

Huong Thi Nguyen, Ph.D. Student  
*School of Religion and Religious Education*  
*Fordham University*

[huonglhc@gmail.com](mailto:huonglhc@gmail.com)

REA Annual Meeting: Toronto, Canada November 1-3, 2019.

## Let's Build Our Universal Home Sweet Home

*Just as God creates the natural universe, so we are called on to create the social universe--a universe, like that of the planets and stars that is ordered, rule-governed, a space of integrated diversity, a world we can see and say, as God saw and said that it is good.<sup>1</sup>*

### Abstract:

*As we live with billions of other people on this earth, we have so much to learn, to understand, and to share with others. Because we are different, we each have something unique to contribute, and every contribution counts. We should embrace and celebrate how special and different we are so that in our interconnected world, we can learn to feel enriched, not threatened, by difference. Since the number of conflicts among races, classes, and religions has been growing in our society, religious educators are called to take an initial step in assisting people to build a world where people can feel truly at home. We need to enable people to recognize the dignity of the differences and to live out the true meaning of religious education. In addition, our role is to assist people to encounter each other in authentic dialogue. Even though conflict between religions, races, and colors is still a reality in our world, it should not be an obstacle to our efforts to foster coexistence in diversity. With the power of imagination, we all are invited to explore ways for community structures and systems to embody justice and equity in diversity.*

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, (New York, NY: Cromwell Press, 2007), 138.

Human beings are conditioned by their own environment, cultural background, and beliefs. This sometimes makes people think that their culture and beliefs, race, and social status are the best, and what is different from theirs is wrong or unaccepted. This way of thinking creates division. Sadly, division is not something new in our human history as well as in each nation and religion's history. It even leads people to shed blood in the name of God. For instance, Cain's jealousy twisted his relationship with God and led to the murder of his own brother (Gen 4:1-8). Through the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, we learn that there was discrimination about behavior and the serving of food after the Lord's Supper among church members. People gathered in the house churches of wealthier church members, and guests were served depending on their respective order, class, or status within society. There was also an atmosphere of disunity among church members. They divided into several groups according to various leaders: Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, (1Cor 1:11-12). During World War II, the Holocaust was one of the unforgotten tragedies. Millions of Jewish people were killed because of racism and religious differences. In our time, there is still division among people because of color, race, and religion.

According to the National Convention of the Religious Education Association, our society is divided into conflicting groups--black and white, poor and affluent, different generations, the have and have-not nations, etc. Often, these groups ignore one another; increasingly they become polarized in confrontation and conflict, sometimes violent, their relations distorted by hate and prejudice. The brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind are denied or held to be utopianism.<sup>2</sup> People use the name of their religion to claim superiority over others. In the name of peace, some attempt to prevent others from seeking a better life. Some even think that they are superior for belonging to a certain group or ethnic background.

Looking at these issues, the question of unity in a nation, religion, and among the world's population is still relevant today. How do we promote co-existence despite differences? How do we bring people together in a fruitful conversation? Why do we need to encounter an authentic dialogue? Should we care about building a world where people can truly feel at home and people can live in peace and harmony despite differences? I believe that religious educators are called to take the initial step in order to create an atmosphere where people can take courageous steps to encounter each other in authentic dialogue. In addition, religious educators are invited to teach "the practice of loving as Jesus did--transforming broken relationships and enacting radical, life-giving ways of being with and for one another."<sup>3</sup> In order to do so, religious educators' task is to recognize the value in differences and creatively use them as a main thread in a religious curriculum.

In this paper, I will first talk about the values of the difference that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks presents in his book *The Dignity of Difference*. Second, since I see the need to reshape the meaning of religious curriculum, I argue for this by using Maria Harris's point of view in her book *Fashion Me a People*. In addition, I discuss what we need to do in order to enable our brothers and sisters to have an authentic conversation. Finally, I present the necessary role of prophetic imagination in our process of building a world where people can co-exist despite differences.

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<sup>2</sup> The National Convention of the Religious Education Association, (*Religious Education*, 64: 3, 162-162, July 10, 2006), 162.

<sup>3</sup> Courtney T. Goto. "Teaching Love: Embodying Prophetic Imagination through Clowning" (*Religious Education*. Vol. III, No.4, July-September), 1.

## *The Dignity of Difference*

Throughout history, most people for most of their lives were surrounded by others with whom they shared the same beliefs, traditions, way of life, etc. In recent years, “the global age has turned our world into a society of strangers.”<sup>4</sup> Difference surrounds us. People live with neighbors whose faiths and cultural backgrounds are different from their own. Nonetheless, this need not be a threat to our identity. First, Jonathan Sacks believes that this (diversity) is what constitutes our humanity. “Just as the natural environment depends on biodiversity, so the human environment depends on cultural diversity, because no one civilization encompasses all the spiritual, ethical and artistic expressions of mankind.”<sup>5</sup> Second, Sacks sees the world not as a single machine; instead, “it is a complex, interactive ecology in which diversity--biological, personal, cultural, and religious--is of the essence.”<sup>6</sup> As we live with billions of other people on this earth, we have so much to learn, to understand, and to share with others. We do not need everyone to be an exact copy of each other, for “Our very dignity as persons is rooted in the fact that none of us--not even genetically identical twins--is exactly like any other. Therefore none of us is replaceable, substitutable, a mere instance of a type.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, because we are different, we each have something unique to contribute, and every contribution counts. We should instead embrace and celebrate how special and different we are so that in our interconnected world, we can learn to feel expanded, not threatened, by difference. I agree with Sacks’ statement that “when difference leads to war, both sides lose. When it leads to mutual enrichment, both sides gain.”<sup>8</sup>

Looking at diversity from a Christian perspective, Sacks points out that, “There are many cultures, civilizations and faiths but God has given us only one world in which we live together--and it is getting smaller all the time.”<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew Bible tells the story of God who makes a covenant with an individual, then a tribe, then a collection of tribes, and then a nation. Even though it is the narrative of a particular people, it starts by telling a story about humanity as a whole.<sup>10</sup> The Babel event marks a turning point in the Bible narrative. This story ends with the division of humankind into a multiplicity of languages, cultures, nations, and civilizations. However, in Sack’s view, God’s covenant with humanity as a whole has not ceased. From here on, God will focus on one family, and eventually one people to be God’s witness and bearers of God’s covenant. God will ask of them that they be willing to give up home, birthplace and land, all the familiar certainties, and undertake a journey with God as their only protection. They will be a people who are different.<sup>11</sup>

Christians believe that God created all human beings and all things in the world and declared that they were good. The creation story teaches us that we share the God who created us and all the rest of creation. We are all equal in God’s eyes. In addition, “*the unity of God is to be found in the diversity of creation.*” In Sacks’ view, the test of faith is whether we can make space for difference. Therefore, Christians also should ask whether religion could become a force for

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<sup>4</sup> Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

peace rather than a source of conflict. Can we make space for difference? Can we recognize God's image in someone who is not in our image, whose language, faith, ideals, are different from ours? Can we hear the voice of God in a language, a sensibility, a culture not our own? Can we see the presence of God in the face of a stranger?<sup>12</sup> Do we see the other as a threat to our beliefs and way of life, or as an enrichment of the collective heritage of humankind?<sup>13</sup> Reflecting on this, I believe that valuing diversity is something that should be the aim of all humans, especially Christians. This is important since, if we cannot love our diverse brothers and sisters within the church, how can we hope to share and show the love of Jesus to the diverse communities and organizations in our secular contexts. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul asked his audience to celebrate their differences and believe that they each bring something important to the community. He challenges them to “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others” (2:3-4).

Now is the time to embrace diversity! “The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, living in the world when it is getting smaller and smaller, religious educators’ task is to walk with people and provide opportunities for people to discover the dignity of difference. In addition, we also allow the dignity of difference to become the main thread of the curriculum of religious education. Acknowledging that the phrase “religious education” has been used to refer strictly to the catechism program and religious curriculum, including textbooks used or courses/programs to be run, I argue that it is essential for us to reshape these understandings. So what in fact do religious education and religious curriculum include?

### ***Reshaping the meaning of Religious Curriculum***

Over time, religious education has been limited to the formation programs. However, we should not narrow its meaning, for it includes all aspects of our faith and life. It is life-long and life-wide. It begins at birth and ends at death. George Albert Coe defines religious education as “the systematic, critical examination and reconstruction of relations between persons, guided by Jesus’ assumption that persons are of infinite worth, and by the hypothesis of the existence of God, the Great Valuer of Persons.”<sup>15</sup> Mary C. Boys also states, “Whenever men and women have gathered to tell stories and enact rituals in response to the mystery of life, whenever they have searched for the truth and sought to do what is good, religious education has been happening.”<sup>16</sup>

In a conversation between Maria Harris and Craig Dykstra, Dykstra was surprised as he learned that Harris was writing a book on curriculum. For him, “the very word ‘curriculum’ conjured up images of boxes piled on top of each other in out-of-the-way places, packed with dull workbooks for children to fill out endlessly in Sunday school. Why would anyone want to write a book on such a topic? How could such a topic deserves a book?”<sup>17</sup> After encountering

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<sup>12</sup> Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 5; 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>14</sup> Nelson Mandela, “Let freedom reign,” inaugural address as President of South Africa, 10 May 1994, in Brian MacArthur (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches*, 499.

<sup>15</sup> Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Vision*. (Harper & Row, New York: NY, 1989), 53.

<sup>16</sup> Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Vision*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 7-8.

Harris' book, *Fashion Me a People*, he acknowledges that "curriculum is about the mobilizing of creative, educative powers in such a way as to 'fashion a people'" and "curriculum is the practice of fashioning a people, in response to and in cooperation with the fashioning of people that God is carrying out."<sup>18</sup>

Harris argues that the term "curriculum" in religious education should not be reducible to resource materials. Curriculum is an activity, a practice of a people. The meaning of curriculum is fluid, and it has always been broader than schooling alone. Church curriculum is the *entire course of the church's life*. Even though the term "curriculum" was not used in the early church, we find that its forms are presented in the Acts of the Apostles: *kerygma* (proclaiming the word of Jesus' resurrection), the *didache* (the activity of teaching), *leiturgia* (coming together to pray and to represent Jesus in the breaking of bread), *koinonia*, or community, and *diakonia* (caring for those in need).<sup>19</sup> Fascinated by how *leiturgia*--the curriculum of prayer-- could be used to bring people together and assist people to build a better world, I will explore this curriculum more deeply.

The term "*leiturgia*," or "liturgy" in English, is often translated as "the work of the people," which comes from the Greek word for public service. Harris emphasizes that "because of this meaning, the word 'liturgy' has become associated with the church worshipping as a body, together as a people, and less so with the personal prayer life of church members."<sup>20</sup> Harris sees prayer as a component of the curriculum of educational ministry, for it is one of the central patterns and rhythms of Christian communities. She acknowledges, "We are educated *to* prayer, and we are educated *by* prayer."<sup>21</sup> This education can happen anywhere and at any time. The curriculum of prayer can happen in two forms, corporate and personal prayer. There are several forms of corporate prayers: Mass, prayer group, retreat, rosary, etc. For example, in the form of a retreat, the curriculum is the coming together of a group of people to pray and to be educated *to* prayer, *by* prayer, and *in* prayer. The essential element of corporate prayer is prayer where the agent is not we as individuals but we as a praying community. For Harris, this corporate form of prayer is the form we need in order to create and re-create our identity as a people, for *leiturgia* is at root "the people at prayer."<sup>22</sup> Since "the liturgy is the starting point and ending point of all that the church does", therefore "a continuing education for Catholics is needed to appreciate the liturgy."<sup>23</sup>

Besides corporate/community prayer, personal prayer is another aspect of the curriculum. The church teaches us that the spiritual life is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians are called to pray with their communities, but they must also pray by themselves, in private, to the Father.<sup>24</sup> Moran notes that people think private prayer is completely different from liturgy, even in opposition to it. However, for Moran, the "private" in private prayer is the interiority of every human activity that is at the core of all liturgy and worship. Those who pray in the quiet of their own rooms or when riding the subway can still be linked to the church's liturgical life since private prayer is a centering of all life in relation to God and creation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Harris, *Fashion Me A People*, 8, 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>23</sup> Gabriel Moran, *Fashioning a People Today*, (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), 73.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Chapter I, No.12.

<sup>25</sup> Moran, *Fashioning a People Today*, 88.

There are many methods that can be used for personal prayer. Private prayer can be both verbal and nonverbal (meditation, contemplation, etc.). In verbal prayer, we use words to address God while in meditate prayerfully. We place ourselves quietly in the presence of God and think, reflect, or meditate on a particular theme, asking God to open our hearts to accept what He might wish for us in relation to the theme.<sup>26</sup> This personal prayer takes place when we spend time alone in the company of the Divine. We can pray at church, at work, at home, on a bus, while walking, visiting friends, or comforting the sick, etc. Moran shows us that “private prayer is a centering of all life in relation to God and creation.”<sup>27</sup> I agree with him. I remember an experience of walking around a school campus in the evening. In the silence of the night, I felt related to things around me. I breathed the air, which I did not see, and was aware of the absence of any smell. I felt the wind blowing on my skin, my hair, and my whole body even though I did not know where it came from. I heard different insects' sounds. Through the experience of my senses, I thanked God who brought me into existence. I thanked God for giving me eyes so that I can see things, a nose through which I can smell things, legs that can walk, and hands that can touch things. I felt God's love for me. I realized that this universe is a common home for all, and everything is related. God created me and put me in this universe for a reason. Therefore, as a steward of God's creation, I recognized my duty to take care of God's creation and protect this common home.

In the age of globalization and technology, many people put extreme value on money and power. It is sad to see the economic gap that has created many social justice issues in all aspects of life leading to division among religions, people, and races. Reading the signs of time, I believe that religious educators are especially called to continue God's mission in building a world where justice, peace, and unity are embraced. Religious educators' task is to assist people in deepening their spiritual life, allowing people to reach out to others and to cooperate with others in building a peaceful world. The event on 20 August 2000 at the United Nations shows us an historical moment where many religious leaders from different faiths came together. According to Sacks,

There was the saffron robes of the Tibetan monks, the grey vestments of Japanese Shinto priests, Sufis in their distinctive hats, Sikhs in their turbans, the black robes of the imams, the blue and red sacred clothes of the reindeer people of north Sweden, Native Americans with their eagle bonnets, African priests in purple, Anglicans with their clerical collars and, it seemed, every other conceivable shade and shapes of dress. Being there was like walking into a living lexicon of the religious heritage of mankind...In the great conference chamber normally reserved for politicians debating the issues of the day, here were men and women who devoted their lives not to the noise of now but to the music of eternity, not to the shifting sands of the international arena but to the inner landscape of the human spirit.<sup>28</sup>

### ***The Art of Encountering into an Authentic Conversation***

It is true that working with diversity is not easy; however, it is not impossible. The gathering of more than 2000 religious leaders at the United Nations building was an example. Moreover, there are ways that help us to encounter into an authentic conversation with our brothers and sisters in this diverse world. Ingeborg Gabriel thinks that when we speak about what really matters to us, we create inner personal bonds with others. However, it also has a potential risk

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<sup>26</sup> Harris, *Fashion Me A People*, 96-7.

<sup>27</sup> Moran, *Fashioning a People Today*, 88.

<sup>28</sup> Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 5.

since what really matters to us can also create deep division and conflict with others. For Gabriel, such conflicts can only be avoided by strengthening mutual respect based on the fundamental insight that as contingent and limited human beings, we are always searching for the truth but never own and possess it in an essentialist way. Furthermore, it has to be taken into account that dialogue is characterized by an inherent tension.<sup>29</sup>

In the context of our society today, there are different forms of dialogue that need our attention. The document “The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions,” from the Vatican’s Pontifical Council, presents to us several kinds of dialogue. There is a dialogue of life, which focuses on a greater appreciation for common humanity and seeing one’s faith anew.<sup>30</sup> Dialogue of deed and collaboration focuses on humanitarian initiatives. Theological dialogue seeks greater mutual theological and philosophical understanding. The dialogue of religious experience includes sharing one’s spiritual life and opens the possibility for corporate religious experience.<sup>31</sup> In order to make these dialogues become authentic, Sacks proposes,

We must learn the art of conversation, from which truth emerges not, as in Socratic dialogue, by the refutation of falsehood but from a quite different process of letting our world be enlarged by the presence of others who think, act, interpret reality in ways radically different from our own... We must make ourselves open to their stories, which may profoundly conflict with ours.<sup>32</sup>

Bernard Lonergan acknowledges that religious education has an important role in fostering an authentic dialogue through its teaching for cosmopolis.<sup>33</sup>

Cosmopolis involves authentic engagement through ongoing dialogue with the other. It is a commitment to be attentive to our own and other’s human experiences, to be intelligent in the questions we ask about the meaning of those experiences, to be reasonable in our judgments concerning those experiences, and ultimately, to be responsible for how we act toward others based on our experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding.<sup>34</sup>

According to Tom Neal, “the art of dialogue, of *dia logos*, which is literally to “think through” another person, not talking “at” another person, or even “with” them, but thinking *through* them.”<sup>35</sup> In this sense, a dialogue partner helps the other to “think through” the truth of the matter they are seeking together. This is an example of an authentic dialogue. As we work toward having an effective and fruitful dialogue, we see that it requires a number of skills and attitudes in order to yield new insights. In Neal’s view, humility is crucial. “Humility is an open, willing disposition to learn from anyone and anything—to be corrected and to correct—as well as the persistent realization that I, on my own, never fully possess the whole truth and nothing but the

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<sup>29</sup> Ingeborg Gabriel “All Life Is Encounter: Reflections on Interreligious Dialogue and Concrete Initiatives,” (*Religious Education*, 2017; 112:4, 317-322), 318.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Feldmeier, *Encounters in Faith: Christianity in Interreligious Dialogue* (Winona, MN: Christian Brothers, 2011), 267-8.

<sup>32</sup> Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Dennis Gunn, “Teaching for Cosmopolis: Bernard Lonergan’s Hopeful Vision for Education in a Globalized World,” (*Religious Education*, 113:1, 26-37, 2018): “Teaching for cosmopolis is an invitation to dialogue which promotes mutual understanding, mutual respect, and mutual interdependence in a globalized world.”

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Neal, “The Arts of Dialogue,” *WordonFire*, May 22, 2018. Accessed August 10, 2019.

truth. God alone *is* truth, we are stewards of truth, and truth is only held as a *common* stewardship.<sup>36</sup>

Knowledge and understanding of one's own religion as well as of the others enables people to be involved in a true dialogue. According to Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, "the experience of interreligious learning suggests that the best dialogue partners, those best equipped in building meaningful alliances across religious differences, are those who have a high degree of religious literacy in their own tradition as well as in other traditions."<sup>37</sup> Kujawa-Holbrook points out that the effort for interreligious encounter cannot succeed if there is no room for learning. In fact, the first steps of interreligious encounter--altering the calendar, changing food, changing music, changing the prayers--could cause resistance if they never progress to the stage of rich and mutually fulfilling interreligious learning. Therefore, to encounter into an authentic dialogue, "faith communities and religious organizations must confront the challenge of envisioning a new way of relating to the religious "other" where we seek to understand each other more deeply, and are open to learning from each other."<sup>38</sup> We have to bear in mind that "The solicitude doesn't demand that one always agree, but it does demand that one recognizes that one is walking on sacred ground."<sup>39</sup> It requires us to listen more closely and ask more questions so that we understand what is really meant. We also need to pay better attention to our own assumptions about norms and practices that might be different in other cultures.

One of the factors that prevents us from entering into an authentic conversation is hatred. People do not like others because they do not act the way they are "supposed" to. People do not love others because of a conflict of faith. I believe that religious educators are people who are called to foster love in an educational circle for we have been loved by God and we are called to love one another. Dwayne Huebner also points out what love can do in education. First, when we are faced with the possibility of destruction as we reach beyond ourselves, love provides the assurance that we will not be destroyed, and we will be whole again. Second, the power of love can acknowledge weakness. Love heals the differences within us and reconciles the new tensions and divergences in our life. Moreover, it provides the patience, trust, collective memories and hopes, and conversation to heal the social body.<sup>40</sup> It takes time to have a truly deep conversation with others so that we can understand who they are and why they act the way do. This is because, "When talking with others often and intensively, a light may appear in the soul that guides us to greater understanding."<sup>41</sup> This light could happen when we allow ourselves to imagine things as if they could be otherwise, but only if we allow the space and time for this to occur.

### ***Prophetic Imagination and Role of Religious Education in a Divided Society***

According to Kieran Scott, "the imagination plays a fundamental role in the cultivation of our vision of the world. Its power opens us to new possibilities, other ways of seeing. It enables

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<sup>36</sup> Neal, "The Arts of Dialogue," 1.

<sup>37</sup> Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, "Interreligious Learning," (*Religious Education*, 110:5, 483-486, 2005) 484.

<sup>38</sup> Kujawa-Holbrook, "Interreligious Learning," 484.

<sup>39</sup> Feldmeier, *Encounters in Faith*, 261.

<sup>40</sup> Dwayne Huebner, "Religious Metaphors in the Language of Education." Vol. 80, No.3, summer 1985, 467.

<sup>41</sup> Gabriel, "All Life Is Encounter," 318.



us to ‘look at things as if they could be otherwise (Green 2014, 32).’<sup>42</sup> With the power of imagination, we are able to relate one thing to the other, and we can draw out insights from things that we encounter. Maria Harris also thinks that we are always involved in imagining. Imagination is always accessible to us, and it is as natural and near as breath. “Imagination is not trivialized by its dailiness, for its correlative is that we are always creating, shaping, and constituting our worlds and our lives.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, “today, religious educators should be encouraged to imagine new possibilities for educating in faith that take into account how religious convictions and practices are embodied in specific life contexts within contemporary, postmodern culture.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, since teaching is a vocation centered in the religious imagination, religious educators should encourage their students to cultivate the power of imagination. After all, “the heart of teaching is imagination.”<sup>45</sup>

Living in a divided society, “will we endlessly replay the hatred of the past? Or will we choose differently this time, for the sake of the world’s children and their future?”<sup>46</sup> I believe that the prophetic imagination is very important in religious education today. In Scott’s view, the prophet is a person who sees the world with the eyes of God. Their eyes are directed to the contemporary scene, and they are moved by responsibility for society. Furthermore, “Prophetic practices offer the possibility of revitalizing church life from within and, in turn, offer an outward response to repair our social and public world.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the task of the religious educator is to “nurture individual and communal dispositions of openness, courage, and capacity for loving, even when there are many differences and histories within a single group.”<sup>48</sup> Sacks believes that “As our capacity for destruction grows, so too must the generosity of our moral and spiritual imagination. I pray that this affirmation will be echoed by many voices from many faiths.”<sup>49</sup>

As Christians, we believe that God [actually Jesus in Mt 25] identifies God-self in our brothers and sisters: whatever we did for one of the least of our brothers and sisters, we did for God and whatever we did not do for one of the least of our brothers and sisters, we did not do for God (Mt 25). Since God’s love is unconditional and has no boundary, Jesus calls us to love and care for our brothers and sisters regardless of their nationality, culture, or faith. This teaching is made clear through the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). The story is about how extraordinary it is that an enemy of the Jews, a Samaritan, would bend down to help the Jewish victim. In striving to enter into an authentic dialogue, I believe the story of the Good Samaritan is a perfect step that demonstrates to us how to act toward brothers and sisters. This story also serves as a bridge to encourage people to come together.

Living in our time, when conflicts between religions are prevalent, what can religious educators do to enable people to perform their prophetic role? According to Maxine Greene, there are people who are born into a culturally defined literacy. Many alienated and marginalized people are made to feel distrustful of their own voices, their own ways of making sense. Yet they

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<sup>42</sup> Kieran Scott, “Alternating Currents: Sacramental and Prophetic Imagining and Church Education” (*Religious Education*, Vol. II, No.4 July-September), 448.

<sup>43</sup> Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People*, 78.

<sup>44</sup> Harold Horell, “Fashioning and Transforming: The Power of Imagination in Religious Education.” *Religious Education* (Vol. 110, No. 3 May-June) 246.

<sup>45</sup> Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, viii.

<sup>47</sup> Scott, “Alternating Currents,” 447.

<sup>48</sup> Goto. “Teaching Love,” 403.

<sup>49</sup> Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, viii.

are not provided alternatives that allow them to tell their stories or develop new insights into what they already know. Therefore, the task of the religious educator is to teach others to find openings for this growth. In this sense, our teaching should provoke critical questions concerning the modes of literacy, the preferred languages, the diversity of languages, and the relation of all of these to the greater culture.<sup>50</sup> “Religious educators can help to slowly shift the common habit of seeing race in terms of black and white by understanding the paradigm, by catching themselves in the act, reflecting critically, and exploring what and whose experiences are obscured.”<sup>51</sup> Religious educators can use the arts, such as films, theater, stories, poetry, etc., to release our students’ religious imagination as “artists attempt to portray ‘a touch of eternity’ that communicates potent truths about their subjects, and even to evoke certain feelings and response in the viewer.”<sup>52</sup> Green notes, “Encounters with arts and activities in the domains of art can nurture the growth of persons who will reach out to one another as they seek clearings in their experience and try to be more ardently in the world.”<sup>53</sup>

Living in a time when division is not only between people from different faith backgrounds but even between people who share the same faith, reconciliation is an urgent need. I recall one of my experiences when I visited a particular parish here in America. There were two priests who served a multicultural parish. Unfortunately, this parish divided everything into two, including parishioners. Each priest had his own mass set, sound system, altar boys, and choir. Whatever they could divide in two, they would. It was sad to see people in the same parish say nice things about one of their pastors, but not the other. One group tried to do things better than the other. The disunity of this particular parish is just one example of other disunities that exist in our church today and in our relations with other Christian denominations. Therefore, religious educators should become a bridge that brings people together. Religious educators must have a hope and a dream to build a brighter future of living out our Christian faith for our younger generations. Marilyn Llewellyn reminds us that “since we can never completely know another person, there is always the possibility of surprise and hope for the newness present.”<sup>54</sup>

In conclusion, it is obvious that in recent decades, the number of conflicts among races, classes, and religions has been growing. There are people who think that their culture, their way of life, and their religion is the best. This way of thinking blocks people from acknowledging the value of differences. In addition, it prevents people from being open to others, making it impossible to learn and to walk together in love and peace on this earthly journey. This divided society is a challenge to religious education. I believe that religious education must play a significant role in teaching authentic dialogue that allows individuals to acknowledge that they are part of a greater whole. As participants in such a holistic society, each member should, together with others, contribute their best to the whole. Religious educators are people who are especially called to continue the teaching ministry of Jesus. Like Jesus, whose words and deeds show how God has loved all humanity, religious educators are instruments to continue to teach

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<sup>50</sup> Maxine Green, *Releasing the Imagination* (San Francisco: California, 1995), 110-111.)

<sup>51</sup> Courtney T. Goto, “Beyond the Black–White Binary of U.S. Race Relations: A Next Step in Religious Education,” (*Religious Education*, 112:1, 33-45, 2017), 40-1.

<sup>52</sup> Charles B. Gordon and Karen E. Eifler, “Bringing Eyes of Faith to Film: Using Popular Movies to Cultivate a Sacramental Imagination and Improve Media Literacy in Adolescents.” (*Catholic Education*, Vol. 15, No. 1, September 2011), 31-2.

<sup>53</sup> Maxine Green, *Releasing the Imagination*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publisher, 1995), 132.

<sup>54</sup> Marilyn Llewellyn, “Reclaiming a Spiritual Language and Embracing a Spirituality of Liberation.” *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 71.

this message of inclusion. In addition, the task of religious education is to be active in healing divisions. Conflicting groups may be brought together as part of the religious education process. Even though conflict between religions, races, and colors is still a reality in our world, it should not be a stumbling block to our efforts to foster coexistence in diversity. We all are invited to explore ways for communities' structures and systems to embody justice and equity. Let us encourage one another to create opportunities that allow our prophetic imagination to make a change for the better in our world. Prophetic imagination should be used in order to allow people to conceive and realize a better world where all people can truly feel at home!

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