’s Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible’s Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 20.

¹⁹ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 20-21; Anders Schinkel, “Introduction,” *Wonder, Education, and Human Flourishing: Theoretical, Empirical, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Anders Schinkel (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2020), 11.

²⁰ Hadzigeorgiou, “Wonder,” 187.

²¹ Hadzigeorgiou, “Wonder,” 189; Bazhydai and Westermann, “From Curiosity,” 151.

²² Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 23.

²³ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 20-23.

²⁴ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 22.

²⁵ Hadzigeorgiou, “Wonder,” 207.

to slow down and see things differently, helping to cultivate deep contemplative wonder.²⁶ Curiosity and wonder are also piqued by ambiguity, paradox, and tension. Valentine Banfegha Ngalim and Fomutar Stanislaus, reflecting on the value of traditional African pedagogy for cultivating wonder, write that African proverbs and riddles spark wonder through their “oblique and veiled” nature.²⁷ Thus, educators can create space for wonder by introducing students to puzzling proverbs or contradictory ideas and allowing students to wrestle with their ambiguity, rather than resolving them.

Curiosity, more so than wonder, is a skill that can be developed. Although students can open themselves more to the experience of wonder over time, curiosity as the more intellectual endeavor can be practiced and actively cultivated. Youth ministry scholar David White writes that young people are intrinsically curious and love to learn. Rather than being stimulated and nurtured, however, their curiosity is often tamped down and suppressed; White writes that “youth’s alienation from their intellect...is not natural or normal,” but results from an educational system whose focus on teaching facts rather than awakening wonder “drain[s] them of their intrinsic intellectual interest.”²⁸ He goes on to say that churches have followed schools in “fail[ing] to spark intellectual curiosity and capacity.”²⁹ One simple way to cultivate the curiosity of students is by teaching them how to ask questions – a skill that comes quite naturally to young children but, as White points out, is lost in adolescence. Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana, creators of the Question Formulation Technique, argue that asking good questions is a skill that can be developed and should be taught in schools.³⁰ In the past, I have led youth group Bible studies around the practice of reading the text together and having youth formulate questions about it to discuss together. In the beginning, students were unable to formulate their own questions. With practice, however, I saw their curiosity blossom – as well as their capacity for wonder.

Reflection

The next practice of wisdom is *reflection*. Where wonder and curiosity are more open and wandering, reflection is the intentional and disciplined processing of events, phenomena, and ideas. Reflection is an analytical enterprise, exploring themes, patterns, relationships, and connections for the purpose of meaning-making, which in turn enables one to apply the knowledge gained from reflection to future decisions. It does not shy away from complexity or tension, but enters into it, viewing as a fruitful opportunity to cultivate wisdom.

Autobiographical reflection – that is, reflection on events or experiences in one’s life – is the type of reflection most often discussed in literature on wisdom. Reflection on one’s life experiences is more than mere reminiscence; it is what Nic M. Weststrate refers to as

²⁶ Laura D’Olimpio, “Education and the Arts: Inspiring Wonder,” *Wonder, Education, and Human Flourishing: Theoretical, Empirical, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Anders Schinkel (Amsterdam: VU University Press), 259, 266.

²⁷ Valentine Banfegha Ngalim and Fomutar Stanislaus, “Using Oral Traditions in Provoking Pupils to Wonder and Grow in Moral and Intellectual Values,” *Wonder, Education, and Human Flourishing: Theoretical, Empirical, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Anders Schinkel (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2020), 242.

²⁸ David F. White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 115.

²⁹ David F. White, “Pedagogy for the Unimpressed,” *Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture* (Eugene: Cascade, 2008), 23.

³⁰ Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana, *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Education Press, 2011).

“exploratory processing,”³¹ which considers questions like how a life event relates to what came before and after it, what insight can be gained from the experience, and – in theological terms – how God may or may not have been present in the experience. Dori Baker’s pedagogical method of Girlfriend Theology is an excellent example of theological autobiographical reflection that moves beyond reminiscence into more intentional structured reflection. In this method, Baker asks participants to recall a life experience that seems particularly meaningful, and the group reflects together on it. How does the story make them feel? Does it remind them of stories in their own lives or in Scripture? Where do they see God in the story, and what new images of God can arise from their reflection?³²

One can also reflect on natural and/or social phenomena, or the relationship between the two. The biblical wisdom literature demonstrates the ways in which creation and natural phenomena serve as a source of theological reflection; in the book of Proverbs, natural phenomena are often connected with social phenomena, making analogies and drawing conclusions about human life based on observation of nature. Social phenomena – particularly complex social problems or systemic injustices – also require reflection. In *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, David White explores the practice of critical reflection on social phenomena as “loving God with one’s mind.” For White, the “root question” to be explored is, “What forces and relationships impact the situation we are trying to understand?”³³ A pedagogical strategy White suggests is to ask the question “But why?”, uncovering progressively deeper layers of history, politics, and ideology that contribute to situations of injustice and oppression in the world. Other questions that can help one reflect on phenomena include the following: What is your relationship to, or experience with, this phenomenon? What is others’ relationship to it? How does it shape society or impact the world? Does it remind you of other things? How has it changed over time?

Finally, one can reflect on ideas and concepts, higher-level philosophical and theological propositions. Ideas are never fully abstract – they arise from others’ reflection on phenomena and/or experiences – but they become their own source of reflection. Reflection on ideas may involve uncovering their origin – What assumptions are behind this idea? How was this idea influenced by its time and place? – pondering whether and how an idea coheres with one’s own experiences, and considering the implications of an idea for others.

Dialogue

The last practice of wisdom is *dialogue*. Wisdom is found in the intersection, mutual exchange, and even tension between different life experiences and viewpoints. No one perspective contains all the wisdom there is to be had, and the wisdom that exists at the intersection of multiple perspectives is more than the sum of its parts. While there is wisdom to be gained through quiet contemplation on one’s own, ultimately, one becomes wiser through dialogue with others refining and enlarging one’s own perspective.

Dialogue helps to cultivate wisdom in two key ways – in wisdom’s affective sphere, and in its cognitive sphere. Dialogue’s affective value lies in its ability to foster empathy and

³¹ Nic M. Weststrate, “The Mirror of Wisdom: Self-Reflection as a Developmental Precursor and Core Competency of Wise People,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 509.

³² Dori Grinenko Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

³³ White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, 123.

understanding for others. An important aspect of wisdom that differentiates it from intelligence is its ethical component: a wise person considers how their decisions impact others, and they make choices that lead to flourishing for others as well as themselves. As such, “understand[ing] and valu[ing] diverse points of view” is key for wisdom.³⁴ When one understands what matters to others and what is at stake for them, one is able to make more better-informed, more compassionate choices.

The cognitive value of dialogue is the way that it nuances and challenges one’s thinking. Paulo Freire argues that “only dialogue...is capable of generating critical thinking.”³⁵ The dialogue that Freire proposes, however, is different than the discussion often employed in youth groups. Youth group discussions are often dominated by the agenda of the leader, who comes with a set list of discussion questions. Often, those discussion questions are not open-ended; they either have a predetermined answer or a range of acceptable answers. They often stay at the surface level with questions of comprehension or application rather than presenting a challenge to the students’ intellect and inviting true dialogue, even debate. What differentiates Freirean dialogue from discussions like these is the teacher’s goal for the dialogue. Because Freire’s use of dialogue was intended to liberate students to think for themselves, he was frustrated later in life that some had wrongly understood the dialogical method as the takeaway of his work, employing it without awareness of the politics of their pedagogy. Dialogue as a pedagogical tool, if it is divorced from a foundational commitment to respect and trust the learners’ agency, leads nowhere at best and reinforces domination at worst. Without a commitment to liberation, and without a central topic about which to dialogue, it devolves into pseudo-dialogue which is often used to lead to, and reinforce, the teacher’s point. Instead, true dialogue in youth ministry – dialogue as a practice of wisdom – is an open-ended opportunity for a group to explore an idea together, rather than a roundabout means of lecturing, as it often is in youth curriculum. This type of dialogue requires that youth ministry leaders re-frame the way they approach discussion in a number of ways.

First, dialogue should stem from what Freire called “problem-posing.”³⁶ The teacher introduces a stimulating idea or concept (the “generative theme”) that is seen as the shared property of the group and prompts its members to dialogue. Because of their riddle-like nature and openness to interpretation, proverbs are an excellent example of generative themes for dialogue. Ngalim and Stanislaus write that while direct questions often require cookie-cutter answers, which “limits the extent to which a child may wonder imaginatively,” proverbs as a didactic tool invite open interpretation and enhance creativity.³⁷ Similarly, questions should not assume a “right” answer. Instead, they should be crafted in such a way that the whole group can explore an idea together deeply.

Second, the religious educator should share their own opinion as one helpful contribution, rather than the definitive answer. By virtue of their position of authority as the teacher, students are socialized to take the educator’s word for it. To keep the conversation going, religious educators need to recognize this power dynamic and make an intentional effort to invite disagreement and ongoing dialogue. It can be more inviting to students for educators to preface their contributions by saying, “Different people think different things about this, but I think...” or, “This is my experience, but I’m curious if others have had a different experience.”

³⁴ Sternberg and Hagen, “Teaching for Wisdom,” 375-6.

³⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 92.

³⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, ch. 2.

³⁷ Ngalim and Stanislaus, “Using Oral Traditions,” 242.

Third, religious educators should engage in mutual conversation with their students, neither shutting down a contribution with which they disagree, nor affirming all comments regardless of quality. Instead, students need to be pressed to think critically about their ideas. Educators can continue the dialogue by saying, “I wonder if that’s true in all circumstances, though – can you think of a situation where that might not be true?”, or, “What are some other ways of looking at this issue?”

Fourth, religious educators should engage the whole group in dialogue. Often, student responses to discussion questions are disconnected from each other; the students respond to the leader’s question, not to each other. Instead of accepting a response or two and moving on, the educator should involve the whole group in dialogue: “Has anyone else had an experience like that? How was it similar or different?” When a student asks a question, educators should resist the urge to answer it, which often cuts off the opportunity for deeper engagement. Instead, they should again invite the group to engage with the question: “Marie just asked whether God makes everything happen, or just knows everything in advance. What do you all think? Are there other options besides those two?”

When religious educators engage dialogue in these ways, they create a learning community where old ideas can be challenged, new ideas can sprout, and difficult puzzles can invite students to deeper learning and wisdom.

Conclusion

As the reader may have noticed, the five practices of wisdom weave in and around one another, sometimes nearly indistinguishable from each other. Playfulness requires a sense of wonder and curiosity, which arise from unhurried attentiveness. Wonder leads to reflection, and curiosity to dialogue. Dialogue can be a playful enterprise that invites further wonder and reflection. Each of these practices also cultivates desire for deeper engagement and further learning, a key characteristic of wisdom. Together, these five practices constitute a pedagogical approach that helps students experience the modes of thinking, the cognitive and affective processes, that both characterize wisdom and continue to cultivate it.

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Spiritual Intelligence: A Vision for Religious Education that Fosters a Just Learning Community

Abstract: An education without spirituality in its system will perpetuate epistemic injustice. People long for a model of education that fosters a communal setting, where teachers and learners are co-learners to study, challenge, interchange, and grow. Thich Nhat Hanh believed when people find wisdom as a living stream and not as an icon to be preserved, they can transmit their wisdom to future generations.¹ I explore the role of spirituality in religious education, focusing on spiritual intelligence (SI) as a vital way of knowing that expands the notion of epistemology to include the knowledge of the heart. SI fosters the ethical aspect of interconnectedness to promote a sense of belonging for learners. I argue that SI is a pathway to wisdom that enables a just learning environment embedded in interbeing based on *Koinonia* in Christianity and *Sangha* in Buddhism. I envision religious education (RE) using SI as an approach to foster a shared vision based on Micah 6:8.²

Key terms and definitions: **Spiritual Intelligence (SI):** a form of intelligence that enables a better understanding of the inner self and creates more profound meaning for both the individual and community; **Spiritual Quotient (SQ):** a measure that looks at a person’s spiritual insight; **Koinonia:** Community/Communion in Christian tradition; **Sangha:** community in Buddhist tradition.

¹ Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is a global spiritual leader, poet, and peace activist, renowned for his powerful teachings and bestselling writings on mindfulness and peace. (See "The Life Story of Thich Nhat Hanh," Plum Village, accessed April 8, 2022, <https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography/>.)

² You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Mk 6:8)

I. The Spiritual Crisis in Education

Western religious educational practices often reflect the values of a modern academic world that privileges rationalism, competition, assimilation, and often exclusion. Such obligations, inherited from colonial and patriarchal systems, affect significantly minoritized and marginalized communities in our churches. We need fresh approaches in RE that are inclusive and just. Christian Hong criticizes the colonial mode of theological education which sets a standard of competence through the lens of white normativity and diminishes diversity by erasing differences.³ Teachers and learners have been a part of a colonial project that has formed them to follow white and Christian supremacy and its entangled saccharine poison.⁴ This way of teaching and learning creates a vague sense of community where educational instructions are a safe place for some but not for others. Consequently, teachers and learners confront a spiritual crisis of belonging, specifically not being part of a healthy environment that fosters holistic growth in mind, body, and spirit.

The colonial mode of theological education lacks opportunities for learners to have time to reflect on their ultimate concerns, since they are busy and surrounded by many subjects and competition to climb the social ladder of achievement and alliance. When learners do not experience accountability for their studies, they undergo modern cognitive colonization. They allow someone else to shape their mindset and set a standard for them to become who the system wants them to be, not who they want to be. Ironically, learners might choose to end their lives due to their studying obstacles. I encountered such a tragedy in 2021 when Leea (not her real name), a first-year student at Branford College, Yale University, died by suicide at the age of 18. I imagine why and how Leea lost the joy of studying and chose to end her studying trial with death as a tragic way out. She lost her purpose in studying at this Ivy League school due to a spiritual crisis of being and belonging. An education that does not promote learners' well-being in its system fails to fulfill its task. In Rachel's case, who is responsible for her death? Herself? Her family? Her friends? Or Yale University? None of these options could offer the correct answer. According to Yale Alumni Magazine, after Rachel's suicide, Yale took action to resolve the ongoing demand of students seeking counseling by "the creation of 14 new full-time counseling positions, including 8 with offices in or near residential colleges."⁵ This response by the institution is crucial but inadequate. All learners have a right to thrive, not just to survive in education, and their well-being and flourishing are the tasks of education.⁶ To accompany learners facing ontological crises such as in Rachel's case or those searching for a true sense of self to pursue a meaningful way of being must be the main priority.

³ Christine J. Hong, *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2021), 2-3.

⁴ Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 3.

⁵ Mark Alden By Mark Alden Branch '86 | May/June 2021, "First-year student dies in suicide Her death puts renewed focus on mental health resources at Yale," *Yale Alumni Magazine*, May 2021, 1.

⁶ Hannah Alexandre asserts that the task of education---liberal and spiritual---is not to reform the community by means of our children. It is to renew the community by reinvigorating and re-committing ourselves to become spiritual role models and democratic leaders whose daily lives are filled with the study, practice, and celebration of a higher vision. The aim of education is the development of human reason, which enables learners to live a better life by creating organic communities. This community is based on educators' and leaders' modeling role and skills to equip learners to thrive in studying and in daily life. Educational reform must not harm learners in any way. (See Hanan A. Alexander, *Reclaiming Goodness: Education and the Spiritual Quest* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 211.

Learners face the obstacle of isolation and alienation, which can cause tremendous harm, as in the case of Rachel. The colonial mode of theological education pushes learners into forced assimilation and competition to meet the standard designed by the colonial system. If religious educators call forth learners to form a beloved community based on connectedness as a core value, learners will begin to find a sense of belonging. An education that does not include spirituality in its system will perpetuate epistemic injustice by the forced assimilation to the dominant group's culture and values. I define spirituality according to Vietnamese tradition, which is how people put faith into practical action regardless of their faith background. All human beings have a spiritual desire to find an ultimate purpose, be aware of ultimate values, search for a deeper meaning in life, and long for a sense of fulfillment called core experiences of SI noted by Dorothy A. Sisk, an endowed chair in the education of gifted students at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas.⁷ I envision RE being distinctly different when it takes SI seriously and more intentionally. The following section explores SI as a knowledge from the heart and how examining education cultivates a healthy learning environment for learners using SI.

II: Addressing the Spiritual Crisis with Spiritual Intelligence

SI is a way of knowing from the heart that enables people to balance the inner life of the mind and spirit with the outer life of work.⁸ Using Thich Nhat Hanh's categories, SI could be understood as consciousness that enables humans to expand their capacity for seeing things as they are; a compass for an orientation toward knowledge that he calls the "flower of insight." We are familiar with using our minds to attain knowledge, but SI offers a different type of knowledge, that of the heart, which enables learners to pursue the authentic self. It also transforms the learner from knowing something to feeling something about what they know. According to Vaughan, SI motivates people to seek knowledge based on multiple aspects: collaboration among one's perceptions of their beliefs and behavior, the interaction of thinking, seeing, and feeling to cultivate a culture of love, compassion, sympathy, and service; and discovery of the hidden wellsprings of love and joy in daily life.⁹ People can attain a higher level of intelligence, expressing what they know through moral and ethical values. SI, a way of knowing from the heart, which ignites in the human heart a desire for those ultimate values; taking action to achieve and share what they learn with others. Teaching learners a deeper understanding of spirituality through the notion of love leads them to embrace remarkable human capacity for empathy or compassion, which sometimes reason and science alone cannot prove or explain.

Sisk explores fields such as psychology, education, science, ancient wisdom, and Eastern wisdom to establish a foundation for SI. Sisk addresses today's issue of humans searching for meaning and purpose and how SI might enhance their search. Such spiritual desires cultivate humanity's capacity to engage in creativity and renovation. When these crucial spiritual needs are unmet, some lose their motivation or life navigation; others face inner emptiness. Although the lack of SI impacts everyone, Sisk notes that "the real price paid is in education, with a lack of

⁷ Dorothy A. Sisk, "Spiritual Intelligence: Developing Higher Consciousness," *The SAGE Handbook of Gifted and Talented Education* 32, no. 3 (2016):196, DOI: 10.1177/0261429415602567.

⁸ Frances Vaughan, "What is Spiritual Intelligence?," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 42, no. 2 (2002): 19, doi:10.1177/0022167802422003.

⁹ Vaughan, "What is Spiritual Intelligence?"20-22.

interest or effort to meet the needs of children and youth whose spiritual intelligence is neither recognized nor developed.”¹⁰ Leea reached the pit of despair when she did not have opportunities to embrace SI as a tool to be motivated to continue to live and to study.¹¹ Sisk proposes ways to develop and nurture SI in education following Parker Palmer’s view of teaching spirituality using connectedness as a significant theme in disciplines such as history, physics, and psychology.¹² Parker Palmer sees teaching as a vocation.¹³ An art of teaching as a vocation is aiding and abetting learning instead of demanding that learners become like the teachers, a modern form of colonialism in education. Teachers are responsible for empowering learners to grow holistically in their critical thinking and imagination. By cultivating in learners a desire to learn from their rich imagination and helping them to see the interrelationship among human beings and other species of nature, learners can develop a notion of the connectedness of all of creation. When learners are educated holistically using SI, they can meet their spiritual needs and find their purpose in giving service to humanity.

When teachers fail to foster collective spiritual values, or solely focus on the personal level embedded in individualism, they do not accompany learners to a holistic manner of learning. Moreover, it is inadequate to train people lacking in discernment to concentrate on individual needs, because they fail to make the spiritual choices to promote the well-being of others by their self-centered orientation. Education, in this case, fails to enable healthy human development.¹⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh offers a method for learners to attain knowledge of the heart and insight that comes from deep meditation and concentration which links seeing and loving together to experience love in all things. He notes: “Great understanding goes with great

¹⁰ Sisk, "Spiritual Intelligence 194-196. Sisk points out these six spiritual intelligence components:

1. **Core capacities:** concern with cosmic/existential issues and the skills of meditating, intuition, and visualization; 2. **Core values:** connectedness, unity of all, compassion, a sense of balance, responsibility, and service; 3. **Core experiences:** awareness of ultimate values and their meaning, peak experiences, feelings of transcendence, and heightened awareness; 4. **Key virtues:** truth, justice, compassion, and caring; 5. **Symbolic system:** poetry, music, dance, metaphor, and stories.

6. Brain states: rapture as described by Persinger (1996) and Ramachandran and Blakeslee (1998).

¹¹ Sisk further emphasizes that “People who manifest spiritual intelligence are open to a multisensory way of knowing in which the psychic and physical are no longer differentiated, and they are able to use the core capacities of meditation, intention, and visualization as proposed by Carl Jung in 1969 (Sisk, 195)

¹² She quotes educator and administrator Rachael Kessler, who developed a Passages program to integrate heart, spirit, and community with solid academics. This program offers learners opportunities to cultivate their authentic selves to fulfill their spiritual needs. The program explores spiritual desire and how to foster the following: (1) search for meaning and purpose; (2) longing for silence and solitude; (3) urge for transcendence; (4) hunger for joy and delight; and (5) creative drive and the need for initiation. Let's imagine how Rachel's destiny could have changed if someone had introduced her to embrace these five skills during her crisis. Although Sisk proposes Kessler's strategies to help incredibly gifted students, I believe all levels of students could benefit from this program. Sisk also suggests ways to equip learners for their spiritual quest by offering seven ways to develop SI through the following core values: community, connectedness, oneness, compassion, a sense of balance, responsibility, and service. This approach is also proper for younger learners. As Gail DeBlasio, a PhD candidate in education, notes, “We do not recognize that the childlike wonder and idealism they possess are sources of motivation and inspiration in the classroom. The raw material is there, but our focus is elsewhere. We are so concerned with directing a child's thoughts to follow our script that opportunities to engage in discovery and develop a contemplative mindset are diminishing rapidly.” (See Gail DeBlasio, "The effect of spiritual intelligence in the classroom: God only knows," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 2 (2011):149-50, doi:10.1080/1364436x.2011.580724.)

¹³ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

¹⁴ Vaughan, "What is Spiritual Intelligence?26.

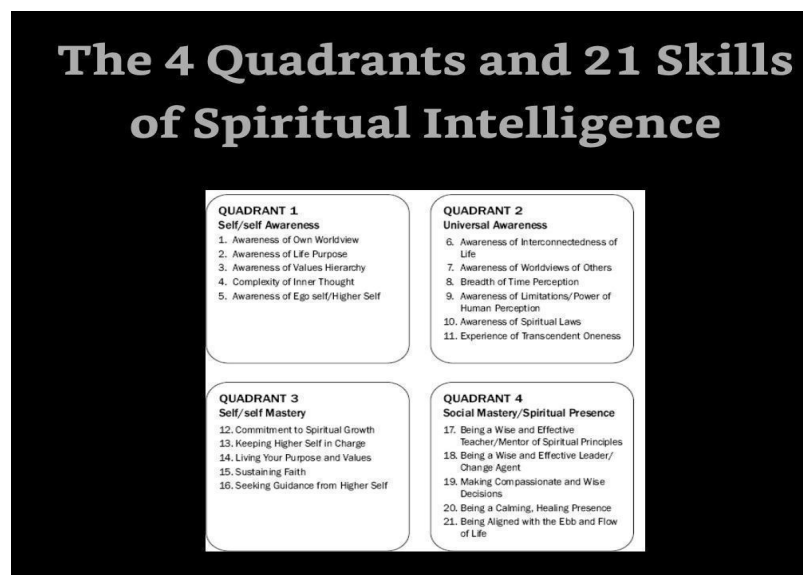
compassion.”¹⁵ Vaughan shares a similar view when she highlights the connection between SI as an interacting knowledge of both heart and mind. Such knowledge helps people feel the love Thich Nhat Hanh mentions resulting from deep concentration and meditation. SI and meditation lead people to achieve “the power of forgiveness and enhance their capacity to give and receive love.”¹⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh believes in the human capacity to see things as they are without bias and distortion, to distinguish truth from illusion, and the capacity to handle anger and to forgive others.

Learners in the process of self-discovery can benefit from Thich Nhat Hanh’s experience to strengthen his identity and improve the negative impact of feelings such as anger or hatred. Moreover, he believes in the capacity to attain peace within oneself even amid obstacles. He shares his own experience during an activist trip to the United States, calling for an end to the Vietnam War. He experienced extreme inner turmoil when a group of Americans asked him to return to Vietnam to end the war in his homeland rather than try to convince the American people to stop the war in the United States. He shared that although he was filled with anger, he learned how to control his feelings by embracing them, and he responded: “The root of the war is here, not in Vietnam.” Thich Nhat Hanh handled his challenging situation as a person with high SQ (whose egos are transformed to handle challenging living situations) by remaining balanced, managing his anger, while maintaining his inner peace.

Drawing from Cyndy Wigglesworth, an expert in SI, I see persons having high spiritual quotation (SQ) as those who act with love, wisdom, and compassion even in a volatile situation.¹⁷ Peace from within is a fruit of SI - forgiving others, showing compassion, and positively handling emotions and feelings. Wigglesworth explains how SQ coaches train people for higher SI following the twenty-one skills,¹⁸ and each skill is measured from novice to mastery, level 1 to level 5.

Learners may develop a higher quotient for their SI, to move from a lower SQ to a higher one, from self-awareness to universal awareness, from self-mastery to social mastery.

We now move to focus on SI and the way we acquire wisdom through the idea of spiritual maturity and *Samadhi*, energy, or concentration in the Buddhist tradition, following Thich Nhat Hanh and Dorothy A. Sisk, a scholar of SI in gifted education.



¹⁵ Thich, *The Sun My Heart*, 71

¹⁶ Vaughan, 29. In intimate relationships, spiritual intelligence helps us learn from our mistakes and make wise choices.

¹⁷ Cindy Wigglesworth, *SQ21: The Twenty-One Skills of Spiritual Intelligence* (New York: SelectBooks, 2012), Kindle edition, 153.

¹⁸ Image from *SQ21: The Twenty-One Skills of Spiritual Intelligence*, 46.

III. SI: The Act of Acquiring Wisdom through Spiritual Maturity and *Samadhi*

Spiritual maturity (SM) and *Samadhi* are significant components of SI. I define SM as a spiritual status that enables teachers and learners to embrace the beauty of connectedness to share wisdom, enabling both teacher and learners to have desires and a will to create a safe and just learning environment. Dorothy A. Sisk offers an example to demonstrate the effects of teaching SI to learners, creating a difference in their collective identity that fosters a will to work for social change.

In 1998, six-year-old Ryan Hreljac was shocked to learn that children in Africa had to walk many miles every day just to fetch water. Ryan decided that he needed to build a well for a village in Africa. By doing household chores and public speaking on clean water issues, Ryan's first well was built in 1999 at the Angolo Primary School in a northern village in Uganda. Ryan's determination led to Ryan's Well Foundation, which has completed 667 projects in 16 countries, bringing access to clean water and sanitation to more than 714,000 people.¹⁹

Ryan Hreljac was just six years old when he learned the lesson of interbeing between the African children suffering from lack of drinking water and himself. Perhaps his parents or teachers introduced the story and reality of the African children to Ryan, and this knowledge changed his worldview and self-identity. The insights of interconnectedness are what Sisk addresses as a core value of SI.²⁰

When learners like Ryan are trained in terms of SI and the core value of interconnectedness, they can apply the practice of interbeing to search for truth and act for justice. They strengthen their discernment and work toward spiritual maturity. The journey with SI leads to spiritual maturity or *Samadhi*, and this journey entails love, freedom, and wholeness for themselves, the whole human family, the entire planet, and the whole web of life. As a result, SI offers knowledge of the heart in its action to bring well-being to all. To embrace communal values, people need to attain spiritual maturity, which describes their exterior behavior with others. "Some qualities that tend to be associated with SM include loving-kindness, honesty, tolerance, open-mindedness, and inner peace or equanimity in the face of life's existential challenges."²¹

The fruit of SI is not only to bring self-awareness but also mindfulness. Mindfulness is being aware of one's surroundings and what happens within oneself as the foundation of a person's attitudes and behavior changes. Based on Thich Nhat Hanh's view, mindfulness is a higher level of SI than consciousness. It is "the practice of looking deeply, touching reality, and living mindfully. One looks at and touches everything as an experience, not as a notion."²² When we put SI at the level of interbeing, it helps us find our purposes and live mindfully. In today's self-centered culture, we need SI as a new vision to create a collective spiritual culture. SM is a sign of high SQ in people. Vaughan sees spiritual maturity "as an expression of spiritual intelligence [that] subsumes a degree of emotional and moral maturity and ethical behavior."²³ As Vaughan indicates, "spiritual maturity implies connecting the inner life of mind and spirit

¹⁹ Dorothy A. Sisk, "Spiritual Intelligence: Developing Higher Consciousness," *The SAGE Handbook of Gifted and Talented Education* 32, no. 3 (2016): 199, DOI: 10.1177/0261429415602567.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

²¹ Sisk, "Spiritual Intelligence," 23.

²² Nhat Hanh Thich, *Cultivating the Mind of Love* (Parallax Press, 2004), 50.

²³ Vaughan, 22.

with the outer life of action and service in the world.”²⁴ The foundation of SM is self-awareness: I know who I am and have viewpoints on my world. Openness to learning, growth in perception, thinking, attitudes, behaviors, and relationship with others are steps in deepening SM. SI brings fruitfulness to people's lives and transforms them to become better persons.

If mindfulness enables learners to see the interconnectedness between humanity and the world, *Samadhi* (concentration) is an energy source that motivates learners to fulfill goals and meaning. Thich Nhat Hanh views *Samadhi*, a Buddhist doctrine, as the power to keep insight alive in every moment, as a continuity of knowledge of the heart that moves people to act. He explains that “Great concentration is achieved when you are fully present to and in profound communion with living reality.”²⁵ Being fully present offers humans opportunities to see beyond mere words and notions to the pure existence of something. Thich Nhat Hanh believes the insight gained by *Samadhi* calls us to go beyond the limitation of the subject-object binary to be one with the living reality on which people reflect.

SI is implemented in RE, enabling learners to begin the human quest for truth and put their knowledge of the heart into action. The goal of education is not simply to acquire knowledge but to use that knowledge to pursue wisdom for living. Although it is challenging to apply this philosophy in teaching, educators are called to enable learners to transform what they learn into action and uplift their knowledge into wisdom, not just for themselves but for others. Thich Nhat Hanh offers the practice of *Samadhi*, so learners have a solid will to transform what they know into actions. *Samadhi* equips people to move from the first energy in Buddhism, mindfulness, to the second energy, concentration. People with deep concentration can pursue practical wisdom or philosophy that fosters a worthwhile life for each individual and society. Attaining this third and highest level of learning is called the “flower of insight.”²⁶

Reflecting on SI in the context of education and interbeing, the primary purpose of education is to cultivate good people. I interpret the notion of good people as those who have developed healthy relationships based on collective vision and values. The idea of interbeing expresses one of the beauties of the global South, which implies adhering to both collective values and a communal bond. In a crisis of meaning and belonging in education, people need a model for both teachers and learners to embrace the notion that humans are social, spiritual, and collective beings. It is impossible to become one’s best self without interacting with others. Education aims to enable people to live a human life, be good people in society, and be true believers. SM allows learners to have open minds, to learn and grow in their thinking, interpreting, and reacting to their daily circumstances. If we build schools within a just and loving community, we have hope to end the crisis of belonging. School is not a place to compete for top honors. It is a place to find a sense of being and belonging. This strategy applies to identity formation and the meaning-making process for students struggling in their studies and lives, as in the tragedy of Leea, the student at Yale University mentioned earlier. Hanan A.

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁵ Hanh, *The Sun My Heart*, 71.

²⁶ The practice of Buddhist meditation is to generate three kinds of energy. The first kind of energy is Smrti; it means mindfulness. The second is Samadhi, concentration. And the third is Prajna, insight. (“What is Mindfulness?”, Plum Village, last modified September 20, 2007, <https://plumvillage.org/library/clips/what-is-mindfulness/#hyper transcript>.)

Thich N. Hanh, *The Sun My Heart*: 121. *Thich shares that* “Our practice is to look deeply and to live deeply, dwelling in the “diamond samadhi” of concentration. We stay concentrated not only while practicing sitting meditation, but also while walking, drinking tea, or holding our newborn baby. Looking deeply, we are not fooled by signs. When you touch a flower in diamond samadhi, you touch the sun and the whole cosmos!” (99).

Alexander is correct in claiming, “Becoming educated is not about becoming rational for its own sake, but about becoming intelligent to be good.”²⁷ The crucial factor in educating people as good is their ability to pursue collective spiritual values: such as the ability to show compassion, to accept people as who they are, and to pursue happiness. The interconnectedness among humanity found in people with high SI demonstrates how faith and reason mesh and how spiritual values harmonize with rationality to educate good people for society. EQ or IQ alone cannot offer this knowledge; it must be achieved through SI. When schools abandon spirituality, learners cannot meet their spiritual needs to achieve the best version of themselves. When one searches for the rational relationship between faith and reason in teaching RE, one must emphasize the interaction between the two. The same goal exists in philosophy and theology, i.e., reason and faith interact to help humans seek their purpose in life or meaning in what they do. SI can serve to guide people hungry for purpose and truth. It calls us to live each day intentionally through a daily practice using meditation, self-awareness, discernment, etc., to join in the mystical journey of humanity toward God.²⁸ This perspective is a vision to encourage all future RE educators to embrace SI in their teaching. When learners are trained to search for truth, this truth enlightens their thinking and living to draw close to the true God. The following section will explore the role of a beloved community as a healthy environment for learners through two communal models: *Koinonia* and *Sangha*.

IV. *Koinonia* And *Sangha*: A Communal Way of Being

SI and its practice are in dialogue with the Christian traditional notion of *Koinonia* and the Buddhist community model called *Sangha*. *Koinonia* means fellowship, communion, or participation.²⁹ Based on Saint Paul’s theology, *Koinonia* is revealed in a faith-based community where one is connected to Christ and embraces a new identity in baptism. This divine union is a foundation on which to build up a harmonized relationship. John D. Zizioulas, an Orthodox theologian, offers his theological viewpoint of communal ontology through an ecclesial model. In Christian communities, when all the members are one in communion, they become an ecclesial being that is bound to the very essence of God.³⁰ The singular being, therefore, becomes a collective entity of many people, forming a new identity called the ecclesial being. All is one in this model. Zizioulas builds his thought of communion following 1 John 1.1. St. John tells readers that a true communion “[It]is not merely [a] communion of the mind or the heart, but a communion of vision, hearing, and touch, with [Jesus Christ] whom our hands have touched.”³¹ Zizioulas stresses how important it is for one to be in communion to achieve true personal existence. Indeed, it is not from reasoning, thinking, or feeling, but from experiencing Christ in person that Christians can achieve true communion. Zizioulas emphasizes the significance of an

²⁷ Alexander, *Reclaiming Goodness*, 172.

²⁸ Pope John Paul II echoes the wise words from Saint Bonaventure to call theologians to deepen their understanding and knowledge in faith and reason to avoid their inadequacies in teaching and serving: “Reading without repentance, knowledge without devotion, research without the impulse of wonder, prudence without the ability to surrender to joy, action divorced from religion, learning sundered from love, intelligence without humility, study unsustained by divine grace, thought without the wisdom inspired by God.” See John Paul II, “Fides Et Ratio (14 September 1998),” Vatican, last modified September 14, 1998, #81

²⁹ See “Koinonia,” St. Bernard Catholic Community, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.stbernardlou.com/koinonia>.

³⁰ John D. Zizioulas and Jean Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: RSM Press, 1985), 15.

³¹ Lectures in Christian Dogmatics, 8

ontological communion that goes beyond the idea of a *well-being* Church to the *very being* of the Church. Each human becomes a person when they participate in the life of God, what Zizioulas calls *Koinonia*; this term expresses a communion with one another in and with God.

Sangha, like *Koinonia*, reflects a communal bond and wisdom from the Eastern culture. Thich Nhat Hanh retells a classic Buddhist story from 2500+ years ago, which reveals interbeing's significant role in humanity. "Shakyamuni Buddha proclaimed that the next Buddha will be named Maitreya, the "Buddha of Love."³² Thich Nhat Hanh interprets this story through his vision of *Sangha*. He thinks "Maitreya Buddha may be a community and not just an individual."³³ A good *Sangha* is crucial for the practice of SI, in which humanity accompanies one another on the path of self-transcendence. When all humanity journeys toward this goal with the notion of interbeing to build spiritual bonds with other people and all creatures, it brings universal transcendence. This universality implies a foundation within the concept of interbeing, as universal transcendence alters relational dynamics: We treat one another differently if all may or will transcend, and thus the nature of our understanding of interbeing is defined by this concept. The seed of SI planted in the soil of a sound community can be cultivated and nurtured more efficiently. Thich Nhat Hanh shares his wisdom on why *Sangha* is the most precious jewel in Buddhism with these words:

Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are three precious jewels in Buddhism, and the most important of these is Sangha. The *Sangha* contains the *Buddha* and the *Dharma*. A good teacher is important, but sisters and brothers in the practice are the main ingredient for success. You cannot achieve enlightenment by locking yourself in your room.³⁴

The communal values following *Koinonia*, and *Sangha* can contribute to education to end the epistemic injustice and to end a moment of danger raised by Boaventura D. Santos called *epistemicide*, the murder of knowledge.³⁵ When the dominant culture fosters an undefined sense of community through the path of assimilation, the minorities who resettle their lives from the global South to the North might put aside their traditions and cultures to survive and be accepted in a new society. The path of epistemic justice is based on the insight of interbeing and its practice. To end *epistemicide*, there is a need to create equal exchanges among cultures.

As Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us, people cannot achieve enlightenment by locking themselves in their rooms. Scholars also cannot achieve justice by locking the truth in a library or records' office; reaching out to the public square might create a greater impact. Additionally, hiding information in a way that cannot be accessed by the community is a form of epistemicide exemplified by the crisis of sexual abuse happening throughout the world, especially what we have seen in the Roman Catholic Church. To end epistemicide, people should be invited to express how injustice has occurred to them. This is exactly the spirit of synodality, which Pope Francis is calling the whole Church to journey through together in the synodal process to renew the Church. The "murder of knowledge" is the keeping or active destruction of information that would lead the community to cry out for justice. Oppositely, the art of listening and sharing can build bridges to bring communion among people. Teachers and learners are called to transform their foundational communities where they belong to a beloved community. In designing a learning environment like *Koinonia* or *Sangha*, teachers and learners collaborate with one

³² Nhat Hanh Thich, *Cultivating the Mind of Love* (Parallax Press, 2004), 111

³³ Ibid., 111.

³⁴ Ibid., 111.

³⁵ Boaventura D. Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (London: Routledge, 2015), 92.

another as a gathering of love around rules, laws, and stories. These qualities that connect a community are informational in content, and thus must not only be freely available, but learners must be taught how to interpret that information in connection with the community (“the story” becomes “our story”). Robbing a community of that information, or of the educational facilities to teach the community how to use that information, is a form of injustice. When RE sets a standard based on White supremacy that forces those who are not white to meet that standard such action threatens their traditional and cultural identity.

Christine Hong, a Korean American practical theologian, offers a vision to renew RE by using intercultural and interreligious intelligence to build a healthy learning environment. She notes that “Intelligence framed as posture does not seek mastery or competency over knowledge to wield it against others but aims for openness to the new.”³⁶ Her scope of intelligence is not as an instrument to master a field or gain power over people lacking opportunities and privileges, such as minority persons or people of color. Moreover, intercultural, and interreligious intelligence is fostered through a humble approach to knowledge and makes space for failure. Her model of co-learning invites both teachers and learners to contribute, and learning is towards liberation.³⁷ White supremacy and Christian hegemonic structures and systems are at the core of how we experience teaching and learning. They exist as frameworks in everyday biases that need to be put to an end so that learners can thrive in their studies. She offers the notion of interbeing through her tradition called *Woori*, a Korean word for togetherness. She explains that

The concept of *woori* is more than a concrete Korean concept of oneness and community. When expanded to consider the minoritized lives of people in theological education, *woori* is a framework that is transnational, boundary crossing, aware of the creative potential of communal and individual dissonance, and at times, dangerously prioritized over self-determination. Woori-ness is part of formation that should be a part of our day-to-day teaching and learning. It is a lens through which minoritized people and dominant culture people might learn to see one another and themselves as grounded in significant places, people, and spiritualities amid feelings of otherness on North American soil.³⁸

An educational approach based on *Koinonia* offers healthy human development: Learners can feel fully included, respected, and welcomed.³⁹ The concept of *Woori* parallels *Koinonia* and *Sangha*, which foster communal values such as wholeness, oneness, and connectedness. These ways of being in the community offer teachers and learners an environment needed for their flourishing. Learners in a *Koinonia-based community* are called to encounter Jesus Christ through an experience of the Christian community.

Christians are invited to share the Gospel message, particularly that of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, so that each person may respond to the unique invitation of Christ to join with him in deeper union or communion. Religious educators are called to form learning environments as beloved Communities, transforming schools through hospitality and faith. Groome recommends that every learner in *Koinonia* should feel cherished, respected, and included. To find ways to welcome ‘the other’ with an open heart and mind is the task of the learner.⁴⁰ God bestows God’s love and graces on humans so that people can attain a flourishing

³⁶ Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁸ Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 110.

³⁹ Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith?*, 207.

⁴⁰ Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith?*, 208-212

life, whose communal aspect is an essential condition for spiritual growth in three dimensions: with God, with others, and within oneself, mirroring the mutual relation of the Trinity. A sense of belonging is essential for learners. When learners can gather with teachers as a community that shares the same vision is most significant. The following section will focus on a shared vision of community well-being based on Micah 6:8.

V. Learning Community and a Shared Vision Based on Micah 6:8

SI is a pathway to expand epistemology toward the heart of knowledge by gathering people who share the same vision of interbeing and ethical commitments following Micah 6:8 as a beloved community. One of the beauties of *Koinonia* as a verb is the jointly contributed gifts and sharing. To establish a beloved community, a gathering is the first action to be taken. As I mentioned earlier, a gathering is needed for learners to experience community. Theologian Willie Jennings envisions an education in belonging as a follower of Jesus Christ, who comes to gather the crowd and enable them to live a better life. He criticizes the wages of whiteness and colonists who have turned the world into commodities, including the educational system. People who hold power in this plantation pedagogy treat learners as objects or products of its educational system and design them into a conformed model, which Jennings terms white-self-sufficient masculinity. Thus, teachers and learners in these mal-educational systems face hardship in building a life together. Jennings sees teachers and learners not as free people but as “a crowd in chains, and only holy desire that forms [them] for one another can break those chains and guide [them] to a place where [they] meet each other in ways that announce eternity.”⁴¹ Jennings points out the need for a new ethics of sharing, which is lacking in the modern colonial model. Thus, a shared vision is a condition needed to transform the learning environment to cultivate good people in terms of interconnectedness.

Drawing from Peter Senge, Jane Regan, an emeritus professor at Boston College, defines a shared vision as:

A genuine vision that serves to energize and motivate all members and levels of the organization. This vision serves as a point of preference for all the decisions that direct the movement of the organization across time. Building a shared vision is fundamentally about creating shared meaning. Shared meaning is a collective sense of what is important and why.⁴²

A shared vision serves as anchoring points and navigators to guide people toward a common goal. To build a shared vision in an educational environment, teachers and learners must navigate and harmonize their vision toward a shared collective imagination. Regan noted that “moving from compliance to enrollment to commitment is at the heart of the discipline of a building shared vision.”⁴³ We may re-imagine through SI a new vision of being based on the foundational SI insight of interbeing, communal bonding, and practice of collective identity. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes this concept of interbeing through his work on the beauty of the Eastern communal bond, which reinforces collective agency.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Willie J. Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020), Kindle edition, 159.

⁴² Jane E. Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Loyola Press, 2002), 124.

⁴³ Regan, 124

⁴⁴ The nature of “individualism,” self-sufficient vs. others.

Practices that nurture SI can be found in various wisdom traditions and walks of life. Vaughan says that “It is not enough for a person to claim spiritual knowledge if it is not expressed in the world through wisdom, compassion, and action. Integrating spiritual intelligence means living by one’s core beliefs.”⁴⁵ However, Vaughan does not recommend a method of how to build up the foundation of SI within an institution or community. A concept for SI and wisdom from the East is community-based well-being. *Koinonia* or *Sangha* takes us one step further to show teachers and learners how to develop an educational model as a just and loving community. I envision RE using SI as an approach to end the spiritual crisis of belonging by initiating a shared vision based on Micah 6:8 that offers us three actions God requires of religious educators to construct a just environment.

Love tenderly: For every Christian, to live their vocation is to express their unique aspect of loving God and neighbor. We need to pay attention to practical habits to build up our sense of feeling and compassion towards others, not just as “them” but as “us,” not as an outsider but always as one of us. Alexandre asserts that “Love of mercy is the well-spring of the intelligence necessary for moral discourse.”⁴⁶ Faith education contributes to a political movement that impacts broader communities beyond faith-based communities of believers. RE embraces knowledge, spiritual wisdom for life, and the arts in teaching and learning. It is not only for a personal transformation or for the Church’s enhancement but also for the whole world. Love becomes a source of human wisdom.⁴⁷ Additionally, Wigglesworth searches for practical ways to follow Jesus and saints who embody love in their daily lives and offer unconditional love to others. She recommends the 21 Skills model as a mental map to fulfill her quest for love and act from wisdom to be a good person.⁴⁸ Wigglesworth quotes a definition of love from the East as “a birth with two wings. One wing is compassion; the other wing is wisdom. If either wing is broken, the bird cannot fly.”⁴⁹ Behaving with love is a core principle of SI. Applying this principle in RE enables the rational language of the head to encounter the emotional language of the heart to inspire learners toward loving others without risking their loving care for themselves.

Act Justly: To act justly is a crucial component of a shared vision to build a just learning community based on biblical justice. “Justice is a consequence of free will, our capacity to make and enact moral decisions,” Alexandre claims.⁵⁰ To do justice refers to human behavior in relationship to others. To act justly is an act that fosters a proper relationship with people embedded in their healthy relationship with God, self, and others. Groome explains the notion of right relationship with both virtues: Being holy and being just non-separately.⁵¹ How do religious

⁴⁵ Vaughan 31

⁴⁶ Alexander, *Reclaiming Goodness*, 212

⁴⁷ The key point of Jesus’ recommendation is the practical aspect of human love. Jesus wants us to give total commitment to what we do. Moreover, the love one has for God should be reflected through the love one has for God’s people and the love one has for oneself. The competition between self-love and love for others should not be a paradox, but two sides of the same coin. Many prophets were transformed to love God and serve God through their witness by vibrant actions of living in joyful witness to the faith, such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta or Archbishop Oscar Romero. The way they lived presents their act for justice. Bringing these examples into education motivates learners to stand up for justice.

⁴⁸ Wigglesworth, *SQ21*, 88.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8. Wigglesworth tried to explore SI as the practical path to releasing ego and learning to love others after the experience of the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. She urgently needed to find a common language to release interreligious tension using SI. Love enables people to have an open mind and to honor other spiritual paths.

⁵⁰ Alexander, *Reclaiming Goodness*, 212.

⁵¹ Thomas H. Groome, *Faith for the Heart: A "Catholic" Spirituality* (2019), 270.

educators welcome learners and their contributions and form their education justly or foster epistemic justice and testimony? Groome notes that “Christian faith first demands the works of justice – permeated with the spirit of [agape] love.”⁵² Groome recommends a new concept of justice named *restorative justice* besides the three traditional forms of justice: commutative, distributive, and social justice.⁵³ Groome also offers a praxis for justice and its foundation based on political spirituality as a core factor in developing a critical social consciousness.⁵⁴ To have a vital social consciousness, learners need to have a social awareness by thinking contextually and historically. Groome offers the historical example of the injustice and oppression of white supremacy and patriarchy excluding women and people of color from education, leadership, or decision-making. Like Groome, SI can offer ways to strengthen learning and concerns about inequity and injustice by using problem-based learning on real problems.⁵⁵ SI enables learners to value justice for themselves and others by responding to the injustice or suffering in their current living circumstances.

Walk humbly with your God: Humility is a gift offered to everyone to accept themselves as who they indeed are, “neither too low and self-regarding or too high and full of pride.”⁵⁶ Humility enables people to channel knowledge into wisdom, first transform one’s personal life and then share that wisdom with others to pursue God, the ultimate goal of learning. God wants God’s people to walk humbly with God and follow God’s navigation to the right destination. A faith journey requires a humble heart to be God’s followers as Jesus’ disciples and embracing Jesus Christ as the centrality of education from and for faith matters in RE. The belief in Jesus Christ makes Christianity different from other religions and philosophical beliefs. It is not an idea but a person: Jesus Christ, whom God sent to bring salvation to humankind. Countless places in the Church’s teaching remind people about the role of Jesus Christ in RE. For example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms: “The heart of Christian faith is Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ When religious educators choose Jesus as their centrality, they must follow what and how Jesus teaches. They are reminded to build a learning community that shows love, expresses inclusion, and stands up for justice. Alexandre claims that “Humility is an outgrowth of recognizing our fallibility.”⁵⁸ The virtue of humility inspires teachers and learners to accept failure or mistakes and to keep the joy in not knowing. In the SQ21, Wigglesworth recommends ways to attain humility through the art of knowing one’s belief system, recognizing that one’s worldview cannot be a legitimate view to judge others or to impose one’s beliefs on others.⁵⁹ Moreover, to improve learners’ higher level of SI, Wigglesworth advises learners that “[their] Higher Self has more wisdom and much more humility.”⁶⁰ Since humility can lead people to the source of wisdom, Hong recommends religious educators ground their teaching in humble modesty, a core theological and social ethical virtue.⁶¹

⁵² Thomas H. Groome, “TMRE 7060-Fall 2021” (lecture #6, Boston College, 2021).

⁵³ Groome, *Faith for the Heart*, 269.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 273-274.

⁵⁵ Sisk 201

⁵⁶ Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 75.

⁵⁷ Thomas Groome, *Will There be Faith?* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 34.

⁵⁸ Alexander, *Reclaiming Goodness*, 212

⁵⁹ Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 52.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁶¹ Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, x.

To walk humbly with God in the art of teaching requires religious educators to see learners through God's eyes, so they can cultivate the goodness God has created in learners. Walking with Jesus in the path of preaching and teaching for epistemic justice is crucial to training learners to pursue knowledge actively and critically. Learners can grow in their judgment in their learning experience to distinguish truth among various levels of truth claims. When learners walk with Jesus to offer unconditional love, restore justice to human dignity, and be humble to do all they can and entrust to God the rest, they hold on to a hope to cultivate a sense of belonging in the just learning community following Micah 6:8.

Conclusion

Hate, control, or exclusion has no room to grow when learners embrace interconnectedness to form their perception and behavior. When teachers and learners see others through the pronoun "we" to express the interconnectedness among human beings, they can build a healthy learning environment. SI is not just to foster personal well-being but also to fulfill the quest for communal well-being. In recognizing and cultivating spiritual values communally, people with high SQ will diminish the mindset of control, domination, and discrimination. Love and gratitude are fruits of SI when learners use their senses to connect with their hearts in listening to others. SI helps learners hear with their ears and hearts and then motivates a solid will to act for transformation. It is essential to have a beloved community that fosters a healthy environment for learners using SI. SI links with the essence of interbeing and expands the capacity for both self-love and loving others. With this new insight of interconnectedness, the most crucial theme of SI interacting with Micah 6:8, calls religious educators to plant the seeds of love, justice, and humility in learners within a just learning community. This vision of RE enables learners to grow holistically and attain the ability to act with wisdom and care, even in challenging situations. Now is the time to cultivate and nurture these seeds in RE; now is the time to build a beloved community to offer a healthy learning environment. To have a higher SQ needs time and effort, personally and institutionally. SI is a communal wisdom that impacts communal being and agency. How RE fosters learners so they can improve gradually from a self-awareness to universal awareness, from self-mastery to social mastery need coordinated efforts from teachers and learners. RE leaders need to pay attention to curricula and theological pedagogy, establishing a shared vision to gather people to this beloved community. Therefore, all can be agents of the Holy Spirit to a living faith rooted in the source of wisdom to maintain and sustain their lives found not in teaching/learning but in living.

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Ancestors are the Storytellers: The Realm of the Hungry Ghost and Hell in Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

Ancestors are storytellers. Buddhists consider that people will go to one of six realms after death. The six realms represent six worlds that consist of different mental states which correspond to one's wholesome and unwholesome karma. Buddhist ancestors have warned why life impelled by ignorance, hatred, and greed leads to undesirable rebirths, such as in the realms of hungry ghosts and hell, and have taught the value of moral conduct through stories and paintings to children and adults. This paper focuses on how Buddhist hell stories can shape moral and interreligious education, cultivating the value of life and interconnectedness for future generations.

KEYWORDS

Interreligious education, morality, storytelling, hungry ghost, hell

Introduction

We were born, we are living, and someday, we will die. These three evident conditions correspond to the title of a renowned painting by Paul Gauguin, "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going? Within the three, "Where Are We Going?" is the most curious question for many. Every story has a voice, and it is a medium of the spirit world and the ordinary world in which we live. Susan M. Shaw says, "When learners are engaged in a story, they are transported to another world. They have traveled to another place,"¹ therefore, stories have the power to reflect the changes and foster the desired goals of religious instruction.² Today, Buddhist meditation and mindfulness have been popular in western culture. However, life after death in Buddhism is not well-known in the West. Non-Buddhist children might have questions, such as "Is there heaven and hell in Buddhism? If so, what does the Buddhist inferno look like?" "What kind of people are sent to hell?" These questions, which are born from genuine curiosity, open children's minds to be aware of diverse cultures and people, such as religious rituals, festivals, arts, music, and even food nurture imagination. Gloria Durka elucidates:

A rich imagination is needed to discover ways of living together justly and pursuing common goals. None of this will happen unless we as teachers are

¹ Susan M. Shaw, *Storytelling in Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1999), 379-380.

² Ibid., 119.

committed to looking through the eyes of each of our students and confronting the lived reality and possibility of the common good of all of us.³

Imagination nurtures spiritual growth, and it is indispensable to pursuing the goal of what is good for humans.

Because of COVID-19, people all over the world have faced challenging situations. More people are concerned that society has shifted to a lack of patience, mutual understanding, generosity, love, and compassion. However, “religion and religious communities to confront harsh realities and contribute to global solidarity and collaboration to address current threats to people and to global societies,”⁴ as Hyun-Sook Kim puts it. Thus, the role of religious education is more crucial than ever because religious education enables us to make this world a better place and nurture spirituality for future generations. In such a sense, learning from ancestors’ stories filled with wisdom will illuminate our future paths even though the current world is covered with dark clouds. The next question follows, “How should we regard the relationship between religious education and ancestors?” Gabriel Moran explains:

Religious education will then be seen to emerge at the center of education not at the periphery. Religious education would be a place of both passion and tolerance, a place to stimulate the deepest intellectual search and invite a personal choice to follow the best way one has discovered through conversations with one's ancestors, with the generations of human travelers, and with the nonhuman lives that speak to us.⁵

As Moran says, religious education should be positioned at the center of education because conversations with our ancestors enable us to discover better paths through the most profound intellectual quest. What do ancestors in hell want to tell us? What are their moral messages? This paper elaborates on the world after death in Buddhism and examines the meaning of ethical life inspired by Buddhist textbooks and traditional Japanese art. Ancestors’ voices from hell contain precious moral teachings; therefore, Buddhist storytelling may contribute to interreligious and moral education.

Methodology

Drawing mainly from the Buddhist textbook, *Ōjōyōshū*⁶ (The Essentials of Rebirth), written by the Tendai School monk, Genshin, in 985 AD and the *Jigokue* (Paintings of Hell) in Japan, this paper is based on theoretical methodology which reveals moral messages from the past (ancestors), and how it can invigorate moral and religious education.

The Six Realms

³ Gloria Durka, *The Teacher's Calling: A Spirituality for Those Who Teach* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002), 52.

⁴ Hyun-Sook Kim, “Beyond Doubt and Uncertainty: Religious Education for a Post-Covid-19 World,” *Religious Education* 116, no. 1 (January 19, 2021): pp. 41-52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2021.1873662>, (PDF,8).

⁵ Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989), 241-242.

⁶ For a more detailed background of the *Ōjōyōshū* and the beliefs of the Pure Land in Japan, see Robert F. Rhodes' *Genshins Ojōyoshu and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018.

The notion of karma is often misunderstood in contemporary society. People use the word karma as synonymous with predestination or fatalism. It is not the correct understanding of karma because it can be wielded as an excuse to escape from adverse circumstances.⁷ The word karma translates as action. Karma refers to one's good and evil deeds that result in pleasant or painful experiences in the future.⁸ Karma has two varieties, wholesome karma, and unwholesome karma. In short, wholesome actions result in eventual happiness for oneself and others; on the other hand, unwholesome actions result in suffering for oneself and others. Thus, karma is considered as a moral action and responsibility that one should owe. Karma will manifest itself in the same way a mango appears on a mango tree.⁹ When a person dies, karma, which has been accumulated in his or her present life as well as the past lives, determines the form of existence in the next life.¹⁰ unless one will achieve nirvana and be free from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, called samsara.

There are six realms, gods (Deva), demi-gods (Asura), humans (Manushya), animals (Tiryak), hungry ghosts (Pretas), and hells (Niraya). The first three are considered desirable, and the latter three are undesirable. Within the six realms, the realm of Deva is thought to be the most fortunate rebirth. The dwellers in this realm can enjoy sensual pleasure, spiritual pleasure, or tranquility for a long time, even eons, as a result of wholesome actions, such as keeping moral precepts. However, their happiness is still temporary because when the force of good karma is exhausted, Devas fall from heaven and will be reborn in other realms because Devas have not achieved nirvana. In the realms of Asura, they suffer because they are envious and have conflict, thus feeling unfortunate and unhappy. One positive cause to be reborn in the realms of Asura is generosity, and the negative causes are anger, envy, and jealousy.¹¹ Human birth is difficult to gain, and it is the result of good conduct. Indeed, the Buddha taught how rare and precious to rebirth as a human being; therefore, it is crucial to cultivate one's mental quality and not waste time seeking pleasure. In the realm of Tiryak, animals suffer from numerous undesirable circumstances. Humans kill them for food, and even if they are not killed, domestic animals are forced to work hit by whips. The foremost cause of being born an animal is an ignorance. Pursuing animal-like desires, such as eating, sleeping, and sexual desire, and not striving to cultivate one's mind will cause this unfortunate rebirth.¹² In the realms of Pretas, hungry ghosts suffer torments of hunger, thirst, heat, and cold. Hungry Ghosts are depicted as "unkempt beings that have bloated stomachs and tiny mouths."¹³ Hungry ghosts are those who did not have good faith and did not offer food and clothes to the needy while they were alive because of desire greed; in other words, desire after desire. Some of them can only eat incense smoke or blowing wind. However, when their unwholesome karma is exhausted, they can be reborn in a higher

⁷ Peter D Santina, *Fundamentals of Buddhism* (Carmel, NY: The Buddhist Association of the United States, 2007), 81-83.

⁸ Nanako Sakai, "Visual Compassion for Women's Empowerment," *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, December 29, 2021, <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/dcse-2021-0017>.

⁹ Santina, *Fundamentals of Buddhism*, 81-88.

¹⁰ C.T. Shen, *Mayflower II: on the Buddhist Voyage to Liberation* (Stony Brook, NY: The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, 1983), 56.

¹¹ Santina, *Fundamentals of Buddhism*, 97.

¹² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹³ Robert F. Rhodes, *Genshin's Ojoyoshu and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 203.

realm. In the realm of Niraya, hell dwellers suffer the pain of hell until their unwholesome karma is exhausted. The cause of rebirth in hell is habitual violent actions such as killing and cruelty. Thus, each realm corresponds to the state of one's mind and actions such as whether one keeps the moral precepts or not.

Rokudōe 六道絵 and **Jigokue** 地獄絵

Rokudōe (The Paintings of the Six Realms) is a set of Buddhist paintings mounted on fifteen massive hanging scrolls, which can be called an example of a visualization of the *Ōjōyōshū*. The essential passages of the *Ōjōyōshū* are quoted in cartouches on the paintings and are considered the illustrated versions of the text.¹⁴ *Jigokue* (The Paintings of Hell) refers explicitly to the images of hell, which depict the details of the torture of sinners. Such artistry has influenced the people's popular image of life after death and ethical conduct in Japan. As mentioned, *Ōjōyōshū* was written by Genshin (942-1017 AD) in 985. Borrowing from the *Ōjōyōshū*, *Rokudōe*, and *Jigokue* could have mutual influence between the text and the images. Another essential piece is *Kanagaki Eiri Ōjōyōshū* (The Illustrated Essentials of Rebirth Written in Kana), which was published during the Edo period (1603-1868) to spread widely the content of Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*. The new version written in *kana* contributed to reading easier among people and provided fixed images of hell in Japan.¹⁵

The Ten Kings of Hell

Just like a judicial system in present-day society, a similar system exists in hell to judge a person. The Ten Kings¹⁶ are the judges who are responsible for the ten trials after one's death in hell.

The First Hall of Hell (seventh day after one's death): Shinkō-ō 秦広王 is a Judge who asks the dead person whether they had kept the Five Precepts while they were alive. The Five Precepts are: Not harming, Not stealing, Not lying, No sexual impropriety, and No intoxicants. Once people exit the First hall, they come across the *Sanzu River* (River of Three Crossings). Dead people must cross the river on the way to the afterlife, depending on their heaviness of karma. Light sinners go through a fordable stream, heavy sinners need to go into the muddy water, and virtuous people can cross a bridge or use boats. Even today, six old coins are placed in the casket of the dead during the funeral process for the payment to a ferryman.

The Second Hall of Hell (fourteenth day): Shokō-ō 初江王 is a judge who is in charge of the first precept: not killing. **The Third Hall of Hell** (twenty-first day) Sōtei-ō 宋帝王 is a judge who is in charge of the sexual misconduct and adultery. **The Fourth Hall of Hell** (the twenty-eighth day) Gokan-ō 五官王 is in charge of the precept: not lying. In this hall, a scale is used to measure the weight of one's unwholesome karma, which is called *gōbakari* (the karma scale.) Even though sinners tell lies that they did not do anything bad in front of the Enma, the karma scale reveals the truth. **The Fifth Hall of Hell** (thirty-fifth day) Enma daiō or Emma 閻魔大王 is the most well-known king of hell. In this hall, a crystal(quartz) mirror called *Jōhanokagami* reflects all the

¹⁴ Ryouji Kajitani, Naoki Nishida, and Kazuya Takaoka, *Hell in Japanese Art* (Tokyo: Pie International Inc., 2017), 28-29.

¹⁵ Ibid., 584.

¹⁶ Genshin does not mention the Ten Kings in hell in *Ōjōyōshū*. The story of the Ten Kings has its roots in the two sutras; the Ten Kings (the Sutra of Ten Kings), written in China, and Bussetsu Jizo Bosatsu Hossin Innen juo-kyo, 仏説地藏菩薩発心因縁十王經 written in Japan.

wholesome and unwholesome actions when one was alive. Because of this mystical mirror, it is impossible for sinners to say words of evasion. He keeps the records of the deceased, which is called Enma-Cho (Enma's Notes.) **The Sixth Hall of Hell** (forty-second day) Henjoo-ō has jurisdiction over the dead. He refers to Enma's notes. **The Seven Hall of Hell** (forty-ninth day) 泰山王 Taizan-ō refers to a King of Tai Mountain. The forty-ninth day is critical because it is the last day being the intermediate existence between one's death and rebirth (bardo). In this place, each person must enter the gate based on their deeds (karma) while they were alive. **The Eight Hall of Hell** (one hundred days) Hyōdō-ō 平等王 manages a retrial because one's sin is slightly reduced if his or her descendants offer a service for the dead. **The Ninth Hall of Hell** (First Death Anniversary) Toshi-ō 都市王 also manages a retrial. **The Tenth Hall of Hell** (Third Death Anniversary) Godōtenrin-ō 五道転輪王 keeps the records of the dead who would be reborn.

How the Eight Sins Corresponding to the Eight Hells

In addition to the five precepts, (1) Not harming, (2) Not stealing, (3) Not lying, (4) No sexual impropriety, and (5) No intoxicants, there are sixth, seventh, and eight precepts. If people break these precepts, they are sent to hell. The three additional precepts are (6) those who have the wrong view (ignorant beings who deny the karmic law), (7) those who sexually assault nuns, and (8) those who commit patricide, matricide, and killing an arahant¹⁷ are added. According to Fumihiko Sueki, the relationship between each precept and its consequences, leading to eight kinds of hell when one does not keep the precepts.¹⁸ Each hell has subsidiary hells, too.

1. Those who break the precept (1) are sent to the Hell of Repetition.
2. Those who break the precept (1) and (2) are sent to the Hell of Black Rope.
3. Those who break the precept (1), (2), and (3) are sent to the Hell of Assembly.
4. Those who break the precept (1), (2), (3), and (4) are sent to the Hell of the Lamentations.
5. Those who break the precept (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) are sent to the Hell of Great Lamentations.
6. Those who break the precept (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), and (6) are sent to the Hell of Scorching Heat.
7. Those who break the precept (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), and (7) are sent to the Hell of Great Scorching Heat.
8. Those who break the precept (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), and (8) are sent to the Hell of No Interval.¹⁹

The Structure of the Eight Hells and the World We Live is illustrated in Appendix (Figure 1.)

I. Hell of Repetition

The first hell is the Hell of Repetition, and as explained above, this is a place for those who have committed the killing. According to *Ōjyōshū*, this place is described as follows:

¹⁷ An arahant is the highest level practitioner of Theravada Buddhism. An arahant no longer needs to go through samsara, the cycle of birth and death.

¹⁸ Fumihiko Sueki and Kenji Oguris, *Jigokue No Nihonshi* [Japanese History of Hell Paintings] (Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 2021), 57.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Hell of Repetition is located one thousand yojanas²⁰ below this world...The sinners in this place are always bent upon injuring one another. If anyone by chance, they act like a hunter would toward a deer. Whetting their iron claws they proceed to scratch each other's eyes out and lacerate the flesh on each other's things until the blood runs out and the bones are exposed. Thereupon come the hell wardens and beat them with iron rods from head to foot till their bodies are broken into fragments like grains of sand...All who destroy life in any form fall into this hell.²¹

The sinners who fell into the Hell of Repetition continue to kill each other even after death. Regarding the Five precepts, Thich Nhat Hanh²² has reshaped them to adjust to contemporary society. He emphasizes the need to deal with our minds because we have a certain amount of violence and nonviolence within us. Thus, it is possible to become more or less nonviolent depending on our state of mind and transform the condition of wars in ourselves into a peaceful one. Thus, to practice the first precept is “a celebration of reverence for life.”²³ Teaching children why killing is an unwholesome action and how to protect the lives of all sentient beings is the role of education at home, school and community. Durka states that education in the 1970s was based on moral relativism, “Values are caught, not taught.”²⁴ Teachers were required not to directly tell students what was right or wrong. She asserts that religious educators should be able to declare things morally wrong as knowledge, and there is much more to say from the standpoint of religious tradition.²⁵ Moral education was accomplished using moral tales and parables throughout history. Therefore, the knowledge has been preserved in religious traditions through the teachings, traditions, and lives of those who share the common story.²⁶ The description of the Hell of Repetition provokes the fearful emotion; however, it provides an opportunity for children to learn their moral heritage because “Virtue can be taught and caught.”²⁷ Tortured by the hell wardens, ancestors in the Hell of Repetition want to tell us, “Do not kill or hurt anyone. If you commit the killing, this is what you will be.” Practicing nonviolence is the first step to protecting all life forms.

II. Hell of Black Rope

The hell of the Black Rope is located below the Hell of Reception and is of the same size as the latter. The hell wardens seize the sinners and fling them face down to the ground, made of hot iron. The hell wardens in tormenting the sinners say, “The heart is itself the chief enemy and causes the greatest evils. It binds men and sends them to appear before Emma-O. You must be

²⁰ Yojana is an ancient Indian measure of distance. One yojana is about 10 km or 6 miles.

²¹ Eileen Gardiner, *Buddhist Hell: Visions, Tours and Descriptions of the Infernal Otherworld* (New York, NY: Italica Press, 2012), 59-60.

²² Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2015), 90-91.

²³ Ibid., 91-93

²⁴ Gloria Durka, *The Teacher's Calling*, 52-55.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

roasted alone in hell and be devoured as a result in hell and be devoured as a result of your evil work. Wife and children, brothers and sisters or relatives are all of them unable to save you.”²⁸

The second precept, Not Stealing, refers to abstention from taking what is not given and has a broader meaning in contemporary society rooted in consumerism and commercialism. It does not merely mean prohibiting theft but includes fraud, deception, and exploitation. Various kinds of stealing exist in contemporary society, such as false advertisements, fraud, and phishing emails. The broader perspectives of the second precept are social justice and ecological awareness. We should practice generosity by sharing our time, energy, and materials resources with those in need. We should not steal and not possess anything that belongs to others. We should pay respect to the property of others, and more importantly, we should not profit from the human suffering of other species on Earth.²⁹ What do ancestors in the Hell of Black Rope want to tell us? They might say, “When we were alive, we thought money was the most important matter in our lives. To get money, we deceived people and continued to steal. Instead of stealing, we should practice generosity, but it was too late.” Many people are living in a materialistic and highly competitive society. To awaken our consciousness to the issues of social injustice and environmental destruction are crucial because they are other types of stealing.

III. Hell of Assembly

In Hell of Assembly, there are various ox-headed and horse-headed hell wardens armed with pronged iron sticks and clubs for the purpose of torture. This hell is known as a Forest of Sword Blades. When the dweller looks at the top of the trees in this forest, he sees the well-dressed, beautiful woman. He recognizes her face, whom he once loved. Filled with joy, he tries to climb the tree. However, while climbing, the branches and leaves turn into swords and lacerate the flesh and bones into pieces. Defying the swords, he tries to reach the top of the tree, driven by his sexual desire. Nevertheless, when he reaches the top of the tree, the woman is now on the ground and saying, “Because of karma created by my passion for you, I have come to this place. Why do you not come near me and embrace me?” So, he begins to climb down the tree and reach the ground; however, the woman appears on the top of the tree. He tries to climb the tree again even though his body becomes bloody, and the woman continues to seduce the man. It is said this process keeps going for ten trillion years.³⁰

Sexual misconduct ruins the lives of many people. The third precept refers to appropriate sexual behavior and refraining from hurting another person through sex. It requires celibacy for monks and nuns, and limits sexual intercourse within marriage for laypeople. Today, the precept is more crucial because young people are exposed to magazines, TV shows, movies, and social media filled with “violent sexual seeds,”³¹ such as sexual abuse of children, rape and sex trafficking. Many girls are forced to work at the brothels in South Asian countries. Sex trafficking of minors is a multibillion-dollar industry across the globe.³² Durka asserts,

²⁸ Gardiner, *Buddhist Hell*, 61-62.

²⁹ Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 93-94

³⁰ Kajitani et al, *Hell in Japanese Art*, 58-59.

³¹ Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 95-96

³² Nanako Sakai, “Visual Compassion for Women's Empowerment,” *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, December 29, 2021, <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/dcse-2021-0017>.

“Preventing violence means teaching about the cause of violence, and naming it where it exists.”³³ Even being cut by the blades for ten trillion years, ancestors in Hell of Assembly cannot overcome their sexual desire. With regret, ancestors might say, “Do not hurt others through sex. If you break the precept, this is the place you will be.” Educators have an essential role in teaching children where violence comes from, how they protect themselves, and when they need to raise their voices at home, community, and in society.

IV. The Hell of the Lamentations

In the Hell of the Lamentations, the heads of the hell wardens are yellow color like gold and their eyes blow flames of fire. They wear red garments, and their arms and legs are fat, large and strong. They can run like the wind, releasing horrible voices from their mouth; by their powerful voices, they can pierce the sinners just like arrows.³⁴ The sinners are crying out with a grudge against Enma and saying, “O your honorable ruler! Why do you not treat us with a heart of pity? Why are you not more gentle with us? We are vessels of sorrow. Why do you not show mercy toward us?”³⁵ Enma answers,

You are deceived by the web of your own passions. You have created evil karma and now you receive the reward of your evil works. Why are you angry with me and holding a grudge against me? ... While you were in the world you were deceived by your heart of lust and folly and thus you created evil karma. Why did you not at that time repent? Even though you repent now it avails nothing.³⁶

The fourth precept teaches us why we need to use wholesome, loving speech. When we tell a lie, we lose faith in our beauty and the trust of others.³⁷ The precept is applied to break the wall caused by ignorance, such as prejudice, discrimination, and hatred. Today, young people are hurt by harsh words via social media. According to Plan International USA, online harassment has emerged as a significant theme among young people.³⁸ Besides, even though they are connected to hundreds of people on social media, they feel more isolated compared to older generations. When we lie or hurt someone with a harsh word, we lose the beauty in our minds and break the relationship. Ancestors in the Hell of the Lamentations might say, “Be careful of your mouth.” They show us that lying and harsh speech are destructive actions. A religious educator must be honest and a seeker of profound spirituality; “The more we work on our inner life, the better teachers we will be.”³⁹

³³ Gloria Durka, *The Religious Education Association* 109, no. 3 (May 28, 2014), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2014.911619>.

³⁴ Zengyo Shimoizumi, *Jizo Bosatsu: Jigoku Wo Suku Roboo No Hotoke* [The Buddha at the Roadside Who Save People in Hell] (Tokyo: Shunjuusha, 2015), 94-96.

³⁵ Gardiner, *Buddhist Hell*, 66-67.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 101.

³⁸ Sakai, <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/dcse-2021-0017>.

³⁹ Durka, *The Teacher's Calling*, 76.

V. The Hell of Great Lamentations

The Hell of Great Lamentations is located below the Hell of Lamentations and the size is the same. The suffering in this hell is similar to the other hells except that it is ten times greater than all the suffering on the four hells that are described above and their subsidiary hells.⁴⁰

Murderers, thieves, adulterers, drunkards, and those who use evil language fall into this hell. The hell wardens torment the sinners while quoting the scriptures saying, “Evil language is the worst fire, which burns up even the great ocean. Therefore the one who uses such language will be consumed like dry grass, trees, or tinder.”⁴¹

One of the subsidiary hells is called Receiving-Boring-Suffering. In this hell, the sinners’ mouths and tongues are nailed together with hot iron nails so that they cannot cry out.⁴²

The fifth precept is No Intoxicants. Alcohol and drugs help a person forget the bad things in life temporarily. The Buddha taught abstention from drink and drugs because they dull the mind, and gradually we tend to use them to escape from reality. Preventing the behaviors that cause damage to our body and mind is crucial because keeping our bodies healthier is the same as expressing our appreciation to all ancestors and not betraying our future generations. When people are trapped in the web of addiction, they might take any harmful actions, such as lying, stealing, or even killing, that lead to breaking all five precepts and later regret. On the contrary, practicing just one precept leads to practicing all five, as the five precepts are interconnected.⁴³ During the quarantine of COVID-19, the increasing use of alcohol and drugs became a social problem. Ancestors in this hell warn us not to make our minds dull with alcohol and drugs.

VI. The Hell of Scorching Heat

The Hell of Scorching Heat is situated below the hell of Great Lamentations and the size is the same. Murderers, thieves, adulterers, and those who have falsehood and wrong views fall into this hell.⁴⁴

The hell wardens seize the sinners and make them lie on the ground, which is made of hot iron. Sometimes they make them lie facing upward and sometimes downward, all the time beating and punching them from head to foot until their flesh is beaten into a pulp. Sometimes they place them on a large roasting shelf made of iron and heated to an intense heat. Thus they roast them in a raging flame. Turning them over first on one side and then on the other, they roast them until they are burned thin.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Gardiner, *Buddhist Hell*, 67-68.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 93-106.

⁴⁴ Shimoizumi, *Jizo Bosatsu*, 101.

⁴⁵ Gardiner, *Buddhist Hell*, 68.

At this place, sinners feel jealous of the preceding five hells because they feel as if (the five hells) are cold like snow or frost. Why should we not tell a lie? What are the right views? How do educators teach such morality? A teacher cannot preach the ethic because “She or he must live it.”⁴⁶ Teachers should show how human beings are affected by social and personal aspects and point out the responsibilities that flow from them.⁴⁷ It seems that ancestors in this hell did not have good teachers or did not try to learn from their teachers while they were alive.

VII The Hell of Great Scorching Heat

In the Hell of Great Scorching Heat, the sufferings are almost the same; however, they are ten times greater than the combined suffering of the preceding six hells and their subsidiary places of torture.⁴⁸ Life in this hell lasts one-half a Middling Kalpa.⁴⁹ Murderers, thieves, adulterers, those who have falsehood and wrong views, and those who have raped nuns who keep the chastity fall into this hell. Hearing the cries of the victims who are already in this hell, they are filled with sorrow, distress, and fear; they are subjected to immeasurable torments.⁵⁰ Taking each sinner separately, the hell wardens torment a sinner and say,

Are you frightened as you hear the cries and see with your eyes? How much more then, will you be terror-stricken when your body is burning like dry grass and tinder! However, the burning by fire here is not that of a literal fire but rather the hot passion of your evil karma. The burning of fire may be extinguished, but the burning of evil karma cannot be put out.⁵¹

Flames rise to 500 yojanas in height and 200 yojanas in breadth. The flame is raging to correspond to the power of evil karma that the sinners have created.⁵²

Moran says that suffering is the human condition from which we start; some sufferings touch the profound greatness of humanity, while other sufferings are useless, painful, and destructive of humanity. Humans are confused about suffering and try to flee from it but only find themselves entangled in worse suffering.⁵³ Sufferings in hell seem to be only painful and destructive. Ancestors who try to escape from the tortures in hell can be overlapped with people who live in ignorance. On this earth, we should attempt to sublimate our suffering toward the greatness of humanness, and perhaps it is what ancestors in this hell want to teach us.

VIII. The Hell of No Interval

⁴⁶ Durka, *The Teacher's Calling*, 56.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Gardiner, *Buddhist Hell*, 70.

⁴⁹ Kalpa refers to an immense measurement of time in ancient India.

⁵⁰ Shimoizumi, *Jizo Bosatsu*, 102.

⁵¹ Gardiner, *Buddhist Hell*, 71.

⁵² Shimoizumi, *Jizo Bosatsu*, 104.

⁵³ Gabriel Moran, *Fashioning a People: The Educational Insights of Maria Harris* (New London, CT: Twenty Third Publications, 2007), 132.

The Hell of No Interval is also called *Abijigoku*. It is situated below the Hell of the Great Scorching Heat and at the bottom of the very bottom of the realm of craving. While between the state of dying and rebirth, sinners doomed to this hell wail out loudly and describe:

There is nothing but flames. They fill the sky and there is no space (between the flames) ...All the space on the ground is filled with evil people. There is nothing I can rely on. I am alone, with no companion. I am within the darkness of this evil realm. And will (soon) enter the mass of flames. In the sky, I can see neither the sun nor moon nor the stars.⁵⁴

It must be a dark world if we cannot see the sun and the stars in the sky. The description of hell provokes scary images (Figure 2.) However, it draws attention to the significant differences between the darkness of hell and our beautiful world filled with a bright light. We can enjoy the beautiful cherry blossoms in spring and the smell of fresh air after a thunderstorm in summer. The colorful yellow, red, and orange leaves on the ground tell us the winter is approaching, and we notice how beautiful the snow-capped mountains are in winter. Ancestors in this hell recollect that they did not appreciate the beauty on earth when they were alive because they had never thought such things were valuable. With deep regret, they will say, “If we can see a beautiful sun and stars again, we gladly give our lives.” Educators need to teach the value of good actions, such as “feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked”⁵⁵ and taking care of those who are ill. Hell dwellers are those who do not have such wholesome actions and lack compassion while they are alive. It seems hopeless in hells; however, Jizo-bosatsu⁵⁶ is a savior from the torments of hell and protects all beings in the six realms of existence.

Conclusion

We have two different kinds of ancestors, our biological ancestors, and our spiritual ancestors. All people can learn from their spiritual ancestors regardless of their religious traditions. Thich Nhat Hanh says that the spiritual ancestors have given birth to us; therefore, if we have enough spiritual strength, we will continue giving birth to spiritual children, even after we die. He concludes:

When we respect our blood ancestors and our spiritual ancestors, we feel rooted. If we can find ways to cherish and develop our spiritual heritage, we will avoid the kind of alienation that is destroying society, and we will become whole again. We must encourage others, especially young people, to go back to their traditions and rediscover the jewels that are there. Learning to touch deeply the jewels of our own tradition will allow us to understand and appreciate the value of other traditions, and this will benefit everyone.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Rhodes, *Genshin's Ojoyoshu and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan*, 199.

⁵⁵ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 149.

⁵⁶ Jizobosatsu is Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva in Sanskrit. Ksitigarbha means “earth treasure.”

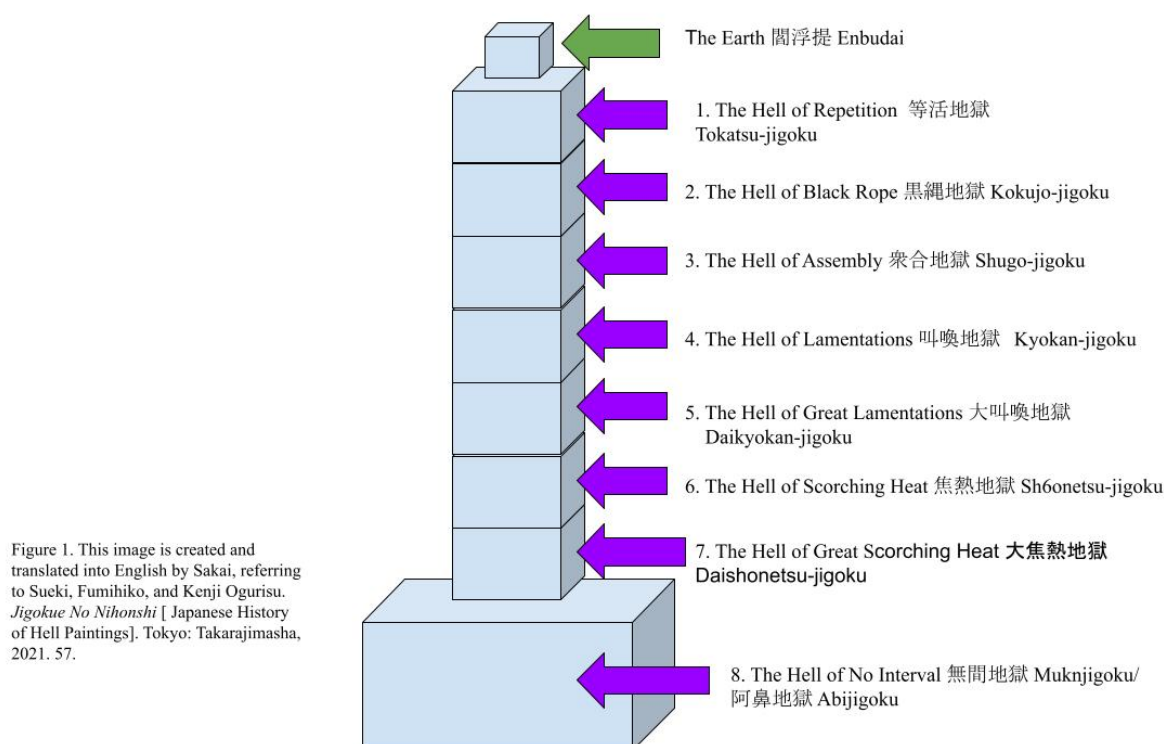
⁵⁷ Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 90.

The world seems to be covered with dark clouds; thus the role of religious educators is crucial to nurture spiritual strength. William Cenkner says, “No cultural tradition can be satisfied with its own accomplishments, much less can any religious tradition be satisfied with its own accomplishments.”⁵⁸ Therefore to have the interreligious perspectives is indispensable for mutual understanding. Religious educators are gatekeepers for spiritual heritage so that future generations can benefit from it, just like we have had many world heritage sites in the world. We should remember that both the blood ancestors and the spiritual ancestors are excellent storytellers.

Appendix

Figure 1: The Image of the Structure of the Eight Hells and the World We Live

The Image of the Structure of the Eight Hells and the World We Live (The Earth)



⁵⁸ William Cenkner, “IV Religious Experience and Teaching Asian Religions,” Taylor & Francis (Religious Education, 1971), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0034408710660405>, 262.

Figure 2: Rokudoe-Abijigoku-fuku, 六道絵 阿鼻地獄幅 [Six Realms: The Eighth Hell] The collection of Shoji-raigo-ji 聖衆来迎地寺所蔵 国宝 (National Treasure.)



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**Haunted by (Ontological) Ancestors:
Prospects for Religious/Theological Education in Light of
Ontological Terror, Biopower, and Necropolitics**

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Abstract

This essay seeks to expand how religious educators/theologians envision and speak of ancestors. It does so by considering the multifaceted and elusive forms that ancestors can take, including as “ghosts” of one’s own past selves (“ontological ancestors”). The essay then considers how, once the self allows for its own hauntings by any and all ancestors, creative co-creation can emerge as resistance to ontological terror, biopower, and necropolitics. Such haunting is possible only through continual unlearning and dislodging of one’s very self amid honest engagement with present (hopeless) realities.

Introduction: On Hauntings by Ever-Present Death

The term “haunting” certainly conjures images of cemeteries and scary movies, of the fall breeze on Halloween night as children run from house to house in search of sweets, or of dilapidated structures with ghoulish inhabitants. Spooky and spine-tingling might be apt adjectives for the event of a haunt. But one need not delve into the worlds of spirits to experience a haunting. The soil itself might harbor the spilled blood and broken bones of past generations. The land is infused with ancestral relics and specters. Like Golgotha, for example, the land now known as the United States is a site of multiple and ongoing crucifixions—a scene of ontological terror and unjustified, senseless mass death and suffering.¹ And utopian dreams of a more equal and just

¹ Mayra Rivera, “Ghostly Encounters: Spirits, Memory, and the Holy Ghost,” in *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 119.

society where all bodies can live and thrive seem ever out of reach within this necropolitical landscape that grants states the right to organize and police mortality via biopower—determining the value of bodies and their disposability.

Are we haunted by deaths of all kinds? Death is everywhere at all times. Far from being a fact meant to elicit fear, such realization might liberate a self stuck in pretensions of a settled (eternal, even) self. It might also lead selves—especially those under the illusion of being self-made—to see that all life, all existence, comes at the cost of other life.² You and I are here because other life has given (and continues to give) us life. Think of the flesh you consume on a daily basis or, if vegetarian, of the plants you deprive other lifeforms of. From the moment of birth to death, all bodies participate in competition for resources that nourish, embellish, or provide social status. Some bodies consume a large share of the world's resources, resulting in vast amounts of waste—and depriving others of mere survival.³ So an uncomfortable question arises: is innocence ever possible, even for hominid infants? For example, an infant born in a wealthy Californian suburb consumes almost 70% more resources, on average, than an infant born in a Brazilian favela or even in the Liberty City neighborhood in Miami. Realization of complicity in death for survival is certainly uncomfortable, especially for those who see their lives as peaceful or as engaged in fights for justice and equality. Consistent deaths of self are therefore essential to bodies always on the move to the final, physical death. These deaths might also spark compassion and empathy for bodies already in extreme precarity.

² M. Shawn Copeland notes: “We owe all that we have to our exploitation and enslavement, removal and extermination of the despised others.” Reinhold Niebuhr makes a similar observation: “all human life is involved in the sin of seeking security at the expense of other life.” Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Fortress, 2010), 100. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1964), 169.

³ See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), especially pages 194-199.

Ancestors can manifest in many shapes and forms. Though the dead (especially victims of injustice) can serve as reminders to the living of past events, one's "self" can become a ghost and ancestor that reminds the present self to remain unsettled and always open to a multitude of possibilities, even in the most constricted of scenarios. Past lifeforms and past selves serve as constant reminders that deaths of all kinds are inescapable and ever present—notwithstanding attempts to sanitize life and avoid the specter of rotting flesh. This essay seeks to expand how religious and theological educators envision and speak of ancestors. It does so by considering the multifaceted and elusive forms that ancestors—as ghosts—can take, including “ghosts” of one's own past selves (what I am calling “ontological ancestors”). The essay considers how, once the self allows for its own hauntings by any and all ancestors, creative co-creation can emerge as resistance to ontological terror, biopower, and necropolitics. Such haunting is possible only through continual unlearning and dislodging of one's very self (through practices I explore in this essay). Ultimately, this essay proposes that religious and theological education should open spaces that resist reductions of the self and of ancestors—allowing hauntings of all kinds to surface whenever and wherever.

Haunted by Conditions of Ontological Terror, Biopower, and Necropolitics

As mentioned, hauntings are possible in the present. Indeed, ontological terror (the realization of one's nonhumanness) is itself a continual haunting with several implications, especially for black bodies. “Human life is dependent on black death for its existence and for its conceptual clarity,” writes Frank Wilderson III. “There is no world without blacks, yet there are no blacks in the world.”⁴ Black bodies, or the Negro as both Calvin Warren and Achille Mbembe argue, provide the fodder for the ontological security or coherence of non-black bodies (human

⁴ Frank Wilderson III, *Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption*.

beings).⁵ Warren urges his readers to resist the humanist affect and acknowledge an inconvenient truth (at once feared and dismissed as nonsensical), namely that “blacks have function but not Being—the function blackness is to give form to a terrifying formlessness (nothing).”⁶ Ontology built on metaphysical fiat is essentially imaginary, a construction—it is a “nothing” but with real consequences. Black bodies and blackness, argue the Afropessimists, provide a (non)form (a tangible object or equipment without Being) that represents the antithesis to the ideal ontology.⁷ Thus Warren notes, “The Negro is not a human being that is simply being mistreated, but is, instead, an invention designed to embody a certain terror for the world.”⁸ Black bodies simultaneously haunt and are haunted. The annihilation of non-white flesh—the primordial existence before power imposes an identity and transforms it into a body or object—is a continuous feature of modern society/coloniality.

According to Warren, the black body (the Negro) is a tool, a toy, and ultimately a floating body (a specter of sorts). It is a *tool* because, as mentioned, it quells both ontological and metaphysical anxieties stemming from nihilism, thus providing a referent for what is not “human” to humans. It is a referent without a referent—a true conundrum for semiotics. It is a *toy* insofar as it is a “vehicle for fantasy—a vessel of the human’s imagination and configuration of the world.”⁹ Black bodies are also playthings in a physical sense, useful only for their entertainment value to colonial gazes and desires. And finally, it is a *floating body* because it “lacks form or placement within a political/ontological landscape (a sign of formlessness).”¹⁰

⁵ Calvin Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 61.

⁶ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 6.

⁷ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 8.

⁸ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 38.

⁹ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 147.

¹⁰ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 56.

The black body can never find a resting place, a home. It is a nomad (and a ghost) both “unassimilable and radically other, straddling nothing and infinity.”¹¹

Mbembe equates Negro lives with animal lives, for the animal too “lives in a state of suspension. It is ... neither this nor that.”¹² These formless and suspended bodies inhabit what Mbembe calls the Zero World—a place itself suspended and deferred, outside the ontological and metaphysical world but very much integral to its imaginary.¹³ Residents of this world come and go, here one second and gone the next, always teetering on the edge of nothingness, of nonexistence—lives in precarity that exist simply not to die, as Fanon states. “To exist means staying alive.”¹⁴

But staying alive for what? For Warren, black life matters negatively, as both necessary and disposable to current metaphysical and ontological paradigms: “The Negro is the interstice of metaphysics, the formless form between man and animal, property and human, whose purpose is to embody formlessness as a corporeal sign. As an intermediary, its position within metaphysics is paradoxical, as an excluded inclusion, an untranslatable entity without proper referent...”¹⁵ The Negro Question asks, “Can black “things become free? What is the status of such beings?”¹⁶ Warren would answer “no” to the first and would suggest that blacks are inherently something other than a human being. His entire project “challenges the claim that blacks are human and can ground existence in the same being of the human.”¹⁷ As a paradoxical and non-being entity, the black body cannot be emplotted within a metaphysical humanistic framework or understood within the Euro-Christian concept of *imago Dei*. Language of human

¹¹ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 47.

¹² Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 167.

¹³ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 168-69.

¹⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 232.

¹⁵ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 35.

¹⁶ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 16.

¹⁷ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 6.

dignity and rights is therefore empty rhetoric fueling cruel optimism in a world of colonial difference sustained by metaphysical fantasies of hierarchical and categorical existences—of a world haunted by specters of bodies deemed nonexistent or if existent, as disposable fodder, as ghosts in the machine.

Biopower and Necropolitics: Specters Par Excellence

A brief analysis of power relations (through a Foucauldian lens) shows that power is anything but one dimensional. It is not simply a vertical phenomenon that emerges from a few hands (a singular center, such as the state's sovereign) or in binary form (such as them versus us). Foucault warns that power must

be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something that functions only when it is part of a chain. It is never localized here or there, it is never in the hands of the some Power functions. Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit and to and exercise this power.¹⁸

It is therefore essential to explore power beyond the confines of sovereign power if dreams of resistance and transgression are ever to surface. Power operates at all times and in different ways, and it can be both positive and negative.¹⁹ Power itself occasions haunts.

Foucault points out that when he speaks of power, “people immediately think of a political structure, a government, a dominant social class, the master slave, and so on.”²⁰ It is a common misconception that power operates only in binaries. This common script limits potential responses and resistances to another set of scripts: revolting, voting, protesting, becoming a politician, joining the grassroots struggle, etc.... The vertical understanding of power also assumes a singular center and its margins. But power creates several centers and margins, with

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picador, 1997), 29.

¹⁹ Foucault notes that “multiple relations of power traverse, characterize, and constitute the social body....”

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity/Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1994), 291

margins within margins. Categories of exclusion and inclusion also require reconsideration in light of more complex understandings of power.

So why do most focus on one form of power, that is, the political-juridical (sovereign) form? Perhaps because it is more visible and older than the other (biopower), with Foucault locating its genesis in the Middle Ages as a “reactivation of Roman law and ... constituted around the problem of the monarch and monarchy.”²¹ In terms of visibility, Foucault observes that “one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death.”²² Crucifixions, beheadings, burnings at the stakes, pressing to death, and forms of modern capital punishment are all quite visible examples of the sovereign’s seemingly unilateral power over subjects that violate the state’s will.

But, as noted, power is more complex than the visible and ancient form. Foucault identifies another form with origins in the seventeenth century (during times of colonization): biopower. Rather than exercise power through the ability to kill (or to refrain from killing), biopower exerts its powers through the “management of life” toward optimal and predictable societal outcomes. “The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power,” Foucault notes, “was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life.”²³ Biopower depends on two interrelated techniques: discipline of individual bodies and control of the population, with both working in tandem to normalize bodies and behaviors that are then conducive to societal homeostasis or equilibrium.²⁴ No wonder Foucault boldly claims that “biopower was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the

²¹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 34.

²² Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 135.

²³ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 139-40.

²⁴ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 246-47.

machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes.”²⁵

A few shifts to note with biopower on the scene. The body passed from being only a legal subject or object beholden to sovereign power (or church power) to a “living subject” whose whole body and existence are now game for various techniques of power that could intervene when threats to social optimization (to the norm) appear.²⁶ Biopower is thus a “continuous regulatory and corrective mechanism” that exceeds law’s control over the self.²⁷ All life (even internal thoughts) is now power’s prerogative—not simply life in relation to the state or one’s duties to the sovereign. Power now works to distribute the “living in the domain of value and utility.”²⁸ Foucault continues: “Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm.”²⁹ It can do this without much noise or attention, such as when a judgmental gaze at a gay couple holding hands in public elicits from the pair shame, anger, or pride. Thus, the living who occupy the several distributions themselves contribute to and wield power over others, for both ill and good, perpetuating certain norms.

Biopower also regulates and intervenes in order to avoid accidents and to control spontaneity that could upset homeostasis. It is all about preserving the grids of power used to discipline and regulate bodies and populations. Power is now total, seeping into bodies via the

²⁵ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 141.

²⁶ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 142-43.

²⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 144.

²⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 144.

²⁹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 144.

state and via other bodies, as well as through one's own body. It is a totalizing gaze that only death can elude.

Sovereign power, however, still survives. The question becomes: How can the sovereign continue to take life while simultaneously preserving it and optimizing it? In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault raises a similar question: "How can a power such as [biopower] kill, if it is true that its basic function is to improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances, to avoid accidents, and to compensate for failings?"³⁰ Enter racism. But not racism as relating only to phenotype. For Foucault, racism is found within any relationship of enmity—any adversarial confrontation that allows killing for the sake of preservation and even purification. He is talking about a biological (or evolutionary) form of racism wherein the "more inferior species ... die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated" so that there will be "fewer degenerates ... in the species as a whole...."³¹ Remaining life, in turn, can continue its long trek toward perfection or optimization—in effect, a version of survival of the fittest.

Foucault thus argues that "racism justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger insofar as one is a member of a race or a population, insofar as one is an element in a unitary living plurality."³² Elimination of threats to progress, then, remains within the purview of sovereignty, whose reach has also expanded beyond legal measures to instill a complex power system that regulates all life itself and that intervenes at all moments on the way to realizing a utopian society. "To be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power," Mbembe reminds us.³³

³⁰ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 254.

³¹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255.

³² Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 258.

³³ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 66.

Western rationality and its techniques find their expression in the synthesis between massacre and bureaucracy.³⁴ Enter necropolitics. Sovereignty, according to Mbembe, now means the “capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not.”³⁵ Killing of the disposable serves to manage life so as to enhance it (read: to normalize it). Filtering and categorizing bodies based on perceived worth or value sets the stage for the necropolitical world: a world of marked differences and tight boundaries where there are “different rights for different categories of people, rights with different goals but existing within the same space...”³⁶ Cristina Beltran defines this space within the U.S. as a “Herrenvolk Democracy” that is “democratic for the master race but tyrannical for the subordinate groups.”³⁷ Within this world there is a dance of power. Death is balanced with life, with both visible and invisible deaths occurring at every moment. Hauntings everywhere at all times.

Yet biopower cleverly seeks to intervene to “enhance” the quality of life of even those considered “disposable” or undesirable, lest power appears as only negative or cruel. The sovereign does not need to outright kill for its power to spread; it can simply relegate those obstructions to progress to what Mbembe calls the “death-worlds, that is, the new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead.”³⁸ These living dead are those I call bodies teetering on the edge of nonexistence, on the edge of precarity³⁹—and on the verge of escaping power’s grasp

³⁴ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 76.

³⁵ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 80.

³⁶ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 79.

³⁷ Beltran, in turn, borrows this term from sociologist Pierre L. van der Berghe. See Cristina Beltran, *Cruelty as Citizenship: How Migrant Suffering Sustains White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 14-18.

³⁸ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 92.

³⁹ By precarity, I follow Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s definition as “life without the promise of stability.” See *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 2.

either through suicide or within a normalized system that others confuse with natural, given, and eternal—as a sort of filtering system. The deaths of these living dead seem immune from the criticism and indignation usually reserved for visible killings or murders. These deaths are rationalized as acceptable; it's just another weak or degenerate body no longer burdening society and its march toward optimization and homeostasis. The prospect of death is everywhere, just not always so loud. More tragic is how the living dead are kept alive with the carrot of a better tomorrow if only one can afford to be within the norms, which today seem to be imbricated with capitalist production and consumption and attendant liberal-democratic values. Hope keeps the living dead on life support, including within well-intentioned liberation narratives and dreams. It attempts to block hauntings by bodies already rotting without any salvation in sight.

So how to resist ontological terror, biopower and necropolitics? Through death (of self) and through the hauntings that those deaths occasion—while never forgetting the actual deaths of so many stigmatized and disposable bodies.

On Ontological Ancestors

What does it mean to be a “good ancestor”? At first blush, to someone spiritual, such question might conjure narratives of immediate ancestors who were pillars in the community or in one's family but who now dead provide fortitude and healing in the present to the living. To those beholden to positivist logic, talk of spiritual ancestors might be nonsensical, the fantasies of puerile minds. And some, including religious adherents, might avoid the topic altogether for fear that such speech opens portals to the demonic, Spiritism, or the occult.

What are the implications of ancestor talk for religious education in a context of hopelessness spawned by mass senseless deaths, suffering, and abject inequality amid the loop of what Foucault calls “domination upon domination”? While imagining and speaking of ancestors

are crucial to better grasping one's "self" and perhaps to finding one's (shifting) place in the vast and likely indifferent cosmos, I worry when ancestor talk fetishizes and so limits possibilities for what ancestors can be and do across time and space. There are physical and spiritual ancestors, though a physical one can certainly become a spiritual one.

Spiritual ancestors (or, as Mayra Rivera calls them, ghosts) must be free to haunt the living, especially at the most inopportune (most inconvenient) times.⁴⁰ Ancestors remind the living that control is illusory, that the fascism (or ego) within us all should and can be continually disrupted. Indeed, one's former "self" can become an ancestor for one's present self through the process of unlearning and rendering oneself discontinuous, especially at those moments when one feels most settled and whole. Rubem Alves states, "To return to God one has to undergo a great deal of forgetting. One has to unlearn what was learned."⁴¹ Similarly, to return to the self that never was, one has to unlearn one's self; one has to continuously become an *ontological ancestor* to oneself.

Ontological ancestors (who can become spiritual) can aid one's present self in navigating the uncertain and perhaps hopeless journey to nowhere, to a future out of reach because of the limited imaginations and imaginaries of the present (what Franco Belfardi calls "the age of impotence"). But this journey should not—must not—be a journey only with one's many selves across time and space. One's ontological ancestors must commune with others' ontological ancestors as well as with spiritual ancestors once enfleshed. Non-human ancestors, including non-human animals, also play a crucial role in reconnecting present selves to the wider matrix of life.⁴² And intellectual ancestors—those thinkers and writers long gone in bodily form—survive

⁴⁰ Rivera, "Ghostly Encounters."

⁴¹ Rubem Alves, *Transparencies of Eternity* (Miami: Convivium Press, 2010), 29.

⁴² Rivera, "Ghostly Encounters."

in and through their texts, influencing present bodies and communities. Far from the disenchanted world that Charles Taylor describes in *A Secular Age*, an attuned (sensitive) self can traverse a haunted mansion that features several ghosts (in a multitude of forms) roaming its many rooms—and even the surrounding grounds, since ghosts cannot be contained by existing human structures, including fantasies of returning to a lost “self” on a linear timeline.

Reconstituting Selves: Continually Becoming Ancestors to Ourselves

Perhaps due to coloniality’s obsession with classifications and categorizations aimed at governmentality (relying on “others” to sustain a stable ontology and social relationships) or perhaps due to Christian speeches on the necessity of self-vigilance and confession (“Catholic confessional technique”) because of one’s identity as a sinner, or perhaps due to the emergence of psychoanalysis and neoliberal capitalism’s incessant need to market products to specific audiences, talk of identity is in vogue and exacerbated by social media. Of course, many are familiar with the phrases “know thyself,” authentic self, true self, whole self. These are common, perhaps trite phrases in the rhetorical economy, especially with the emergence of self care. Such “identity talk” assumes a self that is dependent on the epistemes that organize social life and economic systems. In other words, modernity and coloniality make certain identities (characters) and their formations possible.

Imagining identity as something comprehensible, graspable, and progressive (with some telos) gels cogently with the obsession to categorize necropolitically in order to filter between what is useful and what is waste—between who matters and who matters less—in social relationships and the global economy. Take talk of stages of faith formation, for example. Widely regarded within pastoral theological circles and in religious education, James Fowler’s stages of faith development assumes a linear progression toward the seemingly unreachable sixth

stage, universalizing faith. Usually reserved for spiritual teachers and gurus, this sixth stage makes the very few who reach it “more fully human than others.”⁴³ Is this not a claim about worth or value? Of his theory, Fowler writes, “I claim that stages in faith development are hierarchical, sequential, and invariant.”⁴⁴ Juxtapose this with the non-positivistic (non-ordered) wisdom of Marguerite Porete, who in the *Mirror of Simple Souls*, struggles to describe the soul’s dance among seven levels. The soul might possibly never reach the final level that entails a precipitous freefall into oblivion or annihilation.

The language of psychoanalysis has also seeped into contemporary imaginings of identity. In many respects, psychoanalysis has Platonic roots, since it promises to, as Patrick Hutton states, “reestablish the broken connections between past and present experiences and so restore to the psyche the integrity of its identity.”⁴⁵ It relies on recovering knowledge buried in the unconscious—a knowledge that Freud believed was lost during the psyche’s encounter with early life experiences.⁴⁶ Psychoanalysis is “effectively a search for a lost self,” similar to the Platonic return to the self. It is a project that seeks unity of self by returning to some imagined essence, which makes it easier for a given self to represent that imagined self to the world. This identity is then subject to governmentality and discipline.

But is there some essence or stable self prior to its exposure to the world? For Foucault, according to Hutton, “our human nature is not a hidden reality to be discovered through self-analysis but the aggregate of the forms we have chosen to provide public definitions of who we are.”⁴⁷ Selves, to put it differently, constitute themselves by how they discipline and police

⁴³ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 201.

⁴⁴ James Fowler, *Lifemaps* (W Pub Group, 1985), 36.

⁴⁵ Patrick H. Hutton, “Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 125.

⁴⁶ Hutton, “Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self,” 124.

⁴⁷ Hutton, “Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self,” 127.

themselves within existing epistemes.⁴⁸ There is no human nature, no essence. Selves can reframe themselves through words and deeds, rewriting and rewiring. It follows from this that we can and do inhabit multiple identities depending on locations and gazes (for example, think of code-switching). The result is, as Hutton states, that “[e]ach day we make ourselves anew in fresh formulations.”⁴⁹ Each day we can (re)haunt ourselves rather than search for imagined established selves now scattered or lost.

Memory is fragmented; it is not the tool used to make us whole, for the past is romanticized to fit current needs or desires for a root, for a trajectory, for a life’s plan and purpose in hindsight. Likewise, desires for a romanticized past can actually be mechanisms to avoid the ongoing hauntings of the present—to turn away from the horrors amid flux, chaos, and precarity. While remembering can be essential to forging new selves, remembrance, as Rivera writes, “is threatened by the tendencies to objectify the past or construe history as a foundation of reified identities and hypercertainties.”⁵⁰ But for Foucault, as with Gilles Deleuze to a certain extent, self-understanding is a never-ending journey, since one constitutes oneself incessantly. “The search for the self,” Hutton tells us, “is a journey into a mental labyrinth that takes random courses and ultimately ends at impasses.”⁵¹ These impasses allow for hauntings in the present that constitute selves for tomorrow. The creativity of refashioning ourselves, even within the constraints of the epistemes, is what gives us power. In a way, Foucault’s vision of the self (of identity) is liberating. We are not beholden to a mythical past or to past forms. Instead, the past—

⁴⁸ “The self is an abstract construction, one continually being redesigned in an ongoing discourse generated by the imperatives of the policing process.” Hutton, “Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self,” 135.

⁴⁹ Hutton, “Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self,” 134.

⁵⁰ Rivera, “Ghostly Encounters,” 122.

⁵¹ Hutton, “Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self,” 139.

—however formulated—presents fragments that one can pick up and use to constitute new constellations, however fleeting, in the face of possible hauntings.

So how to resist totally succumbing to simplistic identities (stale versions of self) and to the dominant and normative epistemes that structure those identities? By allowing ghosts and ancestors of all kinds to haunt us continually.

Conditions for Ongoing Hauntings: Rhizomes, Askesis, and Selves Who Never Were

An ethics of the self might be among the best ways to conjure ancestors of the self. Ethics of the self is a form of deep self care—an ongoing interrogative process that turns its gaze upon the self but without the temptation (or cue) to name oneself for the sake of governmentality (whether of church or state). This section traces some contours of a deep self-care that seeks to *delay* the self in order to *relayer* in infinite ways—in order to self-stylize (or (re)constitute) in complexly unforeseen ways. This requires what several decolonial thinkers have called a “delinking of epistemes.”⁵² This does not mean unlearning all Eurocentric knowledge, for that is both a fantasy and a return to some sense of purity outside hybridity.⁵³ After all, Eurocentric knowledge itself contains possibilities for its own undoing through retrieval of unauthorized sources or through a careful re-reading of (un)authorized texts.

Rather, I seek a self-care that allows selves (always in transition) to envision and craft selves that resist, survive, thrive, and even joke within the loop of Western epistemes. I am after a practice or training of self-care that allows one to layer infinitely—to be eclectic and to build protective armor that reduces the blows of harmful inner monologues stemming from external disciplinary mechanisms that seek to normalize all bodies and minds at all costs.

⁵² Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533.

⁵³ On this point, see Foucault’s essay, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.”

Askēsis and rhizomatic identities present some viable forms of resistance within Western epistemes themselves, one stemming from the ancient Greeks, the other from poststructuralist, postmodern philosophy. Both also allow for hauntings of past selves in the present—leading to the emergence of ontological ancestors with lessons for the here and now.

According to Foucault, “the idea that one ought to attend to oneself, care for oneself (*heautou epimeleisthai*), was actually a very ancient theme in Greek culture.”⁵⁴ Initially, the Greeks considered self-care as important only to those with the responsibility to govern city-states; eventually several schools of philosophy encouraged such cultivation of the self for all (free men) as ongoing. But this practice was later adopted by the Stoics and others for *all*. Self-care is a continual practice (or training) that can take many forms, such as taking stock of one’s day, reflecting at particular times throughout the day and night, listening intently to others (i.e. sages) and then reading and writing to make the words of others one’s own, or avoiding pleasures that could distract from the journey to oneself. There is no correct self-care formula, since cultivation of the self is an embodied and thus situated practice, unique to each self whenever and wherever it finds itself.

That being said, Foucault seems to hint that care of the self entails—broadly speaking—“turning your gaze on yourself” and a conversion to the self (*askēsis*). To turn one’s gaze on oneself leads to a form of spiritual knowledge (distinguished from intellectual knowledge) about oneself in relation to the self, others, and the self’s place in society and even within the cosmos. It is a way of being in the world—and of unfurling in multiple ways. Intellectual knowledge, on the contrary, is knowledge about the external world. Spiritual knowledge involves what Foucault calls four conditions: “the subject’s change of position, the evaluation of things on the basis of

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol 3: The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 43.

their reality within the kosmos, the possibility of the subject seeing himself, and finally the subject's transfiguration through the effect of knowledge."⁵⁵ The subject cannot attain spiritual knowledge by remaining fixed or static. Turning the gaze on oneself demands that the subject change her position, "either rising to the summit of the universe to see it in its totality, or striving to descend into the heart of things."⁵⁶ The subject's constant movement renders the self discontinuous and so detached from social rhythms and cycles that can fundamentally constrict the subject's freedom. Within this motion—this discontinuity—the self finds junctures of freedom from itself and from scripts.

By rendering ourselves discontinuous, Foucault tells us, "we realize that what we think to be our identity, or that in which we think we should place it or seek it, does not itself guarantee our continuity."⁵⁷ Once this gaze is turned on the self and through practice kept there, one renders oneself subject to reconfigurations that resist simplistic self-categorizations and identities (the fodder for external powers). Being subject to reconfigurations allows one to remake oneself ad nauseam and by extension reduce (or fragment) that inner monologue/voice that "negatively" or "positively" shapes one's view of oneself (i.e. as too fat/thin, too unproductive/productive, too poor/wealthy, etc...). A false unity, in other words, opens the door to a static identity that then stakes its worth (for better or worse) in narrative logics and other myths that themselves claim to provide unity, comfort, and meaning and that in turn reify existing normative epistemes—thereby continuing the loop without an inkling of resistance.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (New York: Picador, 2005), 308.

⁵⁶ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 308.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 303-304.

⁵⁸ Foucault writes about the importance of "showing the extent to which our own identity—that little totality we constitute in our own eyes: continuity in time and space—is in reality only made up of singular, distinct elements, which are separate from each other, and that basically we are dealing with a false unity." *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 306-307.

Rhizomatic identities might better facilitate a self capable of being haunted by past selves as well as by the bodies and species of all kinds living in the terror of precarity. Deleuze and Felix Guattari define a rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* “as a continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals.”⁵⁹ Rhizomes have no center; they conjure images of multiplicities, assemblages of all kinds (including unexpected ones) that are always in movement. Rhizomes are decentered and always traveling in unexpected directions, with no telos. They can spring up in several forms and at different junctures. And Rhizomes are always in between, “interbeing intermezzo,” messing with fixed borders or settled concepts of self.

They are random and not a product of a continuity or logical sequence. Deleuze distinguishes Rhizomatic relations from “tree-like” or arboreal practices, which are rooted, rigid, and fixed—always calling for unity, wholeness, and boundaries to protect the trees from being cut down.⁶⁰

Rhizomatic connections are transformational, multiplicitous; they are offshoots that form “unexpected alliances” across seemingly irreconcilable differences.⁶¹ With the help of askēsis (rendering one discontinuous) and envisioning identities as Rhizomatic connections, we move closer to opening pathways—other synapses or portals—to a pluriversal re-conception of our own positionalities and epistemes, rendering the modern/colonial ones as just some among a multitude of possibilities. Epistemic justice depends on undoing selves limited by dominant

⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 22.

⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari write that “unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects to any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple It is composed not of units but of dimensions or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overfills.” *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

⁶¹ Beltran, *Trouble with Unity*, 168.

scripts. Perhaps this is the most practical practice within our ambit of power. Who knows? Maybe, just maybe, we might be able to stave off—even if just for a moment—the little fascist within us all, which might in turn begin the seemingly impossible task of demystifying and fragmenting the very epistemes that structure reality. With an infinite number of connections now possible, rhizomatic identities have the potential to lead to a chaotic and disruptive “ghostly multitude [that] cannot be gathered neatly as a body of evidence to found reified identities and hypercertainties—religious or political.”⁶²

What emerges may be a sort of limbo. But it doesn’t have to be a static experience. Within that limbo of existence (somewhat suspended in time) can occur exciting and transformative rearrangements of the shards, the fragments, that coalesce within our bodies to form what we are at a particular time and place—akin to a snapshot. “We are all patchwork, and so shapeless and diverse in composition that each bit, each moment, plays its own game,” argues Michel de Montaigne. “And there is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others.” Our existences might resemble shards of glass held together by a network of strings. We can never quite piece them all together to see our full reflection. We must settle for fleeting glimpses (ghostly shadows) through broken pieces held loosely together, with the unpredictably jagged edges of the glass shards routinely threatening to sever the very strings holding them together. Ancestors (and our ghosts) are part of those fragments—themselves undergoing reconstitutions as they arise and dissipate in our own memories, desires, and beings.

Haunted by these looming and persistent cleavings, the self can begin to conceptualize its own fragility and woundedness in ways that might perhaps challenge dominant narratives of settled selves. What apertures can theology and religious education provide to facilitate the

⁶² Rivera, “Ghostly Encounters,” 132.

present self's haunting and concomitant dislodging from fascist, fanatical, and totalitarian tendencies—from hypercertainties that seek to shield bodies from possible hauntings of all sorts? Vulnerability is key to occupying feral and unpredictable spaces haunted by all types of ghosts, even unpleasant ones. This is possible by inhabiting memories of past sorrows and joys, wounds and healed wounds, traumas and festivals, the good times and the bad. Opening portals to these spaces will allow the self to feel with intensity the hauntings from the several past reconfigurations of shards that will never ossify into a perfect mirror.

Broken glass everywhere. Stare long enough at the shards and one might just see a transient image of what never was but what could be for life. To co-create creatively entails including all the fragments that comprise the communities both within and beyond the self. Can religious education foster such imaginative and radical inclusion of existences both understood and enigmatic, both seen and unseen? Can theology envision co-creation with bodies and ghosts in constant transit and who are perhaps heading nowhere but to a self who never was?

Fleeting moments of joy, delight, and pleasure are crucial in moments of terror and exhaustion from hauntings. Those moments sustain the ongoing and wearisome journey toward a self always in the making, toward an edifice always undergoing renovations and reconstructions. (Think of the infamous Winchester House in San Diego. Its owner, Sarah Winchester of the Winchester Rifle empire, continually renovated the house for 38 years following the deaths of her husband and infant daughter. According to legend, Winchester insisted on ongoing construction in order to confuse the vengeful spirits of those killed by Winchester rifles.) Moments of reconstitution, of rebuilding, of relayering are paradoxically the moments when one approximates oneself—when one glimpses at a self too layered to ever be authentically seen, understood, and expressed by oneself and by others, but which is the “purest” one will ever get.

For an evanescent moment, in these fugitive gaps of being, one finally accesses some modicum of oneself. “The individual who has finally succeeded in gaining access to himself is, for himself, an object of pleasure,” Foucault writes. “Not only is one satisfied with what one is and accepting of one’s limits, but one ‘pleases oneself.’”⁶³

I imagine the weary Sarah Winchester finding some pleasure in her being during those brief gaps between the end and commencement of yet another construction project within her ever-morphing house. Haunted as we are by the ghosts of past layers but tormented mostly by the ghosts of our aspirational selves (selves imaged to be “whole” or at “rest” in some system or in some “Other), perhaps Sarah’s fate is ours: we must keep rebuilding ourselves until our last breaths, with no particular end in sight. Foucault states, “To become again what we never were is, I think, one of the most fundamental elements, one of the most fundamental themes of this practice of the self.”⁶⁴ Becoming again what we never were is to render ourselves always fluid and discontinuous, especially at moments of deep desire for some seductive continuity that seeks to lodge itself within our illusory selves. Foucault refers to a passage from Seneca’s Letter 50, addressed to Lucilius: “We should not think that the evil that afflicts us comes from outside; it is not external to us but within us.... In this practice of ourselves we must work to expel and expurgate this evil within us, to master it, throw it off and free ourselves from it.”⁶⁵

To free oneself once and for all is an impossible task for mortals such as we, beholden to the layers that paradoxically form our innermost demons *and* our protective armor. Lest the armor itself become another obstacle, the wearer must continually rearrange its scales to fend off the latest attacks from outside while allowing the flesh underneath to breathe a sigh of relief

⁶³ Foucault, *Care of the Self*, 66.

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 95.

⁶⁵ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 94.

before transforming yet again. The body will eventually perish from exhaustion and will become a ghost—a shadow—of itself able to commune with new selves and with disposed bodies who continue to haunt while themselves being incapable of being haunted again. To be haunted is a gift and a responsibility one has to ancestors of all kinds! If we hope to be responsible ancestors to a new generation trapped within the loops of ontological terror, biopower, and necropolitics, hauntings offer possibilities for fleeting escapes from the loop through ongoing reconstitutions of selves. In the words of Rivera, “May we pray to be haunted.”⁶⁶

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⁶⁶ Rivera, “Ghostly Encounters,” 135.



“Then Almitra spoke, saying, ‘We would ask now of Death.’

And he said:

‘If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, *open your heart* wide unto the body of life. For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.’¹

PART I: Compassionate Inner-Action

When last fall faded into winter at the School for Theology and Ministry at Seattle University, I received an email. For one thing: the spiritual discernment class you are scheduled to teach is cancelled. Too few students, *an unfortunate normal* at a sunseting school.

For another thing: Internship and Integration—a two-quarter class designed to shepherd students as they reflect upon and integrate what they are learning about how to be of service in the world at their respective internship sites—needs a new instructor.

Can it be you?

In its first quarter, the dynamic between the faculty and students became problematic. The train broke down and needed a new conductor. The breakdown, I was told, stemmed from how the previous instructor’s Christianity held the space in a grip that felt too Christian even for the Christians.

¹ Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 80.

Part of me, part of the time: Damn (or dang). I prepared a lot for “spiritual discernment” and looked forward to teaching a class my advisor at the GTU taught me.

Another part of me, another part of the time: Someone kind, please: bathe me in warm water. Frozen in fear, I looked at the class roster and saw two students who had thrown destructive arrows into my heart. This part of me wondered if the students would like me better and if my heart could take another piercing.

Another part of me, another part of the time: If we want to keep *a slab* of ends meat on the table, we need to teach this class. Like many contingent faculty, I am a close cry from homelessness (which I have been doing extensive anthropological research on for the past five years).

Another part of me, another time part of the time: This is a class I am qualified for, skilled to facilitate, and can love tenderly for our more-than-human world. I also have the support I need to, as Gandhi put it, “experiment with truth,” humbly.²

Another part of me, another part of the time (also from the book of Isaiah): “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.”

² M. K. Gandhi, *Mobandas K. Gandhi Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (New York: Dove Publications, 1983).

Richard Schwartz is a founder of Internal Family Systems (IFS). This emergent therapeutic practice is derived from Schwartz's listening deeply to clients describe *parts of themselves* and *the transformation* that occurred when parts were attended to with curiosity, compassion, and skillful integration.³

In the world of IFS, the human person is a world alive with parts. Parts are like sub personalities. None are bad. They mean well; they are all good and pregnant with potential. Trauma, though, hurts parts that can become hurtful, burdened, and stuck. In IFS, there is an indestructible "Self" [capital S] in people which, like Christ or Buddha nature, is a steady fountain of spontaneity, openness, confidence, and compassion.

The goal of IFS is not to banish parts into the shadows (which is *tragically counterintuitive*). The goal of IFS, rather, is to bring parts into consensual, liberative harmony. In a word, the goal of IFS is to help someone become "Self-led" and live with greater frequency in the limitless qualities of the 8 cs: calmness, creativity, clarity, curiosity, courage, compassion, and connectedness.

IFS is a spiritual psychology. Although I am not a devotee, it is a practice I find helpful to practice with a therapist and think with in the classroom. And others do, too: several primary and secondary schools across the country are exploring how to integrate IFS in their curriculum.⁴

I appreciate how IFS adds color and complexity to the nature of human personhood in a way that is grounded *in* the real *for* the good, the true, and the beautiful.

So: I began preparing for Internship and Integration by noticing different parts of myself for *compassionate inner-action*. I began by seeing that students (even the ones with sharp arrows handy) have parts and, for their reflection and integration, may appreciate practicing practices that facilitate *compassionate inner-action* as well.

What does it mean to become a good ancestor and co-create? How can we teach for the future when things are falling apart in the present? Here is my first proposal. We must begin by

³ <https://ifs-institute.com/about-us/richard-c-schwartz-phd>. Richard Schwartz, *No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with The Internal Family Systems Model* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2021).

⁴ <https://www.selfleadershipcollaborative.com/about>

understanding and tending to the diverse, complex world within and bring to the fore pedagogies of mind that scatter good seed in our inner landscapes. Parker Palmer put it well all those years ago: “we teach who we are” and “the human heart is the source of good teaching.”⁵

A second proposal. A pedagogy for the future must be a humble but differentiated student of living and local more-than-human histories.

PART II: SU/STM Context.

Seattle University (SU) was founded in 1891. It is one of 28 Jesuit University in the United States and more than 100 in the world. SU’s mission is to educate the whole person to professional formation and empower leaders for a just and humane world. It would like to be one of the most innovative, progressive Jesuit universities in the world.

SU began as a primary school in a rented church. It served 90 children. The faculty were Holy Names sisters and a handful of Jesuits. World War I threatened the school’s survival when students dropped out to join the war. World War II vitalized and then grew the college: engineering students built war planes for The Boeing Company, nursing students staffed a medical center in Normandy, and enrollment doubled with the G.I. Bill.⁶

The city of Seattle was established 40 years before SU, in 1851. “Seattle” is taken from an Indigenous chief (Seathl), who was a beloved leader known for negotiating between diverse tribes and white colonists.⁷ Seattle gave one of the most beautiful, prophetic, and heartbreaking ecological speeches after then-Washington governor announced Indigenous land loss. Seattle’s speech

⁵ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2017), 2-3.

⁶ Tracy Decroce, “Seattle University: 125 Year History of Excellence,” in *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* (October 19, 2017).

⁷ David M. Buerge, *Chief Seattle and the Town That Took His Name: The Change of Worlds for the Native People and Settlers on Puget Sound* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2017).

concluded: “The White Man will never be alone. Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not altogether powerless.”⁸

A stone’s throw from the School for Theology and Ministry, in front of the Indigenous People’s Institute, a hardly frequented corner of campus, is a bronze statue of Chief Seattle.

Seattle’s daughter, Kikisoblu, was renamed Princess Angeline by early colonist Doc Maynard. Kikisoblu became a housekeeper for white families—and homeless on her people’s homeland. She converted to Catholicism after her daughter killed herself, but whether she felt at home in Catholicism is a question. In 1871, a reverend wrote in a journal that Kikisoblu erupted over the violence caused by colonization in a gathering of “church ladies.”⁹

I think of Chief Seattle’s speech, and Kikisoblu’s church-lady eruption, as a kind of *protest spirituality* that tries to establish the spiritual conditions of being in a disempowering local world and transform the affective atmosphere that’s pulsating *weight* of present. This is like intuitive spiritual care for oneself and others when trauma wounds.

Seattle University has over 7,000 students: 4,300 undergraduate and 2,3200 graduate. Its masterfully designed material space makes one feel somehow in a garden oasis in the middle of the major downtown in the United States.

St. Ignatius Chapel was designed by Steve Hall with the concept of “A Gathering of Different Lights,” which is meant to facilitate the school’s mission of the spiritual and academic life.

Currently there are eight colleges or schools at Seattle University. After next academic year, however, a historic and transformative gathering place for different lights will go out. The School of Theology and Ministry (STM) will close. In a recent meeting with STM core faculty, the provost referred to

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<https://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Reading%20the%20Region/Txts%20by%20and%20about%20Natives/Texts/7.html>

⁹ Josephine Ensign, *Skid Road: On the Frontier of Health and Homelessness in an American City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 50.

the closure of STM as a “death experience,” which brought to my mind the first question I asked at a department meeting as a core faculty member: *“How can we die together in a beautiful way?”*

Graduate theological education began at Seattle University as a summer program in the transformative years of the late 1960s. From its inception, the school labored to birth lived faith shepherded by wisdom traditions grounded in a laboratory of economical dialogue for social healing. Raymond Hunthausen, the youngest Bishop to participate in Vatican II, is experienced by the community as a pioneer of the institution.

When the sun began to set on the School for Theology and Ministry, there were six graduate degrees and professional certificate programs, including an MA in Couples and Family Therapy and a Doctor of Ministry. Over seventeen religious traditions were represented: from Evangelical to Jewish to Muslim to Unitarian. Today, over 2,200 alumni work in various capacities for a more humane and just world.¹⁰

On June 30th, 2020, students and faculty were notified that a committee determined that the school needed to close. One rationale was that the school had operated at a significant loss for three consecutive years (over a million dollars). As Wu-Tang put it: “cash rules everything around me.”

Months before the announcement, in March 2020, the country’s economy shut down due to the escalating COVID plague. A month before, George Floyd was murdered in the daylight by a Minneapolis police officer. Floyd’s murder caused protests all over the country, including a block from Seattle University’s campus where the notorious Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) was formed by activists and abolitionists.¹¹ Some students wondered if CHAZ tasted like the revolutionary summer of love in San Francisco in 1967, just after their school was born into the world. If so, I see no bridge into religious worlds like there was with the Jesus People that literally transformed our religious landscape.

¹⁰ <https://www.seattleu.edu/stm/>

¹¹ <https://www.kuow.org/stories/looking-back-at-seattle-s-chop-one-year-later>

The news of STM's future death came as a shock and a wound. Some things started falling apart. Students felt betrayed, like the university had given up too soon and sold their values down the Duwamish River. Folks were upset that the commitment had not been transparent in its wondering before decision. Though no one ever said so, it also seemed to me that the news announced an unannounced death of a certain kind of love.

PART III: PNW/Seattle

In a community discussion about the closure of STM, which I experienced as a grieving, a protest, and a plea, former dean Mark Markuly said that, in addition to operating at a million-dollar loss shouldered by the university, STM's closure had to do with local culture.

As a theological anthropologist, Markuly's comment struck me as a playground worth playing in and a puzzle that might be solved.

We are not surprised that graduate theological education is suffering. Schools across the country have closed, are closing now, and merging. Likely all are positioning themselves given their unique charisms and cultural contexts for what Daniel Aleshire calls "the next future of theological education."¹²

Some of the reasons ring true across our differences. Enrollment is down. Student debt has become a kind of plague. The professional value of a graduate degree in theological education is in question. Communities of faith have lost membership (and public trust).¹³

Our culture is looking for a therapist and a Netflix series, not a priest and a church.¹⁴

¹² Daniel O. Aleshire, *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, MI: 2021).

¹³ Ibid, 11 & 159.

¹⁴ This reference harkens to Carl Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2017).

As Elizabeth Drescher demonstrates, we are also living through a transformation of our spiritual and religious landscape.¹⁵ An increasing number of people in the United States are religiously unaffiliated. They are “spiritual but not religious,” as the contested designation goes. In a talk at Harvard, Jeffrey Kripal suggested that the “spiritual but not religious” phenomenon, though hardly monolithic, share a moral protest against the woundedness religion has influenced upon the world.¹⁶

In my ethnographic fieldwork on the spiritual lives of people who are living on the streets of Seattle, I found that rejecting religion (and Christianity in particular) to be the birth of a new, life-giving spirituality. When I asked about what spirituality is like, people began by describing how their spirituality is emphatically *not* like Christianity. Some of the “street kids” I spent time with developed street personas after Christianity’s antiheros, like Lucifer and Lilith—and they considered themselves Luciferians.

It seemed to me that people on the streets were rejecting something that they perceived to be rejecting them, and that this rejection empowered them in a disempowering local world. I found religious rejection to be a kind of religion that offered personal and social salvation from soul woundedness, which I think of as a confluence of social wounds in an unlivable local world and spirituality as the pursuit of a presence that might help render a livable life in an unlivable local world. Religious rejection, which really mattered in this shared local world, struck me as an act of care and means by which the spiritual conditions of being might be co-created.¹⁷

I think religious rejecters and Luciferians are an extreme example of something common in the culture, an important reason why the first train of Internship and Integration fell off the tracks, and why STM would close after decades of thriving.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁶ Jeffrey Kripal, “The Future of Spiritual but not Religious” at Harvard Divinity School: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0g2SSczJ_XI

¹⁷ Note Jarret Zigon, *A War on People: Drug User Politics and a New Ethics of Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

I need to put few abstract greys on this canvas. Though religious communities have lost members, buildings, and their very communities, religion is not dead in the PNW. It still matters. Some faith-based communities are robust. In *Land of Stark Contrasts: Faith Based Responses to Homelessness*, Manuel Mejido demonstrates that faith-based organizations remain a vital component of social justice efforts.¹⁸

It is without question, however, that religion seems to matter little to most. Like Howard Thurman in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Charles Taylor demonstrates that humans need *a place of power* to stand in the world. His tomes—*The Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self*—illuminate the reasons (like how our epistemological conditions have changed in the West and made belief in a God a difficult question rather than an axiomatic answer) religion has become a less powerful place to stand.¹⁹

This story about religious decline is often told around our cultural fireplaces. I want to tell a new story. The story I want to tell is about how a divine love that lives and moves and has its being in progressive persons and politics, which is generated in places like STM, is experienced as dying. This is a story about the death of a school, then, and the perceived death of a justice-loving Spirit that people believe called this school into being and is the hope for the future.

In *America's Four Gods*, sociologists Christopher Bader and Paul Froese demonstrate that most Americans still, despite the secularizing projections of many founders of social science, believe in God. Their work also demonstrates that *how* people experience God is (a) wildly diverse and (b) one of the most salient influences on political action. For Bader and Froese, there is a lesser-known war going on in everyday worlds over how people define God and this war really matters in our everyday political realities.²⁰

In “Explaining Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Political Backlash and Generational Succession, 1987-2012,” Berkeley sociologists Michael Hout and Claude Fischer argue

¹⁸ Manuel Mejido, *Land of Stark Contrasts: Faith-Based Responses to Homelessness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021).

¹⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Christopher Bader and Paul Froese, *America's Four Gods: What We Say About God—And What That Says About Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),.

that the decline in religious affiliation is the result of *a particular religious presence in the world, not an absence*. They demonstrate that the 1960s and 70s were a cultural earthquake that scared conservatives: made them afraid the culture would take away their Jesus and moral worldiness. In response, figures like Billy Graham filled stadiums around the country, Jerry Falwell created the Moral Majority, Ted Haggard presided over the National Association of Evangelicals, and Pat Robertson's politics found a home in many lives living on sofas in suburban living rooms. From here, a public presence of religion took the cultural spotlight and came to define religion itself.²¹ It is for this reason that, when I taught theology to undergraduates at Seattle University, many wondered if what I was teaching was Bigotry 101. And why last week in a jacuzzi in San Diego, when I said in trepidation that I am religious, a lesbian woman asked if I was going to damn her.

Sociologist Christian Smith and Mark Chaves have another important explanatory sentence in this story. They dispute the notion of a steady religious decline as unreliable, simplistic, and taken on bad faith. There is no invisible current in the cultural waters destined to wash religion away, they say. Religion is down in the United States, but it might not be out. The authority of religion is a struggle for authority that changes in relation to time and place.²²

In my view, the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University has been engaged in a larger cultural struggle for the definition of religion and how religion will be experienced. Part of what they have been doing is creating persons and social spaces where a divine lover who loves through progressive politics might show up, transformatively. For the psychologist William James, religion is fundamentally a question about attuning yourself to a larger power that gives your life power and I think people fear this power (this love experienced as divine and made real in progressive politics) is dying when schools like STM die.

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud wondered about the relationship between religion and culture, and he worried about increasing discontent, which could tear to pieces our social fabric. For Freud,

²¹ Michael Hout and Claude Fischer, "Explaining Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Political Backlash and Generational Succession" (Sociological Science, October 2014): 423-447.

²² Mark Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority," in *Social Forces* 72, no. 3 (1994): 749-774; Christian Smith, ed., *The Secular Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

discontent stemmed from a loss of love, which people had historically found in the womb of religion.²³

What does it mean to become a good ancestor and co-create for the future? How can we teach for the future when things are falling apart in the present? My third proposal, which is more of a research question to be lived experimentally than an answer to be given, is that we explore whether a feared death of divine love is a beat in the heart of our cultural discontent and in our classrooms. Put differently, my third proposal is a question about really matters when religious worlds die and a provocation that we allow love to be our mortician in the present and our midwife for the future.

INTERLUDE I

(An interlude from Kalil Gibran's *The Prophet*).

Then a ploughman said, Speak to us of Work.

You work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth.

When you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music.

When you work you fulfil a part of earth's furthest dream, assigned to you when that dream was born.

And in keeping yourself with labor you are truly loving life,

And to love life through labor is to be intimate with life's most inmost secret.

And when you work you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God.

And what is it to work with love?

²³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilizations and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2010).

It is to weave the cloth with the threads of dawn from your heart, even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.

It is to build a house with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.

It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy, even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.

It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit.

And to know that all the blessed dead are standing about you and watching.²⁴

Part IV: The Structure of the Class

In *Waiting for God*, Simone Weil writes that love, in all its fullness, is being able to look at another person and ask: “what are you going through?”²⁵ The look is as crucial as the query. Both are meant to liberate the Other from one’s own limiting preconceptions so that the Other can emerge to you in freedom (*and a hospitable presence might be co-created*). In a loving look and a loving question, an authentically loving presence is at stake, which is created with the energy of genuine freedom.

With Weil mind, I began engaging the students in Internship and Integration with a simple question before the class began. “What do you need from this class? How might I help create a space that is hospitable to what you are going through?” “If it feels free and fruitful,” I said, moreover, “consider spending time with this query as you do a spiritual practice that holds meaning and power for you at this time.”

²⁴ Gibran.

²⁵ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*

Here is the third step I took in my course design, after noticing the parts of myself with curiosity and compassion—and spending time with what I thought really mattered about current situation—as defined by its history, values, and cultural context.

For the sake of confidentiality, I cannot share what students wrote. What I can say, however, is that three themes emerged in the emails I received: (i) a need for *a free space to reflect* on one's experience at STM/their internship site, (ii) a need to *be in open conversation with their peers*, and (iii) a need *to practice skills* that students learned over the course of their program.

After reaching out to students and spending contemplative time with their responses, I reached out to experienced professors. First, people in my department who knew the students intimately and understood clearly what was at stake in this course.

I then reached out to professors I respect at other institutions who have taught similar courses. I asked them what they learned about what worked. They listened to me share my ideas and provided valuable feedback about how to think about co-creating a helpful space.

The next step I took was to consult with theorists whose work I respect and who I wanted to help inform my own idiosyncratic and evolving pedagogy. I will name four. Critical here is bell hooks who is committed to pedagogy as a (i) a practice of freedom and (ii) a practice of love, which is born and nurtured by freedom, and (iii) something pleasurable.²⁶ Palmer was essential, especially his thesis in *The Courage to Teach* that good teaching is born in the heart, rooted in a teacher's integrity, and that teaching can be a practice of social healing. Patricia Killen, whose wise accompaniment last year was the most valuable gift I could have received, invited me to consider Priya Parker's work in *The Art of Gathering*. Parker speaks about the concept and practice of a professor-host, who is there to help facilitate conversation through a "generous authority" that keeps the group's shared purpose at the heart of the experience.²⁷

²⁶ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 1994).

²⁷ Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2018).

Finally, I asked myself about God. Quakers are fond of saying that there is that of God in everyone. And more recently, we are likely to say there is that of God in *everything* to make space for attentiveness to the divine in the natural world. I asked myself how I might help free the energies of God in me to enter this space even if, as Natalie Wigg-Stevenson writes, it means inviting transgressive devotion.

After this deep listening, I retuned into myself and drafted a course that consisted of the following elements: (i) easing in with tunes and tea; (ii) taking turns creating a ground exercise that might help create a playful, mindful base for our shared time; (iii) a creative reading, in class, of Valarie Kaur's fantastic book, *See No Stranger: A Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*; (iv) rest; (v) an hour of processing one's internship and/or experience at STM, which would (a) begin with a journal prompt students would take turns creating and then (b) open up for sharing; (vi) and finally; (vii) a group discernment exercise with photography.

I proposed this structure to the students on the first day of class and asked if we needed to make any adjustments, which could be made by group consensus. We agreed that the structure was worth living into and experimenting with. I also invited us to be open to a new wind coming into our space and blowing things around.

Part V: The Difference it Made

The hybrid course lasted ten weeks, though we missed two weeks due to holidays. Covid derailed a few students from showing up in-person now and again.

The first week began with lamentation. Students were tired. Upset. Grieving. Many recalled how they entered the program hopeful and excited but now, with the hard work and the closure of STM, felt burned out. Some students were looking forward to a sabbatical. Some students were dealing with dreams that appeared to be shattered (or hopefully on hold).

It struck me as an act of care to step back and simply listen and affirm this lamentation, and to let the students show up for each other. In this case, generous authority seemed to mean co-creating the space and then fading into the background.

That proved to be the most fruitful and regular feature of the course, actually: showing up for each other to grieve or rejoice and speak praise over one's goodness.

Creative contemplative practices seemed to create a note that slowed things down and illicit the energy to play in what matters.

Students enjoyed creating reflective prompts and being able to be the teacher for and with each other.

The reading of Valarie Kaur's work inspired some, and not others. I encouraged a creative reading of Valarie Kaur's work: reading as a slow, loving, and transgressive art. Some got into this, and others did not. I think a few of the students had given up on reading books and did not find value in it.

More than anything, I think this class created a presence that helped us remember what really matters: being together in a humble and open spirit of love and freedom for more love and freedom in the world, and where precise answers to our pressing problems will come and go like the sunrise and the sunset. Each day a new answer but everyday a similar question. I think we learned that learning integration is ground in a presence that grounds and frees and loves.

Part VI: Conclusion.

This presentation has explored two interrelated queries. *How can become good ancestors through courageous co-creation* and *how can we teach for the future when things are falling apart in the present?*

These queries have been situated in (i) the ongoing death experience of Seattle University's School for Theology and Ministry, (ii) the larger context of secularization, and an (iii) Internship and Integration class I facilitated.

I made four proposals.

First, that we begin by understanding and tending to the diverse, complex world within and bring to the fore pedagogies of mind that scatter good seed in our inner landscapes.

Second, I proposed a pedagogy for the future must be a humble but differentiated student of living and local more-than-human histories.

My third proposal, which was more of a research question to be lived experimentally than an answer to be given, is that we explore whether a feared death of divine love is a beat in the heart of our cultural discontent and in our classrooms. A pedagogy for the future stays close, as the Christian tradition long has tried, to the wounds of love.

Fourth and finally, and as a result, I proposed that we focus on what really matters in a culture that is rife with death experiences like the one at the School for Theology and ministry, and that we therefore work with heartfelt love for our friends and enemies alike; that we allow love to be our mortician in the present and our midwife for the future.

Kahlil Gibran has been our poet-prophet into a clear thesis: if we work with love and for love, by letting a greater love do its work, we can sow seeds in the present that can bloom into something beautiful in the future. Gibran helps us remember to live the poem in the Song of Songs: that love is stronger than death. With trust in this steady and yet gentle presence of divine love, which we can have faith will be reborn when it appears to be dying, we can become freer to love the future and be courageous co-creators as fall apart in the present. Paradoxically, hope flies into the future on the wings of a beautiful death.

I like to begin and end and remain tended by questions, and so I wonder: is there a question that has been born in you, and which you would like to live together?



