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Critical Perspectives on Interreligious Education

Experiments in Empathy

By

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Developing Pedagogies of Interreligious Understanding

Judith A. Berling

The essays in this volume were developed in conversations over a period of years by participants in a project on "Interreligious Education and Pedagogy." Project participants shared their own experiences of developing and evaluating interreligious programs, their successes and their frustrations. They learned from and with one another, and several of them participated in panels at professional associations or contributed essays to volumes on interreligious pedagogies. They sought out conversations with educators and essays by faculty from institutions and backgrounds beyond their own.

The project also sponsored a research report mapping the current state of interreligious learning in theological schools and seminaries. The report expanded upon the contributions of project participants with a thorough review of published literature and in-person or online interviews with faculty from a wider group of institutions. Each institution has had its own distinctive journey of challenges and opportunities, which has shaped its approach/es to interreligious education. That report is soon to be posted on the website of the GTU.

This brief chapter will reflect on the pedagogical issues and implications of the essays in this volume, informed by the broader research of the project.

1 Overcoming the Obstacle of Monotheistic Exclusivism

This volume, and the project which developed it, focused primarily on theological schools and seminaries, and primarily on Christian, Jewish, and Muslim programs of interreligious education. Given that focus, initiatives in interreligious education had to break free from historic constraints against positive views of other religions, constraints that are deeply embedded in the mainstream histories of these three great traditions. Reuven Firestone's essay addresses this issue head-on, exploring how the historical rise of monotheism positioned monotheistic religions to argue against and/or condemn other

religions. But he goes on to argue that in the post-enlightenment era, some educated adherents of monotheistic religions have become increasingly aware that their tradition is embedded in rich cultural diversity, a vast array of different knowledges, and many sophisticated religions. In his view, and given that awareness, it is important for students, especially seminary students, to recognize that as powerful and authentic as their own tradition is, it does not contain all knowledge or wisdom. Learning something of the wisdom of other traditions not only cultivates appropriate spiritual humility (there is always more to learn of God's revelation), but also gives rise to questions that it may be important—even vital—to ask of their own tradition. He thus makes a case for exposure (a course, perhaps) to help establish the need and appetite for lifelong learning of theological students.

Firestone makes an excellent case for the "exposure" approach to interreligious education: adding a course, or a text, or a speaker about "another tradition" to help students recognize that the worldview that has shaped them is not inevitable, or the only option: that there are many approaches to the search for religious truth. This exposure model is very often an institution's first step toward interreligious education, and it is still prevalent, though the experiences of this volume's authors have led most of them to go beyond this model.

Tony Richie's arguments for a Pentecostal/Evangelical approach to interreligious education also deals directly with the resistance of many in his denomination. He, like some other Pentecostal and Evangelical theologians, seeks to maintain a strong commitment to high Christology and missiology with an openness to dialogue and interreligious education and relationships. These theologians turn to pneumatology (the Holy Spirit) to argue that Christ and God are not bound by the institutional church, but are at work everywhere, including in and through other religions. And they build on Pentecostalism's commitment to an affective experience of God and to lived Christianity as the goal of education to argue for an interreligious educational approach that leads Pentecostals out into the interreligious world to work alongside many others, including allies from other religions, against secularism and oppression of the marginalized. Given the history of the conservative rejection of other religions, these Pentecostal/Evangelical approaches have to include both a theology of religions (teaching students how to reconcile their Christian theological commitments with openness to other religions) and ministry in a multifaith context (providing alternative models of Christian hospitality to and partnership with adherents of other faiths). These pioneers in interreligious education are working against some resistance within their denominations, but they are providing leadership in both their teaching and their theological writings.

These two essays are important in that they make relatively conservative cases for interreligious education, cases which honor the distinctive commitments and demands of their tradition while opening a careful door for interreligious engagement, because both their religious leaders and their members are living in a religiously diverse world. They illustrate how much interreligious pedagogy is necessarily shaped—both constrained and empowered—by its particular context. There is no one-size-fits-all model of interreligious pedagogy, as it must be embedded in the mission and values of the institutions in which it is practiced.

John Thatamanil writes from the progressive wing of Protestantism, from Union Theological Seminary in New York. His essay articulates a pedagogical approach to teaching interreligious theology. Leaving behind approaches of comparative theology (which compare texts or doctrines from two or more religions), he argues for a pedagogy that is not confined to the complications of doctrinal differences. Referencing Edward Farley, he argues for understanding theology, not as a narrowly cognitive discipline, but as "embodied wisdom," understood by observing the spiritual practices and disciplines of a religion, informed by its texts and teachings. He asks students to commit to the practices of another religion, and to reflect thoughtfully and critically on their experience. This experience gives them an "embodied appreciation" of the tradition, which is quite distinct from articulation of its doctrinal language. Note that practicing the wisdom of a tradition does not entail committing to a creed or an institution. Appreciation is not "belief": it is an aesthetic, affective, and embodied category. Pedagogical approaches to inter- or cross-religious practice are being developed in a number of settings.[1] There may, of course, be instances when an individual does not feel comfortable engaging in such practices; it remains to be seen how such difficulties will be negotiated. The approach will depend on the source of the discomfort: cultural, affective or doctrinal. It should be noted that at Union Seminary, where Thatamanil teaches, there is an interreligious course on the liberative practices of Buddhism and Christianity, co-taught by a Buddhist monk and a Brazilian liberation theologian. Students are asked to create rituals/activities in which adherents of both religions can participate, focusing not on the easy commonalities, but on the

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1 Louis Komjathy, who teaches at the University of San Diego, argues for embodied pedagogies of religion and interreligious learning. He requires students to commit to a practice for the semester, critically reflect on it, and to participate in at least one community event of the "other" religion they are studying. "Engaging Radical Alterity: Pluralism, Interreligious Dialogue, and Encountering 'Reality,'" in *Teaching Interreligious Encounters,* ed. Marc A. Pugliese and Alexander Y. Hwang (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 95–114.

distinctive differences between the traditions.[2] How or to what extent can those differences be negotiated?

2 Complex Religious Identities

One reason that interreligious education has become important in seminaries and theological schools is that student bodies are increasingly interreligious. Some seminaries and theological schools have programs and/or classes in which adherents of two or more traditions share the same course. Students of Asian, African, Oceanic, and Indigenous descent are increasingly aware that their personal and cultural identities have complex interreligious layers. And in many theological schools there are increasing numbers of "nones" (spiritual but not religious): students with a deep interest in religion, but with no desire for institutional affiliation and—sometimes—a complex mix of practices and beliefs. These complex religious identities challenge the traditional model of seminaries forming students in the school's denomination.

Recent developments in scholarship—particularly postcolonial, feminist, transnational, and ethnic studies—have made thoughtful students more aware of these complexities and issues.

Monica Coleman's essay demonstrates how the categories she was taught in graduate school to understand religious pluralism and diversity are not adequate for understanding African American religious identities. Beneath the surface of Christian membership of black churches are layers of African, indigenous, and folk practices that complicate an overly neat "Christian" identification. Her essay demonstrates the pedagogical assumptions and moves necessary to bring that richness into the classroom.

Christine Hong's essay deals with transnational (and, she argues, transspiritual) identities of migrants or Americans from other cultural backgrounds. She argues that to include such students fully in the classroom, pedagogy has to be rooted in students' specific stories and experiences, using the diversity of those stories as the core of their learning experience. Many teachers begin a seminary course with students sharing something about themselves, but Hong argues for a teaching model that builds from those stories. Such an approach is a very rich, student-centered approach. It challenges the teacher to help discover and articulate the "core" (shared insight) of the course and learning outcomes that will both affirm each student's experiences and challenge them to learn and grow in the diverse context. It also requires learning experiences

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2 Interview with Greg Snyder, Union Theological Seminary, July 2, 2018.

that will grow organically out of and be shaped by the diverse stories of the students. The nature and range of the diversity among the students will also affect the nuances of this approach: in some cases, the stories of other students may be quite familiar; in others, they may be dramatically different from anything the students have previously encountered.

3   Muslim Perspectives

One of our Muslim authors brings a very different approach to Muslim engagements in interreligious education: educating students for quite different roles. Timur Yuskaev teaches in a highly regarded program for Muslim chaplains at Hartford Seminary, an intentionally interreligious school with a long tradition of Muslim involvement. Although the Muslim students have their own courses in Quranic and legal teachings pertinent to chaplaincy, they take some basic ministry courses together with Christian and Jewish students. Yuskaev interviewed two graduates of the program in order to understand more deeply the impact of the interreligious dimensions of their education.

In his two case studies, the students brought their Muslim sensibilities and understandings to the pastoral situation, but both reported that their interreligious training in pastoral skills had been central in opening their insight into how to handle the situations with understanding and compassion. The interreligious sharing of ministry perspectives and experiences had honed their pastoral sensitivities in significant ways. This is significant, since most traditional Islamic education is text-based, pointing students to Quranic or legal texts which "speak to" a broad range of human issues. It is necessary and important to understand Islamic teachings on the situation, but sometimes in the moment it is the pastoral response that can cut to the heart of the issue, creating (in time, perhaps) a space for hearing the teaching of the tradition.

In one of the interviews for the mapping report, a Muslim doctoral student helping to develop broader principles for Muslim chaplaincy programs reported that during a visit to a hospital in the Middle East he asked Muslim health workers how they interacted with women who had miscarried. The health workers reported that they recited a hadith which argued for a long-term view of the loss from the perspective of Allah's mercy and blessing. He pointed out to them that, while the verse was certainly pertinent, these grieving women were in no state to take in that long-term perspective in their moment of intense grief.[3]

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3 Kamal Abu-Shamsieh, personal communication, October 17, 2017.

For some, like Yuskaev, interreligious education can train leaders from many religions to minister in a diverse world, and in particular, Muslims to minister in the United States, where there are established pastoral practices. Yuskaev's students benefited from interreligious courses teaching and adapting Christian pastoral practices to other religious and cultural environments.

For others, like the co-editor of this work, Najeeba Syeed, the primary motivation and goal of interreligious engagement is to bring persons of many religions together to create a better and more just world—to transcend the tendency of religious difference to create conflict and violence, and, on the contrary, come together to work for a better world that reflects many overlapping values. Syeed's teaching builds on liberationist pedagogies adapted to interreligious collaboration.

Research has shown that interreligious collaboration creates positive relationships, and is a powerful antidote to religious stereotypes and suspicion of religious others. Moreover, there are certainly issues on which interfaith/interreligious groups have been able to collaborate, building a common space of shared experience and values. And these two are not diametrically opposed, as pastors, rabbis, and imams increasingly find themselves engaged in community projects to combat hunger, environmental degradation, or other social issues.

4   Learning with Religious Others: Co-formation

If in the early years of interreligious education in seminaries and theological schools the exposure model predominated (a course about, a text from, or a guest speaker from another religion), over time many institutions came to believe that effective interreligious pedagogy required engagement with religious others, learning with them and not just about them. Three of the essays in this volume particularly emphasize this development.

Nancy Fuchs Kreimer's essay reflects on the evolution of interreligious education at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia (RRC). After 9/11, the RRC decided that its rabbinical students needed both a well-grounded understanding of Islam and positive collaborative relationships with Muslims. They recruited students in Islamic Studies from the University of Pennsylvania for a joint program with their students, engaging in joint textual studies and in a collaborative educational project. Joint textual studies have been a key pedagogical approach to interreligious understanding. The RRC used the *hevruta* method, where pairs of students from the two religions study one another's texts, honoring the spiritual and interpretive traditions of their partners.

Scriptural Reasoning is another widely adopted method in which interreligious groups read texts together, discovering the many readings that arise from intertextual conversation.[4] The second part of the RRC program had pairs of Jewish and Muslim students develop an educational program which they could present in a Jewish institution. The program was training a cohort of educators who could address interreligious understanding in Jewish communities. Over time, as tensions over Israel and Palestine escalated, the RRC found it more difficult to recruit Muslim participants, and harder to persuade Jewish institutions to accept the Muslim-Jewish pairs for interreligious education. It thus revised its program to become one of spiritual refreshment and development for Jewish and Muslim leaders. In this new incarnation, groups of leaders meet for a program of self-reflection and shared spiritual practices that can renew those on the front lines of interreligious engagement. The new program is called "Cultivating Character: Conversations Across Communities."

The RRC story is one of thoughtful reflection on how the context of the broader society both constrains and helps define the needs of interreligious education. They have not pulled back from their conviction that Muslim and Jewish leaders need to know one another and their respective traditions in order to avoid the tensions that can arise between and toward groups. But they have continuously adapted their program and goals to changing circumstances, exploring various ways of learning with religious others.

Jennifer Peace, teaching at Andover Newton Theological Seminary, was convinced that in a multi-religious world theological formation had to be co-formation: learning and growing spiritually toward leadership in partnership with religious others. Andover Newton had already entered into collaboration with their neighbor Hebrew College, offering joint courses, encouraging cross-registration among their students, and developing interreligious events shared by the campuses. They had developed a rich menu of interreligious opportunities for their students. Peace and her collaborator Or Rose took matters further by developing an interreligious fellows' program in which interreligious pairs or groups of students applied for a one-year fellowship to do a joint interreligious project—academic, artistic, or service. The fellows group had a joint seminar on leadership skills, and were mentored in developing their projects. The program developed strong interreligious collaborations. As Peace notes,

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4 See Scriptural Reasoning, accessed March 23, 2018, www.scripturalreasoning.org, and Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Literacy and Scriptural Reasoning: Some Hermeneutical, Anthropological, Pedagogical and Experiential Reflections," in *Teaching Interreligious Encounters*, 95–114; also see part III of the same volume, Textual Encounters: Methods, Texts, and Traditions, 181–227, for more text-based interreligious pedagogies.

this program was not meant to be an add-on, but was to redefine the structure of theological education, putting co-formation at its very center.

Rachel Mikva of Chicago Theological Seminary traces the development of interreligious studies and engagement in the United States by comparing it with the "waves" of women's movements, and then uses those insights to reflect on interreligious education in her institution. Mikva was appointed to a newly-endowed chair in Jewish Studies at the seminary in 2009. After several years, she argued that effective interreligious education required the presence of students from diverse life stances, so the school developed a customizable degree program and expanded its recruiting base. Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) has a strong commitment to social justice and community service, so interreligious collaboration for social justice was soon added to the program, with attention to the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion. Mikva's description of the CTS program thus intersects with many of the other essays I have already reviewed. What her essay also lifts up with particular clarity is that effective interreligious education requires a thoughtful transformation of Christian institutions. Many of the community structures, patterns of activities, and curricular structures were so thoroughly "Christian" that they were not sufficiently hospitable to interreligious education. That is to say that CTS, like many institutions, had to attend to the *implicit* as well as the *explicit* curriculum of interreligious education—not just the content of courses, but how institutional structures and patterns either enabled or constrained interreligious education. As hospitable as many institutions aspire to be, the assumptions and structures of institutions and their curriculum are, as Dr. Seuss might say, "Christian all the way down." As institutions make a deep commitment to interreligious education, they have to re-examine many aspects of institutional and curricular practice. This requires honest institutional conversations and a commitment from the President and Board down through faculty and staff to make the necessary transformations.

5   Issues to Consider

The essays in this volume demonstrate thoughtful, critical reflection on the issues, approaches, and stakes of interreligious education by an experienced and committed cohort of leaders in the field. Yet, as any thoughtful readers will see, interreligious education is still a work in progress. While its history goes back decades, it has gained serious momentum only in the twenty-first century. As one faculty said to me in an interview, "I feel as if I am spinning, trying to see which way to go." That sums matters up quite well.

As the essays demonstrate, the approaches to date have been shaped by the missions and characters of the institutions adopting them, and by larger developments in culture and society. As the role and shape of "religious" activity in the culture continues to morph and evolve, none of us can see far into the future of "religious" institutions and patterns, or of theological education. We are moving experimentally into an unknown future. Programs, practices, and institutions will continue to evolve.

This shifting ground can make it difficult to step back and reflect more deeply on interreligious education; we are too busy experimenting, adapting, and learning from successes and failures. Yet precisely because the ground is shifting, it is important to aspire to a deeper form of reflection. I want to raise three issues pertaining to the pedagogy of interreligious learning.

6   Outcomes

The first issue is: what are the intended outcomes of interreligious education? An astute reader will note that none of the essays directly addresses this issue, although they do suggest some implied outcomes.

When interreligious dimensions are added to a "standard" course in the theological curriculum, it is often as a form of enrichment. The standard learning outcomes of the course (defined by the curricular structure of the degree program) dwarf any interreligious outcomes. The interreligious activity "enriches" the course by adding a different perspective, or reminding students that there are other religious ways of addressing the issues addressed in the course.

The essays in this volume, however, articulate pedagogical approaches in which interreligious learning is more central to the course or educational program. Timur Yuskaev's essay documents how the pastoral practices taught in pastoral skills courses taken with Jewish and Christian students became central in the ability of Muslim chaplains to adapt Muslim teachings sensitively in pastoral situations. Tony Richie's essay illustrates how in Pentecostal/ Evangelical interreligious education it is necessary to address both theological and ministerial issues interreligiously in order to overcome historical resistance to "religious others." This seems to entail a learning outcome in which Christian theological and ministerial thinking can be adapted to interreligious settings.

John Thatamanil's approach to teaching interreligious theology invokes a broader understanding of theology as embodied wisdom in order to establish learning outcomes that are not about doctrinal understanding, but about

embodied appreciation. How his approach assesses "embodied appreciation" is an intriguing issue, but it seems to involve both self-reflection and conversation.

Monica Coleman and Christine Hong both use student-centered pedagogies to help students articulate, understand, and claim their complex religious identities. In this approach, religious pluralism is both an intrapersonal reality and an external fact in the world. The learning approaches would seem to be related to self-understanding and articulation, and to engaging and affirming diversity through mutual conversation. It would be helpful to hear more about the sort of assignments (learning exercises) that comprise the arc of these courses.

For Jennifer Peace, interreligious pedagogy entails developing leadership skills and collaboration on projects. She uses experiential and collaborative learning to foster formation of leadership skills. Rachel Mikva's students also learn through collaborative action in the community.

Nancy Fuchs Kreimer's program focuses primarily on the learning outcomes desired for their rabbinical students, but also aims to benefit Muslim students and leaders. In the initial phase of their program, rabbinical students were asked to develop the knowledge and personal skills to be effective educators and leaders opposing the forces of Islamophobia. The learning outcomes were: (a) understanding the tradition and its texts; (b) establishing collaborative relationships; (c) developing educational programs for use in Jewish contexts. In their Cultivating Character program, students are already-established Jewish and Muslim leaders in need of renewal and inspiration for carrying on the work. The program is designed with outcomes for increased self-understanding, spiritual renewal, and establishing or deepening interreligious relationships.

Rachel Mikva's approach includes strong doses of critical analysis of the intersectional forces of oppression in society as a preparation for effective social action. While this outcome is not explicitly interreligious, it is arguably a foundation for more informed and effective interreligious collaboration for justice, reminding students that religion is only one factor in a complex social situation.

7   Metrics for Assessment

What these essays do not offer is specific information on how to articulate and measure/assess those learning outcomes: what are the metrics? The current literature on interreligious education is, regretfully, somewhat thin on metrics. Eboo Patel's Interfaith Youth Corps has made assessment planning and training central to its institutional grants, but I have seen no published data about

what form such assessments take. Patel evaluates his own programs for community leaders on three vectors: changes in attitudes, development of relationships, and knowledge about other traditions.[5] The Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University has adapted Early and Ang's "cultural intelligence" (CQ) assessment tool for evaluating interreligious intelligence: it uses a Likert scale for "before/during/after" responses and a free response section.[6] These are promising beginnings, but we need more literature on methods for assessing interreligious learning.

8   Sustainability

Interreligious education is expanding rapidly into a broad range of institutions as we seek to educate leaders and citizens to contribute to an increasingly religiously diverse society. Such education is recognized as significant and seems to be gaining momentum, but there are serious challenges of sustainability.

First, there are the economic strains on and the fragility of many theological institutions. As Heidi Hadsell shares in her essay, these strains have encouraged theological schools to open their spaces and their doors to students beyond their original denominations. But many theological institutions are fragile. In the years I was researching my report mapping interreligious education, three of twenty-four schools I studied either closed or moved into another institution, and two very successful programs were ended because of financial difficulties. Interreligious education is caught in the midst of these ground shifts; for some institutions it may be a way to strengthen the school's mission as it moves into the future, and for others, it may be seen as a distraction. The challenge is to redefine or expand a school's mission while affirming its core values. As both Heidi Hadsell's and Rachel Mikva's essays demonstrate, a core commitment to interreligious education may require considerable institutional transformation.

Second, there is the issue of faculty resources. Too often interreligious education rests on the shoulders of a single faculty leader. If that leader leaves, the program collapses. And, as interreligious issues have special resonance with faculty of Asian, African, Oceanic, or Indigenous descent, this issue may be added to the considerable burdens they already carry.

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5   Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon University Press, 2016), 100–101.
6   Marianne Farina and Robert W. McChesney, "A Contextual Model for Interreligious Learning," in *Teaching Interreligious Encounters*, 287.

The need for faculty leadership in the field raises the issue of graduate formation of faculty for interreligious education. There are few doctoral programs which ground faculty both in theological disciplines and in interreligious skills; and there is thus an inadequate pipeline of faculty to lead this work. Because of lack of training in doctoral programs, many faculty who take on interreligious education need additional support to develop interreligious courses and approaches.

The doctoral program at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley is now organized into four interreligious departments, with required interreligious departmental seminars. The departments are: Sacred Texts and their Interpretation; Historical Studies; Theology and Ethics; Religion and Practice. This is a recent reorganization of the GTU's program away from a Christian-dominated structure; GTU faculty are still negotiating the challenges of living into the requirements of the new program. Yet this is an important experiment, as it is one step toward the development of theological faculty with interreligious skills.

Despite the challenges and the work yet to be done, the essays in this volume amply demonstrate the promise and vitality of interreligious education. With new professional organizations, a presence on the program of the American Academy of Religions, and journals through which to share developing knowledge, this initiative is bound to thrive

Teaching African American Religious Pluralism

Monica A. Coleman

Abstract

This chapter reflects on my pedagogical interrogation of classical theories of religious pluralism in light of African American cultural experiences. How does the African American cultural context change the questions posed in theories of religious pluralism? How do people navigate the contemporary manifestations of the diverse religious inputs that make up African American Christianity? What common themes, if any, persist across religious difference because of the historical, cultural and political particularity of African American experiences? I explored these questions while teaching graduate level courses in theological education at Claremont School of Theology. Across two different courses, I focused on lived experience and non-academic religious texts. This involved assigning memoirs and inspirational texts intended for practitioners, arranging site visits and hosting religious leaders as speakers. I sought theoretical propositions across various academic disciplines, and, at times, from mass-market anthologies. I ensured that the course material was relevant for all students. In these courses, students and I learned three things about African American religions relevant for the enterprise of religious pluralism: African American religiosity itself is religiously plural; African American life offers both tools and gifts for living across religious boundaries; and African American religiosity signals the markers of African American culture and politics. Investigating African American religious pluralism also serves to broaden the intellectual enterprise of religious pluralism by reconstructing its primary questions into investigations of how individuals and communities straddle and merge religious differences.

1 Introduction

I long suspected that classical theories of religious pluralism did not and could not account for African American religiosity. I took these suspicions to the classroom so that my students and I could explore the ways in which African American contexts alter conversations about religious pluralism. In this essay I will share how I developed two courses in African American religious diversity

at Claremont School of Theology, focusing on the importance of leading with religious experience, drawing from textual sources outside of the field of academic religion, and establishing relevance for non-black students.

As a kind of prolegomena, I want to share my two early entrées into this conversation. During the first year of my doctoral program at Claremont Graduate University, I took a course on religious pluralism taught by David Ray Griffin. He was working through ideas for the book that eventually became *Deep Religious Pluralism*.[1] We read several classic theories of religious pluralism, but for my final paper, I was interested in the following anonymous letter to the editor published in the popular black women's magazine, *Essence*: "My family still celebrates the holidays in a big way, but I've converted to Yoruba. How can I respect my family's beliefs and still honor my own religion?"[2] I saw this brief letter as an example of what might have happened in African American cultures as the 1970s black arts movement coalesced with the *Immigration and Nationality Act* of 1965 and Cuban immigration to New York City spawned a significant revival of traditional Yoruba religious practices (including *Santeria, Lukumi* and *Ifa*) among descendants of the U.S. slavery system.[3] This anonymous writer's concern about respecting her family's beliefs also reflects the strong role that family plays in African American identity. Without having a language for it, I suspected that individuals from high-context cultures have an interconnected sense of community and self that turns religious differences within families into identity crises.[4] To put it more positively, the strong connections of family and community of high-context cultures may function as an incentive for developing practices of interreligious understanding.

At the time, I attempted to map John Cobb's theory of mutual transformation onto the way in which I imagined the contemporary encounter between black Protestant Christianity and traditional West African-derived religions takes place.[5] In this theory, Cobb suggests that the encounter between two religions changes not just the practitioners of different religions, but the religions themselves. Based on the way Cobb writes of a "Buddhized Christianity"

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1 David Ray Griffin, ed., *Deep Religious Pluralism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

2 Anonymous, Letter to the Editor, *Essence* (November 2000): 98.

3 Cf. Tracey E. Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press: 2014); and Anthony B. Pinn, "Ashe! Santeria, *Orisha-Voodoo* and Oyotunji Village," in *Varieties of African American Religious Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998): 53–103.

4 Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language*, 1959 (New York: Anchor Books, 1973).

5 John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998).

and a "Christianized Buddhism," I imagined that interaction between Yoruba and Christianity might likewise produce a Yorubized Christianity and a Christianized Yoruba.

Both Griffin and I knew the paper was flawed; the theory was applied optimistically and was slippery, even at its best moments. Griffin encouraged me to keep thinking about the issue because he was certain that I was onto something. I could not then find a language to articulate that there was more at stake than theology and truth claims: that cultural pride and migration greatly influence the ways in which African Americans experience religious differences. That is, during the 1960s and 1970s, the civil rights, black power and black aesthetics movements in U.S. politics had a corollary within African American religiosity, with many African Americans converting to religions they felt had a stronger alignment with Pan-African politics and cultural pride—such as the Nation of Islam, Sunni Islam and traditional African religions. Thus a kind of religious pluralism arose within African American communities which was connected to an affirmative act of identity formation and preservation, just as much as—if not more than—a shift in theological understanding. I found none of these intimations in the thinkers I had been assigned in class.

Years later, in my first teaching position at Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, North Carolina, I taught an undergraduate course on African American religious history. All of my students were African American women, many with roots in the southeastern United States. For most of my students, the presence of women in ministry and non-denominational black megachurch culture were normative religious experiences. I assigned Albert Raboteau's canonical work, *Slave Religion,* over the course of three weeks.[6] At one point, referring to the lessons about how the religions of the Fon and Dahomey of West Africa syncretized with Catholicism in Haiti and many parts of Louisiana, a student asked me: "How many people practice Vodun?" My immediate response was rather flippant: "No one really knows, because they all go to Catholic mass." As soon as I said this, I realized that teaching African American religions requires teaching religious pluralism in distinctive ways. Rather than exploring how individuals and communities negotiate religious differences, African American religious studies requires discussions about how individuals and communities live across and within religious differences.

These two experiences are touchstones for me as I interrogate classic theories of religious pluralism and African American religious thought. How does

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6 Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

the African American cultural context change the questions posed in theories of religious pluralism? How do people navigate the contemporary manifestations of the diverse religious inputs that make up African American Christianity? What common themes, if any, persist across religious difference because of the historical, cultural and political particularity of African American experiences? I explored these concepts in graduate level courses in theological education as a professor at Claremont School of Theology (CST).

During my time at CST, the mission to educate across religious traditions was both distinctive and explicit. I was hired in 2008 when a new institutional mission statement was adopted: "An ecumenical and interfaith institution, Claremont School of Theology seeks to instill students with the ethical integrity, religious intelligence, and intercultural understanding necessary to become effective in thought and action as spiritual leaders in the increasingly diverse, multi-faith world of the 21st century." All students understand that the institution affirms the inherent value in various religious traditions, and most courses incorporate religious plurality in instruction. As an institution that housed leading theorists of religious pluralism, John Hick and John B. Cobb Jr., there were already classes on theories of such pluralism.

My training in theories of religious pluralism had presented religious plurality as a theological problem for those Christians who believe that adherence to certain beliefs about Jesus constitutes the exclusive means of salvation. I learned that there are three primary responses to this problem: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Deriving from the colonial missionary encounters between Christians (usually Catholics) and non-Christian communities in the two-thirds world, the pluralist approach seeks to understand how non-Christian people who seem good and true might not be denied the Christian promise of salvation. Moving beyond Karl Rahner's description of "anonymous Christians," theories of religious pluralism articulate how religious traditions with competing truth claims and different ideas about God (if theistic at all) might respect one another, dwell together peaceably, seek to understand rather than convert one another, and even learn from and be transformed by one another. Within this tradition, I read the works of John Hick, Paul Knitter, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John B. Cobb, S. Mark Heim, Diana Eck and David Ray Griffin.

These different thinkers (and many others) look at the major tenets of different religions, compare and contrast them, find resonances in similar philosophical systems, argue for the validity of different starting points or different ends, and share a vision or labor for the common good. I didn't disagree with these perspectives and noted their strengths and weaknesses, as have many friendly critics. This genealogy of scholarship does suggest that mainly white Christian men care about religious pluralism, but the aforementioned letter to

Essence indicates that is not the case. In all of these writings, there is complete disregard—and sometimes dismissal—of any religious tradition outside of an imperial Christian, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism. I knew that something important was missing.

I wanted to examine the role of culture in studying religious pluralism, with the sense that I might discover something different from that found in the existing theories. In the fall of 2010, I proposed a course with broad parameters: "Religious Pluralism in Cultural Context." Although I intended to explore African American culture, I imagined that other faculty members could use the same course number to explore other cultural contexts. I wrote the course description thusly:

> Major theories of religious pluralism emerged from a Western Christian philosophical desire to understand how non-Christian religions related to Christian doctrines of salvation and election. The experience of religious plurality in contemporary society rarely matches up with the classical theories. This is further complicated by cultural diversity. This course discusses the way culture interacts with religious identity to raise issues of syncretism, multiple religious belonging, trans-religious spirituality and pragmatic ethics. We will consider religious experiences in the cultural context through narrative, memoir, motivational literature, interviews, and/or site visits.

2   Lived Experience

I began with a focus on lived experience. I am trained as a liberation theologian with roots in black and womanist theologies. I am also trained as a process philosopher of religion, a philosophy that has deep connections with the British empirical tradition. Both of these fields start with experience before moving to theory or theological reflection. In fact, any theorizing is to be based on and tested by experience in the world. Because I sensed that existing theories of religious pluralism could not account for African American religious pluralities, I needed to place the lived experience of practitioners before theory so that theory could be examined and assessed in light of the lives of those most affected.[7]

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7   Cf. Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2006); Nancy T. Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

I facilitated religious experience in three modes: memoirs, guest speakers and site visits. I wanted to look at spiritual writings by African Americans who were explicitly not Christian. I used Alice Walker's essay, in which she describes her pagan identity as the appropriate response to black experience. The essay is titled, "The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven Is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind (Off Your Land and Out of Your Lover's Arms): Clear Seeing Inherited Religion and Claiming the Pagan Self," and is the first chapter of her book, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved.*[8] I also used memoirs and books that were a combination of self-help/inspiration and memoir. Jan Willis' memoir, *Dreaming Me,* is well-known among black Buddhists, while books by black New Thought leaders Deborah L. Johnson and Michael Bernard Beckwith and Iyanla Vanzant fit into the latter category.[9]

Assigning these works serves multiple pedagogical and theoretical functions. I hold that non-theologians construct theology, and that religion lives outside of sacred texts. Womanist theology has long affirmed the exploration of black women's literature for theological insight and religious ethics. I follow in that tradition by looking beyond academic scholarship to narrative depictions of African American lives and ideas. As these texts are themselves sacred sources of information, I refute the idea that scholarship in religious pluralism is best done in the side-by-side comparison of canonical texts. These alternative texts both remind us that some religious traditions do not center on written texts, and that the canon of sacred texts is ever expanding.[10]

The choice of these authors and books also highlights the complexity of non-Christian African American spirituality. Walker identifies as pagan in the essay I selected, but in later essays, she discusses how the work of Buddhist

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8   Alice Walker, "The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven Is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind (Off Your Land and Out of Your Lover's Arms): Clear Seeing Inherited Religion and Claiming the Pagan Self," in *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism*, (New York: Ballatine, 1997), 1–28.

9   Michael Bernard Beckwith, *Spiritual Liberation: Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential* (New York: Atria Books, 2009); Deborah L. Johnson, *The Sacred Yes: Letters from the Infinite* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2006); Iyanla Vanzant, *Tapping the Power Within: a Path to Self-Empowerment for Women* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 1998, 2009).

10   As one example, Tracey Hucks writes about how many practitioners of Ifa (traditional Yoruba religion) learn about their faith from the academic writings of anthropologists and art historians. This does not negate the presence of an Ifa scripture, but the scripture—the Odu—is an oral scripture, which is not fully transcribed, and plays a larger role in lineages of Ifa than in others (where Orisha worship might be primary). Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism.*

Pema Chodron affects her spirituality.[11] Willis' book *Dreaming Me* has a different subtitle in each of its later editions: from "An African-American Woman's Buddhist Journey" to "An African American Woman's Spiritual Journey" to "Black, Baptist and Buddhist - One Woman' Spiritual Journey." Variously emphasizing race, gender and conversion, Willis offers a complex understanding of her own journey. Likewise, there are two significant different editions of Vanzant's *Tapping the Power Within*. In the first edition, she describes herself as a Yoruba priestess writing for black women's spiritual health. The book outlines Yoruba rituals made palatable for a non-Christian adherent. Twenty years later, Vanzant draws more from her experience as a New Thought Unity minister and emphasizes the relevance of these teachings for the edification of all women. (African rituals are edited out or offered as optional resources.) We also read online articles and interviews with Ann Holmes Redding, an African American Episcopal priest and New Testament scholar best known for how her Episcopal bishop rescinded her ordination after she publicly took *shahada*, the Muslim confession of faith. It quickly became apparent that many non-Christian African Americans straddle the boundaries of religious difference.

This African American straddling of religious difference raises completely new questions about the classic theories of religious pluralism. An unspoken assumption of those theories is that we each, individually or communally, stand firmly in one religious tradition and interact with others, who squarely occupy another religious tradition. Yet these non-Christian African American writers openly live quite differently. Some religious writers claim two religious traditions without ceding adherence to one or the other. Other religious writers—like those in New Thought traditions—feel they have found a path that is valid for many traditions: their home tradition and other religions as well. The boundaries that classic theories of religious pluralism assume became blurred from the very beginning of my class assignments.

As a second approach to beginning with experience, I invited African American religious leaders who live across religious difference to come to campus and share their spiritual journeys. I invited Ann Holmes Redding, Michael Bernard Beckwith, spiritual director of the ten thousand-member Agape International Spiritual Center in the greater Los Angeles area, and Jeff Obafemi Carr, an ordained Baptist minister based in Nashville, Tennessee, who has been initiated into traditional Yoruba religion. Each speaker gave a public lecture (which was recorded and archived in the school library and online) and then spoke

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11   Cf. *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2012), a special issue on womanism and Buddhism.

more intimately with the students in my class. My emphasis on experiencing African American plurality outside of sacred texts rendered it important to learn from speakers face-to-face. That is, many of these African American religious experiences are centered in an embodied practice, and so I wanted to continue to learn from those physically and epistemically embodied before us. Personal interaction with speakers also allowed for dialogical learning through question and answer, the natural flow of conversation and extrapolation from unprepared comments.

Conversations with the speakers illuminated the particularity of the African American cultural context. Redding discussed her roots in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) church where a common call to Eucharist uses the words: "Let us break bread together on our knees/ Let us break bread together on our knees/ When I fall on my knees, with my face to the rising sun, oh Lord, have mercy on me."[12] She believes that this song, used for a distinctively Christian act, holds within it the practice of her enslaved Muslim forbears who prayed to the east, "the rising sun." For Redding, being Muslim and Christian is in keeping with African American historical practice. Carr noted that navigating religious difference is no more complex than being black in the United States, and navigating one identity as black and another as American. Beckwith talked about how he tries to bring the best of the black spiritualist and protest traditions in which he was raised to New Thought religion. This merger manifests in principles of "Sacred Service" social justice work and worship music, both of which are innovations in American New Thought religious communities.

The speakers offered three important insights into African American religious pluralism. First, African American religiosity itself is religiously plural. Enslaved Africans were not devoid of religion, but rather brought with them their experiences in Islam[13] and traditional African religions. These religious experiences encountered an evangelical Protestant Christianity or Catholicism and were variously retained as minority religions or merged with Christianity in ways that created something new, although the contributing religions were still visible. The latter practice is often referred to as "syncretism." While scholars of African American culture debate the extent to which previous religious and cultural traditions are retained and viable in African American

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12   "Let Us Break Bread," African American Spiritual. First published in 1925 in *The Journal of American Folklore* and *Saint Helena Island Spirituals,* with roots in Gullah/ Geechee slave culture in the Sea Coast islands and coastal area of South Carolina and Georgia.

13   Cf. Richard Brent Turner, "African Muslim Slaves and Islam in Antebellum America," *The Cambridge Companion to American Islam*, ed., Juliane Hammer and Omid Safi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28–44.

realities, they agree about the central role of history, geography, and slavery in the formation of African American religions.[14]

Second, the speakers suggested that African American life offers tools and gifts for living across religious boundaries. African Americans have long negotiated cultural complexity in the United States (and the Americas), a complexity that includes shifting understandings of race and color and a complex understanding of identity, and this within a larger, and often oppressive, environment. Many African Americans have thus developed the skill sets to maintain multiple religious identities without contradiction in similar ways.

Third, African American religiosity also manifests the markers of African American culture and politics. From their early beginnings in the hush arbors of slavery, African American religions functioned as sources for societal uplift, social contact and political activism.[15] Sometimes these sources are expressed overtly in preaching and organization; other times more covertly in spiritual songs and charismatic worship. The speakers suggested that these features are not just hallmarks of African American Christianities, but are indeed present in African American non-Christian religions as well. African American culture and politics may contain some elements that can exist in whatever religious tradition African Americans maintain. There are elements of African American intellectual thought and politics that appear in African American religions, and the wrestling and varied forms of reconciliation may indeed be the commonality amidst the theological and experiential differences.

As the third aspect of beginning with experience, my students and I made an early-morning site visit to a worship service at Agape Spiritual Center, an hour's drive from campus. Students arranged their own transport, and I took them to breakfast after a 6:15 a.m. service. This outing allowed students to witness the public teaching and community they had read of and heard about from Michael Beckwith. The site visit allowed us to move from a focus on individual experiences into the experience of a community that lives across religious boundaries.[16] We heard preaching and music that affirms the religious figures of various religious traditions within a large community that accepts these teachings. From attending a large multi-racial house of worship with

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14   The classic debate is crystallized by anthropologist Melville K. Herskovkits *Myth of a Negro Past*, 1941 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990) and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier *Negro Church in America*, 1963 (New York: Schocken, 1974).

15   Cf. Raboteau's *Slave Religion* and C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Church in African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

16   At the time, the Agape website explicitly referred to itself as "transreligious spirituality." The website has since been edited and the term is no longer used, see Agape International Spiritual Center, last accessed October 10, 2019, www.AgapeLive.com.

African American leadership, I surmised that this form of African American religious pluralism is not a minor trend; rather it is popular and attractive across racial lines.

3   Non-Academic Religious Texts

Examining African American religious pluralism required looking beyond academic religious texts. For sources of experiences, I drew from texts created for lay readers—memoirs and motivational literature. The same was true for theory. I used academic religious writings from the classic theories of religious pluralism. I also looked at writing by a younger generation of religious pluralists: Jeanine Hill Fletcher, Michelle Voss Roberts, John Thatamanil, Catherine Cornille and Peter Phan (among others). These thinkers wrestle explicitly with the kind of multiple belonging I discovered in the section on experience; some looking at language of identity and hybridity with others remaining skeptical about the blurred religious boundaries.

I also looked to anthropology because the term "syncretism" so readily arises in connection with non-Western religious traditions. While as closely connected to theories of religious pluralism as the field of missiology, anthropology more explicitly factors culture into religious practice, and gives less consideration to theological claims or inconsistencies. Finally I looked at books written for more popular audiences, such as Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Gloria Akasha Hull's *Soul Talk: the New Spirituality of African American Women*. (This was, admittedly, a heavy reading load, but I felt it was necessary to grasp the issues at play.) Drawing from mass-market texts also reminds one that wisdom concerning African American religious pluralism may be found among those who make no attempt to theorize about religious truth claims. Rather, the serious consideration of gender, migration and contemporary spirituality offered by these authors may offer models for African American religious practices that are deeply shaped by migration, indigeneity and plurality.

4   Relevance for All Students

As a pedagogue, I did not want students to encounter African American religious pluralism as merely an academic exercise. I wanted students to have a personal connection to the material. Los Angeles offers a fertile ground of religious diversity, with worshipping communities representing nearly any religious tradition I choose to teach. Claremont School of Theology, on the other

hand, has a distinctive cultural composition. At the time of instruction, fewer than 5 percent of matriculating students were African American, and 40 percent of the student body were international students with English as a second language and no assumed knowledge of American history. I had to use cultural experience to make this course relevant for students who were not African American. Thus I taught African American history alongside theories of pluralism. I also asked students to write case studies about their own experiences with religious plurality. Students then had to note the larger issues of religious pluralism at play in their concrete experiences. They shared these reflections at the beginning of each class and thought aloud with their classmates about how religious pluralism operated in their lives.

The final papers were most revelatory, in that all students had the opportunity to write about African American religious pluralism in terms of their own research interests. One African American student wrote about the complexity of religion and culture as an openly gay black Christian navigating a LGBTQI-welcoming secular world of the arts (which functioned for him as religious space) and a more homophobic black Protestantism. A white Mennonite student wrote about how African American religious plurality models a way for Mennonites to wrestle with the cultural plurality in peace traditions and the religious implications of such plurality. A white Buddhist student wrote about how Jan Willis' narrative and Jataka tales offer an engaged religious pluralism that is different from the ways academicians (e.g., John B. Cobb and Masao Abe) discuss the interaction between Christianity and Buddhism. A white Jewish student, motivated by the common calls for justice among the black religious experiences we studied, asked whether religious pluralism can rightly hold social justice ends without making normative theological claims.

I was both surprised and impressed by this pedagogical experience. As the practitioners described their experiences, I heard ideas on religious pluralism that were nowhere in the literature. Likewise, listening to practitioners and searching for appropriate texts showed me that non-Christian African Americans were often straddling and merging religious difference in ways that seemed easy and natural to them, even if misunderstood by church authorities and academic theoreticians. To teach African American religious pluralism required teaching multiple religious belonging and transreligious spirituality.

In a second course, nearly five years later, I returned to teaching African American religious plurality. This time I taught a course entitled: "African American Diasporic Religions." Intentionally interreligious and transnational in scope, I focused on four religions in great depth. I wrote the course description with the idea that the actual religions could change with each round of instruction:

This course will acquaint students with African-American religions practiced in the United States and throughout the African Diaspora. This class will discuss the historical trajectories, beliefs (theology), cultural and political influences, and contemporary challenges at work in each religious tradition. This course gives attention to both published scholarship and lived experience. The class involves four required field trips in the Los Angeles area (usually on Sundays). The class will focus on four religions each semester. Fall 2015: Black Mega-church, African American New Thought religion, Rastafari and Traditional Yoruba Religion (Ifa)

I use the term "Diasporic" to connote that persons of African descent in various places around the world adhere to the selected traditions. My naming of "diasporic" intentionally subverts canonical notions of "world religions." In the history of theologies of religious pluralism, African diasporic religions have been dismissed out of hand and excised from the conversation of more "evolved" religious traditions. In 1954, Ernst Troeltsch describes these traditions as "heathen" and "animist": "We shall not assume [the earlier proposition of religious pluralism] among the less developed races, where many religious cults are followed side by side, nor in the simple animism of heathen tribes, which is so monotonous in spite of its many variations."[17] Thirty-five years later, John Hick refers to "pre-literate forms of archaic religion" that exist in "parts of Africa, the Americans, Indonesia, Australasia and the Pacific Islands … [wherein] the local gods and spirits, sometimes ancestors, sometimes totem animals, who are to be variously worshipped, placated or subtly negotiated with."[18] In Hick's assessment, these "pre-axial religions" have pedagogical value but lack hope and future vision, and thus are not considered in his theorizing of religious plurality.[19] Troelstch, Hick and others maintain these positions by their own misunderstanding and lack of understanding of African Diasporic religions and their white colonial supremacist assumptions about them. My grouping of African diasporic traditions insists that these black religions practiced both locally and globally are "world religions." They should be included along with the five classics birthed from

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17   Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions," in *Attitudes Towards Other Religions: Some Christian Interpretations*, ed. Owen C. Thomas (New York, Harper & Row, 1954, 1969), 8.

18   John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 22.

19   Hick, 28.

Orientalism—Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism.[20] When African diasporic religions are considered world religions, scholars are forced to think differently about what constitutes a religion, and how and why it is practiced in various locales, and how religions encounter and respond to each other.

5   Religious Experience Anew

As in the previous course, I incorporated religious experience. Rather than focus on memoir, this class encountered religious experiences in devotional literature and site visits. For every religion, I assigned a book that practitioners read for their own spiritual development: Michael Beckwith's *Spiritual Liberation*, Fa'lokun Fatunmbi's *Iwa-Pele: Ifa Quest*,[21] Kenneth Ulmer's *Knowing God's Voice*,[22] and Empress Yuajah's *Rasta Way of Life: Rastafari Livity*.[23] Students compared and contrasted these readings with their academic readings on the religion connected to the site visit, and their subsequent worship experience there.

Establishing site visits was much more challenging in this course. Given RastafarI and Ifa are traditionally oppressed traditions, one struggles to find locations and meeting times from an internet search. RastafarI only worship around festival days, most of which occur during the summer months outside the academic calendar. As an example of the steps I took to arrange a site visit, I went to a Jamaican restaurant in an area where I heard there was a RastafarI bookstore. I asked the servers in the restaurant, who sent me two doors down to a bookstore that was closed. The owner came out and told me to go to the black arts district (another part of Los Angeles) at night. I went to that district another night and found some people rehearsing on African drums in a small building with an open door. I recognized one of the drummers from a previous personal interaction and asked about the RastafarI community. This drummer took me across the street to the House of Melchizedek, a minority sect of the RastafarI community. Their leader then took me down a dark alley, through the back gate to the recreation room in the home of the leader of the First Church of Rasta. This leader gave me newspapers and told me that the First Church of

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20   Hick, 33.

21   Awo Fa'lokun Fatunmbi, *Iwa-Pele: Ifa Quest: The Search for the Source of Santeria and Lucumi.* (Brooklyn, NY: Original Publications, 1991).

22   Kenneth C. Ulmer, *Knowing God's Voice: Learning How to Hear God Above the Chaos of Life and Respond Passionately in Faith* (Ventura, CA: Chosen Books: 2011).

23   Empress Yuajah, *Rasta Way of Life: Rastafari Livity Book* (CreateSpace: 2014).

Rasta had lost their building in the neighborhood where I first looked. Now, when there is no large festival, they host a weekly reggae night with a spiritual message at the House of Melchizedek. Although I am not RastafarI, the fact that I wore my hair in dreadlocks and dress in a way appropriate to RastafarI women helped me gain entrée into a community for the site visit. Gaining experiential communal knowledge of African American religions often requires time, tenacity, acculturation and near-insider status. Information about historically oppressed religions (within an historically oppressed race and culture) often travels by word of mouth from those who know where and how to seek such information. With each site visit, I instructed students on appropriate attire—which was quite different for each religious tradition and varied by traditional gender categories. Although we were clearly visitors, we demonstrated respect both by our knowledge and our physical presentation.

Site visits rely upon both the religious diversity and black population of the geographical area. Teaching this course would be possible in most major cities in the United States and African Diaspora where there are significant black populations, but it would look different. For example, the largest African American New Thought communities in Chicago have a history with the Unity Church branch of New Thought, rather than the Religious Science arm of New Thought as do the communities in Los Angeles. Thus African American New Thought communities in Chicago more closely resemble churches in their worship style than the Agape International Spiritual Center. Even within the United States, the history of African Americans and black migrations alter the shape of the worshipping communities. Whether traditional Yoruba practice looks more like *Lukumi/Santeria* or a contemporary Nigerian practice depends largely on the training and ethnicity of the leader, and the migration patterns of descendants of the U.S. slavery system and of other diasporic blacks.[24] Arranging site visits in cities or towns with a smaller black population would be much more difficult. While I was able to find practitioners of *Ifa* and RastafarI to speak to my students when I taught in Greensboro, NC, there were no nearby worshipping communities of practitioners for a site visit.

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24   For example, most African Americans in California have roots in Oklahoma, Louisiana and Texas, where slavery was practiced with different religious and economic patterns than in Georgia and North and South Carolina, from whence many former slaves moved to Washington DC/ Baltimore, New York or Philadelphia. The different immigration patterns of Cubans, Haitians and Nigerians also shape how traditional Yoruba worshipping communities practice. This is just one example of the complexities in local worship experiences.

6   Academic Readings Outside of Religion

This class also correlated experiential knowledge with academic reflection. Exploring African American diasporic religiosity reveals how little academic writing within religious studies covers non-Christian African American religions. Sociologists and political scientists write the best academic texts, covering black mega-churches as a socio-cultural-theological phenomenon.[25] Students quickly found that in these works, the theological reflection was not as rigorous as that found in the writing of those trained in theology or ethics. Most scholarship on traditional African religions is found in the disciplines of history and anthropology. There is only one scholarly work on African American New Thought churches. We had to look at academic writing on New Thought religions in general—also fairly sparse. Historians and sociologists write most of the books on RastafarI,[26] with Noel Erskine's *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology* a notable exception.[27] In other words, studying African American religious diversity requires interdisciplinary study. This is particularly challenging, as each field uses its own distinct language and methodology, and the student must traverse these differences with speed and agility.

In our reading, my students and I found that across religious traditions, African American cultural contexts raise similar issues as points of contention. Issues of liberation and nationalism arise in every tradition, even if resolved quite differently. Each religious tradition wrestles with or takes a clear stance on its relationship to Africa and blackness as a central theme. Each tradition has clear ideas about its role in politics, and how the pursuit of justice is achieved through theology and praxis. Even with these differences, the telos of justice and freedom is a given in each religion. Music and movement are integral to every worship experience, although in vastly different ways. While a survey of African American religious studies will quickly reveal these themes, the Los Angeles context allowed my students to experience them first-hand,

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25   Cf. Sandra L. Barnes, *Black Megachurch Culture: Models for Education and Empowerment* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Tamelyn N. Tucker-Worgs, *The Black Megachurch: Theology, Gender, and the Politics of Public Engagement* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

26   There are several excellent academic texts on Rastafari religion, with the canonical work being Leonard E. Barrett *The Rastafarians* 20th anniv. ed (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977, 1997).

27   Noel C. Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology* (Tallahassee, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).

and as a subject of a lived spirituality with which they could interact, rather than as an object of study.

7   Relevance for All Students

Again, most of the students in this class were not African American in racial or cultural experience. A first-generation Adventist Chicano student wrote about the roles of women in RastafarI and Zapatista movements—both nationalist political movements connected to cultural indigeneity. A white doctoral student who usually researches Dharmic traditions wrote about whether the lack of explicit race-consciousness in African American New Thought religion renders it a liberational theology. A Korean-American Protestant student found in the black religious nationalism of traditional Yoruba religion a helpful methodology for helping millennial Korean American Christians find cultural grounding in their faith. A white Muslim convert asked if the spiritual practices found in various African American religious devotional literature might be relevant for humanist spirituality.

Students were able to take what they learned about the particularity of African American religious diversity and apply it to their own research interests. I was delighted with their embrace of religious and cultural nationalism as they used African American religious plurality as the measure for other investigations. This academic activity undermines classical Western training by foregrounding what is usually on the margins.

This pedagogical experiment brought me to three conclusions about African American pluralism. First, African American religious plurality is relevant to all students of religion. Too often, the study of black religions or even black church traditions is seen as an educational praxis for black students alone. While black students may feel a particular cultural connection to learning about African American and African Diasporic religions, they are not the sole beneficiaries of this content. Theological educators are comfortable teaching ancient and Western Christianity to students of color. I adopted that same premise in teaching black religions to every interested student. Learning about African American religious plurality is as important as learning about any other kind of religious plurality, because the people and communities students encounter may believe differently from the way they do, and there are diverse ways of believing within the communities students encounter. Students cannot rely on what William D. Hart calls the standard narrative of black religion—an assumption that all African Americans adhere to a black Protestant Christianity making "the black Protestant Church … virtually conterminous with

Black Religion" and thereby implying "every other form of black religious expression is normatively peripheral and culturally suspect."[28] One cannot assume that racial and cultural identity as "black" or African American connotes knowledge of African American history and culture. Thus I included appropriate background information with instruction on each black religious tradition for non-black students, as I would for black students. As a corollary, the ways that African Americans live with religious plurality served as models for non-African American students to think about religiously-plural practices in non-African American contexts also. Through their papers, I repeatedly saw how students harnessed the methodologies of African American religious plurality and applied them in more familiar contexts. These are not acts of cultural appropriation; rather students found language and strategies within African Americans religions that better articulated and named experiences and ideas with which they were wrestling.

Second, African American religious pluralism broadens the intellectual enterprise of religious pluralism. I engaged with religious traditions that are often seen as localized and "animist" rather than global and complex. Most institutions of theological education do not teach a plurality of African American religions or the kind of religious pluralism that emerges from African American religious diversity. Then again, most discussions of world religions do not include African American religious diversity. "New religions" and "indigenous religions" fall into different categories from the five that emerge from Orientalist constructions of the world. The significantly different traditions in those rubrics—new and indigenous—are rarely taught in their individual specificity. I want to remind the larger field of the study of world religion and religious pluralism that a narrower scope is just that—a narrow scope—and that theorists of religious pluralism are obligated to consider religious traditions that, historically, have been rendered invisible in traditional studies of religion. If they were to do so, there would be more religion scholars (my former students among them, perhaps) writing and teaching about African American religious diversity using some of the theological and ethical insights of the broader field. Just as saliently, African American religious pluralism broadens the sources for religious pluralism by pushing the conversation into memoirs, devotional literature, lived experience, motivational, and mass-market literature. The oral testimony of practitioners may be a better source for information about theology and practice than written texts.

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28   William David Hart, *Black Religion: Malcolm x, Julius Lester, and Jan Willis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 8.

African American religious scholars generally recognize the plurality of black religious practice, and several scholars engage in a kind of comparative analysis to construct a theology that draws also on non-Christian black religions.[29] Yet these conversations happen in isolation from those whose work is more explicitly categorized as "theories of religious pluralism." Perhaps, like me, other scholars assume African American religious diversity and sources without considering the need to ask the classic questions about salvation. Perhaps the impulse of liberation theologians to define salvation as survival, liberation and justice in the temporal world has erased the need for most truth claims and confessional statements about Jesus. The wider field of religious pluralism (and comparative theology) can learn from ways black religious scholars embrace and call on black religious plurality in their theological and ethical work.

Third, African American religious pluralism reconstructs the primary questions of theories of religious pluralism. I learned two ground-breaking concepts from my initial inklings, the texts that I taught, the sites we visited and the practitioners who spoke. African American religious pluralism is not just about theological truth claims. African American religious pluralism is about theology *and* culture, identity, and a sense of community and empowerment. Examining theological differences alone does not get at the heart of why African Americans convert to or remain in religious communities, nor the ease or struggle with which African Americans interact with individuals across religious difference. African American religious pluralism is as much about how individuals and communities merge and straddle religious differences as it is about how people encounter and interact with one another across religious difference. African American religious pluralism involves wrestling with multiple religious belonging and transreligious spirituality as core theoretical questions, rather than as an ancillary or invalid activity in which only a minority engages.

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29   Cf. Noel Erskine's *Rastafari Theology* mentioned earlier, Josiah U. Young's *Pan African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors*, Will Coleman's *Tribal Talk: Black Theology, Hermeneutics and African/ American Ways of "Telling the Story,"* my work *Making a Way Out of No Way: a Womanist Theology* and Jawanza Clark's *Indigenous Black Theology: Toward an African Centered Theology of the African-American Religious Experience* do this in explicit ways. Several other black religious scholars draw on conjuring and folk religion too—Yvonne Chireau's *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition*, Katie Cannon's *Black Womanist Ethics*, etc. One could even count James Cone's use of spirituals in *The Spirituals and the Blues: an Interpretation* and Dwight Hopkins's use of slave narratives in *Shoes that Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* under this rubric. This list doesn't even include the ways African theologians engage with religious pluralism in their liberation theologies.

African American religious pluralism thus disrupts theories of religious pluralism at large. Relevant for all students and scholars, African American religious pluralism expands the content and sources of the field, and reframes the central questions of the religious pluralism enterprise.

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Interreligious Learning as Monotheist Imperative

Reuven Firestone

Abstract

Because seminaries are designed to further the goals of the religious communities that fund and support them, interreligious learning may not be generally accepted as fulfilling their institutional needs. This perspective derives from the history of interreligious polemic and competition between and within monotheist traditions, based on the assumption that God represents a single Truth that cannot be compromised, and that *our* expression of religion represents *that* Truth. This essay interrogates these assumptions and argues that true understanding must transcend the limits of religious institution, and offers an instructive way to understand the distinctiveness of one's particular spiritual tradition in relation to other attempts to understand the Infinite.

1   University and Seminary Teaching

I have been teaching for decades simultaneously in seminary and university settings, and I have had to be cognizant of the different approaches to the teaching of religion therein. It is important to differentiate between seminary and university settings in higher education, and equally important to relate to the two as "ideal-types" (*idealtypus*) in the Weberian sense, since not all universities are equally open in their quest for knowledge, and not all seminaries are equally constrained by religious creed in their pursuit of understanding. In this essay, I do not discuss the university setting, because, at least in theory, it is open to a highly analytic examination of religion that neither privileges nor disparages any individual religion, or the notion or practice of religion in general. In real life, of course, there is certainly deviation from this norm, but the norm nevertheless stands as the standard educational philosophy for the study of religion in the academy.

This has not been the case with the seminary environment, for understandable reasons. Seminaries are training institutions for the development of thought and character among religious devotees of particular faith communities and, more recently, of clusters of similarly-minded faith communities.

Seminary training is designed, ultimately, to further the goals of the religious communities that fund and otherwise support them.

Institutional goals are the absolute bottom-line issue in such endeavors. Seminaries are constrained by the institutional goals and values of the religious communities that pay for them. This is a natural phenomenon, of course, since like all other institutions, religions function in one way or another as "living organisms" that do everything in their power to remain healthy and live in perpetuity.[1] Seminaries are key tools for ensuring the strength, continuity, and durability of religious communities.

The question that lies behind interreligious learning in the seminary setting is "Does interreligious learning fulfill the mandated institutional goals of the religious community represented by the seminary?" There are several ways to answer this question. The traditional response, which does not typify the predisposition of those participating in this project, is that interreligious learning does *not* fulfill the spiritual mandate of a religious community. This position is time-honored, not unreasonable, and must be considered carefully for obvious religious and intellectual reasons. It must be addressed by those engaged in projects such as ours, at the very least in order to articulate a sensible response to its claims.

The negative position represents the normative historical perspective of communities that have funded seminaries or their equivalent since the rise of the scriptural monotheistic traditions. After all, according to the basic historical narrative shared by scriptural monotheisms since their emergence some three millennia ago, God revealed the divine imperative in a clear and authoritative communication that was carefully recorded into what has come to be known as scripture.[2] Those who know scripture possess the truth revealed within it.[3] There can be nothing remotely beneficial from learning anything from those who deny that truth through disagreement (heresy) or misunderstanding (deviant heterodoxy).[4] In fact, interaction and even association with

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1   I do not refer here to evolutionary theories of cognition and adaptation in religious thought and behavior; cf. Pascal Boyer and Brian Bergstrom, "Evolutionary Perspectives on religion," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (2008): 111–130; Scott Atran and Ara Norenzayan, "Why Minds Create Gods: Devotion, Deception, Death and Arational Decision Making," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 27, no. 2 (2004): 754–70. Rather, I am referring to simple mechanisms for religious institutional survival; see Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

2   Deut. 30:11–14; Ps. 19:7–9; 119:105, 130; 2 Cor. 4:6; 2 Tim. 3:14–17; Qur'an 12:2; 44:58, etc.

3   Ps. 86:11, 119:160; Dan. 10:21; John 17:17, 14:6; Eph.1:13–14; Jas. 1:18; Qur'an 2:144–47, 2:176; 5:48.

4   John B. Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

those espousing different religious ideas or creeds is dangerous and may lead to punishment in this world and the next.

2 Monotheism and its Limitations

This binary division between the revealed truth and all else, which has characterized the conventional religious worldview shared by scriptural monotheisms, represents a serious barrier to interreligious learning and dialogue. The binary perspective derives at least to some extent from the history of religious genesis, or at least the history of the emergence of monotheisms in the ancient Near East. Prior to the emergence of monotheisms, there was seemingly infinite variation of a single social-spiritual system comprised of what we call today religion, culture, ethnicity, kinship, and politics.[5] Gods governed the natural world, and gods were also attached to communities. Some gods existed in a covenantal relationship with tribal communities.[6] Others were urban gods who protected and were sustained by their communities of worshipers in town or city environments.[7] These were in a symbiotic relationship with their human worshipers, who fed them through offerings and received beneficence from them in return. People worshiped other powers as well, ones associated with fertility, the weather, death and disease, bodies of water, stars and the heavens, and other aspects of nature.[8] The names of these gods varied by culture and language but their roles were identical.[9] Together, they represented a kind of universal religion in infinite variation. Various gods were associated with various powers and attributes. They gave various directives and expected

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5   The following observation reflects a modern, academic historian's perspective. It differs from the religious narratives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, each of which has its own perspective on the origins of monotheism.

6   The most obvious examples come from the Hebrew Bible, which archaeology and paleography confirm is a fairly basic representation of the ancient Near East. Tribal gods include, for example, Chemosh of the Moabites (Num. 21:29), Milkom of the Ammonites (1 Kgs. 11:6), Dagon of the Philistines (1 Sam. 5), and even El-Berit, "God of Covenant," who was the god of Shechem (see note 7 below). For lists of tribal and other such deities known to the biblical world, see 2 Kgs. 17:29–31, 23:4–11.

7   Ashtoret in Tyre, for example (2 Kgs. 23:13), or El-Berit or Ba'al Berit in the city of Shechem (Jdg. 9:4, 46).

8   Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Dearborn, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); Glenn Holland, *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).

9   Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 2008), 53–58.

various acts from their worshipers. These ancient Near Eastern religions and their gods have not survived, though many aspects of their religious thought and practice survive in part among the monotheistic religions that are their heirs.[10]

With the emergence of monotheism—the result of a very long process of transition[11]—the notion of a single creator god responsible for the entire world gave rise to a very different worldview. Many gods could communicate many different, even conflicting, messages, because each deity controlled only a portion of the world and nature. A single God responsible for the entire world is not only much more powerful, it represents a unity and consistency unimaginable in a multi-theistic world. The very unity of God, along with the assumption of divine omniscience and omnipotence, suggests a kind of uniformity and absolute accuracy in any communication that derives from God.

With divine unity comes a unified message.[12] This eminently logical conclusion demands a unified human response to God's expectations and demands.[13] However, if there is any one common human trait that crosses all cultures and communities, it is that people do not respond in a unified manner to any imperative, even a divine imperative.

3   Internal Strife and the Formation of New Religion

Monotheisms have always been plagued with sectarianism wrought of disagreement. Humans differ. People are individual, sentient beings that see and interpret the world in an autonomous manner and in remarkably diverse ways, and who frequently disagree. This often results in the formation of sub-units within any group. When internal disagreements within communities become great enough, they lead to further factionalization, and when the rift between factions becomes great enough, they subdivide into competing camps, which

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10   Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001); Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*.

11   Nili Fox, "Concepts of God in Israel and the Question of Monotheism," in Gary M. Berkman and Theodore J. Lewis eds., *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 326–45.

12   Reuven Firestone, "A Problem with Monotheism: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Dialogue and Dissent," in Bradford Hinze, ed., *Heirs of Abraham: The Future of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Relations* (New York: Orbis, 2005), 20–54; Martin Jaffee, "One God, One Revelation, One People: On the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 4 (2001): 753–75.

13   Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods*, especially chapter 6 (106–26).

sometimes requires a complete separation and the formation of discrete communities. This process can result in the emergence of new religions.

Among scriptural monotheisms, new religion requires new scripture.[14] Otherwise, the emergent (or divergent) community retains a sectarian and thus secondary status under the authority of power structures based on existent scripture. Most sub-groups within religious communities remain within the larger community as sectarian movements or schisms.[15] The authority for sectarian movements rests on the power of interpretive argument in a world in which the ruling religious factions control the discourse. This phenomenology of sectarian formation, which always occurs in environments of contention, raises the polemical rhetoric of both established religions and sectarian movements. Each argues against the other in order to promote its own position, and these arguments become integrated into the worldview or personality of the religion or movement that espouses them. An antagonistic perspective is encouraged, not only toward the particular group it is arguing against, but toward all foreign or different religious expression,. Sectarian groups may eventually become reabsorbed into the larger community for a variety of reasons, or their differences may increase until they are excommunicated or even destroyed by the larger community.

In some cases, a sectarian group finds a new source of divine authority, usually understood as a new divine communication that surpasses or supersedes the previous. In this situation, the authority of the group then rests directly with God through the new communication, which it claims supplants the authority of previous scripture.

The claim of a new revelation of the divine imperative challenges established religion and threatens its authority. What emerges is a kind of existential competition between communities that cannot be resolved because both claim ultimate authority in a *different* divine disclosure, each version of which is understood to represent the absolute will of an omnipotent and omniscient God. This sets up an eternal conflict that is, ultimately, unresolvable. Each community claims that its scripture transcends any authority vested in the

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14   This statement needs to be qualified somewhat, since in certain taxonomies Catholic Christianity, Evangelical Christianity, and Russian Orthodox Christianity may be considered to be entirely different religions. For the purposes of this analysis, I consider them all representations of Christianity. A current idiom in Religious Studies is "Christianities." The cluster of communities listed above are all Christianities, as opposed to Judaism(s) and Islam(s), each cluster of which relies on a different scripture.

15   Roger Finke and Christopher Scheitle, "Understanding Schisms: Theoretical Explanation for their Origins," in James R. Lewis and Sarah M. Lewis, eds., *Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11–33.

other. This can best be described as a form of zero-sum competition. There is no compromise with the divine imperative. Given the natural history of relationship between monotheist communities, should we then be surprised that honest and curious interreligious learning among them was typically forbidden? On the contrary, the purpose of learning about the religious other traditionally has been to attack and disparage competing claims for truth and wisdom. As Bishop Krister Stendahl famously indicated by his three rules of religious understanding, it is common when engaging in comparative religion to compare the "best" of one's own religion with the "worst" of the other.[16]

In situations of religious conflict (the usual state of affairs between monotheist religious communities) religious validity rests on the authority and success of argument. Sectarian formation, which always occurs in environments of contention, increases the level of polemical rhetoric within both the established religion and the sectarian movement. This has had a profound impact on interreligious learning. On the one hand, the development of polemical literatures in the scriptural monotheisms has promoted an interest in knowing the views of the religious adversary, but its intention is to refute the claims and deny the validity of the religious other. In the process, polemical works often fail to understand the actual perspectives and beliefs of the religious other, and in many cases, they misrepresent and distort them.

4   Modernity, Science, and a Shrinking World

In the pre-modern world intolerance was a virtue. Those with reliability and integrity, demonstrated by unwavering adherence to their beliefs, were people whom we would consider today to be *in*tolerant. Such people had the wisdom, discernment, and métier to actively refute the untruths, lies, and undercutting of those who held contrary positions and were, by definition, divergent and therefore hostile to the divine will and the truth of God. The root of this logic, according to Jan Assmann, is an inherent totalistic perspective that lies at the very core of monotheism. Assmann has argued that the crucial element of monotheism "is not the distinction between One God and many gods, but the distinction between truth and falsehood in religion, between the true god and

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16   Barbara Brown Taylor, "My Holy Envy of Other Faith Traditions," *Christian Century*, March 7, 2019, accessed October 11, 2019, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/my-holy-envy-other-faith-traditions.

false gods, true doctrine and false doctrine, knowledge and ignorance, belief and unbelief."[17]

If we know the truth, why should we sully it or allow ourselves to be tempted away from it by the untruths of those who claim truth in falsehood? This perspective precludes the possibility of learning about others' religious ideas and practices, since any claims for a different view of truth are by definition false and, therefore, evil.

The sense of confidence described above largely fell away as the world entered modernity. In the modern era, a gradual change in thinking resulted, ultimately, in the relativization of the construction or perception of truth—though not the relativization of truth itself. The modern pursuit of science required constant redefinition and refinement of the laws of nature. Science did not deny the existence of any absolute truth, but the scientific process taught that our understanding of truth is limited and could always be improved through better method and perspective. This view reached a kind of philosophical apogee with the realization that certain absolute, unchanging laws of physics could not be accurately and equally experienced by observers who encountered them from different perspectives.[18] While a single "Truth," therefore, could indeed exist, we have come to accept the fact that our experience of it, at least in the world of science, is inherently limited.

Modern science profoundly influenced all social and humanistic fields, from social philosophy to theology. How do we know what we know, and how can we know that we even know it? The discipline of epistemology, an old pre-monotheist, a-religious discipline, was revived and revised in the modern world. Under the influence of both physics and social science, it reconceptualized our consciousness of the notion of reality and the truth that it represents to the observer. "Concrete reality is therefore entirely subjective and individual, and so-called objective reality disappears, for it is simply an abstract concept that we all share."[19]

Not only did science modify our outlook, so too did the revolution of travel. While the shrinking of the world initially allowed for the forced imposition of the conquerors' worldviews onto the conquered, it soon became evident to the discerning that what was unwittingly regarded as "primitive" or subaltern

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17   Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 2.

18   Max Born, *Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (New York: Dover, 1965).

19   This citation comes from Kitaro Nishida's inquiry into experience and reality in *An Inquiry into the Good,* trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 74. This work was originally published in Japanese, *Zen no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1921), 74.

could in fact be enlightened and extraordinary. The "discovery" of foreign wisdom that seemed to align with the wisdom of the West opened up the possibility of observing commonalities within (or despite) difference. The discovery of certain shared features or attributes, however, did not immediately open up the world to an appreciation of wisdom in general. One reaction to the realization of commonalities prompted the impulse to prove the superiority of one's own wisdom, culture, and tradition over that of the other. Yet another response was simply to learn without feeling the need to judge and dominate. The latter impulse opened up the possibility of engagement with the religious other in a genuinely dialogical manner.

This process evolved in three stages. The initial comparative impulse was self-aggrandizing, undertaken to hone one's sense of truth and worth by contrasting it with the falsity and unworthiness of the other. Then came the discovery of commonalities and the impulse to reflect on how religions share common or similar traits and aspirations. Finally, some came to realize that deeper wisdom comes neither from value judgments nor from affirmation based on likeness, but rather from the stimulation deriving from reflection on the nuanced subtleties of difference and the illumination that springs from their value-free contemplation. In the last few decades a number of important collections have been published that take this kind of embracing comparative approach.[20]

5   Truth and the Religious Imperative

Religions are complex organisms. Like living beings, they are made up of impulses and drives and they are hardly consistent. One of the traditional goals of systematic theology among the scriptural monotheisms has been to resolve what appears inconsistent in religion, because inconsistency conflicts with the primary authority for all things religious: an omniscient and omnipotent God.[21]

Religions are also complex because as much as they represent God, they also represent those who adhere to God. God reveals; humans respond—this is

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20   John Hick and Edmund Miltzer, eds., *Three Faiths One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989); James Heft, Reuven Firestone, and Omid Safi, eds., *Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility among Jews, Christians and Muslims* (New York: Oxford, 2011); Catherine Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

21   This is a very large field. For an introduction to the issues, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1994).

a formula that produces religion. Humans cannot help but process the world around them as independent and autonomous beings, so the religions they experience also contain a complex array of arcs and paths through which they respond by way of thought and practice to the divine imperative.

Religions contain a range of thinking about almost everything. They are both inward-looking and outward-looking. They reflect a powerful need for hierarchy, yet they are often extremely anti-hierarchical. They react to threat and conflict with an assortment of responses, from extreme violence to radical nonviolence. They lean sometimes toward universalism and sometimes toward particularism. These vectors or trajectories of thought and practice are the very essence of religion.

The theological differences between the scriptural monotheisms are best understood through the language of relative measure. Even classic, defining differences, such as the nature of God's essence via Trinitarian theology in Christianity and anti-Trinitarian theologies in Judaism and Islam, are not absolute. Jewish and Islamic mysticism, for example, include schools that observe a division in the Godhead that finds parallels with Trinitarian notions, while some Christian communities reject an essential Trinitarian division altogether.[22]

It was right to conclude, as our monotheist ancestors did, that in one creator God there exists an essential unity in the created universe, which continues to move it to this day. It was also correct to conclude that from this essential unity there is most likely an actual, single *Truth*. It is a mistake, however, to think that we can "own" that truth, that anyone can truly know it. As we move through history and learn new and ever-expanding quantities of information about both cosmos and microcosmos, it is the quintessence of temerity to think that we could possibly be confident that we understand "God's truth."

So, what do we do about it? We do what seekers have always done. We learn, both from within and outside of our particular religious tradition.[23] Learning

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22   Harold Gutteridge, *The Esoteric Codex: Nontrinitarianism* (NP: Lulu.com, 2012); Yehuda Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," in Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 139–56. Jonatan Benarroch most recently treats Trinitarian ideas as they appear in the Zohar; *"Sava and Yanuka": God, the Son and the Messiah in Zoharic Narratives—Poetic and Mythopoetic Aspects* (Hebrew, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, forthcoming); Ian Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 100, 114–17.

23   There are myriad ways we can engage in interreligious learning, from discussing theology to studying different scriptures, observing rituals, and even engaging with people of various religious faiths in unrelated projects of common interest, such as working at food pantries. While it is not the topic of this particular essay, the art and science of interreligious engagement is an important expertise.

is always a bit risky because it changes us. Most often, however, the changes that derive from learning deepen our sense of who we are and our sense of being grounded in a very complex world. In my own engagement with believers of other faith traditions through discussion, scriptural reading, and observing prayer, I have come not only to deepen my personal relationship with the Ultimate but also to strengthen my connection with the particularity of my own religious tradition. Additional angles of perspective offer additional possibilities of understanding.

The seminary is the place where we learn the unique and remarkable wisdom that our particular religious communities have derived from their efforts to understand the meaning of the Ultimate, and where we learn how our communities have responded to what we understand as the divine imperative. Our individual traditions contain great wisdom and extraordinary insights about these, but they do not contain all Truth because that is simply impossible. Nor are our individual seminary approaches or methodologies the only or even the most complete way to learn. The best we can do is to unpack a slice of Truth from the efforts of our religious predecessors and teachers. They—and we—are limited by the particularity of our own traditions. If we are serious about learning we need to open ourselves to Truth as understood by followers of other faith traditions.

I would argue that this is the new religious imperative. Even our broadest and deepest particular experiences are limited. We need to encourage our seminarians to experience the interpretive processes as well as conclusions of other faith traditions. One of the most effective and exciting ways to do this is by engaging with seminarians of other faith traditions. While it may seem natural or intuitive to engage with members of other scriptural monotheisms, it need not and should not be limited to "monotheists." The Ultimate speaks through the longing of all creation.

6 Seminary Learning

We expand and deepen our own religious understanding by learning with our religious co-travelers from other faith traditions. The new imperative is to learn wisdom not merely from our own tradition but also from others that have posed many of the questions we ask, but from different angles. From these different perspectives followers of other faith traditions derive responses that are unavailable to us because of the confines of our own viewpoints, and they sometimes pose entirely new questions that we could not possibly have thought of. I am not arguing that all perspectives are equal in value, but different

perceptions deepen our knowledge of what is without and what is within. We know from modern science that even established truths are experienced differently by observers who come to them from different viewpoints. Learning more of the variety of human spiritual experience and thought increases the likelihood of deeper and fuller understanding.

Given the expansiveness of our own religious histories, theologies, and literatures, it might seem that interreligious learning would reduce the amount and quality of wisdom that one could absorb from one's own religious tradition. I do not think interreligious learning requires a great amount of curricular space. One or two well-planned courses may be adequate if supplemented with two additions: experiential engagement with seminarians and religious leaders of other faith traditions outside the classroom framework, and a consistent message that religious and interreligious learning must continue after seminary training.

One of the important lessons conveyed to rabbinical students of all denominations in my own Jewish community is that ordination marks the culmination of only an early stage in the journey of learning. Learning about Jewish text and tradition becomes part of a rabbi's culture, and daily learning is expected to be a part of any rabbinic job description. Inculcated learning is built into the curriculum of Jewish seminary education. It should also include the expectation that seminary graduates engage with their religious counterparts of other faith communities, and that such engagement can (and should) trickle down into the communities they serve.

God reveals and humans respond. As noted above, the inevitably autonomous human response to the Ultimate is one of the miracles of creation. We think and we feel, and we are uniquely cognizant of sensing the world around us. If there is anything that captures the biblical references to humans having been created in the likeness of God,[24] it is this. We have somehow been given the tools—the gifts—of cognition, sentience, and self-awareness. The best way to take advantage of this extraordinary, God-given aptitude is to learn from one another.

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24 Gen.1:27, 2:26, 9:6. This position is not found in the Qur'an and is controversial among some Muslims. However, the canonical Ḥadīth includes traditions on the authority of Muḥammad that God created Adam in his own likeness (ḫalaqa Allāhu Ādam ʿalā ṣūratihi). The source is Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, given on the authority of Abū Hurayra citing the Prophet (Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 79, "Al-Isti'dhān," 1, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1420/1999, 4:142). See also Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Musnad, "Musnad Abī Hurayra," 8191, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1413/1993, 2:421.

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Interreligious Education: Transnational and Trans-Spiritual Identity Formation in the Classroom

Christine J. Hong

Abstract

This chapter engages with ways interreligious and intercultural pedagogies might honor and make visible the religious and cultural diversity present in classrooms by co-cultivating new forms of trans-spiritualities and nurturing a commitment to mutual transformation. It examines how minoritized people and communities carry porous boundaries across space, time, and lands, creating new practices, customs, and lexicons, while simultaneously struggling with the impact of internalized cultural and religious hybridity. The chapter discusses the dangers of white and Christian supremacist understandings of non-white and non-Christian communities, and the resistance of such supremacism to any naturally hybrid and dynamic representations of culture and religion in the intercultural and interreligious classroom.

1   Introduction

Stories are the cornerstone of how human beings learn in a vibrant and intersectional world. C.S. Song reflects on the power of story for theological and personal formation in his book, *In the Beginning Were Stories Not Texts: Story Theology.* Song asserts that story making and storytelling simultaneously deconstruct and construct the matrix of our theological commitments. It is in childhood that we start this process of inquiry: the deconstruction and construction of our understandings of one another and the world. From the moment we begin to point at objects, wondering what they are, we enter the process of inquiry, of learning how we are influenced by the actions of others, the push and pull of the world, and how our own embodied ways of being might help or harm those around us. As we continue to learn, our stories change with the continued deepening of our experiences of the world and one another. The alterations to our narratives are what help us learn and hear across human differences, especially different lived religious and spiritual

commitments, the misunderstandings of which, at times, threaten to keep us fearful and separated from one another.

Our deep entanglement in story, particularly stories about religious and interreligious commitments, is what teaches us about others and ourselves. The process of investigating story, creating, sharing, telling, internalizing, and interpreting, helps us wrestle with the deep-seated fears, biases, and assumptions we may harbor towards others with whom we share this world. As we learn more about the ebb and flow of student formation in interreligious classrooms, particularly the identity and spiritual formation of students of color in North America, our pedagogies need to shift along with our students to center the power of these changing stories, both our own stories and the stories of the collective "we." This essay begins by describing the impact of story on the liminal transnational and trans-spiritual identity formation of students, and concludes by identifying ways this lens can impact classrooms and pedagogical approaches to student learning, particularly within intentionally intercultural and interreligious spaces.[1]

2   Story as Transnational and Trans-Spiritual Empowerment

The sharing of stories and narratives is part of how identities are formed, shaped, and reshaped. As a second generation Korean American, my identity and commitments grow increasingly transnational. The stories shared with me by the older immigrant generation reconnect me to the land that my parents left behind. The stories of a painful immigration, war, and refugee experiences of survival and thriving, have been transmitted, internalized, examined, written down and retold and continue to connect me to Korea and the Korean people, as well as to their collective histories and concerns. These stories also

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1   I am using the term trans-spiritual to describe religious and spiritual commitments, beliefs, and practices that originate from different experiences, places, histories, and religious and spiritual traditions, but that are embodied and held together in one individual. Like transnationalism and its commitments, trans-spirituality does not merge, synthesize, or syncretize distinct commitments, but these commitments, practices, and beliefs exist, are present, and transformed in tension and conversation with one another. Trans-spirituality is not a cherry-picking of religious beliefs and practices, but rootedness in them through communal, familial, and personal histories, experiences, and commitments. Trans-spiritual practices, for persons and groups with colonized histories, can be practices that were once indigenous and that have been re-interpreted, and re-indigenized.

connect me to the faith and spirituality that sustained them throughout painful periods of history.

Stories that emerge from lived experience make deep imprints on our consciousness and even our genetic data. Numerous studies of displaced communities, First Nations, Holocaust survivors, and African Americans reveal the extent of trauma's imprint on the DNA. The effects of trauma have deep psychological and physical ramifications for future generations, many of which have yet to be understood. Shared narratives across generations and the resulting ways in which we learn to carry those stories in and on our bodies and through our actions, affect us and the stories we tell. They connect us to spaces, places, and often indescribable emotions across oceans and time. Is it possible that it is not only trauma that imprints on us, but also the practices that sustain us or help us cultivate resilience in the face of traumatic experiences as well? Perhaps spiritual practices and the benefits we receive from them, and religio-cultural identities also, are transmitted through collective experiences and the sharing of stories. If so, how might making space for understanding and cultivating transnational and trans-spiritual identity formation alter the way we construct interreligious classrooms and approach interreligious pedagogy?

Though I was born in Los Angeles, I have always felt a deep connection with my Korean roots. For me, the concept of home has always felt nebulous. Home is neither here in the United States, where I remain a perpetual foreigner,[2] nor is it in South Korea where much of my family still resides. Home remains both places and neither place. Home is not only to do with geography or the physical rootedness of my feet, but is also where I feel the most present in my body and comfortable in my own skin, without feeling the need to constantly explain myself or the dynamics of my identity and commitments. This includes how I might or might not cultivate and practice my spiritual and religious beliefs. This transnational and trans-spiritual identity was partly facilitated by frequent travel to South Korea and our close-knit family systems.

Transnational and trans-spiritual identity formation is dynamic and constantly negotiated. The objects of negotiation include spiritual and religious identities, beliefs, and practices. As this negotiation occurs, internal and external third spaces are created. Levitt and Waters, in their edited volume on trans-nationalism among youth and young adults showcase several examples of the formation of transnational identities across newly malleable boundaries. Immigration no longer effects the permanent severing of familial or national

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2   "Perpetual foreigner" refers to Asians and Asian Americans who because of the stereotypes and prejudices associated with their appearance cannot assimilate to North American life. They are assumed always to be foreign, visiting, or traveling through, but never at home.

ties. Many second and third generation North Americans identify home as multiple places and people, not restricted to national boundaries. While their commitments to these different places, nations, and people can often conflict, they are still held together without the need to work out the conflictual commitments.[3] For instance, as a child I remember a common question second-generation Korean Americans would ask one another: "If the United States and Korea ever went to war, which side would you be on?" It was one of those questions without an answer. While we were situated in the United States, with parents—the immigrant generation—having worked diligently to carve a path forward for us, many of us still had relatives in Korea whom we still visited. Complicating this was the cultural and Confucian values of family loyalty and honoring one's elders, and the ever-present racism and discrimination we experienced as perpetual foreigners in a white supremacist land.

In the interreligious and intercultural classroom that is intentionally porous and self-revelatory, I increasingly find students choosing to self-identify as transnational and increasingly negotiate their religion, spirituality, and faith in boundary-crossing ways. As students engage with and unpack their personal narratives, identities, and inheritances, they discover that their spiritual practices are rooted in more than one community and more than one location. I once had a student in a class on interreligious engagements in diaspora who at first identified as a Christian white male. As the class went on and we focused on what it meant to identify with our personal histories, he revealed to his colleagues that he actually identified as a Latinx man who had been raised both Catholic and Wiccan and who came to Protestantism later in life. He shared that he had initially chosen to identity as a white Christian male because he had learned that a fair-skinned and light-eyed Latinx man who practiced Protestant Christianity with Wiccan and Roman Catholic understandings and underpinnings was problematic for those he encountered. He learned to present himself as people expected him to be rather than explore who he knew himself to be in his innermost being. The white Christian male identity afforded him privilege and social capital, but made for a challenging personal and spiritual life.

Transnationalism and its defining characteristics can extend to the landscape of trans-spiritualism and one's inter-spiritual and interreligious commitments. Hybrid religious and spiritual practices become embodiments of negotiated transnationalism. My family has been Christian for three generations. Christianity and its practices took root while my grandparents were still in North Korea. As they embraced Christianity, and Presbyterianism in particular,

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3 Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters, *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002).

they put away the Confucian-cultural practices that for them could not be assimilated and reinterpreted into their new Christian theologies and beliefs. However, what is consciously buried does not always stay underground. As various historians, theologians, and scholars on Korean American religious practices began to uncover the indigenous origins of Korean Christian practice, ways of trans-spiritualism also began to emerge.

2.1   *Porous Boundaries*

One of our family's rejected practices was the practice of *jeh-sah* or ancestor veneration. Counter to what white European and North American missionaries assumed, the practice of *jeh-sah* is not one-dimensional ancestor worship. It is the practice of remembering the dead and the recognition that the boundaries of life and death remain porous. The living set a banquet table for the deceased, placing the dead person's picture on the table along with their favorite foods, and in contemporary practice, items that held meaning for that individual while they were alive. The living then bow before the table and offer prayers. These prayers are conversational, wishing the spirit well, asking for guidance and protection for the living. This practice of setting *jeh-sah* table and holding conversational prayer, articulate the permanence of a relationship that is not severed with death.

I started practicing *jeh-sah* on the first anniversary of my maternal grandmother's death. Even after her death, I still feel her presence deeply upon my life. At each anniversary I lay out the banquet table, including the handwritten Bible she gave me on the occasion of one of my last visits with her. This practice has helped me feel a profound connection, not only with her, but with my Christian understanding of the cloud of witnesses and the resurrected body, as well as with the indigenous shamanistic practices of the Korean people for the releasing of *han* or the collective suffering of the people. Transnationalism is for me also trans-spiritual and decolonial. I hold my commitments to the United States and the Korean Peninsula together with my commitments to Christianity and the spiritual practices of my people, which are now being reclaimed from their erasure during the encounter with Christian mission and Japanese annexation.

Over the years, other trans-spiritual practices among transnational immigrant communities have been assimilated and re-appropriated for the sake of new religious practices in a new land. The connective tissue of the land, culture, religions, and spiritualities left behind are re-cultivated for a new place to ensure the survival and thriving of the transplanted community. In their edited volume, *Gatherings in Diaspora*, Warner and Wittner describe the hybrid

practices of Catholic Haitians in New York who practice elements of Santeria, as well as the religious and cultural adaptations made by Jewish Iranians in the Los Angeles area.[4] In the Korean American community such hybrid practices are most prominently reflected in *ttong-song-kido* (fervent prayer) and early morning prayer, both which possibly originated out of very early Shamanistic practices of confronting and releasing *han*.[5]

This reinterpretation and transformation of embodied spiritualities and identities does not begin or end with immigration or migration. New converts to and from different religious traditions can also, intentionally and unintentionally, carry with them personally significant religious practices and theological understandings about G-d and self into sacred spaces. In our fluidity, we human beings bring forward our narratives, the histories, theologies, beliefs, and practices of our people into new religious and sacred spaces, particularly in moments of crisis. I was raised in a Presbyterian family and church, although one that practiced reformed traditions in decidedly Pentecostal and charismatic ways. This practice is not uncommon among new immigrant Christian communities in Asian America.[6] To this day, even though I am an ordained Presbyterian minister committed to the theologies behind reformed spirituality and practice, when in crisis my prayers become decidedly Pentecostal and charismatic. When I need to expediently communicate with G-d, I do not go to a book of prayers or recite creeds. Instead, I pray spontaneously and unabashedly ask for the things I want and need, including the expectation of divine and miraculous intervention on my behalf. My reformed theology allows for spontaneous prayer, but would challenge the logic and ethics of petitioning of G-d in this manner. However, in crisis, my prayer practices organically overcome these boundaries. What is at the foundation of our spiritual formation cannot always be exorcised from us. I have observed this boundary crossing between religious and spiritual practices in the lives of others as well. Once, at a biennial gathering of Presbyterians, an interreligious guest received communion at our Assembly-wide service. A practicing African American Muslim who converted in early adulthood, she cited her deep belief in the connective quality of the Christian sacrament of communion for both people and

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4 R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner, *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

5 *Han* is the indigenous Korean terminology for collective sorrow, grief, and pain. *Han* can be personal, connectional, and national. Practices of prayer like *ttong-song-kido* can in effect be a cry of lament and releasing of *han*.

6 Charismatic practices among Korean American Mainline Protestant Christians echo the indigenous shamanistic roots of Korean spiritualities.

the divine as her reason for participation. This most likely went against both our traditional and theological preconceptions, but she was embodying her trans-spiritual and communal commitments in a way that made sense for her religious and spiritual life journey, the places from whence she came and the new places her religious identity locate her today. As I watched her receive the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Christ, she was in my view crossing back and forth between the same porous boundaries that separate me from my grandmother at the *jeh-sah* table.

2.2 *Technology*

These porous boundaries between national, spiritual, and religious spaces and practices are further facilitated by evolving technology, which in turn changes the way students engage with one another and the world in the interreligious classroom. When my parents emigrated to the United States, they lost the ability to have instantaneous communication with their loved ones. Long distance calls were too costly other than for emergencies and special occasions. Letters had to be handwritten and took weeks to arrive. The feeling of loss and separation was much more permanent than it is now. Today, technology allows transnational peoples to engage with their different homelands in a multiplicity of ways and in real time.[7] People are able to experience rootedness and commitments to other places and people via technology. They are even able to observe and participate in worship with communities across the world. Through the power of technology, we are no longer bound to a single location. With the help of technology, interreligious classrooms become interreligious spaces across national and spiritual boundaries through the observation of worship in different places around the world, and the direct engagement with different religious practitioners via video conferencing. Students are no longer bound by texts on paper; instead people all over the world become living texts through which students are able to learn. As transnational religious and spiritual people, we are also no longer bound only to mine and interpret our historical stories to ground and develop our current theologies and spiritual practices. We are able to make meaning and create new stories with living communities and living practices, by cultivating of newly-formed spiritualities together. We are able to follow diverse stories and curate our identities and commitments through encounter with the identities and commitments of others as they happen.

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7   Levitt and Waters, *The Changing Face of Home.*

3   **Cultivation of Trans-spiritual and Transnational Identities and Narratives**

While technologically-transmitted narratives, because they are living texts, sustain the porous quality of inter-spiritual boundaries in interreligious education, they are also susceptible to dangerous romanticizing. The construct of "home" is created and re-created through technologically-transmitted narratives that can be romanticized into re-imagined communities and renewed meaning making around spiritual practices. Confucian practitioners, Korean American Christians, and even members of my own family would most likely profess shock at my practice of *jeh-sah* for my grandmother. Truth be told, perhaps part of my impetus in resurrecting the practice of *jeh-sah* may be the way I have romanticized some of the narratives that have been passed down to me from those of my parents' and grandparents' generation. South Korea and all she possesses is irreplaceable in my mind's eye. She is flawed but not irredeemably so. My cousins, Korean nationals, on the other hand, are always surprised by how much I long for "home" and how much I dread leaving when I visit. I always cry upon departure; it is a keening of loss, the loss of the warm feeling of comfort, of the feeling of belonging that can only come with hearing your mother tongue all around you and living in a context that does not require you to explain yourself at every turn. Perhaps it is a loss that is partially my own romanticizing of homeland. I will continually remake my trans-spiritual practices based on how Korea continues to transform herself in my heart and mind. Unfortunately, this transformation can lead to the erasure of other conflicting but significant narratives.

Why the need for rose-colored glasses? Are we looking for a blanket positivism to cover over the narratives we would rather not immerse ourselves in? There are dangers to this cultivated and romanticized form of transnationality and trans-spirituality. The rose-colored transnationalities and trans-spiritualities and the curation of the narratives we receive can render invisible entire narratives and histories, including the most painful and unspeakable stories. We risk the danger of curating privileged narratives that avoid the sticky and messy stories we hesitate to hear and re-tell. Romanticizing our transnational and trans-spiritual identities can encourage us to see only what we desire to see and little else. Students and instructors are at risk of picking and choosing what is most meaningful to them, centering their own stories without consideration for the larger narratives and the stories of others from which their own emerge.

In the face of self-cultivated identities and commitments, how do we continue to foster a type of interreligious education that encourages students to

take off their rose-tinted glasses? How do we help students work through the process of holding disparate narratives together for the purpose of a more holistic and communal identity formation? JoAnn D'Alisera documents the differing narratives of Sierra Leonean families in the Washington DC area:[8] While the second generation, through the narratives heard in the media and public education system, imagines "the dark heart of Africa" and all that this bias implies, their refugee parents describe rich and beautiful histories, lands, and cultures that were left behind for a hostile North America. These youths hold these two disparate narratives together in tension, wrestling with what these conflicting stories might mean for them and their commitments to both the United States and Sierra Leonean communities at large. What are our students learning about their constantly curated identities and stories in the classroom? Is what they are learning in the classroom porous enough to enable them make sense of, and create room for alternative narratives they will encounter of other places, people and experiences at home, in worshipping communities, and in the media?

In the interreligious and intercultural classroom, there must be an intentional balancing of the narratives that are transparent and the narratives that are hidden, as well as an uncovering of the way narratives are destroyed and altered, particularly through the white and colonist gaze. This is especially the case for people in the diaspora who learn about their motherlands in spite of a lack of information about them in our textbooks, or do so through the lenses of the conqueror over the conquered and the civilized over the savage. The classroom must equip students to hold these divergent stories in tension, help them sift through and critically and powerfully examine, deconstruct and reconstruct the stories they encounter.

As the second and third generations receive stories from the immigrant generation, unpack them, and make new meaning from them, including the creation of hybrid spiritual practices, they also hear and internalize a different set of narratives from a white supremacist culture and its accompanying white gaze on "foreign" histories, religious practices, and peoples. During a conversation with my family in Korea early in my adolescence, I was astounded to discover that the narrative of the American military as "savior" post Korean-War was not the narrative my family understood. Their understanding was of American military occupation on South Korean soil, an occupation that was

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8   JoAnn D'Alisera, "Images of a Wounded Homeland: Sierra Leonian Children and the New Heart of Darkness," in Nancy Foner, ed., *Across Generations: Immigrant Families in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 114–34.

tolerated because of the nuclear threat of North Korea, but not welcome because of the violence from American soldiers, the embedded American exceptionalism, and the neocolonial white supremacist lens that came with American military presence on Korean soil.

As the studies in intergenerational trauma mentioned earlier reveal, there are continuing effects of empire and colonial histories on the transnational identities of people of color in the United States, including the ways the white gaze and American exceptionalism have bled into the narratives we have interpreted and internalized about our homelands. This reality and tension leads to a continuous process of unpacking and reimagining our identities and the spiritual and religious practices embedded within them. Just as I have done with the *jeh-sah* practice, there is a movement by those with colonized histories in North America to reclaim and reimagine the spiritual practices that have been lost or erased through encounters with Christian mission and other forms of imperialism. However, this reclamation can cause individuals to feel simultaneously empowered and isolated in their respective chosen communities, therefore necessitating a re-negotiation, not only of religious and spiritual belief and practice, but also of the relationship between community and personal identity. My status as an ordained clergy person both empowers me in religious spaces and makes me into a disorienting agent for many in the Korean American community. As a result I feel largely isolated from those in the Korean American community who adhere to more conservative theologies around women's ordination. I embody a negotiation of stories and their meanings remade. My very presence as a woman with spiritual and religious authority is a challenge to the norming of Confucian-Christian practices that ally maleness with holiness. Simply by dwelling in this tension within the community creates a necessary conflict and conversation, which heads towards transformation and newly-negotiated spaces that disrupt paradigms of power and privilege in Korean American congregational life and theology. This in turn deconstructs the overlay of white-Christian supremacist narratives that seek to simplify Korean culture by representing it as rigid, theologically conservative, and sexist.

4 Rethinking Pedagogical Approaches in Interreligious Education

With these complexities in mind, how do we approach interreligious and intercultural classrooms, where many of our students are nurturing transnational and trans-spiritual identities? First, I define interreligious classrooms and

interreligious education as spaces where participants are intentionally learning and negotiating the complexities of interreligious life, as well as the larger systemic and societal structures of public and religious life. Part of the process of interreligious education and learning is to remain open to one another's particular cultures and traditions for the sake of appreciation, without the need for proselytization. How do we encourage students to retain these porous boundaries between one another's narratives and histories in their cultivation of identity through story, all the while retaining a sense of self-esteem and growing their capacity to courageously engage with the tensions and conflicts they are bound to encounter? What are some practices that will ensure students' identities are not subjected to a secondary erasure by the colonist and white gaze, or to destructive forms of assimilation through the parameters and measures of success and failure set by western forms of theological education?

4.1   *Conflict in the Interreligious Classroom*

Conflict in the classroom, especially around negotiated identities, is not something we should fear. In his text, *Transformative Classroom Management,* John Shindler frames conflict as a way forward, a way to co-create a culture of listening and respect. Conflict in the classroom, when surfaced and properly engaged with, can open doors to new ways of hearing one another.[9] Though Shindler is referring mostly to classrooms of adolescents, his theory is applicable in interreligious spaces as well. If adolescence is a heightened time when our identities are tested and selfhood is learned, interreligious and intercultural spaces in theological education are heightened times of formation for classroom participants also, particularly for white Christians who have never before had the primacy of their religious or cultural identities challenged in North American spaces.

Often when conflicts arise around contested religious and cultural identities, stories, and perspectives in the classroom, our instinct is to quickly and efficiently re-direct or diffuse the topic. Yet when we follow this instinct, what is really challenged and changed in the identities and perspectives of the instructors and students? Perhaps only the authority of the instructor is reaffirmed. When properly and carefully mediated, conflicts can become vehicles of community and individual transformation for both the instructor and student and by association, adjacent communities. The students' very presence, as they embody the transnational and trans-spiritual identities they are

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9   John Shindler, *Transformative Classroom Management: Positive Strategies to Engage All Students and Promote a Psychology of Success* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

constantly re-negotiating, transforms and challenges the classroom space. Classmates and instructors learn from these students' perspectives and stories and from the lenses they use to interpret and curate the narratives, identities, and spaces they call home. By lifting up and uncovering what is already being embodied in our students, our understandings of identity and spiritual formation become porous together, making learning across difference much more possible and collectively transformative, effectively extending the classroom towards inward spaces of learning and beyond physical walls.

As potentially transformative as conflict can be when encountered strategically in the classroom, instructors must first establish classrooms that are hospitable to both the transnational and trans-spiritual identity formation of students and instructors. Conflicts in the classroom can arise as consequences of classrooms being unintentionally inhospitable places for the negotiation of these fluid identities, and instead being places that assume that identities are rigid and that the performance of identities is as deep as identity goes.[10]

4.2 *Presumed Identities*

When instructors and students assume identities in the classroom without taking the time to leave the borders around identities and identity performance porous and open, key identity markers that are being constantly and tenuously negotiated remain invisible. This invisibility can occur through micro-aggression by both students and teachers. Common experiences include assumptions about social location and socio-economic status, the mispronunciation of ethnic names, and the rendering invisible of disabilities. Recent studies have shown the negative effect on students of color when their teachers and others mispronounce their names in public spaces without correction. Entire histories and the meanings that are embedded when names are created and given become invisible and are rendered powerless.[11] Studies of Asian American children and adolescents further reveal that this powerless feeling extends to the formation of the person's self-esteem and can even result in self-harming behaviors.[12]

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10   Judith Butler notes that gender is performed and essentially fluid outside of societally-constructed performativity. I am asserting that national, racial, ethnic, religious, and spiritual identities are also fluid, but that students and instructors learn to perform out of more rigid societal expectations of identity, and out of necessity and survival in inhospitable environs.

11   Corey Mitchell, "A Teacher Mispronouncing a Student's Name can Have a Lasting Impact," PBS, May 16, 2016, accessed September 8, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/a-teacher-mispronouncing-a-students-name-can-have-a-lasting-impact/.

12   Nita Tewari and Alvin Alvarez, *Asian American Psychology: Current Perspectives* (New York: Psychology Press, 2008).

When an instructor's lenses are not sufficiently self-reflective or examined for bias, presenting identities in the classroom tend to be privileged over those whose identities are more internalized, but just as, if not more tangible, for the people who hold them. In the classroom, this can take the form of Christian privilege or the privileging of Christian narratives and persons, clergy privilege, heteronormativity, male privilege, or the centering of the white gaze and white privilege. Subjection to such privileging can also be the experience of instructors of color in the context of Western institutions and training.[13]

Classroom environments and the pedagogy we use within them should work to encourage the deepening of self-identification over assumptions, as well as the simultaneous self-interpretation of multiple identities, including those that are religious, spiritual, national, etc. Good pedagogical practices work to unpack how student, teacher, and community identities are negotiated and understood, and they lift meaning out of even the seemingly smallest of identity markers. G. Yamazawa, a Japanese American artist of the spoken word, describes the power of his father's accent in his poem *The Bridge*: "My father's accent is like climbing a barbed wire fence … it means he spent more time cooking for other people in his restaurant making ends meet for his family than trying to learn English." More than a marker of immigration, for Yamazawa, his father's accent told of his father's commitments, choices, and even love for his family. What would our classrooms look and feel like if instead of only learning how to pronounce one another's names correctly, we also encouraged the unpacking of our names? If we asked how names were born and how we received them, what they meant to the giver and what they mean to us? How they continue to shape us? Sometimes our motherland names are the only link some of us have left to the mother tongue or our homelands.

My grandfather gave me the Korean name Hong Jin. In the Chinese characters that it comes from Hong means wide while Jin means small and precious. To my grandfather, I was a small and precious person across the wide expanse of the ocean he was waiting to meet. I cannot think about my given Korean name without thinking of this story, the origin of my name, the person who gave it to me, and the deep longing and sorrow he must have felt at not being able to meet his first grandchild until much later. Just as names have deep rootedness in how our identities are shaped and how our transnational ties are carried and sustained, spiritualities and spiritual practices are

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13   Indigenous scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Andrea Smith reflect on the decolonizing of the indigenous scholar's mind from the influence of Western epistemologies and research processes.

also inheritances and legacies that connect us to our many "homes" within the classroom space.

4.3   *Christian and White Privilege in Interreligious Education*

Interreligious education seeks to identify and interrogate the pervasive Christian and white privilege in interreligious and intercultural life. Even when homogeneity appears to exist, for instance in an entirely Christian or an entirely Muslim classroom, deep differences do exist and need the appropriate spaces to present themselves. In an essentialist North American culture, many of our differences necessarily become submerged within the larger umbrella of racial identities and commitments. Entire communities have undergone this submersion in order to survive within the hostile white supremacist systems and Christian privileging that occurs in North American society. However, when this categorization becomes the primary and only mode of cultivating identity in the classroom and other systems, the deep conflicts embedded within even large identifying umbrellas become buried. For instance, the complex and unique ethnic Asian and Asian American histories become invisible in lieu of an essentialist and often East Asian oriented narrative of Asian America. Contrary to the belief that all colonists were white Americans and Europeans, Asian history is full of colonial histories, occupations, oppressions, and liminalities that occurred solely among and between Asian nations and peoples. In the U.S. context, this call to assimilation, to melt and become singularly Asian American also extends by default to our religious narratives and identities in the social and American public sphere. Even among students who identify with the same signifiers will understand those signifiers differently. For instance, Christianity, its lived theologies, and practices mean different things to Christians everywhere. The 2014 gathering of the ecumenical World Council of Churches in Busan, South Korea, was heavily boycotted outside by none other than Korean Christians who did not agree with the ecumenical practices the WCC pursued. In the same way, being "Asian American" means different things to different Asian Americans, whose immigration histories, points of arrival, and participation in American civic life are vastly divergent. We can say the same for people who affiliate and identity as either Hispanic, Chicano, Latin@, or Latinx but whom the census would like to identity as one singular category: Non-white Hispanic. Like racial and ethnic identity, religion and religious experience is multifaceted and never monolithic. When teaching and learning in the porous classroom, we resist the urge to pin down one normative meaning or experience, and when we must adopt essentialisms, we do so in the acknowledgement that this move towards normativity always frames

outside experiences as marginal and irreconcilable with a privileged central narrative.

Like our constantly negotiated identities, hybrid spiritualities and practices in the student and in the classroom are always shifting. These moves are influenced by various factors, including the classroom makeup, home, worship spaces, etc. These changes are deepened through encounters with others in a constantly changing community. A helpful pedagogical approach works to lift up the dynamic nature of communities and classrooms, not as things to be essentialized, or in some cases, newly colonized, through one monolithic interpretation, but held in tension with one another. The conflicting narratives in a classroom need not always agree with one another, but can sit together in tension, creating a space where each participant feels camaraderie over the level of risk involved in continually negotiating identity and spirituality. Therefore, pedagogical approaches in intentionally interreligious and intercultural spaces should validate and affirm the existence of trans-spiritualities and continually complex identities, with the experience of tension held up as the catalyst for mutuality. This comes from our understanding of religious and spiritual dynamism as more than a patchwork of religious practices and beliefs. Our resistance to understanding some world religions as hybrid realities can be broken down when we begin to understand that some of our religions, including Christianity, have been hybrid realities from inception.[14] Trans-spiritualities and practices can exist in seemingly mono-religious spaces and identities. As mentioned earlier, hybridity is a cornerstone of many seemingly monolithic Christian practices, particularly in immigrant and migrant Christian communities. These tensions need to breathe and they bear exploring in the classroom. Even the tension between religion and spirituality—the assumption of one being more valid than the other—is a nebulous space we can explore in interreligious education.

4.4 Hospitable Interreligious Classrooms

Hospitable interreligious classrooms facilitate the co-formation of identities and spiritualities and render complex the relationship between them. Students, teachers, and educational institutions are shaped and reshaped in their encounters with one another—in joy, grief, conflict, and creation. For the practical theologian in particular, the goal of any rigor within the classroom is transformation of the participant, institution, and society.[15] Practically, this

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14   Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books, 2011).

15   Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

mutual transformation can occur with the perpetual asking of the question, "Who are we?" and close examination of how we draw lines around the "we." For instance, whose interests are served in the boundaries we draw around "we"? Who is permitted to draw the lines? Who is excluded? Who benefits from the "we" that is established and who is minoritized?

Amos Yong expands the notion of "we" in Christian theology to include those of other religious traditions. Yong, a Pentecostal theologian who specializes in pneumatology for interreligious engagement and life, identifies radical interreligious hospitality as a function of the Spirit of G-d. Yong postulates that, for Christians, even in the Spirit's function of evangelization, there is a strong element of attitudinal conversion and re-conversion to one's own doctrines of neighborliness and hospitality that is required for deep engagement with and commitment to Christian life.[16] If we follow Yong's understanding of we-ness, interreligious education is a way in which, by deeply embodying radical hospitality towards one another, by opening ourselves up and deepening our appreciation of difference, we become truer adherents of the religious traditions and cultures that we claim.

The porous classroom, like our porous identities and spiritualities, requires the understanding that learning and formation of religious and spiritual identity continues outside of the classroom space and deeply dynamizes the classroom experience. The classroom is porous and borderless in the sense that interreligious or interfaith dialogue and life is not only shaped with words but also through the art, music, silence, taste, communal memories, etc. that occur outside the classroom context; the experience of which only enhances how we navigate our interactions with others within the classroom space.

Pedagogy for the porous classroom, or a classroom that fosters hospitable spaces for the shifting identities and spiritual formation of students and teachers, constantly lifts up and tracks the varied dimensions of power and privilege in the classroom, and tracks how they change or are changed through encounters.[17] Some of the markers of difference within structures of power and privilege include religion, gender, nationality, language, age, and sexuality. As facilitators of these spaces, we try and do this with care, through understanding and working with the vulnerable experiences of tracking identity formation through self-reflexivity in marginal spaces. Practical ways we do this include doing away with the false notion of "safe spaces" and moving into emboldened

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16   Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Mission Theology in the Third Millennium Global Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 55–63.

17   Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook. *God Beyond Borders: Interreligious Learning Among Faith Communities* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishing, 2014).

and democratic spaces. There are some people who are never fully safe regardless of where they are in society. Some people are always on the defensive because of safety concerns, having to explain themselves, or intentionally hiding aspects of their identities in order to survive. The reality is, to call a space "safe" in North American society privileges heteronormativity, men, able-ism, and whiteness. Individual and communal identities, religious and otherwise, can hold power in one space, but remain liminal in others. As previously described, my clergywoman status is empowering within my ecclesial family. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is currently 92 percent white, but my clergy status and denominational leadership give me access to transformative avenues of conversation. In my Korean American context, I am a paradox. A woman with spiritual and religious authority is perceived with suspicion as subverting normative Confucian structures and systems that are still deeply patriarchal.

4.5   *Dismantling Binaries and Assumptions in the Classroom*

We further the aim for hospitable interreligious education and classrooms by integrating anti-racist and anti-supersessionist approaches and critiques into our pedagogy and posture. As we work to lift up the dynamics of tension between narratives and make visible the stories, realities, and histories that have been buried through the centering of colonial narratives, we must also work to deconstruct dangerous binaries. The two most common binaries that work against the cultivation of holistic identities are the racial binary of Black and white and the religious binary of Christian and other. The Black/white binary works to suppress the complex narratives of people of color communities, while the Christian and other binary centers the Christian agenda and story over and against the rich diversity of religious and spiritual narratives in our world. We cannot hope to maintain the porous boundaries between transnational and trans-spiritual identities and practices within binary constructs that work to keep the complexities of different identities and commitments hidden and ultimately pit vulnerable communities against one another.

Other constructed assumptions that do not foster the complexities of identity and story co-forming in the classroom are generational and vocational assumptions. In theological education particularly, we can no longer assume that our students hail from a monolithic millennial generation with all the pigeonholed stereotypes this label carries with it. Assumptions about generational belonging damage the porous identities and borders we encourage in interreligious education. Generational assumptions work against potential intergenerational cooperation between traditions, cultures, and peoples. Today, it is

common in theological education to have students from millennial, generation x, and boomer generations sharing space and learning together.

Another intersection where assumptions abound is around vocational differences. Second and third career students share spaces with students with multi-vocational realities on the horizon. Many community religious institutions, such as churches and synagogues, can no longer sustain full-time staff and leadership. This shortage of traditional religious leadership roles has forced students in theological education to harness their creativity, patching together different leadership roles simultaneously along their career paths. The bringing together of second and third career students with students who will eventually need to be experimental to ensure income security, brings to light socio-economic disparities that in turn affect the different narratives in the classroom. In addition, the growth of non-traditional master's programs within the Association of Theological Schools reveals that students are entering theological education for reasons other than embarking on religious leadership.[18] As instructors, how are we accommodating the different reasons students seek theological education, layered as these differences are with the different textures of their transnational and trans-spiritual commitments and formation, and their socio-economic and potential career realities?

Students bring their different lived experiences, histories, perspectives, generational and intergenerational gaps and realities, community and group resources, points of access, and communication styles into one collective space. This deep diversity may seem daunting at first because of the potential for conflict and misunderstanding. However, the gathering of these divergent narratives becomes less resistant to transformation when they are in co-formation together. In the presence of profound differences, student and instructor assumptions wear down and the boundaries between self and other become porous in the same way as our transnational and trans-spiritual identities and practices. It is possible that because of growing generational differences, and differences in social location in our classrooms of theological education, we are poised, more than ever before, to cultivate an increasing capacity for conversation about and through difference, which in turn supports the formation of students with transnational and trans-spiritual identities and commitments.

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18   Association of Theological Schools, "Annual Data Tables, 2015–2016," accessed September 15, 2017, http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables/2015-2016-annual-data-tables.pdf.

5 Conclusion

The stories we hear, learn, and share shape us and those around us. Our stories are constantly shifting. They speak of our deepest commitments—transnational and trans-spiritual—even those commitments that we are still learning to understand and unpack. They flesh out our religious beliefs and practices, both personal and communal. Our identities are threaded through with narratives that are simultaneously fragile and resilient, narratives that work against one another and exist in tension within the confines of our bodies and minds. Our identities, both transnational and trans-spiritual, are co-formed in our encounters with one another, in particular in the intentionally vulnerable spaces of theological education.

Good and transformative pedagogy builds bridges between diverse stories, our histories, social locations, and understandings of religion and practices, without requiring students to assemble rigid and permanent definitions of self. It fosters classrooms that are hospitable and individuals who hold their identities, commitments, and practices in porous ways, so as to allow for the continual formation of selfhood that comes from the encounter with others. The way we nurture hospitable classrooms can encourage the breakdown of dangerous binaries and assumptions that promote hostility and fear, while encouraging mutual transformation towards one another. We ensure mutuality in thriving when we learn to hold the narratives, commitments, and practices in tension, both within ourselves and within spaces of learning.

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Reflections on Islamic Studies in an Interreligious Context

Munir Jiwa

Abstract

In these reflections, I want to highlight some of the challenges and opportunities in Islamic studies in theological schools, focusing on the Center for Islamic Studies (CIS) at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU). I will begin with a brief historical overview of the GTU and CIS, followed by an outline of some of the institutional challenges as well as some of the personal challenges I have had to navigate both as the Founding Director of the Center for Islamic Studies and as Associate Professor of Islamic Studies and Anthropology. Finally, I want to share some of the opportunities I think deserve to be encouraged, especially in the area of Muslim contributions to interreligious studies, dialogue and leadership, both in the academy across disciplines, and in the larger public sphere. These reflections are prior to April 2018.

1　Historical Context

During the first half of the twentieth century, several Protestant denominations and Catholic orders relocated their seminaries to Berkeley. Drawn by the proximity of the educational resources at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB), individual seminaries opened their classes to students of other schools, listed courses in multiple course catalogs, and shared library resources. In the early 1960s, theological education in Christianity began shifting from a denominational focus to approaches that were more ecumenical. Seminaries began to understand the advantages of working cooperatively to strengthen curricula and to offer advanced degree programs, and to promote ecumenical dialogue.

With this local historical background, a cooperative degree program was negotiated by Protestant seminaries resulting in the creation of the Graduate Theological Union in 1962. A couple of years later, the first Catholic school was admitted to the consortium, and in 1968 the Center for Jewish Studies was established. In the decades to follow, the GTU added several additional

academic centers, including the Center for Theology and Natural Sciences, the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, and the Institute of Buddhist Studies. In 2007, the Center for Islamic Studies was created as an academic program unit of the GTU. The Mira and Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies was inaugurated in December 2015, and both the Center for the Arts and Religion and the Center for Theology and Natural Sciences became official program units of the GTU in 2016. Today, the Graduate Theological Union is the largest partnership of ecumenical and interreligious theological schools, seminaries and centers in the country.

2   The Center for Islamic Studies at the Graduate Theological Union

Founded in 2007, the Center for Islamic Studies has become integral to the cooperative ethos and interreligious engagement of the Graduate Theological Union. The CIS provides an academic space for research and scholarship on Islamic texts and traditions, and on the diversity of Muslims in their theological, historical, cultural and comparative contexts. It offers a certificate and master's in Islamic Studies, supports Islamic studies in the various GTU departments at the doctoral level, and provides graduate courses on Islam and Muslim societies for students throughout the GTU consortium and the University of California, Berkeley. The Center contributes to and works collaboratively with many GTU member schools and with a wide range of partners, including departments and centers at UC-Berkeley, expanding the resources available for classes, research, teaching, and public programs.

A recent study by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding estimated that 250,000 Muslims, across a variety of ethnicities and countries of origin, live in the San Francisco Bay Area where the GTU is located.[1] Our location positions us as an important place for deepening engagement with Muslims and the Islamic tradition in an interreligious context. The CIS attracts thousands of attendees from Bay Area communities to its programs annually, and since its founding ten years ago, has offered more than 700 educational programs, forums, and public events. Within this diverse interreligious context, the CIS is uniquely positioned to build bridges of understanding within and across religious traditions, through informed scholarship and teaching in Islamic Studies that fosters balanced perspectives and invites deeper conversations and reflection.

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1 See: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, "The Bay Area Muslim Study," accessed April 2, 2018.http://www.ispu.org/public-policy/the-bay-area-muslim-study/.

3   Institutional Challenges for Interreligious Studies

As the GTU expands its religious diversity and public outreach, and as it establishes programs and academic courses in underrepresented traditions, such as Dharma studies (including Hindu studies, Jain studies, and Indian Buddhist studies), Sikh studies, Swedenborgian studies, and Mormon studies, along with its continued support of Jewish studies, Buddhist studies and Islamic studies, it continues to meet new challenges. On the one hand, each underrepresented tradition has an immense task to establish and/or continue its academic and public programming within its specific tradition, including teaching about the diversity of interpretations and expressions within that tradition. On the other hand, there are many increased demands today by the institution and the larger public to include underrepresented traditions in various classes, to teach more interreligiously, and to provide interreligious programming. Some courses are collaboratively taught, modeled along the lines of an introduction to world religions, in which each professor teaches about her or his specific tradition or field of study for a week or two. Another model brings together professors from various traditions and across academic disciplines to collaborate in thinking through theoretical approaches and methodologies, identifying different pedagogies, and convergences and divergences around specific topics (e.g., identity, pilgrimage, war and displacement, environment/ecology, violence, art, law). Other models are more ministry-oriented and concerned with practical theology. But in an interreligious context, such programs must consider the diverse practices of other faith communities, including sensitivities around the intersectionality of religious identity and belonging with race, gender, sexuality, class, culture, ethnicity, nationality, language, and able-bodiedness.

As we move at the GTU and within the larger society from being religiously representative (multireligious) to engagements within and across traditions (interreligious and intrareligious), there is an even greater need to balance faculty time and scarce resources, particularly for minority faculty and those in underrepresented traditions, who are generally much fewer in number. Key to this balance are time-management and careful setting of priorities, as well as fundraising. While finding such a balance remains a major challenge for many theological institutions, extraordinary steps have been taken at the GTU to address these challenges by providing opportunities for collaboration in new ways.

Another challenge is presented by a changing student body that is increasingly diverse and non-Christian. Some students identify as spiritual but not religious; many are simply interested in religion as an academic study. Within this diverse student body, each student may design a particular configuration

of courses, finding a personal fit within what the GTU offers. The newly reconfigured doctoral program is a good example of how academic programs can be structured to advance research, teaching and interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching across traditions in innovative ways, attending to the changing religious landscapes in the United States and globally.

In addition to the academic requirements of teaching, advising students, conducting research, and publishing, there is the ongoing challenge of fundraising and growing the program. At the CIS this also involves recruiting new students, and building and maintaining academic partnerships locally, throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. This includes collaboration with schools and centers at the GTU and partnering with departments at UC-Berkeley and neighboring Zaytuna College (the first accredited Muslim liberal arts college in the United States). It also requires building public partnerships with Muslim organizations and among journalists, policy makers, religious leaders, state officials, and international visitors. The work takes place in a variety of settings, such as schools, prisons, social/media, museums and arts organizations, think tanks, non-profit organizations, and Muslim and other religious and interfaith communities.

Growing the Islamic studies programs simultaneously means growing the interreligious programs as we are in conversation with students, scholars and practitioners from different faith traditions. This requires thinking in new ways—about contextual learning and pedagogy, whether engaging religion in the city, or in sacred spaces; about the use of media in classrooms; and about models of online learning and immersion learning—all of which may contribute to the diversification and global reach of our programs.

4   Particular Challenges for Islamic Studies and Muslims

As we expand offerings in Islamic studies, there are numerous urgent demands in the public sphere, especially in an era of increased divisiveness, Islamophobia, and daily negative news stories about Islam and Muslims. The world in which we find ourselves today demands constant engagement, and ready, thoughtful responses to increased academic queries and public requests for explanations. Serious and pressing questions from media and the public must be addressed in a timely manner, and this puts us in crisis management mode. This takes an extraordinary amount of time, energy, skill and patience, as well as taking an emotional toll. There are also risks in scholarship, such as research topics (for example security and terrorism), and travel for research, which can make a scholar a target for particular kinds of scrutiny in the West and elsewhere, especially if the scholar happens to be Muslim. This has had a

huge impact on academic freedom for such scholars in the United States and abroad. Much needed critical scholarship on the Islamic classical tradition is too often eclipsed, while focus is centered on Islam and Muslims in contemporary political and media contexts. The ongoing global situation distinguishes the challenges faced by those in Islamic Studies from those in other disciplines and areas of study, for whom there is less political scrutiny of professional and personal engagements, and considerably reduces the time available for scholarship and publications.

I very often have to navigate being seen only through my identity as a Muslim. In other words, I must be saying what I am because I am a Muslim, regardless of my academic credentials or other subject positions and identities. This often puts me, and minorities in general, on the defensive, because we are trying both to attend to excluded histories, while at the same time often being evaluated on our "objectivity" and judged as not having a sufficiently critical distance from our identities. For example, in many of my discussions in and out of the class, when I am looking at the history of Euro-American empire and its continued violence in the world, my critiques are often viewed as coming from "Islam" or my being a Muslim, rather than, for example, my training in anthropology, or being Canadian—just go north to get a vast and steady stream of critiques of the United States! In my own field of working within contemporary Islamic studies, teaching on topics such as secularism, modernity, liberalism, war and violence, identity, media, art and aesthetics, Islamophobia, the politics of pluralism, religious formation, interreligious engagement, and the diversity of Muslim expressions, I find myself needing to work within the normative frames through which Islam and Muslims are most often represented in the Euro-American public sphere and media. These frames are what I call the five "media pillars" of Islam, namely: 9/11 as the predominant temporal lens through which we approach Islamic history and theology and Muslims in the United States; terrorism and violence; Muslim women and veiling, and more recent discussions on sexual minorities; "Islam and the West"; and finally the Middle East as the geographical/spatial lens through which we view the entire "Muslim world," focusing on politics.

5   The Five "Media Pillars" of Islam

5.1   "9/11"

The first frame, "9/11," tends to be the most dominant temporal frame used in thinking about Islam and Muslims, most certainly in the United States. As Jean Baudrillard wrote in his provocative 2002 publication, *Spirit of Terrorism*:

> When it comes to world events we had seen quite a few. From the death of Diana to the World Cup. And violent, real events, from wars right through to genocides. Yet, when it comes to symbolic events on a world scale—that is to say not just events that gain worldwide coverage, but events that represent a setback for globalization itself—we had had none. Throughout the stagnation of the 1990s, events were "on strike" (as the Argentinian writer Macedonio Fernandez put it). Well, the strike is over now. Events are not on strike any more. With the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, we might even be said to have before us the absolute event, the "mother" of all events, the pure event uniting within itself all events that have ever taken place.

He goes on to say:

> This goes far beyond hatred for dominant world power among the disinherited and exploited, among those who have ended up on the wrong side of the global order. Even those who share in the advantages of that order have this malicious desire in their hearts. Allergy to any definitive order, to any definitive power, is—happily—universal, and the two towers of the World Trade Center were perfect embodiments in their very twinness of that definitive order.[2]

"9/11" not only becomes a temporal frame marking Muslim presence in the public sphere in the United States, but it erases the long history and presence of Muslims in the Americas, forcibly brought over during the Atlantic Slave Trade, as Sylviane Diouf and others remind us. It also erases the important history of African-American Muslims in the United States, central to understanding America and Islam in America. In addition, 9/11 becomes a way of thinking about the questioning of symbolic power—the twin towers as both symbols of global capital and a site of sacredness. In what now probably seems like a dated example from 2010, public debates about the Park 51 Islamic Community Center were often couched as questions of sensitivity, as if proximity of the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque" would profane the otherwise sacred ground of the fallen twin towers. What is interesting here are the liberal markers we use to make Muslim public space thinkable and acceptable to a wider public: the mosque could not just be a mosque, for example, with a dome and minaret (though not essential or required features). Initially, the mosque only registered

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2 See Baudrillard's 2002 work, *Spirit of Terrorism* (New York: Verso, 2002), which when first published was often viewed as insensitive given how soon it was published after the events of September 11, 2001.

as thinkable because it was presented as a proposed community center, open to Jews, Christians and other faiths, with an interfaith center, art exhibits, a culinary school, a recreation center, and a memorial to pay tribute to those who lost their lives on 9/11. Even though the idea of Park 51 was modeled on the YMCA or Jewish Community Center, it was never quite accepted as a community center. Again, imagine if it were just a mosque and not an extended community center, there would likely have been even more of a public outcry. Indeed there was once the "Stop the Islamization of America" organization (also called the Freedom Defense Initiative), co-founded by Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, began calling it the "Ground Zero Mosque," sometimes also the "Victory Mosque." This was the issue around which we also saw the coalescing of the Islamophobia industry in their attempt to disrupt the 2010 mid-term election.

Public conversations are not only confined by how they are framed, but the discussions within those frames are further scripted. As the work of George Lakoff reminds us, "frames are the mental structures that shape the way we see the world." For example, in the case of Park 51, there seemed to be a significant disconnect between particular and localized conversations about the architecture and logistics of the building (how it aimed to be the greenest building in New York City, the designs and aesthetics of the building, what the recreation facility would look like, etc.) and the public understanding that was focused on the politics of the proximity of the "mosque" to ground zero. If one only focused on the aesthetics of Park 51 or say, for example, the recreation facility they were hoping to have at the center, the general public would think these conversations odd, or missing the larger, national conversations about Park 51 in relation to 9/11, ground zero, and how shari'a was taking over. These are the scripts and codes within particular frames to which I am referring. If I were to talk about Park 51's green architecture, I would be seen as an apologist, as not dealing with the "real" and wider public issues, even though much of my own interest in and work with the community center were concerned with these architectural and aesthetic details. Years later, the story about the community center (which was never built as planned) is hardly remembered, and when it is, it is usually as a national controversy.[3]

5.2   *Terrorism and Violence*
The second frame used to discuss, think about, and represent Islam and Muslims in the American public is terrorism and violence. We can hardly think

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3   There have been many excellent articles and works, even a PBS film, on Park 51, but see especially Rosemary Corbett's 2017 book, *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service and the "Ground Zero Mosque" Controversy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

about Islam and Muslims today without thinking about terrorism, or constantly asking Muslims to denounce terrorism. Jihad, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, burqa, and madrasa are all English words now and most of the American public knows them only as English words. Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Syria, Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib—these are all the frames and archives through which we think about Islam and Muslims, consistently connected to violence.

Talal Asad's book on suicide bombing is instructive for its discussions on death dealing and the effects of different forms of violence—some forms of violence shock us while some do not, even as they destroy lives.[4] I would argue along the lines of Butler, that in addition to Asad's discussion on the scales of violence, our different responses to violence are also related to whose lives count as lives to begin with. I would argue that some forms of violence are acceptable to us when we perpetrate violence on others (justifying it as being in their best interests and for the sake of freedom, democracy, and security). Yet, when these same forms of violence are perpetrated against us, we interpret them as the products of hatred, evil, religious fervor, fundamentalism, and terrorism. These forms of violence are also differentiated by whether or not they are state-sponsored. It is often the spectacular nature of violence and the lack of predictability of violence perpetrated by Muslims that is said to be the reason for such differentiation, but I would argue the endless "War on Terror" is also unpredictable and has killed far more people. To understand our differentiated approaches to violence and death dealing requires studying these phenomena both in terms of power and in terms of classifying people (individual or collective) as subject or objects, as victims or perpetrators of violence.

5.3   *Muslim Women, Veiling, and Sexual Minorities*

The next frame is Muslim women and veiling. We often talk about "Islamic patriarchy" as if patriarchy were intrinsic and limited to Islam and Muslims. Our concerns about women driving in Saudi Arabia, honor killings in Pakistan, or saving Afghan women (from the Taliban-imposed *burqas*—itself having a long colonial history), seem misplaced and excessive given the alarming rate of rape of women in the United States, or the fact that women are exploited by and enslaved to a multi-billion-dollar beauty and sex industry. Given the magnitude, scale and insidiousness of the exploitation of women here, one would expect to see a lot more national and collective outrage.[5] It seems then

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4 See Talal Asad's book *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), and also how Judith Butler takes up his points in her book *Frames of War* (New York: Verso, 2009).

5 This is not to undermine the incredible work that has done to expose various exploitations of women in the West and their lack of rights, but my point here is that given the scale of rape, harassment, sexual exploitation, and exclusion of women, there should be more awareness

that the defining difference is that women in the West are free to choose (their exploitation) and women in the rest of the world (especially the Muslim-majority world) are in need of such choices.

The discussions marking and evaluating different societies according to the rights they accord their women and other minorities is now extended to sexual minorities, which Massad, Puar, and others have written about so brilliantly.[6] Focusing on legal categories at the level of the state alone often misses out on accounting for the great diversity of lived experience, and hence the importance of looking at both. For example, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan recognizes the category of the third gender on national identity cards. Long seen as part of South Asian societies, *hijras* (as they are most often identified, and in Pakistan often as *khawaja sira*), are protected by the state, and can choose the category of third gender to identify themselves. (There are numerous examples of how Muslim societies have protected sexual minorities in various ways across time and place.) And among the most watched television shows a few years ago in Pakistan was "Late Night with Begum Nawazish Ali," where the male host Ali Saleem, performed in drag the female character, Begum Nawazish Ali. Given his popularity, Ali Saleem now hosts his own show as himself. In light of such national and legal recognition, does this all of a sudden make Pakistan more "liberal" than the West? Can the West learn from Pakistan about gender and sexual minorities given that it is hard to imagine recognition of this sort currently in the United States? What about the fact that Pakistan has had a female Prime Minister?

The ideas we hold prescribing a state to specificities and scripts based on whether they are Islamic or not tells us little about the way in which people live their lives. The same is true if we focus on the *hijab*, or more specifically on Muslim women's various forms of headscarves. Headscarves have been mobilized as a colonial strategy to secure entry into the Muslim-majority world, including the way the *burqa* was used to gain military entry into Afghanistan.[7] Returning to my point about Pakistan's third gender, notice how

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and outrage in the United States, given we are so confident in moralizing about the status of women in other parts of the world, especially the Muslim-majority world.

6   See Jasbir Puar's work, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), and Joseph Massad's work, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015) for detailed analyses and critiques of how lgbtq rights have been mobilized against Islam/Muslims, especially as they are used in civilizing discourses and neo-liberal and imperial practices.

7   See the many excellent works by Lila Abu-Lughod, Leila Ahmed, and Saba Mahmood, among many others, who have written and spoken so extensively about Muslim women, veiling and colonialism.

those transgendered men, or men who cross-dress as women, don't think twice about wearing headscarves—that is not their focus. My point here is that veiling by Muslim women has been taken up in the West as a major frame and focus, especially as it relates to rights discourse and legitimizing war, but that the discussion lacks the nuance of Muslim lived experience. Where gender advances are made in the Muslim-majority world, they are often ignored on procedural grounds, especially when Muslim women look to the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition for liberation and guidance in living more piously. Saba Mahmood's many excellent works help us understand these discussions in more detail, including the importance of rethinking categories of "freedom, agency, authority, and the human subject."

5.4   *"Islam and the West"*

The fourth frame is "Islam and the West" or the so-called "clash of civilizations." The idea that Islam and Muslims are somehow "foreign" to America and American values is problematic on many levels. As mentioned in the first frame on 9/11, first and foremost this binary forgets the long history of Muslims in the West, African Muslims who were forcibly brought over to the Americas during the Atlantic slave trade, or the long history of African-American Muslims. Or, in the context of Europe, we forget to go beyond the immigration debates to remind ourselves of Bosnian Muslims as Europeans. In this frame, the primary discussions generally focus on questions of democracy and freedom, and Islam's compatibility with the West in terms of values—reinforcing somehow that Muslims are less American or less European, returning to the language of "us" and "them" with Muslims having to prove their loyalties. The most insidious part of this, as we have seen in the efforts by Pamela Geller and "Stop the Islamization of America" organization, is that even if Muslims seem to be "good American citizens," they are not to be believed because they might be practicing *taqiyya*—a marginal concept in Islam that permits religious dissimulation if under threat (especially within the Shi'i tradition). Geller's group attempts to instill fear in the American public by stating that Muslims following "Islamic ideology" are appearing to be moderate and hiding their real efforts at exerting a "jihad" against America, which she and other Islamophobes refer to as "stealth jihad." An example of this, according to Geller's group is how "shari'a" is supposedly taking over the American legal system. More importantly, she attempts to show how Islamic values, laws, and traditions have always been at odds with so-called progressive Judeo-Christian civilization. Were it not for the millions of dollars being poured into funding the Islamophobia industry, very often endorsed by state officials, we might be able to dismiss such blatant Islamophobia, but unfortunately, mobilizing the

concept of freedom of speech and expression permits the exercise of such hatreds.[8]

5.5   *Middle East*

If 9/11 is the temporal frame through which we think about Islam and Muslims in America, the fifth frame is the Middle East as geographical and spatial frame. The focus on the Arab world and on Israel and Palestine is central to this frame, even though we know that the majority of Muslims live outside the Middle East, namely in South Asia, with the largest Muslim-majority country being Indonesia. While a focus on the Middle East may be relevant given the origins and practice of the faith (for example the annual *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca), and the centrality of the Arabic language, the fixation on the Middle East is usually tied to politics, oil, terrorism, and Orientalist fantasies, and is generally not about the profound intellectual contributions of Arabs/Muslims to the West, including the incredible history of Arab/Muslim contributions to the sciences, aesthetics, architecture and art.

6   Overcoming Challenges by Rethinking Frames

In class we unpack these totalizing frames and discuss how difficult it is to work outside of them, given the risks of being unrecognizable or apologetic. We often begin with the language we use, such as "progressive," "moderate," and "fundamentalist," including unpacking other English words such as jihad, madrasa, Taliban, al-Qaeda—notice how none of them come up as errors in spell-check! We also focus on how to unlearn or challenge the predominantly Christian lenses through which we attempt to understand the Islamic tradition, for example, by not imposing the methodologies of biblical hermeneutics onto Qur'anic studies; by noting how religious norms are so often liberating in many communities around the world, by challenging liberal and/or secular norms and values, or by not dismissing feminisms that might base their liberation in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. Or, for example, when I am trying to get my students to think about how Islam is mobilized and instrumentalized in claims about "religious" violence in the world, I challenge them how not to think about Islam/religion/theology alone, but instead to focus on the historical, social, political and economic contexts, and the military industrial complexes in a globalized world.

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8   See the report, "Fear, Inc. 2.0," by the Center for American Progress, accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/religion/reports/2015/02/11/106394/fear-inc-2-0/.

This takes a lot of imagination among my diverse MA, MDiv, MTS, Ph.D., and DMin students, who, even in their care and sensitivity, often find it difficult to extend themselves to think beyond the confines of Euro-American Christianity, secularism and liberalism, which present themselves as "universal." Having international students present, or students from different traditions adds significantly to the breadth and depth of class discussions. There is also a difference in the way class discussions are experienced by Muslim and non-Muslim students, and those who are in Islamic studies and those who are studying other traditions or from different academic disciplines or perspectives.

Often it is not students alone who need opportunities to learn about Islam and Muslims, but also faculty, administrative leaders, and leaders in ministry at the GTU member schools. We must be willing to ask the difficult questions of our own traditions that we so confidently ask others, and become aware of the biases we hold that often reproduce the larger political and media frames I mentioned. Many tend to think because we are a "progressive" consortium, this makes us more "inclusive." In my own experience, this has not always been the case. First and foremost, there is a profound ignorance about the history of exclusion of Islamic studies in theological schools and the secular academy in the United States, which if better known, would help theological schools and seminaries understand the need for Muslim traditions to also be studied normatively and confessionally, like Christianity and Judaism.[9] Interestingly, in my experience at the GTU, it is often the more liberal ministries claiming to be the most inclusive, that have set up the most obstacles in our diverse academic study of Islam, often subjecting us to identity politics and practice of faith issues that are part of their ministries and particular denominational and ideological approaches, rather than allowing us our focus on the underrepresented scholarly tradition of Islam and Muslim diversity in the academy.[10]

Indeed, while we are becoming more publicly aware of the systematic production and dissemination of Islamophobia by the right, we tend to overlook

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9   For example, most of my ministry colleagues forget that there has not been a place in academia or theological schools in the West for Muslims to study Islam theologically and confessionally. Islam has mostly been studied in academic secular institutions in the United States through area studies. In such a context as the GTU, it should be noted that not all those who study Islam are Muslims, and Muslims also study other traditions here. These are very complex considerations given that the CIS is an academic center: students don't have to bracket their religious commitments and ideas, but they do have to navigate religious difference alongside other differences.

10   The GTU MA and Ph.D. are academic degrees, and our criteria for admission for students in Islamic studies (like the other fields) is academic, not confessional (though the students and scholars may be confessional), a point that is often missed by our very own colleagues in schools of ministry.

the left because it often presents itself as working in the interests of Islam and Muslims. Drawing on rich scholarship, especially in postcolonial and decolonial studies and methodologies, including in anthropology and critical theory, some of my own work and critique of Christian ministries in theological schools focuses on the particular ways that discussions on women, gender, feminism and sexuality have been mobilized by the Euro-American left to discipline and exert power over Islam, Muslims and Islamic studies in its own selective liberal image. This reproduces a colonial process of divide and rule, and creates an index of "good" and "bad" Islam and Muslims: Islamophilia via befriending and promoting Muslims who uphold liberal values, and Islamophobia via intimidation of those who resist or provide nuance through critique.[11] So fundamentalist and self-selecting are these unquestioned liberal norms and markers, and so totalizing are their myopic frames, that efforts to reframe liberal politics puts Islam and Muslims on trial. This raises important theological and academic questions, such as, how do we understand colonial conceptions and practices of time and space embedded in terms like "progress/ive" and "universal," so intrinsic to ministry, mission, and empire, which are colluding on the left and the right? How are Western liberalism, secularism, and the "Judeo-Christian civilization" reconfigured vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims, especially when using the frames of law and citizenship? What can anthropological discussions on "native informants," and concepts such as "savage," and "salvation," still teach us? By what stretch of the American imagination and under what conditions and limits, can we make possible expanded norms of recognition of Islam and Muslim life? And perhaps most importantly, how do we rethink the power inherent in the production and dissemination of knowledge? I think continuing to ask such questions is important as we build programs in Islamic studies, and even more so in interreligious studies, so that we might begin to see how discriminating our sets of questions are when it comes to different traditions.

While difficult questions are welcome and necessary for advancing scholarship and understanding, the larger concern here is that what often presents itself in the language of diversity, or as calls for diversity, are really what I have

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11   The title of Mahmood Mamdani's brilliant 2004 book, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon) has been widely used, even by those who haven't read the book. A central argument is that the categories of "good" and "bad" Muslims are political and not cultural or religious. Shryock's edited volume, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Friendship and Enemy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010) shows how we tend to love the good Muslims who are like "us," civilized and liberal (Islamophilia), and fear the "bad" Muslims who are against or unlike "us" (Islamophobia).

experienced as liberal forms of Christian proselytizing, or what I have called elsewhere, liberal fundamentalism and conversion. Singling out students who happen to be Muslim, and singling out their Muslim identity over other identities, and asking where they stand on certain issues just recently being discussed in U.S. and European contexts, makes such parochial questioning Euro-American-centric and subject to Euro-American time. Liberal tests (see Butler and others), are the new ways liberals create classes of good and bad Muslims by reserving this particular kind of scrutiny to Islam and Muslims. As Saba Mahmood has suggested, we need to question liberalism too.[12] I would add, we should also question liberalism's exclusions, its deceits and limits, its claim to universality and its claim to liberate all people.

7   Opportunities in Islamic Studies for Advancing Interreligious and Interdisciplinary Education

While I highlight these challenges and critiques, and raise these questions, the GTU is committed to addressing them in very reassuring ways. I mentioned the new configuration of our doctoral program as an example of how the GTU is moving toward becoming more interdisciplinary and interreligious. Three examples below—*Madrasa-Midrasha*, Islamic art, and Islamophobia studies—exemplify the role of CIS in advancing interreligious and interdisciplinary education, and creating opportunities for innovative and creative pedagogy and learning, while forging collaborations at the GTU, UC-Berkeley, and with the larger public.

8   Madrasa-Midrasha: Teaching Islamic Studies and Jewish Studies Interreligiously

A model for interreligious teaching is offered by the *Madrasa-Midrasha* program at the GTU, jointly developed by the Center for Jewish Studies and Center for Islamic Studies. Since its inception in 2009, the *Madrasa-Midrasha* program has offered numerous courses, workshops, lectures, conferences, and other public programs that provide opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and community members to explore the richness, diversity, and

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12   See Saba Mahmood's 2003 essay in the *Boston Review*, "Questioning Liberalism Too," which was a response to Khaled Abou El Fadl essay, "Islam and the Challenge of Democracy."

commonalities of the Islamic and Jewish traditions. This program promotes critical dialogue among participants about contemporary issues. Students commit to the scholarly study of both faith traditions, as they are lived and practiced today through their sacred texts and in historical and cultural contexts. Shared learning includes the study of holidays, dietary laws, prayer, rituals, literature and the arts, and politics.

Events and courses over the years have included topics such as: the lunar calendar; understanding our holidays, laws and practices of *halal* and *kashrut*; circumcision; religion and the White House; Israel/Palestine; Islamophobia and anti-Semitism; Hajar/Hagar; women and gender; media representations; aesthetics of sacred space; Islamic art and Jewish art; environment and climate change; and sacred seasons: pilgrimage, piety, and personal transformation. Each of these courses and programs, including museum visits, has offered opportunities for diverse audiences to understand the particularities of studying these two traditions in their own contexts. But there is also the added learning of studying these two traditions together—acknowledging both the similarities and differences, visiting mosques and synagogues—all the while continuing to build and strengthen partnerships within academia, Muslim and Jewish communities, interfaith communities, and the public at large.

9   Aesthetic Engagements: Understanding Islam and Muslim Diversity through the Arts

As reflected in nearly a decade of public educational programming, the arts have been a major emphasis at the CIS and throughout the GTU. But the study of Islamic art, architecture and aesthetics is significantly underrepresented in Islamic studies throughout the United States, and the study of Islamic art is usually restricted to the discipline of Art History.[13] While this is very much needed to diversify studies in the history of Western art, it is important to encourage more collaboration across disciplines, and to integrate Islamic art and architecture within Islamic studies.

In April 2016, the CIS convened a day-long conversation with historians of Islamic art, museum curators, and educators called, "Negotiating Cultural Boundaries Today in the Study and Teaching of Islamic Art." Drawing upon these rich conversations, and what we have learned from CIS public programs over the years, Islamic arts and architecture need to be increasingly included

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13   This is true for the visual arts, though there are many who study literature and poetry within Islamic studies; music and performance are also taught in separate departments or programs.

in educational curricular development throughout the GTU and in our commitment to public engagement. A major initiative in the arts involved the planning and organizing of an exhibition, "Reverberating Echoes: Contemporary Art Inspired by Traditional Islamic Art," which opened on January 31, 2017 in the new Doug Adams Gallery of the Center for the Arts & Religion at GTU, through May 26, 2017. Historian of Islamic Art and CIS Research Scholar, Carol Bier, served as curator.[14] This exhibition highlighted the work of seven American artists whose contemporary artworks engage with the Islamic tradition in different ways. Building upon the tremendous success of this innovative exploration, and to celebrate its 10th anniversary, in fall 2017, the CIS had an exhibition at the GTU library, called, "Knowledge & Diversity." The exhibition highlighted the work of our students, graduates, faculty and visiting scholars in Islamic studies, and displayed the works of several artists who have worked with us over the years.

The CIS's goal is to continue including the arts as part of larger efforts in challenging stereotypes, countering prejudice and misconceptions, and providing a platform for conversations through shared reflections among diverse audiences. The arts are also important in further opening up conversations on identity, cultural heritage and destruction, colonialism and imperialism, museums, galleries and art markets, beauty and suffering, war, displacement, migration and refugees, social justice, the environment, ecology and sustainability, and issues of Orientalism, artistic and cultural appropriation, translation and representation.

The arts and artists provide a platform for dialogue and understanding Islam and Muslims, and we also hope that by drawing on the arts in our academic courses and programs, including through exhibitions, we can provide a better understanding about the arts themselves. The artistic process and the formal aspects of art-making (whether visual, performance, musical, literary, media or other) are important dimensions of our curricular development and provide a way to dialogue across histories, cultures, languages, and religious traditions. The arts also provide an opportunity for aesthetic engagements at the level of affect and experience, embodiment and spirituality.

While promoting a better understanding of the Islamic tradition and Muslims through the arts, or studying Islamic artistic and architectural contributions to the West (as in many other fields such as science, medicine, mathematics, sociology, anthropology), I am mindful that such efforts can easily be seen as cultural diplomacy, which often hardens the binary of the "aesthetic,

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14   See Carol Bier's 2017 book, *Reverberating Echoes: Contemporary Art Inspired by Traditional Islamic Art* (Berkeley CA: Graduate Theological Union), which was published on the occasion of the exhibition.

interreligious, good Islam/Muslims" as opposed to the "politicized, insular, bad Islam/Muslims." Rather, at the CIS/GTU we incorporate a critical approach to the arts and aesthetics to help us enrich our teaching and learning about Islam and Muslim diversity, past and present, and also include discussions on art as resistance and subversion. We recognize that an aesthetic education is central to how we might imagine the world with hope, justice, new forms of solidarity, and an awareness of power relations.

10   Islamophobia Studies

One of the most important projects that the Center for Islamic Studies has co-sponsored is the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project (IRDP) at the Center for Race and Gender at UC-Berkeley, directed by Dr. Hatem Bazian. IRDP was the first such project in the country, and takes a systematic and empirical approach to the topic, including studies of the well-funded Islamophobia industry. The importance of the project has not only been in advancing scholarship in this growing field and sharing it through the *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, the website also provides extensive resources, all the while forging academic and public partnerships. The annual IRDP conference has also played a significant role in creating an international network of scholars in dialogue with the larger public in diverse fields, and has provided a place for students to present papers, and be mentored by faculty.[15]

We live in perilous and precarious times marked by violence and war, refugees and displacement, environmental crises, the rise of white supremacy, ethnonationalism, xenophobia and growing Islamophobia. The latter entails state-sponsored Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs and surveillance of Muslim communities, the monitoring and curtailing of religious and academic freedoms, and the consistent underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Muslims in mainstream media, politics and beyond. In this post-truth era of alternative facts, fear, rage, and the rise of white nationalism in the United States and parts of Europe, Islam and Muslims occupy a strange national platform through which Islamophobia and Islamophilia can be expressed and mobilized by those for and against Trump's bans, walls, profanities, and exclusions. Within the last year or so in the United States, Muslim women in hijab went from mostly being seen as oppressed, to temporarily becoming the face of freedom in the 2017 Women's March. In response to Trump's Muslim ban in

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15   See: April 2, 2018. https://irdproject.com/. See also Georgetown University's Bridge Initiative, last accessed April 2, 2018, http://bridge.georgetown.edu/.

2017, people of all backgrounds came together in solidarity and protest at airports throughout the country, where public prayers were welcomed. Public sites became venues for public expressions in support of pluralism and patriotism in solidarity with Muslims. Yet while we have seen such apparent Islamophilia in the past, it is usually short-lived, and Muslims and other minorities know all too well how such solidarity can be temporary, contingent and political. As we often hear, Islam and Muslims become a means by which white liberals can vent their frustration at Trump. As many ask, would any of this have happened if Hillary Clinton became President?[16] And yet, this painful lesson is now ironically forcing the nation to face itself and its history of denials and exclusions.

In the spirit of learning and dialogue, and in the privilege of our classrooms and public programs, it is important to advance scholarship and critique, and to continue asking and addressing the difficult questions that prepare us for an unpredictable world. I often remind my Christian colleagues that much of what they say and do needs to be in dialogue with, and kept in check by, the communities they claim to include. If we extend our interreligious studies outside our comfortable contexts, we quickly begin seeing our biases, the limits of our rhetoric, and the often white, Christian liberalism, which is a profoundly different experience in communities of color. This means attending to issues of power and place—the *where* of interfaith—and being mindful that the assumptions we make and the positions we take in one context, will be challenged in another.

11   Working Together and Looking Ahead

The presence of Islamic studies is critical today in theological schools and seminaries, not only for reasons of historical exclusion, but also to acknowledge the profound contribution of Muslims to Western civilization. Islam is also an American religion here, right from the time African Muslims were enslaved in the Americas during the Atlantic Slave Trade, and there is a long struggle and rich history of African-American Muslims who have upheld the faith. Islam and Muslims make significant contributions to how we collectively reflect upon ourselves in profoundly new ways in the interreligious and interdisciplinary

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16   I have had many conversations on such topics with my students, our faculty and visiting scholars, and I thank them all. For this particular question, I thank Paula Thompson, one of my doctoral students, who is also the Coordinator of the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project at the Center for Race and Gender, UC- Berkeley.

contexts where we study and live our faiths. Islamic studies is not just an add-on to how we think about, teach, and practice interreligious studies; it is integral to these. We need to study and reflect on the Islamic tradition in its own specificity and history, and we need to do so in the context of mutually constitutive histories—histories of overlap, entanglement, and messiness, but also histories of shared intellectual and spiritual learning.

CIS exemplifies the critical role that Islamic studies and Muslims play in theological schools and the larger academy. As we reflect on the CIS's first decade and think to the years ahead, addressing the challenges we face today and anticipate in the future, CIS provides and facilitates opportunities for dialogue at a time of heightened divisions, nationally and internationally. To date, our over fifty MA and Ph.D. students and graduates in Islamic studies, along with CIS faculty and visiting scholars, bring vast experiences and histories that transform the GTU and beyond, coming as they do from seventeen countries and speaking, reading or writing in thirty-two languages—a remarkable global diversity that characterizes Islamic studies at the GTU. The CIS has established itself as an important and leading partner in the GTU consortium—which is also intrareligious, interreligious, intercultural, interdisciplinary, and international—by advancing sound scholarship in Islamic studies, while also contributing to the dialogue on the pressing issues of our time within the academy and beyond.

As we grow our programs in Islamic studies, which include the arts; as we continue discussions in areas such as Islamic leadership, chaplaincy, and spiritual care, environment and sustainability studies; and as we expand pedagogical initiatives such as online and immersion learning and course intensives, and diversify and increase our library resources, there is still so much that needs to be learned and shared, academically and administratively, within and across institutions. There are major contributions that the study of religions in theological contexts can jointly make. Because interreligious education aims to equip students with skills and professional competencies of sensitively navigating commonalities and differences within and across traditions, we have the opportunity as a group of scholars and faith practitioners to advance the positive role of religions in academia and public life—in media, the arts, museums, public policy, law, social justice work, business, and religious communities. I think of this work as mediation, translation, and boundary-crossing, as it reframes religions and religious practitioners as sources of divisiveness to ones that promote dialogue and understanding through critical engagement. Advancing religious and interreligious literacy in theological schools, which includes understanding people in their intersectionality and understanding things in their historical, social, political, and economic contexts, has tremendous transformative potential in the larger public sphere.

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Interreligious Education at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College: A View from the Jewish Edge

Nancy Fuchs Kreimer

Abstract

This chapter reports on the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC)'s bold experimentation in the field of inter religious education as integral to its mission. It chronicles how, with the support of the Henry Luce Foundation, over the last decade and a half, RRC has responded to developments in the American and Jewish environment with an-ever evolving approach to the training of clergy. The chapter details two signature programs, one to build solidarity between Jews and Muslims, the other to create a novel entry point for education in interreligious literacy and co-spiritual formation across multiple traditions.

1 Introduction

In 1941, Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan shocked the traditional Jewish world by publishing what he called "The New Haggadah." The founder of the Reconstructionist Movement heavily edited the traditional liturgy for the Passover Seder, making the story of the Exodus both more humanistic and more universal. Today there are thousands of versions of the Haggadah, but in the midst of World War II this was a radical move. Years later, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) continues the tradition of radical, forward thinking, evidenced by the early inclusion of GLBTQ rabbinical students, our ability to hold a range of views regarding Israel and Palestine, and our groundbreaking multifaith initiatives. In 2015, the Jewish press spotlighted—often critically—RRC's decision to accept rabbinical students with non-Jewish partners. We boast that "multifaith is in our DNA." Our leadership, both lay and professional, is proud of our work in this area. That said, our story is not a simple one. From where we sit, the work of seminary interreligious education is urgent, deeply meaningful, and, in that overused but perfectly apt word, complicated.

As Reconstructionists, we see ourselves living at the edge of the Jewish world, situated to grapple with some of the most difficult questions raised by a

changing religious landscape, questions that are not limited to us or even to Jews. These issues already impact, or will in time, many who care about the flourishing of religious communities. In the last decade, thanks to the vision of the Luce Foundation, we at RRC have been able to experiment boldly as we consider what these changes mean for clergy training. In this paper I will review the institutional history of the RRC against the backdrop of developments in the Jewish and American scene.

The focus will be on the emergence and evolution of two signature projects, responding to two sets of questions, both related to religious difference. The first project involves combating the negative potential of difference—the way in which religious difference can be exploited to generate fear and hatred. Today, that concern manifests most saliently for us in the troubling rise of xenophobia, especially toward Muslim Americans. Our Muslim-Jewish Engagement program asks how we can empower our students to lead their communities toward more nuanced understanding and solidarity with Muslim Americans, even as issues between our communities become more fraught.

Our second project, Cultivating Character: Conversations Across Communities (C-4), responds to a different set of questions about difference. As the boundaries of our communities become more fluid, people define themselves less through solidarity with particular religions and more as individuals with complex, often multiple sources of identity. How will the nature of interreligious encounter change? How will people located in a given religious tradition continue to be rooted and nourished by that tradition? How will those traditions continue to flourish? Can a novel entry point for interreligious literacy also contribute to the spiritual formation of individuals? We are trying to develop a framework for people from different traditions to ground themselves more deeply, even as they open themselves more widely.

For both these projects, we have created courses for our own students and retreats for a wide spectrum of leaders and emerging leaders. The RRC has mined its institutional legacy in order to confront developing challenges. As we pause to reflect on these efforts, we readily admit that we still have more questions than answers. We welcome the opportunity to continually learn from others.

2   Background

In the first half of the twentieth century, influenced by John Dewey and William James, Mordecai Kaplan created the Reconstructionist approach to Judaism, the first Jewish denomination founded on American soil. Kaplan

understood Judaism as the multivocal, evolving, religious civilization of the Jewish people. Rather than being chosen by God, Jews, along with other people, seek meaning through their sacred narratives, rituals, and traditions. Judaism, rather than being a timeless set of truths, is the Jewish people's flawed human attempt to bring the ethical and the sacred into our daily lives. In the post–World War II era, Jews saw interfaith work as a way to secure our place in the civil religion of America.[1] In the 1960s, some Jews and Christians found common cause in the civil rights and anti-war movements, as reflected in the iconic photograph of A. J. Heschel marching alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma.

Since its founding in 1968, RRC has taught Judaism through the civilizational approach. Jews have always interacted and learned from the people among whom we have lived. Thus, our education always included learning from the history of our interactions with other peoples, from contemporary social science, and from the values of American democracy. Kaplan's phrase "peoplehood" captured something powerful for Jews in the 1940s, when he coined it. It still made sense in the 1970s, when the rate of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews was under 20 percent (of the Jewish population) and many American Jews were only a second or third generation away from immigration. With the memory of the Nazi Holocaust still vivid, American Jews were virtually united in their support for worldwide Jewry.

As one of RRC's early graduates, I was inspired by the work of Christians who were reconstructing their theology, liturgy, and religious education in the light of the Holocaust. They believed that religion can be dangerously toxic as well as powerfully healing. They thought that those of us who were sustained by our spiritual traditions had a unique obligation to oppose the hate-mongers in our communities and become allies with those who have been harmed. I earned a PhD in Religion at Temple University with Christian scholars who were focused on helping Christianity and Christians "get it right" in relation to Jews and Judaism. The mission aligned well with the "peoplehood" focus of the Reconstructionist movement and its pragmatic orientation: theology made sense in the service of real-world issues of justice.

3   The Eighties and Nineties

When RRC moved from the inner city of Philadelphia to a suburban campus in 1982, the institution strove to continue its commitments to a wider world. Soon

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1   For example, Will Herberg's *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

after, the dean invited me to establish a Department of Religious Studies. The RRC became the first—and for many years the only—rabbinical school to require courses in other religious traditions as a prerequisite for ordination. The requirement was two full courses from among a rotating menu that included Christianity, Islam, Jewish-Christian Dialogue, Eastern Religions, and Religion and Science. My job was part time, and most of the courses were taught by adjuncts.

The Introduction to Christianity course, taught by Hal Taussig for over fifteen years, was required for all students. Taussig reported that in the beginning it would take half the semester for some students to relax their Jewish guard and begin to open themselves to the material. These students had clearly defined boundaries of the self as Jewish. And yet, conversations with the "other," as strange and confusing as they might be at the beginning, became a valued skill. The course prepared the Jewish students to work in a non-Jewish, mostly Christian world.

As the nineties waned and the promise of the Oslo Accords dissolved, both the Holocaust and the State of Israel, twin pillars of Jewish identity for decades, began to hold less power for the next generation. In my own work, I began wondering if Christian anti-Judaism continued to be the most serious problem needing attention at this time. Muslim Americans were barely on our radar. Throughout this period, we regularly engaged a scholar from Temple University's Religion Department to offer an academic course on the history and beliefs of Islam. We thought we were doing well.

4   2001–2012

It did not take long after September 11, 2001 to realize that our program in Islam needed a major overhaul. The interfaith world had "discovered" Muslims; I was invited to participate in panels with imams and Muslim public intellectuals. I soon realized that my own graduate school preparation was woefully inadequate. I knew very little about the Muslims I was encountering. Who were they? What was their history in this country? What were their concerns and hopes? I committed myself to figuring out how to train rabbis who could be responsible partners working in solidarity with Muslim Americans.

My own commitment to religious values in action shifted its focus to helping Jews "get it right" in relation to Muslims in America. I understood the work—educating our students to be allies in fighting Islamophobia—as a tribute to my Christian mentors. It was also deeply aligned with my Reconstructionist and progressive Jewish concerns for an inclusive American religious

landscape. It was not clear then how challenging this work would continue to be in the wider Jewish world.

Soon after 9/11, we invited a Pakistani American doctoral student from the University of Pennsylvania to teach a contemporary version of the "Introduction to Islam" course. We added a requirement to visit a mosque to witness a service. (A parallel assignment had been a standard part of the Christianity course for decades.) Students appreciated getting to know their Muslim teacher. They loved that he was, like them, a graduate student who was able to share his personal experience of faith and practice. The upgrade to our basic course in Islam still left much to be desired, however. Students found it difficult to connect with a mosque and found the service confusing and uncomfortable, especially for the women in the class. For some, it reinforced their sense of Islam as foreign.

I needed to find a better way to take students into the world of Muslim Americans, and I knew that the best guides would their peers who were Muslim. We began a partnership with the Middle East Center at the University of Pennsylvania. The Center agreed to recruit and provide a stipend for Muslim graduate students to participate in a community-based learning component. As the course developed, Jewish and Muslim students were paired and expected to schedule three additional sessions with each other. They engaged in Qur'an and Torah study, visited a service at a mosque, and planned and executed a teaching session about Islam and Muslims at a Jewish venue.

Most students were curious, eager, and openhearted. Some of the younger students had college friends who were Muslim, but few, if any, had ever been inside a mosque. Paired with a Muslim peer, the experiences were far more positive than when they had gone alone. The students and their Muslim peers created successful programs for Hebrew schools, for Jewish nursing homes, and for synagogue Shabbat lunch-and-learns. Audiences were grateful for the simple opportunity to meet with a Muslim (a Penn graduate student!) and be able to ask "everything they always wanted to know about Islam." Muslim students were willing to help. "Get to know your neighbor's faith" was both forward-looking and appropriate.

Since none of our sister seminaries on the East Coast provided any education in Islam at the time, RRC began organizing retreats with emerging Muslim and Jewish leaders. While most programs convene either "Abrahamic" or multifaith conversations, we believed that the intensity of history and feeling—both negative and positive—between Jews and Muslims merited a particular conversation. More than once we heard from students, "How could I have thought of becoming a Muslim/Jewish leader without this experience?"

A total of sixty-four Muslim and Jewish emerging leaders participated in one of our four-day retreats and follow-up programming. Eight participants have returned as "alumni facilitators" to help plan and present later retreats, greatly enhancing the program and their own leadership skills. The cohort is equally split between Jews (rabbinical students from across the denominational spectrum) and Muslims (graduate students, chaplains, journalists, and activists from diverse backgrounds). Retreat alumni continue to build on the skills, knowledge and, most important, the relationships they forge in our program. They continue to network with each other by phone and social media and, in some cases, have established ongoing professional collaboration.

During this decade, we also began tracking changing Jewish demographics as well as emerging understandings of identity. When Shaul Magid and others first began drawing attention to post-ethnic trends in American religious life,[2] Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer issued a strong response: "Whereas [Magid] applauds the shift to a porous, self-constructed, and voluntary ethnicity ... [w]e take wary cognizance of post ethnicity and urge American Jews to contend with it, rather than surrender."[3] Rather than "contending," as Cohen and Wertheimer suggest, we have moved from hand-wringing to curiosity and active engagement. Many liberal denominations now have non-Jews in their pews. The Reconstructionist movement has been a leader in recognizing these fellow travelers as members of our communities.

When our students held clearly-defined boundaries of themselves as Jewish, conversations with the "other" were of course challenging, but they prepared them to work in a world of diversity. Many of our students now live that diversity daily in the communities they serve, and in their families and homes. The realization that the "other" is not so "other" is particularly significant when working with Jewish youth, who often have hybrid religious identities.

The 2013 Pew Survey confirmed what we knew anecdotally: the intermarriage rate had climbed to over 50 percent (for non-Orthodox Jews over 70 percent).[4] When we first conceptualized the challenge of including multifaith learning in our curriculum, we thought we would have to compete for scarce resources, and confessed in our grant proposals: "Unfortunately, many of our

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2   See David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Shaul Magid, *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic* Society (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).

3   Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer, "What is So Great about Post-Ethnic Judaism?" *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas,* March 1, 2011, accessed October 17, 2019, http://shma.com/2011/03/what-is-so-great-about-post-ethnic-judaism/.

4   See Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," accessed October 17, 2019, http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/.

students, attracted by our expansive vision, are in need of more immersion in the languages and rhythms of Jewish life. We are constantly struggling to find time in the curriculum to address those gaps alongside our robust multifaith offerings."

As the RRC student community became more diverse, our students' grounding in Jewish traditions was increasingly in need of enrichment. Many faculty members wanted rabbinical training to immerse our students in Judaism so that they would become "vessels of Torah," living exemplars of an (albeit contemporary) religious tradition. They would then be able to lead their communities to a more robust embrace of Jewish life. In fact, those of us who were advocating for multifaith and social justice education did not disagree!

Our students themselves recognized that there could be a conflict between the various goals we have for them. In the Leadership Skills for Pluralism course we responded to students' stated desire to place a heavy emphasis on multifaith social justice collaboration. One student wrote, "Now I am wondering how much I should be encouraging my future congregation to engage in this kind of activity, and how much I should be teaching them how to pray, study, and live in uniquely Jewish ways."

5 2013 to Today

In recent years, we at RRC have been rethinking our approach to Muslim-Jewish engagement and, at the same time, we have been developing the Cultivating Character project as a new entry point to interreligious learning.

The Gaza invasions in the summer of 2012 and 2014 heightened tensions between Jews and Muslims in this country. During the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, the rise of ISIS, multiple terrorist attacks in Europe, and the divisive rhetoric unleashed by Republican political candidates have made the situation of Muslims in the United States much more vulnerable. At the same time, the rapid growth of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement on campus signaled a new development among students at RRC. We began seeing a wider range of views than before, including non-Zionist and anti-Zionist students in our rabbinical program. The issue of Israel/Palestine has become increasingly divisive both within the Jewish community and between Muslims and Jews.

In 2015 I became convinced that our Muslims in America course was no longer adequate for the new, increasingly challenging times in which we live. Students were finding it more difficult to schedule Jewish venues to host the Muslim program. In one case, a student who worked for a Hillel was unable to

fulfill the assignment where he worked because his supervisor was unwilling to sponsor the Muslim guest speaker. This was at the very same campus where, four years earlier, one of our students had led a successful program with his Muslim peer. Other venues refused to host a Muslim student who was involved with the Council for American Islamic Relations (CAIR), and many Jewish institutions have declared CAIR to be "off-limits."

In sharp contrast to the seemingly increasing acceptance of Christians and Christianity, we have noted an increased wariness, even fear (although less common) with regard to Muslims. The current climate of Islamophobia in this country impacts even progressive communities, and we have noted how Islamophobia and Israel/Palestine issues have become linked in the view of both Jews and Muslims.

The RRC has also found it more difficult to recruit Muslim graduate students. This might be attributable, in part, to "ambassador fatigue." Emerging Muslim leaders are heavily in demand to speak and represent their communities, and many are finding these new social duties a distraction from their own scholarship and professional work. It may also reflect less willingness to volunteer to educate Jewish communities. A Muslim colleague helped me understand this problem more deeply: "Many non-Muslim spaces feel less than safe. We are called in to apologize for worldwide Muslim terrorism. It threatens our dignity as human beings."

As I consulted with Muslim colleagues, I realize that to do justice to the issues in our society, we need to further refine our program. The original design presumed that building a relationship with a Muslim and then modeling that relationship in a Jewish venue would be good enough, and in many ways, it was adequate for the time. In the years after 9/11, we capitalized on the openhearted curiosity of American Jews who were willing to confront their own ignorance on the subject of Islam and Muslims.

Today, as politicians and pundits ratchet up levels of Islamophobia in our society and in the Jewish community, RRC's rabbinical students need more thorough and sophisticated preparation. The problem is no longer simply lack of knowledge or personal experience with Islam and Muslims. Students must develop a conceptual framework in response to concerns they will hear voiced and—let it be said—concerns in their own minds. They need a sophisticated analysis of Islamophobia in America and in the Jewish community. They need to engage the charge of "the Islamic roots of ISIS" with more than simplistic rhetoric that "Islam is a religion of peace." They need to get deeper into the complexities of the issues confronting global Islam and Muslim Americans today. To truly understand what is happening now, it is not the Qur'an but rather the last two hundred years of history that will help most. We need to teach

students how to recognize the flashpoints of conflict between communities and prepare for encounters beyond attending a Muslim lecture.

At our Muslim-Jewish leadership retreats the issue of Israel/Palestine had become increasingly fraught. We had dealt with the "elephant in the room" in different ways—declaring the topic off-limits, arranging highly structured dialogues, or just dancing around the edges. Our failure to successfully address the topic impeded our progress on other fronts. While Jews and Muslims are natural allies in many ways, we also found ourselves countering Islamophobia and antisemitism in our own communities, with Israel/Palestine at the core.

While it is true that this issue often divides Jews and Muslims, it is also true that neither of our communities is monolithic in its views. The official communal agendas are hotly contested and many of our emerging leaders are among those doing the contesting. At RRC, we had been working to manage a wide range of views around Zionism, including the largest cohort on the far left of any rabbinical school. We knew that deep fissures existed in the Muslim community as well.

Since we were polarized, both between and within our respective communities, we believed this was the right moment to jump in feet first. For our fifth retreat in August 2016, we selected sixteen alumni from previous retreats and carefully designed a process to build on the trust we had established to take this critical conversation to the next level. Unlike the four prior retreats, this event had a singular focus, i.e., the ways in which the Israeli/Palestinian conflict divides our Jewish and Muslim communities. We wanted to explore how this issue impacts our communities' relationship with each other and the larger American (Christian and secular) world, including its impact on Islamophobia and antisemitism. We wanted to learn how we could use our relationships with one another to work toward less polarization and more mutual understanding, so that we could better train leaders in our own communities. Our experience at that retreat served to confirm and deepen an insight we had the previous year—that interfaith encounter works best when focused less on issues that divide us and more on the spiritual and ethical practices that sustain us.

In 2014, at the fourth retreat, we learned something of value going forward. This event was "women only," at the request of some of the Muslim participants from past retreats. With one less difference to negotiate, we hoped to see the rapid bonding that often happens in same-gender groups. In fact, something quite different occurred. Perhaps because of the more intimate, vulnerable female space, our differences—especially around Israel and Palestine, but also class and race—emerged more strongly than in the past. We engaged in our usual modalities of connection: text study, structured conversations, and

the like, but tensions roiled under the surface and, occasionally, above it as well. One morning, one of the Muslim participants offered to share her spiritual practice of *dhikr* (a form of Sufi chanting) and invited others to join if they felt comfortable.

One participant noted that "It was amazing to be 'allowed in'—welcomed in, actually, to Sufi Muslim practice as a Jew." She reflected how so much of interfaith work is about dialogue, but faith is so much more than what one talks about. "This small experience of sharing a practice was a glimpse into another model of interfaith connection that we were just beginning to explore. Sharing spiritual practices can establish a level of connection and a different kind of trust. In that case, it allowed us to move back into the more difficult places of interfaith dialogue and disagreement."

Which leads us into a discussion of RRC's second project, Cultivating Character: Conversations Across Communities (C-4). In 2013 our faculty completed a thorough reimagining of the rabbinic curriculum. After three years of exploration and negotiation between competing demands, the multifaith requirement remained two full courses, this time including one on Islam. The requirement continues to be among the most robust among seminaries. At the same time, our students' mandatory period of study in Israel, immersed in a fully Jewish environment, has been changing. Many students go for less time than they once did, and some have been clear that their primary interest in the Israel study period is in Palestinian solidarity work.

In response to the issues we began tracking, as discussed above, we have also recalibrated the goals of RRC's multifaith courses. We still aim to equip students with the knowledge and skills to be interfaith leaders and to combat xenophobia, particularly in the Jewish community. At the same time, we want our students to use the encounter with people of other faiths as a resource for their own ongoing spiritual/ethical formation, along with deepening their own Jewish beliefs and practices.

Encouraged by the Luce Foundation to explore new pedagogies and models for interreligious learning and encounter, we proposed Cultivating Character: Conversations Across Communities. The program began four years ago as an idea for a series of retreats and is now a course in the RRC curriculum. It quickly became a model for interfaith encounters, generating enthusiasm and interest in the wider world. Our "brain trust" worked to adapt the innovative model to the training of campus professionals.

The C-4 program grew out of my own spiritual journey. When I began a serious practice of Mussar (a traditional Jewish discipline of character cultivation) my Jewish formation really flourished. As I practiced in a program that met weekly with a rabbi for over a decade, I also wondered about the spiritual and

ethical disciplines of other religious traditions. The best interfaith encounters involve people whose hearts are a mile wide and whose spiritual grounding is a mile deep. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (a former teacher of mine and the founder the Jewish Renewal movement) was a model of a completely, authentically Jewish person while learning with Catholics and Sufis, among others.

The C-4 is a program for religious leaders that focuses on character. Conversations between Jews, Humanists, Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims are dialogues across differences—different theological assumptions, different vocabularies, different practices. With the common concern of character cultivation, we meet one another in a vulnerable, openhearted place and find commonality. This experience can nurture us as we engage in more difficult conversations. In this process, each tradition would, we argued, maintain its own integrity. "The goal will be mutual enrichment—cross-fertilization and inspiration—not an effort to achieve 'synthesis,' a common language or fusion of practices." This is a new entry point into interfaith literacy. After close to three years of work, we feel we are "on to something" that is both more complicated and more promising than we initially thought.

At C-4 retreats participants speak about their own character challenges and the practices they find in their traditions. We teach one another and experience a variety of practices in a variety of modalities. By teaching, participants learn more about the value of their own practice; through learning, they experience another faith and reflect on the growth of their own soul. People find growth and connection in unanticipated ways.

Before the retreat begins, participants write about and share their own character challenges with one another. When beginning from this place of vulnerability, even veterans of multifaith "dialogue" quickly realize that the process elicits surprising honesty and depth. Over time, each participant teaches about a spiritual practice (e.g., bowing in a Muslim prayer service, Buddhist walking meditation, Jewish text study), share their own story of why the practice is meaningful to them, and invite others to participate in the practice if they are comfortable doing so. Reflections follow. What does it mean for a Jew to experience the embodied nature of Muslim prayer, or for a Buddhist to learn how community plays a part in the spiritual practice of a Roman Catholic? Shared aspirations and softening edges open a gateway into another faith that transcends theology or politics.

Recently, the religious world has begun to recognize the growing population of so-called "nones,"[5] the "spiritual but not religious" folks who are beginning

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5   Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

to demand a seat at the interfaith table. The old-style interfaith dialogue settings struggle to accommodate those who identify as "humanists," "secular," "trans-spiritual," etc. Our informants tell us that on college campuses where such an option exists, the secular humanist advisor does a brisk business, while the "religious advisors council" struggles to expand to include this option.

As Reconstructionists, we are well positioned to understand and respond to this phenomenon, since our own theological roots as a movement grew from, among other sources, the secular humanism of Felix Adler, one of Kaplan's teachers. Many Reconstructionists do not define themselves through religious belief. In developing the Cultivating Character program we chose to use the word "communities" and leave open the space for those voices. The very frame of character cultivation invites this addition and we are eager to see how it will enrich the conversation as more people locate themselves outside traditional religious groups.

When we offered a C-4 course at RRC for our students, we designed it to explicitly ground the students in their own formation as Jews. For ten days students take on a Jewish observance that they do not currently practice, such as saying blessings after meals, kissing the *mezuzot* on passing a doorway, or going to *mikveh*. They take on such practices with the intention of cultivating a particular character trait. Only then are they introduced to Christian and Muslim practices.

Imagine! Over a semester, rabbinical students participate in *lectio divina*, Ignatius' *Examen* and Christian Intercessory Prayer, *dhikr,* five-times-daily statutory prayer, and the Sufi evening accounting of the soul. They are also required to write a lesson plan of how they would teach a Jewish spiritual practice to an interfaith group, in which they explain the origins and meaning of the practice, their own relationship to it, and how they would engage the group in experiencing it. Each student prepares a protocol and conducts an interview with someone from another religious tradition, investigating their spiritual practices in relation to character cultivation. For the final assignment, students design an interfaith program involving C-4 sharing for a specific setting in which they work or might someday work.

In the session on *lectio divina* with Francesca Nuzzolese of Palmer Seminary, students listened to a short piece of New Testament text three different times, each time letting the words enter them with a slightly different prompt, all more emotional than intellectual. They heard a text that was foreign, theologically provocative, and, for some, a negative trigger. They were instructed not to argue with it, or attempt to deconstruct it historically or linguistically. They engaged in the practice as *practice,* and they experienced what this traditional Christian approach to encountering text might teach them about themselves and their own practices of studying sacred text. A rich conversation followed.

At a final session with our Muslim and Christian teachers, students turned to these religious guides as resources to help them think through their own issues. Many wanted to explore theology: Does what you do grow out of your faith in God? Does it strengthen it? Are you ever conflicted when a practice feels compelling but is imbedded in a theology that is problematic for you? How do you make use of what you learn from other traditions? Does it ever feel transgressive? How does "holy envy" work best in your life?

We have many questions about this methodology. For those such as the leaders in our retreats or our students, do we see an impact on participants' own spiritual practice? On their feeling rooted in their own tradition? On their understanding of and empathy toward the "other?" We have anecdotal evidence but want to know more. How might this pedagogy impact people with more fluid religious identities or less grounding in a particular tradition? Is it a good entry point for building conversations across differences? How might this pedagogy impact the range of religious professionals on college campuses?

We see our work on Cultivating Character as just beginning. We sit at the edge of the Jewish community, yet our issues are rapidly impacting others as well. Conversations with colleagues from many traditions—from liberal Protestants to Korean Buddhists—have taught us that these concerns are not only for Jews. As for Muslim-Jewish engagement, RRC's commitment to work at the edge of Muslim-Jewish relations continues unabated, as does our belief that we can only do this work in conversation with Muslims willing to go to the edge with us. We look forward to more opportunities to learn.

6   Postscript

In a well-known cartoon someone asks a fish, "How's the water?" The fish responds, "What's water?" Interfaith dialogue and understanding have become the water in which many of us swim. Indeed, the boundaries that once demarcated our tribes are blurring. In the Reconstructionist movement, multifaith is fast becoming our natural home. Ironically, Reconstructionists, known for articulating Jewishness as "peoplehood," are now at the forefront of a paradigm shift that is causing us to question that very idea.

Today, my own family is part of the great experiment in multifaith engagement. My two siblings and my two daughters are married to non-Jews. Our Thanksgiving table includes a Korean American, a practicing Roman Catholic, a "recovering" Catholic, and a secular Arab Muslim. Political and religious discussions at our family dinner sometimes require all the skills I have sought to hone in a lifetime of dialogue work.

As a religious person, what is at stake for me is how I show up for the challenges of my life with humility and compassion, and how I may contribute. As an educator and a grandmother, what is at stake is the future. How will my students teach Jewish tradition so that it continues to yield blessings for those who engage in its practices? And how will Judaism, alongside other faith communities, contribute to healing our society, our country, and our planet?

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Integrating Vision: Comparative Theology as the Quest for Interreligious Wisdom

John Thatamanil

Abstract

This chapter argues that the two words in the term "comparative theology" generate between them a field of creative tension that require the nature of theology itself to be reimagined. The adjective "comparative" does not sit placidly alongside "theology," leaving the latter materially unchanged for business as usual. The adjective pressures the noun to undergo transformation when encounters with other traditions compel comparative theology to remember that its primary genre once was, as Edward Farley has shown, *sapientia* or contemplative wisdom, and not academic text production. Because theological reflection in other traditions still remains a quest for such wisdom, an encounter between Christian theology as academic text production and theology as practiced by other traditions, will likely be of limited value. Theological writing that engages other traditions will have to harken back to its earliest genre—the quest for wisdom. Comparative theology, in at least one of its modes, will then become a quest for "interreligious wisdom." In this chapter, I will attempt to offer a preliminary working definition of interreligious wisdom. The prime pedagogical question to follow is then, "How can interreligious wisdom be taught?"

1 Defining Disciplines: On Theologies of Religious Diversity and Comparative Theology

Two of the subfields at the center of Christian reflection on religious diversity, theology of religious pluralism and comparative theology, have flourished in Christian theological writing since the early 1990s.[1] The former subfield asks

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[1] Among the earliest works identifying themselves explicitly as projects in comparative theology include Robert C. Neville's *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay toward Comparative Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991); Francis X. Clooney's *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993); and Keith Ward's trilogy of books beginning with his *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1994).

about the meaning of religious diversity as such. Is religious diversity an error or part of the divine will? What is the meaning of that religious diversity for Christian faith? Comparative theology, on the other hand, focuses instead on concrete detailed engagements in which Christian theologians seek to learn more about ultimate reality from and with persons and texts of other religious traditions.

There was a brief sense of impasse and crisis in the late 1990s when some argued that comparative theology must replace a theology of religious pluralism because the latter enterprise seemed critically compromised. James Fredericks, in particular, argued that every extant option within the subfield had critical flaws.[2] However, new theologies of religious pluralism have since been ventured, and writing in both theological subfields flourishes, coming from a wide range of ecclesial communities including evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics.

The very work of theologies of religious pluralism—which I now prefer to call theologies of religious diversity (TRD)[3]—was once identified with theological liberals or pluralists such as John Hick and Paul Knitter as they were among the pioneering founders of the field.[4] Responses to those voices from theological moderates and conservatives have served to broaden the range of available options, and that is much to the good of theological education. We are no longer in a historical moment in which the very attempt to discuss the meaning of religious diversity might give the appearance of presupposing a pluralist position. Regardless of where an institution or religious community falls on the theological spectrum,[5] there are judicious voices that take seriously the question of the meaning of religious diversity, voices that can be taught in seminary and adult education classes. In sum, any theologian teaching a

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2   For a sense of this impasse, see James Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christianity and the Other Religions* (New Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999).

3   For more on this matter, see my forthcoming book, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). For now, it has always seemed awkward for a field to bear a name that is also given to one of the options within the field. To use "pluralism" as a name for one type within the field and for the field as a whole is, at the very least, inelegant and at worst confusing.

4   For John Hick, see his magnum opus, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd ed.(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005) and for Paul Knitter, see his *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

5   I use the word "spectrum" to characterize the field of theologies of religious diversity because the standard positions within the prevailing typology are not as discrete as the literature implies. Upon careful consideration, virtually any given theologian or theological position incorporates elements from across the typology. Typologies are good to think and teach with, but we ought not to lock ourselves within them.

responsible course on theologies of religious diversity now has access to the widest range of carefully articulated positions from and with which to teach.[6] Students, whether exclusivist, inclusivist, pluralist, or particularist, can know that their position is a credible option from and with which to think, even if that initial position is subsequently subjected to stringent challenge.

What about the relationship between TRD and comparative theology (CT)? The sustained and patient work of learning with and from other religious traditions presupposes that there is some truth to be found in those traditions. To hold such a position would seem to require that theologians adopt, at the very least, an inclusivist posture, if not a still more robustly pluralist position. It is, of course, logically possible to do rigorous comparative theology from an exclusivist standpoint. Such comparative theology would amount to apologetics—disciplined learning about other traditions to argue that those traditions are mistaken in important ways.[7] However, such work, at least done in responsible scholarly fashion, is rare to the point of vanishing. What is striking instead are evangelicals who have articulated reasons for believing that other traditions can and do hold religious truth that is not already found, at least explicitly, in their own traditions; such theologians have prepared the groundwork for doing comparative theology from an evangelical perspective even if that work still remains in its early stages. The work of Pentecostal theologians is especially noteworthy, and in particular the work of Amos Yong.[8]

One further note about the current state of theologies of religious diversity: not only is it the case that theologies of religious diversity are now being articulated from a wide variety of Christian confessional commitments, but TRD is being ventured from a variety of religious traditions. Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Jewish TRDs are readily available. This new religious diversity within the field is yet another reason to put to rest any talk about an impasse.[9] In

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6   Surely the reasons for this proliferation of a wide range of perspectives on religious diversity is due to the fact that religious diversity has become a matter of intimate experience for Christians from a wide range of confessional and theological orientations. Lived experience requires every theologian to think and write carefully about persons and communities who are no longer on the other side of the globe, but sometimes on the other side of the bed.

7   On the important role that apologetics can play in interreligious encounter, see Paul Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007; previously published by Orbis, 1991).

8   Among this scholar's immensely prodigious output, I have found one of his slimmer volumes to be particularly powerful. See *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

9   We will need more research to establish this point, but there is every reason to suspect that there is nothing "new" in absolute terms about these theologies of religious diversity. After all, virtually all of these traditions have been thinking about the meaning of diversity in

terms of pedagogy, the presence of this literature now means that classes in TRD need no longer be confined to Christian speculation about other religious traditions—an exercise that is interreligious in a rather limited sense. Now—and this turn is long overdue—our courses about the meaning of religious diversity can themselves be robustly interreligious. The gaze can be reversed. Christians can hear how persons from other religious traditions think about the meaning of religious diversity in general and the meaning of Christianity in particular.

Whereas TRD, both in scholarship and pedagogy, has been structured by its typologies, textured comparative theological engagement across traditions refuses grand overarching judgments. Therefore, there can be no typologies within comparative theology. To read any text with theological judgment, whether from one's own tradition or another, is to find oneself in the midst of complex, subtle, and nuanced decision making of a sort that is resistant to rubrics. My own work, which explores the category of the human predicament by appeal to the "medical model," shows that not just traditions, but individual theologians within a given tradition, will disagree about diagnoses of the human predicament, etiologies, prognoses, and prescribed therapies. On such matters, grand sweeping pronouncements cannot be proffered.[10] Comparative theologies will, in their *outcomes*, be as diverse as theologies are in general both within and across religious traditions. That said, given the relatively early stage of contemporary comparative theology as a field, there is not an indefinitely large set of approaches or *methods* for doing comparative theology. The work of teaching comparative theology, therefore, need not be hampered by the sheer variety of possible theological outcomes. As in any given field, methods are relatively few, but outcomes are many.[11]

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religiously diverse geopolitical contexts—often from positions of marginality—for a very long time. What is new is the emergence of these voices within a particular discourse constituted as an academic field.

10 See my *Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament. An East-West Conversation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006).

11 The work of Francis X. Clooney's situated comparison—the work of crossing over and coming back—and Robert Neville's more speculative and metaphysically-grounded comparative methodology remain the two most prominent methodological options within comparative theology. The more recent work of Michelle Voss Roberts and Joshua Samuel, in which an ethnographic component is introduced into comparative theology, introduces new permutations. For Voss Roberts, see especially her *Tastes of the Divine*: *Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014). For Samuel, see *Untouchable Bodies, Resistance, and Liberation*: *A Comparative Theology of Divine Possessions* (Boston: Brill, 2020) Likewise, the ritual turn in comparative theology inaugurated by Marianne Moyaert presents yet another option. See Marianne Moyaert's

When I read any theologian, whether a co-religionist or not, I routinely find myself in enthusiastic agreement and vehement disagreement depending on the particular passage or page I happen to be reading. Theological judgment inevitably hinges on the particulars. What does that mean for the work of theologies of religious diversity? Has the time now come to surrender typologies there as well? Regardless of what one believes about the merits of the classical typology in TRD, it is worth bearing in mind that it is misleading to make claims about entire "religions" as such. Hence, any typology that operates by appeal to judgments about entire traditions—all are saving, one is most efficacious, only one is saving—is sure to be inelegant and mistaken. These observations suggest that interreligious theological reflection will need to work for a richer synthesis between theologies of religious diversity and comparative theology so that these tasks are no longer carried out in isolation but in "mutual fecundation."[12]

Even as we begin to sense the need for a deeper interpenetration between what we say *about* others (theologies of religious diversity) and the work of learning *from* those others (comparative theology), the latter discipline has recently experienced several transformations. Comparative theology—at least as performed by one of its contemporary founding fathers, namely Francis X. Clooney—has come to be characterized (and perhaps caricatured) as marked by a certain overly pristine logic: a person cleanly identified as located within one particular tradition ventures out into another clearly demarcated tradition only to return transformed and yet still remains, at least in terms of religious identification, what she was prior to departure.

In light of their classroom experiences, many younger theologians have questioned this way of imagining comparative theology as a process of "crossing over" and "coming back." Many of the essays in the recent *Comparative Theology in the Millennial Classroom* make the point that linear accounts of belonging do not apply to millennial students, many of whom are untraditioned "nones," unformed by any particular tradition and hence with no traditioned starting point. Still others are shaped from the first by more than one tradition, by virtue of intermarriage for example, and so cannot be said to have only one determinate tradition of origin.[13] This transformation of how we understand the practitioners of comparative theology and how that practice is necessarily transformed by variegated patterns of belonging and affiliation is

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"Towards a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems," *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1 (January 2018): 1–23. All of these approaches can easily be taught within any single one semester course in comparative theology.

12   I borrow this creative expression from the writing of Raimon Panikkar.

13   Mara Brecht and Reid B. Locklin, eds. *Comparative Theology in the Millennial Classroom: Hybrid Identities, Negotiated Boundaries* (New York: Routledge Press, 2016).

an important and welcome change in comparative theological research and teaching.

As important as these transformations are, a still more basic transformation of the field is called for. Let me explain by adverting to personal experience. Some years ago, I created and served as Project Director for the American Academy of Religion/Luce Summer Seminars in Theologies of Religious Pluralism and Comparative Theology. Those seminars were designed to gather an interreligious teaching team of experts in those fields to introduce their areas of expertise to university and seminary faculty (AAR/Luce Fellows) who were relative newcomers. (This teaching team included, among others, Jeannine Hill Fletcher, S. Mark Heim, John Makransky, Peter Ochs, Anantanand Rambachan, Najeeba Syeed, and one of the founding figures in contemporary comparative theology, Francis X. Clooney.) During that process, some of the fellows repeatedly pressed us to be clearer: just what exactly is "comparative theology?" We spoke of comparative theology as both comparative and genuinely constructive/normative: comparative theology does more than compare. It genuinely aspires to learn more about ultimate reality by way of its engagements with other religious traditions. We talked about styles and methods of comparison including those of Clooney and Robert Neville. Clooney even ended up writing what is now a widely read and highly regarded primer on the nature and tasks of comparative theology over the course of these seminars.[14]

And yet, I observed lingering dissatisfaction among the fellows. I believe I now see (with the light of hindsight) what the fellows were trying to convey. In effect, they were saying, "You have told us a great deal about the term 'comparative' in 'comparative theology,' but you haven't really spoken sufficiently about the term 'theology.'" In retrospect, I am unsure that we ever managed to address this question to the satisfaction of our fellows. That question remained unanswered because, to some degree, we took the term "theology" for granted. After all, we know what theology is. We treated the noun as the constant and the adjective as the variable. We assumed that the variable needs unfolding and explication whereas the noun remains stable. To be clear, so precise an intuition never came to explicit thought; that conviction remained largely subterranean and so shaped our deliberations without quite rising to the surface. The danger here is plain: regnant Christian styles of doing theology remain uninterrogated and so the de facto norm. How Christian theologies past and their analogs in other traditions operate is rendered invisible.

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14   Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

My suspicion now is that the fellows who were being introduced to the work of comparative theology—gifted with "beginner's mind"—tacitly appreciated something that some among the instructional team, or at least just I, did not. The term "comparative" does not sit placidly next to the term "theology" leaving the latter unaffected and unchanged; it refuses to behave. The adjective pressures the noun in ways that we had not then understood and likely will not for quite some time to come. Christian theology's familiar adjectival companions include the terms "dogmatic," "systematic," "practical," "pastoral," and "constructive," but only rather recently the term "comparative." "Comparative theology" is not wholly new. Francis Clooney, Hugh Nicholson, and Tomoko Masuzawa have rightly reminded contemporaries that there is a nineteenth century literature on comparative theology.[15] But it is not clear whether those who used the term then or now fully appreciated the metamorphic pressures generated by this most unusual of conceptual pairings.

I have argued elsewhere that the phrase comparative theology is likely to strike some as oxymoronic. Theologians customarily take for granted that theology is deliberative reflection about ultimate matters that takes place *from, for,* and *within* the parameters and constraints of a particular religious tradition. Theology is customarily distinguished from philosophy, for example, precisely insofar as philosophy rejects the "tutelage of tradition" and "dares to reason" autonomously. Theology, by contrast, as Clooney notes, is "faith seeking understanding." And Clooney does not mean faith here as a universal human propensity, but faith as shaped and formed by particular confessions, creeds, and practices of the Christian community. Hence, comparative theology for Clooney is *Christian faith* seeking understanding, although of course, Clooney can readily imagine and welcome analogous particular projects emerging from theologians who belong to other traditions. Under these definitions, it is easy to see why some might think that if theological reflection is comparative, it cannot really be theology; and if it is theology proper, it cannot and indeed must not be comparative.

One way to respond to the pressures exerted by the juxtaposition of the two terms is to observe that the term "theology" has now come to acquire new generic meanings. The term can and does now refer to normative reflection as it takes place within any tradition. The apparent elasticity of the term is particularly striking in the case of some Buddhist scholars who have adopted

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15   See Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

"theology" for their own purposes. I am thinking here in particular of the remarkable volume of essays, edited by Roger Jackson and John Makransky called notably, *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*.[16] The full-throated adoption of the term "theology" by scholars from a tradition which is customarily regarded as lacking any *theos* altogether suggests that the term now enjoys an extensive semantic range even before the term "comparative" is brought into close proximity with it.

But even here, caution is warranted. The fact that some Buddhists find the term acceptable does not indicate that the term itself has therefore become generic, universal, or neutral. Words stubbornly carry the freight of their semantic and cultural histories with them—a truth that one does not have to be Gadamerian to accept. Nor is it the case that theology has to be stripped of its conventional meanings before it can become usable in interreligious and comparative contexts.

2   Reimagining Theology as the Quest for Wisdom

The recent pliability and expanding semantic range of theology notwithstanding, there remains a certain stark disjuncture between normative reflection as it transpires in a variety of other traditions and normative reflection as it takes place in contemporary western Christian quarters. Borrowing from the language of Edward Farley, that disjunction can be identified as a basic conflict about the question of genre. The question Farley asks and wants theologians to ask is just what is (Christian) theology's primary genre?

To answer that question, Farley offers an archaeology of knowledge—to use Foucault's phrase—to trace the historical configurations that have shaped what we take theology to be and to mean. In brief, he argues for three crucial historical periods each with its own radically distinct understanding of what theology is: "the period of pious learning (divinity), the period of specialized learning, and the period of professional education." Although what Farley has to say about each of these three historical periods and the nature of theology within them is important, I am particularly struck by the transition he maps between Period 1 and Period 2, the transition from divinity to specialized learning. Hastily summarized, Farley observes that theological education in its earliest mode was a training in divinity where, "Divinity named not just an objective science but a personal knowledge of God and the things of God in the

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16   Roger Jackson and John Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

context of salvation. Hence, the study of divinity (theology) was an exercise of piety, a dimension of faith."[17] Farley uses a wide range of evocative expressions to name the earliest and, for him, the primary meaning of theology. Theology in its earliest period was, "a personal, cognitive disposition toward divine things."[18] In more elaborated fashion, he writes, "First, theology is a term for an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God, a cognition which in most treatments attends faith and has eternal happiness as its final goal."[19] But that is plainly not what the genre of theology is now generally understood to be. He continues, "Second, theology is a term for a discipline, a self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding. In the former sense theology is a habit (*habitus*) of the human soul. In the latter it is a discipline, usually occurring in some sort of pedagogical setting."[20]

For Farley the transition between these two meanings and genres of theology occurs over a vast historical sweep. The first and most ancient meaning of theology persists from the early church and even through the founding of the medieval universities in the twelfth century. After the founding of these universities, theology begins to acquire a double sense. The first and primary meaning of theology is retained and by no means disappears. But theological knowledge understood as (*scientia*) also takes on a second set of meanings, not just "a passion or perfection resulting from the union of something intelligible and an actual intellectual power," but also, "the enterprise of investigation or reflection which produces such knowledge. And as these enterprises can be directed to different sorts of things, types of *sciences* arise.[21] For Farley, it is at this juncture that theology acquires a complex double meaning, a doubling that has complicated our thinking about theology thereafter. The first, Farley calls "theology/knowledge," and the second, he calls "theology/discipline."[22] Farley argues that our histories of the meanings of theology and our contemporary conversations about theology become infelicitous when we forget the distinction between these two meanings and confound them.

That problem did not, however, vitiate thinking about theology from the twelfth century through till the Enlightenment, because both meanings of *scientia* persisted during this period. They began to fall apart only after the German university model took over when the earlier and primary meaning and

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17   Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001; originally published by Fortress Press, 1994), 7.
18   Farley, 30.
19   Farley, 31.
20   Farley.
21   Farley, 33; emphasis in the original.
22   Farley.

genre of theology began to recede. About the earlier medieval period, Farley writes that the "school theologians," borrowing from Aristotelian anthropology, "portrayed knowledge (*scientia*) as a habit, an enduring orientation and dexterity of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals."[23] The sense of *scientia* as discipline does not displace this older meaning. In fact, Farley is clear about this period: "And if there is a dominant position, it is that theology is a *practical*, not theoretical, habit having the character of wisdom."[24]

What has transpired since, after the Enlightenment and the rise to prominence of the German university model, is a severing of the two meanings of *scientia* and the rise of a specialist discipline as the primary genre and meaning of theology. Farley writes,

> The genre of theology, which has dominated the modern era, is a field of study, a "science," replete with advanced degrees, learned journals, professional organizations, linguistic skills, and specialty rigor. It is clear that if this is what theology is, it is not available to the uninitiated. It is enclosed within an academic institution. Professional teachers pursue it; ordinary church members, and in many cases, even their clerical leaders, do not. Theology is done for them, about them, on behalf of them, but not by them. It is also clear that theology as a scholarly activity will not survive the student's move from seminary to congregation or other leadership posts. This means that to teach theology as an academic field has obsolescence built into it. It is quickly shed like a heavy coat in hot weather. It is a pedagogy designed to be left behind at graduation.[25]

In sum, theology is now one discipline among other university disciplines, and there is little sense in effecting unity either between these disciplines or between theology as academic pursuit and the formational work of the minister. Theology now operates almost entirely as a field of "academic study" and its normative written expression is the academic text. That understanding of theology remains the default norm that comparative theology inherits. Theology so understood may have lost its contemplative character, but not its Christian provenance nor its shaping by a particular historical turn of the Enlightenment.

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23   Farley, 35.
24   Farley; emphasis in the original.
25   Edward Farley, "Four Pedagogical Mistakes: A Mea Culpa," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 9, no. 4 (2005): 200–203.

3 Comparative Theology as the Quest for Interreligious Wisdom

Farley's concern in these writings is *pedagogical*: how can the teaching of theology be transformed so that Christian theology remembers its earliest and primary meaning? How can that recovery revitalize theological education so that the formation of clergy and others can genuinely take the form of "minister as theologian," wherein the identity of the theologian is marked by the antique but ever-relevant sense of embodied practical wisdom.

My concern is *interreligious*. I wish to argue that the transformation that Farley calls for is essential and indispensable for comparative theology if comparative *theology* is to have any resonance with the modes of reflective activity taking place in other traditions. Why? Those who read in other traditions, even casually, quickly register that theology—or rather its analogs in other traditions—does not belong to the academic genre. Theology in these traditions—and I have in mind particularly Buddhism and Hinduism, no matter how rigorously analytical in their modes of argumentation, is always oriented toward personal and communal transformation. Farley's language of sapiential wisdom is on the mark. What Buddhists and Hindus are after is a conception of theology as a "*practical*, not theoretical, habit having the character of wisdom." It follows that if comparative theology *in its very genre* is to be in accord with the traditions that it works with and seeks to learn from, then comparative theology must also undergo the shift that Farley commends. It too must come to understand itself as sapiential wisdom, "a personal cognitive disposition toward divine things." To the extent that Farley's call is heard and Christian theologians remember and reinhabit the ancient sense of theology as wisdom, then the way is prepared for comparative theology to make the same turn.

Yet comparative theologians need not wait. Comparative theologians must make this turn if they wish to be in harmony with the materials that they find in other traditions. Otherwise, they will find themselves in a clash of incommensurable genres between, on the one hand, academic text production in which theology consists largely of propositions *about* divinity, and on the other, modes of theology in which theologians speak not only about but instead *of* and even *to* divinity or ultimate reality more generally. In the latter communities and tradition, even discourse about ultimate reality is proffered not for the sake of *information* but rather *transformation*.

Consider for example the *Brahmasutra* and the seventh-century master teacher Sankara's commentary on that text. That foundational text of the

Advaita Vedanta tradition begins, "Then therefore the enquiry into Brahman."[26] The Sanskrit is, "*atha atah brahmajijnasa*." Although the term, *brahmajijnasa* is translated customarily as "enquiry into Brahman," the master teacher Sankara and the subsequent commentarial tradition is clear that the root grammatical and exegetical meaning of the term is "the desire to know" (*jijnasa*) Brahman. What sort of knowing is this? Is the enquiry or desire to know Brahman a quest for propositional knowledge? No. Even if what Sankara undertakes in the *Brahmasutrabhasya* is a closely argued and rigorous commentary, he is clear about what motivates the entire effort: "Virtuous deeds have secular prosperity as their results and these depend on the performance (of some rites etc.). But the knowledge of Brahman has emancipation as its result, and it does not depend on any other performance."[27]

The knowledge sought after here is not a narrowly theoretical knowledge; the end goal or *telos* of this knowledge is nothing less than "emancipation" or liberation (*moksa*). Indeed, even to undertake such an inquiry, the student must possess certain prerequisites.

> They are discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal; dispassion for the enjoyment of fruits (of work) here and hereafter; a perfection of such practices as control of the mind, control of the senses and organs, etc.; and a longing for liberation. Granted the existence of these, Brahman can be deliberated on or known even before or after an inquiry into virtuous deeds, but not otherwise.[28]

Here again, Sankara teaches that the student must possess certain qualities and capacities before undertaking enquiry into Brahman. The admission requirements for the course of reading scripture are rigorous. In the immediate context of his commentary, Sankara is taking up an argument with the Purva Mimamsa school about whether those prerequisites should include knowledge of ritual practice and ethical action—karma broadly speaking. His answer is, strictly speaking, no. Knowledge of ritual practice and ritual theory are not required for taking up enquiry into Brahman. What matters is whether the student possesses virtues, capacities, and dispositions identified by Sankara.

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26 Sankara, *Vedanta-Sutras with the Commentary by Sankaracarcya, Part 1*, trans. George Thibaut, Vol. 34 of Sacred Books of the East, ed. Max Muller (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 9.

27 Sankara, *Brahmasutrabhasya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), 8.

28 Sankara, 9.

However, within the larger compass of Sankara's writing, we know that un-
dertaking virtuous action, including ritual action, without attachment to the
fruits of such action, is one of the means by which students can acquire the
capacities enumerated by Sankara. When I engage in a virtuous action—
without thought of how it might redound to my benefit and for the sake of that
virtuous action alone—Sankara argues that such action leads to purification
of mind (*cittasuddhi*). Such purity of mind is marked by the virtues and dispo-
sitions named in Sankara's list of prerequisites. Right actions done for their
sake alone are ancillary means by which a student may come to acquire the
virtues and dispositions required for inquiry into Brahman. Still, if these quali-
ties are present, *regardless of how they have been acquired*, students are poised
to commence inquiry into Brahman. Hence, those virtues alone suffice.

The details of these debates matter for gathering a nuanced appreciation for
Sankara's pedagogical project. But even apart from the subtleties of the argu-
ments between Mimamskas and Vedantins, one thing is clear: Sankara is a
theological teacher who teaches for transformation, and that is what reading
the scriptures and the *Brahmasutras* are meant to be accomplish. The reading
of the scriptures, the sutras, and his commentaries thereon are not in the first
instance meant merely to convey propositional knowledge about Brahman.
After all, given the ineffable nature of Brahman, no set of propositions is ade-
quate. Brahman exceeds all language. *Neti, neti*, not this, not that.

The subsequent content of what Sankara has to teach will routinely include
elements that will strike the western theological reader as familiar—arguments
for the existence of Brahman, descriptions of the nature of Brahman and the
like. What is noteworthy for present purposes is that those tasks are meant, not
to generate in students a conceptual knowledge of ultimate reality, but to gen-
erate in properly prepared students deep transformation that will set them
free from the cycle of transmigration. Indeed, the final teaching that Sankara
has to offer is not that there exists an infinite reality named Brahman some-
where out there. The final goal of all his teaching is to persuade his readers to
recognize that Brahman is just what they themselves always already are. *Tat
tvam asi*, you are that. You are the infinite mystery. The light of consciousness
that shines in you and makes possible all your worldly knowing, that very self
(*atman*) is Brahman.

There is no deeper transformation possible than this. Persons who had for-
merly thought of themselves as finite ego-selves, threatened by danger and
hoping to be completed and fulfilled by objects of desire come to see that that
is not at all who or what they are. Instead, through karma yoga—disciplined
action unattached to the fruits of action—the guru's guidance, and scriptural
exegesis, they come to the knowledge that they just are Infinite reality itself.
Such transformation can indeed only be called wisdom.

Sankara offers just one example of the kind of materials that comparative theologians might encounter when studying traditions other than their own. What befalls a theologian, let us say a Christian theologian, who is moved and claimed by Sankara and the tradition he mediates? If the *claims* and *aims* Sankara commends register their power and desirability on the heart and mind of a given theologian, what is that theologian to do? Here attention to particularity matters. If the claims and aims of Sankara's affirmation of nonduality (*advaita*) supplant a theologian's prior convictions, then the matter is relatively simple to resolve, at least in theory. Conversion is the solution.[29] The more interesting and complex challenge arises when the claims and aims of another tradition are felt to *supplement* rather than *supplant* one's prior convictions. What then is one to do? It is here that the notion of comparative theology as interreligious wisdom becomes particularly appealing and compelling.

What then is interreligious wisdom? Interreligious wisdom is the capacity to see the world through more than one set of religious lenses and to combine what is seen thereby into an integrated vision. That is just what one is called to do if one is claimed by both some particular form of Christian wisdom and Advaita convictions. Are these two distinct ways of seeing the world compatible? If so, how? What can persons and communities learn by drawing on the wisdom of both traditions? Answering questions such as these is the challenge of comparative theology.

Let's begin with the metaphor of lenses. For any wearer of glasses (as I am), the metaphor of lenses is suggestive. I am enabled to see, or at least see clearly, because the corrective prescriptions of my lenses make improved vision possible. Intriguingly, and this is often true in childhood, you often fail to recognize that your vision is far from optimal. After all, how could you? Others detect the symptoms—squinting, teary eyes, and headaches—and suggest that you might need glasses. How far your vision is from 20/20 is something you come to recognize only when you are sitting in an ophthalmologist's chair. "Which is better, this one or … this one?" Only then, after your vision has been corrected, are you in a position to truly appreciate just how just how poor your vision was in the first place.

This metaphor is illuminating because most religious traditions take themselves to be corrective lenses, albeit of a metaphysical sort. They hold that human beings are captured in complex predicaments marked by affective and cognitive disorders that make it impossible for them to see the world and

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29   While "conversion" is often understood as a category that is inapplicable to classical Hinduism, it is nonetheless the case that a variety of Hindu movements have emerged in the last century that now welcome non-Hindus into their ranks. ISKCON and Arya Samaj are the two most widely-known examples of such inclusive communities.

themselves truly. Curative treatment is necessary before right seeing is possible. Those who have not undergone treatment are in no position to understand the gravity of what ails them. Each religious tradition—or rather strands within it—offers a richly articulated account of what ails us and how to cure it. The wisdom that a tradition has to offer to rectify this predicament must be communicated in a graduated or incremental manner. Strategies of communication need to take into account what people are capable of understanding at any given stage in their developmental unfolding through the treatment process. As spiritual maturation takes place, new and subtler accounts of truth can be communicated.

The category of "predicament" can be framed neutrally with respect to the gravity of the condition under diagnosis by the tradition in question. The precise nature and gravity of the predicament is a matter of internal debate within traditions as well as across them. Nor does predicament discourse entail positing something like original sin as some Christian traditions do, or beginningless ignorance as Hindu and Buddhist traditions do. Some traditions are unwilling to ascribe a primordial fault of this kind. The category only entails that deep and accurate knowledge of the way things are will require addressing some ailment, propensity, or condition that obstructs or impedes such knowing.

Addressing such predicaments is never merely a matter of conveying information. Reading a prescription or knowing the chemical composition of one's medicine is not the same as taking it. Whether one works with the metaphor of corrective lenses or this second metaphor of a human predicament as illness for which some treatment is required, transformation is a necessary precondition for right knowing. One might be able to recite the Four Noble Truths, but that is not the same thing as seeing the world as Buddhists do, let alone seeing the world as the enlightened do. Why? The Four Noble Truths, at least as explicated by some particular Buddhist community, articulate a comprehensive interpretive scheme—a way of seeing the whole of things from a Buddhist perspective. But for such a scheme to count as wisdom, the interpretive scheme must be installed in the body. It must come to shape the *comportment* of those who wish to see as Buddhists do. To see as Buddhists do is to move ever closer to seeing as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do.

Just what is comportment? Before I offer a formal definition, let me first turn to a narrative, in this case, Chuang Tzu's tale of famously skilled and subtle butcher, Cook Ting who is carving up an ox in front of Lord Wen-Hui. In the story, Cook Ting carves up the ox with such ease, grace, and fluidity that his work has the appearance of a carefully choreographed dance: "At every touch

of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee—zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-shou music." Witnessing this, Lord Wen-Hui exclaims, "Ah, this is marvelous! Imagine skill reaching such heights!"[30]

And, here, in an inversion characteristic of Chuang Tzu, the cook corrects and instructs the Lord by saying that what he is up to has little to do with skill. Here, we must turn to the narrative at length:

> Cook Ting laid down his knife and replied, "What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and following things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.
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> A good cook changes his knife once a year—because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month—because he hacks. I've had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I've cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about it. That's why after nineteen years the blade of my knife is still as good as when it first came from the grindstone.[31]

Within its native context, Chuang Tzu is teaching a characteristically Taoist truth. To follow the Way is to know the joints of reality or, to use another metaphor, to go with the grain of things—in this case, to know where the empty spaces are. The invitation issued is to be attuned to the way of things and to act accordingly, a way of acting that is so gracious that it gives appearance of musicality, or of a carefully choreographed dance. Such work gives the appearance of being effortless, although of course, as the tale makes clear, effortlessness is

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30   Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu*: *Basic Writings,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), Kindle ed., "The Secret of Caring for Life," Section 3.

31   Chuang Tzu, "The Secret of Caring for Life," Section 3.

not easily or speedily acquired. It has taken Cook Ting years to carve as he now can without dulling his blade in the slightest.

A full treatment of how this dexterity is attained is beyond the scope of these reflections. But much is clear: Ting's capacities are installed in the body by way of spirit. They are not accomplished by deliberative rationality or even by way of a knack or skill narrowly construed. They seem to rest in a deeper intuition that has seen, with eyes closed, the deep patterns of nature. That (non)seeing has become manifest in a set of bodily dispositions and capacities that now allow him to do his work effortlessly, because those dispositions and capacities have become part of his comportment in the world. Ting is so in accord with the Way that he can now engage the ox in a fashion that is strangely free of violence. He no longer hacks at things. So, his blade is not blunt nor, we might add, is he. Cook Ting has come to know the Tao in his very flesh.

The tale concludes with one more surprising reversal: Lord Wen-Hui exclaims, "'I have heard the words of Cook Ting and learned how to care for life!'" A Lord not only learns from a cook, but in this topsy-turvy vision, a butcher teaches care for life. The tale offers its final lesson: the work of managing our political affairs, which is the labor of caring for life, requires understanding the Tao. The rhythms and patterns of human life are nothing other than the patterns found in the natural world. That is why the Lord can learn from the cook.

Comportment then is the state in which persons come to be true to the way things are. It is bodily right orientation, reflected in stable dispositions and capacities, and prized by a particular religious tradition's comprehensive interpretive scheme. Comportment is accomplished by undertaking the therapeutic regimen commended by that particular tradition in order to remedy contrary dispositions and incapacities that mark the human predicament. Undertaking a therapeutic regimen, which might include scripture reading, memorization, contemplation, meditative practices, singing, dancing, celebrations of Eucharist, consumption of hallucinogenic compounds, etc., generates in persons and communities the quality of comportment prized by the community in question.

What does this tale have to do with interreligious wisdom? Before the narrative can offer us an object lesson about interreligious wisdom, it is a pointer to what constitutes Taoist wisdom, at least as Chuang Tzu sees it. To be wise in the Taoist way is to train oneself in the dispositions and capacities that enable one to be in harmony with the patterns of the Tao. Cook Ting knows the Tao not by textual scholarship. He knows by way of spirit, intuition, and the long and painstaking process of bodily learning. What such bodily learning makes possible is not *knowledge about* the Tao but *knowledge of* the Tao.

Elsewhere, I have spoken of this difference in another vocabulary: first-order and second-order knowledge.[32] In that essay, I spoke of the difference between the swimmer's knowledge of water and the knowledge about water possessed by a non-swimmer who nonetheless happens to be an expert in fluid mechanics. Without trivializing in any way what the latter knows about water—surely vastly in excess of most swimmers—the expert risks drowning if dropped into the deep end of a pool. His encyclopedic knowledge *about* does not generate knowledge *of*. The swimmer's knowledge of water is akin to Cook Ting's knowledge of the Tao. In both cases, we are speaking of an embodied wisdom, one that surely includes, but in some ways exceeds conceptual or cognitive knowing. Cook Ting has acquired an embodied intimacy with the ways of the Tao by long training.

What are the implications of this analysis for interreligious wisdom? I venture that interreligious wisdom requires that the one seeking such wisdom train herself in acquiring the dispositions and capacities prized by other ways of being in the world, and integrate into her bodily comportment, in the Christian case, what a Christian body already knows. If religious wisdom is embodied knowing, it must follow that interreligious wisdom must likewise be installed in the body. Hence, if religious wisdom is embodied orientation to understanding the world as Hindus, Buddhist, Muslims, or Christians do, then interreligious wisdom is the work of acquiring a complex and enfolded wisdom that requires the creative synthesis of two ways of seeing the world.

Returning to the metaphor of lenses, we know that with or without glasses, just such integration is happening in the brain as it synthesizes distinctive information about the world that is given to the brain by each individual eye. What each sees is not identical with what the other sees. In fact, it is precisely the distinctiveness of each that makes depth of field possible. With just one eye, the world would seem to us flat. Binocular vision offers depth perception.

Without suggesting that the wisdom that comes to us from just one religious tradition is impoverished, it is possible nonetheless to suggest that interreligious binocular vision might well offer perspectives on ultimate reality and world that monocular vision does not. To see as Christians do *and* to see as Buddhists do is to have attention called to features of experience that are typically not the focus of one tradition alone. Moreover, deep resonance and complementarity might also emerge. What might be the effect of practicing sociality through Eucharistic life and learning to see the world as marked by dependent coarising (*pratityasamutpad*a)? What dimensions of the divine life

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32 John J. Thatamanil, "Transreligious Theology as the Quest for Interreligious Wisdom," *Open Theology*, vol. 2, (2016): 357–59.

might be gifted to Christians who have come to understand nonduality of self and ultimacy through Sankara's Advaita? Just such possibilities are intimated through the ancient Indian parable of the blind(folded) men and the elephant which I have treated elsewhere.[33] Trust in this promise of richness is what motivates the quest for interreligious wisdom.

To desire interreligious wisdom, even to hold that such wisdom is possible, presupposes a great many subtle affirmations. First, interreligious wisdom is possible only if there are, at least in the case of some traditions, ways of seeing and experiencing the world that are compossible and even complementary. When considering any two traditions—or for that matter, even very different strands of a single tradition—fundamental differences often seem quite evident—although even here, the comparativist must refrain from drawing premature conclusions. Differences do not stand up and announce themselves but are discerned through careful comparative learning. And even when strong disagreement is eventually recognized, such differences may prove to be productive. The discovery that you and I disagree on some matter—and not just think that we disagree—is already a real gain in conversation, particularly if we begin with very different religious vocabularies. We have clarified terms and concepts and have come through sustained conversation to see that we really do disagree.

Now, a subsequent conversation can begin about what to make of our disagreement. Is one of us in error? Both? Perhaps both our perspectives are partial or valid from different but not incompatible perspectives? Are our differences consequential or relatively marginal? Engaging with these questions can be deeply enriching and can enhance our readings of experience and our sense of the world. In other words, discovery of disagreement need mean neither the end to conversation nor the foreclosure of the possibility of interreligious wisdom.

Indeed, in the quest for interreligious wisdom, simple agreement would be less promising. If you and I are already in agreement, then it is unlikely that I have something new to learn from you. Of course, that we can discern agreement even across strikingly different religious and linguistic vocabularies is no trivial matter; there is much to be learned from recognizing that differences in religious idioms need not entail incommensurability of thought and experience. But deeper possibilities for interreligious wisdom present themselves

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33   See my forthcoming book, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). There I make clear why it will not do to speak of blind men for reasons indebted to lessons learned from disability theology.

when one intuits or senses not identity or agreement but resonances, possible complementarity, and tensions that might prove to be productive.

In sum, interreligious wisdom is a matter of comportment that generates first order knowledge about ultimate reality and the world by integrating what one has come to see about the world through more than one set of religious lenses. To train oneself in the dispositions and capacities prized by two or more religious ways of being in the world and to integrate those dispositions and capacities into embodied knowing is the desired goal of interreligious wisdom. At its deepest and best, such wisdom is not merely a matter of conceptual learning—it is information about other traditions that now is integrated alongside information previously known about one's home tradition. That preliminary work is important and noteworthy and must play a role in the quest for interreligious wisdom. Such information teaches us about the claims of other traditions. But interreligious wisdom attends to the way in which those claims are intimately wedded to the aims sought for by the tradition. Interest in *aims* not just *claims* is the distinguishing feature of interreligious wisdom qua wisdom. When one is committed to the aims of two or more traditions, then learning *information* must of necessity become part of a larger quest for *transformation*.

4 Toward a Pedagogy for Interreligious Wisdom

What then are the implications of this vision of comparative theology for pedagogy? I have argued that comparative theology seeks interreligious wisdom. Moreover, I have argued that essential to this process is the first order knowing that is generated by undertaking the disciplines or therapeutic regimens of more than one tradition. It should be further specified that we must undertake such therapeutic regimens in responsible learning with and from persons from those traditions in order to avoid problems of misappropriation. Simply knowing about the world as Buddhists or Hindus do is not yet interreligious wisdom. Interreligious wisdom requires a further step: the move toward integration—thinking about and living with what one is coming to know of ultimate reality and the world through two or more ways of knowing, but now as written into the body. Here, we have to pose a question as old as Plato's *Euthyphro*, albeit slightly reconfigured: can interreligious wisdom be taught?

Pondering that question is complex and context dependent. A complete answer would require extended consideration that moves well beyond the scope of this chapter. One would have to take up questions about the epistemological norms that currently prevail in university-based education, the

extent to which even seminaries are constrained by those norms, both for good and for ill, and even mundane questions such as staffing. After all, it is appropriate to wonder if interreligious wisdom can be taught in a religiously homogenous seminary. Without treating each of these questions in full, I wish only to argue here that incremental steps in the direction of interreligious wisdom can be ventured. I shall use my own institutional context to speak of how this might be done.

At Union Theological Seminary, we have two instructors who are substantially trained in and qualified to teach within distinctive Zen Buddhist lineages. Both have decades of meditative experience within their respective Zen schools. In addition to teaching Zen traditions in rigorous and scholarly fashion with recourse to primary materials, both also teach courses in which Buddhist meditation is practiced. To use my language, both teach students Buddhist interpretive schemes *and* the therapeutic regimes by which the world as understood by those interpretive schemes is inscribed into flesh. Over the course of the semester, they require students in their classes to engage in many hours of meditation outside the classroom. Of course, there is no way in which, despite these hours of practice, students can accrue even a fraction of the time to which disciplined adherents of Zen traditions, especially monastics, have committed themselves. Nevertheless, this embodied learning provides a meaningful practical and experiential basis from which the quest for interreligious wisdom can be launched.

Why and how? Because this learning occurs within the context of a Christian theological institution, a context in which Buddhist students are obliged to think about Christian traditions, and Christian students are compelled to think about the meaning of their Buddhist practice for Christian faith. If anything, it is the teaching of Christian spiritual disciplines that now must be fostered in comparable depth in a historically Protestant seminary that has shied away from forms of practice that might be figured as self-salvation through works righteousness. Indeed, this very recognition—only now incipiently emerging—is itself a fruit of the presence of another community for whom the rigorous practice of therapeutic regimens matters.

It would be misleading, however, to say that Union is absent of Christian therapeutic regimes. Far from it. Regular worship, rigorous theological study, a culture of protest in the traditions of liberation theology, practice in the homiletical and liturgical arts, training in pastoral care and listening—all these are key elements in Christian therapeutic regimes, particularly those taken to be essential for the formation of ministers. What is less fulsomely offered are courses in Christian spirituality in which the robust work of contemplative prayer is undertaken. This remains a lacuna in need of filling.

Nevertheless, at least some students at Union are being shaped in substantive ways by the interpretive schemes and therapeutic regimes of both Christian and Zen traditions. Doing the work of such learning and thinking about that labor is key to courses on Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Comparable courses also exist on Hindu-Christian dialogue and Muslim-Christian dialogue. Particularly noteworthy is "Liberation Theology and Engaged Buddhism," Union's course co-taught by Claudio Carvalhaes and Greg Snyder, each of whom is an expert in the traditions they teach. Snyder is a Zen master and Carvalhaes is a leading expert on Latin American liberation theology. In this co-taught course, both instructors and students are together learning what each tradition has to teach, and, in the process, are together learning to engage in mutual critique and mutual transformation. What does each tradition have to say about anger, violence, care for non-human creatures, and ultimate reality? In conversations such as this, students engage in matters theoretical and practical and attend not merely to the interpretive schemes but also the therapeutic regimes of these traditions. Hence, a class is offered within a larger institutional milieu in which interreligious wisdom can be birthed.

It goes without saying that students in theology classes are unlikely to acquire the combination of textual and practical mastery attained by the likes of Paul Knitter or Aloysius Pieris. Yet they can make incremental movement toward embodied knowing. What can be done in a single course or even a two or three-year master's degree cannot equal the intensive embodied learning that most traditions require from their adepts. The processes of formation prescribed by any single tradition are complex and customarily require lifelong learning, not to speak of formation in two traditions. Still, the impossibility of accomplishing the maximal is no justification for forgoing the incremental.

What is at stake pedagogically is clarity about the question of genre; it is more than possible to convey that theology is more than academic text production. The body-mind can, by participation in the therapeutic regimens of other traditions, acquire a measure of tacit knowing of other ways of interpreting the world, and, building on the basis of such knowing, students can write, preach, and teach in ways that demonstrate more than a propositional knowledge about this or that feature of other traditions. Nor should propositional knowledge be dismissed; it has legitimate importance and value, and most teaching in academic contexts will continue to be about conveying such information. The communication of such information might amount to second order rather than first order knowledge, but such knowledge too can contribute to the cultivation of deeper transformation, so long as teaching insists that propositional knowledge within religious communities is meant to serve deeper ends. That insight about propositional knowledge can be taught, performed,

and embodied through a practical intimacy with the therapeutic regimes of the various religious traditions.

Of course, the pedagogical particulars of this process hinge on a host of further contingencies: which traditions are being taught, the staffing level in those traditions, the composition of the student body, the denominational tradition, if any, of the host institution, and on and on it goes. There is no one-size-fits-all formula for establishing the institutional conditions under which interreligious wisdom can best be cultivated.

Are there risks involved in the quest for interreligious wisdom? What risks must educational institutions in particular contend with? At the very least, educational institutions such as seminaries must be mindful to avoid misappropriation. By misappropriation, I mean the use or appropriation of the wisdom and practices of another tradition without the endorsement of the communities in question. This risk is especially fraught when there are deep and persistent historic asymmetries of power between the community that appropriates and the community from which practices and wisdom are appropriated. The following sorts of questions must be posed: Is the institution in a position to be accountable to the communities and traditions from which it seeks to learn? Are instructors who teach expert in the traditions they are teaching? More specifically, given the complexities of teaching the religious disciplines of particular traditions, do those who teach possess some measure of expertise in the prescribed spiritual itineraries of their traditions? Those who pursue interreligious wisdom are, after all, not merely invested in conveying information about traditions, but seek transformation by taking up the therapeutic regimes of those traditions.

Are those who teach mindful of the potential problem of contraindication? By contraindication, I mean to signal that many spiritual traditions have clearly graded and ordered sequences of spiritual disciplines that must be carefully prescribed to students according to their particular needs and aptitudes. Even within a tradition, not every spiritual discipline or therapy can be combined with every other. That challenge becomes even more complex when dealing with disciplines across traditions. Can ingredients from the therapeutic regimes of the various traditions be combined? In what order? Navigating questions such as these in any context, whether classroom or otherwise, is enormously complex for teachers and students alike. They will not be answered in short order and will likely require a long process of trial and error through which practical pedagogical wisdom will be required.

These complexities, risks, and dangers notwithstanding, there is enormous promise in the quest for interreligious wisdom. The seemingly intractable problems that human communities and indeed the species itself now face are

unlikely to be resolved by appeal to the resources of any single religious community. We need deep interreligious wisdom if we are to resolve problems of a ruptured global economic order, rising ethnonationalist authoritarianism, and grave ecological peril. When confronting such vexing civilizational challenges, one intuits the promise of cultivating communities of students who embody the wisdom of the traditions they study. Compassionate students who embody and exhibit the rich enfolded binocular vision that comes through the careful study and practice of the interpretive schemes and therapeutic regimes of more than one tradition are just the kind of religious leaders we need in our complex multireligious societies. The work of comparative theology is meant to serve the cultivation and formation of just such students.

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Reflections in the Waves: What Interreligious Studies can Learn from Women's Movements in the U.S.

Rachel S. Mikva

Abstract

In this chapter I trace the development of interreligious studies and engagement in the United States by comparing it with the "waves" of women's movements, and then use those insights to reflect on interreligious education at Chicago Theological Seminary and beyond.

1 Introduction[1]

As colleges, universities, and seminaries innovate programs in interreligious studies while the academic field is just taking shape, where do we look for theoretical and pedagogical models? Although we can trace the modern study of *Religionsgeschichte* ("history of religions") to the nineteenth century and examine the field of comparative religion that emanated from it, these academic foci do not necessarily provide the best foundation for our work. As Paul Hedges points out, such approaches generally seek an ostensibly "objective historical or phenomenological account of similarities or points of meeting between religious traditions," whereas interreligious studies "is more expressly focused on the dynamic encounter between religious traditions and persons."[2] When we recognize also the critical mix of theory and praxis within interreligious studies, the commitment to seek understanding across lines of difference,[3] the

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1 This chapter is adapted from Rachel S. Mikva, "Reflections in the Waves: What Interreligious Studies Can Learn from the Evolutions of Women's Movements in the United States," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 53:4 (Fall 2018): 461-82; and from a panel presentation, "Religious Pluralism and Feminist/Womanist/Mujerista Theologies," American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, 2015.

2 Paul Hedges, "Interreligious Studies," in Anne Runehov and Lluis Oviedo, eds., *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 1077.

3 The phrase draws from Diana Eck's definition of religious pluralism; see The Pluralism Project, Harvard University, accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/.

intersectional and interdisciplinary complexity, the contextual urgency of the issues, and the particular challenges that arise, we may discover it is more fruitful to examine the development of a field that shares all these qualities, such as women's studies (and now gender studies).

To explore the potential of this association, Part 1 outlines "waves" within women's movements and identifies parallels that illuminate the interreligious project, with its headwaters in *Religionsgeschichte* and its unique directional flows. This broad sketch is a heuristic framework, leaving aside for now much of the complexity that typifies both gender and interreligious studies.[4] I employ an historical perspective but I do not chart the waves by decade; one wave does not end precisely as the next one begins. If we think of waves as forces within the ocean that have mass and momentum before they arrive on shore, and which continue to move in the waters after defining their particular outline in the sand, and if we recall that there is never only one wave moving at a time—then we can examine the sequential but not separate waves that emphasize (1) equality, (2) difference, (3) diversity, and (4) intersubjectivity.

This lens sharpens our view of the learning curve for interreligious studies and engagement, and illuminates some of its growing edges. I discuss in Part 2 how the theoretical framework informs the pedagogy at Chicago Theological Seminary, and then draw from this one context to discern broader implications for the emerging field.

Two qualifications are in order. First, this examination of feminism's waves delineates a Western, especially American-focused, analysis. Although it is a limited perspective on global questions of gender justice, it suits *this* discussion of interreligious studies, which has a similar geographical/cultural focus. Second, there is ongoing debate about the influences and most essential qualities of each wave in women's movements; the current study selects elements that provide the most salient comparisons.

2   Part 1: The Waves

2.1   *Equality*

The modern women's movement began with a fight for equality.[5] In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women campaigned for suffrage and for

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4   Many works within gender studies both utilize and problematize the "wave" framework. See Cathryn Bailey, "Making Waves and Drawing Lines: The Politics of Defining the Vicissitudes of Feminism," *Hypatia* 12, no. 3 (June 1997): 17–28; Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, eds., *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

5   The beginning of the "first wave" is often attributed to the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848, organized by Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others, with

labor protections; they demanded the right to own property, enter restricted professions, serve on juries, divorce their husbands, and receive custody of their children. They sought freedom to speak in the public square and to enter male domains of education and leadership.

Yet the theory underlying this drive for equality addressed human nature as androgynous, and thus the standard was still a male one. Women fought to vote and to attend school because, they argued, they could be as rational as men. Working class women fought for their rights as part of the universal (male) proletariat. Even Sojourner Truth's phenomenal speech, "Ain't I A Woman?" in which she insisted that "woman" did not mean "white woman" and challenged the social construction of women as delicate flowers who need male protection, contested that narrative by comparing her labor and her toughness to that of a man.[6] Equality became sameness, an attitude that helped to sustain patriarchal privilege at the same time that women's movements sought to challenge it.[7]

There are numerous parallels with the development of interreligious engagement during the same period. Christian privilege pervaded multiple aspects of society: in blue laws that restricted commercial enterprises on Sundays, in religious tests for state and local public office, in the Protestant tone of public education, and in repeated calls to amend the Constitution to explicitly declare the United States a Christian nation.[8] Despite the First Amendment's protection of religious freedom, adherents of minority traditions in the United States were often engaged in struggles for equality.

Before the Civil Rights movement, for example, Jews were excluded from social clubs and hotels; they could not buy property in certain areas or purchase insurance for their businesses. They were regularly denounced in publications of the era and considered suspect as witnesses in judicial proceedings. Quotas were imposed on university admissions and, after the 1924 Immigration Act, on admission to the country, disguised as limits based on countries of origin.[9] Significant communal energy was devoted to combating such

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its impetus assigned to the abolitionist movement. An alternative "first wave" is Mary Wollstonecraft's 1793 work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (repr., New York: A. J. Matsell, 1833).

6   Ohio Women's Rights Convention held in Akron, 1851: Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" accessed January 10, 2019, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp.

7   See Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1988); and Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

8   Naomi Cohen, *Jews in Christian America: The Pursuit of Religious Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 65–92. See also Warren Blumenfeld, Khyati Joshi, and Ellen Fairchild, eds., *Investigating Christian Privilege and Religious Oppression in the United States* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2008).

9   Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

discrimination; for example, the Anti-Defamation League was founded in 1913 "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all."[10] In 1923 the Federal Council of Churches established a committee to reduce anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic prejudice, as an extension of its ecumenical commitments.

A key strategy in the fight for equality was to emphasize similarity with mainline Protestantism, the dominant faith of the nation. Many Reform synagogues moved their primary worship to Sunday, and increasingly modeled the service in a Protestant style.[11] The movement's Pittsburgh Platform, ratified in 1885, emphasized Judaism's "universal" teachings of monotheism and minimized Jewish particularity, rejecting all rituals that "are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization."[12]

The birth of the modern interfaith movement is sometimes traced to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, convened parallel to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago; it was an axial event in shaping attitudes toward religious diversity.[13] As the first time that many Americans came into contact with Eastern traditions, there was a commitment to portray "the substantial unity of many religions in the good deeds of the Religious Life."[14] Yet this universal vision of common ground was self-consciously located in Christian territory. John Henry Barrows, president of the Parliament, was sincere in his desire to examine the shared principles of the world's religions, but his concept of universal was essentially an expansive Christianity. He wrote of the proceedings, "The Christian spirit pervaded the conference from first to last. Christ's prayer was daily used. His name was always spoken with reverence. His doctrine was preached by a hundred Christians and by lips other than Christian. The Parliament ended at Calvary."[15]

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10   The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.adl.org/about-adl/.

11   This process began in Germany; see Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit, IL: Wayne State University, 1995).

12   "Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/pittsburgh_program.html. Subsequent platforms of the movement reclaimed numerous rituals and increasingly valued Jewish particularity; they can be understood within the second wave, which made more space for difference.

13   Eric J. Ziolkowski, ed., *A Museum of Faiths: Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

14   Charles Carroll Bonney, *The World To-day: A Monthly Record of Human Progress*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: World Review Company, 1902), 1501.

15   John Henry Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions* (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), 2:1578. Other inequities were also evident; many African Americans criticized the Exposition (and the Parliament) for its nearly total exclusion of blacks from the list of speakers and from the shaping of American history: "Ida B. Wells: African

Academic trends that followed in the Parliament's wake, such as the growth of the Chicago School, attempted to "dislodge … the study of other religions from its missionary moorings and set it free as a discrete academic specialty."[16] Yet Joachim Wach, putative founder of the school, reinforced Christianity as the norm against which other religions could be measured. He sought "to describe the landscape of world religions such that Christianity is the ultimate truth," and "felt that his normative project was leading toward the realization of a Christian telos that he thought already properly described the ultimate religious experience."[17]

Scholarship of the era may not have been subservient to Christian evangelical commitments, but it still advanced the cause. Religions were seen to have value to the extent that they paralleled the Christian norm. Monotheistic traditions fared relatively well in this light, but tribal religions were deemed primitive and Eastern practices were exoticized. Theology of religions meant Christian theology, and categories of study were Christian categories.[18]

Community-based interfaith efforts reflected these dynamics. Interreligious prayer modeled white mainstream Protestant worship, and dialogue emphasized sameness: *Look at all we have in common!* In 1965, the Second Vatican Council issued the declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, a paradigm-shattering statement of kinship with diverse religionists that expanded interreligious engagement exponentially. It too was based on similarity between the traditions:

> In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.[19]

Americans at the World's Columbian Exhibition," *Chicago Encyclopedia*, accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1495.html.

16 Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 77.

17 Charles S. Preston, "Wach, Radhakrishan, and Relativism," in Christian Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger, eds., *Hermeneutics, Politics and the History of Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 94.

18 See Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

19 Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, The Vatican, October 28, 1965, accessed January 10, 2019, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

This became the grounds for equality. Such efforts bore fruit, but also sustained Christian privilege, leaving its normativity substantially unchallenged.

As in the evolving women's movements, the struggle for equality is not over. Atheists have a hard time getting elected to public office in the United States. Some religious individuals, especially Muslims, are targets of overt discrimination. Between 2010 and 2017, forty-three states introduced anti-Sharia legislation and twenty bills were enacted. The Trump administration has repeatedly attempted to ban foreign Muslims from entering the country, again trying to pass Constitutional muster by identifying "countries of origin" in order to obscure religious bias. Native Americans have endured a long history of court cases denying their First Amendment free exercise claims, and they continue to witness violation of their sacred lands (e.g., the Dakota Access Pipeline project that threatens ancient burial grounds and the water supply at the Standing Rock reservation). These are not acts of isolated individuals but represent broad-based social bias.

In the ongoing construction of interreligious studies and engagement, where nominal equality is a given, representation and voice emerge as key issues and there are always new battles on the horizon.[20] Secular humanism and other nonreligious lifestances[21] are only beginning to be addressed in North American interreligious efforts because they are not sufficiently "like" the norm. This bias has had consequences for funding from campus spiritual life offices, invitations to the interfaith table, inclusion in textbooks and analyses.[22] It is also powerfully reflected in the continuing inadequacy of the field to linguistically account for these lifestances other than by what they are not—i.e., "nonreligious." New religious movements, individuals who identify with multiple traditions, those who identify as spiritual but not religious, and pagan or indigenous cultures are often still invisible in scholarly discussions and applied contexts.[23]

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20   See Rachel Mikva, "Six Issues that Complicate Interreligious Studies and Engagement," in Eboo Patel, Jennifer Peace, and Noah Silverman, eds., *Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 124–36.

21   "Lifestance" (also "life stance") was coined to open up religious and interreligious discourse to include nonreligious perspectives around matters of ultimate concern: See Harry Stopes-Roe, "Humanism as a Life Stance," *New Humanist* 103, no. 2 (October 1988): 19–21. Although the term caught on more quickly in Europe than in North America, the recent expansion of interreligious studies to include secular humanism, atheism, etc. presses for similarly inclusive language.

22   Harvard University had a humanist chaplain in 1974, but this was highly unusual until recently.

23   See Grove Harris, "Pagan Involvement in the Interfaith Movement: Exclusions, Dualities and Contributions," *Crosscurrents* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 66–76; Karla Suomala, "Complex

2.2   *Difference*

A subsequent wave of feminist theory emphasized difference. Women recognized that it was not helpful to default to maleness as the norm, and began to take seriously the category of "woman." Theorists also looked at how sexual difference is socially constructed and symbolically fraught; for example, women's roles have been historically undervalued, and female qualities seen as undesirable, due to the enduring power of patriarchy.[24] Eventually this wave washed into religious studies as well, even though there was tension between the fields. Lettie Cottin Pogrebin claims she often felt "like a double agent for two sacred causes, Judaism and feminism, neither of which necessarily believes the other deserves a place in heaven."[25] Nonetheless, (mostly female) theologians grew sensitive to the impact of male imagery for God, of women's erasure from scriptural exegesis and religious history, and of religious authority used to preserve patriarchal structures.[26]

In the process, however, feminist efforts tended to essentialize "woman" as a singular creature—a white, middle-class Christian woman at that. "All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave," proclaimed Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith—the title of their groundbreaking 1982 book on black women's studies.[27] Even though Ida Wells and Mary Church Terrell had been arguing since the turn of the twentieth century

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　　　　Religious Identity in the Context of Interfaith Dialogue," *Crosscurrents* 62, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 360–70; and Michelle Voss Roberts, "Religious Belonging in the Multiple," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 43–62.

24　　Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, first published in French in 1949 (*Le duexième sex* [Paris: Galliard]; English translation by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier [New York: Vintage Books, 2011]), is often identified as the early voice of the second wave. The period is generally defined as beginning in the 1960s and continuing into the 1980s in the United States. A classic text of the time is Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*, first published in France under the title *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974); English translation by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

25　　Lettie Cottin Pogrebin, *Deborah, Golda and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America* (New York: Crown Publishing, 1991), xi.

26　　See Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1990); Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992); and Amina Wadud*, Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), based on doctoral work completed in 1989.

27　　Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1982).

that the link between sexism and racism stood at the root of white male dominance; even though women of diverse races, classes, and religions had struggled with the pain of invisibility; even though the fight for civil rights highlighted the different experience of African American bodies in America; even though Alice Walker was probably right when she famously wrote "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender,"[28] suggesting that womanism is the richer, larger project because it addresses multiple forms of domination and makes more room for the diverse relationships that shape women's lives—white feminists like me still struggle to decenter the white experience. Similarly, Christian feminists struggle to decenter their own religious perspective.

While second-wave feminism recognized that women were not simply men in disguise, the tendency to essentialize perpetuated injustice. "Such universalizing claims about women are always false, and function oppressively to normalize particular—socially and culturally privileged—forms of feminist experience."[29]

Parallel progress and problems are evident in the development of interreligious learning. It increasingly recognized and dignified difference, liberating study and encounter from lowest-common-denominator equations. Dialogues were reimagined to learn about the uniqueness of each tradition.[30] Just as feminist theology tried to affirm the voice and experience of women (or at least white women), these encounters attempted to affirm the voice and experience of diverse religions. Such approaches contested what Asma Barlas has called "the pervasive (and oftentimes perverse) tendency to view differences as evidence of inequality."[31]

One could see a shift as the field of religious studies took shape in the 1960s, distinct from theology in its non-confessional approach. Explicitly interdisciplinary and comparative, with deep study of religious difference, the field experienced a rapid expansion of degree programs and academic positions. Ninian Smart, a key figure in the popularization of such nonsectarian study, introduced a highly influential methodology that attempted to break free of Western or Christian conceptions of spiritual worldviews. Making room for

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28   Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), frontispiece.

29   Alison Stone, "On the Genealogy of Women: A Defense of Anti-Essentialism," in Gillis, Howie, and Munford, *Third Wave Feminism*, p16.

30   See, for example, Leonard Swidler and Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, *Jewish-Christian Dialogues* (Washington, DC: National Council of Catholic Men and National Council of Catholic Women, 1966).

31   Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002), 5.

nontheistic traditions, for instance, he identified doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential, and institutional (and later material) "dimensions" of religion.[32] Similarly, Wilfred Cantwell Smith's 1962 controversial but now classic book, *The Meaning and End of Religion*,[33] asserted that the very concept of religion was a modern Christian European invention. He proposed an alternative framework to examine the diverse "cumulative traditions" and multiple modes of expressing "faith."

The study of difference revealed additional challenges. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argued that Christian privilege and its associated geopolitical power distorted perceptions of difference, leading to patronizing conceptions of the "East," making scholarship a tool of Western imperialism.[34] In addition, religious studies and comparative religion often operated as though one could establish a singular Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc. They did not account for diversity within religious communities, or the ways lived tradition might vary from the reified "ism" of a particular religion. Although more recent scholarship has attempted to avoid such essentialism,[35] pedagogy frequently still falls into these patterns. A quick scan of textbooks used to teach about religions of the world illustrates how difficult it is to capture the dynamism and diversity within each one.

In interreligious studies and engagement there is still a tendency to focus on religious traditions that are theistic, scriptural, and global, and on communities with recognizable hierarchies, clergy, and organizational structures. Leonard Swidler's pioneering work in the field illustrates the early imprint of this frame: *The Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (founded in 1964 as an intra-Christian endeavor and evolving to become the first academic journal to address interreligious studies) and the Dialogue Institute (founded in 1978) focused for many years on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His still-cited rules of interreligious dialogue are known as the "Dialogue Decalogue," a reference most evocative for faithful readers of the Bible. One of its principles is that a person must come to the table "significantly identified with a religious community,"[36]

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32   Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969).

33   Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1964).

34   Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

35   Although Smart cautioned in 1978 that scholars should pay more attention to "religion on the ground," the more essentialized approach remained the rule. See Smart, *Religion and the Western Mind* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 50.

36   Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 1. He later added the term

thus potentially excluding individuals who are agnostic, interspiritual, or spiritual but not religious, and raising questions about who owns traditions. Despite increasing awareness of these complexities, the undertow of old habits lingers.

There also remains a tendency to center Christian experience. The locus of many interreligious degree programs, for example, is in Christian or historically Christian theological and divinity schools. While this development flows naturally from the historical dominance of Christianity, as well as seminaries' special interest in the "dynamic encounter between religious traditions and persons," the result is that many programs have majority Christian faculty and student bodies, curricular structures that best fit Christian learning goals, and the power dynamics of serving as host. What is a secular humanist or a student who does not subscribe to a scripture to do with the concentration on sacred texts? Similarly, preaching and leading worship are not universal roles for religious leaders, yet they remain requirements in most programs. How does "pastoral care" (even the language reflects Christian culture) change in a Hindu context, and can a classically trained Christian practical theologian incorporate it in more than token fashion?

Another example: A frequent exercise in interreligious studies involves developing a theology of religions so that students become self-aware of the terms on which they engage religious others. The analysis usually revolves around the classic trinity of pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism—essentially Christian categories flowing from Christian questions about salvation. Even though they have been problematized for lacking sufficient nuance or capacity for diversity, the tweaks still make the most sense for a tradition that has (or had) universal aspirations. Some lifestances do not really need to create a theological account for people who orient around religion differently.[37] Beyond the framing of comparative questions in Christian terms, the ongoing "norming" of Christian values remains problematic. Its tendency to privilege that which is eternal and universal, for example, marginalizes traditions

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"Inter-Ideological" to make room for atheism and other orientations that might not be termed "religious."

37   See Paul Knitter, ed., *The Myth of Religious Superiority* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), especially Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed," 13–27; and Rita Gross, "Excuse Me, but What's the Question? Isn't Religious Diversity Normal?" 75–87. See also Seung Chul Kim, "How Could We Get Over the Monotheistic Paradigm for the Interreligious Dialogue?" *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 13 (February 2014): 20–33.

that emphasize the temporal and particular.[38] Embedded deeply in the cultural context of the United States, Christianity dominates even "secular" values; there is no neutral space for interreligious engagement.[39]

2.3   *Diversity*

None of these dynamics completely vanish in theory or practice, but we now shift to delineate waves whose imprints are still more recent on the shoreline, alongside the rising tide of interreligious studies as an identifiable field. "The personal is political" was a rallying cry of second-wave feminism, recognizing the connection between individual experience and larger social structures. As the claim becomes populated by the stories of diverse individuals in the third wave, real multiplicity becomes visible. We each come with our own narrative, an identity that is itself multiple and in flux, with accounts of race, class, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender, and religion. Stripping away essentialist constructions, we cannot presume the primacy of gender or religious identity, demand that an individual represent his/her entire tradition, or expect that someone's embodiment of gender or religion will be precisely like that which we have read in a book.

It takes a while for the wave of diversity to wash over these fields, a theoretical approach that presents no master narrative of oppression or experience, and no single, static view of liberation or religion. Third-wave feminism is not simply advancing more inclusive ideas of women's experience, but also exploring different methodologies. Chela Sandoval writes of a "differential consciousness" in third world feminism, one that is "vital to the generation of a next 'third wave' and provides grounds for alliance with other decolonizing movements for emancipation."[40] Womanist and *mujerista* thought pave the way in

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38   Judaism has frequently been denigrated for its more particular focus. See Anders Runesson, "Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity? Some Critical Remarks on Terminology and Theology," *Studia Theologica* 53 (1999): 58–60; Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002); Rosemary Radford Ruether on the "schism of particularism and universalism" in *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1974), 233–39.

39   See Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

40   Sandoval, "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders* 10 (1991): 4. The earliest invocation of the third wave may have been in the 1980s, when M. Jacqui Alexander, Lisa Albrecht, and Mab Segrest planned a volume, *The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives and Racism*, but the publisher (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press) was struggling and the project did not come to fruition until 1994, with a broader array of editors and amended title.

addressing manifold forms of domination, theorizing hybridity, and speaking about *lo cotidiano*, the significance of quotidian details in our lives.[41] Queer theory also helps to deconstruct assumptions about categories of man/woman, as in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*,[42] facilitating more fluid, nonbinary deliberations.

Recognizing that we are all impacted by the social construction of gender and its inequities, women's studies has been reorganized as gender studies in many schools, and its interdisciplinary foundations have deepened.[43] In a 1992 article in *Ms.* magazine, Rebecca Walker emphasizes alternative dimensions of the third wave; she is more conscious of generational difference and focuses on noninstitutional change, personal agency, and iconoclastic expressions of self.[44] Collectively, such developments stake out a larger and more inclusive tent.

Many of these trends are reflected to some extent in interreligious studies as the field begins to develop some disciplinary maturity. Multiple ways of thinking about religious difference emerge out of each religious and nonreligious particularity, pressing the field to account for lived religion beyond the "isms" and how that shapes actual engagement. After the 1965 Immigration Act opened the doors wider to individuals from Asia, subsequent decades brought more substantial religious diversity to college campuses. As a consequence, encounters with diverse Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh people eventually transformed perceptions of Eastern traditions from exotic, essentialized religions of faraway lands into dynamic, homegrown multiplicities. Transnational identity and cross-cultural influences add complexity to analysis. Majority and minority religious cultures necessarily shape each other, expanding thinking

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Important works pointing toward third wave issues without the terminology include bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 1981); Audre Lorde, *Sister, Outsider* (repr., 1984; New York: The Crossing Press, 2007); Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1981).

41   See Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the 21st Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996); Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics & Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* (July 1991): 1241–99; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

42   Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

43   See e.g., Department of Gender and Women's Studies, "History," University of California, Berkeley, accessed January 10, 2019, http://womensstudies.berkeley.edu/about/history/.

44   Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave," *Ms.* 11, no. 2 (January 1992): 39–41. See also Jo Reger, ed., *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

about hybridity.[45] And, as we increasingly emphasize the individual story, it becomes clear that people speak *from* a lifestance rather than speaking *for* the whole of it.[46]

Encounter with postcolonial theory and its global perspective challenge theonormativity. Alongside rapidly growing religious diversity in the United States, they expand interfaith engagement beyond the "trialogue" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They also prompt a critique of theological pluralism as the universal standard for religious enlightenment, with its potential to become yet another imperialist project that imposes Western values: must one affirm the sufficiency and efficacy of other lifestances, and the value of multiple paths in the world as the "new truth?"[47]

The field of interreligious studies and community engagement efforts are now grappling with a certain lack of diversity in their ranks. In a realignment of spiritual communities, "progressive" traditions and individuals often find more in common with each other than with conservative perspectives in their own religious group. Few people who identify as religiously conservative have been active in the field or movement. This is beginning to change, however, due to global events that demonstrate the urgency of interreligious cooperation, and a more clearly articulated distinction between *theological* pluralism versus the more fundamental commitment to religious pluralism as seeking understanding across lines of difference.[48] As with the shift from women's studies to gender studies, recognition that all of us are impacted by the social construction of religion and the encounter with difference draws a broader range of participants into interreligious studies, including theologically

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45   See E. Allen Richardson, *Strangers in This Land: Religion, Pluralism and the American Dream* rev. ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1988, 2010); Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Became the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002); and Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

46   See Jennifer Howe Peace and Or Rose, eds., *My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth and Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012); and Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, *Christians & Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2006). Some textbooks for religion in America courses have become more cognizant of intrafaith dynamism and variation, e.g., Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2012).

47   Kwok Pui-lan and Stephen Burns, *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry: Leadership, Liturgy and Interfaith Engagement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016); and Paul Knitter, "Is the Pluralist Model a Western Imposition?" in *The Myth of Religious Superiority*, 28–43.

48   See Nicholas M. Price, "All Nations Before God's Throne: Evangelicals in the Interfaith World," *Crosscurrents* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 404–13; and Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

conservative voices. Yet the bigger tent can also complicate issues of gender and LGBTQ rights; even the question of Christian privilege in interreligious space becomes more fraught, since evangelicals experience that claim very differently from mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics.

As the academic field builds its institutional infrastructure with the creation of degree programs, the establishment of an American Academy of Religion (AAR) Interreligious and Interfaith Studies unit, an increase in dedicated journals and consortia, etc., it is simultaneously expanding the space for individuals' noninstitutional perspectives—the people who are "spiritual but not religious," who do not identify with mainstream articulations of their faiths, or who claim multiple religious belongings.[49] Queer theory also helps to disrupt categories of religious identity. These more iconoclastic lifestances have begun to reshape some of the working foundations of interreligious studies. For example, what does interspirituality do to assumptions about appropriation? How do we challenge gatekeeping that marginalizes individuals who do not fit tidily inside traditions, while still recognizing the value of boundaries for theological coherence and community cohesion?

The "third wave" includes non-experts who share stories in books and blogs about their transformative encounters with religious difference. They create independent networks of people who want to build bridges. They launch crowd-funding campaigns to assist *someone else's* religious community in distress.[50] Misinformation abounds in some "lay" spaces, but the world of interreligious learning grows larger.

In moving from the encounter of religions to the encounter of persons, greater attention is paid to the intersections of religious difference with race, class, nationality, gender, and sexuality—with varying salience for each person and context. The result is an amazingly rich chorus of diverse voices. Yet the theoretical emphasis on diversity also has its limitations, and sometimes

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49 See Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Manuela Kalsky and André van der Braak, eds., *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (January 2017); and Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

50 See Ranya Idliby, Susanne Oliver, and Priscilla Warner, *The Faith Club: A Muslim, a Christian a Jew—Three Women Search for Understanding* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, accessed January 10, 2019, https://sospeace .org/; and Muslim campaigns to rebuild black churches and Jewish cemeteries attacked by vandals, e.g., Launchgood, "Rebuild with Love: Rebuild Black Churches and Support Victims of Arson Across the South," accessed January 10, 2019, https://www .launchgood.com/project/rebuild_with_love_rebuild_black_churches_support_vic-tims_of_arson_across_the_south#/; https://www.launchgood.com/project/muslims_ unite_to_repair_jewish_cemetery#/.

becomes mired in identity politics, undercutting possibilities for connection. The intersections can be challenging to navigate. For example, many Jewish anti-racism activists are angry about the plank in the Black Lives Matter platform that accuses Israel of genocide against the Palestinian people and endorses the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel. Feminist and womanist voices sometimes reflexively view *hijab* and *niqab* as oppressive, despite Muslim women's divergent accounts. Interreligious space can become constricted, as people refuse to sit with others who will not stand with them. We need a more capacious language of and platform for encountering difference, one that can transcend the potential for division in diversity.

2.4   *Intersubjectivity*

Suggestions that a *fourth* wave of feminism has begun often highlight online communication and activism that have created national and transnational social networks. This wave is queer, sex and body-positive, anti-misandrist, and trans-inclusive. It tries to live into the ecology of commitments that intersectional theory brought to the fore. Continuing the micropolitics of the third wave, it challenges the sexism that appears daily in television, advertising, media, and the multiple contexts of women's lives—with the added power of generating instant social media campaigns.[51] From calling out the epidemic of drug-facilitated sexual assault to Pantsuit Nation (a Facebook group born during the 2016 presidential campaign, with its perplexing match-up of the first woman to head a major-party ticket and a candidate who spoke about the privilege of groping women at will), fourth-wave feminism tries to harness the power of women's stories through the internet.

Some of these qualities appear in the world of interreligious learning and engagement. Certainly, cyberspace has become an increasingly important venue for such activity, for good and for ill. Many people get an increasing percentage of their information (and misinformation) about religion from the internet/social media, and even individuals who live in homogeneous communities can "meet" people who orient around religion differently.

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51   See the varied emphases among these respective online postings: Ealasaid Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?" PSA Blog, accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/feminism-fourth-wave; Martha Rampton, "Four Waves of Feminism," Pacific University, October 25, 2015, accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism; Jennifer Baumgardner, "Is there a Fourth Wave? Does it Matter?" Feminist.com, 2011, accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/ genwom/baumgardner2011.html; and Kristen Sollee, "6 Things to Know about Fourth Wave Feminism," Bustle, October 31, 2015, accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.bustle.com/articles/119524-6-things-to-know-about-4th-wave-feminism.

Recognized contexts for multifaith encounters continue to multiply. The Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) capitalizes on the remarkable diversity on college campuses to nurture student-led integrative learning projects with participants who actively seek engagement with religious difference. These efforts are fashioning a new generation of interfaith leaders.[52] Businesses have become more conscious of the need for religious accommodation and interreligious competencies. Advertisements feature Muslim actors and representatives to counter the impact of Islamophobic rhetoric. Arts, families, media—all are increasingly recognized as critical sites of interreligious connection.[53] Pedagogical tools such as the Pluralism Project's case study initiative (since 2008) use religion as a central organizing paradigm to highlight ways in which difference complicates every facet of our lives, even when people come with good intentions.

There is another development within the fourth wave of womanist/feminist/*mujerista* thought that may be even more transformational for interreligious studies—namely, its serious attempt to wrestle with the implications of identity politics. "The elusiveness of this category of 'woman' raised questions about the nature of identity, unity and collectivity," and revealed that a movement hoping for unity based on female identity was too fragile.[54] Emphasis on identity draws some in from the margins but it also risks fracturing the body politic.[55]

One way to address this problem is to emphasize intersubjectivity, solidarity (*communidad* in *mujerista* theology), and relationality. These concepts contest old notions that agency derives only from autonomy. What we identify as boundaries are often permeable and mutually constitutive; competing identities are increasingly recognized as intersectional. Nira Yuval-Davis speaks of a process of rooting and shifting:[56] rooting in our particular identity, but also recognizing how the partiality of our positions and selves leads us to need one

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52   See Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016). The IFYC was established in 2002. In the 1980s and 1990s a few campus chaplains and faculty led the way, establishing multifaith councils, interfaith discussion groups, and resources to reimagine interreligious learning and engagement on campus. See Victor Kazanjian and Peter Laurence, *Education as Transformation: Religious Pluralism, Spirituality and a New Vision for Higher Education in America* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

53   Kate McCarthy began to explore diverse contexts of interfaith engagement in *Interfaith Encounters in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

54   Gillis, Howie, and Munford, *Third Wave Feminism*, xxi.

55   See Linda Martin Alcoff, Michael Hames-Garcia, Satya Mohanty, and Paula M. L. Moya, eds., *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

56   Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997).

another. Thus we shift in diverse and provisional alliances where, in true dialogue with difference, we experience other ways of being.

Interreligious studies similarly lifts up encounters with difference as catalysts to deepen our own spiritual formation. We cease to theorize each other and instead meet each other in our messy multiplicity in a coformative process. Intersubjectivity incorporates theologies that are already afloat. As a Jew, I hear echoes of Martin Buber, who showed us the irreducible relation of I and Thou, and Emmanuel Levinas, who explained through the biblical Hebrew construct "*hineni*—here I am" how the "I" is constituted in response and responsibility to another.[57] Others might hear Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh's exposition on interbeing.[58] These ideas deepen our accountability to one another as they illuminate our interdependency and magnify our capacity for empathy.

Recognizing both the limitations and privileged perspective of our own experience, a dialectic that feminist theorist Donna Haraway calls "situated knowledge,"[59] opens another avenue for interreligious relationship—the recovery of epistemological humility as a theological position.[60] Interreligious studies, like gender studies, is learning to embrace ambiguity. Coming to terms with irreducible difference yields not just a debate about conflicting truths, but a dialogical necessity. This inexorable logic makes the field of interreligious studies an urgent requirement.

The directions of these waves press for a different pedagogical model, one that does not treat interreligious programs primarily as a division of religious studies. As with women's studies, having the conversation only with those already predisposed to attend to the relevant issues from a particular perspective is of limited value. Expanding diversity illuminates the need for interreligious literacy in multiple professions and contexts. Yet the experience I can share unfolds in a seminary context, where interreligious studies cultivates the knowledge, attitudes and skills religious leaders need to productively navigate a spiritually diverse world.

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57   Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (repr., 1923; New York: Touchstone, 1971); and Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Berlin: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1981), 114, 142–43, 152, 185, 199.

58   Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987).

59   Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575–99.

60   See James L. Heft, Reuven Firestone, and Omid Safi, eds., *Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility among Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

3 Part 2: Interreligious Studies at Chicago Theological Seminary: Institutional Transformation in Motion

3.1 *Background*

Over thirty years ago, Hebrew Bible scholar André LaCocque instituted a Center for Jewish and Christian Studies at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS),[61] convinced that Christians could not understand their faith without understanding the Judaisms out of which it grew. The Center was comprised primarily of a doctoral program and related academic conferences, but the commitment embedded itself in the institution. Chicago Theological Seminary was among the first Christian seminaries to emphasize Jesus as a Jew, to teach the Hebrew Bible as the people and faith of Israel, to set interreligious understanding into its "Mission and Commitments" statement, and to grapple with the polemical and supersessionary nature of Christian scripture, language, and theology. Adding Islamic Studies to the Center's focus, LaCocque then organized the first conference in the United States about women in Islam with an emerging cadre of Muslima scholars.

The work was also intended, "in recognition of the toll taken by religious divisions in our world," to foster "better understanding and collaboration among religious traditions, paying particular attention to cooperation among Christianity, Judaism, and Islam toward the end of realizing the aims of the prophetic traditions."[62]

These goals formed the core of the institution's stake in interreligious education: to prepare religious leaders/teachers who better understand their own religious identity, and who build bridges across religious difference to effect positive social transformation. In many ways the project typified a second-wave phenomenon, making space for difference with only rudimentary theoretical tools to excavate the complexity of Christian history, power, and the contemporary context.

Since that time, CTS endowed a chair in Jewish Studies, hired adjunct or visiting faculty with expertise in diverse traditions, and expanded the Center for Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Studies (JCIS) to include a rich variety of co-curricular and public programs (workshops, lectures, artistic presentations, holiday celebrations, worship, symposia, and social justice projects). The

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61   The Chicago Theological Seminary is affiliated with the United Church for Christ, with students, staff, and faculty from diverse religious traditions.

62   "Mission and Commitments," Chicago Theological Seminary, last accessed November 6, 2017, www.ctschicago.edu/about/philsophy/. The paragraph was updated in 2017 to include a broader array of lifestances and recognition of Christian privilege.

Center increasingly worked with members of the diverse Chicago community in a variety of partnerships to make its mark on the public square.

While CTS was very supportive of these efforts, the projects were often too dependent on the initiative of a few individuals. Broader institutional buy-in for interreligious studies unfolded during the seminary's strategic planning process. We began to "audit" various internal structures—calendar, chapel, the language of our program areas and mission statement, etc.—to challenge Christian privilege and name its particularity. For example, guidelines for chapel leaders were revised to encourage facilitators to identify their religious particularity (leading also to greater recognition of intragroup diversity), and to be sensitive to the potential presence of people who stand outside the tradition. Leaders are *not* told to seek the lowest common denominator; spiritual hospitality does not mean erasure of identity. During convocations and commencements we try to express the diverse voices of our community and find more inclusive language, without diminishing the clarity of particular expressions. Achievement of these goals remains uneven, however, and it is still "chapel"— a normatively Christian gathering.

Chicago Theological Seminary established a requirement for advanced-level coursework in a religious tradition other than one's own, expanded course offerings, and introduced a master's degree in Interreligious Engagement as well as concentrations for existing degree programs. In an effort to avoid the structural biases of Christian institutions, the degree was designed to be customizable.

Beginning in 2014, we admitted as part of our incoming class a multifaith cohort committed to sustained conversation and collective work, exploring the intersections of theological education, interreligious engagement, social justice, and sustainability. The three-year project, entitled ECOmmunity, crystallized after faculty addressed two substantive issues in our interreligious efforts. First, the enterprise is too theoretical if there is insufficient religious diversity within the institution. Second, although there had frequently been a few non-Christians studying at CTS, the isolated nature of their experience meant that they had to do all the work of adaptation (of Christian language, culture, curriculum). We needed a student cohort of mutual support, one with enough heft to help transform the institution. We subsequently recruited several talented groups of Christian, Muslim, Hindu, secular humanist, and transreligious individuals, with differing racial, national, gender, sexual, and class identities, and representing some range along the religiously progressive-conservative spectrum.

Incremental change generally reveals its limitations, however. Although we prepared one masters-level program to foster religious diversity without the

vestiges of Christian normativity that generally inhabit theological degrees, many of our non-Christian students need the MDiv or traditional MA for their professional pursuits. For now, we are merely tweaking the other programs, relying too much on the initiative of students and advisors to navigate a way through with petitions for alternative requirements. Also, each lifestance that is new to our community challenges our capacity to provide adequate learning inside that tradition, and to responsibly integrate it within our broader curriculum and culture.

Within these institutional constraints, and still buffeted by all the tidal forces at work, in recent years our pedagogy of interreligious studies and engagement has developed in ways that reflect the third and fourth waves. As we reimagine how this work unfolds at CTS and beyond, JCIS and ECOmmunity have been absorbed by a new enterprise, the InterReligious Institute, that is more fully integrated throughout the institution. Below, I discuss three elements—coformation, complexity, and intersectionality—that have shaped our growth through this ongoing process.

3.2 *"Coformation"*

Advantages of theological education in a religiously diverse setting are manifold: Students become more conscious of their own religious particularity and more adept at narrating their journey within it, gaining perspective to view their tradition from outside as well as within. Utilizing each tradition's capacity for self-critique and development, students refine their ideas and identities through the sharpening lens of encounter. Their agency is magnified by relationship with one another. They come to know other ways of being and experience their limits not only as boundaries but as meeting places.[63] They recognize how their beliefs take shape in a complex, intersubjective, multifaith and nonfaith world.

The ECOmmunity cohort began as an exercise in coformation,[64] growing from consciousness of our intersubjectivity and informed by the teaching

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63 See Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 114–38.

64 Coformation theory emerges out of therapeutic and sociological contexts, such as the work of Bette Katsekas, "Holistic Interpersonal Mindfulness: Activities and Application of Coformation Theory," *Journal of Clinical Activities, Assignments and Handouts in Psychotherapy Practice* 2, no. 3 (2002): 1–12; Jules Falquet, "La règle du jeu. Repenser la coformation des rapports sociaux d sexe, de class et de 'race,'" in Elsa Dorlin, ed., *Sexe, race et classe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), pp. 177–97. Jennifer Peace utilizes the term in interreligious engagement, "Coformation Through Interreligious Learning,"

philosophy of Paulo Freire: we educate one another, in communion, in the context of living in this world.[65] Coformation unfolds in sharing personal stories as well as grappling together with the challenges and opportunities of seminary education. The process asks students to be vulnerable to one another, to trust that the tensions will yield new insights, and that the journey together through the wilderness will enable them to live more fully into their religious/philosophical commitments and their human potential. "The lived experience of on-the-ground, co-inhabited cultural diversity has functioned as a fluid, omnipresent, alternative and global social imaginary always-in-the-making."[66]

Students work to cultivate common ground, and to respect substantive differences in the ways individuals orient around religion. While celebrated as expressions of the vital, vibrant diversity of human life, differences can also lead to conflict; consequently, students learn to make space for difficult conversations. They practice with each other, participate in courses and programs that model this capacity, and undergo training in conflict transformation. The recent controversy over "safe space" on college campuses unfortunately suggests a binary choice; interreligious studies can present a middle ground of *supported* space for uncomfortable but essential encounters.

Questions of power, privilege, and oppression cannot be excised from our understanding of the ways in which religion impacts people's lives, and how interactions among religions shape history. They inundate the public square, the campus, and the very programs that try to name them. One cohort facilitated a workshop on "Power, Privilege, and Oppression in an Interreligious Context" for our major spring conference. We prod students to explore these issues not only "out there," but also in our own institution, grappling with the asymmetry of resources and representation, competing priorities, and manifold claims of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion. This challenging terrain strengthens the sinews of their lifestance formation.

ECOmmunity's intimate learning cohort can be adapted in numerous ways, such as the interfaith living communities established on several college campuses. "Living in close quarters with those of different faiths can teach students first-hand about different beliefs and values, dietary practices, and ways of

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Colloquy 20, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 24–26,http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy/colloquy-2011-fall.pdf.

65   Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

66   Cinthya Martinez, "The East," in Elisa Faco and Irene Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina and Indigenous Women's Lives* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 27.

practicing and worshipping."[67] This kind of space naturally creates room for difficult conversations, but the requisite attitude and skill set can also be cultivated with other types of experiential learning. Key to coformation is peer-to-peer interaction, developing intersubjective sensitivity, and learning to be accountable to one another.

Coformation unfolds in relationship with the institution as well. While theological education is expected to have significant influence on the spiritual formation of students, the presence of substantial religious diversity also helps to (re)form CTS, cultivating deeper consciousness in course construction, instructional language, food, calendars, sacred space, worship, and every other seminary activity. ECOmmunity students expanded their impact on the institution in their regular interactions with peers and professors, and in creating tools such as an "Interfaith Firsts" video designed to spark conversation at CTS—simultaneously shaping their own identity as interreligious leaders. The impact was not always intentional. In revamping our "Middler Review" process (a self-assessment instrument used in the MDiv program to determine suitability for the profession) to work for non-Christians, we stumbled upon a far more compelling exploration of spiritual formation.

Because there are now students who arrive without any background in Christianity, faculty members are having to readjust how certain subjects are taught. One professor fielded the question "Who is Paul?" on the first day of her "History of Christian Thought" course. Although she recognized that answering such a basic question on a key Christian figure would likely benefit some Christian students as well (who would not dare to ask the question), the experience highlighted new pedagogical challenges in teaching graduate students from an increasingly broad range of backgrounds. Even so, coformation theory insists that we often learn more about or even *become* ourselves as we explain ourselves to others.

Institutional transformation is gradual. Many faculty members, staff, and students have figured out how to navigate a multifaith context of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (reflecting our longer-term efforts), but this does not easily expand to include other faiths and secular traditions, or to acknowledge individuals who do not fit in any box. Students find some courses to be well designed for teaching in an interreligious setting, with much of the previously covert diversity now finding fruitful expression, but other courses still operate

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67   Interfaith Youth Core, "Interfaith Communities in Residence Life," accessed October 13, 2019, https://www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/u4/ResLife.pdf. Macalester, Colgate University, Rollins College, and the University of Southern California offer interfaith communities as part of their Residential Life programs.

as if everyone in the room is Christian. In the latter case, non-Christian students must continually engage in acts of translation to make their learning meaningful, and seek out religiously diverse voices on their own. The shared struggle of students and the seminary over how to catalyze institutional change is also part of our coformation; to achieve maximal impact, interreligious efforts cannot be siloed.

3.3 *Complexity*

Despite the theoretical complexity that has taken hold as interreligious studies becomes an academic field of study, numerous programs and individuals still pursue the work as if sympathetic learning about religious difference constitutes its single objective—as if only the first two waves had washed ashore. Given ongoing tensions emanating from religious diversity, it may seem unwise to complicate the normative value of coexistence that remains an anchor for the field. Yet even such convictions should be problematized as they are pursued. How might a commitment to theological pluralism be a Western or a liberal imposition? How do we maintain the principles that undergird the interreligious project, while recognizing them as situated knowledge rather than objective truths?[68]

Thus, while our core course in interreligious engagement includes multifaith literacy and understanding, dialogue, and peacebuilding skills, it also tries to complicate the narrative based on the conviction that a more sophisticated exploration will yield more resilient progress. Students explore *intra*-group diversity, the politics of representation, theorizing difference, issues of appropriation and ownership, etc. Questions about the "theology/philosophy of religions" are informed by postcolonial and feminist theory, to decenter Christian and Western (and male) experience.

Students interrogate the presumption that "interreligious" means we are dealing with stable and equal definable entities, with established institutions, communities, clergy, deities, and scripture. They recognize issues of power and privilege; intersections of identity around race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion;[69] how our religious narratives impact each other; diverse contexts

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68   See Janet Jakobsen, "Ethics After Pluralism," in Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen, eds., *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 31–58.

69   See Debra Mubashshir Majeed, "Womanism Encounters Islam," in Stacey Floyd-Thomas, ed., *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 38–57; and Laurel Schneider, "What Race is Your Sex?" in Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 142–62.

and modes of engagement;[70] and the impact of religion in the public square.[71] When students undertake study about lifestances other than their own, they must include experiential learning and resist essentializing. They are then required to convey the learning to a peer who stands inside that tradition, discerning what it means to be accountable to one another.

We try to sustain complexity through comparable critical engagement in other courses, such as the deliberately de-essentialized "Living, Breathing Judaisms"; Bible courses that examine hermeneutical lenses and social location in the history of exegesis; and a "Women's Voices: Ruether, Lorde, Plaskow, and Wadud" seminar that explores gender, sexual, and racial justice issues with an interreligious, intersectional lens. These courses are increasingly emblematic of the broader curriculum, from pastoral care to constructive theology, with diverse religious voices.

Community engagement is essential to the field because it illuminates ways to move beyond essentialism or reified tradition toward connection with the fluid, polymorphous, interactive spiritual patterns of human believing, behaving, and belonging. Through biweekly cohort meetings, specialized workshops, co-curricular programs, group projects, and opportunities for students to involve themselves beyond the boundaries of the seminary in structured field education experiences and independent initiatives, ECOmmunity attempted to nurture a sophisticated appreciation for the concrete challenges of interfaith encounter. JCIS served as a living laboratory for students, although we were not always successful in empowering them to develop community partnerships and design/implement programs.

A variety of factors constrain the pursuit of a sophisticated pedagogy—riptides that run counter to the flow of the waves. Since many Christian students come with little experience or understanding of religious difference, for

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70   In addition to the common modes of engagement such as dialogue/study, worship, service-learning, and social justice work, the course explores the critical role of media, arts, cyberspace, family life and campus engagement.

71   See Barbara A. McGraw, "Introduction to America's Sacred Ground," in Barbara A. McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola, eds., *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Spiritual Politics on America's Sacred Ground* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 1–26; David Hollinger, "Religious Ideas: Should They Be Critically Engaged or Given a Pass?" *Representations* 101 (Winter 2008): 144–54; and Eboo Patel, "Religious Pluralism in the Public Square," in Sally Steenland, ed., *Debating the Divine: Religion in 21st Century American Democracy* (Washington DC: Center for American Democracy, 2008), 16–25; available online at Center for American Progress, June 24, 2008, accessed January 10, 2019, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/06/debating_the_divine.html; and Diana Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (December 2007): 743–73.

example, students of other lifestances admit to feeling occasionally exoticized when those who are not in the cohort express sincere but inept interest. In some ways, we must continually start again at the beginning when new students arrive. Limited time constricts the depth of learning, and lack of established metrics to assess the impact of interreligious studies and engagement, in the academy and the public square, all hamper development of best practices. In seminary contexts, limited funds also reduce the capacity for transformation: ECOmmunity materialized only when a grant allowed us to engage a full-time visiting professor in Islamic studies. While we make efforts to recognize the full spectrum of lifestances, we can afford to develop expertise and resources in only a few, unfortunately often perpetuating bias toward the "Abrahamic" religions.

3.4   *Intersectionality*

The developing pedagogy of interreligious studies at CTS is designed to nurture the ecology of our commitments to counter systemic racism, sexism, heteronormativity, poverty, environmental destruction, religious discrimination, and other oppressions. In response, ECOmmunity was born to operate at the intersections of theological education, interreligious engagement, social justice, and sustainability. Unpacking the last of these items begins to reveal their interdependence.

The ecological component is significant, given our move to a "Gold" LEED-certified building, alongside a growing interest in lifestance responses to environmental crises and creation care. We understand sustainability, however, both as an environmental concern and an organismic goal for human communities. We embrace the fundamental conviction that diversity is more sustainable and life-producing than monoculture, and affirm its theistic translation: *unity in Heaven is manifest through diversity on earth*.

Decentering Christian experience in theological education dovetails with decentering human experience on the planet, and our intersectional approach to human community parallels interactions within ecosystems. Nurturing this type of deep ecological consciousness, ECOmmunity focused on interdependent relationships: the distinct backgrounds and gifts of cohort members, diverse aspects of the project, different centers and programs of CTS, synergetic relationship with many institutions and groups whose objectives overlap with our own—all of these form the connective tissue that holds the social body together and fashions stronger communities.

A social justice pedagogy is not merely appropriate in the progressive, politically engaged context of CTS; it is fundamental to interreligious studies' normative claims of cooperation and appreciation. In the wave of "diversity," the

multiplicity and dynamism of identity was increasingly recognized; we all bear notions of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, etc. in shifting balances and contexts. In the current of "intersubjectivity," it becomes evident that efforts to challenge discrimination and resolve conflict can be successful only if we engage the intersectionality of identities and oppressions. More than embodied solidarity or collective agency, we recognize our immutable interconnection. We also recognize the unique ways in which individual identities combine in our social context: just as a "woman" has historically been viewed differently depending on her skin color, so too are religious experiences often different depending on other factors of identity. Theory is tested repeatedly over against the singular lives of a diverse student body as we become accountable to each other's story, still being written.

Interreligious studies at CTS sets religion at these crossroads without claiming primacy. We require all Master of Divinity students to take a course called "Living into our Commitments and Creating Social Change." The course explores critical discourses around race, gender, sexuality, class, and religion so that we develop a shared language—making religious difference an integral part of students' thinking about human community and contesting the siloing of interreligious engagement. Conversely, courses that emphasize interreligious learning must reckon with all the other vehicles of difference at the intersection, both in the syllabus and in the classroom.

Intersectionality is also a focus in applied contexts. For example, JCIS put substantial energy into two national conferences sponsored by CTS that were ostensibly about race, "Selma at 50: Still Marching" and "Mapping a Movement." Integration of voices from multiple faith traditions brought vital perspective to the work, directed attention to the ways in which each social issue touches upon others, and enhanced conference participants' networking power for making change.

Despite these efforts, and despite broad support for the interreligious project, it is difficult to eradicate tensions around the scarcity of resources. Competing priorities around gender, race, sexuality, class, and religion vie for time, people, money, and attention. Thus the InterReligious Institute (IRI) is designed to be profoundly intersectional and interdisciplinary, drawing together the worlds of activism and the academy, theological education and other fields/professions, and our diverse aspects of identity. It also moves beyond the "Abrahamic" traditions. More closely integrated in the workings of the seminary, the project is building strong structures for deliberation and collective leadership.

The IRI seeks to operate on three platforms. InterThink develops metrics and disseminates best practices in interfaith and intersectional community

efforts. InterFace implements leadership training for individuals in diverse fields that require interreligious and other multicultural skills. InterChange is the seminary's living laboratory for creative pedagogies and public programs directed at social transformation. Chicago Theological Seminary hopes to pour much of what it has learned along the way into this new mold.

Do these paths have broader implications for Interreligious Studies beyond the parameters of CTS? Thomas Tweed, in his 2008 book *Crossing and Dwelling*, speaks of "itineraries" as a metaphor for theories, playing with the term's semantic range. An itinerary is a proposed route, but it is also the embodied journey along that route and an account of the travels told from a particular position.[72] The discussion of pedagogy as it is evolving at CTS is an itinerary: while delineating one perspective that unfolds within a single context, it also offers ideas to explore, essentials to pack, cautions for the road, and snapshots for comparison as fellow travelers join in documenting the developing pedagogy of interreligious studies.

Returning to the metaphorical universe of waves, what can we say about the currents of interreligious studies, given that people and institutions find themselves in different parts of the sea? Because the work at CTS grew out of broader social forces and disciplinary developments, many elements appear to be germane across contexts. Of course, each effort finds its own starting point along the shore and wades into the waters in its own way. None of the waves have completed their work, even as the sea continues to generate new ones. While it is difficult to establish fixed standards and goals for the field of interreligious studies and engagement, we can help each other ask the right questions. The self-critical capacities of most lifestances and the academy have driven the tidal forces that carried us along through the waves of equality, difference, diversity, and intersubjectivity—and they will continue to press forward toward new horizons.

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72   Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) also attempts to redress the tendency to describe lifestances as static and independent.

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God's Mercy is Broader than This: Theological Sensibilities and Interreligious Theological Education

Timur Yuskaev

Abstract

Why and how does interreligious theological education matter? In this chapter I reflect on such questions through in-the-field experiences of Muslim chaplains trained at Hartford Seminary. In moments of crisis—situations that viscerally encapsulate multitudes of embodied histories and hierarchies of power—chaplains rely on seminary courses that interweave theological, comparative and pastoral threads. The intersectional quality of such coursework is impactful because it is formational: it enables seminary students to hone a more nuanced, deeper sense of the pluralistic spaces they inhabit. Employing William E. Connolly's theory of pluralism, I argue that interreligious theological education matters when it adds depth to the experience and politics of pluralism.

> Each word (each sign) of the text exceeds its boundaries.
> MIKHAIL BAKHTIN[1]

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> A preliminary commitment to deep, multidimensional pluralism is amplified by the experience of belonging to time.
> WILLIAM E. CONNOLLY[2]

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1 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences: Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 161.
2 William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 169.

"She is wearing a scarf!" gasped a volunteer Muslim Sunday school teacher at a detention center for young women. The teacher and de-facto Muslim chaplain had been visiting the facility for months. Many of its inmates, twelve- to eighteen-year-old girls, were Muslim. None of them wore *hijab*: it was against rules that had been set in place because some girls had committed suicide by hanging themselves with their headscarves. Whenever a newcomer wearing a scarf arrived at the institution the staff made sure to enforce the regulation quickly and efficiently. It had always worked. Yet this diminutive fourteen-year-old girl, who looked even younger, was still wearing her scarf many hours, perhaps a full day, after being admitted. "How did they let you do this?" the teacher asked. "Well, you know," she responded, "if I take it off, I'm going to hell."

Many factors influenced what happened next. At the time, the teacher was also a student in Hartford Seminary's Islamic Chaplaincy program, so she approached the situation as a chaplain. "I remember thinking," she told me in an interview, "that I have to address this and have to do this carefully." She knew that she would likely get a chance to speak with the girl in *hijab* only once. Most inmates would stay at the facility briefly before being transferred someplace else. The audience for the chaplain's monthly lessons rotated constantly, and the girls' presence and attention was fleeting. Within minutes the chaplain assessed the situation and decided to hold a class, or rather a conversation, with "three girls"—the institution's entire population of incarcerated Muslims on that particular day. "Let's talk about a concept," she suggested to them, "What do you think about God? What is your relationship with Him?" The discussion "started with mercy, and it [was] not as black and white [as some might think]."[3]

Why—and more importantly *how*—does interreligious theological education matter? What and how do we teach? In fact, what is interreligious and theological about the education our students go through? This chapter reflects on these questions through stories of graduates of one interreligious theological school, Hartford Seminary, where I have been teaching since 2010. I know Hartford Seminary as an extraordinarily welcoming place for religious minority students, particularly Muslims. For example, in 2016, when I was writing this essay, 39 percent of our students were Muslim. Most of our Muslim students are in the Islamic Chaplaincy program, which I happen to direct. Founded in 1999 by Ingrid Mattson, the program is a MDiv equivalent 72-credit hour combination of the MA in Religious Studies and the Graduate Certificate in Islamic Chaplaincy. While preparing to write this essay, I did what I always do: I taught courses ranging from "Muslims in American Religious History" to

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3   Anonymous, interview with author, May 16, 2016.

"Religion and Public Life" and a skills-aimed "Muslim Public Speaking," and a theology-designated course in "Muslim Political Theology in 20th and 21st Centuries"—and I conversed with current students and graduates. Keeping this project in mind, I looked to those conversations for stories and insights that might go into this chapter. In seven cases I scheduled follow-up interviews, and two of these interviews anchor this essay as its case studies.

In this case of the interview that included the story from within the walls of a detention center, described above, my conversation partner and interviewee will remain anonymous. At the time, she was my student, and now she is a chaplain. We agree that confidentiality is imperative in our work—it affects human beings and if we are not careful, such effects might be negative. The second case study is based on a published article, and my interlocutor in this case was Bilal Ansari, a 2011 graduate of the Islamic Chaplaincy program. On September 13, 2015, Ansari posted an online article, "Thug Life Theodicy—A Mustard Seed of Faith: Reflections on the 20th Anniversary of Tupac Shakur's Song 'So Many Tears.'"[4] Ansari and I spoke about that piece in May 2016. At the time, he served as the Dean of Students at Zaytuna College, a Muslim liberal arts college in Berkeley, CA. "Thug Life Theodicy" was one of many examples of the ways in which Ansari serves as both a chaplain and a public intellectual with a voice.

In conversations with my anonymous interlocutor about an incarcerated *hijabi* resister and with Ansari about his "Thug Life Theodicy," I asked them both to talk about what prepared them to respond to each situation the way they did. I discovered that in both cases, as different as they were, each acted on their professional instincts: the teacher conducted her class as a chaplain, and Ansari reflected on Shakur's "So Many Tears" as a chaplain as well. Therefore, I ended up prompting them to reflect on the instincts behind their choices of words and actions. In the back of my mind and expressed through a variety of questions was a search for theology in their actions. Practically speaking, I wanted to trace glimpses of their Hartford Seminary training in their lived theology.

Of course, my interlocutors' theology is broader—and its roots run deeper—than a cursory review of their formal theological curriculum might suggest. Both come from Muslim families: my anonymous interlocutor is female, in her late twenties or early thirties, Arab American, Shi'i, and not yet a parent. Ansari is male, in his early forties, African American, Sunni, and a father of four children. Before and after their careers at Hartford Seminary, both had

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4   Bilal Ansari, "Thug Life Theodicy—A Mustard Seed of Faith: Reflections on the 20th Anniversary of Tupac Shakur's Song 'So Many Tears,'" accessed June 23, 2017, https://ummahwide .com/thug-life-theodicy-a-mustard-seed-of-faith-5bb62c88dfc2#.15vj9wcv9.

multifaceted and extensive professional and educational experiences. My anonymous collaborator had substantial experience as a caseworker at a non-profit serving low-income families; Ansari had worked as a chaplain at the Federal Correctional Institution for women in Danbury, Connecticut, and served as the Muslim chaplain at Williams College in Massachusetts. Both of these chaplains' work reflect broader trends in North American theological education: Ansari wrote "Thug Life Theodicy" while pursing the Doctor of Ministry degree at the Pacific School of Religion, and both he and his younger colleague took courses at Hartford Seminary with faculty who had also been teaching at other institutions.

The gist of my argument in this paper is found in the opening quotes from Bakhtin and Connolly. In my dialogues with the seminary's Muslim students and graduates, I searched for stories that encapsulate what we (they, I, other faculty, our institution) do. I found that their theology—what went into the word "theology" when they spoke it—exceeded the boundaries of what one would ordinarily understand by that term, particularly as it is framed within academic curricula. In moments where their theological training really mattered, what they relied upon went beyond the formal lessons they had learned in courses designated as "Theology." Undeniably, theology courses were crucial: they provided a degree of fluency in the conceptual vocabulary and discursive grammar of their own and other traditions. But what proved to be vital was that Hartford Seminary had helped them to hone their theological sensibilities in ways that resonated with their pastoral work, in their professional settings. To explain this, I begin with Ansari's "Thug Life Theodicy" and then move to the conclusion of the "going to hell" episode. In part, this structure is chronological, as Ansari was a student at the seminary before his anonymous colleague. Their joint trajectories reflect a slice of the institution's history. Finally, after discussing *how* interreligious theological education matters, I offer a reflection on *why* it does. This is where Connolly's notion of deep, multidimensional pluralism comes in. Central in my case studies is a deep, multidimensional, and theology-infused sense of time.

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Ansari's timing was impeccable: he published "Thug Life Theodicy" on September 13, 2015, twenty years to the day after the release of Tupac Shakur's "So Many Tears." That song—a "powerful spiritual hymn," as Ansari described it—presaged Shakur's death by exactly one year.[5] Ansari published his reflection in *Umma Wide*, an online magazine with 1,300 Twitter followers that

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5   Bial Ansari, interview with author, May 18, 2016.

describes itself as "a digital media startup telling stories that transcend the borders of global Muslim communities."[6] *Umma Wide* promised its readers that Ansari's piece would be a "7 min read." (What it did not mention is that seven minutes only allows for a compressed, surface read of the piece.)

"Thug Life Theodicy" is a deep theological reflection delivered in the genre of a cyber sermon. It follows the basic structure of a *khutba*, the Islamic Friday congregational sermon, consisting of two units (first and second *khutbas*, as *khatibs,* Muslim preachers call these units), with a meditative break in between. At the beginning of the first unit there are two scriptural quotes, from the New Testament and the Qur'an, both relating the parable of the mustard seed: "If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed … nothing would be impossible" (Matt. 17:20), and, "We will set up a just balance on the day of resurrection, no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least; and though there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, [yet] will We bring it" (Qur'an 21:47). Ansari concluded the first *khutba* with a prayer on his audience's behalf, inviting them to follow in his step:

> Whether you live in deserted Detroit or Damascus, wait in prison in Philadelphia or Occupied Palestine, or are bomb survivors in Boston or Baghdad, may God hear the prayers of the archetypal Black man clinging on to a "mustard seed of faith," boldly hoping and longing for a better life to come.

Ansari infused the break between the two units with a long quote form "So Many Tears," in which is Shakur's vital appeal and lamentation is evident:

> Is there heaven for a G? Remember me
> So many homies in the cemetery, shed so many tears
> Ahh, I suffered through the years, and shed so many tears
> Lord, I lost so many peers, and shed so many tears

At the end of Ansari's sermon is a supplication, which I will address later. Preceding it is a lesson (*dars*):

> Tupac Amaru Shakur cries out the struggle and misery of a child in a violent environment without family roots. His lack of education leads him to a business dirty and demonic. He was constantly intoxicated, which, in the urban streets, we call "medicated." In this state of mind, he concluded

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6   Ummah Wide, accessed March 20, 2017, https://ummahwide.com.

it was impossible for him to be anything other than a seed; he longed to be laid to rest where he would find peace in the dirt like so many of his peers. Yet this state did not prevent him from repenting and hoping for God's forgiveness, mercy, and ultimate grace. He lived and died on the meaning of his Arabic last name, Shakur, as he did recognize and appreciate the transcendent capacity of a generous giver of grace who he called upon repeatedly as his God and Lord. Although he shed so many tears and failed to live a righteous life, his hope prevailed for a God who would grant him redemption.

The "we" in this quote identifies Ansari's audience: as a skillful preacher, he signals his connection to them by including himself in the collective "we." That "we" is also an indication of Ansari's sense of timing. As he explained to me in an interview, he wrote the piece "for young college-age hearts and minds who are struggling with finding their place, and [for] African Americans and Muslims—those who are going through hard times here and identify with hip-hop as a genre of resistance." By "resistance," Ansari meant Black Lives Matter, a movement that emerged in 2013 with a hashtag, after the murder of Trayvon Martin, an African American teenager, and the subsequent acquittal of his killer. By 2015, spurred by more killings at the hands of law enforcement, of children (Tamir Rice), women (Korryn Gaines), and men (Keith Lamont Scott), Black Lives Matter became a civil rights movement, an Internet-era iteration of James Baldwin's "the fire next time."[7] To Ansari, that time had a particular sense: "There is so much pain, so much apathy within African American community.... So I used [the piece] to give hope to everybody who reads it and [is] going through a thing like that."

How does Ansari's cyber sermon reflect his theological education at Hartford Seminary, the Pacific School of Theology, and beyond? To answer this question, we have to start with the "beyond," which comes across in his instinctual and confident use of the word "redemption," the last word in the sermon's lesson/*dars*: "[Tupac's] hope prevailed for a God who would grant him redemption." Ansari began his studies at Hartford Seminary in 2006 at the age of thirty-five. Before then, his "theological preparation was of a Smörgåsbord type." He was involved in several Muslim networks, and had listened to and studied with many Muslim authorities, including Zaid Shakir and Hamza Yusuf, co-founders of Zaytuna College. His base, however, was within the community of Warith Deen Mohammed, an African American Sunni Muslim movement that grew out of the Nation of Islam of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm x.

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7 See Black Lives Matter, accessed March 21, 2017, http://blacklivesmatter.com.

Before Hartford Seminary, Ansari explained, he had been "blessed to listen to the lectures of Imam Mohammed." In W. D. Mohammed's teachings, the word "redemption" was the shibboleth, the password that reveals how God speaks to African Americans through scripture, the Qur'an and the Bible, as well as through history and nature.[8] Ansari's fluent interweaving of the message of redemption, which he found in the Bible and the Qur'an, comes from the years he spent listening to W. D. Mohammed. Behind this somewhat obvious dynamic, there is a deeper layer: "W. D. Mohammed," Ansari remembered, "was just a modest, humble man who worked and served those he was called to serve." In other words, underpinning and informing W. D. Mohammed's theological articulations was the purpose of serving his community. Ansari recalled that he had sensed this service-oriented nature of his and W. D. Mohammed's theology all along. At Hartford Seminary, he found a formal term and framework for it.

Ansari's first theology course at Hartford Seminary, "Introduction to Islamic Theology," with Timothy Winter, a prominent academic and Muslim intellectual based at the University of Cambridge, UK, took place in fall 2007. The course "was very intellectual," Ansari remembered, and "what was awesome about it was that Winter is an expert on [the thought of Abu Hamid] al-Ghazali," the twelfth-century Muslim jurist-theologian whose influence in Islamic discourses parallels those of Maimonides in Judaism or of Thomas Aquinas in Christianity. Winter guided the students through al-Ghazali's famous text, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. "Then," Ansari recalled, "Winter said that the *Revival* could be read as a pastoral guide." To Ansari, that characterization was an eye-opener. Winter's insight became for him a guide to looking at theology "as a pastoral means to try and preserve the flock."

"Pastoral theology" became Ansari's own shibboleth, the key to his framework of engagement with other courses and, most important, to his work as a chaplain, which he continued to do throughout his years at Hartford Seminary. I asked him what courses had stood out in that respect. Ansari responded that in terms of his work as a chaplain it was the "Islamic Ethics" course taught by Ingrid Mattson, Professor of Islamic Studies and founder of the Islamic Chaplaincy Program that stood out. Ansari had taken the course near the end of the MA part of his program, while preparing to write a thesis that reflected upon "the challenge of leading my flock, Muslim women, mostly African Americans" at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, CT. Mattson's course allowed him to formulate an ethical and pastoral approach to a situation that

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8   See Chapter 3, "Redemption," in Timur R. Yuskaev, *Speaking Qur'an: an American Scripture* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2017).

had arisen, and that other male religious authorities—imams in local mosques who were called upon by the prison's administration—perceived through the lens of jurisprudence.

The case involved a dilemma: incarcerated Muslim women demanded that prison authorities allow them to hold weekly Friday congregational prayers led by an imam. Local imams, while sympathetic to the intent behind this request, responded that, legally speaking, women are not required to attend Friday congregational prayers. They added that they were already taking care of their own flocks and could not come to the prison on Friday afternoons. To Ansari, this response was tone-deaf; it went against the grain of his sense of theologically-infused pastoral care. While aware of juristic intricacies, he decided to volunteer as the imam/chaplain to lead afternoon Friday prayers for the women at Danbury prison. His response was informed by Mattson's course, where he had learned that "ethics is a blend between theology and law, and that's how I was focusing on it and that's how it was helpful: it helped me to come up with an ethical response" to the dilemma.[9]

Winter and Mattson's courses proved to be crucial in Ansari's theological education. The course that informed Ansari's "Thug Theodicy" more directly, however, was "Suffering, Theodicy, and Repentance: Interreligious Readings of Job and Jonah," taught by Yehezkel Landau, Hartford Seminary's first Jewish core faculty member and Director of the Abrahamic Partnership Program.[10] The course resonated, Ansari explained, because he could see parallels with African American experience in Landau's discussions of Jewish theological discourses. Central was the course's "insight into Jewish scholarship, thought, critique—just how much scholarship and work they put in into their theological wrestling," especially, he highlighted, when it comes to "the challenge of theodicy." As Ansari perceived many years later when he felt the call to respond as a Muslim chaplain at the time of Black Lives Matter, theodicy was the challenge of Shakur's "So Many Tears." Beyond Landau's course at Hartford Seminary, what went into Ansari's meditation on theodicy in Shakur's masterpiece

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9   See Bilal Ansari, "The Foundations of Pastoral Care in Islam: Reviving the Pastoral Voice in Islamic Prison Chaplaincy" (MA diss., Hartford Seminary, 2011); Harvey Stark, "Looking for Leadership: Discovering American Islam in the Muslim Chaplaincy" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2015); and Timur Yuskaev and Harvey Stark, "Imams and Chaplains as American Religious Professionals," in Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 47–63.

10   Yehezkel Landau, "Building Abrahamic Partnerships: A Model Interfaith Program at Hartford Seminary," in David A. Roozen and Heidi Hadsell, eds., *Changing the Way Seminaries Teach: Pedagogies for Interfaith Dialogue* (Hartford, MA: Hartford Seminary, 2009), 84–120.

was his study of the thought of Howard Thurman and Judith Butler at the Pacific School of Religion, under the guidance of Dorsey Blake, Ansari's DMin advisor there, and Munir Jiwa, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies and Anthropology at the Graduate Theological Union's Center for Islamic Studies. In between, permeating all of this, was his mostly informal study of Edward Said through conversations with his wife, Colleen Keyes, also a Hartford Seminary graduate.

From Said, Ansari borrowed the insight into the paradoxical power of public intellectuals' out-of-placeness. As a chaplain, he has been cultivating the ability to speak from an "exilic" place, of not being confined to routine, and to everyday senses of place, justice, and politics. One can sense the religious, interreligious, and pastoral dimensions in Ansari's "Thug Life Theodicy." The piece brings readers into a conversation with Abrahamic scriptures and Shakur's sorrowful psalm, and, through this shared ground, it responds to their "pain" and "apathy" and offers hope. Once Ansari's pastoral theology framework is apparent, traces of what he learned in places like Hartford Seminary become somewhat salient. Yet where is the theology in his cyber sermon?

My sense is that it is in Ansari's timing, in his theological "wrestling" with his and his readers' sense of time. Consider, for example, how he utilizes the very medium of his online reflection. His text—especially its meditative break, an excerpt from Shakur's supplication—is judiciously interleaved with links to other texts, from Isaiah 54:17 to "Signs & Symptoms of Suicidal Ideation."[11] These cyber pathways serve to disorder readers' routine sense of time. Visiting those additional, ever-multiplying cyberspaces while listening to Shakur's song becomes impossible to resist: it takes more than the allotted seven minutes to really read Ansari's multilayered text. This accomplishes an effect of a particular type of latency: an ever-present possibility of expansion and deepening of time, from the secular "7 min" to the time of eternity. It becomes pronounced in the cyber sermon's final note, the supplication at the end of the second unit:

> I pray that we today press on, holding tight to the rope of God, in order to live righteous lives despite the difficulties of this temporal life. I pray that we today continue our longing for God's grace despite the misery of life. Dear God, our trust in You is firm and we hope that the archetypal Black

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11   Bible Gateway, Isaiah 54:17 (KJV), accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+54%3A17&version=KJV; and Valley Behavioral Health System, "Signs and Symptoms of Suicidal Ideation," accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.valleybehavioral.com/suicidal-ideation/signs-symptoms-causes.

man has the weight of at least a mustard seed that opens heaven's door to him and those unjustly oppressed.

Sermonizing is a genre of oral communication. A sermon's meanings depend on its sound. That is why, while preparing this chapter, I emailed Ansari with a follow-up question. I wanted to know what word he would emphasize if he had a chance to speak that supplication out loud. I shared with him a hunch: based on the fact that he timed his piece to be released exactly on September 13—*to the day* twenty years after Shakur's "So Many Tears" and nineteen years after his death—and guessed that Ansari would stress the word "today" in the first sentence of his supplication. Tied to this would be other time-bending emphases: "life," "temporal lives," "God's grace," and "mustard seed." "Am I correct?" I asked. Ansari confirmed it: "You are correct with your interpretation and my intention with the word choice of 'today,'" he said, adding, "I meant it like *al-'Asr*."[12]

Ansari's deeply theological response is made even more profound by the fact that his "Thug Life Theodicy" does not directly reference the Qur'anic chapter *al-'Asr*. It is certainly there but as a deep allusion, even more deeply embedded in the text than his cyber links. Undergirding Ansari's sermon is his theological sensibility of time informed by the revelation. The word *'asr* in Qur'an 103 is polyvocal: it is a play on the word "day/afternoon" that also means "time" and "Time," as in a moment, which can be any moment, of ingathering, crystallization of time (pasts, presents, and futures that have or will have passed). Ansari's fluent, instinctual, deeply-ingrained ability to speak from the Qur'anic sense of time is central to his pastoral work. He explained that his use of the phrase "archetypal Black Man" was in "the James Weldon Johnson mode."[13] Yet this "archetypal" sense is also, at the very same time, Qur'anic, attuned to the way the word *insan* ("human") comes across in Qur'an 103, as at once singular and plural, directed at all humanity and at each individual. It is in this sense, connected to Ansari's specific flock, that his pastoral theology comes alive. And this is where Ansari's answer to Shakur and his peers' question, "Is there heaven for a G?" comes from. Ansari's answer, as he spelled out in our interview, is that "our theology allows room for people like Tupac; I think there is room in my theology, *in my pastoral theology* [his emphasis], for those who have been dismissed. I believe that heaven is spacious."

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12 Bilal Ansari, email interview with author, March 22, 2017.

13 See James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (New York: The Viking Press, 1927).

"What is your relationship with Him?" asked the de-facto Muslim chaplain to three incarcerated teenagers, hoping for a reply from the person at the center of that day's controversy, the girl who had refused to take off her scarf. The chaplain knew that their class was only forty-five minutes, and that it might be the only time she would be able to share with them. Through conversation she guided them to a point where they could tell their stories, ask their questions. Eventually, the girl asked, "Can I remove the scarf?" "How did you respond," I inquired. "She was asking me a *fiqhi* (legal/jurisprudential) question," the chaplain explained, but "I approached it from a theological perspective." That approach led her to continue the conversation.

The girl in *hijab* eventually shared that it was her "Muslim boyfriend" who had led her to believe that the repercussion for removing the scarf was "going to hell." She later confided, "You know, I don't understand, how can I shower?" The chaplain recalled telling the young woman, "You are going to run into a lot of people who are going to tell you a lot of things: 'You're not Muslim if you do this or that.' [But] we are given a kind of a gut check: trust enough to know that you can ask for another opinion." That was a pastoral response in many ways. The general contours of the situation were fairly typical—many teenagers in the institution had been "pressured by their boyfriends" to do all kinds of things. Knowing that they had "permission to ask questions" and seek advice from other authorities could help them find the power to break through cycles of abuse. Where does that permission come from? At the end of the class, the chaplain finally gave her answer: "God's mercy is broader than this."

The teacher/chaplain shared this story with me when I asked her to talk about a particular situation in which her Hartford Seminary training came into play. As in Ansari's case, timing was crucial. At the time of her encounter with the *hijabi* rebel she was taking the "Chaplaincy: Models and Methods" course with Lucinda Mosher, director of the seminary's Multifaith Chaplaincy Program. "I would have approached this interaction differently if I didn't have that chaplaincy course," she recalled. "I remember thinking, I have to address this carefully, and I have to bring the other girls, and [we] can't have a one-on-one conversation, and ... how do I interact in a way that doesn't impose?" This technique of instantaneous assessment, she explained, came from Mosher's chaplaincy course.

The next crucial step—the chaplain's decision not to rush into a boilerplate response to a seemingly legalistic question—was informed by another theology course, also taught by Mosher, "Christian-Muslim Encounter: The Theological Dimension." Before she told me about it, however, we spoke about her Muslim theological education before and during her years at Hartford Seminary. Like Ansari and many other students, she had enrolled in the seminary

after having done some serious, albeit often informal, study. While growing up she had attended an Islamic elementary school, but the most important factor was that her parents, who took religious study and exploration very seriously, had home-schooled her all the way through high school. After college, a period in which it seemed to her that there was "a gap in deep thinking about God," she worked "in a nonprofit, as a case manager and then manager of case managers, working with low-income families." Concurrently she spent her "evenings hopping to *khalaqas*, Qur'an study circles." She went to Harford Seminary in part because she had found herself "really seeking more of an academic understanding of religion." The Islamic theology courses she attended at the seminary were useful, she recalled: "They gave me an understanding of the history of Muslim theological thought." Yet, somehow, the comparative theology course with Mosher made the difference in that specific chaplaincy situation.

To find out a bit more about this, I reached out to Mosher, who explained in an email interview that she based her approach on a theological wrestling of sorts, an engagement with theologies of other human beings that stresses "the relation between theology and empathy in action."[14] My hunch is that it was this aspect of the course that proved crucial in the chaplain's disciplined determination to continue the conversation, and in her ability to infuse it, at the right time, with the deeply theological notion of "God's mercy is broader than this."

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What was the role of Hartford Seminary's theological education in the two chaplains' stories? The seminary coursework that made the most tangible impact in both cases, in moments when it really mattered, was intersectional. For Ansari, the Islamic theology course he remembered infused pastoral care into theology. Added to the mix was a course that "blended theology and law" and one in comparative "theological wrestling." His colleague's path was comparable. Unlike Ansari, she did not find her Islamic theology course immediately productive; it had been informative but not formational. Like him, however, the courses she considered most impactful interweaved comparative theological engagement with pastoral care. Of course, in both cases, such interweaving was dialogical. The combination of the three threads—theological, comparative, and pastoral—resonated with both my interviewees because of their own

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14   Lucinda Mosher, email interview with author, March 20, 2017. Mosher's comparative theology course echoes Francis X. Clooney's *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

professional and personal callings. As chaplains in training they gravitated toward courses that stressed the "relation between theology and empathy in action." And, as an institution that trains chaplains, it was natural for Hartford Seminary to offer such courses. Also not coincidental is the fact that two of the faculty members mentioned here, Ingrid Mattson and Lucinda Mosher, were directly involved in shaping the seminary's chaplaincy education. Yet the lessons of these stories, the dynamics within them, are broader than the Hartford Seminary and other theological schools' chaplaincy programs, and because of this, the importance of what we do is also broad.

To explain what I mean by this, it is useful to begin with chaplaincy. Ansari and his anonymous colleague had done chaplaincy-type work prior to their seminary studies. This had shaped their priorities, the agendas that informed what they sought in the courses they took. What they needed were frameworks, terminologies, skills. What they found were courses that honed their personal and latent professional sensibilities and allowed them to respond to tough challenges instinctually, within a blink of time. Similarly, what they thought about God, their "relationship with Him," had been shaped in their pre-seminary lives and study. They had applied to the seminary seeking a more formal theological education. They found theology courses in their own tradition to be essential. Such courses provided them with deeper vocabulary, frameworks, logistics, and familiarity with historical and current precedents— all of which enabled them to function as religious professionals. Yet, as important as the academic aspect was to both chaplains, the "pastoral" fine-tuning is what made all the difference.

As I was mulling over this chapter, I related the story of the chaplain in the juvenile detention facility to one of my colleagues, Benjamin Watts, director of the Black Ministries program at Hartford Seminary. I asked him, "Where is our theological education in that story?" "Well," he said, "it is about moments when we need to live our theology in tight spaces." For chaplains, the need for this is obvious. The stories I have related in this chapter are about two chaplains' ability, refined in part through their study at Hartford Seminary, to infuse deep theology into "tight spaces"—through a word ("today"), or a brief phrase ("God's mercy is broader than this"), or perhaps even through the seemingly minor act of continuing a conversation. This last detail, the learned discipline of continuing conversations, signals an additional side to these stories: comparative theology courses were crucial to both chaplains. The tight spaces they inhabit professionally are tight in the sense of being tough, but they are also tight in the sense of just how densely pluralistic they are. In that sense, they are more condensed versions of the spaces inhabited by most of our students and graduates, not only chaplains.

It is useful to remember here that, like the audiences they addressed in the above episodes, Ansari and his anonymous colleague are complex human beings whose lives and actions "absorb and refract" myriads of histories and, crucially, historical and current hierarchies of power, in which they find themselves as "problematic minorities," human beings marked not just by a degree of marginality but also by a state of liminality—a condition in which individuals associated with a "problematic" minority group find themselves at the center of disciplines and discourses that enforce what is (and is not) "normative."[15]

In the United States, the location I share with my interlocutors, institutional practices of belonging within hierarchies of power have consistently revolved around such liminal groups: African Americans, Native Americans, Catholics, Jews, Arab Americans, Asian Americans, Muslims, and many others, including groups classified and disciplined through concepts of "normative" genders. Particular clusters of such groups have come into the center of attention at specific points in history, always connected with numerous local and global developments, such as the "War on Terror" or the Vietnam War.[16] Therefore, this chapter's (of necessity limited) focus on Muslims, a problematic minority, and a preeminent current post-9/11, highlights deeper and broader, and unavoidably—at least latently—problematic dynamics that absorb and refract the experiences of many other minorities.

This matters for interreligious theological schools because the diversity of students we attempt to cultivate is not flat; it not a mere collection of diverse profiles/imagined identities, but rather represents human beings whose lives are enmeshed in hierarchies of power, including, crucially, systems of racialized class prejudice. Interweaved in this human, embodied history and ongoing, never-ending politics, there are also theologies, or rather theological sensibilities. (Remember the chaplain's question, "What is your relationship with Him?" The emphasis on relationship speaks to sensibilities, not formal theologies.) The pluralistic spaces our students inhabit are multidirectional, in the sense of embodied histories and politics. At the same time, done right, interreligious theological education hones in our students a sense of such pluralistic spaces being *multidimensional* as well. This multidimensional aspect of pluralistic spaces is difficult to express in words; it is best sensed—and a

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15   See, for example, George Yancy, ed., *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

16   See, for example, Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009); and Cathy Schlund-Vials, *Modeling Citizenship: Jewish and Asian American Writing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011). My "absorb and refract" wording at the top of this paragraph is a refraction of a phrase by Moustafa Bayoumi; see Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* 121.

theologically informed work of "empathy in action" is a way to cultivate it. At the end of the day, a place like Hartford Seminary, a graduate school of inter-religious theological education, is not just about imparting academic knowledge, but also honing our students' theological sensibilities, including, crucially, their ability to foster and use in transformative, deeply political ways the sense of belonging to multidimensional time (as in Ansari's "today/*'asr*").

Why does interreligious theological education matter? It matters because of the way it infuses theological sensibilities into tight spaces; because of the way it can make our pluralism, our commitment to, and our work within pluralism, deeper. It matters because without the discipline of honing our theological sensibilities, a "7 min" engagement with a text or a human being may go no deeper than a flat, linear seven minutes—and pluralism might just be a collage or a wrestling arena of shallow/shadow identities. To make pluralism really work we need a sense of "God's mercy is broader than this." To make it sustainable as a social reality, we need educational institutions that hone and inform such sensibilities, and enable their graduates, whatever professional paths they end up pursuing, to express and embody it one crucial, transformative moment at a time.

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CHAPTER 9

An Evangelical/Pentecostal Approach to Interfaith Education for Seminarians and University Students

Tony Richie

Abstract

The focus of this chapter is on innovative efforts to educate Evangelical/Pentecostal seminarians and university students regarding interfaith (i.e. multifaith) understanding, dialogue, and cooperation. Most of these efforts have been conducted at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary (PTS) with related activities at Lee University. Both institutions are located in Cleveland, Tennessee, as educational ministries of the Church of God, which has international offices in Cleveland as well.[1] Additionally, annual academic conferences and publications of the Society for Pentecostal Studies have provided a broader forum for promoting multifaith understanding, dialogue, and cooperation among member institutions with their respective scholars.[2]

The structure of this chapter is threefold. First, I outline the philosophy behind an explicitly Pentecostal pedagogy for teaching on interfaith topics in higher education contexts. Second, I survey the current state of the Christian theology of religions among Pentecostal thinkers and practitioners. The third section recounts specific educational praxis through classroom instruction and guided encounters. I discuss symbiotic concerns and questions as they arise in each section.

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1   The Church of God describes itself as Christian, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, etc. "Beliefs," Church of God, last accessed October 10, 2019, http://www.churchofgod.org/beliefs/church-of-god-is.

2   See the website of The Society for Pentecostal Studies, accessed October 10, 2019, www.sps-usa.org. In my roles as Ecumenical Studies Interest Group Leader (2008–2014) and Liaison for the Society for Pentecostal Studies to the Interfaith Relations Commission of the National Council of Churches, USA (2003 to present) I have facilitated discussions on interfaith theological education.

1   Pedagogical Orientation: Transformational Philosophy of Christian Education on Interfaith Issues

Pentecostals have admittedly had somewhat push-pull/love-hate attitudes toward theological education.[3] Yet Pentecostalism is not inherently anti-intellectual.[4] Pentecostals are not only "people of the Spirit" but also "people of the Book" (viz., the Bible).[5] Pentecostals thus generally recognize the importance of education—though perhaps without completely trusting it.[6] Accordingly, Pentecostals have founded numerous Bible schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries, but they continue to be cautious about the inroads (real or imagined) of arid rationalism. While ambivalence toward education, or even open suspicion, persists, many Pentecostals are not opposed to education in itself, only education that destroys faith or reduces dependence on the Holy Spirit.[7] There is wonderful potential for religious education that is consistent with Pentecostal faith and values while genuinely engaging the life of the mind.[8]

Quite obviously, theological education has a distinctive purpose and shape, and Pentecostal theological education has its own unique nature as well. This section looks at theological education as an environment for interfaith

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3   Among other factors, a keen sense of eschatological urgency lends itself more readily to evangelism than education. Cf. D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought,* Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series 10 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996. Reprint, Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2009), 307–309.

4   Noteworthy is a general populist tendency toward anti-intellectualism in America, influenced in part (e.g., after McCarthyism) by Evangelicalism and Revivalism; see Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (Toronto: Random House, 1962, 1963), 15, 21–22, 47.

5   French L. Arrington, *Christian Doctrine: A Pentecostal Perspective,* 3 vols. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1993), 1: 25.

6   Some suspicion may be in order. For example, R. S. Sugirtharajah, a Sri Lankan theologian educated in India, argues in *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) that Western European intellectual and philosophical resources were recruited to sustain racial biases as part of a colonialist agenda.

7   Lewis F. Wilson, "Bible Institutes, Colleges, Universities," in Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 372–73; cf. Cecil M. Robeck, "Seminaries and Graduate Schools," *The New International Dictionary*, 1045–1050.

8   Richard Mouw is a treasure on the topic of integrating authentic scholarship with devout piety; see *Called to the Life of the Mind: Some Advice for Evangelical Scholars* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014). Many Pentecostals take advantage of educational opportunities in "Pentecostal-friendly" Evangelical institutions, Robeck, "Seminaries and Graduate Schools," 1050.

instruction and activism, beginning with a brief overview of a few basic but important guiding philosophical principles. The works of Pentecostal scholars Jackie David Johns and Cheryl Bridges Johns are helpful for comprehending an intentionally Pentecostal orientation to Christian education.

My personal testimony describes an irregular or uneven journey into theological education. Significantly, during a time of pain and anger in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, an internet chat with an African American Muslim imam inspired me to pursue theological education as a means of reaching a coherent and consistent Christian understanding of religious others and their place in the world of religions. I sensed this imam's intense pain and anger at what he saw as the hijacking of his holy faith, and I began to wrestle with personal biases and presuppositions. Interestingly, my desire to understand religious others drove me deeper into my own Christian faith. Eventually I recognized that interfaith theological education is a remarkable aid in the process of discovering our perceptions of religious others. Subsequently, theological education has become a medium for sharing the ongoing fruits of that journey within my own tradition.

Since Friedrich Schleiermacher, the purpose of theological education has often been described as an effort specific to a particular community with its various needs for nurture and leadership.[9] Post-Enlightenment theological educators created an uneasy tension between theological education as a purely academic exercise and practical vocational training.

This tension frequently expresses itself in one of two ways. First, an emphasis on scholarship to the diminishment or exclusion of pastoral and/or practical ministry can result in the actual or perceived irrelevance of ministry. Second, a focus on performance of pastoral and/or practical ministry apart from sustained scholarship can result in theological inconsistencies and vulnerabilities. In either case, a divorce occurs between church and academy.

Despite perennial tensions between theory and practice, or in relating study to vocation, the value of theological education for ministry appears incontestable. Theological education, when done well, enables and equips ministers and pastors and teachers to be more effective in their Christian walk of faith, as well as helping them serve others through excellence in the thought and praxis of vocational calling. The works of Jackie and Cheryl Johns are helpful here in articulating the transformative aspects of theological education, signaling the emergence of an explicitly Pentecostal educational philosophy for realizing the goals of Pentecostal ministry, spirituality, and theology.

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9   Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1850).

In *The Pedagogy of the Holy Spirit* Jackie Johns conducts an in-depth study of the pedagogical role of the Holy Spirit in the patristic church, with specific recommendations for a contemporary paradigm of Christian education in Pentecostal contexts.[10] The supervisory and participatory role of the Holy Spirit in all Christian education via "the redemptive acts of regeneration and sanctification" is central.[11] Christian education is not merely for informational or vocational (i.e., ministerial) purposes, but aims at ultimate union with God through "behavioral, cognitive, volitional, and spiritual objectives which reflect the process of redemption."[12] Human beings are created in God's image; acts of instruction and learning must be adapted to their abilities and needs as such. The content of Spirit-guided teaching and Spirit-enabled learning includes Scripture, both in terms of information about Jesus Christ and as a means of communion with God—particularly through affective encounter— and the doctrines and practices of the church.[13] The Spirit's internal witness validates Christian teaching and learning in conformity with the criteria of "the Word of God revealed in Christ and through the Scriptures."[14]

Johns insists that the pedagogy of the Holy Spirit "mandates methods of instruction appropriate for life in the Kingdom of God," which bear "the markings of the Spirit's presence" and is to be "considered a means of communion with God," carried out primarily by means of "participation in corporate life with the Spirit."[15] A critical element is an environment of spiritual formation, including openness to the Spirit's gifting and charismatic activities. Johns neatly sums up:

> The pedagogy of the Holy Spirit calls forth an approach to Christian education that takes seriously the historical doctrines, practices, and experiences of the church. It requires fresh awareness that the church is to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit is to be known in powerful manifestations, that the church has been called to be God's contrast society on earth, and that membership in the family of God requires discipline and transforming encounters with God. The pedagogy of the Holy

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10   Jackie David Johns, *The Pedagogy of the Holy Spirit According to Early Christian Tradition* (Cleveland, TN: CPM Press, 2012), 147–153.

11   Johns, *The Pedagogy of the Holy Spirit*, 150. Both Jackie and Cheryl Bridges Johns (see below) understand spiritual formation and transformation against the backdrop of a Wesleyan-Pentecostal theology of regenerating and sanctifying grace.

12   Johns, 150.

13   Johns, 151–52.

14   Johns, 152.

15   Johns, 152.

> Spirit is a pedagogy which actualizes redemption unto God through the Spirit's work in and through individuals.[16]

Possible implications of Jackie Johns' work for the process of theological interfaith education in a Pentecostal institutional setting include the following: (1) An understanding of the Holy Spirit as Teacher affirms the value and guides the implementation of the educational process. (2) Connection with the church's ancient and ongoing legacy establishes helpful parameters. Thus, we can also look at the Church's interreligious history in terms of engagement with other communities at the time of Jesus and beyond. (3) Openness to innovative ideas and instruction enables constructive instruction relevant to the various demands of the present. (4) An acceptance that powerful manifestations of the Spirit can occur in educational settings adds a significant vivifying dynamic. (5) Considering the church as an alternative society, as Johns does, creates opportunities for innovative social applications with appropriate contextual sensitivity. (6) Approaching theological education as a discipline involving moral and spiritual transformation adds a critical ethical dimension to interfaith education and training. (7) Seeing theological education as participating in God's soteriological purpose and having pneumatological power provides an exciting avenue into an explicitly Pentecostal affirmation of interfaith education and vocation. (8) Pedagogy as redemptive actualization reinforces and sustains an approach to interfaith theological education that integrates knowing, being, and doing as individuals in a called and gifted community of Christians coexisting in a world of multiple faiths.

In *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy Among the Oppressed,* Cheryl Bridges Johns argues that Pentecostals employ a powerful catechetical formation that moves beyond the rationalism of typical praxis epistemology.[17] She focuses on the impact of Pentecostalism on marginalized peoples. Given that in today's religiously complex world marginalization is too often descriptive not only of negative economic, gender, or racial and social stratification, but also applies to religious, particularly interreligious, social perceptions and identities, her work has significant applications for my theme.

Cheryl Johns describes Pentecostalism as a movement of *conscientization,* of becoming knowledgeable, aware—that is, conscious—of actual reality. This awareness includes one's own identity, environment, or surroundings, and can lead to transformative social action aimed at "justice, peace, dialogue

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16   Johns, 153.

17   Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed,* Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 2 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, 1998).

and authentic self-giving love."[18] For Pentecostals, Spirit baptism is "the unveiling of a new reality and the realization of an altered consciousness," a mode of awareness that can be described as a "critical consciousness."[19] Pentecostal conscientization therefore issues forth in a Spirit-driven impetus toward transformational social action.[20] A Pentecostal environment conducive to conscientization includes the spiritual-affective and oral dimensions of human interaction, essentially "empowering people to know themselves in a transformative way."[21] The context of Pentecostal conscientization is worship, learning, and service to community, and involves universal participation in a "paradigm of catechesis."[22]

Cheryl Johns defines Pentecostal catechesis in a manner consistent with Pentecostalism's understandings of reality, knowledge, and the meaning of Christian faith and how it is developed. She asserts that Pentecostal catechesis is "the means by which the Pentecostal community becomes aware of God's revelation and responds to this revelation in faithful obedience."[23] Consequently, its goal is to promote lived Christian faith in the community of faith and in the world at large, and the content of such catechesis is a dialectical relationship with experience evaluated by the norms of Scripture. Students are fully active participants working with the teacher under God's initiative; teachers are facilitators of God's actions and presence in the teaching-learning community in the context of worship; while the faith community itself serves a role in the learning setting through liturgical practices of water baptism, communion, testimony, healing rituals, Spirit baptism, and songs and dances.[24] The not inconsequential effects of this catechetical paradigm are clear: "The church retains it prophetic identity, maintaining an ongoing dialectic between itself and the socio-political environment in which it exists. As a unique, confessional community of faith, the environment may be characterized as exhibiting the characteristics of mutuality, dialogue, love, openness and critical reflection."[25]

Clearly, Cheryl Johns' catechetical paradigm has manifold applications for both churches and schools. My focus is more specific: What are some possible implications of her work for the process of theological interfaith education in

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18   C. Johns, 62, 81.
19   C. Johns, 95.
20   C. Johns, 96.
21   C. Johns, 109.
22   C. Johns, 110.
23   C. Johns, 121.
24   C. Johns, 125–29.
25   C. Johns, 130.

a Pentecostal institutional setting? The affective and transformational dynamic, along with the pneumatological and communal context for pedagogical formation noted in Jackie Johns' work are found in Cheryl Johns' work as well. She focuses more on Pentecostalism's impact on and responsibility for marginalized, oppressed peoples. Marginalization and oppression do not result only from economic, gender, racial, or social stratification, but also from diverse religious identities.[26] Theological educators thus need to recognize their responsibility to facilitate reconciliation between religious communities.

Additional dynamics arising out of reflection on Cheryl Johns' work include the following

First, an accent on the prophetic nature of Christian education inspires and effectively enables theological educators to embrace the explosive and provocative nature of interfaith issues. Second, an ongoing dialectic between religious educational institutions and their sociopolitical environment encourages the addressing of complex social issues, such as diversity of religions, from a standpoint of the strength that flows out of authentic religious faith. Third, a confessional community is free to identify unapologetically with and express loyalty toward its own heritage of doctrines and practices without demonizing religious others—thus maintaining a nonporous definition of the religious self via the religious other. Fourth, a confessional community supplies essential attitudinal and praxis-oriented resources for interfaith instruction and interaction through such characteristics as mutuality, dialogue, love, openness, and critical reflection. Finally, the overall centrifugal force of pneumatological, transformational energy propels theological educators, along with their students, beyond the classroom into interfaith engagement in theologically-informed activism with an alert sensitivity to social conditions.

Having articulated a Pentecostal philosophy of education suitable for interfaith instruction and engagement, I suggest that the inherent ethos of Pentecostal theological education is a fertile field for addressing interfaith issues. However, much import resides in the relatively new and still developing understanding of the theology of religions among Pentecostals.

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26   Reinhold Niebuhr observes that "religious diversity remains potentially the most basic source of conflict." *The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and A Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944, 1960), 125.

2   Theological Foundation: The Present State of Christian Theology of Religions from Evangelical/Pentecostal Perspectives

Neither Evangelicalism nor Pentecostalism are monolithic entities; both are characterized by a great deal of diversity. Further, while not completely synonymous, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism are nearly interchangeable terms in many people's minds and they do have a great deal of overlap and are often closely aligned.[27] Together, Evangelicals and Pentecostals represent a significant block of more or less conservative Christians, offsetting rigid, censorious fundamentalist movements with an alternative to liberal, modernist movements. From this perspective, Evangelicals are a moderating entity, but they are nevertheless predominately conservatively-oriented Christians, often perceived as politically right-wing.[28]

However, the so-called "New Evangelicals" have returned to earlier "reformist imperatives," and although not without resistance, are becoming more engaged in a wider range of social issues than traditional Evangelicals, including concerns about cultural Islamophobia.[29] Though there is no clear consensus, some Evangelicals are discovering value in cooperative partnerships across religiously plural lines to battle encroaching secularism and global suffering.[30] Shared concerns for religious liberty at times transcend religious differences. For instance, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission petitioned a court on behalf of a

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27   Evangelicalism is a loosely defined movement usually signifying distinctive commitments to a quadrilateral of conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism, and activism. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Pentecostals mostly agree, but have their own distinct emphases, particularly in pneumatology, charismology, and eschatology. See Vinson Synan, "Evangelicalism," in Burgess and Van Der Maas, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements,* 613–16. Conversely, Pentecostalism has been described as "a more radical wing" of Evangelicalism—albeit at odds with fundamentalism. Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Reshape America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 71, 164.

28   Vinson Synan, "Fundamentalism," in Burgess and Van Der Maas, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements,* 655–58. Cf. Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 5–6, 278, 559.

29   Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals,* 616; cf. 561, 564, 599. A recent issue of *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* was dedicated to discussing Islamophobia, including my article, "A Brief Response to Islamophobia by a Pentecostal Observer," *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* (Fall 2016): 40–41.

30   Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals,* 423, 425, 550, 562.

Muslim group denied the right to build a mosque.[31] These developments are encouraging for those convinced of the positive significance of interreligious education, dialogue, and cooperation.

Evangelicals/Pentecostals have a checkered history of relations with other religions. What is more, attitudes toward religious others varies greatly depending on a range of factors and *a priori* views flowing out of various subgroup dynamics. Early and substantial immigration to the United States, as well as certain eschatological schemas, tended to make for more than usual openness toward Jews (and the State of Israel), but extremist elements, often with fundamentalist features, resisted even this small move toward diversity.[32] To be fair, Evangelicals/Pentecostals rightly object to the unequal status and unjust treatment of women in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, especially in their fundamentalist versions, and to human rights and religious freedom abuses.[33] Certainly some American Evangelicals fear "fringe" groups like the Hare Krishna and Scientologists, and consider world religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, as religious rivals.[34] Overall, Islam has been the major concern for many contemporary Evangelicals and continues to be so, though some exhibit slight signs of increasing openness toward Muslims.

Admittedly, Christian-Muslim history in general has been heavily laden with mutual distrust, fear, and violence.[35] In the aftermath of 9/11, a volatile mix of theological ideas and geopolitical commitments, especially Christian Zionist hostility toward Islam, contributed to American Evangelicals' rampant demonization of Muslims, including American Muslims. While some distinguish between radical Islamist groups, associated with global terrorism, and mainstream Islam as a peaceful religion, many do not, and many of those who do make this distinction often do not take adequate time to articulate the reality of moderate Muslims. A tragic consequence has been an almost

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31   Fitzgerald, 634.

32   Fitzgerald, 58, 80, 112, 144–45, 341. At least in part, ambivalent attitudes toward Jews among mostly conservative Evangelicals are traceable to alignment of Reformed Judaism with liberal politics, 462, 502.

33   To be fair, there is internal debate among various Evangelical and Pentecostal groups regarding the role of women in the home, in church, and in society. However, debates over appropriate roles for women do not imply acceptance of inhumane or unjust treatment of women. See the reference to Grady, note below.

34   Lee J. Grady, *Twenty-Five Tough Questions about Women and the Church: Answers from God's Word that will Set Women Free* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2003), 43–44, 106; Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals,* 222, 461.

35   Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought in One Volume* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2014), 157, 180, 328. There have been positive cultural and philosophical exchanges as well, 194–96.

universally negative view of Muslims.[36] American Evangelicals' default negative perspective of Islam often results in automatic and implacable hostility toward Muslims, including American Muslims.[37]

Some Evangelical leaders, pastors, and educators, however, are working to inform their constituencies about disagreements within Islam itself regarding the role of the religion in peace and violence.[38] The spectrum of Evangelical sentiment toward Muslims is illustrated in the following: Franklin Graham, controversial son of popular evangelist Billy Graham, warns against Islam in the strongest possible terms, suggesting the religion itself is as a whole "wicked," while Richard Cizik, former NAE leader and current New Evangelical activist, worries that some are simply projecting previous fears, and inflammatory rhetoric about the Soviet Union and the "Evil Empire" onto Islam.[39] Perhaps most surprising is that in such a combative climate, Evangelical/Pentecostal theologies of religions have begun to develop and, to an extent, thrive.

Contemporary Evangelical/Pentecostal theologies of religions owe much to Norman Anderson and Stephen Neill.[40] Anderson rejects relativistic pluralism

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36 Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals,* 475–80. It is interesting that conservative Evangelicals, Orthodox Jews, and Muslims are political partners in opposing same-sex marriage, 490. Inconsistencies surface: one of the charges some Evangelicals repeatedly leveled against President Barack Obama was that he had been raised Muslim, 578, 593. During the 2016 presidential campaign Donald Trump played on Evangelicals' fear of Islam by suggesting, and later attempting, a moratorium on Muslims entering the United States. However, though approved at the populist level, leading Evangelical thinkers (e.g., Russell Moore) recognized this as blatant violation of religious liberty, 228.

37 Doubtless racism plays a significant role in Islamophobia in the United States and elsewhere. See Catherine Orsborn, "Standing Shoulder to Shoulder Against Anti-Muslim Bigotry," *Evangelical Interfaith Observer* (Fall 2016): 26–27; Richard McCallum, "Islamophobia: A View from the UK," *Evangelical Interfaith Observer* (Fall 2016): 32–33. However, it is a distracting mistake to equate racism, sexism, and religious prejudice—even though they exist with a great deal of categorical overlap. Tony Richie, "A Pentecostal Take on Islamophobia," *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* (Fall 2016): 40–41. Such related dynamics ought to be considered without collapsing the distinctive nature of religious prejudice itself. Only then can the religious component be adequately addressed.

38 E.g., Jim Denison, "immediately after a jihadist terrorist attack in Manchester, England on May 23, 2017, wrote "Islam: Religion of Violence or Peace?" Denison Forum on Truth in Culture, accessed October 10, 2019, http://assets.denisonforum.org/pdf/Islam%20a%20religion%20of%20violence%20or%20peace_.pdf. Denison acknowledges the complexity of the Koran and of Islamic thought, but distinguishes between "Medina" Muslims, a small minority of violent radicals, and "Mecca" Muslims, mainstream, moderate Muslims dedicated to the peaceful practice of their faith. See also Denison's earlier work, *Radical Islam: What You Need to Know,* Unlocking the Truth Series (Atlanta, GA: Elevation Press, 2011).

39 Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals,* 475.

40 In *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), Harold Netland offers a helpful survey of Evangelical theology of religions. The diverse influence of figures such as John Wesley and C. S. Lewis,

and religious syncretism, insisting on a Christocentric soteriology and evangelistic missiology. He acknowledges, however, that God's Spirit works in some sense in and among those of non-Christian religions, and refuses to assume that all non-Christian devotees are automatically and inevitably damned by definition.[41] Anderson's theology of religions leads him into cautious acceptance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation conducted in mutual respect as a component of ecclesial mission.[42]

Neill is an uncompromising Evangelical but tends to be complex and paradoxical. He holds together strong commitments to ecumenism and evangelism, high Christology, and real respect for religious others.[43] Neill avoids Christian compromise or self-assertion, on the one hand, while celebrating the discovery of Christ among the religions on the other hand.[44] Further, no mere theoretician, Neill models dialogue in direct interaction with Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others.[45] Both Anderson and Neill are "committed to maintaining the tension" between "a high Christology and distinctive Christian soteriology with hopeful openness toward those of other faiths." Neill particularly stresses the mutual benefit and appreciation that comes through dialogical engagement.[46] The examples of Anderson and Neill demonstrate that staunch Evangelical commitment is not incompatible with interfaith theological involvement.

Baptist Charismatic theologian Clark Pinnock has had pivotal influence on contemporary Pentecostal theologies of religions.[47] Admittedly, Pinnock's provocative work has not been without controversy.[48] While maintaining typical Evangelical commitments to high Christology, soteriology, and missiology (viz., evangelism), Pinnock uncharacteristically turns to pneumatology as the rationale for his treatment of the theology of religions.[49] For Pinnock, Jesus

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as well as Karl Barth, are felt too. Cf. Tony Richie, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Religions: Encountering Cornelius Today* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2013), 55–56.

41　Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* rev. ed.(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970, 1984), 16–20, 30–34, 45–55.

42　Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions,* 139–40, 184–91.

43　Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism,* 47.

44　Stephen Neill, *Christianity and Other Faiths: Christian Dialogue with Other Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961, 1970), 4–5, 18–19, 207.

45　Neill, 20, 40, 70, 99, 125, etc.

46　Richie, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Religions,* 54.

47　Clark H. Pinnock, popular among Pentecostals, has a major treatment of theology of religions in Chapter 6 of *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994). See also *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

48　Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism,* 309. Netland commends Pinnock's work but suggests it goes "well beyond" most Evangelicals' comfort zones, 310.

49　Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 188, 194–95, 197.

Christ represents the concrete historical and efficacious manifestation of God's redemptive love, while the Holy Spirit transcends time and space in extending salvific benefits beyond ecclesial borders. In other words, the Spirit of Christ is at work in the wider world, including the religious world, carrying out, at least potentially, God's redemptive purposes. Significantly, Pinnock does not describe non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation, but neither is the Spirit restricted to the Christian church. Pinnock advocates for God's global reach and compassionate concern for the salvation of all peoples, while affirming God's gracious revelation in Jesus Christ as definitive and final.[50]

Pentecostalism's early precedents regarding a Christian theology of religions include Charles Parham and, most notably, J. H. King. Parham, a prominent founding leader in the early stages of the modern Pentecostal revival, offered scattered but suggestive anecdotal and homiletic reflections on non-Christian religions.[51] In essence he advocated "eschatological inclusivism"—a combined commitment to Christological uniqueness and soteriological necessity with measured openness to the potential redemption of non-Christian religious adherents, which is to be ultimately completed in the eschaton.[52] Parham did not engage in formal interreligious dialogue, but his personal relationships included interaction with friends of other faiths, notably a Jewish rabbi.[53]

King was a long-term, highly respected denominational administrator in the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.[54] He was not a systematic theologian and tended to address topics as they came up in his duties as an administrator and preacher. Nevertheless, King had some formal theological training and his writings reveal careful reflection and consistent emphases regarding what we can anachronistically call a Christian theology of religions. Furthermore, his international travels brought him into direct and repeated contact with other religions and their adherents.

King displays a stable orientation to Christology,[55] emphasizing both the historical, temporal Christ of the incarnation and the universal, eternal Christ,

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50   Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 179; *Wideness in God's Mercy,* 13.

51   See Charles F. Parham, *The Sermons of Charles F. Parham* (New York: Garland, 1985), a collection of earlier and separate works by Parham published under the titles *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (1902) and *The Everlasting Gospel* (1919).

52   Tony Richie, "Eschatological Inclusivism: Early Pentecostal Theology of Religions in Charles Fox Parham," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 27, no. 2 (2007): 138–52.

53   Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness,* in *The Sermons of Charles F. Parham,* 103–104.

54   See the denominational website of the IPHC, accessed October 10, 2019, http://iphc.org/.

55   Tony Richie, "Azusa-era Optimism: Bishop J. H. King's Pentecostal Theology of Religions as a Possible Paradigm for Today," in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ed., *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts,* preface by Jürgen Moltmann (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 227–44.

thus rooting redemption in the historic Christ event, but without limiting Christ or redemption to time or place. King's theology of religions relies on a doctrine of the general atonement, the reality and efficacy of general revelation, and the Holy Spirit's progressive work in religious experience.[56] He maintains the uniqueness and superiority of Christianity, while distinguishing institutional Christianity from "the religion of Christ,"[57] which means the pre-incarnational, hidden work of God in all of humanity, which is nevertheless dependent upon Christ and the universal agency of his Spirit.[58] In this vein, King insists that the Book of Jonah provides biblical precedent for ongoing openness to God's redemptive purpose beyond the Judeo-Christian religious tradition.[59] King's concept of the religion of Christ potentially transcends dogmatic, rigid boundaries of religious institutions to open up remarkable avenues for multifaith discussions.

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Amos Yong, and Tony Richie are the primary contributors to the contemporary Pentecostal theology of religions and accompanying interreligious dialogue and cooperation.[60] Kärkkäinen is a prolific Pentecostal theologian with two books focusing on the topic of theology of religions.[61] He identifies the doctrine of the Trinity as the chief distinguishing characteristic of Christian theology, but gives it specific application for a Christian theology of religions. Kärkkäinen's theology of religions represents an ecumenical approach from a Pentecostal perspective. He is sharply critical of the ideology of religious pluralism, particularly objecting to any diminishment of

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56   J. H. King, *From Passover to Pentecost* (1911) (Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press, 1976, fourth ed.), 101; *Christ—God's Love Gift: Selected Writings of J. H. King,* vol. 1 (Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press, 1969), 136.

57   J. H. King, "Today," *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* 9, no. 31 (December 1925): 1, 8.

58   I make a comparison between King's "religion of Christ" and Tillich's "Religion of the Concrete Spirit" in "What Have Pentecostals to Do with the 'Religion of the Concrete Spirit'? Paul Tillich's Theology of Religions in Twenty-First Century Global Renewal Context," in Nimi Wariboko and Amos Yong, eds., *Paul Tillich and Pentecostal Theology: Spiritual Presence and Spiritual Power* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 150.

59   J. H. King, "Jonah's Gourd," *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* 20/29 (November 1936): 1–2.

60   While not concentrating on theology of religions per se, Frank D. Macchia addresses it in a significant fashion, Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 178–90, and Steven M. Studebaker, *From Pentecost to the Triune God: A Pentecostal Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 208–39.

61   Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) and *The Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

the doctrines of the Trinity and of a high Christology, and also to derivative attempts to bypass the question of absolute truth.[62]

For Kärkkäinen, communion, unity, and difference come together in the divine being. The Trinity extends communion through self-revelation to the other, to those who are different, providing the paradigm for human relationships, including for interreligious engagement, with respect for tolerance, and recognition of the blessings and challenges of real differences.[63] As a Pentecostal and ecumenical theologian, Kärkkäinen offers an inviting and positive approach to the Christian theology of religions.

Amos Yong, a Malaysian immigrant to the United States from a Buddhist family prior to their Christian conversion, has several major works on the theology of religions.[64] His is a distinctively Pentecostal theology in which he proposes that the Pentecostal experience produces a unique "pneumatological imagination," or a way of theologizing informed by an experience of and orientation toward the Holy Spirit, which in turn suggests possibilities of the Spirit's presence and influence in the world and in the world's religions.[65] Accordingly, Yong develops a "foundational pneumatology" that supports a pneumatological interpretation of other religions and a "general understanding of divine presence and activity."[66] For Yong, the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the world, even beyond the Church, has implications for alethiology and soteriology. Whatever truth or grace is present in the religions, or among their adherents, can be attributed to the Spirit of Christ, even apart from any explicit epistemological awareness.

Yong highlights the need for discernment in a world of diverse spirits. Christian discernment in the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition includes both divine gifting and human discretion. Criteria for discerning the Holy Spirit from other spirits include the fruit of the Spirit, ethical conduct, and signs of the

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62   Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions,* 354; cf. 113–15. Kärkkäinen stands squarely in the biblical, historic theological tradition, but simultaneously shows keen awareness of the Christological interpretations of other religions, entering into respectful dialogue accordingly. Cf. *Christ and Reconciliation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 210, 236, 381.

63   Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 180–82.

64   E.g., Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003); *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008); and *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way?* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

65   Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s),* 29–31, Chapter 4.

66   Yong, 98, 122–32.

coming Kingdom.[67] Within this theological framework, "the pneumatological imagination derived from the outpouring of the Spirit" enables a relatively impartial, sympathetic, yet critical engagement with the religions.[68] Yong's doctrine of discernment sounds an emphatic Pentecostal note and helps guard its uniquely Christian character. Endeavoring to properly relate Christology and pneumatology, he describes the Holy Spirit as "both universal and particular, both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus the Christ."[69] Although Yong obviously stresses the Spirit's presence in the world and its religions, he does not sacrifice the uniqueness or necessity of Jesus Christ in the process.

Like Kärkkäinen, Yong's theology of religions leads naturally to interreligious dialogue in the context of Christian mission. Dialogue serves the righteousness, peace, and truth inherent in God's Kingdom. Meaningful dialogue is both a "journey of critical self-discovery" and a "faithful Christian discernment of the other."[70] He nonetheless insists that a Pentecostal theology of religions should "invigorate the proclamation of the Christian gospel even as it recognizes the eschatological horizon of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity."[71] Overall, Yong's theology of religions is somewhat paradoxical in nature: it emphasizes pneumatology together with Christology, and interreligious dialogue together with Christian evangelism.

My own work is mostly in continuity with Kärkkäinen and Yong, with more of a Wesleyan-Pentecostal focus and an emphasis on testimony as dialogue.[72] Affirming robust Trinitarian and pneumatological emphases, I stress the importance of *continuity* with early strands of Pentecostal theologies of religions

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67   Yong, 243–55.

68   Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 254.

69   Yong, *Beyond the Impasse,* 21.

70   Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s),* 143. In my experience, Pentecostal theologies of religions and interreligious dialogue exhibit bilateral movement. On the one hand, an inclusive theology of religions inspires and informs dialogue and mutual enrichment occurs. On the other hand, exclusive assumptions tend to dismiss dialogue as at best irrelevant or at worst a compromise of identity and mission. Missiologically, and therefore pedagogically, the focus defaults to apologetics and evangelism and a robust theology of religions is minimized or eliminated.

71   Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s),* 313.

72   See Tony Richie, *Speaking by the Spirit: A Pentecostal Model for Interreligious Dialogue,* Asbury Seminary Series in World Christian Revitalization Movements in Pentecostal/ Charismatic Studies 6 (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2011), and *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Religions: Encountering Cornelius Today* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2013).

(however informal or undeveloped), and of *creativity* in utilizing the Pentecostal practice of testimony as a model for interreligious dialogue. Pentecostals may thus utilize a paradigm for contemporary conversations before God with others. My approach is sectarian and traditional in the sense that it is quite self-consciously Pentecostal, but it is also ecumenical and contemporary in the sense that it incorporates a wide range of insights and practices up to and including the present state of Christian theologies of religions and the practice of multifaith dialogue.

I propose a theology *for* interreligious dialogue undergirded by a theology *of* religions. I argue that the Wesleyan-Pentecostal heritage of pneumatological/prevenient grace is rich with resources for today's theology of religions, while proposing a radical revamping of the Christian mission to integrate evangelism with dialogue.[73] I draw on Anglo-Catholic resources to help in understanding the history of religions even as I insist on a staunch Pentecostal hermeneutic for understanding the nature of religious truth.[74] Further, I find that a conversation with mainstream Protestant theology on pneumatology can be mutually informative because of the Pentecostal affirmation of a public/political theology for interfaith appreciation and respect in the civil realm.[75] My essential assumption is that Pentecostalism contains a legitimate ecumenical impulse that further translates into authentic multifaith involvement.[76] My enduring goal is for a Pentecostal theology of religions that is open to others without compromising its own identity.[77]

Roots in Evangelicalism and early Pentecostalism along with contemporary developments form the content and shape of a Christian theology of religions

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73   Tony Richie, "Mr. Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam," *Asbury Theological Journal* 58, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 79–99; "Revamping Pentecostal Evangelism: Appropriating Walter J. Hollenweger's Radical Proposal," *International Review of Mission,* 96 (July/October 2007): 343–54.

74   Tony Richie, "Hints from Heaven: Can C. S. Lewis Help Evangelicals Hear God in Other Religions?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32, no. 1 (January 2008): 38–55; "Approaching Religious Truth in a Pluralistic World: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 351–69.

75   Tony Richie, "A Politics of Pluralism in American Democracy: Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian Realism as a National Resource in a Post-9/11 World," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 471–92.

76   I describe the bases and implications of this assumption in "Correlating Intra-Christian Relations and Interreligious Realities," in Peter Hocken, Tony Richie, and Christopher A. Stephenson, eds., *Christian Unity and Pentecostal Faith* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, forthcoming), Chapter 15.

77   Tony Richie, "Neither Naïve nor Narrow: A Balanced Approach to Pentecostal Theology of Religions," Harold D. Hunter, ed., *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 15 (2006), last accessed 10 October, 2019, http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj15/richie.html.

from a Pentecostal perspective. This form and content is staunchly Trinitarian, faithfully Christological, robustly pneumatological, and intentionally integrates the ecclesiological, missiological, and dialogical. It readily supplies Evangelical/Pentecostal educators with sufficient material for the work of theological education in the discipline.

3   Application: Interfaith Instruction and Encounter in the Classroom and Beyond

Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim assert that Christianity should be studied as a world religion. If they are correct, and as they acknowledge, this would change the way Christianity is taught and studied.[78] To be more explicit:

> The challenge we wish to bring … is not merely that Christianity is a non-Western religion because historically its origins are in Asia; nor just that non-Western Christianities should be taken more seriously by theologians and scholars of Christianity because Christianity's numerical strength now lies in the Global South. What we argue is that all aspects of Christian studies, including church history, theology, interreligious and societal relations, must be reshaped and revised in light of the nature of Christianity as a world religion.[79]

The authors suggest that studying Christianity in the context of other religions would clarify both its own distinctiveness and its commonality with others, giving Christians an outsider's view of their faith, and overcoming the unfortunate and commonplace historical tendency to neglect or suppress interreligious studies.[80] Nevertheless, they acknowledge that studying Christianity against the backdrop of religious plurality is a complex business, requiring careful balance and contextual abilities.[81] The point I wish to emphasize is that effectively studying and teaching Christianity in today's religiously plural global setting positively requires interreligious studies also.

Two considerations are especially noteworthy for Pentecostal theological education. First, since Pentecostalism's rapid and widespread growth and

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78   Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion: An Introduction* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008, second ed., 2016), 282.

79   Kim and Kim, 286.

80   Kim and Kim, 282–83.

81   Kim and Kim, 283–84.

ardent evangelistic impulse brings it into frequent, and sometimes volatile, encounter with other religions, the need for interfaith theological education is particularly pressing.[82] Second, since Pentecostal perceptions of salvation and spirituality are holistic, encompassing all of life, then life encounters with contemporary religious diversity should be acknowledged and interpreted through the insights of this distinctive worldview.[83] In short, both theological and practical conditions make the development and teaching of a Pentecostal theology of religions expedient. To reiterate, the survey of the discipline above indicates, to my mind, the direction and tone that might best be adopted in such a theology.

It is true that Pentecostals are not generally known for ecumenical, much less multifaith, sensitivity or involvement. There have been, however, significant exceptions to generally closed attitudes through "the ecumenism of the Spirit."[84] Pentecostal theology is traditionally conservative, yet emphasis on "the freedom of the Spirit" distances Pentecostals from rigid fundamentalism, potentially creating a generous space for greater openness to others.[85] For myself, ecumenism and interfaith work have been concomitant and symbiotic. In dialogues with adherents of non-Christian faiths I have realized that non-Christians often view Christians in a monolithic manner that is not representative of actual reality. Accordingly, I have come to a greater appreciation of Christian diversity, and I am able to recognize more diversity among conversation partners from other faiths than I once did.

Consequently, I tend to emphasize insights from my own tradition with appreciation and respect for other Christian traditions, as well as for other religions. I have been aided significantly in increasing attitudinal openness by the remarkably permeable nature of the Pentecostal faith tradition, made possible,

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82   Kim, Kim and Kim, 19; cf. 282, 284.

83   Allen Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology," in David F. Ford with Rachel Muers, eds., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 603.

84   Carmelo Alvarez, "The Ecumenism of the Spirit: Emerging Contemporary Contexts of Mission in Latin America," in Miguel Alvarez, ed., *Reshaping of Mission in Latin America*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary 30 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 47–64.

85   Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology," 605. Like Evangelicals, Pentecostals are committed to the Reformation principle of *solus Christus,* therefore rejecting relativistic pluralism, but Pentecostals are more comfortable with a broader hermeneutic informed by pneumatological explications. David F. Ford, "Evangelical Theology," in Ford with Muers, eds., *The Modern Theologians,* 614–615. See also Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology," 595–97.

at least in part, by the robust integration of pneumatology and eschatology.[86] Here I explicitly reference the Holy Spirit's present, anticipatory work of reflecting and ushering in the eschaton, wherein the entire cosmos conforms to God's righteous reign.[87] This inaugurated eschatology enables an ontological and didactic appropriation of eschatological realities in the present age through the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

Of course, Pentecostal interfaith education and dialogue faces the standard challenges of all Christians. For example, in Asia, Christians are often at pains to distinguish their faith and practice from that of Buddhists or Hindus,[88] while in parts of Africa and the Middle East Christians are often a minority group struggling for equality in a dominant Islamic culture.[89] Perhaps most significantly, different understandings of God can complicate even the best-intentioned efforts by the most committed partners.[90] For instance, Judaism and Christianity disagree on the doctrine of God. Muslims side with the Jews, but charge that the latter have corrupted divine revelation, while Christians stake their identity on the Incarnation, which both Jews and Muslims reject—all of which results in "an intractable theological argument."[91]

Additionally, Pentecostals have a confrontational history involving demonization of religious others.[92] Economic competition, ideological/political quarrels, and xenophobia contribute to encounters of conflict. Complicating matters ever further, Evangelical concern for religious others can come across to their "targets of evangelism" as condescending.[93] Despite all this, Pentecostal missiology nonetheless encourages benevolent, constructive interreligious encounter (Acts 19:9–10).[94]

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86   See Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought,* 348; Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, 2010).

87   Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality.*

88   Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 20, 83, 168, 172, 174.

89   Chan, 28–29, 70.

90   Chan, 44.

91   E. T. Charry, "Judaism," in Dryness and Kärkkäinen, eds., *Global Dictionary of Theology,* 434, 441.

92   Cephas Omenyo, "Renewal, Christian Mission, and Encounter with the Other," in Amos Yong and Clifton Clarke, eds., *Global Renewal, Religious Pluralism, and the Great Commission: Towards a Renewal Theology of Mission and Interreligious Encounter* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2011), 152–53.

93   Charry, "Judaism," 441.

94   Amos Yong and Tony Richie, "Missiology and the Interreligious Encounter," in Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelius Van Der Laan, eds., *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories & Methods* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 245–67.

Ecumenical-interfaith collaborative partnerships are therefore critical for theological education and ministry praxis today, and I am convinced of the viability of interfaith education for the Evangelical/Pentecostal tradition. I profoundly hope that the Evangelical/Pentecostal tradition may offer constructive and positive insights and experiences for mutual benefit and engaging reciprocity. For these reasons and others, I am committed to the introduction and development of interfaith theological education. I have taught this topic at Lee University in special forums and as a guest lecturer, but my focus is on PTS.

David Sang-Ehil Han, Academic Dean at PTS, has taken steps toward including religious plurality in the educational curriculum. In 2012 Han participated in an Association of Theological Schools forum on "Christian Hospitality in a Multi-Faith Society."[95] He subsequently brought the topic to PTS through a conference on "Christian Hospitality and Neighborliness: A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Ministry Paradigm for the Multi-faith Context," an interdisciplinary, institution-wide event which received broad attention. Han has also supported my efforts to introduce interfaith theological education courses and curriculum, beginning with incorporating interreligious themes into existing course formats. A modest beginning of one credit hour courses featuring texts on the Pentecostal theology of religions quickly advanced further.

In 2013 I co-developed and team-taught with Richard Pace, Endorser and Coordinator of Church of God Chaplains Commission, a three-credit hour J term on "Theology of Ministry in the Multi-Faith Context."[96] The course focused on the practical preparation for ministry in multifaith contexts with a Wesleyan-Pentecostal theological foundation. Efforts to integrate this course into the PTS Doctor of Ministry program proved unsuccessful, however; the theological nature of the material was judged too intense for DMin-level work.[97] Since then either Pace or I have taught the course several times in a directed study format.[98]

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95 Sang-Ehil Han, Paul Lewis Metzger, and Terry C. Muck, "Christian Hospitality and Pastoral Practices from an Evangelical Perspective," *Theological Education* 47, no. 1 (2012): 11–31.

96 A "J Term" is a week-long intensive with classroom occurring during either January, June, or July.

97 The DMin or Doctor of Ministry degree is mostly vocational in orientation. It does not require extensive work in theology per se. However, this course was originally designed with an "applied theology" focus.

98 PTS Directed Study is a guided reading course with designated instructor interaction. Admittedly, interfaith theological education may be most effective when it utilizes stratified approaches that allow for practical and theological emphases sensitive to particular course content and projected learning outcomes for a specific student composition.

In 2015 I designed a full course on "Christian Theology of Religions: A Pentecostal Perspective" for PTS' master's program and have been teaching it regularly ever since as a theology elective. This course is a distinctive offering among Pentecostal educational institutions—it does not focus on comparative religions or evangelistic training; rather, it examines Christian theology of religions per se. Here the ecumenical, interfaith, Evangelical, and Pentecostal intersect. In addition to Scripture and historical theology, the course draws on ecumenical and interfaith resources with an Evangelical and Pentecostal orientation.

I have received generally favorable responses from PTS students on the theology of religions course. Bachelor's program religion students at Lee are, if anything, even more engaged. Younger (under forty) students in particular seem to more readily recognize the need for theological education on interfaith issues. They are also more inclined toward inclusive and open attitudes about religious others. Several older (over fifty) students have also been positive, and some have expressed regret that they did not encounter this subject earlier in their educational journey. I acknowledge that since the theology of religions is not required coursework at PTS, those who are unfavorably inclined may simply avoid it. I speculate that making theology of religions a required course might send a stronger message to students regarding its significance and lead to a concomitant increase in appreciation and participation.

In spite of the innovative and, to an extent, controversial, nature of introducing interfaith education at our institution, I have been affirmed and encouraged by my colleagues among the PTS/Lee faculty and administration and denominational leadership. I sense that most understand the contemporary applicability of this work. I sometimes wonder if the *primary urgency* of building healthy relationships with religious others of good will is adequately understood as an essential component of ecclesial mission for today's global context. Yet I am encouraged that in a movement that traditionally (rightly) prioritized evangelism, issues of social ethics and ecumenical and interfaith education and dialogue now appear on our institutional and didactic radar much more so than was once the case.

A still developing aspect of PTS theological education involves personal encounters with those of other faiths. For example, I work with Zaynab Ansari, a Muslim scholar from Tayseer Seminary (Knoxville, TN) through firsthand dialogues in PTS and Tayseer classrooms.[99] After a short presentation we engage in an open conversation. It is necessary to conduct such encounters

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99   See the Tayseer Seminary website, accessed October 10, 2019, http://www.tayseerseminary.org/ustadha-zaynab-ansari/.

circumspectly, however; our constituencies draw sharp lines between dialogue, which is acceptable, and promotion of another religion, which is not. PTS students unanimously favor (by actual class vote) these opportunities for mutual engagement.

Another, more informal, off-campus encounter is a Knoxville initiative known as "A Seat at the Table" (ASATT),[100] an informal monthly gathering of people of differing faiths for dinner and conversation. I do not require attendance at ASATT for my classes but announce the opportunity and invite interested participants. Nevertheless, several of my students (and some faculty members) have been willing to drive nearly an hour and a half from Cleveland to participate on their own time. They have expressed unanimous appreciation for the opportunity to get to know people of other faiths as human beings. (Partners from other faiths, and those from other Christian traditions, always appear pleased at Evangelical/Pentecostal involvement—if, perhaps, a bit surprised!) I am fully convinced that supplementing our class work with personal encounters makes for a more informative, and transformative, educational experience for PTS students.[101]

Finally, interfaith education also works well in congregational contexts. Through a Jewish friend, David Elcott, Taub Professor of Practice in Public Service and Leadership at New York University, my congregation, New Harvest Church of God (Knoxville, TN), became involved in an extended (2013–2015) study called "The Religion and Civics Project."[102] In this program we studied religious freedom, civil discourse, and democracy, especially interfaith intersections. The project utilized a combination of written surveys and congregational discussion forums to devise and field-test a teaching aid, which included a pedagogical video and other materials.

Interestingly, data results tended to debunk presuppositions and break down stereotypes, and thus contributed to constructing an optimistic framework for civil engagement by religious groups across a broad spectrum of ideologies. The process of interfaith education and interaction at the congregational level has had discernible implications for civic policies and practices.

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100   Lesli Bales-Sherrod, "Strangers of Differing Faiths Take a Seat at the Table and Leave as Friends," *Knoxville News Sentinel,* July 22, 1916, accessed October 12, 2019, http://archive .knoxnews.com/entertainment/life/strangers-of-differing-faiths-take-a-seat-at-the-table-and-leave-as-friends-3827dec0-9e6d-1074-e053--387954982.html.

101   Furthermore, tendencies toward dehumanizing (or demonizing) others are offset by personal encounters with the other as a human being.

102   See "Religion and Civics Program, NYU Wagner, accessed October 12, 2019, https://wagner .nyu.edu/leadership/religionandcivics.

This experience helped convince me that for interfaith theological education to be maximally effective it must move beyond the academic classroom to include the people sitting in the pews. This inclusiveness not only avoids the rift between church and academy, it actually recruits and trains parishioners in deep Christian discipleship, equipping them for a life of faith in a religiously plural world.

4   Conclusion

Pentecostals' affective, transformational spirituality and theology, coupled with a philosophy of education driven by the same dynamic, is both an engine for interfaith education and an outcome of its pedagogical implementation. culture. Teaching and/or studying the theology of religions potentially enhances self-understanding, elicits deeper discipleship in Christ's service, increases mutual understanding and bridge-building potential with other religions, enables greater prospects for peaceful coexistence among diverse neighbors, and, finally, most of all, it evokes praise toward the Creator and God of all.

Nevertheless, Pentecostal connections with interreligious education and the interfaith movement are at best tenuous. Perennial concerns over relativistic religious pluralism mandate that interfaith education in a Pentecostal seminary or university consistently retain a strong sense of sectarian identity if it is to avoid opposition from within its own rank-and-file constituency. Commitment to one's own faith tradition does not necessarily disqualify one from interfaith relationship-building—provided there is respect for a parallel quality in others. Valued sectarian identity in tandem with respect for the identity of others invites interfaith relationships built on authenticity, transparency, and trust.

Evangelicals, and especially Pentecostals, have too long been invisible and unheard around interfaith education and dialogue tables. In part, we have no one to blame but ourselves—we simply have not sought a place at these tables. That is now changing.

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Religious Self, Religious Other: Coformation as a Model For Interreligious Education

Jennifer Howe Peace

Abstract

What does adequate preparation for the next generation of religious leaders and educators look like, given the complex multireligious context in which graduates will serve? This is the core question addressed in this chapter. To explore the question, I draw on a decade of experience as associate professor of interreligious studies at Andover Newton Theological School where I co-founded CIRCLE (the Center for Interreligious and Communal Leadership Education). The key to instilling interreligious competency is moving from a model of formation to a model of *coformation*. Coformation in this context is a term I coined to describe the model developed at CIRCLE that privileges *learning with* diverse religious communities over *learning about* the religious other. CIRCLE classes, shared between Hebrew College and Andover Newton, were co-designed, co-taught and jointly attended by Jewish and Christian faculty and students. The model detailed here creates a blueprint for both individual and institutional transformation towards an ethos of interreligious understanding.

1 Introduction

One of the enduring insights of my own intellectual formation in the historical and cultural study of religions is that "we know by way of contrast." This building block of knowledge applies not only to concepts and ideas but also to our sense of identity. In other words, "I" can be defined in many ways, but one primary way to define myself is to notice that "I" am not "you." While this simple binary is an essential part of the earliest differentiation each infant makes as he or she begins to make sense of the world, it can create problems when taken to an extreme. Distinguishing between the healthy process of differentiation and meaning-making, versus a pathological commitment to two inviolable categories of *us = good* and *them = evil* is essential. Understanding and dismantling what Jonathan Sacks refers to as "pathological dualism" is at the heart of

my approach to interfaith education in the context of seminary formation.[1] The story of how this central concern might translate into a model for interreligious education is the focus of this chapter.

Between 2008 and 2018 I had the privilege of being at the heart of a remarkable initiative to reimagine seminary education for a multireligious world in my position as founding co-director of the Center for Interreligious and Communal Leadership Education (CIRCLE), a shared initiative between Andover Newton Theological School (ANTS) and Hebrew College (HC). This work began with the providence of proximity, thanks to the nearby location of Hebrew College in 2002 and its rabbinical school, launched in 2003. However, proximity alone does not ensure creative partnership. The interreligious work between the two schools developed over many years of deliberate relationship building, ongoing financial commitments, and the combined intellectual and spiritual resources of our two communities.[2]

Our quest began with a question: What does adequate preparation for the next generation of religious leaders and educators look like, given the complex multireligious contexts in which our graduates will serve? Significantly, the first constituents to pose this question in a serious way were students. Betty Ann Miller, a rabbinical student, began to wonder what, if anything, the formation for ministry process taking place a few hundred yards across the hill at Andover Newton had to do with her own rabbinic training. So she looked for a conversation partner and soon her personal quest became a collective journey. This group of pioneering students, Jewish, Christian, and Unitarian Universalists (UUs), called themselves Journeys on the Hill, or JOTH. Their peer-led conversations about both the practical and theological concerns associated with

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1   Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (New York: Schocken, 2015), 51. "Dualism comes in many forms, not all of them dangerous. There is the Platonic dualism that differentiates sharply between mind and body, the spiritual and the physical. There is the theological dualism that sees two different supernatural forces at work in the universe. There is the moral dualism that sees good and evil as instincts within us between which we must choose. But there is also what I will call *pathological dualism* that sees humanity itself as radically, ontologically divided into the unimpeachably good and the irredeemably bad. You are either one or the other: either one of the saved, the redeemed, the chosen, or a child of Satan, the devil's disciple."

2   In particular, the leadership of founding co-directors Or Rose from Hebrew College and Gregory Mobley from Andover Newton has been essential to the evolution and success of this work. The addition in 2014 of Islamic-scholar-in residence Celene Ibrahim and CIRCLE administrator Soren Hessler allowed the work to expand in new ways. CIRCLE was also supported by the efforts and leadership of key administrators, faculty, board members, and dedicated students at both schools.

formation for religious leadership created the template for what became the CIRCLE fellowship program, a cornerstone of the Center's work. Under the auspices of this joint program, up to twelve CIRCLE fellows are selected through a competitive application process to participate in a yearlong process of interfaith learning and leadership. The fellowship involves both professional development sessions for the whole cohort as well as individual initiatives led by pairs of fellows, designed to increase positive relations across religious lines. While the particular story of how interreligious education became integral to ANTS and HC is perhaps idiosyncratic, the underlying assumptions, attitudes, strategies, and vision that undergird our approach may be instructive for other educators looking to effect institutional change in their own settings.

2   Part 1: From Education to Coformation

In fall 2011, at the beginning of my third year with CIRCLE, I was invited to contribute an article to *Colloquy* magazine, a publication of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the largest accreditor of seminaries in North America. The focus of the issue was "multifaith education initiatives." While crafting a piece to describe the details of our curricular design and articulate what makes it distinctive or new, I realized that ultimately we were not just interested in adding new classes or opportunities for interfaith engagement to an already full schedule of courses and requirements. Rather, more radically, we hoped to influence the conversation and ultimately shift the paradigm about what constitutes adequate seminary education.

Thinking back to my own experiences in both seminary and doctoral studies, I understood that training for ministry and related religious leadership roles was, at its best, a profound formation process. Beyond learning the essentials of history, theology, ethics, the Bible, pastoral care, etc., seminary education is about forming a person. What was new about the model we were developing at CIRCLE was the fundamental assertion that we cannot form our religious leaders and educators in monoreligious isolation. The religious blinders of my own seminary training, revealed through what was explicitly or implicitly left out of the curriculum, gave me the impression that everything I needed to know or be able to do was fully contained in the teachings and traditions of fellow Christians (and, more often than not, white, male, Protestant Christians). In a world where religiously motivated violence and polarizing rhetoric rooted in religious stereotypes dominate the daily news, I am convinced that this model is inadequate for the current realities and demands that our graduates face (if indeed it was ever adequate).

The theory driving CIRCLE's work posits the essential role of learning *with* the "religious other" as we construct a clearer sense of our "religious self." This contrasts with the dominant world religion paradigms where learning *about* the religious other is the norm. The emphasis on religious literacy at the heart of this model is essential, but it is not sufficient. In the opening to my article in *Colloquy* I coined the term "coformation" to signal the new paradigm of the model we were promoting:

> To add the prefix "co" to "formation" and apply it to seminary education is to assert that students are not formed in isolation but in connection to a dynamic web of relationships. Making formation an intentionally inter-faith process reflects the reality that our particular beliefs exist in a larger and complex multireligious (and nonreligious) human community, a community we want to prepare our students to both encounter and en-gage on multiple levels—theological, ethical, and pastoral—as commu-nity organizers, educators, preachers, and citizens.[3]

Beyond the relational skills and civic priorities inherent in this model, the term "coformation" signals another fundamental aspect of this work for me—the inner work that is part of forming the whole person. A key theological insight that underpins my commitment to interfaith education as part of seminary formation is the assertion that interreligious engagement is a *way* of being Christian. Rather than being merely tangential to faithful Christian life, how we understand and treat our religious neighbors is central to it.

In my doctoral training in the Historical and Cultural Study of Religions pro-gram at the Graduate Theological Union, my work was anchored by a focus on Christian spirituality even as I explored similarities and differences across reli-gious traditions. Attention to my own religious life and the spiritual practices that animate it is fundamental to the process of forming my sense of self as a Christian. Coformation is a process of learning alongside religious others, at-tending to both the external and internal demands of coming to know the reli-gious *other* in relation to the religious *self*. Attending to the inner dimensions of one's own spiritual formation, while prioritizing interreligious relationships in the process of training future religious leaders, is an essential part of the equation.

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3 Jennifer Peace, "Coformation Through Interreligious Learning," *Colloquy* 20, no. 1 (2011): 27, accessed October 12, 2019, http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentati ons/colloquy/colloquy-2011-fall.pdf.

One oft-repeated sentiment in CIRCLE's work is that we are interested in helping Jews be better Jews, Christians be better Christians, UUs be better UUs, Muslims be better Muslims, and so on. This is not a model of interreligious education that skirts particularity for the sake of commonality. In fact we would argue that, on the contrary, when the work is done well, students come away with a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own identity even as they may experience some "holy envy" in the face of the practices and commitments of their fellow students from different religions.

Two anecdotes from the early years of our program illustrate this point. The first occurred in the context of our CIRCLE fellowship program, when we were still in the early weeks of the program and the cohort were getting to know each other. As we shared stories, Dan, an articulate rabbinical student, talked about his deep relationship to Judaism and what he appreciates about it. Following his comments Tim, one of the Christian students, said, "Hearing you describe what you love about Judaism makes me want to take the irony out of my voice when I talk about Christianity." Rather than only focusing on critiques of his tradition, Tim was moved to talk about what he finds beautiful in Christianity or, as Tim put it, a "theo-aesthetics" of his faith.

The second illustration of the relationship between personal formation in this process of coformation comes from the classroom. I co-taught a yearlong class on Jewish-Christian relations with my colleague from Hebrew College and CIRCLE co-director, Or Rose. One student, Greg, came into the class with a lot of confidence about his knowledge of the topic. He described himself as an interfaith minister and shared with the class the fact that he had been married for many years to a Jewish woman. Yet after a year of conversation, reflection, and reading, Greg arrived at an unexpected revelation. He had come into the class with a deep appreciation for the similarities across religious traditions, but as he wrote in his final reflection paper:

> What I had yet to realize was that there is even more need to understand and appreciate each other's differences, and in the process, move beyond tolerance, and beyond simply seeking the familiar. Not everything is a commonality, and that is perfectly okay. In fact, it is necessary. In our difference lies our dimensionality, our depth, our richness.

As a result, Greg was inspired to explore his Baptist roots again, with a view to the distinct contours and evolution of his own religious identity. I like to use the analogy of a potluck supper when I talk about interfaith engagement; understanding and owning your particular religious identity is akin to bringing your own dish to the interfaith table.

I often encounter students, like Greg, who come to interfaith work with a default emphasis on sameness. If "sameness" is the entry fee for interreligious relationships, religious commitment and particularity can be seen as antithetical to that goal. While there is typically an altruistic impulse behind this emphasis on sameness, it reveals an implicit assumption that difference is threatening. In my approach to interfaith education, while underscoring our shared humanity and the dignity that affords each of us, an important counterbalance is to dive deep into the irreducible differences that distinguish communities and individuals. An interfaith leader is someone who understands that these differences are to be safeguarded and celebrated rather than erased or flattened.

3   Part II: Interfaith Education and Transformative Learning

Implicit in the idea of coformation is an expectation of change. Genuine learning is a transformative process. Max Stackhouse, former professor of ethics at Andover Newton, once remarked that to truly be a Christian one must be continually open to conversion. When I did fieldwork for part of my doctoral research at a Benedictine abbey, I saw this sentiment reflected in the community's vow of *conversatio morum*, which they interpret as a daily openness to change.[4] This posture of openness coupled with a sense of epistemological humility is essential for learning and essential for the model of interreligious coformation that we are committed to at CIRCLE.

As a professor, I've had the privilege over the years of watching students experience those moments of awe when a genuinely new insight takes hold and they sense that who they were when they came into the class has been altered or impacted in some significant way. On a certain level, the classroom is a protected space where students are free to explore new ideas and follow lines of thought. They can trace the implications of their theories and theologies yet they are spared from the consequences of such thought experiments. Imagining themselves tackling complex interreligious dilemmas from the relative

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4   "The three vows taken by a Benedictine, presented by St. Benedict in Chapter 58 of the *Rule* are: *Stability*, *Conversatio Morum* and *Obedience*. The vows of *Stability* and *Conversatio Morum* are unique to Benedictines. Stability implies not only binding oneself to the physical 'place' and land that is Regina Laudis, but also the personal identification with the spirit and aspirations of the community. *Conversatio Morum*, rooted in the Latin 'conversatio' complements Stability, and asks that the nun be willing 'to change' every day of her life." Abbey of Regina Laudis, "Final Profession of Mother Alma," accessed October 2, 2019, http://abbeyofreginalaudis.org/ceremonies-MotherAlma.html.

safety of the classroom allows students to create mental muscle memory, preparing them for analogous scenarios they may encounter beyond the classroom. To train religious leaders with the confidence, curiosity, and capacity to work across religious lines on complex questions, we need to attend to the explicit, implicit, and null curricula in our seminaries.

"Our experiences change us." In a class I was teaching with Or Rose and Celene Ibrahim on interfaith leadership in the Boston area, Basma, a Muslim student from Egypt who sat in the back row, offered that simple but profound observation. She was talking about her own experiences growing up in a Muslim majority country where all her significant interactions were with fellow Muslims. Coming to the United States with her husband for school, she had myriad new experiences with people from various religious backgrounds. In fact, Basma had become a CIRCLE fellow and had spent the year co-leading a peer group with a Christian (Brethren) student from Andover Newton. The topic was on portrayals of the religious other in scripture and because of the expertise in the peer group they had looked at Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. Basma's comment reminded me of the importance of thinking carefully about the kinds of experiences we create for our students.

Interreligious education is understood in many different ways. In some seminaries in particular it is located squarely under the auspices of comparative theology.[5] In many secular college and university settings, religious literacy is the dominant paradigm.[6] CIRCLE's approach focuses on the broader process of formation for ministry, with an emphasis on the power of "interreligious learning through relationship building." When students are in relationship over time (students spend anywhere from two to six years in degree programs at ANTS or HC) the kinds of questions they ask and the kinds of answers they offer shift and deepen. Knowing that your conversation partner both understands and appreciates you as a person creates the possibility for the kind of trust and vulnerability that can lead to transformative learning.

My own training as an historian of religions influences my approach to interreligious education. History of religions is an interdisciplinary comparative approach to a diverse range of concerns related to how traditions have

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5   See Francis X. Clooney "*The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*" (New York: Continuum, 2010), or Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008).

6   See Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn't* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), or Diane Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

developed, interacted, and impacted both individuals and communities over time. For me, understanding stories from the past offers paradigms and patterns of thought that can provide insights and tools for analyzing current interreligious relations.

Beyond intellectual curiosity, my interest is fueled by an ethical concern that began to form when I was a young college student majoring in South Asian studies. As I read accounts of the partition of India in August 1947 and the massive violence that erupted along the border, my questions centered on how community is created and destroyed. How did those who lived side-by-side before the partition shift from being defined primarily as neighbors to being defined narrowly through the lens of religious identity? What turns a neighbor into an enemy seemingly overnight? How are such breaches repaired? Of course these are not questions confined to history books. They come up again and again when we try to piece together what happened in Rwanda in April 1994 or in Srebrenica in July 1995, to name just two stark and relatively recent examples.

Given both past and contemporary examples of communal violence, particularly where the lines of division are drawn in religious terms, I would argue that cultivating interreligious understanding among our future religious leaders is an ethical imperative. Those of us who identify as members of a religious community have a responsibility to both acknowledge and decry the violence done in the name of the traditions we claim. It is inadequate and perhaps immoral to educate future religious leaders without teaching the skills, encouraging the attitudes, and providing for experiences that will prepare them both to work for peace in the midst of religiously motivated violence and to be "repairers of the breach" in the wake of communal violence.[7] I would argue that one of the central commitments of an interreligious leader is to safeguard the well-being and religious identity of the "other," particularly those from vulnerable religious minorities.[8]

The lines that divide us can be of course drawn in many different ways, and our identities are always more complex than our religious affiliations. This is where interfaith educators can draw on and contribute to scholarship related to the intersectionality of identity, as well as scholarship focused on defining and dismantling systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, homophobia,

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7   The phrase comes from Isaiah 58:12 (NRSV). "And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in."

8   For an exploration of the role of interreligious dialogue in civil society see Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

anti-Semitism, ableism, ageism, and other forms of hatred based on particular identity categories. My own background in feminist studies, coupled with my experiences as a woman working in the male-dominated spheres of academia and religious leadership, have led me to see the parallels between the work of developing a feminist consciousness and the underlying tasks of interfaith education—both are forms of consciousness-raising. Ultimately, raising one's own consciousness cannot be mandated, only encouraged. My task as an educator is to set up the conditions where students feel safe enough and curious enough to accept the invitation to remove their blinders and be changed.

4 Part III: Curriculum Design and Institutional Transformation

Having articulated CIRCLE's vision and some key insights that shape our approach to interfaith education, this section outlines the curricular and co-curricular model that embodies these ideals. A student-led peer group and an ad hoc offering of joint courses and campus events were already underway when I came to Andover Newton in 2008. With the establishment of CIRCLE we began to develop a more strategic long-term vision for how this work could generate wider institutional change. The initial grant proposal to the Henry Luce Foundation framed the goal of our work in broad terms. Beyond adding new resources to develop our interfaith programming, we focused on how the Center might be a catalyst for institutional change—nurturing an ethos of interreligious understanding on both campuses.

Students from ANTS and HC laid the groundwork for the institutional change through their curiosity and entrepreneurial energy, with which they reached out across the two campuses to form a new interreligious student group, Journeys on the Hill (JOTH). The students quickly found allies among the faculty, who began to offer a handful of joint courses. The work continued to develop, gathered momentum, and eventually led to grant applications. With the infusion of significant financial resources in 2008, thanks to the Henry Luce Foundation, CIRCLE was established, creating the essential interinstitutional infrastructure on which the work could be built.

Campus programs, a joint fellowship program, and joint courses were the three primary foci of CIRCLE's work that most impacted and shaped curricular changes. It is worth noting the key features of each of these initiatives before discussing some of the resulting curricular and institutional changes:

4.1 Cross-campus Programming

CIRCLE often describes our two campuses as a "living laboratory" where we can explore various models of interreligious engagement. Campus

programming is the crucible where new ideas are born, some of which find their way into the life of the schools. Broadly speaking, our campus programming typically serves one or more of three goals: jointly acknowledging or celebrating key moments in the liturgical life of our respective traditions; lectures, panels, or conferences that increase religious literacy or interreligious understanding; and activities, events, or programs focused on strengthening or building relations across religious lines. These goals provide a kind of plumb line when we are considering sponsoring new programs.

Beyond the optional programs CIRCLE sponsors, co-sponsors, or supports each year, the annual event with the broadest institutional impact is our Joint Spring Community Day. This event evolved out of an existing practice at ANTS of holding two "community days" each year, in the fall and in the spring. After ANTS invited HC to participate in its joint day of service learning, the event evolved into an important shared tradition planned by CIRCLE fellows with guidance and input from the co-directors. It reflects a significant joint institutional commitment, as both schools close down operations for the day and "require," or at least strongly urge, all students, staff, and faculty to participate in a full day of relationship-building, shared meals, and shared learning. For some on our campuses, this is their first introduction to students from the neighboring school and it often leads to new connections and new commitments that sow the seeds for new initiatives, programs, and fellowship pairs in subsequent years.

Another example of how a singular event can become a shared tradition is the annual CIRCLE-sponsored celebration of *Sukkot*, an autumn Jewish holiday that has a built-in expectation of welcoming the stranger. This creates an authentic opportunity for Andover Newton students to visit Hebrew College early in the semester and get a peek into a particular Jewish practice while sitting in a *Sukkah* and experiencing the hospitality at the heart of this holiday. It has also become a great time to introduce our new CIRCLE fellows and invite students to participate in the range of peer-group opportunities that the fellows lead each year. After doing this together for many years, the annual celebration of *Sukkot* has become an anticipated shared tradition.

A final example illustrates how co-curricular programs can ultimately impact curricular design. This example underscores the importance of cultivating a culture of innovation and entrepreneurial energy to generate a vibrant model of interreligious education. One year, we had a student, Kurt, who was interested in the criminal justice system. He initiated a relationship with a Boston-based organization, Partakers, which organizes volunteers into teams of mentors for incarcerated individuals who are pursuing their GEDs or college

degrees.[9] To ensure the continuity of this collaboration, before graduating, Kurt worked with CIRCLE's co-directors to fold this work into the CIRCLE fellowship program. For many years, the program continued with a rotating set of two students (one from HC and one from ANTS) providing leadership for a "prison justice and ministry peer group." ANTS faculty member Brita Gill-Austern, professor of psychology and pastoral theology, participated in the group one year, and this led Gill-Austern to offer a credit-bearing class on prison justice. This is an example of taking a student-driven initiative and moving it into the curricular heart of the school. While not every program or event becomes a shared tradition or a part of the curriculum, the creative range of programs each year, influenced by the inclinations of students, in conversation with the experience of CIRCLE's co-directors, allows for a dynamic interaction of new ideas that influences the ethos on each campus.

4.2 CIRCLE Fellowship Program

This model of "learning *with* rather than *about*" each other guides our work both within and beyond the classroom, and it has become a key principle in our fellowship program. Over the years the fellowship program has been modified, refined, and altered to suit shifting resources and changes in our model of interreligious work, but it has remained a central and distinct feature of our program since its inception. One of the goals of CIRCLE programming in general is to provide multiple entry points and levels of commitment to honor the range of goals and experiences of our seminary students. On the spectrum of participation, students can attend a single event, take a joint class, join a year-long interfaith peer group, or, at the most time-intensive end of the spectrum, apply to become a CIRCLE fellow.

Two or three students (each from a different religious background) apply to the program as a team. This requires that students have begun the process of relationship building that is at the heart of our model.[10] It also ensures a certain amount of parity, a core value of the work, even in the initial planning stage. We ask students to conceive of a topic of shared concern where their

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9   For an overview of Partakers' "College Behind Bars" mentoring program, accessed October 12, 2019, see http://partakers.org/site/college-behind-bars/.

10   While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into details here, when designing programs that rely on relationship building it is important to consider the power dynamics among students and how racism and other forms of discrimination might disadvantage or even preclude certain students from participation. In our own program I have become increasingly aware of how biases can get in the way of forming the initial partnerships required to apply to become a CIRCLE fellow.

respective traditions inspire, motivate, or equip them in some way to tackle the issue at hand. Fellowship projects over the years have focused on environmental concerns, shared text study, artistic expression (from singing to poetry to multimedia art as a mode of spirituality), prison justice, issues of women's leadership, and LGBTQ issues, to name a few. We have found that this model allows for powerful coformation experiences that radically broaden how students understand their roles and obligations as future religious leaders.

In addition to their leadership around a topic of shared concern, fellows engage as a cohort in a yearlong leadership development program designed by CIRCLE's co-directors. One goal of the regular cohort meetings is to create a sense of community that can extend beyond graduation so that former CIRCLE fellows might become resources and colleagues out in the field. In addition to sharing personal stories and exploring theological questions, these sessions include everything from the nuts and bolts of running a successful interfaith event to strategies and tools for facilitating difficult conversations and an overview of grant-writing.

To expand the model beyond Jewish, Christian, and Unitarian Universalist contexts, we actively built relationships with Muslims in the greater Boston area. To this end, in 2012 I formed an intra-Muslim women's group with the support and partnership of Islamic scholar Celene Ibrahim. We called our group "Third Thursdays," and met together monthly for a year of conversation and relationship-building, focusing on both the needs and resources of the wider Muslim community. Out of these conversations we decided to invite "Muslim community fellows" to apply for our CIRCLE fellowship program. Interest and participation increased each year and eventually laid the groundwork for a historic institutional decision to jointly appoint Celene Ibrahim as our third CIRCLE co-director and Islamic Scholar-in-Residence at HC and ANTS.

In the first years of the fellowship program we provided students with a large annual stipend and met weekly as a cohort. Over the years we've reduced the stipend to a sustainable amount and created endowments to support them, while also cutting back from weekly cohort meetings to monthly sessions. The importance and impact of the innovation and leadership of these fellows cannot be overstated in terms of the impact on the ethos of our campuses over the years, and we are currently in the process of conducting a qualitative study to evaluate the impact of the fellowship program on alums, conducting interviews and sending surveys to what is now more than a hundred former fellows from both HC and ANTS. Initial feedback from fellows speaks to the power of the program and its relevance in their own work as religious leaders. Reflecting on her own changing paradigm for interfaith work influenced by CIRCLE's program, one Muslim fellow commented:

> I think most of my interfaith work was one-directional; people would come to the mosque looking for information on Islam and we would deliver that information. The models of interfaith partnership modeled at CIRCLE are different: often a single issue is engaged from multiple faith perspectives, with each partner learning equally about their own tradition in the process. I've really appreciated this approach as more collaborative and more enriching than the models I've been using.[11]

4.3 *Joint Courses*

As early as the founding of JOTH, students began agitating for shared learning opportunities, not just as co-curricular options, but as credit-bearing courses. They found willing partners on both campuses, particularly Or Rose from Hebrew College and Gregory Mobley from Andover Newton, who provided critical early leadership and taught many joint courses over the years.

As more and more faculty became engaged and inspired by co-teaching, we began to systematize the offerings and create a coherent scope and sequence for students who wanted to leave seminary or rabbinical school with a solid grounding in interreligious leadership. When we considered the courses that had been particularly successful over the years, we noticed they seemed to fall into one of three areas: shared text study, practical or pastoral concerns, and social justice topics. These were areas where joint classes clearly enhanced mutual learning and where there appeared to be a strong sense of mutual motivation. These were also areas where we had complementary faculty expertise on each campus that allowed for joint course design and co-teaching. A final essential ingredient was that these areas appealed to a large number of students from each campus and contributed to their respective degree programs. In addition to these three areas, we began to offer a set of courses focused specifically on understanding the many dimensions of interfaith leadership. Identifying core areas for co-teaching has allowed us to offer a dynamic range of specific courses that speak to student and faculty interests, while providing some consistency and predictability to the kinds of courses we offer.

5 Part IV: Institutionalizing Interfaith Work at Andover Newton

Institutionalization necessarily takes time and involves many stakeholders, including board members, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. While we

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11   Jennifer Peace, "Grant Report: July 1, 2013–June 30, 2014." Unpublished grant report to the Henry Luce Foundation (May 15, 2014), 4.

consciously attend to parity in all our work, progress toward institutional change has necessarily followed distinct if parallel trajectories at Hebrew College and Andover Newton. Because of my own location, I will focus primarily on the shape of this path at Andover Newton.

One of the great success stories of CIRCLE's work toward institutionalization at Andover Newton was the creation of a tenure-track faculty position in Interfaith Studies. It is the first position of its kind in Andover Newton's history and one of a small handful of similar positions across the country. The new position was created with the unanimous approval of both the faculty and the ANTS Board of Trustees in June 2012. After going through the search process as the incumbent candidate, I became the first person to be hired for this position. In 2015, I received tenure and promotion to my current title of Associate Professor of Interfaith Studies. Anchoring the work under the auspices of a tenured faculty member was an important step in establishing its centrality in the academic heart of the school.

With leadership from Dean of Faculty, Sarah Drummond, interfaith education moved from a series of ad hoc courses to the center of our academic programs. Interfaith courses were initially electives, but during a scheduled curriculum revision process we added an expectation that all MDiv students would take at least one class with an interfaith focus. The next step was the creation of a five-course "Certificate in Interfaith Leadership." CIRCLE's co-directors designed the interfaith certificate jointly with the needs and curricular models of both institutions in mind. However, it was an easier adaptation for ANTS because we had previously established a number of certificates in other areas. At HC adding a certificate requires creating a new academic category, which ultimately meant it was never fully implemented as a joint certificate program. We learned important lessons about the challenges of coordinating curricular changes across schools with very distinct educational designs. We applied these lessons when CIRCLE turned its attention to the task of creating parallel interreligious MA programs, a degree with greater "currency" both on our two campuses and in the wider world.

In a major milestone for institutionalization, ANTS and HC both launched their own versions of new master's degree programs in 2015. Andover Newton's Master in Global Interreligious Leadership (MGIL), approved by ATS, is a pioneering program that attracted a diverse group of students to its inaugural class in fall 2015. Andover Newton's version of the degree has a cohort of Muslim, Christian, and UU students, and there is a second cohort of Jewish students in Hebrew College's program. The new MGIL MA degree is described in our report to the Luce Foundation:

The goal of this program is to help current and future communal leaders develop the knowledge and skills to serve effectively in an age of unprecedented interaction among people from different religious and cultural traditions. MGIL addresses an urgent need in the educational formation of emerging and veteran clergy and others serving as religious educators, community organizers, and nonprofit and civic leaders. The program is designed in such a way that students from each school will earn a Master's Degree from Andover Newton or Hebrew College, and a certificate from the other institution. The program can be completed in 18 months at either school, with various components available online.[12]

The MGIL MA programs were built on the foundation of strong relationships fostered through cross-campus events, jointly taught courses, shared faculty development, and inter-institutional structures that allowed for ongoing communication and shared decision-making.

Faculty buy-in, administrative leadership, and curricular and co-curricular programs are all essential ingredients of institutionalizing interreligious understanding, but one added and often overlooked ingredient for this work is physical space. Our work evolved over time through sharing our respective spaces, but a long-standing vision for creating a space specifically dedicated to this work goes back as far as the first grant to the Luce Foundation in 2008. After Nick Carter completed a ten-year term as president of Andover Newton and incoming president Martin Copenhaver chose to live off campus, the historic President's House was no longer needed for housing the college president. The idea of designating the President's House as a dedicated space to create a vibrant center for interreligious living, learning, and research for Jewish, Christian, UU, and Muslim community members on our hilltop campus inspired many, including the Andover Newton board of trustees. In summer 2015 the board voted unanimously to do just that.

"CIRCLE House" has created a much-needed community-building space for Hebrew College, ANTS, and our Muslim partners. It has extended the possibility for new partnerships as community-based organizations doing innovative interfaith and/or Islamic educational work affiliate with us. It offers a natural space to host interreligious events and group meetings. The decision to convert the President's House into a center for interreligious learning also signals an ever-deepening institutional commitment to interreligious work. Perhaps

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12 Celene Ibrahim, and Or Rose. "Annual Grant Report." Unpublished grant report to the Henry Luce Foundation (May 2015), 8.

most importantly, it has created a new shared space on our campuses where students can bump into each other and get to know each other in the kind of relaxed, informal setting that is essential to building genuine friendships across lines of religious difference. The world is in desperate need of more spaces such as these.

As a Christian educator, what is at stake in interfaith education is related to what is at stake for seminary education in general. I see this work as a paradigm shift in our understanding of and relationship to the "religious other." In earlier days (and still in some seminaries today) exposure to the religious other comes primarily through the lens of missionary accounts or classes outlining the tenets of other faiths only as a tool for proselytizing.[13] The approach charted by CIRCLE goes beyond a more neutral religious literacy approach, found in many programs, to a model of transformative learning that results in both better religious leaders and better interreligious leaders.[14] Deep knowledge of one's self in relation to the religious other is no longer only an option but an obligation, if our students are going to responsibly and effectively engage in the pressing needs and current issues of our religiously diverse twenty-first-century context.

After a decade co-directing CIRCLE, I am more convinced than ever that interfaith education is an essential part of seminary formation. The trajectory of CIRCLE's work, from ad hoc student-led programs to a new tenure-track faculty position and an accredited MA in Global Interreligious Leadership, is particular to our context, yet the need for similar innovations and the adoption of interreligious coformation as a key paradigm for seminary education is widely applicable.

My greatest hope is that the work we have done through CIRCLE might serve as a model or source of inspiration for others, even as we learn from other models how to deepen and develop our own work. This interest in being part of a dynamic conversation has led to my work in establishing new platforms where these conversations can take place on the national level. In 2013 I cofounded with Homayra Ziad the Interreligious and Interfaith Studies group as

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13   Auburn Seminary released a study in 2009 on the state of multifaith education in American theological schools. Summarizing the results, the report found that "multifaith education enhances proselytizing" was one of the top three rationales for American seminaries to include classes in this area. Auburn Seminary, Center for Multifaith Education, *Beyond World Religions: The State of Multifaith Education in American Theological Schools,* 2009, accessed October 19, 2019, http://www.auburnseminary.org/seminarystudy.

14   It is interesting to note that the other two rationales Auburn found for "multifaith education" were that it "makes better religious leaders," and that it "strengthens faith."

part of the American Academy of Religions (AAR). Due to the overwhelming positive response and interest in this group at the AAR, I founded the Association for Interreligious and Interfaith Studies (AIIS) in 2017 as a scholarly society dedicated to developing and exploring the potential of this emerging paradigm in the study of religions and its implications for both educational institutions and civic life.

Many of the details of how this work happens falls under the radar of major news outlets or academic journals, yet the ripple effects from one program, one class, one changed heart, one institutional transformation play out every day in countless ways. I attempted to capture a glimpse of these ripples in an annual grant report on our activities to the Henry Luce Foundation:

> I am keenly aware of both the slow pace of making institutional change and the urgent need for transformed leaders working across religious divides. In the two years covered by this report alone, we have seen countless news stories of religious bigotry eclipsing our higher civic values: From the national controversy that erupted in 2010 over the Park 51 Community Center in NYC, to Peter King's anti-Muslim congressional hearings, to the shootings this August in Oak Creek, Wisconsin at a Sikh Gurdwara that left six people dead.

> In each of these moments when fault lines in our country's civic life have been exposed, we have also seen people rise up in acts of courage and vision - people who step into the breach and act as agents for healing. When the Park 51 controversy erupted, a Jew, a born-again Christian, and an atheist teamed up and committed hundreds of hours of time to help counter the false propaganda about the Park 51 (one of whom, Josh Stanton, cofounded CIRCLE's online publications, the Journal of Interreligious Studies and the "State of Formation" blog site).When Congressman Peter King (R-New York) convened hearings on the "extent of the radicalization of American Muslims," Muslim, Jewish, and Christian leaders from the ICPL (Interreligious Center for Public Life, founded by ANTS and HC), joined with others to send a joint letter of concern to elected officials, posted articles condemning the hearings, and convened conversations in their respective communities. In the wake of the killings at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek, students from the summer seminar "Building Interfaith Community and Leadership," which I co-taught with Dianna Eck, responded with letters of condolence, public letters of support, sermons, and solidarity at gatherings in local gurdwaras the week following the attack.

All of these responses confirm my conviction that CIRCLE's work can and does have ripple effects beyond our hilltop. We are creating programming and structures, but most importantly we are nurturing an ethos of understanding that contributes to our collective ability to respond with skill and courage to acts of religious violence. CIRCLE's commitment and that of countless others to interreligious bridge-building is bolstered every time a connection is built, every time ignorance is countered with understanding, every time love and solidarity trump hatred and isolation. We can't predict when the breaches will occur, but we can and must continue to prepare leaders who are equipped for the slow, patient work of repair.[15]

6 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I noted that the interfaith work at Andover Newton and Hebrew College began with a key question: What does adequate preparation for the next generation of religious leaders and educators look like, given the complex multireligious contexts in which our graduates will serve? Over many years of experimentation, reflection, and strategic development our questions have shifted and multiplied. We are no longer asking whether or not the competencies of interreligious leadership are necessary for adequate preparation. Instead our questions focus more on the details of "how" and "what." How can we design a curriculum to move from a model of religious formation to a model of interreligious coformation? How can we integrate interfaith concerns in a curriculum so that they do not remain peripheral or optional? What curriculum designs, educational programs, and pedagogical strategies best serve this work? What does a competent religious leader need to know or do to effectively work with colleagues and community stakeholders across religious lines? These are not questions we can answer alone. The many contributions in this book each help to frame and fill in the details as we collectively confront these pressing questions.[16]

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15   Jennifer Peace, "Final Report on Luce Grant funding from July 2010–June 2012." Unpublished grant report to the Henry Luce Foundation (September 2012) 17–18.

16   In June 2019, Andover Newton Theological School closed its Newton, Massachusetts campus and moved operations to New Haven. Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School no longer houses the CIRCLE program. But the legacy of CIRCLE's work continues in the lives and ministries of those who were impacted by its programs as well as in the ongoing work of the Betty Ann Greenbaum Miller Center for Interreligious Learning and Leadership at Hebrew College.

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A Ministry/*Khilāfa* of Radical Kinship: The Theological Educator and Student as Interreligious Ally

Scott C. Alexander

Abstract

Inspired by the lyrics of Florence + the Machine's riff on the story of the biblical (anti-) heroine Delilah (Judges 13–16), this paper seeks to contribute to the conversation on the nature of the emerging field of interreligious studies through the lens of the struggle to be an interreligious ally. It argues that conversations about the telos/teloi of interreligious studies lie at the heart of broader discussions concerning the shifting orientations of theological education in general in the first few decades of the twenty-first century. After exploring some of the challenges involved in aspiring to be an interreligious ally (specifically the intersectional dynamics around race, gender, and sexual orientation), the paper pursues an original exegesis of Qur'an 2:30–33 as the basis for an exercise in comparative Christian-Muslim theology. It proposes "ministry/*khilāfa* of radical kinship"—especially in the form of becoming an interreligious ally—as one possible paradigm for thinking about the telos of interreligious studies and as a possible organizing principle for emerging interreligious pedagogies.

> It's a different kind of danger
> And the bells are ringing out,
> And I'm calling for my mother
> As I pull the pillars down.
> It's a different kind of danger
> And my feet are spinning around;
> Never knew I was a dancer
> 'til Delilah showed me how
> > Florence + the Machine

1   Introduction

This epigraph is taken from the refrain of an indie rock tune. It's the tune that actually inspired me to write this distinctly personal essay. It focuses on aspects of my own journey as a theological educator deeply engaged in the challenging and rewarding work of interreligious pedagogy in the hope that others may find some elements of my own story relevant to theirs. I'll have more to say about the significance of this song in my concluding remarks. For now, I simply beg your indulgence as I lean into the musical nature of my original inspiration, and employ a musical metaphor—albeit from an entirely different genre—for thinking about the three main sections of this essay.

It opens with a "prelude" in the shape of a personal testimonial. The testimonial is about my aspiration to be an interreligious and intercultural ally; it is about the indispensable nature of this aspiration to my vocation as both a Christian and a theological educator; and it is about some of the dangers and pitfalls of such an aspiration. This prelude is designed to provide the backdrop for two subsequent "movements" and a finale, each of which explores issues that fall within the broader focus of this volume on the praxes of interreligious pedagogy. The first is built around a rather brash ethereal flourish, having to do with the very telos of theological education in a time of tremendous cultural and institutional flux and change. The second movement, significantly more subdued and earthy, has to do with conceptualizing the aspiration to be an ally as a *ministry/*khilāfa *of radical kinship.*[1] It also considers the practical implications of exercising this ministry/*khilāfa* both within and outside the classroom. The finale is a slightly underdeveloped and somewhat atonal attempt to synthesize the registers of the two preceding movements by arguing that one of the central dynamics of the ministerial identity formation of the theological educator and the theology student of the twenty-first century will involve a revolutionary turn toward a full embrace of liminality and the potential for "chaordic" leadership in a *ministry/*khilāfa *of radical kinship*—especially in its interreligious modality.

2   Prelude: Aspiring to be an "Ally"

About five years ago, I was invited to join a "secret group" on Facebook. The group was organized to give LGBTQ Muslims a "safe space" for sharing both the

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1   I borrow this concept of "radical kinship" from the writings of Gregory Boyle, especially in his most recent book, *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

joy and the pain of trying to be, on the one hand, true to themselves, and on the other hand, true to their faith and its tradition of exacting moral uprightness. I hesitated to accept. By conventional standards, I fit neither into the category of "Muslim" nor "LGBTQ." When, for these reasons, I expressed my doubts about joining the group, the Facebook friend who invited me—a South Asian man studying in Europe—assured me that I would be warmly welcomed by the existing members. He made reference to what he knew about my credentials. He pointed out that I had a PhD in Islamic studies and had been teaching in the field for many years. He remarked about the number of Muslim Facebook followers I appeared to have, and said how impressed he was when he read my Facebook bio: "Catholic whose life has been immeasurably blessed by Islam and Muslims." Then he hit me with: "We need *allies* and you're the perfect *ally*." What he didn't know was that when he typed these words into his message window, he not only struck keys on a keyboard, but he also pushed just the right button. I agreed to join.

There was that word again: "ally." I must confess that, beyond the sentimental context of a few favorite WWII movies, it's a word that evokes an ambivalent reaction in me. It's one of those words like "befriend." On the surface, it seductively evokes an ethos of solidarity and relationship building. Just beneath, however, it harbors anywhere from a subtle to a bold resonance of crass self-interest, at times even bordering on the sinister. Yet "ally" is a category into which, for most of my professional life in interreligious and intercultural studies and dialogue, I have either actively striven to be placed, or been blessed to have been reluctantly dragged.

I aspire to be an ally because, as a Christian, it is my sacred duty. Christian discipleship demands love of neighbor—not as cheap sentiment but as costly commitment. My faith teaches that one cannot hope to respond to the call of the Gospel unless one struggles to be in right relationship and moral solidarity with other members of the human family, especially the poor and the oppressed. In my own U.S. American context, and as an economically secure, heterosexual, cisgender male who—to use Baldwin's uniquely apt language—"thinks himself white," this means I must strive to *ally* myself with those who are economically vulnerable, improperly served, individually or culturally misunderstood, stigmatized, minoritized, maligned, and even demonized by the very structures of white capitalist heteronormative "Christian" power and privilege I routinely enjoy.

I also seek to be an ally because I understand this aspiration to be central to the vocation of any theological educator. If, as I will argue below, the telos of theological education in the twenty-first century is to help nurture and sustain generations of transformational spiritual leaders committed to building

communities of radical kinship, then the centrality of the aspiration to be an ally is non-negotiable. For theological educators and students whose social location is, like mine, one of relative power and privilege, there is no way to help orchestrate formative contexts for creative and life-giving ministerial praxis without being intentionally vulnerable and open to intellectual, spiritual, and moral transformation by students, colleagues, and broader publics with subaltern identities and experiences. For theological educators and students who are themselves subalterns, the demands of intersectional personal and professional development in the context of alliances with other subalterns, as well as with allies of privilege, is every bit as non-negotiable.

The many dangers and pitfalls of aspiring to be an ally are fairly well known. They are to be as constantly monitored in an ongoing process of self-reflection, as they are absolutely to be resisted as a basis for either self-congratulation or self-pity. They include the many ways of reinscribing one's own privileged agency at the expense of the agency of the those most affected by injustice: seeing others, for example, as "victims" in need of "help" and perceiving oneself as a "rescuer" or "savior." They include the difficulties of negotiating the psycho-spiritual tensions and ambiguities surrounding distinctions between personal sin and social sin, as one attempts to square the circle of discontinuities between individual identity and accountability, on the one hand, and group identity and accountability, on the other. They also include being perceived, rightly or wrongly, as inauthentic—as an interloper or wannabe who is either insecure in one's identity, deliberately attempting to hide one's true self from oneself and others, or some combination of both.

In my case, this has involved being perceived by various publics as: a "traitor" to Catholicism (or Christianity in general); a traitor to my bleached white immigrant blue-collar roots; a crypto-Muslim; a "good" white guy; a self-satisfied "double-belonger"; and a closeted gay man. Perhaps the most profoundly ironic of all is also the one that is far and away the most painful. It is to be accused of being a crypto-Islamophobe. I am placed in this latter category only very seldomly, and by those who are convinced that the combination of years of study of Islam—including the ability to read the Qur'an and hadith in the original Arabic—together with the fact that I have not converted (i.e., officially declared myself "Muslim") render me a living embodiment of the Western Christian/Orientalist rejection of Islam as an inferior or entirely false religion. I do not see myself at all in this light. Nonetheless, the light in which we see ourselves, and the light in which others see us, frequently and oftentimes sharply differ, with the truth usually lying somewhere along the uncharted spectrum in between. Thus, I am grateful when I am reminded that this is how some perceive me. Despite the fact that it saddens me deeply, I like to think

I understand why people would harbor such profound misgivings about me. And although I continue to have my own serious misgivings about this rare accusation, I nonetheless deeply appreciate the challenge to think about the subtle ways in which my accusers may be right.

For reasons having to do with everything from my own Italian American upbringing in the 1960s and 1970s, to my abiding interest and yet still steep learning curve in U.S. American history (from Jamestown to Trump), to my seventeen years living on Chicago's Southside, among the most pressing, challenging, and exhilarating of "alliances" for me are those into which I have been invited by my Blackamerican sisters and brothers,[2] so many of whom are also Muslims. It is in this context, more than in any other, that I have learned just how pathetic and even comical my aspirations to be an ally can sometimes be. I never cease to be surprised by the depth and extent of my privilege, and the nearly limitless ways I exercise this privilege with what can only be described as blissfully ignorant abandon. I have also come to realize that the very real intellectual, emotional, and spiritual discomfort I experience in this process—all the anxiety, embarrassment, anger, and frustration—is, both in principle and fact, an affront to the cumulative and collective pain of my Blackamerican students, colleagues, friends, and associates. At the same time, however, I am aware that to the degree I cannot live with the built-in "adversities" of aspiring to be an ally, these adversities become formidable obstacles to my efforts, meager as they are. The key to dealing with these adversities, and thus the source of transformative grace in them, lies in the awareness that it is only to the extent that I am willing to own each and every one of my inadequacies

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2   In this usage, I am adopting the apt neologism of Sherman Jackson, who rationalizes its coinage in his stunning theological history of Blackamerican Islam: "On the one hand, to speak simply of 'black Americans' as the counterparts of 'white Americans' is to strengthen the hand of those who wish to deny or hide white privilege. On the other hand, to speak of African Americans is to give short shrift to almost half a millennium of New World history, implying that Blackamericans are African in the same way that Italian Americans or Greek Americans are Italian or Greek. I emphatically recognize, wholly embrace, and celebrate the African origins of Blackamericans. *But in my view, the force of American history has essentially transformed these erstwhile Africans into a new people.* This is especially so with regard to their religious orientation. Of course, I could have opted for the hyphenated convention 'Black-American.' But … the point of the hyphenated American is that the right side of the hyphen assumes the responsibility of protecting the cultural, religious, and other idiosyncrasies of the left side. As Blackamericans have rarely if ever enjoyed this protection on a par with other ethnic Americans, it would be misleading, in my view, to cast blacks as just another hyphenated group in America" (emphasis mine). See Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Kindle ed., loc 236–42 (print edition, 17).

as an aspiring ally, that I can actually *become* an ally. Once I realize and accept my shortcomings, only then can the Master Builder employ me as just one of a myriad of fellow workers in the thoroughly divine adventure of building the Reign of Wholeness in a broken world.[3]

3   Part 1: The Telos of Theological Education

I began reflecting in earnest on the topic of exercising a ministry/*khilāfa* of radical kinship as an aspiring interreligious ally when I took part in a multi-stage project run by Ted Smith of Emory University. The project is entitled "Theological Education between the Times" with an intentional double entendre. On the one hand, "between the times" refers to the present moment of what can soberly be described as tectonic shifts in the landscape of graduate theological education. These shifts involve a number of diverse and intersecting changes from what once was. These include such phenomena as: the closing or consolidation of schools; declining enrollments; the eclipse of the MDiv as the most popular terminal professional degree; a steady rise in millennial self-identification as spiritual but religiously unaffiliated (i.e., as "nones"); the precipitous rise in the popularity and utility of online and other forms of distance learning; the increasingly unmanageable debt of graduates of theology

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3   I draw this image of the "Master Builder" and the "worker" from the words of the late great Bishop of the Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan: Ken Untener. In a beautiful composition widely referred to as the "Oscar Romero prayer" and entitled "A Step along the Way," Untener writes: "It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. *We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own*" (emphasis mine). See Ken Untener, "Prophets of a Future Not Our Own," United States Convention of Catholic Bishops, accessed December 20, 2017, http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/archbishop_romero_prayer.cfm.

and ministry degree programs; the interest in theological and ministerial education as the basis for a second career or a career "add-on" among so-called "adult" learners (mid to late thirties and beyond) who overwhelmingly enroll as part-time students; and the list goes on. On the other hand, "between the times" refers to the present as a *kairos*—a time for the in-breaking of grace between the *chronos* of what was and the *chronos* of what will be.[4]

One of the geniuses of this project, however, is that it has identified and taken successful steps to avoid the temptation of assuming that strategies for coping with and adapting to these "earthquakes" in graduate theological education can be developed independent of renewed, deep, and sustained reflection on the very telos of theological education itself. As Antonio Alonso, one of the project coordinators, has recently written:

> In the daily stress of finding ways to answer these urgent questions [around institutional change], we can often settle into a managerial mindset in which the larger question of the purpose of theological education is subordinated or even lost. Practical questions are of course crucial. Changing institutional configurations demand our very best management. But these new shifts make old questions about purpose even more vital. *Why are we doing this in the first place? What is all of this for? To what end is theological education oriented?*[5]

Another closely related genius of the project is its fundamental conviction that "no single testimony will be fully truthful or comprehensive to the work of answering these questions. Anything like an adequate understanding will require knowledge from multiple perspectives. The pluralism essential to our

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4   The classical Greek distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* as genres of time is one which has roots in ancient Hellenistic philosophy as well as Pauline Christian theology. I have found the following explanation of *kairos* as a special genre of time which interrupts the more conventional *chronos* to be especially helpful: "Time as *kairos* is the 'point in time' in which that which has no worldly correlation comes to appearance, but that time cannot be known either in advance nor—as it defeats all worldly knowledge—at the time of the coming itself. Only with the eyes of faith can it be encountered. *Kairos*, though, is not 'contained' in the future; rather it is the moment (*Augenblick*) between past and future; it is the temporal dimension of decision. In this sense, for Paul, the decision of faith is already living in the *kairos*." See Felix Ó. Murchadha, *The Time of Revolution: Kairos and Chronos in Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), Kindle ed., 14.

5   Emphasis mine. Antonio Eduardo Alonso, "Theological Education Between the Times: Reflections on the Telos of Theological Education" in *Religious Studies News* (April 28, 2017) accessed December 18, 2017, http://rsn.aarweb.org/spotlight-on/theo-ed/between-the-times/theological-education-between-times-reflections-telos-theological-education.

discernment requires diversities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, faith, region, discipline, and vocation."[6]

Whatever I identify as the telos of theological education can be nothing more than a "single testimony." And yet, as Alonso implies, the singularity of any one testimony by no means minimizes its potential contribution to a larger plurivocal process of discernment. Hence, without apology, I offer what I advertised as the "rather brash and ethereal flourish" of this first movement: the telos of theological education can be nothing short of resourcing people of all sizes, shapes and colors—people of all faiths and of no faith—for leadership in what the Roman Catholic tradition refers to as the *missio Dei* or "God's mission." In prophetic terms, this mission is as simple as it is wildly ambitious. It is the work of establishing the *shalōm/salām* of biblical and qur'anic revelation—the integrated wholeness of all things that is the original and eternal desire of the Creator for creation.

"Integrated wholeness of all things" is not a bad translation for a quintessentially theological ideal which, through its far more conventional and decidedly more elegant one-word translation as "peace," is so often confused with its shadowy political counterpart. The point here being that, whereas in geopolitical parlance "peace" connotes the *absence of overt violent conflict*, in theological parlance *shalōm/salām* refers to the *presence of justice*. The problem, however, is that although "integrated wholeness of all things" may be a better technical translation of *shalōm/salām* than "peace," as a response to the question about the *missio Dei* or the telos of theological education, it is no less abstract and vague than its conventional counterpart. In other words, to say that the purpose of theological education is to resource people for leadership in the pursuit of the "integrated wholeness of all things" is to beg the question: "Yes, but what *exactly* does the 'integrated wholeness of all things' mean?" To this question, I can offer no definitive answer simply because "the integrated wholeness of all things" can only be arrived at inductively as the ultimate macro goal is pursued in myriad different micro contexts. What I can do, however, is draw on my own micro context and be a bit more specific as to what *exactly shalōm/salām* entails.

In *Barking to the Choir*, the much-anticipated sequel to his *New York Times* bestseller, *Tattoos on the Heart*,[7] Greg Boyle[8] speaks passionately and profoundly of "God's dream." At one point, after relating the story of a "homie"

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6 Alonso.

7 Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

8 Gregory Boyle is the celebrated founder of Los Angeles's Homeboy Industries—in his own words, "the largest gang intervention, rehab, and reentry program on the planet" (*Barking*, 3).

named Gabino, who intuitively grasps what Boyle refers to as "the original pro-
gram" of the Gospel, the latter writes:

> The Choir aims to challenge the politics of fear and the stances that limit
> our sense of God. It believes that a love-driven set of priorities will ignite
> our own goodness and reveal our innate nobility, which God so longs to
> show us. It invites us to inch the world closer to what God might have had
> in mind for it. And the poor are our trustworthy guides in this. The origi-
> nal covenantal relationship in the Hebrew Bible (the original "original
> program") went like this: "As I have loved you, so must you have a special,
> preferential, favored love for the widow, orphan, and stranger." God
> knows that these folks know what it's like to be cut off. And because they
> know this particular suffering, God finds them trustworthy to lead and
> guide the rest of us to *the birth of a new inclusion, to the exquisite mutual-
> ity of kinship: God's dream come true*.[9]

In the subtitle of this new book, Boyle describes the kinship of "God's dream"
as "radical," by which he means that the kinship God intends for us human be-
ings is, among other things, "boundless,"[10] "total," and "uncompromising" in its
inclusivity.

It is no coincidence that these adjectives are also applicable to the very be-
ing, will, and compassion, not only of the God of the Bible and the Qur'an to
whom Boyle ascribes this sublime "dream." Although Boyle is quite fond of Sufi
poets like Hafez and Rumi, he doesn't make much use of the Qur'an. The one
reference he does make to the Qur'an, however, is spot on. Supporting his point
by citing a verse from *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt* which has become a locus classicus for
Muslim theological reflection on engagement in interreligious and other forms
of intercultural dialogue (Q 49:13),[11] Boyle brilliantly argues that, "It would
seem that God created an 'otherness' so that we could find our way in mutual-
ity to kinship. *Margins manufactured by God, perhaps, so that we'd dedicate our
lives to their erasure*."[12]

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9   Emphasis mine. *Barking to the Choir*, 164–65.

10 The term Boyle uses to describe the "compassion" he references in the subtitle of
    Tattoos.

11 "O humanity! We have created you from a [single] male and a [single] female and ap-
    portioned you into [various] peoples and social groupings so that you might come to
    know one another. Indeed, the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God—
    conscious. For truly God is one who [fully] knows and is [fully] aware."

12 Emphasis mine. *Barking*, 177. For an expanded analysis of the implicit theology of radical
    kinship of Q 49:13, see my argument with respect to a qur'anic theology of *encuentro* in

Of late, I have been tempted to go a bit farther than Boyle when it comes to my own understanding of what the Qur'an appears to teach about "God's dream" of radical kinship.

There is a pericope in *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q 2:30–33), the opening verse of which vaguely echoes Genesis 1:26.

> The One who nurtures and sustains you (s.) said to the angels: "I am about to install a *khalīfa*[13] on the earth." They said: "Will you impose upon the earth one who will spread corruption and shed blood upon her, [when you could install] us—we who glorify you with praise and proclaim your holiness?" [God] replied: "I know what you do not know. And [God] taught Adam all the names. Then [God] placed [every created thing] before the angels and said [to them]: "Tell me their names—if you be [as] prepared for authentic relationship [as you seem to suggest] (*in kuntum ṣādiqīn*)." They said: "Glory be to you! We know only what you have taught us—you who are the Source of All Knowledge and the Source of All Wisdom." God said: "O, Adam! Teach them their names." And when [Adam] had taught them their names, [God] said: "Did I not say to you (pl.): 'I know the hidden [realities] of the heavens and the earth, as well as what you reveal and what you conceal'?"

It is interesting to note that, with respect to the biblical version of this creation scene in the Genesis passage, there is an exquisite and well-known midrashic tradition which calls attention to what some have found to be the somewhat counterintuitive nature of God's use of the first person plural: "Let *us* make the human being in our image, after our likeness." This tradition attempts to explain why the one true God would speak as "we" by arguing that it is an expression of the consultative nature of God and even, according to the commentary of Rashi, "the *humility* of the Holy One, blessed be He."[14] According to Rashi,

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Scott C. Alexander, "Encountering the Religious 'Stranger': Interreligious Pedagogy and the Future of Theological Education," in Ted A. Smith, Marti R. Jewell, and S. Steve Kang, eds. *Theological Education* 51, no. 2 (2018): 49–59.

13   *Khalīfa* (often left untranslated and rendered in English as "caliph" when used as the title of those who "succeed" the Prophet Muhammad *s*. as leaders of the umma) is a notoriously difficult term to translate, especially in the case of this particular qur'anic usage. In the context of this pericope, interpretations range from the highly literal "successor" to the jinn as the second species of rational beings to inhabit the earth, to God's "vicegerent" or "vicar" as steward of the sub-lunar realm.

14   Emphasis mine. See the English translation of the Torah accompanied by Rashi's commentary, accessed December 21, 2017, http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8165 #showrashi=true.

God—generally understood to be the only being ontologically independent of all others—speaks in the first person plural in order to reduce the potential envy of the angels toward the human race, as well as to teach those in positions of authority to act with humility.[15]

Moving back to the qur'anic pericope, what intrigues me is the fact that, although the Qur'an is by no means averse to God's speaking in the first-person plural, that is decidedly *not* the case here. God speaks in the divine "I" and not the divine "We." As the immediately ensuing pericope having to do with the command to the heavenly hosts to prostrate themselves before Adam appears to suggest, the qur'anic telling of this critical episode from cosmic history seems to want to explore the very "envy" of the angels that, according to Rashi's interpretation, God hopes to short-circuit. But why and to what avail?

Perhaps a clue lies in the fascinating way in which the Qur'an seems to deliberately invert the use of the first-person plural. In this qur'anic pericope it is the angels who appear to be depicted as the first of the created order to arrogate to themselves "we-ness." God is singular. The *khalīfa* God is about to "appoint" (i.e., Adam) is singular. The angels are the ones who assert group identity, and more importantly they do so *not* primarily out of a positive sense of shared kinship, but out of what appears to be naked arrogance and jealousy. Put a slightly different way, they assert their celestial "we" and establish their angelic in-group precisely at the expense of a "threatening" *other* and the equally threatening out-group of which Adam will undoubtedly be the progenitor. Translated into substantially earthier and colloquial speech, one can almost hear them impiously grouse between the lines of their overtly pious pleas: "What did you say? You're going to do *what*? Great. Not only are you going to make another one of your playthings who will only end up disappointing and dishonoring you, just like those jinn. (By the way, how'd that work out?) You're going to take it a step further and bestow upon this new muddy 'thing' a place and vocation of honor. And what's worse, you are going to do all this while we who are suffused with supernal light and who have done nothing but praise and exalt you are passed over—yet again?! And you call yourself 'Just'? What a joke!"

God's response is equally fascinating. There is no attempt to reason with the angels, any more than there would be in the case of a wise and seasoned parent dealing with a group of jealous and petulant children. Rather, God answers

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15   Rashi: "Scripture did not hesitate to teach proper conduct and the trait of humility, that a great person should consult with and receive permission from a smaller one. Had it been written: 'I shall make [the human being]…,' we would not have learned that [God] was speaking with [God's] tribunal, [rather than] to Himself."

with a simple, "I know what you do not know," followed by a partial demonstration of exactly what God knows that they do not. God asks the angels if they can *name* all the other beautiful beings of God's magnificent creation. The temptation here is to interpret this as a test of the angels' command of the "created order database." On some level it may be. On a much deeper level, however, asking whether one knows the *name* of another is far more than a taxonomic quiz. It is a test to see if there is a meaningful relationship in place.

When God asks the angels whether they know the names of the other creatures, God is, in effect, holding a corrective mirror up to the very focus of the angels' implicit boast as the elite and exclusive essence of their "we-ness": their sublime ethereal nature. Although the angels are creatures, they are not creatures of the earth, but of the heavens, and the heavens alone. Thus, although they express "concern" for the earth and its varied created inhabitants, God attempts to show them, in this mirror, that their "concern" for the things of the earth is at best abstract—not at all rooted in an experiential and relational connection with the other creatures—and at worst utterly false and feigned. In either case, their "concern" has little or nothing to do with a genuine desire to be in *kinship* with the earth and her creatures, and far more to do with the vain self-satisfaction of belonging to their self-made celestial in-group. Adam, on the other hand, knows the names of the creatures precisely because God has created him as the one earthly being with the capacity for being in relationship to every other type of creature, including the angels. I would propose that an evidentiary linchpin for this interpretation may well lie in the fact that the word *ṣādiqīn* (lit. "righteous ones") comes from the same root as both the words for "charity" (sadaqa) and "friend" (siddīq), and thus that the Arabic *in kuntum ṣādiqīn* can possibly be translated as "if you be [as] prepared for authentic relationship [as you seem to suggest]."[16]

That the hubris of the angels and the inherently exclusivist dynamic of their claim to "we-ness" was to be outdone by the very human beings whose progenitor they were divinely commanded to venerate, is undoubtedly the greatest

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16   I propose this rather unconventional interpretation based on the highly evocative etymological connections, with respect to the root *ṢDQ*, between *being truthful* or *authentic*, and *being in proper and mutually enhancing relationship* with others. Note especially the connective tissue between the first form of the root (having to do with *speaking the truth*); the second form (having to do with *recognizing the truth or authenticity of a another*); the third form (having to do with *acting in friendship with another*); and the sixth form (having to do with *being true and sincere with one another, usually in affection and love*). See, for example, Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part IV (London: Williams and Norgate, 1872), also online, accessed December 29, 2017, http://lexicon.quranic-research.net/data/14_S/032_Sdq.html.

irony of this story. What neither the arrogance of the angels (and Iblis) nor the eventual arrogance of Adam's descendants allows them to realize is that God is the only one who can and does convene a "we" with no "they." All of the "we"s that human beings imagine and construct for ourselves are imperfect and easily coopted for unjust purposes. This is because, in our construction of "we"s, we humans inevitably posit "they"s whom we almost invariably either end up attempting to assimilate, dominate or oppress as unworthy shadows of ourselves, or whom we end up successfully excluding as the objects of our limited compassion and thus futilely attempting to exclude as the objects of God's boundless compassion.

In many ways, this pericope portrays God as teaching the angels a lesson in *tawḥīd*—the endless proclamation, in word and deed, of the unrivaled place the sole Creator must occupy at the center of every creature's life. Somewhat paradoxically, even the angels—beings actually hardwired for nothing other than *tawḥīd*[17]—have not fully grasped the reality of their own being. Enthralled as they are with their own privileged status as those created to perform the heavenly circumambulation (Ar. *ṭawāf*) around the celestial Ka'ba, they cannot appreciate the fact that the heavenly Ka'ba and what is to be the earthly Ka'ba are but one and the same. They cannot understand that God has destined even creatures of "mud" to join as one with them, albeit on a different plane of existence, in one unitive act of worship with the one God as their sole object of service and devotion. After rehearsing, for Muhammad (ṣ), the history of God's messengers to humanity (vv. 51ff), *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'* punctuates this retelling with words spoken not just to the Prophet, but to the wider audience of all creatures:

> This community of yours (pl.) is one community and I the One who nurtures and sustains you (pl.): worship Me! And [yet] they succumbed to division, [but one day] all will return to Us (Q 21:92–93).[18]

Note the highly evocative juxtaposition of the divine first-person singular in verse 91 with the divine first-person plural in verse 93. Despite the fact that the divine plan for all creatures to be an undivided "we" in the worship of the indivisible "I" appears to be frustrated by the creaturely devising of so many "they"s, *all*—without exception—are destined to recognize that there has only ever

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17   The technical term is *musakhkharāt*—creatures who, by nature, obey all of God's commandments without exception.

18   *inna hādhihī ummatukum ummatan wāḥidatan wa anā rabbukum fa-ʿbudūni wa taqaṭṭaʿū amrahum baynahum kullun ilaynā rājiʿūn.*

been, and only ever will be, *one community of worshippers* gathered in unitive circumambulation around the only "Us" that truly exists—the "Us" that admits no "they."

To the extent that this interpretation withstands the hermeneutical scrutiny of others—especially of Muslims—one might argue that the periciope of Q 2:30–33 may well hint at a Qur'anic version of "God's dream" of the radical kinship of creation. If so, one might also argue that this very same pericope positions the human being as a critical fulcrum of this kinship. In other words, perhaps we have found here yet another layer of the possible meaning of *khalīfa* as one who engages in a *khilāfa* (i.e., "caliphate"), or what Christians typically refer to as a "ministry," of radical kinship. If, at this point, you sense that I am contending that the telos of theological education is to provide a context for human beings to embrace the call to the *caliphate of radical kinship* for which God created each and every one of us, you would be right.

4   Part 2. Formation for a Ministry/*Khilāfa* of Radical Kinship as Interreligious Ally

One of the new realities that has emerged on the shifting landscape of theological education, like new growth through the fissures of its many fault lines, is what the title of this volume refers to as "interreligious learning" or the practice of educating and being educated *interreligiously*. I am convinced that, in these early years of the twenty-first century, one of the greatest challenges and opportunities for both theological educator and theology student alike is to be formed as ministers/*khulafā'* of radical kinship in and through relationships of intellectual exchange, personal trust, and moral solidarity with people of other faiths.[19]

In my experience, this formation happens within the specific framework of striving to be an *interreligious ally*—a framework which includes many possible contexts. The purpose of the second "movement" of this essay is to attempt to convey just a few samples of what this specific type of theological formation "sounds" like. To do this, I have chosen to reflect briefly on my experiences in aspiring to be an interreligious ally (and inviting others to do the same) in

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19   Here I mean to include what Chris Stedman describes as "faitheists"—people who do not affiliate with any tradition and who may indeed reject the existence of God or a transcendent reality, but who nonetheless have a genuine respect for the life of "faith" and who recognize and even affirm the quasi-religious character of their own deep existential commitments. See Stedman's *Faitheist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012).

three intersecting contexts. The first is that of formal "classroom" ministry. The second is that of public advocacy. The third is that of a far less formal and far more personal ministry I attempt to exercise on social media.

As a teacher, a great deal transpires in the classroom (be it online or face-to-face) by way of participating in the divine-human synergy necessary for creating sanctuaries for dialogic and mutually transformative learning. At Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago I teach with Muslim colleagues and there are always one, two, or more Muslim students in the various courses we have the privilege of leading. Together we witness—and revel in—the experience of Muslim and Christian students committed to vocations of spiritual leadership in their respective faith communities, working out the shape and content of their vocations in dialogue with one another.

Most recently, this praxis of interreligious team teaching and relationship modeling has opened new and exciting intersectional avenues for student, faculty, and overall institutional transformation. For the past three years, I have partnered with Shamar Hemphill, a Blackamerican Muslim colleague who is a seasoned community organizer for the Inner City Muslim Action Network (IMAN)—an internationally recognized Muslim social service organization pioneering innovative and highly successful projects for social change on Chicago's South Side.[20] Shamar and I teach a course on "community organizing in interfaith perspective," in which students explore Blackamerican Christian and Blackamerican Muslim liberation theology interspersed with training modules in the practice of faith-based community organizing. At the conclusion of the course, students have the option of pursuing a practicum in which they can realize the community organizing project they propose as one of the requirements for the course. In the first year of the course, students inspired and supported each other as aspiring interreligious allies and developed projects ranging from an interfaith effort to end the practice of witch-camping in Ghana,[21] to an effort to help communities on Chicago's South Side better understand and provide support for people suffering from mental illness.

The great Franciscan spiritual writer, Richard Rohr, once prophetically observed: "We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves

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20   In fact, the executive director of IMAN, Dr. Rami Nashishibi, was awarded a 2017 MacArthur Foundation Award (aka "genius grant") in support of the work of IMAN. For more on IMAN, accessed December 29, 2017, see https://www.imancentral.org.

21   For an introduction to the phenomenon of witch-camping, see Kati Whitaker, "Ghana Witch Camps: Widows' lives in exile," in BBC News Online Magazine, 1 September 2012, accessed December 22, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19437130.

into new ways of thinking."[22] It was Shamar who has helped guide CTU into a new way of living, which in turn has led the institution to a new way of thinking about its mission and educating its students. He began by inviting us to welcome IMAN to use our facilities for its annual community organizing training. He then moved to inviting me to live a closer relationship and alliance with him and IMAN, which in turn led to our collaboration on the course I just described. Most recently, through his superb efforts as a community organizer, Shamar has played a pivotal role in our securing a generous gift for the Catholic-Muslim Studies Program at CTU from a Muslim family foundation which also supports the mission of IMAN. Because of this gift, CTU has initiated the Beloved Community Internship Program whereby our students are afforded the opportunity to be formed for ministries of radical kinship as they realize their vocation to be interreligious allies for social justice. Key to the vision for this program is that the kinship the interns help build will help CTU develop a long-term commitment as an *institutional ally* of a local South Side neighborhood sorely affected by the legacy of centuries of broken kinship.

My own ministry of public advocacy—particularly in the fight against Islamophobia and the discrimination it breeds—has also been an important medium for my own and my students' formation as aspiring interreligious allies. Emerging out of the praxis of public speaking, primarily in religious congregations and on college and university campuses in the United States and abroad, I have developed a course entitled "Islam and Muslims in a Time of Islamophobia: a Catholic Response." Students learn that great strides can be made toward building communities of radical kinship by engaging in various forms of public advocacy on behalf of communities facing marginalization and even demonization. The intensive and difficult challenge of winning hearts and minds—and thus effecting significant social change—is a long road with many small but cumulatively transformative milestones along the way. Many of these have to do with the relatively simple, but deeply human business of building relationships of trust—each at its own pace and each with its own particular rhythms. Students also learn, however, that it is in this indispensable realm of activist solidarity that the personal cost can be as high as the potential for meaningful social transformation. If there is anything that human beings cherish and need as much as they do the things and the people they love, it is the things and the people they fear.

For whatever reason, it seems that social media is the context in which arise the most unexpected opportunities for the aspiring interreligious ally to

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22 Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999, 2003), Kindle ed., 19.

exercise a ministry/*khilāfa* of radical kinship. These are moments infused with the grace of an awareness that the hand of divine providence is at work in one's ministry/*khilāfa*. As such, these can also be moments of deep encouragement and affirmation of one's "work in the vineyard"—of its efficacy, of its value, and of its inevitable limitations and fragility. In my own life, these have been those rare moments when years of study and preparation seem to have met with the most precious of opportunities, pregnant with the possibilities inherent in either something as "big" as an entirely new chapter in my ministry, or something as "small" as the simple claim of another human being on me and my capacity to love.

Most recently, such a moment came in the form of my "nephew." When I first met him, he was fifteen going on sixteen. At the time of the publication of this essay, he will likely be nineteen going on twenty. Let's call him "Faysal." I first met Faysal through the "secret" Facebook group I mentioned in the prelude. He sought me out for private conversation. When we finally got past the fact that I was neither gay, nor Muslim—and far too old for the highly problematic and misplaced romantic interest that apparently led him to me in the first place—we began to get to know one another. At my suggestion, he gradually took to calling me "uncle" (then stopped, then started again—adolescents are complicated!) and he eventually became Facebook friends with both my wife and our then twenty-six-year-old son.

I quickly learned that Faysal and his family were among the three-million+ refugees of the Syrian civil war living in Turkey. When we first met, Faysal was deeply self-loathing. He was attending a high school for Syrian refugees sponsored by the Muslim Brothers where, among other things, he was mildly bullied for being "weak," and where he developed a serious crush on one of his male teachers. When he shared this with the teacher, he got a response that I can only describe as similar to what a young Catholic man might receive at a fairly conservative Catholic high school in the United States (or many other places in the world). It entailed notable compassion for Faysal's "plight," mixed with a strong admonition that he should *never*, under any circumstances, act on his sexual desires—never actually enter a loving relationship with another man lest he fall into "egregious sin." I also learned that he was being medicated for depression, but also that he had been put on a powerful antipsychotic drug for the purposes of controlling his sexual impulses. The drug gave him horrible headaches and caused embarrassing weight gain. Faysal's only solace was in his video gaming and what few meaningful relationships he could establish through Facebook and other online media.

We had extended conversations both via text and face-chat in which I would insist on God's love for him *as he is*, and he would respond by accusing me of

being a *mustashriq*—literally an "orientalist," or in the parlance of a certain strain of Muslim Brotherhood education, a westerner interested in colonizing Islam and the minds of Muslims by liberalizing and secularizing them. All I could say in response to Faysal's accusation was that, in the context of our relationship, I could not care less about "Islam" or "Christianity" per se—only him and the kinship God wants for him. By the same token, however, it was clearly my knowledge of his faith and his tradition that became the foundation of our relationship, and, at least at the beginning, of his trust in me.

As I write this, much has transpired in our relationship and in Faysal's life, including a dangerous and failed attempt to cross the Aegean in the "care" of greedy and inept smugglers. He was accompanied by his sixty-year-old mother and his brother who was seriously injured in the war against Assad. He and his family were among only nine survivors of the fourteen people on the boat, including young children who perished with Faisal unable to do anything to help them. It was a traumatic experience for him, to say the least.

In the way that God always brings moments of great grace and joy out of incidents of human sin and suffering, this ordeal ended up being a blessing for Faysal. As traumatized as he was by the events of the crossing, and by two days spent in a Turkish jail separated from his mother and brother, he has realized that he is not the "weak" and fatally "damaged" human being he had been told he was by his father, his brother, and his teachers for so long. He eventually transferred to a different high school and managed to secure a scholarship for Turkish language study and a computer science degree at a regional Turkish university. Because of the difficulties of his social circumstances as a gay Syrian refugee living in Turkey, Turkish campus life has been particularly difficult for him. For this reason, we have been exploring the possibility of his attending university in either France or Canada. Unfortunately, due to recent changes in U.S. immigration and refugee policy—changes which are designed to corrode even more rapidly and decisively the very fabric of radical kinship—the chances of Faysal settling in the United States with his "aunt" and "uncle" are slim to none.

For my part, I have been incredibly enriched by the grace of Faysal's presence in my life. I have learned more about Japanese video games and anime than I ever thought. I have learned more about the online experiences of a young gay man than I ever wanted. But I have also learned so much about myself and God from this truly old soul masquerading as a teenager. His recent but well-earned distaste for all things "religious" stands in a kind of sublime tension with what I believe is his usually unspoken yet profound awareness of the presence of God in his life. This contrast never ceases to engender in me a sense of awe and privilege to be his "uncle" and ally. On a recent Christmas

morning, he called me to wish me a "Merry Christmas." As we face-chatted, I asked if he wanted to see the two gifts my wife and I bought for our neighbors' children who, together with their parents, would be joining us for Christmas dinner. His immediate response was to chuckle and say: "Please don't tell me you bought them Qur'ans!" "Oooh, I should have thought of that," I said jokingly. "No, wise guy," I retorted. "We got them stuffed animals." "I see," he said. "You'll get them Qur'ans when they're older." "It's scary how well you know me," I said. "While we're on the subject, when was the last time you made ṣalāt?" I asked. "Don't start," he said. "It's Christmas—not a time for arguing about whether I should be a good Muslim or not." We both laughed in agreement. After we hung up, I recalled a time when I used to tell him that I loved him and that God loved him. For a few years, his answer was always the same: either deafening silence, or the painfully honest, "I told you I don't know what love is, or who God is. So please don't keep saying this, ok?" Now it is either a warm and slightly sarcastic, "Yeah, I know," or a quiet and only remotely reluctant, "I love you too."

5   Finale: The Power of Liminality and "Chaordic" Leadership

The consciousness of this liminal moment in the history of graduate theological education offers us an opportunity to reflect on the importance of centering theological education, not around a pedagogy of discerning identity and vocation in some imagined center of confessional stability, but rather around a pedagogy of finding one's vocational identity and purpose in the nearly infinite liminal spaces of the limitless fields of the *missio Dei*. And by "liminal spaces," I not only refer to spaces in which we are used to responding to the call to radical kinship, but also in those relatively new, misunderstood, and unjustly maligned spaces created by digital technology where a fifty-two-year-old straight white Catholic can be an interreligious ally to, and "uncle" for, a fifteen-year-old gay Muslim Syrian refugee.

To make this assertion is not to ignore the importance of "centering" oneself in one's tradition. Rather, it is to emphasize the importance of developing a deep and abiding awareness that all such centers are, more often than not, imaginal and constructed spaces which we heuristically locate as floating islands in a sea of liminality.

In a recent landmark book which pioneers a methodology of "theological reflection across religious traditions,"[23] my colleague Edward Foley borrows a

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23   Edward Foley, *Theological Reflection across Traditions: The Turn to Reflective Believing* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

term from Lee Hock, the noted entrepreneur who founded the company known today as VISA. The term is "chaordic" and is a neologism hybridized from the words "chaos" and "order." It is an adjective intended to describe frameworks for human creative activity which subvert traditional command-and-control paradigms of organization, paradigms which Hock felt were "antithetical to the human spirit."[24]

Foley describes what I have referred to as this distinctly "liminal" moment in theological education not only as "chaordic" in fact, but also as one which requires the embrace of a consciously "chaordic" approach to pedagogy for theological and ministerial education. He does so with great insight and precision.

> Somewhat akin to the chaotic changes in business and industry that took place in the late twentieth century, theological education and the many ministries it was designed to serve have also undergone their own revolutions. No longer the exclusive terrain of dominant culture males appointed to well-established congregations, today's seminaries and divinity schools are admitting women in large numbers, some of whom represent growing populations of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and even secular humanists. Besides a marked diversity of ministerial students in gender and sexual orientation, ethnic background, and religious identity, the contexts in which such spiritual leaders and chaplains are exercising their service is enormously varied. Steeple churches and other traditional brick-and-mortar settings are giving way to ministries and services variously described as liquid, emergent, experimental, and avant-garde. It is clearly a chaordic age for ministers and chaplains of every stripe.[25]

The epigraph to this essay, to which I promised at the outset that I would return, is the refrain from a track by the popular English indie rock band, Florence + the Machine. The title of the track is "Delilah." The band's riff on the biblical narrative of Samson (Judges 13–16) is highly suggestive of this chaordic mode of theological reflection and education that Foley settles on denoting as "the turn to reflective believing." The lyrics of this song are deceptively theological. The female lead singer, Florence Welch, sings:

> Drifting through the halls with the sunrise,
> Holding on for your call.

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24   Lee Hock, "The Chaordic Organization: Out of Control and Into Order," *World Business Academy Perspectives* 9 (1995): 5–18, accessed September 22, 2014, http://www.ratical.org/many_worlds/ChaordicOrg.pdf. in Foley, Kindle Loc 96/3117.

25   Foley, Loc 137–38/3117.

> Climbing up the walls for that flashing light
> I can never let go…
> Now the sun is up and I'm going blind,
> Holding on for your call.
> Another drink just to pass the time,
> I can never say no.
> Cause I'm gonna be free and I'm gonna be fine,
> Maybe not tonight.[26]

On the surface, these words are commonly interpreted as the lament of a woman anxiously awaiting a telephone call from her lover. Perhaps after a one-night stand. But for those familiar with the biblical narrative, it is difficult not to infer that these lyrics are anything less than a reflection—with some significant chaordic twists—on what I would like to propose could be interpreted as discernment for a ministry/*khilāfa* of radical kinship ("holding on for your call").

Among the twists is the fact that a *woman* gives voice to the fervent supplication of the legendarily macho Israelite judge—Shimshon, the nazirite "man of the sun," now "blinded" by his passion for justice as his chopped hair begins to grow back. In his hour of discernment and decisive action, Samson is identifying with the courage and strength, not of another male warrior, but of his mother ("And I'm calling for my mother")[27]—the one originally visited by the angel in what Christians have traditionally understood to be a prefiguration of the Annunciation. All this as s/he stands in that liminal place *between* the pillars of oppression and proceeds to "pull the pillars down" on her/himself and the Philistines.

And to whom does Samson give credit, after his mother, for this, his greatest act of prophetic courage? He praises, as the source of his last great act of strength, none other than the traditionally maligned prostitute female pagan outsider, Delilah—the ultimate "other" in morality, gender, culture, and cult. The one whom he identifies as his greatest inspiration in the pursuit of ultimate righteousness is the one who otherwise lives in misogynist infamy as the Gazan Philistine cursed for having manipulated his lust and love in order to sap the great Israelite of his strength.

Although the authorized biblical narrative would blame Delilah for his eyes being gouged out by his Philistine enemies, Florence/Samson does not. Instead s/he sings:

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26   For the complete lyrics, see "Delilah" by Florence + the Machine on Genius.com, accessed
      December 29, 2017, https://genius.com/Florence-the-machine-delilah-lyrics.
27   See epigraph.

> Now I'm dancing with Delilah and her vision is mine
> Holding on for your call…
> …It's a different kind of danger
> And the bells are ringing out,
> And I'm calling for my mother
> As I pull the pillars down.
> It's a different kind of danger
> And my feet are spinning around;
> Never knew I was a dancer
> 'Til Delilah showed me how

Am I reading a bit too much into this popular rock song? I may well be. But I cannot help being convinced that it evokes, in an almost uncanny way, Foley's call for a turn to reflective chaordic believing in theological and ministerial education—to what I would identify as formation for a ministry/*khilāfa* of radical kinship as an aspiring interreligious ally. I am convinced that, like this song, theological educators, in this liminal moment, must forge a new chaordic paradigm for theological education which sends a clear message to our students that authentic faith identity cannot ultimately be found, cultivated, and lived out in the allegedly secure spaces of the here or there, the past or the future, the male or the female, the straight or the gay, the Christian or the Muslim. It must be found in the liminal spaces in which stark dualities are softened by a divinely ordained mingling that does harm to neither, but rather illuminates the existence of a mysterious, fearsome, dangerous, exhilarating, creative, and life-giving interdependence between the two.

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Conclusion

Heidi Hadsell

The authors of this volume are path-breakers; colleagues in a shared commitment to the creative, disciplined scholarship and relationship building that interreligious education requires. These scholars are grounded in their own academic disciplines, but are willing to be experimental; they are teachers who learn from each other, their students, and from religious communities—their own and others. The work of these authors supports the efforts of those who build bridges in order to understand another religious worldview, engage with the people who inhabit that worldview, and also welcome the light that journey shines on their own tradition and self-understanding.

The conversations between the authors of this book during their several face-to-face gatherings was as compelling as is the implicit conversation between them in this book. The reader will have noted that the authors' work is in part shaped by the various facets of their complex identities and the nature of their own religious experiences. The authors share a sharp sense of just how quickly interreligious teaching and learning is changing in North America and how different in some respects it is now than it was just a few years ago.

The choice to engage with and explore religious difference is a choice to respond positively to the fact of religious pluralism and diversity. Over the last several decades the reality of the multi- religious nature of North America has slowly sunk in for many people, religious and secular. During these years, various religious communities, bolstered by immigration patterns that began changing in 1965, have sought and found or have begun to find effective ways to organize their religious communities and institutionalize their religious practices in North America. The impetus for this organizational work has in part come from the fact that they are facing the questions and challenges that pertain to the education of new generations of religious leaders in ways that make sense in the North American context.

The slow crumbling of Christian numerical hegemony in the United States over the last decades and the changes this has brought to Christian communities, institutions, finances and self-understanding has occurred during the same period in which religious institution building in communities of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and others across the country has gathered momentum.

These two dynamics taking place at the same time have together created or helped create a moment that is propitious for the actors on all sides to reach out to the other, to seek knowledge about, and cooperation with each other, to

share educational resources, to befriend each other, to empathize with each other, and to join or form wider interreligious organizational structures that are open to all religious communities.

So for example, Christian seminaries and Jewish seminaries, long experienced in institutionalized religious education and training at the graduate level, have found that they have a lot to share with colleagues from other religious traditions, who have sought their experience and knowledge on topics such as accreditation, as they take their own initial steps to institutionalize. And, as the numbers of Christian and Jewish students enrolled in many schools and programs dip, some schools discover that they have property to share with groups from other religious traditions, or property to rent or sell to these new colleagues, thus helping others with space for graduate theological education in their own traditions, while also easing their own budgets. Programs too, such as the long-established Clinical Pastoral Education programs, which are required for accredited chaplaincy in the United States, have also begun to expand to include students from a wider range of faith traditions. And everyone involved has begun to learn just how much the preparation for religious leadership in one tradition has in common with many aspects of preparation for religious leadership in another.

The growing interreligious realities across the country, the partnerships and the appearance of new religious institutions serving different religious communities, interact with and form the backdrop to the creative and often experimental work being done in the classroom by authors and teachers such as those included in this volume. This is a rapidly changing and dynamic moment and is in many ways unstable and uneven. One cannot know the exact trajectory change will take, but one can be sure of two things. The first is that these teachers and writers are responding to religious life as it is being lived by increasing numbers of people in this country,[1] and to the realities of the students who find their way into their classrooms and the religious communities they belong to, and which some of them will someday lead. The second thing one can be sure of is that the academic work represented here, rests on and contributes to an expanding interactive web of relationships and thought that carries within it key shared values. The practice of respectful, appreciative and critical reflection shared across religious lines helps lay the groundwork for the flourishing of religious communities whose identities include the values of solidarity, friendship and cooperation. These are values found in each tradition,

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1 "One-in-Five U.S. Adults Were Raised in Interfaith Homes," October 26, 2016, Pew Research Center, Religion in Public Life.

and they are values that are shared between people across lines of religious difference as well as other kinds of difference.

These shared values and the individuals and communities that carry them and are nurtured by them are important sources of the creative energy that pervades the chapters in this book. The reader has, we trust, learned from these authors, but also has come to see him or herself as a participant in the common, hopeful, ongoing interreligious adventure of which these scholars are a part, and which is still unfolding in classrooms, communities and organizations across this land.

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