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The Journal of Interreligious Studies
A Collaboration Between Hebrew College and Boston University School of Theology

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From the Managing Editor

The publication of another issue of the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* provides an opportunity for scholars, educators, and practitioners to share their ideas, methods, experiences, and theologies with a community of readers that the editorial team is honored to have. The *JIRS* endeavors to bridge the gap between academia and (inter)religious communities, and I believe this issue contains a balance of articles and book reviews that indeed takes a few steps in building that connection.

The first two articles are written from within the interreligious discipline of comparative theology. Joseph Kimmel, in an exercise of comparative theology, carefully reads texts from the Buddhist and Christian religious traditions on confession and sin in search of theological and ministerial implications. Ko Takemoto, in an exercise of historical retrieval, examines an early twentieth-century Japanese Catholic theologian's version of comparative theology genealogically distinct from the Western lineage of the comparative study of religion. In both these articles, the authors offer practical and constructive conclusions either to ministry (Kimmel) or to the discipline itself (Takemoto).

The next two articles turn to interreligious learning and practice. Beverley McGuire illuminates the import of embodied practices in interreligious teaching and learning; she suggests that studying theories about religious pluralism should not be disconnected from praxis and ritual. Kristi Del Vecchio connects the field of interreligious studies with the discipline of religion and ecology; she proffers a set of "moral competencies" that perhaps other faith-based organizations can seek to engender in their members and communities.

The final article, by Jon Paul Sydnor, tests the limits of interreligious ritual participation, or inter-riting; he describes and then constructively analyses his own Christian community's experience of inviting a Jewish community to share in the constitutively Christian ritual of communion.

These five articles are then followed by three book reviews.

I hope you benefit from this issue and that you share it widely with friends, colleagues, and students. The *JIRS* readership continues to grow, and we look forward to many issues to come, to partnerships with conferences and colloquia, and to remaining an accessible forum for academic, social, and timely issues affecting religious communities around the world. The *JIRS* editorial team remains grateful to the Henry Luce Foundation, which awarded the Boston University School of Theology and Hebrew College a two-year grant to support the *JIRS* and related projects jointly published and coordinated by the two schools.

On behalf of the *JIRS* editorial team, let me convey our gratitude to both authors and readers for making this learning community possible.

Axel M. Oaks Takács
Managing Editor

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Comparative Confession: A Comparative Study of Confession in the Writings of Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva

Joseph Kimmel

This paper comparatively analyzes confession of sin across three Christian and Buddhist texts. Specifically, the paper compares the diverse ways in which confession is presented in Tertullian's De Paenitentia*, St. John Cassian's* Conferences*, and Śāntideva's* Bodhicaryāvatāra*. In so doing, the paper not only highlights the multiplicity of forms confessional practices may take (both between religious traditions and within a particular tradition), but also underscores the common theme among all three authors of confession's fundamental role in personal transformation. After analyzing each author's understanding of confession and its effects (encompassing spiritual, moral, and emotional domains), the paper concludes with a discussion of theological and ministerial implications.*

Keywords: confession, sin, personal transformation, Buddhist-Christian studies, Tertullian, John Cassian, Śāntideva, ministry

Introduction

As Annemarie Kidder observes at the beginning of her history of confession in Western society, a work written "on confession may seem like an archaic undertaking. It conjures up images of monastic self-chastisement and penance, darkened confessionals with a concealed priestly penance, and a trembling and squirming sinner waiting to be absolved."[1] Laden with a host of such negative associations and tending to evoke such unpleasant imagery, the practice of confession may often be viewed as an historical relic in Western society, a practice no longer necessary or relevant for modern individuals, even those who self-identify as spiritual and/or religious. The rejection of this spiritual practice points as well to the broader repudiation in contemporary Western society of the notion of sin. As discussed explicitly in Karl Menninger's 1973 monograph, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, the concept of sin[2] has been reinterpreted through a variety of alternative descriptors (e.g., character flaws, personal weaknesses) such that its use within modern discourse has waned significantly.[3] In this haste to distance ourselves from "sin-heavy" expressions of religious faith or spirituality—and the confessional practices that may accompany them—I wonder

[1] Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession, Hearing Confession: A History of the Cure of Souls* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), xi. Kidder proceeds to counter this charge in her book's introduction by contending that confession is not the bizarre, awkward experience it occasionally is caricatured to be, but instead is an emotionally healthful practice that appears in a variety of forms in contemporary society, ranging from admissions of guilt in informal conversations with friends to self-help groups (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous) to formalized, religious rituals.
[2] Sin is defined, for example, in the catechism of the Catholic Church as "an offense against God," a willful "revolt against God" marked by "self-exaltation…diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus." This descriptive overview precedes a division of sin into moral and venial types, along with a discussion of different kinds of sins (e.g., "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness," and so on) based on St. Paul's *Letter to the Galatians*. See http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P6A.HTM (on the definition of sin) and http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P6B.HTM (on the different kinds of sin).
[3] Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), 13.

if an important, even essential, component of the spiritual life is being lost. At what cost do we neglect to confess moral failures? Or, to cast the issue positively, what does a person in the contemporary world stand to gain by rediscovering the long-lost practice of confession?

In addressing this fundamental question throughout the following paper, I will comparatively analyze presentations of confession advanced by three moral thinkers whose insights tout confession's many benefits: from the paradox of morality resulting from immorality via confession, to the experience of joy created by the confessional act. Such benefits will be examined through a close reading of texts by the following authors: Tertullian, a prolific late second/early third-century CE Christian apologist, whose treatise, *De Paenitentia* (*On Repentance*), considers the function and importance of confession within Christian churches; St. John Cassian, a prominent late fourth/early fifth-century CE Christian theologian, whose *Conferences* discusses principles of the religious life, including the practice of confession within monastic communities; and Śāntideva, an eighth-century CE Indian Buddhist monk, whose poetic presentation of the "way of the Bodhisattva" (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) portrays confession as integral to progress along the Bodhisattva's path.

Each of these individuals' respective conceptions of confession is rooted in a particular understanding of sin. For Tertullian, sin was perceived to be a "disobedience of the will," encompassing any "act of rebellion of the creature against the will of the Creator."[4] Tertullian argues in *De Paenitentia* that such disobedience occurs when a person, having been "admitted to [an acquaintance with] the divine precepts" (which in Tertullian's view happens "immediately" upon one's conversion, as God directly enables a new Christian to recognize sinful versus righteous conduct[5]), chooses to act in ways that violate the prohibitions of these precepts against certain behavior.[6]

This view of sin as deliberate acts of disobedience sharply contrasts the perspective held by St. John Cassian. As will be discussed at greater length below, Cassian views sin not fundamentally as the disobedient actions one does but most basically as tempting thoughts suggested to one's mind, without one's awareness, by Satan. While Cassian notes in his *Conferences* eight "principal faults" that encompass a range of behaviors and emotional states,[7] he emphasizes, in contrast to Tertullian, that these sins "attack" humans through Satan's efforts to penetrate one's mind, rather than resulting from humans' willful rebellion. In particular, Cassian contends that the root of these

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[4] Gerald L. Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 89–90.

[5] Tertullian's discussion of how one comes to understand what counts as "sin" refers only to Christians and does not include non-Christians, possibly because, in Tertullian's perspective, such individuals already live in a state of sin, not having been baptized, and therefore the possibility of living righteously does not yet even exist for them. See Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 1 and 2 on the need for conversion prior to any consideration of repentance for individual sins.

[6] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, trans. Sydney Thelwall; ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), accessed August 20, 2017, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0320.htm, Chapter 3.

[7] These eight "faults" include: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, dejection, listlessness, boastfulness, and pride. See John Cassian, *The Conferences of John Cassian*, trans. Edgar C.S. Gibson (Christian Classics Ethereal Library Edition), accessed August 20, 2017, http://www.ccel.org/c/cassian/conferences/cache/conferences.pdf, 135.

various types of sin are "secret thoughts" subtly sown in the mind by Satan, which eventually yield sinful actions.[8]

In Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the term for conduct that requires confession is *pāpa*. In his historical overview of confession in Indian Buddhism, Christian Haskett briefly defines *pāpa* as "general evil, sin, or wrongdoing."[9] Other scholars choose instead to understand *pāpa* as deeds that are "unsalutary, unwholesome, or nonvirtuous,"[10] deeds of poor quality (as in "wool that is poorly spun"[11]), or as non-virtuous actions tied to "correspondingly negative effect[s]."[12] This relationship between *pāpa* and its effects links this concept to the notion of *karma*, underscoring that a full appreciation of *pāpa* must encompass the unpleasant consequences resulting from the negative *karma* produced by immoral deeds. While some scholars understandably resist translating *pāpa* as "sin" due to potentially misleading connotations,[13] I will at times translate *pāpa* as "sin" in this paper because I believe there is enough overlap between what Tertullian and Cassian describe as "sin" and the immoral conduct confessed by Śāntideva to justify such a translation.[14]

Having briefly introduced the understandings of sin held respectively by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva, I would like to address very succinctly my selection of these three specific figures for this comparative study, before delving into an analysis of their views on confession. First, I have chosen to pair Tertullian and Cassian because these two particular thinkers, while both self-identifying as Christians and voicing a similar emphasis on the importance of one's spiritual community in the confessional act,[15] nevertheless present remarkably different accounts of when, where, and how confession ought to be practiced. Because of their notable divergence with respect to the mechanics, and even the underlying nature and theology, of confession, analyzing Tertullian and Cassian in light of each other offers modern practitioners a rich array of ways to understand, and possibly even to practice, confession.

But why include Śāntideva? Śāntideva's voice in this analysis of confession is particularly important because of how he shows that the process of transformation via confession is not an

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[8] Ibid., 53–54.
[9] Christian P. B. Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs: A History of Confession in Indian Buddhism" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010), 190. See also Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), 55, where Dayal equates *pāpa* simply with "sin."
[10] Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 620.
[11] Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs," 101. Haskett notes that such usage of *pāpa* appears primarily in Vedic sources, well before the time of Śāntideva.
[12] This emphasis on *pāpa* as "non-virtuous acts" appears in Prajñakaramati's commentary of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (see Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs," 101). For *pāpa* defined in relation to its negative effects, see Buswell, Jr. and Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism*, 620.
[13] Buswell, Jr. and Lopez, Jr., for example, argue that such a translation is "misleading because there is no divine being in Buddhism whose commandments can be broken" (Buswell, Jr. and Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism*, 620).
[14] Specifically, the conceptions of wrongdoing held by all three authors share a common sense of violating standards of behavior, which produces harmful consequences both for oneself and for the community in which one lives. Moreover, as will be discussed below, in admitting his *pāpa*, Śāntideva explicitly confesses to having "transgressed" the Buddhas' "command" (chapter 2, verse 54)—an admission of violating rules established by divine beings, which undercuts the objection highlighted in the previous footnote to translating *pāpa* as "sin." See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18.
[15] In contrast to a figure like St. Augustine, whose probing, self-reflexive presentations of confession center largely on an individual's own experience of this practice.

exclusively Christian phenomenon, but thrives as well in a very different religio-cultural setting. Śāntideva's insights thus suggest that regardless of adherence to a particular religious affiliation, confession exists more broadly as a human ethical practice that highlights a ubiquitous need for moral accountability. Moreover, because of the prominent influence of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* upon the practice of Buddhism in Tibet and beyond,[16] Śāntideva occupies an especially significant role in the spread of Buddhist confessional rituals, shaping their practice even among contemporary Buddhist communities.

Motivated for these reasons to focus my analysis of confession around these three moral thinkers, I intend to argue below that for Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva, confession is an essential spiritual-ethical practice because, most fundamentally, it plays an integral role in the process of personal transformation. Specifically, in each of these authors' discussions of confession—understood as the presentation of one's moral faults to a spiritual authority (e.g., a priest, the Buddha)—the confessional act produces a fundamental inner change. In addressing the mechanics of this transformation below, I will first discuss how the confessional act is understood by each of the three figures. Then I will highlight the effects (spiritual, moral, and emotional) believed by each to be secured via confession. Finally, in my conclusion, I will briefly underscore several theological and ministerial implications relevant not only to contemporary spiritual leaders and practitioners but also to religious scholars and academicians.

Defining Confession

Tertullian

First, in the view of Tertullian, confession is a public, one-time act made by a Christian before her church community that marks her with a particular (and temporary) "penitential" status within the Church. Discussed in detail in his treatise on repentance (*De Paenitentia*), Tertullian describes confession as "publishing oneself" (*publicatio sui*[17]) through self-mortifying acts that reveal to others (particularly one's church community) that one has committed sin. Before considering Tertullian's theological interpretation of repentance specifically, it may be instructive to look at a particular example of this "self-publishing" repentant behavior. Although this specific example occurred a couple of centuries after Tertullian, the illustration (recorded in a letter by St. Jerome[18]) reflects the type of penitential practice advocated by Tertullian and thereby illuminates his penitential theology. The illustration can be seen in the case of St. Fabiola, a lady who had divorced her husband and married another man prior to the death of her previous spouse. St. Jerome notes that, moved by contrition over her sin of adultery,

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[16] Michael J. Sweet, "Mental Purification (*Blo sbyong*): A Native Tibetan Genre of Religious Literature," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 245. Sweet contends here that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is the single "most important source" for the entire "mind purification" (*blo sbyong*) genre of Tibetan religious literature.

[17] A term that commonly appeared in its Greek form (i.e., *exomologesis*) among early Church Fathers, contrasted later with confession as *exagoreusis* ("permanent verbalization") by St. John Cassian. On this, see Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 17–18.

[18] Though St. Jerome lived approximately two hundred years after Tertullian, Taylor notes that a "continuity" exists among these "penitential performance[s] over several centuries," stretching from the time of Tertullian through that of Jerome, at least as far as the fifth century; see Taylor, *Culture of Confession*, 19. Thus, while the account related in St. Jerome's letter may have occurred well after Tertullian's lifetime, this continuity of practice makes St. Jerome's example relevant, particularly in the absence of a concrete example in the writings of Tertullian himself.

> [Fabiola] put on sackcloth to make public confession of her error. It was then that in the presence of all Rome (in the basilica which formerly belonged to that Lateranus who perished by the sword of Caesar) she stood in the ranks of the penitents[19] and exposed before bishop, presbyters, and people—all of whom wept when they saw her weep—her dishevelled hair, pale features, soiled hands and unwashed neck.[20]

Through this public ritual of self-abasement, one who had sinned, like Fabiola, could enter an order of penitents, described as a specific class of individuals within the Church "distinct from catechumens and [the] faithful."[21] By entering this class through the performance of the penitential ritual described above and then adopting the lifestyle of a penitent—marked by almsgiving, fasting, and "enduring [the] public humiliation" of one's willing, ongoing self-mortification[22]—a sinner could, after a certain period of time, rejoin the ranks of "the faithful" within the Church.

Tertullian describes the theological underpinnings of both the content of, and motivations for, public confession in two extended passages from the seventh and ninth chapters of his *De Paenitentia*:

> [A]though the gate of forgiveness has been shut and fastened up with the bar of baptism, [God] has permitted it still to stand somewhat open. In the vestibule He has stationed the second repentance for opening to such as knock: but now once for all, because now for the second time; but never more because the last time it had been in vain.[23]

> This act . . . is ἐξομολόγησις, whereby we confess our sins to the Lord, not indeed as if He were ignorant of them, but inasmuch as by confession satisfaction is settled, of confession repentance is born; by repentance God is appeased. And thus *exomologesis* is a discipline for man's prostration and humiliation, enjoining a demeanor calculated to move mercy. With regard also to the very dress and food, it commands (the penitent) to lie in sackcloth and ashes, to cover his body in mourning, to lay his spirit low in sorrows, to exchange for severe treatment the sins which he has committed; moreover, to know no food and drink but such as is plain—not for the stomach's sake, to wit, but the soul's; for the most part, however, to feed prayers on fastings, to groan, to weep and make outcries unto the Lord your God; to bow before the feet of the presbyters, and kneel to God's dear ones; to

[19] In his lecture on this event, Michel Foucault underscores the significance of this phrase: that those marked as "penitents" are grouped together, "probably standing at the church door in ranks," physically separated from the rest of the church community—and that this separation constitutes part of the performative element in the confessional act; see Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France, 1979–1980*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 207.

[20] Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus (St. Jerome), "Letter 77," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 6, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W. G. Martley; ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), accessed August 21, 2017, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001077.htm.

[21] Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 5.

[22] Taylor, *Culture of Confession*, 18.

[23] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 7.

> enjoin on all the brethren to be ambassadors to bear his deprecatory supplication (before God). All this *exomologesis* (does), that it may enhance repentance; may honour God by its fear of the (incurred) danger; may, by itself pronouncing against the sinner, stand in the stead of God's indignation, and by temporal mortification…expunge eternal punishments. Therefore, while it abases the man, it raises him; while it covers him with squalor, it renders him more clean; while it accuses, it excuses; while it condemns, it absolves. . . . [24]

Thus for Tertullian the "act" of confession, as illustrated in Jerome's example of St. Fabiola, and presented theologically through the above selections from his treatise on the topic is understood to be a set of behaviors that express contrition, employed to provoke mercy from God. Constituting a "second repentance," and covering aspects of one's appearance, diet, and emotional condition, this penitential behavior seeks to abase oneself so as to avoid much harsher penalties from God. Applying "temporal mortification" (e.g., fasting, kneeling, wailing), the penitent seeks via these external signs of contrition to indicate the depth of one's repentance and thereby to honor God and avoid his punishment against sin. This external repentance thus is utilized, at least in part, to "expunge [the] eternal punishments" of suffering in hell that await those who die outside God's grace.

For the purposes of this paper, three notable points can be highlighted regarding this presentation of confession. First, this so-called "second repentance" can occur only once in the life of an individual. As Tertullian describes in *De Paenitentia*, an individual's sins are cleansed in the "first repentance" of baptism that marks one's entrance into the Church.[25] If one should fail morally after becoming a Christian, the penitential process offers an opportunity to be forgiven a second time. However, if a Christian were to sin again, after undergoing a second repentance, no further options existed for cleansing, and he was permanently excluded from the Church.[26] In Tertullian's view, God has allowed access to forgiveness of sin committed after one's baptism, but "never more" for those who seek forgiveness after already using up the "second repentance." As quoted in the passage above, the second repentance is accessible as a means to forgiveness for those who "knock." But this method of accessing God's grace should be regarded as enjoyed "once for all," since once one has exhausted the option of this second repentance, in Tertullian's view, "because the last time it had been in vain" (i.e., because one's second repentance failed to curb future sin), there remains "never more" any further opportunities for repentance and forgiveness.[27]

Second, the ritual of confession, as well as the lifestyle of one marked by penitential status, is largely nonverbal. Constituting a kind of "physical" confession, Tertullian's penitential ritual is a public, performative, nonverbal presentation of one's sin, contrition, and acceptance of penitential status. As seen in the example of St. Fabiola, confession occurs through the public "self-publishing" performance of one's guilt, characterized by self-abasement and the adoption of a status that sets one apart (not only in a spiritual sense but also in a physical sense, as seen in St. Fabiola grouping herself with the "ranks of the penitents") from the rest of one's church community until the period of one's penitence concludes.

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[24] Ibid., 9.
[25] Ibid., 6.
[26] Taylor, *Culture of Confession*, 18.
[27] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 7.

Finally, for an accurate understanding of Tertullian's conception of confession, it should be noted that he seems to make a distinction at times between confession and repentance, not always using the two terms synonymously. For example, in the lengthy passage cited above, Tertullian comments that "of confession repentance is born; by repentance God is appeased." This expression suggests that confession marks an initial step along a broader path of repentance and that only by fulfilling the entire penitential process—not by confession alone—is divine punishment averted. At the same time, however, even within the same passage quoted above, Tertullian equates the penitential process of self-mortification with "confess[ing] our sins to the Lord," a process of confession that "enhance[s] repentance" and moves God to act mercifully towards the confessant. Thus confession for Tertullian seems both to represent the first step of a larger process of repentance, while at the same time he occasionally uses the term "confession" to refer to the process as a whole.

Cassian

The characteristics seen in Tertullian of confession as a one-time, public, performative act, constituting the acceptance of a new status within the church community, highlight the significant differences between Tertullian's understanding of confession and the form advocated by St. John Cassian just a couple of centuries later. Describing techniques of self-examination practiced by monks in Egypt and Palestine, Cassian diverges sharply from Tertullian by presenting a form of confession that is primarily concerned with one's thoughts (rather than immoral actions), and also is verbal, intimate (practiced in the company of usually just one other person, rather than before one's entire religious community), and ongoing. Cassian uses three brief metaphors and one short story to illustrate this understanding of confession. First, in his *Conferences*, Cassian describes the threat posed by thoughts when he writes that the human mind must be like a miller, a military officer, and a moneychanger. All three must carefully examine the content passing before them—whether grains, soldiers, or coins—to ensure that only those of good, authentic quality are allowed through.[28] The last metaphor is developed at length by Cassian when he writes:

> We ought . . . with wise discretion to analyze the thoughts which arise in our hearts, tracking out their origin and cause and author in the first instance, that we may be able to consider how we ought to yield ourselves to them in accordance with the desert [i.e., virtue] of those who suggest them so that we may … become good money-changers, whose highest skill and whose training is to test what is perfectly pure gold and what is commonly termed tested, or what is not sufficiently purified in the fire … this we can do, if we carry out the Apostle's advice, "Believe not every spirit, but prove [i.e., test] the spirits whether they are of God."[29]

Here Cassian surpasses concern for the morality of one's actions to focus instead on the origin of the thoughts that undergird those actions. Believing that beneath actions lie thoughts and behind thoughts lie the "spirits" that incite them, Cassian teaches that a Christian must diligently verify the authenticity of one's thoughts—"testing the spirits" that plant them within one's mind—

[28] Cassian, *Conferences*, 29, 32, 201.
[29] Ibid., 32.

to determine whether they truly come from God, rather than arising from Satan. This careful discerning of the origin of one's inner thoughts constitutes for Cassian an ongoing confession that progressively purifies the self. The process by which this purification occurs is illustrated by Cassian in the following story that appears in the eleventh chapter of his second *Conference* about a young monk who, unable to maintain a fast, had stolen bread to satiate his hunger:

> [W]hen after supper the spiritual conference had begun to be held, and the old man [i.e., the monastery's abbot] . . . was speaking about the sin of gluttony and the dominion of secret thoughts, and showing their nature and the awful power which they have so long as they are kept secret, I was overcome by the power of the discourse and was conscience stricken and terrified, as I thought that these things were mentioned by him because the Lord had revealed to the old man my bosom secrets; and first I was moved to secret sighs, and then my heart's compunction increased and I openly burst into sobs and tears, and produced from the folds of my dress which shared my theft and received it, the biscuit which I had carried off in my bad habit to eat on the sly; and I laid it in the midst and lying on the ground and begging for forgiveness confessed how I used to eat one every day in secret, and with copious tears implored them to intreat [*sic*] the Lord to free me from this dreadful slavery. Then the old man: "Have faith, my child," said he, "Without any words of mine, your confession frees you from this slavery. For you have today triumphed over your victorious adversary, by laying him low by your confession in a manner which more than makes up for the way in which you were overthrown by him through your former silence. . . ." The old man had not finished speaking when lo! a burning lamp proceeding from the folds of my dress filled the cell with a sulphureous [*sic*] smell so that the pungency of the odor scarcely allowed us to stay there. . . . [30]

Several important aspects of Cassian's understanding of confession are evident in this passage. First, underscoring the metaphors mentioned above, the root of the sins of theft and gluttony is shown to be the "secret thoughts" harbored within the young monk until the point at which he reveals his "bosom secrets" through verbal confession. In contrast to Tertullian, sin here is primarily a problem within the mind that must be purified not through a set of self-debasing actions but through verbalizing one's inner thoughts. In commenting upon the confessional aspects of this story, Michel Foucault observes that the decisive moment in which Satan (symbolized through the sulphurous odor lingering about the novice) leaves the young, repentant monk occurs neither because of the abbot's sermon nor when "the young monk reveals his act and restores the object of his theft," but finally through the "verbal act of confession, which comes last and which makes appear . . . the truth, the reality of what has happened."[31] Verbalization here serves to "drag" Satan from the inner recesses of one's impure thoughts out into "the light," from which he, being "incompatible with the light," is forced to flee.[32]

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[30] Ibid., 53–54.
[31] Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 178.
[32] Ibid.

Second, this purifying verbalization occurs neither privately nor before the entire monastic body but is presented primarily as being facilitated by the intimate presence of one's spiritual leader. While Tertullian interpreted confession as an act made publicly before one's church community, confession in Cassian occurs as an interpersonal encounter between a young monk and his abbot. For the repentant novice, the abbot exists as the "image of God" before whom the verbalization of thoughts reveals, as in the metaphors of the miller, military officer, and moneychanger, whether one's thoughts derive from God or Satan.[33]

Third, this encounter between the monk and the abbot has expelled Satan from the monk's inner self in only one sense—the thoughts that undergird the young man's sins of theft and gluttony—and presumably he remains in need of purification from other types of sinful thoughts. Thus the exorcising confession, operating through the verbal presentation of one's thoughts to one's spiritual master, must occur repeatedly. As in the metaphor of the moneychanger, one must examine constantly the "coins" passing through one's mind, in order to ensure that no "false," corrupting thoughts, originating from Satan, take root. Thus, as illustrated by the above metaphors and anecdote, Cassian's understanding of confession contrasts that of Tertullian in a number of notable ways: by being primarily thought-focused, verbal, intimate, and ongoing.

Śāntideva

Third, confession of sin as presented in the second chapter of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* both complements and diverges in specific ways from the respective understandings of confession espoused by Tertullian and Cassian. In particular, confession for Śāntideva results from two apparent motivations: an explicit fear of karmic retribution in the next life, as well as a desire to cultivate the "Awakening Mind" (*bodhicitta*). Also, like confession for Tertullian, confession in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is communally practiced, though this community is presented by Śāntideva as a spiritual rather than temporal one. These aspects of confession are presented by him through the following sections of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*'s chapter on confession: 1) worship (verses 1–25); 2) taking refuge (verses 26, 46–54); and 3) confession of misdeeds (verses 27–45, 55–66). These three practices mark the opening sections of a Mahāyāna liturgy known as the "Supreme Worship" (*Anuttara-Pūjā*, also called the "seven-limbed prayer"), a ritualized liturgy characterized by seven components[34] that developed as early as the late second century CE as a means for purifying sin and cultivating the Awakening Mind.[35] As Crosby and Skilton contend in the introduction to their translation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*'s second and third chapters, since this cultivation of the Awakening Mind is also the primary goal of Śāntideva's text, it is likely that he intentionally

[33] Michel Foucault, "Christianity and Confession," in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 186.

[34] As Haskett explains, these seven were configured into different possible arrangements, all of which typically included confession, from the following pool of ten possible liturgical components: 1. worship (*vandanā*), 2. offering (*pūjanā*), 3. triple refuge (*triśaraṇagamana*), 4. confession (*pāpadeśanā*), 5. rejoicing in merits (*puṇyānumodanā*), 6. requesting the Buddhas to teach (*adhyeṣanā*), 7. asking the Buddhas not to pass into *nirvāṇa* (*yācanā*), 8. giving up one's self (*ātmatyāga*), 9. generating the Awakening Mind (*bodhicittotpāda*), and 10. dedication of merit (*pariṇamanā*). See Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs," 116.

[35] Barbra R. Clayton, *Moral Theory in Śāntideva's* Śikṣāsamuccaya: *Cultivating the Fruits of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 2006), 138. Cf. Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 54, who places the development of this liturgy in the fifth to sixth centuries CE.

modeled part of his work on the structure of the popular *Anuttara-Pūjā* liturgy.[36] By analyzing the presentation of each of the three sections of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*'s second chapter (i.e., worship, taking refuge, and confession), I aim to draw out the most salient features of Śāntideva's understanding of confession and how this understanding compares to those held by Tertullian and Cassian.

Śāntideva opens his second chapter with an extended section of praise to the Buddhas who possess the Awakening Mind that he so earnestly seeks. Śāntideva begins this section with an explicit statement of the reason why he worships the Buddhas when he writes in the first verse: "That I might fully grasp that Jewel, the Mind, I worship here the Tathāgatas, and the flawless jewel, the true Dharma, and the sons of the Buddhas, who are oceans of virtue."[37] He thus establishes in the opening verse that his overarching motivation in this chapter is to "grasp" the Awakening "Mind," the *bodhicitta*, or in other words, the mental state (*citta*) characterized by enlightenment (*bodhi*).[38] After stating the reason for the worship that follows, Śāntideva then praises those beings who are enlightened ("the Tathāgatas"), the teaching that produces enlightenment ("the true Dharma"), and those who, following the Buddhas' teachings, have become enlightened ("the sons of the Buddhas"). Imagining himself in the presence of these three entities, Śāntideva offers them a host of gifts (including "blossoms," "fruits," "jewels," and various kinds of "plants" (verses 2–6)) before offering his "entire self" (verse 8), requesting that the Buddhas and their sons "take possession" of him. This section of worship and self-offering then culminates several verses later in Śāntideva seeking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and the "assembly of Bodhisattvas" (verse 26). The fundamental importance of this act for Śāntideva and for all who seek spiritual advancement according to his Buddhist tradition is underscored in the commentary on this passage by Patrul Rinpoche, a prominent nineteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist lama, who states: "Taking refuge opens the door to all the Buddhist teachings. It is the basis of all the vows and the source of all excellent qualities. It marks the difference between those who are inside the Dharma and those who are outside it; and through it one joins the ranks of those who are within. Refuge is therefore of the greatest importance, for it is the entrance to the entire Dharma."[39]

Thus desiring the Awakening Mind accessed through the Buddhas and their teachings, Śāntideva worships the Buddhas, Dharma, and sons of the Buddhas, gives them (in meditation) a host of offerings, including himself, and then requests to take refuge in them. However, immediately upon seeking this refuge, Śāntideva recognizes with new clarity the depth of his own moral faults. Crosby and Skilton summarize this effect of taking refuge upon Śāntideva when they note that "this act of commitment has a reflexive effect upon the individual, namely the perception of one's own shortcomings."[40] Far from an experience of blissful unity or awakened transcendence, Śāntideva's decision to seek refuge in the Buddhas sparks instead a profound awareness of the "cruel evil I have wickedly done" (verse 31). This awareness then provokes a powerful experience

[36] Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, "Introduction: Chapters 2 and 3," in Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 9–12.
[37] All verse references are taken from: Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[38] For an extended discussion of the meaning of *bodhicitta* in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* see Francis Brassard, *The Concept of* Bodhicitta *in Śāntideva's* Bodhicaryāvatāra (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).
[39] Kunzang Pelden, *The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech: A Detailed Commentary on Shantideva's* Way of the Bodhisattva, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007), 81.
[40] Crosby and Skilton, "Introduction," 12.

of terror at the thought of the punishment to be incurred upon death by all of this accumulated evil. Referencing the foundational Buddhist notion of *karma*, along with the belief that the quality of one's next lifetime is determined in large part by the degree to which one's *karma* upon death is good or bad (which in turn depends upon whether one has lived morally or immorally in this and previous lifetimes), Śāntideva describes himself as "continually in a state of alarm," and begs the Buddhas to "let death not come too soon to me, before my mass of evil is destroyed" (verse 32). After lamenting the inescapability of death, Śāntideva continues, "For one seized by the messengers of Death, what good is a relative, what good a friend? At that time, merit alone is a defense and I have not acquired it. By clinging to this transient life, not recognizing the danger, heedless, O Lords, I have acquired great evil" (verses 42–43).

Stricken in this manner with "feverish horror" (verse 45) at the thought of the suffering he stands to face if he dies without somehow negating the karmic debt incurred by his sin, Śāntideva confesses having "transgressed" the Buddhas' "command" (verse 54). Though Śāntideva does not detail his moral errors specifically, he nevertheless admits in a general statement of culpability any and all "evil" he has "done or caused" (both in this and all previous lifetimes), including any "harm" done to the "Three Jewels" (which refer in Śāntideva's text to the Buddhas, Dharma, and Bodhisattvas), his parents, or "others worthy of respect" (verses 28 and 30). He then summarizes both the specific motivation of fear behind his confession, as well as the general content of his confession at the very end of this chapter when Śāntideva writes, "Whatever evil I, a deluded fool, have amassed, what is wrong by nature and what is wrong by convention, see, I confess all that as I stand before the Protectors, my palms together in reverence, terrified of suffering, prostrating myself again and again…" (verses 64–65).

Thus the image of the confessant depicted by Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is of a person motivated most immediately by fear of long-term suffering but also by a desire for the Buddhas' Awakening Mind, who admits her culpability for acts of "evil" to these Buddhas in the context of seeking refuge in them. This presentation of confession both mirrors and diverges from confession as depicted by Tertullian and Cassian in a number of ways. For example, as seen also in Tertullian's presentation of "second repentance," confession is presented by Śāntideva as an effective method for avoiding much more painful punishment after one dies. While such punishment for Śāntideva lacks the eternal quality of Tertullian's conception of such suffering—and also results not from God but from the processes of *karma*—both Śāntideva and Tertullian present confession as a critical tool for negating the harmful consequences engendered by sin that, apart from being confessed, would otherwise fall upon oneself.

In addition, both Tertullian and Śāntideva underscore the communal nature of the confessional act. Though Śāntideva does not state explicitly whether he intends this ritual to be observed by a community of Buddhist monks or a solitary practitioner, he nevertheless highlights the essentially communal character of confession by portraying it as an interaction between a confessant and the exalted beings before whom she supplicates.[41] Confession as presented by Śāntideva is neither a solitary ritual within one's own mind, nor as in Cassian's depiction an intimate spiritual practice involving just two individuals. Instead, confession occurs in the presence

[41] Significant to this theme of confession's communal nature is the fact that such "exalted beings" are typically understood to include one's own lama, before whom monks often confess even today.

of a host of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the very beings whose Awakening Mind one seeks to cultivate. These beings play essential roles throughout the entire process of one's confession: stimulating Śāntideva's awareness of moral fault, in turn provoking his sense of remorse and fear, and finally offering a source of compassionate protection by receiving his requests for refuge. While this communal dimension differs from Tertullian's understanding, in which a confessant admitted her sin before her specific church community through a nonverbal act that changed her spiritual status in the eyes of other Christians, confession as a communal act nevertheless is espoused also by Śāntideva, in the sense that the Buddhas before whom one confesses play fundamental roles in one's confessional act and thereby make confession for Śāntideva an inherently interpersonal process.

In regard to other characteristics of the confessional act readily apparent in Tertullian and Cassian, such as whether the act is verbal or nonverbal and whether it occurs only once or many times, Śāntideva remains largely silent. He does not state explicitly whom he expects to follow the confessional ritual he outlines, nor how often it is to be practiced, nor whether it is to be verbalized. However, given that the ritual described by Śāntideva mirrors the confessional component of the "Supreme Worship" (*anuttara-pūjā*) liturgy,[42] these characteristics are likely already implied within the established ritual. In particular, as discussed above, such a ritual was composed of seven different parts, of which confession (*pāpadeśanā*) was one, and would have been recited verbally according to an established formula by a monastic practitioner for the cultivation of a certain goal, which in the context of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is the development of the Awakening Mind.[43]

Effects of Confession

Having considered in the previous section the meaning and general characteristics of confession for Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva, we can now examine in greater depth each author's view of the diverse benefits and effects caused by confession. Each writer presents certain transformative benefits as stemming directly from the confessional act, without which such effects cannot be experienced. These benefits overall can be grouped into three different categories: intrapersonal transformations that occur on spiritual, moral, and emotional levels.

Spiritual Effects

In a spiritual sense, all three authors present confession as occasioning transformative effects upon the spiritual status or condition of one who confesses wrongdoing. For both Tertullian and Śāntideva, these spiritual effects are closely related to suffering and punishment after death on account of sin performed in one's earthly life (along with previous lives, for Śāntideva). Tertullian, for example, depicts sin as "sickness" and confession of sin as "medicine" for its cure when he writes, "Let not to repent again be irksome: irksome to imperil one's self again, but not to be again set free…Repeated sickness must have repeated medicine. You will show your gratitude to the Lord by not refusing what the Lord offers you. You have offended, but can still be reconciled…"[44] Spiritually speaking, in Tertullian's view sin is a potentially deadly illness that "imperils" the sinner because of how it eventually provokes God's eternal punishment. But repentance exists as a form

[42] See footnote 34.
[43] Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs," 115–116, 196–197.
[44] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 7.

of spiritual "medicine," a method of alleviating God's anger over sin and experiencing reconciliation with him. Tertullian explains this spiritual effect of repentance in the ninth chapter of *De Paenitentia*, when he describes public self-mortification to express contrition over sin as a particular "demeanor calculated to move mercy," and a practice that "stand[s] in the stead of God's indignation, and by temporal mortification…expunge[s] eternal punishments."[45] Thus one of the primary effects of confession for Tertullian is a spiritual one: the confessant, by virtue of her repentant public self-mortification, moves from a state of spiritual illness in which one is subject to eternal punishment to a state of spiritual healing and reconciliation (both with God and with her religious community, whom she rejoins as a full participant after the period of her penitential status concludes) where God's mercy has replaced impending, eternal suffering.

Similarly for Śāntideva, one of the primary effects of confession is alleviation of future suffering to be incurred because of one's moral failures. In this sense, confession for Śāntideva is closely linked to the process of seeking refuge in the Buddhas. As depicted in the second chapter of his text, seeking refuge is the procedure that in the first place awakens Śāntideva to the profound depth of his moral failures and to the suffering he is likely to experience after death on account of them. Motivated by terror over this impending karmic punishment, Śāntideva confesses his moral wrongdoing (in a general sense) to the Buddhas and once again seeks refuge in them, with this second act of taking refuge motivated not primarily by a desire for the *bodhicitta* that they possess but by a need for protection. This contrast can be seen by comparing his requests for refuge near the beginning and end of his chapter. His first request, which appears in verse 26, is motivated entirely by his desire for "Awakening," as he writes that he seeks refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and assembly of Bodhisattvas "as far as the seat of the Awakening"—a phrase meaning "for the essence of Awakening" or "until I become a Buddha."[46] By contrast, by the end of his chapter, his motivation for seeking refuge is purely fear of retribution. This terror is conveyed, for example, in verse 54, where addressing a particular Bodhisattva (Vajrapāṇi), Śāntideva confesses wrongdoing and immediately requests refuge: "I have transgressed your command. Now, at seeing the danger, terrified, I go to you for refuge…" In between these two requests for refuge, Śāntideva repeatedly confesses his faults and bemoans the punishment that he may suffer. Thus for Śāntideva, refuge for *bodhicitta* leads to confession, which in turn leads to refuge for protection. Taken together, these two interlinked practices are presented by Śāntideva as the sole antidote for the karmic retribution moral wrongdoing incurs. While Śāntideva never expresses with certainty that his confession has been effective in warding off future suffering, his portrayal of confession, connected to taking refuge in the Buddhas, Dharma, and Bodhisattvas, nevertheless depicts this practice as essential for realizing the spiritual benefit of alleviating karmic punishment.

Related to this spiritual benefit and mirroring the impact of confession evident in Tertullian, the procedure of moving back and forth between seeking refuge and confession suggests that another spiritual effect of confession for Śāntideva is a deepening relationship between oneself and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to whom one confesses. Echoing the reconciliation aspect of Tertullian's text, in which a penitent's confession not only frees her from punishment but also fosters a renewed relationship with God,[47] confession in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* involves a deepening

[45] Ibid., 9.
[46] Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 148.
[47] See, for example, Tertullian's discussion of the possibility of reconciliation with God through repentance in Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 7.

of one's dependence upon the exalted beings who receive one's admission of sin and request for refuge. Bridging Śāntideva's two requests for refuge, confession functions as a mechanism that propels Śāntideva from seeking the Buddhas purely for their *bodhicitta* to seeking them out of a desperate, terrified fear. Confession thus produces a spiritual effect upon the relationship between Śāntideva and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. As in Tertullian, confession for Śāntideva plays an essential role in deepening the relationship between the confessant and the one hearing the confession, moving to a much more emotionally charged level of desperate dependence.

In Cassian, however, in contrast to the emphasis on freedom from future punishment as seen in Tertullian and Śāntideva, the presentation of the spiritual effects of confession suggests that confession for Cassian leads not so much to alleviation of future suffering as to the spiritual effect of exorcising the influence of Satan within one's life in the present. This effect is seen, for example, in Cassian's story of the young monk who confesses his theft of bread to his abbot. Upon hearing the monk's confession, the abbot commends him for openly revealing his sin, not because such disclosure of wrongdoing fosters freedom from eternal punishment but because by confessing, the monk experiences freedom from spiritual "slavery" in this life, dramatically depicted by the "sulphureous" odor (symbolizing Satan's influence upon the monk) leaving the monk after his confession.[48] By verbally admitting his wrongdoing to his abbot, the young monk experiences a kind of exorcism, freeing him from demonic influence. Cassian furthermore enjoins his readers to view their minds as a "moneychanger," carefully sifting through one's multitude of thoughts—like a moneychanger searching out false coins—bringing each thought to light via the practice of ongoing, verbal confession that reveals the source of each thought.[49] Through this process, the confessant is enabled to recognize whether one's thoughts come from God or from Satan and, by rejecting the latter, to experience freedom from Satan's influence in their present lives.

Moral Effects

In addition to the spiritual effects presented by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva as stemming from the confessional act, these three authors also relate confession to a series of moral transformations in the lives of confessants. Specifically for Tertullian, a moral dimension of repentance is suggested by the way he writes of evil ceasing once one repents of it. For example, in a passage on the benefits of public, penitential self-mortification, Tertullian writes:

> It is a miserable thing thus to come to *exomologesis*: yes, for evil does bring to misery; but where repentance is to be made, the misery ceases, because it is turned into something salutary. Miserable it is to be cut, and cauterized, and racked with the pungency of some (medicinal) powder: still, the things which heal by unpleasant means do, by the benefit of the cure, excuse their own offensiveness, and make present injury bearable for the sake of the advantage to supervene.[50]

Here Tertullian continues the medical imagery discussed above in regard to the spiritual benefits of confession. While spiritual effects may be interpreted from this passage, a moral dimension to the benefits of *exomologesis* is also evident. In this passage, Tertullian concedes that the self-

[48] Cassian, *Conferences*, 53–54.
[49] Ibid., 32.
[50] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 10.

mortification and public exposure of *exomologesis* is a "miserable" process, but nevertheless strongly exhorts his readers to practice this "second repentance" because of its powerful and "salutary" effects upon evil. Specifically, in Tertullian's view, repentance causes the "misery" of evil to cease: functioning like a medical technique, referenced by Tertullian through the imagery of cutting, cauterizing, and utilizing a strong medicinal powder, repentance "heal[s] by unpleasant means," curing the penitent from evil, an effect that suggests both the spiritual dimension discussed above and the moral one of being strengthened to avoid future evil. Just as a wound when cauterized ceases to fester in one's body, evil when confessed ceases to grow in one's soul.

A similar moral effect appears in Śāntideva's chapter on confession. In addition to the spiritual benefits discussed above of alleviation of karmic punishment and a closer relationship with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas before whom one confesses, confession in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* also fosters a life of greater moral conduct. While Śāntideva does not state as explicitly or descriptively as Tertullian confession's efficacy in promoting a desire for moral living, the final verse of his chapter suggests that confession plays an important role in leading one from immoral to moral behavior. After fearfully confessing his wrongdoing before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and begging them for protection from punishment for the negative *karma* he has incurred, Śāntideva concludes his chapter with a commitment to a life of greater morality, as he writes, "Let the Leaders [i.e., Buddhas and Bodhisattvas] accept my transgression for what it is. It is not good, O Protectors. I must not do it again" (verse 66). Thus the final words of a chapter devoted to confession are Śāntideva's personal resolve not to commit future wrongdoing. Through the processes of worship of the Buddhas, fearfully recognizing personal moral faults, refuge-taking, and confession of these faults Śāntideva has reached a place morally where he not only recognizes the immorality of past behavior but also discovers a determination to chart a new moral course. By thus tying together in this verse admission of "transgression" and a commitment to a life of greater morality, Śāntideva's text suggests this renewed moral resolve as a possible effect of the process of recognizing and confessing one's sin.

For Cassian, the moral effects of confession overlap closely with the spiritual ones described above. Because confession both enables one to recognize thoughts that result from Satan and also frees one from this demonic influence, confession produces the morally transformative effect of enabling the confessant to follow only those thoughts that come from God and thereby to live a morally upright life. Lacking the verbalization of one's thoughts before a spiritual leader (e.g., abbot), one often fails to understand where they ultimately originate, and therefore one is prone to thinking—and in turn behaving—in ways that run contrary to God's moral ways. But through the progressive purification of one's thoughts that occurs via confession, one is enabled to recognize the sources of specific thoughts, reject those from Satan, and follow only those that originate from God.

Moreover, confession not only helps one to recognize the sources of thoughts and retain only those that are godly, but it also changes one's desires. Cassian refers to this transformative effect when, in relating the story about the young monk who confesses his sins of theft and gluttony in stealing bread, he includes the following observation at the end of the anecdote: "the sway of that diabolical tyranny over [the monk] has been destroyed by the power of this confession and stilled for ever [*sic*] so that the enemy has never even tried to force upon [him] any more the

recollection of this desire."[51] Confession of sins thus releases the monk not only from the influence of Satan ("that diabolical tyranny") but also affects his desires such that Satan no longer attempts even to remind him of his previous attraction to the sins of theft and gluttony. In this way, confession exerts a positive influence upon moral desire, freeing one from immoral attractions. Thus confession in Cassian's view both enables one to discern moral (divine) versus immoral (demonic) sources of thoughts, and also reduces Satan's influence over one's moral desires. In turn, these effects enable one to make behavioral choices in accordance with only those thoughts that stem from God and to experience freedom from desires that result from Satan, thereby making possible a lifestyle characterized by increasing moral purity.

Emotional Effects

Besides the various spiritually and morally transformative effects of confession suggested by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva, positive emotional benefits tied to confession also can be identified, particularly in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. In this text, the emotional transformation from gloomy fear to joy, through the process of confession, appears most clearly when examining the sharp contrast in the emotional tenor of the final verses of Śāntideva's chapter on confession and the first verse of the following chapter (i.e., chapter 3, "Adopting the Awakening Mind"). Specifically, while in the process of realizing the depths of his wrongdoing and admitting this failure before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Śāntideva describes himself with a range of dark emotions and feelings, including being gripped by "feverish horror" (verse 45), "confusion" (verse 47), "fear" (verse 50), and "terror" (verses 51, 54, and 65). But once his confession is complete, in the very first verse of the following chapter, Śāntideva's emotional state has completely changed, as he opens the chapter by stating, "I rejoice with delight at the good done by all beings. . . . " (verse 1). Having discarded the terror brought on by awareness of moral failures through the related processes of confession and taking refuge, Śāntideva is quite suddenly able to rejoice and experience "delight" over the moral actions of both himself and others ("the good done by all beings"). Emotionally transformed by the process of confession, Śāntideva moves from fear to joy, from terror to delight.

While such an explicit presentation of the emotional transformation of the confessant is absent from the works of Tertullian and Cassian, Tertullian does reference such transformation in *De Paenitentia*, though not in regard to the confessant but with respect to God and the angels. While in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, confession produces a profound emotional change in the confessant, in *De Paenitentia*, confession produces such a transformation in God. Not only are "the heavens" and "the angels" described by Tertullian as "glad" at a person's repentance, but even God himself, though initially "offended" by a person's sin, is moved out of "paternal love" to respond with "joy" over a sinner who repents of her sin.[52] In support of this contention, Tertullian references three parables from Luke 15,[53] which describe the joy experienced by God when someone who has sinned repents and returns to live according to God's ways.

[51] Cassian, *Conferences*, 54.
[52] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 8.
[53] These are the parables of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3–7), lost coin (Luke 15:8–10), and prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).

Conclusion

This paper has briefly compared the respective understandings of confession as promulgated by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva. By analyzing the diverse ways in which confession is presented in Tertullian's *De Paenitentia*, Cassian's *Conferences*, and Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the paper not only has sought to highlight the multiplicity of forms confessional practices may take (both between religious traditions and within a particular tradition), but also has attempted to underscore the common theme among all three authors of confession's fundamental role in personal transformation. Each author directly connects moral self-accounting with an array of profound benefits (spiritual, moral, and/or emotional), casting confession as a critical practice for the realization of meaningful personal change.

In addition to these personal benefits, the respective presentations of confession by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva also yield a variety of larger theological and ministerial implications. Theologically, one of the primary insights advanced by these authors relates to the communality of sin and confession. While an individual's wrongdoing and confession may seem to be among the most private of practices, influencing only one's own spiritual welfare, the three authors contend, by contrast, that sin and confession affect one's entire religious community. In addition, Cassian and Śāntideva in particular underscore confession's essential role in the paradoxical conversion of immorality into morality: confession as a mechanism that takes a life characterized by wrongdoing and transforms it into one of moral purity.

Furthermore, all three authors emphasize the critical importance of spiritual authority, as they depict confession as occurring between an individual and a figure (or figures) who holds some degree of spiritual power over that individual. The essential role played by these authorities suggests that for these moral thinkers cultivating recognition of the ways in which one is spiritually subservient to certain others is a necessary and beneficial endeavor.

One final theological implication, seen particularly in Tertullian's largely nonverbal confession, is the role of the body in confession: confession as a physical act, which addresses the intersection of spirituality and physicality. As illustrated, for example, in the repentance of St. Fabiola mentioned above, the confessant in the penitential form advocated by Tertullian communicates her contrition through physical acts rather than words. Contrasting the ongoing verbalization that characterizes Cassian's understanding of confession, for example, Tertullian teaches that confession is best expressed physically through acts of self-mortification (e.g., abstaining from bathing, failing to comb one's hair, fasting). By utilizing one's body in ways that silently deprive it of common pleasures, a particular spiritual condition (namely contrition) is communicated and a desire for forgiveness is expressed. Thus the body for Tertullian functions in confession as a kind of window into one's contrite soul, expressing one's inner emotions and spiritual desires in a manner that reveals a body-centered spirituality, a way of practicing the spiritual tradition of Christian confession without necessarily needing words.

In addition to these diverse theological implications, the depictions of confession offered by Śāntideva, Cassian, and Tertullian also carry various implications for ministry leaders. Briefly stated, the essential role played by confession in the cultivation of the spiritual life, as discussed by these authors, suggests that religious ministers could greatly benefit their congregants by

encouraging the practice of this oft-neglected ritual. Specifically, Buddhist ministers may consider the value of aiding their practitioners in rediscovering the benefits of confession as presented by Śāntideva. Particularly in the case of Western Buddhists who may embrace Buddhism as an alternative to the "sin-heavy" traits of certain Judeo-Christian traditions, helping such practitioners recognize both the importance placed upon confession by figures as eminent as Śāntideva and the benefits that result from confession may assist these individuals in rediscovering a spiritual practice which, when cultivated appropriately, can foster a life marked by the joys of moral and emotional transformation.

Christian ministers may also consider reacquainting their congregants with the practice of confession in light of the numerous benefits presented by Tertullian and Cassian. Besides simply exhorting practitioners to confess sin, however, ministers of Christian congregations might also take into account the diversity evident in Tertullian's and Cassian's contrasting depictions of confession as they consider how to present this spiritual practice in a way that is meaningful to Christians today. Just as confession in Cassian's context differed noticeably from the *exomologesis* advocated by Tertullian, contemporary Christian ministers might look to the contextualizations and reinterpretations of confession's form as described by Cassian as a starting point for their own innovations in making confession more relevant for their particular religious communities.

In sum, Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva present the practice of confession in a variety of forms, yet collectively underscore the critical importance of this spiritual practice for personal transformation. Contrasting the common, contemporary discomfort with notions of sin and confession, as highlighted in the works of Kidder and Menninger, these three religious writers suggest that confession is neglected only to one's own loss and that a rich array of benefits exists to be enjoyed by those who do not avoid, when necessary, to confess wrongdoing. Moreover, their respective presentations of confession, particularly when read alongside each other in a comparative way that highlights the unique features of each text, offer a stimulating variety of ways to rethink traditional interpretations of sin and confession, providing contemporary individuals (and religious communities) fresh paradigms through which to re-engage the ancient practice of confession.

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Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko's Theo-Humanistic Comparative Theology: Analogies of Mysticism

Ko Takemoto

Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko was an early twentieth-century Japanese Catholic theologian. His main concern is how to align Christianity with modernity in Japan and with the Japanese spiritual heritage of his time. Yoshimitsu argues that Christian grace could embrace Japanese spiritual heritage, and the same grace could guide anthropocentrism within atheistic modernity in a theo-humanistic direction. He suggests that thinking of "mysticism" as "the élan of life" would bridge Christianity and Japanese spiritual heritage; beyond that, doing so would create an effective response to a modernity in which people are caught between the grandeur of scientific advancement and the poverty of metaphysical spiritual engagement based on this unique approach to "mysticism." With this perspective in mind, Yoshimitsu explores interreligious studies including Christianity, the Advaita tradition in Hinduism, and Islam. His approach to "mysticism" is considered to be a theo-humanistic approach, rather than a theo-theistic approach, which has been common in the West. And while certainly we expect that the understanding of religion, in general and with regard to specific religions, has changed over time, there is still much of value in Yoshimitsu's presentation of "analogies of mysticism" in various religions.

Keywords: comparative theology in Japan, Japanese Catholicism, analogies of mysticism, élan of life, theo-humanism

Introduction

In Europe and the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century, several notable studies in comparative theology were completed by F. Max Müller, James F. Clark, and J.A. MacCulloch.[1] At about the same time, there was a similar sprout of comparative theology in the Far East, but from a different angle. This article traces scholarly works by the most prominent scholar of the latter moment, a Japanese Catholic theologian named Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko. Yoshimitsu did not primarily identify himself as a comparative theologian, nor did he focus mainly on interreligious ideas, but his theological arguments clearly engage with comparative theology covering Christianity, the Advaita tradition in Hinduism, and Islam. Yoshimitsu should not be regarded as an expert on Hinduism or Islam, but rather as a Japanese Christian of his time who is engaging with those religions in particularly intelligent and productive ways. His approach to comparative theology, which emphasizes practice and anthropocentrism, is different from those of today's mainstream Western comparative theologians. Due to this distinct approach, as well as limited translation of his works into English, Western scholars have paid little attention to his works.[2]

[1] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 32–35.
[2] Only two of Yoshimitsu's articles are translated into English: "Catholicism and Contemporary Man," included in *Xavier's Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture,* ed. Kevin Doak (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011) 80–90; and "The Theological Grounds of Overcoming Modernity: How Can Modern Man Find God?" included in *Overcoming*

However, his unique endeavor offers valuable insights to broaden our knowledge of contemporary comparative theology.

Yoshimitsu was born in 1904 on the southern Japanese island of Tokunoshima, where traditional ancestor worship was commonly practiced together with Buddhism.[3] He was initially baptized into the Protestant community in 1921, and then converted to Catholicism in 1927. He graduated from the Imperial University of Tokyo in March 1928. Soon after graduation, he studied for two years in France with Jacques Maritain and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP. Yoshimitsu wrote many articles about Christian theology, but also showed a keen interest in non-Christian religions, including Hinduism and Islam. Since Yoshimitsu had been raised in a non-Christian environment where non-Christian religions were taken for granted on their own terms, he had no hesitation in engaging with non-Christian religions throughout his scholarly life.

Yoshimitsu's approach to comparative theology is unique compared with contemporary comparative theologies in the West. Yoshimitsu is an advocate of a theocentric humanism where the dichotomy of nature and the supernatural is eminent; the relationship between doctrine and practice is also important. This comparative theology based on theocentric humanism is distinct from Western approaches, which are based on theocentric theism.

To that end, this article begins by comparing Yoshimitsu's approach to comparative theology with that of the West in the late twentieth century, focusing on the key aspect of theism vs. humanism. It then explores Yoshimitsu's comparative theological framework based on nature, the supernatural, and mysticism. After reviewing Yoshimitsu's theological_framework, this article explores the background of Yoshimitsu's focus on mysticism in the moment of Japan's Western-influenced modernization. Through this analysis, the article suggests that mysticism as theo-humanistic approach provided an entry point for Yoshimitsu to bridge his own practice of Christianity with other religions, while also offering hope that Christianity would be accepted during his home country's modernization. Finally, the article engages Yoshimitsu's analysis of mysticism within the Hindu Advaita and Islamic traditions. It brings us significant insights about the way mysticism can function as the "*élan* of life," which analogically exists in various religions and has the potential to connect various religious traditions in a unique and insightful manner.

Yoshimitsu's Approach of Theocentric Humanism

Yoshimitsu's comparative theology is distinct from the Western approach common among mainstream scholars of the late twentieth century, such as S. Mark Heim, Jacques Dupuis, and Keith Ward. One of the main differences between Yoshimitsu's approach and the Western approach lies in different interpretations of "theocentricity." Both Yoshimitsu's and the Western approach are based on theocentric ideas, but Yoshimitsu's is based on theocentric humanism, while Western scholars emphasize theocentric theism. Comparative theology based on theocentric theism (which I term CTT) explores a clear-cut, non-dualistic structure of God or the Absolute. The concepts or elements of the Being are central to the scholarly work of those who emphasize

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Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan, ed. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 77–91.

[3] Eisuke Wakamatsu, *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko: Shi to tenshi no keijijōgaku* (Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu: A Metaphysics of Poetry and Angels) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014), 3.

theocentric theism. On the other hand, comparative theology based on theocentric humanism (which I term CTH) has a multi-layered, dualistic structure. In CTH, the main concerns are the understanding of the relationship between nature and the supernatural in each religion and the way each religion fills the gap between nature and the supernatural through mysticism or practice. CTT tends to seek the analogy of super-naturalness among religions in its discourse, while for CTH, the matter of concern is, first, the identification of the religious domain of each religion (whether it is in the domain of nature, or in the domain of the supernatural, or both) and, second, the relationship between these domains of nature and the supernatural, or the relationship of two different states within the single domain of nature. There exist theologies and religions in which the relationship between "nature" and the "supernatural" is paramount, such as Christianity, but also those in which the relationship between "nature" and other "nature" in the same natural domain is more important, such as Buddhism.

Yoshimitsu's comparative theology is rooted in his Catholic faith, which emphasizes the desirable relationship between Man and God, together with the adherence to Thomist ideas of freedom and grace. Based on this, he extends his viewpoint of Man (nature) and God (the supernatural) to other non-Christian religions. For Yoshimitsu's CTH, human religious aspiration, either within the realm of nature and the supernatural or just within the realm of nature, are inclusively important. In other words, mysticism is a form of religious aspiration that lies between the realm of nature and the supernatural on the one hand and between the realm of nature and nature*[4] on the other.

For Yoshimitsu, mysticism has no nominal definition; rather he defines it as "the *élan* of life" ("the dynamism of life").[5] Yoshimitsu's notion of "the *élan* of life" shares a common ground with Bergson's "*élan vital*" in terms of mysticism and experiential metaphysics; however, the two notions are distinct. Yoshimitsu's "*élan* of life" seeks to balance intellectual recollection towards transcendence (divinity) with experiential practice. On the other hand, Bergson's notion of "*élan vital*" emphasizes the intuitive evolution towards transcendence (divinity) as an experiential practice.[6] Yoshimitsu suggests that *élan* of life" is a dynamic practice between Man, as a creature of reason, and God ("*Motus creaturae rationalis ad Deum*").[7] To express this "*élan* of life," he uses the phrases associated with "restlessness towards God," "humility," and "perseverance (even foolishness sometimes)."[8] These progressive and virtuous elements seem to be the basis for Yoshimitsu's mysticism. Bernard McGinn suggests one typology of mysticism is process. Yoshimitsu's mysticism belongs to this category. McGinn writes:

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[4] Here, "nature*" denotes "true self" or "the ultimate experience" within nature.

[5] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpishugi to nijūseiki shisō* (Mysticism and Twentieth Century Thought)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1938] 1984), 4.

[6] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Tetsugakusha no kami: Bergson and Pascal* (Philosopher's God: Bergson and Pascal)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1941] 1984), 169–170.

[7] Ibid., 170.

[8] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Gendaini okeru shinpishugi no mondai* (Current problems of Mysticism)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1942] 1984), 44; Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Tetsugakusha no kami: Descartes and Pascal* (Philosopher's God: Descartes and Pascal)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1941] 1984), 390–392.

> [M]ysticism—or, better, the mystical life—is essentially a process, an itinerary or journey to God, not just a moment or brief state of what is often called mystical union, important as such moments may be. A proper grasp of mysticism requires an investigation of the ways by which mystics have prepared for God's intervention in their lives and the effect that divine action has had upon the mystic and those to whom he or she has communicated the message.[9]

In this context, if non-Christian mysticism engages "the *élan* of life" processually, it is analogous to Christian mysticism even though there may be no shared doctrine or the understanding of transcendence. This common (and expanded) mysticism is a base of Yoshimitsu's CTH.

Scholars of CTT such as Keith Ward, S. Mark Heim, and Jacques Dupuis have offered general concepts of the sublime value such as the "supersensory realm" and "limitless better possibility" as ways of representing the divine within different religions. Ward defines religion as "the ultimate nature of things in relation to a supersensory realm."[10] Ward's phrase "supersensory realm" may sound like "other worldliness." Heim too offers his own term to encapsulate religious commonality, using the notion of achieving "a limitless better possibility" to illustrate a religious common goal.[11] Dupuis perceives salvific Ultimate Reality within various religions.[12] These three terms—"supersensory realm," "pursuit of limitless better possibility," and "Ultimate Reality"—demonstrate different theologians' expressions of how major world religions pursue or imagine the ultimate Truth. Despite these theologians' departure from the word "God," however, the basic concept of these three approaches is still theistic inasmuch as all three rely on the elements of omnipotence and infinity associated with the Absolute.

Yoshimitsu accepts the individual legitimacy of global religions in the same way as the pluralists in the West, but he does not attempt to integrate religions through "analogies of super-natural" based on a single paradigm such as the supersensory realm. Rather, he uses generic dimensions, such as nature and the supernatural, to map global religions and find "analogies of mysticism" between nature and the supernatural or between two different natures. For Yoshimitsu, mysticism as process is the indispensable hinge between religious seekers and their goal, or further, a process that could be a goal itself in some cases. Yoshimitsu never downplays mysticism as process in favor of doctrine in his comparative theology.

Nature, the Supernatural, and Mysticism

For Yoshimitsu, nature and the supernatural are two distinctively different domains that must not be comingled. Hence, in religions, the identification of the precise relationship between nature and the supernatural is essential. The Absolute in nature, like Brahman and God in the supernatural, are distinct. Yoshimitsu does not attempt to wrap the Absolute and God into one basket of theism. He contends that both the relationship of nature and the supernatural, and of nature and true-nature, must be the core of religious paradigm. Hence, when identifying the essence of religions, Yoshimitsu avoids a single abstraction such as "the supersensory realm," "a

[9] Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), xiv–xv.
[10] Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 318.
[11] S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 213.
[12] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 254.

limitless better possibility," or "the Ultimate Reality." Each global religion presents a different discourse on the relationship between nature and the supernatural or nature and nature*. Some religions are open to revelation, while others are not.

Yoshimitsu's main concern is each religion's understanding of the relationship between nature and the supernatural, or nature and nature*, and eventually, mysticism as "the *élan* of life." He looks into how each religion explores the possibility of nature coming closer to the supernatural or nature*. On the other hand, his view towards nature* (the Absolute) is inclusive. Yoshimitsu contends that doctrine needs to be experienced in some form. He presents this idea of mysticism as follows:

> The workings of religions and philosophy should always be where there are humans as spiritual beings, and mysticism or *mystik* is its central life, its lively élan, and its ultimate deployment of life. Philosophy and religions, in particular, must be understood as *die Sache des Lebens* (the matter of life). *Mystik* is the ultimate substance of religious and philosophical life, and *mystik* is a fact of life preceding explanation and definition. It exists in the living awareness of life.[13]

Here, Yoshimitsu seems to favor Alois Mager's phrase, "Mysticism is experienced dogma."[14] This highlights the religious and philosophical tendencies that pursue mysticism in life. To grasp doctrine fully, doctrine-based mysticism must be lived or experienced by humans. There are different combinations of doctrine and mysticism, but they all pursue a living awareness of life such as restlessness, humility, and perseverance. In the meantime, Yoshimitsu is critical about ecstatic mysticism, which is distant from life experience.

In Yoshimitsu's approach to Christianity, there is a clear distinction between mysticism as human endeavor or "the *élan* of life" on the one hand and God's will or grace on the other. That said, both mysticism and grace are necessary. In this context, Yoshimitsu suggests that his view of Catholicism requires both Augustinian mysticism that values faith as well as a Thomist understanding of grace under the supernatural order of salvation. In other words, "nature" must thrive with its own form of mysticism side by side with a theological understanding of Thomist grace. As long as Man is in nature, for Yoshimitsu, Man cannot bypass mysticism as a process to cultivate his own finite, yet virtuous, quality. This experience is necessary if Man wants to encounter God's gifts, even though prevenient grace may already exist within nature. On the other hand, Yoshimitsu acknowledges different forms of mysticism embedded in non-Christian religions. Each of these is a form of the "*élan* for life" towards the Absolute or nature*, but they are not all directed towards the supernatural. They are also experiential and existential. Yoshimitsu terms this mysticism "natural mysticism" following his mentor Jacques Maritain.

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[13] The original text is included in Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu's 1938 article "*Shinpishugi to nijusseiki shisō* (Mysticism and the Twentieth Century)." The English translation of this quotation is included in Akira Takahashi's article "Understanding Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko's Mysticism," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 39, no. 4 (2002): 277.

[14] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpishugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 4 (Tokyo: ,Kōdansha, [1943] 1984), 50.

Mysticism: A Way Forward

Yoshimitsu's special interest in mysticism is related to his struggle as a Japanese Catholic theologian faced with the advent of "modernity" in the early twentieth century. During his lifetime, Japan was in the process of undergoing a robust westernization after two centuries of national seclusion, while in the West a strong current of atheism and nihilism were ascendant. Based on this distinct vantage point, Yoshimitsu observes a certain stagnation of Western thought after the sixteenth century:

> Since the sixteenth century, modern spirituality has exposed a tragic dialectic process in history. It started as the separation from the church; it confronted rational deism and the separation from Christ in the seventeenth to eighteenth century; it went through naturalism and materialism in the nineteenth century; then, eventually it ended up with the hopeless selfish heroism symbolized by "God is dead."[15]

Yoshimitsu sees the Western intellect as being caught between the grandeur of scientific technology and the misery of a poverty of metaphysical spiritual contemplation.[16] To cope with this stagnation, Yoshimitsu seeks a return to the authentic Catholicism of Thomist grace and Augustinian faith. Yoshimitsu's adherence to Augustine's soul-oriented metaphysics comes from his basic commitment to faith or the "open spiritual attitude (*hirakareta seishintaido*)."[17] Yoshimitsu thinks that spirituality, which is especially based on mysticism or mystical theology, can help one regain true humanism in the midst of modernity. Rebalancing "intellectual ethics" and mysticism is thus the core of his approach to modernity. Yoshimitsu illustrates this idea by drawing Descartes and Pascal in conversation:

> Descartes's "intellectual ethics" must unite with Pascal's "logic of religious faith." Until then, there can be no salvation for the modern world. The tragic situation of conflict, where there is no reconciliation between Descartes and Pascal but rather a false choice between the two, exemplifies the powerlessness of modern metaphysics and exposes the cause of the problems facing the modern spiritual world.[18]

Yoshimitsu upholds Pascal's mysticism, or his "*élan* of life," which owns restlessness, humility, and perseverance, as follows:

> Pascal illustrates the continuous demand for salvation from the human soul until one is salvaged by the order of grace, which is the third of his three orders: the order of body, the order of spirit, and the order of grace. Pascal's significance resides in

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[15] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Chūsei seishinshi no rinen* (Ideas in the Spiritual History of the Middle Ages)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1943] 1984), 12.

[16] Kevin Doak, "Time, Culture and Faith: Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko's Critique of Modernity." *University of Tokyo Center of Philosophy Bulletin* I (2003): 113.

[17] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*St. Augustine ni okeru risei to shinkō: Seishinshiteki shūkyō tetsugaku jyoron no isshō* (St. Augustine's Reason and Faith: A Chapter for the Introduction of Spiritual Religious Philosophy)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1943] 1984), 83.

[18] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Descartes yori Thomas heno michi* (The Road from Descartes to Thomas)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1943] 1984), 409.

> the fact that he is the deepest Christian confessional thinker, as exemplified by his saying that "I will not sleep with Christ until the end of the world."[19]

Pascal's enthusiastic mysticism or even love, which is shown here, is necessary to counterbalance Descartes' *cogito*. In the early twentieth century, Yoshimitsu tries to find a new modernity by rebalancing "intellectual ethics" with "mysticism."

During this period of Yoshimitsu's life, Christianity in Japan was still in its infancy after a two centuries-long national prohibition of Christianity. Despite this adversity, Yoshimitsu was optimistic due to the legacy of "natural mysticism" in Japan. "Natural mysticism," as noted above, is mysticism directed towards nature* rather than towards God. Yoshimitsu believes "natural mysticism" will seamlessly lead Japan into Christian mysticism. He writes of this possible transition as follows:

> If the impact of one thousand years' history of Buddhism on Japanese spiritual culture is considered, including the contribution by Shotoku-Taishi, Kobo-Daishi, and other Kamakura era religious thinkers, this new bloom of spirituality will compare with the previous years. The new bloom of Christian souls in Japan embracing the perspective of "the supernatural" is hopeful, and God's future providence in world history will not be less in coming years than in the past two thousand year glory.[20]

Yoshimitsu's struggle with modernity as a Catholic theologian gave him a special awareness of mysticism. At the same time, Yoshimitsu thinks that mysticism will be a continuous religious anchor into the future if the religious paradigm does shift in favor of Christianity. For Yoshimitsu, legitimate mysticism has the potential to be a seamless guiding force between religions. Due to this privileging of mysticism, Yoshimitsu is skeptical of religious approaches that minimize or eliminate mysticism. His study of Hinduism and Islam is firmly rooted in this hopeful, inclusive approach to mysticism.

Yoshimitsu's View on the Advaita Tradition in Hinduism

Yoshimitsu lays out his approach to the Advaita tradition in Hinduism in his article "The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence" ("*Shinpishugi to keijijyougaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi*"). Hinduism represents a diversified set of religious thoughts and practices. As a constellation of religions, Hinduism also has been influenced by Islam and British colonialism.[21] In the case of Yoshimitsu, his thought on Hinduism seems to concentrate on the specific tradition of Advaita (non-dualism). He mainly focuses on two elements: the Upanishads and Patanjali's Yoga, both through the lens of Advaita. He also follows Shankara's discourse on

[19] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Pascal wo kataru* (Interview: Thoughts on Pascal)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1942] 1984), 419.
[20] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Maritain sensei heno tegami* (Letter to Professor Maritain)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 5 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1938] 1985), 145.
[21] The expression "a constellation of religions" to refer to Hinduism is used in Ariel Glucklich, *The Strides of Vishnu: Hindu Culture in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

Advaita Vedanta. Although Yoshimitsu's approach towards Hinduism is limited to those threads that relate to the Advaita tradition, and does not include any other aspects or foreign influences, his focus on Advaita still gives us key insights into Hindu mysticism. Yoshimitsu tries to show the seeds of mysticism within the Advaita tradition in order to demonstrate how they explore the homology between nature and nature*. He suggests that the Upanishads in their invitation to speculation, and Patanjali Yoga in its commitment to practice, offer a similar mystical thesis that could be called "natural mysticism."

Yoshimitsu argues that the Upanishads offer both a contemplative tradition as well as a philosophical and religious one. According to Yoshimitsu, this contemplative tradition relates more to a practical necessity for emancipation (*moksha*) from life and death rather than a pure intellectual speculation. Thus, this spiritual search for the inner-absolute has the element of religious mysticism.[22] Yoshimitsu asserts that the search for the Absolute as the cosmic true existence is made through spiritual, empirical, and existential comprehension. In other words, since *moksha* is considered to be a homological union between the human and the cosmic Absolute, it is a part of mysticism. Yoshimitsu describes the core concept of Brahman in the Upanishads as follows:

> Brahman is the true existence behind phenomena. It is the permanent true nature under all creation and change; it is certainty over uncertainty; it is the eternal principle for all; it creates all; it is the force to maintain and include all; there is no other thing in existence except Brahman. Brahman is the Atman: the Soul; it means oneself, it means "thou," and it means him. It is the universal soul which exists as deep trans-individualistic existence.[23]

According to Yoshimitsu, the Upanishad's core concept of *Tat twam asi* ("That thou art") indicates that Brahman is the universal self-ness for all people, including "thou" and I. Brahman is the individualistic Atman and the universal Atman at the same time (hence the term *advaita*, "not-two").

Yoshimitsu finds similar thoughts within Patanjali's Yoga, which was compiled after the Upanishadic period. Yoshimitsu identifies the key point of Patanjali Yoga as the quest to abide the seer's (or the soul's) true nature by stilling the changing states of the mind.[24] Since Patanjali Yoga claims that the soul's true nature must be obtained through the cessation of truth-bearing discrimination and meditative absorption without form, Yoshimitsu suggests that Patanjali Yoga provides a mystical path much like the union of Brahman and Atman (hence the term yoga, "union").[25] Yoshimitsu writes about this similarity as follows:

> Positive unity between Brahman and Atman through metaphysical speculative explanation and Patanjali Yoga's negative meditative absorption without form do not differ in substance. In both cases, the mystical contemplator's psychological experience needs to go through two stages. First, the direct perception of existence (*ishvara*) or soul (*purusha*) is attained through conscious spiritual concentration

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[22] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpishugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," 65–66.
[23] Ibid., 61.
[24] Yoshimitsu refers to the Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali (I, 2-3).
[25] Yoshimitsu refers to the Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali (I, 51).

> (*samprajnata-yoga*). Second, thinking subjectivity, thinking objectivity, and thinking acts must be united as one by the absorption of all thinking functions into the cause (*prakriti*) within the unconscious process (*asamprajnata-yoga*).[26]

For Yoshimitsu, the unity of Man's soul with Brahman, which is the understanding that the current consciousness of Brahman in Man's inner soul and the ascetic experience of the Absolute in Man's soul which creates total cessation and the state of "void" share a similar "*élan* of life."

For Yoshimitsu, these forms of Hindu mysticism in speculation and in practice could be termed "natural mysticism" (*shizenteki mystic*). He explains his definition of "natural mysticism" as follows:

> "Natural" means the opposition to "supernatural" in Christian theology. In the original sense, mysticism exists only in relation to the experience of God as supernatural grace, but it could be possible to use mysticism in relation to nature if humans can achieve an analogous inner direct experience with the Absolute within their spiritual possibility. In this context, this experience of the Absolute, as its possibility and its potentiality, must be the inner consciousness of the creator and the divine providence which aligns with the supernatural Christian God.[27]

Here, Yoshimitsu does not comingle nature with the supernatural and the Absolute with grace, but instead contends that the mystical trajectory of Hinduism in the Advaita tradition may harmonize with Christian mysticism. Yoshimitsu does not see a contradiction between the essence of Advaita's natural mysticism and the possibility of supernatural grace in Christian mysticism. He contends that Hinduism's "natural mysticism" in the Advaita tradition offers a solemn path to both graceful and supernatural possibilities. This is possible because Advaita's natural mysticism is interpreted as a restless state before meeting with God, a state that values "one's internal human nature" (*naiteki ningensei*) by which one pursues direct contact with the origin of one's existence through one's absolutely emptied soul.[28]

Yoshimitsu cannot dismiss "natural mysticism" as an entrance point to Christian mysticism, because the intellectual and ascetic tradition of Christian mysticism seeks the progress of oneself towards inner-self and spirituality. Furthermore, he argues that natural mysticism may involve the sense of limitedness within existential experience, which leads into the quest for supernatural mysticism beyond idealistic monistic thoughts. In this sense, Yoshimitsu believes that Hinduism's natural mysticism in the Advaita tradition can be interpreted as a humble principle of existence or the state of Advent. This is Yoshimitsu's inclusive view of Hindu Advaita. For Yoshimitsu, Hindu Advaita is in natural light; thus, it is able to access supernatural light at any moment.

Yoshimitsu's thesis that Hinduism in the Advaita tradition is a form of natural mysticism and of Adventism is different from the Western approach undertaken by scholars such as Keith

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[26] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpishugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," 64.
[27] Ibid., 65–66.
[28] Ibid., 67.

Ward. For Yoshimitsu, mysticism within the Advaita tradition would be analogous to Christian mysticism. However, Ward suggests that Shankara's Advaita and the Divine of Thomas Aquinas are deeply united through their manifestation of un-real Real. Ward writes:

> He [Thomas Aquinas] argues that God is utterly simple and without parts; is timeless and changeless; stands in no real relation to the finite universe; and is wholly ineffable, except by the use of terms which, though appropriate, do not signify what we think they do. Wherein does this differ from Shankara's allegedly pantheistic and impersonal philosophy? For both, the Divine manifests to us for the sake of our eternal bliss in the forms of time and space. For both, the apparent can truly express or signify the Real, even though it is illusion to take it for the Real in itself. The deep unity of these views should be clear.[29]

From Yoshimitsu's perspective, the Real in Hindu Advaita must be attained through both the intellectual and ascetic traditions, but this Real stays within nature and may include the potential to meet the Christian Real. Yoshimitsu's approach does not suggest the absorption of the Hindu Real by the Christian Real nor a sameness between the Hindu Real and the Christian Real; rather, it suggests that they exist in the different domains of nature and the supernatural while retaining a similar "*élan* of life." This is possible precisely because, for Yoshimitsu, natural mysticism allows the practitioner to move from the natural realm to the supernatural realm without disruption.

Yoshimitsu's View on Islam

Unlike Hinduism, in which Yoshimitsu identifies a "natural mysticism" that could be compatible with grace and the supernatural, orthodox Islam causes him some difficulty. While Yoshimitsu's religious approach is based on the dimensions of nature and the supernatural, orthodox Islam has an extremely clear structure reliant solely on the supernatural. In other words, Islam deals with the supernatural so vividly in the Qur'an that it minimizes the role of nature and the Order of Creation with which Yoshimitsu is so concerned. Due to this, Keith Ward characterizes Islamic thought as solely Qur'anic. He writes, "There is consequently little interest in God's self-revelation in history in Islam, since God gives a perfect revelation in the Koran."[30] Hence, there is no apathetic aspect or supernatural truth-searching asceticism to be found within "nature" in orthodox Islam, since religious seekers have the Word of God in front of them. From Yoshimitsu's perspective, then, it would be simply a matter of "take it or leave it" in relation to the Word of God. Unfortunately, there is no article in which Yoshimitsu directly deals with orthodox Islamic thought.

Though orthodox Qur'anic Islam provides him no clear entrepôt, Yoshimitsu engages strongly with Sufism and its theistic mysticism. Sufism promotes the ascetic annihilation of oneself and one's unification with God. Ward summarizes the core of Sufi religious tradition as follows:

> Such movements [Sufi movements] espouse a life of devotion to God, with stages of spiritual ascent, leading from repentance and renunciation to a final stage of "annihilation"'(*fana*), in which the individual self seems to fade away and nothing

[29] Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 147.
[30] Ibid., 175.

> remains but the face of God. . . .Thus when they are most truly themselves, they become transparent to the only basis of their reality, which is God.[31]

Yoshimitsu's analysis of Sufism relies heavily on the thinking of one of his mentors in France, Louis Massignon, a French Catholic scholar of Islam. Massignon observes that most Sufis will reach their revelation as soon as they get to the entrance of spirituality (the point of liberation from the flesh) through chanting and contemplating the Qur'an. Hence, one can either achieve religious ignition through spirituality quickly and successfully, or go for broke unsuccessfully trying.[32] According to Yoshimitsu, Sufi mysticism is different from Hindu mysticism in the Advaita tradition due to this closeness to revelation. However, Yoshimitsu specifically recognizes an exception within Sufism in the "God's hands" alluded to by Al Ghazali (1058–1111) and Al Hallaj (858–922). He terms this group of Sufis as "super-Qur'anic."[33] Yoshimitsu engages most completely with these two distinctive Sufis from the "super-Qur'anic" group. Ghazali is the dominant Islamic theologian of the eleventh to twelfth centuries, while Hallaj is more of an extremist who was executed for his thoughts in the tenth century. Therefore, while they are both super-Qur'anic inasmuch as they seek a "soul-illuminating" encounter with the supernatural, there are significant differences between the two in the Islamic tradition.

Ghazali's work emphasizes the importance of the spiritual encounter with God alongside one's intellectual pursuits within the Qur'an. Paul Heck articulates this as follows:

> The only way to have one's character informed by divine and not simply human wisdom is to integrate the Qur'an into one's limbs, one's feelings and sentiments, one's gut. . . .This is Ghazali at his best—limbs in unison with the heart, action conforming to knowledge of God, which for Muslims is above all the soul-illuminating knowledge of the Qur'an.[34]

As Heck points out, Ghazali's approach is a mystical technique that tries to conform to the knowledge of God with the heart.

Hallaj, on the other hand, is an extremist and a controversial figure from the Islamic perspective. Despite this, Yoshimitsu pays more scholarly attention to Hallaj than to Ghazali. The reason for his interest in Hallaj may come from the proximity of Hallaj's religious thought process to Christianity, as is the case for his mentor Massignon. Heck explains the abnormality of Hallaj within Islam as follows:

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[31] Ibid., 189.

[32] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpishugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," 72–73. Paul Heck explores some limits of the practice of recitation of the Qur'an as follows: "The transformation that such practices [recitation of the Qur'an] offer is blocked by impurities of the heart and body as well as intellectual doubts and excessive scruples with the external practices of the religion—its ritual and moral norms. . . . Those preoccupied with worldly concerns are unable to identify emotionally—physically and spiritually—with the verses of the Qur'an." Paul L. Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 27–28.

[33] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpishugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," 73.

[34] Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism*, 28.

> Hallaj, a controversial figure of the ninth century who claimed to embody divine truth and was subsequently crucified, in his view to expiate the sins of Muslims, was not accepted as a liturgical model—that is, a focal point of communal prayer—in Islam. His life and death did not reflect the part of the prophetic heritage that Islam emphasizes, prayerful worship of the unique Creator and Lord. In Islam, there are prophets but not priests.[35]

Despite the heretical nature of Hallaj's thought from the point of view of Islamic orthodoxy, Yoshimitsu builds on Massignon's appraisal of Hallaj as noble and pure in his mysticism.[36] Following Massignon, he recognizes the unique position of Hallaj within the Islamic tradition of mysticism that began with Hasan Basri (643–728) and gradually developed by integrating the Islamic creed and monastic mystic theology.[37] Hallaj explores a form of mysticism that implements a non-traditional Islamic idea of unity with Allah. Yoshimitsu confirms the main thesis of Hallaj, quoting his remarks on his pilgrimage to Mecca: "We are two spirits fused in a (single) body. Thus, to see me, is to see Him. And to see Him is to see us."[38] He evaluates Hallaj's remarks on this embodiment of the divine. He writes:

> Here, as we know and remember together with the name of Hallaj, the phrase of "Ana al Haqq (I am the truth)," which also signifies him as a blasphemer in Islam, is a difficult proposition which I do not have the qualifications to solve. But, we must admit that Hallaj expressed through this phrase the joy of the interface between God and soul, or the joy of discovery of God within the emptiness without one's ego, as the confession of "mystical unification of God," assuming Hallaj unmistakably stayed in the Islamic faith.[39]

Keith Ward notes that Hallaj's "Ana al Haqq" is paradoxical considering the absolute transcendence and power of God in orthodox Islamic discourse. He contends that Ghazali's eleventh-century revision of Hallaj was necessary in this context. Ward writes:

> Although al-Hallaj was put to death for this claim, it is a recurrent theme in some forms of Sufism that great saints or imams can achieve a sort of identity with Allah. The eleventh-century sage al-Ghazzali, who achieved a synthesis of Sufism and orthodoxy and is generally accepted as the greatest philosopher of Islam, is at pains to state that there is never an actual identity of the soul and God. "That [the experience of *fana*] had not been actual identity, but only something resembling identity," he says. Orthodox Islam naturally draws back from a doctrine of *hulul*, of Divine indwelling or incarnation. Yet such a notion is a constantly recurring feature of Muslim spirituality.[40]

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[35] Ibid., 37.
[36] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpishugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," 73.
[37] Ibid., 73.
[38] Ibid., 74.
[39] Ibid., 75.
[40] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 190 (bracketed words in original).

Since Yoshimitsu's discourse concerns process or mysticism, he shows his strong scholarly interest in two distinctively different practices within Islam: the citation of the Qur'an and Hallaj's endeavor for the embodiment of Divine reality.

In the case of Hindu Advaita, Yoshimitsu characterizes its "invitation to speculation" and "practice" as "natural mysticism," which might also be incorporated into his Christian inclusivity as an Adventist practice. Yoshimitsu identifies Hallaj's mysticism as very close to the mysticism of grace in Christianity. He writes:

> The inner religious quality, which Hallaj persistently seeks, shares common ground with the inner aspect of "Grace which fulfills law," which has been explored within St. Paul's Letters in the Bible. This idea will surpass the Qur'anic notion of religiousness, and it will merge into the point where God's supernatural mysticism is represented solely as "God is Love."[41]

Yoshimitsu is clearly aware that there is neither the Incarnation nor the Trinity in Islam, but he contends that Hallaj is considered to be a martyr for putting Jesus (as a saint) ahead of Mohammed and also putting one's inner sanctity ahead of Islamic laws.[42] Yoshimitsu perceives that Islam embeds antinomy between individual spirituality and external law due to its strict reliance on revelation by word. This might create a fatalistic limit. Further, this antinomy might not be objectively and universally solvable. Hence, Yoshimitsu suggests that the mysticism of Hallaj can be interpreted as analogous to the expectation of graceful love in St. Paul's Letters in the Bible that completes the Torah, or the one that represents mysticism of anxiety towards the sacramental mundane reality of the supernatural.[43] From the viewpoint of mysticism, Yoshimitsu foresees uncertainty in the Qur'anic approach and anxiety in the super-Qur'anic approach.

If we adopt Yoshimitsu's terminology of "natural mysticism" for Hindu Advaita, the super-Qur'anic approach of Sufis such as Hallaj could be said to be a "non-Christian mysticism." Yoshimitsu further suggests that this "non-Christian mysticism" would be completed, both as Christian mysticism and theology, by the Thomist God.[44] For Yoshimitsu, grace is not to be pre-owned by word, nor is it the object of unification. He contends that grace resides within mysticism as the *élan* of life that is assured by the two Thomist pillars of the order of creation and the supernatural order of salvation. He contends as follows:

> It would be a surprise that a truly Thomist understanding of God completes Islamic religiousness both in theology and in mysticism; the Thomist understanding of God is the revelation of Grace through the Incarnation within the realm of "Analogia entis creati et increate (The analogy between God and creation)" in nature and it is the living experiential truth within Christian mysticism.[45]

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[41] Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpishugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," 75.
[42] Ibid., 75–76.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 76.
[45] Ibid.

For Yoshimitsu, Islam experiences both theological and mystical anxiety by looking at God only through the lens of omniscience and omnipotence, not through a form of living experiential truth like grace. Just as in his view on Hindu Advaita, Yoshimitsu does not deny Islam nor Sufi mysticism; he only sees a limitation within them from his Catholic perspective. For Yoshimitsu, some combination of mysticism and doctrine that bridges nature and the supernatural is necessary to unite oneself with the supernatural life through grace and the Incarnation.

A Concluding Note

For Yoshimitsu, religious mysticism is not an additional, indifferent branch, nor an appendix to religious doctrine. It is a necessary process and "the *élan* of life," one that shares a similar aspiration of restlessness, humility, and perseverance despite being based on different religious doctrines with or without a supernatural element. Christian mysticism is the soul-oriented act, making oneself open to receive grace under the supernatural order of salvation. In the Hindu tradition of Advaita, natural mysticism associated both within a speculation of Brahmanism and a practice of Patanjali Yoga would also be a mysticism that bridges two different stages or consciousness of nature. The super-Qur'anic approach in Islam shows some anxiety towards mystical union. Each of these religions has different doctrines and domains regarding nature and the supernatural; however, all three religions have a clear sense, or some distance in case of Islam, towards "the *élan* of life."

Yoshimitsu does not present his work as constituting a separate scholarly field such as comparative theology, nor does his work try to offer complete coverage of all major religions or texts. Furthermore, this article does not make a general statement through him about the nature of those religions. Yoshimitsu's view on religions is specific and it is influenced by his struggle against modernity and the westernization of Japan in the early twentieth century. However, his approach to religions through theocentric humanism or mysticism offers valuable insights and new dimensions for the standard theistic approach and comparative theology in general. Yoshimitsu's practical and anthropocentric approach, which is intellectually substantive, culturally neutral, and authentically balanced between doctrine and practice, offers us many rich insights into the human condition today. And while certainly we expect that the understanding of religion, in general and with regard to specific religions, has changed over time, there is still much of value in listening to Yoshimitsu and the theology of his day.

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Preparing Students for Interreligious Dialogue: Experiential Learning as a Precursor for Pluralism

Beverley McGuire

This paper argues that experiential learning in introductory courses in the study of religion can prepare students for interreligious dialogue. In an introductory Asian religions course students intentionally engaged in social rituals, stillness, yoga or a social media fast, singing, nonviolence, and mindfulness meditation. Afterwards they reflected on their experience and brought it into dialogue with their understanding of Confucian, Daoist, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. This experiential and dialogical approach prepared them for engaging with pluralism at the end of the semester, when they not only discussed pluralism but also applied diverse religious perspectives to hypothetical scenarios of religious misunderstanding and existential crisis.

Keywords: experiential learning, Asian religions, stillness, social media, yoga, meditation, Interreligious dialogue, pluralism

Introduction

Interreligious learning equips students with knowledge, attitudes, and skills for understanding and engaging with people from diverse religious traditions in a pluralistic society. Scholars have argued that genuine interreligious dialogue occurs in groups and entails forming relationships across religious traditions.[1] Some define interreligious learning as "a form of interreligious dialogue emphasizing study in the presence of the religious other and encounter with the tradition the other embodies,"[2] which poses challenges for those who may not have religiously diverse classrooms.[3] Although most scholarship on interreligious learning focuses on religious or theological education, those who teach courses in the study of religion can also prepare students for pluralism. Diana Eck describes interreligious dialogue as "the expression of critique and counter-critique, the mutuality of voices that count and have something to say . . . as in any relationship, it is strongest in its mutuality, and it is weakest when one incorporates the other."[4] Pluralism involves actively engaging with others, attempting to understand them, and acknowledging real differences and particularities.[5] Scholars recommend various activities for enabling such engagement and understanding, including site visits that allow students to encounter

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[1] Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, "The Meanings of Dialogue in Interreligious Teaching and Learning Today: A Response by Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook to Elena Dini," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 18 (2016), http://irstudies.org/journal/the-meanings-of-dialogue-in-interreligious-teaching-and-learning-today-a-response-by-sheryl-kujawa-holbrook-to-elena-dini/.

[2] *Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, Christians and Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Woodstock, Ontario: Skylight Paths, 2006), 95.

[3] Peta Goldburg, "Developing Pedagogies for Inter-religious Teaching and Learning," in *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education*, ed. Kath Engebretson, Marian de Souza, Gloria Durka, and Liam Gearon (New York: Springer, 2010), 342.

[4] Diana L. Eck, "Pluralism: Problems and Promise," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 17 (2015), http://irstudies.org/journal/pluralism-problems-and-promise-by-diana-l-eck/.

[5] Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 70–71.

those with different religious commitments[6] and case studies that require students listen carefully to other perspectives as well as examine and refine their own.[7]

However, students must first understand religions on their own terms before engaging in interreligious dialogue, otherwise they tend to read their own presuppositions into other religious worldviews and subsume the voices of others within their own. When I initially taught the course, in an effort to ensure that they understood Asian religions on their own terms, I asked students to use Sanskrit or Chinese terminology instead of English translations, to bracket their own religious assumptions, and to avoid comparing religious traditions. Nevertheless, students persisted in translating terms such as *nirvana* as "heaven" and making simplistic comparisons between religious traditions. Considered in light of Chris Hermans' three types of religious education—mono-religious education that focuses on one religion in particular, multi-religious education that recognizes pluralism and presents religions in terms of their own self-understanding, and inter-religious education that not only recognizes pluralism but encourages dialogue between different religious practitioners[8]—they were not even engaging in multi-religious education, let alone inter-religious education, because they could not see religions on their own terms.

Experiential learning facilitates this understanding by offering an arena for students to interrogate their own assumptions and delineate other religious worldviews. Here I discuss an experiential curriculum that provides the scaffolding for such awareness and prepares students for site visits and engaging with diverse religious practitioners. It begins with a social location activity in which students articulate their diverse and intersecting social identities and reflect on how their social location impacts the way they experience the world.[9] I also incorporate Dena Samuel's activity "Standing Silently in the Face of Oppression," which helps students recognize that their experiences can be analyzed as systemic problems and inequalities.[10] This encourages students to identify their normative assumptions from the outset and engage in interreligious study only after they have delved into the complexity and diversity of each religion.

For each tradition students encounter a series of interpretive frameworks, beginning with a documentary conveying an insider's perspective, a discussion of a textbook chapter that gives a scholarly perspective, an experiential activity that allows them to reflect on their own perspective, and finally a textual analysis that incorporates multiple perspectives. Only after they have moved between these various perspectives for each religion do they discuss pluralism based on Diana Eck's

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[6] Elena Dini, "Processing Experiences Within an Academic Framework: A Challenge for Interfaith Education," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 15 (2014): 38, http://irstudies.org/journal/processing-experiences-within-an-academic-framework-a-challenge-for-interfaith-education-by-elena-dini/; Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "When Practice Precedes Theory: A Study of Interfaith Ritual," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 20 (2017): 5, http://irstudies.org/journal/when-practice-precedes-theory-a-study-of-interfaith-ritual-by-jeannine-hill-fletcher/.

[7] Ellie Pierce, "'What is at Stake?' Exploring the Problems of Pluralism through the Case Method," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 17 (2015), http://irstudies.org/journal/what-is-at-stake-exploring-the-problems-of-pluralism-through-the-case-method-by-ellie-pierce/.

[8] *Chris A. M. Hermans, Participatory Learning: Religious Education in a Globalizing* Society (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 337–349.

[9] I adapt the social location activity developed by Mai-Anh Tran, discussed in Jack Hill, "Fighting the Elephant in the Room: Ethical Reflections on White Privilege and Other Systems of Advantage in the Teaching of Religion," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 12, no. 1 (2009): 3–23.

[10] Dena R. Samuels, "Connecting with Oppression and Privilege: A Pedagogy for Social Justice," accessed December 24, 2017, http://jfmueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/crow/connectingtooppressionandprivilege.doc.

"From Many, One" in *A New Religious America* at the end of the course.[11] Their final take-home test has them address possible misconceptions about religious practitioners (for example, that all Sikhs are militant or all Hindus polytheistic), and compare and contrast how Asian religious practitioners might interpret and respond to existential crises occasioned by the death of a loved one or natural disasters (such as Hurricane Matthew, which happened during one of the semesters).

Students engage in activities analogous but not identical to religious practices as they learn about each tradition: social rituals for Confucianism, stillness for Daoism, yoga or a social media fast for Hinduism, singing for Sikhism, nonviolence for Jainism, and mindfulness meditation for Buddhism. They do the activities and journal about them for several days, and they then submit a two-page reflection on how they might bring their experience into dialogue with the religious tradition under study, and how their experience might clarify similarities and differences between that tradition and others they are familiar with. As they progress they expand their comparative analysis to include not only their own religious traditions but those they have learned about in the course.

Because I teach at a public university in the southeastern United States, my approach differs from those who incorporate contemplative practices or inter-riting into their instruction.[12] The latter could criticize my activities for being decontextualized, reductive, or characteristic of a "buffet-style" or "wine-tasting" approach to practice.[13] Reflecting on her students' resistance to her invitation to experience what prostration feels like in their bodies by posturing their heads to the floor, Jeannine Fletcher writes, "this suggests that ritual cannot be accessed hypothetically and outside the sacred space, or that if ritual is so accessed, it certainly has a different quality to what is communicated."[14] I agree that the experiential activities in my class communicate different messages than religious practices themselves. These very differences allow my students to contrast their experience with religious practices as much as compare them. In fact, this very activity of critically examining their experience and simulating a dialogue that crosses religious traditions helps develop skills for interreligious dialogue.

To address a secondary concern that Fletcher raises—how decontextualized experience seems to offer no logic for participation or way "in" to the experience—I find my students all too eager to engage in these experimental activities. As Barbara Walvoord notes, students often hope to grow spiritually or religiously in their religion courses,[15] and my students enjoy using their lives as laboratories for such exploration. Because of their secular and seemingly superficial nature—I emphasize that they are *not* religious rituals—they do not pose issues for students with religious commitments. Instead my students approach them as an experiment in which they themselves are the subjects, and I encourage them to juxtapose their experience as much as compare it with the religious traditions under study.

[11] Eck, *A New Religious America*, 26–79.
[12] Louis Komjathy, *Introducing Contemplative Studies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017); Fletcher, "When Practice Precedes Theory."
[13] Louis Komjathy, "Approaching Contemplative Practice," in *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer,* ed. Louis Komjathy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 34.
[14] Fletcher, "When Practice Precedes Theory," 6.
[15] Barbara E. Walvoord, *Teaching and Learning in College Introductory Religion Courses* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 6–7.

Analogous Activities

Although they may seem superficial, analogous activities prepare students for interreligious dialogue by engendering respect for other religions and simulating interreligious dialogue internally through reflective writing. As one student remarked, "I go into these exercises skeptical and thinking it will be rather easy but in reality I end up learning a lot more than I thought I would and having more respect for the religion." Here I provide examples of how analogous activities impact students' understanding of and attitudes towards various Asian religions.

For the social ritual assignment, students are told to observe three rituals: (1) opening doors for others or letting them into traffic, (2) saying please and thank you or otherwise expressing gratitude, and (3) not ogling ("checking out") men or women with whom they were not involved.[16] They then have the option to choose two of their own, and students often elect to avoid gossip, look people in the eye (rather than looking at their phones), sit up straight, get up early, or clean their apartments. Of all the experiential activities, the social ritual hits closest to home for many of my students, who remark that it reminds them of how they were raised to have manners or be respectful. One student wrote:

> Many of these rituals were things I tried to do on a daily basis, but had never really made an effort to keep up constantly or paid much attention to as I did them. However, when I looked at these actions through the context of Confucianism, they made me feel a closer connection to the people around me. My "natural inclination to live harmoniously with others" and the spirit of *ren* or "co-humanity" could certainly be felt as I practiced these rituals.[17] As I sought to forge closer connections with others through maintaining eye contact and speaking politely, my natural inclination for compassion towards others was made apparent. This showed me that Confucianism is a relatable religion, despite its foreign roots and my previous unfamiliarity with the practice.

Many students referenced the notion of *ren* (benevolence, humaneness, or co-humanity) when they brought their experience into dialogue with the Confucian tradition, and some Catholic students identified similarities with their own religion's emphasis on performing actions that positively impact humankind. Others noted differences between the way they engaged in the practices and how a Confucian might practice them in the hopes of personal transformation or attaining perfection, and some Christian students wrote that Mencius's notion that humans are naturally inclined to be good conflicted with their own belief in original sin. Students also remarked that the activity clarified their understanding of Confucian rituals as everyday practices that refine and cultivate a person to create a harmonious society instead of worshipping God. In this way students used their experience as fodder for better understanding the Confucian tradition, but also for comparing and contrasting Christian and Confucian beliefs and practices.

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[16] Dr. Justin Ritzinger originally designed the social ritual assignment, which inspired me to create the experiential learning curriculum for the course.

[17] Randall L. Nadeau, *Asian Religions: A Cultural Perspective* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2014), 32.

Whereas social rituals often resonate profoundly with their own upbringing, stillness proves challenging for the vast majority of my students. Instructed to engage in non-purposeful action for thirty minutes a day, students sit on their porch, sit at the beach watching the ocean, swing in their hammock, or drink tea. My students struggle with stillness, and in their reflection they often emphasize how it goes against American or Western emphasis on constant activity, time management, and goal orientation. As one remarked, "Compared to the Daoist ideal of the 'Uncarved Block,' it feels a bit like my upbringing has encouraged me to become sculpted, intricate, and defined. It is hard for me to stay away from normative judgment of these ideas because they are so opposite to those I have grown up with." In this way students are able to create a space for reflecting on profound differences between worldviews before judging one as superior to the other. Another student similarly noted, "My life has been constantly in pursuit of doing things. Not doing things seemed absolutely absurd to me. But I practiced this foreign concept and was astounded at the results . . . it never occurred to me that someone could be actively passive." What initially seemed absurd became not only intelligible but valued after the student engaged in the activity for several days.

When reflecting on their experience students can occupy a space between religious traditions, a fundamental skill for interreligious dialogue. As they proceed through the curriculum, they add to their comparative religious understanding, noticing differences and similarities between Confucian and Daoist traditions. On the one hand, they remark that the Confucian emphasis on perfecting oneself through ritual differs from the Daoist ideal of *wuwei* (non-action, non-purposeful action), but on the other hand as one student wrote, "I like Asian religions because they try to focus on self-awareness as well as living in peace among one another. Growing up in the Christian faith, they emphasized self-reflection a little bit, but they emphasized more letting God shape and change you. Daoists and Confucians emphasize doing things yourself, which is good to be aware of, but not exactly how I do things." They highlight how both Confucian and Daoist traditions emphasize the importance of harmony, and how humans could create such harmony (albeit through different processes), and they appreciate both traditions even though they differ from their own religious orientation.

Not only do students analyze Daoist concepts in light of their experience, but they also interpret their experience in Daoist terms. Students frequently allude to Daoist concepts of *yin* and *yang* when describing their experience with stillness. One wrote, "I feel that I have much more *yang* in my life and not enough *yin*. I am very active in my life and I do not ever feel like I get a chance to enjoy relaxing like I should. This assignment put into perspective just how out of balance my life really is." In this way students' lives become the texts that they interpret through Daoist and other religious lenses, which facilitates both their understanding and appreciation of the religious traditions under study. Students notice how their lives are in a state of imbalance; their constant busyness does not allow them the space for stillness. They also note how non-purposeful action allowed their minds to wander creatively. One student wrote, "This practice has made me realize that there are different ways of seeing and reacting to things. It really emphasized, to me, that there are different ways of thinking." By engaging in stillness for several days, students not only appreciate the Daoist tradition but also that there are alternative ways of perceiving the world.

Whereas stillness challenges my students' need to be busy and productive, social media fasts confront their desire to be constantly connected. When given the option to do yoga or engage in a

social media fast, most students opt for the latter and find it extremely difficult. Students often allude to Hindu ascetic ideals of "taming the ego" through discipline and self-control when describing their struggle to refrain from social media. One student remarked how the social media fast entailed "not feeding my ego such as not focusing on how many likes I get on my Instagram or Facebook posts or how many views I get on Snapchat." Several pointed out that it forced them to pay attention to other things in their life, especially people surrounding them. One student wrote, "I realized after the third day that I actually connect with more people and nature without having this social media. Many others and I are so caught up with the 'interaction' social media provides that we actually lose real connection with the world around us."

Figure 1: John Holcroft, "Digital Feed."[18]

Students admit that their social media fast is but a small taste of asceticism—what one student described as asceticism "on a minimal and superficial level." Nevertheless, it engenders respect and gives them a sense of why one might engage in an ascetic lifestyle. One student wrote, "Although I did experience an ego reduction in this activity, as I was able to gain control over my body and not let my thoughts and desires control my mind, I would not say that I had an experience of unity with the cosmic self." They acknowledge the difference between their experience and those of ascetics seeking to free themselves of attachment to the illusory world in order to achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

Many Christian students compare their experience with Lenten fasting practices, especially students who take my course in the spring, as it falls during the season of Lent. One student remarked, "They both require you to do something extreme, deprive yourself/push yourself farther than you normally would, and it gives you a chance to refocus on the spiritual truth and be more productive and motivated to do what it is that your faith requires you to do." While students who engage in the media fast draw similarities between their experience and ascetic practice, those who do yoga often point out the dissimilarities between Western approaches to yoga and its role in the Hindu tradition. They note how in the West yoga is primarily a means of physical exercise as opposed to a spiritual practice of self-discipline. One student remarked, "It felt just like an exercise

[18] John Holcroft, "Digital Feed," accessed January 4, 2018, http://www.johnholcroft.com/portfolio18.html. Used with permission.

class and I gained no insight. I think this is incredibly ironic considering that 'The great problem addressed by Hindu spiritual self-cultivation is our tendencies to identify ourselves purely with our bodies.'"[19] Although the student feels they gained "no insight," in fact their recognition of the disjunction between their experience and Hindu discussions of yoga facilitates an awareness of how religious practices can be appropriated and transformed.

For the singing assignment students select motivational songs to sing in the morning and evening, which they typically do in their room, shower, or car, but occasionally with other people. Although some choose religious songs or those they find spiritually significant—for example, one student chose Grateful Dead's "Ripple" (1970) and engaged in a thoughtful reflection on the "ripple with no pebble tossed"—most students choose secular songs that then become juxtaposed with Sikh songs sung in *kirtan* and morning devotionals. When they bring their experience into dialogue with the Sikh tradition, they focus on the important role singing plays within the tradition: how song was the primary medium for Guru Nanak's message, how it promotes harmony and balance for both listeners and performers, and how it serves as a means of communicating with God. Most students then remark how their own singing, outside of any religious context, was dissimilar from Sikh practice, or how their experience paled in comparison with Sikh practitioners who engage in their devotional singing between 3 and 6 a.m. in the morning. Many students write about the positive impact of singing on their mood and energy level, and they show appreciation for Sikh practice. One student wrote, "I may not believe in the same things the Sikhs do, but I can understand how they feel singing can help us connect with the world around us on a spiritual level."

Christian students often say it resonated with their own singing of hymns and devotionals, which they describe as "a form of worship to God, a way to show thanks and appreciation, and to bring the congregation together." A student remarked, "My grandma always tells me that singing is like a direct phone call to God." However, some Christian students contrasted their practice of singing hymns in a Sunday church service and daily devotional singing, such as one who wrote, "Their personal devotional singing, unlike my practice of it, is an extension of doctrine—it is a prescriptive aspect of their faith where it is not one of mine." Other Christian students started wondering why it wasn't a daily practice in their tradition: "While doing this I found myself thinking: if I really believe all the things I'm singing are true, then why do I only sing like this on Sundays? I think the simple answer (among other things) is that this sort of devotion was inconvenient." In this way the activity enabled students not only to appreciate Sikh devotional singing but also engage in internal interreligious dialogue about singing in Christian and Sikh traditions.

The nonviolence assignment entailed preventing harm of sentient beings (for example, by walking on grass) or engaging in "nonviolent communication."[20] Students remarked that it required tremendous discipline to not walk or bike on the grass, and how Jain ascetics would engage in even stricter practices to ensure they did not harm any form of life. As a result, students expressed great respect for their discipline, restraint, and perseverance. The nonviolence assignment also slowed their pace and heightened their awareness of themselves, nature, and how their actions affect the world around them. As one student wrote, "I felt more aware of myself and my

[19] Nadeau, *Asian Religions,* 110.
[20] Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 3rd ed. (Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer Press, 2015).

surroundings, as well as a level of appreciation for nature by simply avoiding harm." Those students who engaged in nonviolent communication said they initially had difficulty not evaluating or criticizing what other people said—especially family members—but that when they listened and responded free of judgment, their relationships improved. One wrote, "The most difficult thoughts to monitor were those of jealousy and desire, because it seems like we have grown up in a culture that every person wants what they do not have, even when what they have is completely sufficient." Several students discussed the differences between Jain emphasis on self-restraint and Western habits of consumption.

The final analogous activity, mindfulness meditation, allowed students to engage in breath awareness or body and sound meditation available through a mindfulness center website.[21] When they brought their experience into dialogue with Buddhism, they mostly referred to the importance of overcoming attachment to the self. As one student remarked, "While I might not have realized enlightenment over the span of several days, I have begun to grasp the concept of the self as a non-permanent entity." Some students said it was difficult to understand how one might not be attached to the self, writing, "When I wake up in the morning, all of the 'I' thoughts run through my head, meaning I am concerned all about myself, what I look like, what I have to do that day, etc." Many students felt frustrated by their constant mental chatter or continuous train of thoughts, and they speculated it would require years of practice to achieve any awakened state of mind. They also noted how Buddhist approaches to meditation differed from their previous exposure to meditation as solely used for relaxation or stress reduction. Several Catholic students compared their practice of meditation with their experience praying, though they also acknowledged theistic assumptions that differentiated the latter from the former.

Analogical activities can serve a variety of pedagogical functions. First and foremost, they impact students' attitudes and facilitate a greater appreciation and respect for different religious traditions. Secondly, they stimulate a greater understanding of those traditions by encouraging students to reflect on the ways in which experience is mediated by religion and culture—how their own social location impacts the way they interpret their experience, and how other religious perspectives might yield different explanations. Finally, they begin building skills for interreligious dialogue by having students reflect not only on similarities and differences between religious traditions, but begin to entertain the possibility of "similarities in differences and differences in similarities."[22] Instead of viewing religious traditions as wholly different, they can identify similarities within differences: for example, how Daoists and Confucians value harmony, even though they propose different ways of achieving such harmony. Similarly, they can avoid simplistic judgments by attending to the differences within similarities: for example, how a daily practice differentiates Sikh devotional singing from Christian hymns sung during worship.

However, the success of analogical activities stems from their significance for students, not solely from their pedagogical usefulness. Students often enroll in our courses to grow spiritually or better understand their religiosity. For those of us who teach at public colleges and universities — and perhaps for those reticent to incorporate contemplative practice into their courses—

[21] "Free Guided Meditations," UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, accessed January 3, 2018, http://marc .ucla.edu/mindful-meditations.
[22] Lee H. Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 1–6.

experiential learning can allow students to reflect on their own identity while simultaneously learning about other religions. Analogous activities can be incredibly motivating for students, as such activities use their lives as laboratories for their learning and allow them to reflect on themselves, while also enabling them to better understand other religious traditions.

Preparing for Pluralism

Having gained a foundational knowledge about these different traditions, an attitude of respect and appreciation, and basic skills in interreligious dialogue, my students better appreciate Diana Eck's emphasis on the difference between tolerance and pluralism. They understand the work that interreligious dialogue entails. When reflecting on Eck's writing, many quote the passage in which she states, "pluralism requires participation, and attunement to the life and the energies of one another."[23] Having spent the entire semester engaging with different religious perspectives and becoming better attuned to the life and energies of Asian religious practitioners, they consider it a skill to be developed. As one student writes, "Pluralism is not something that just exists, but rather it has to be created and it will always be an ongoing process that has to be worked on from generation to generation." They add their own examples of ways in which the normative status of Christianity in America continues to be assumed, and they emphasize how vital it is to understand and accept religious differences.

They disagree on the extent to which America has achieved a culture of pluralism. One of my students wrote that Eck's chapter reminded her of the bumper sticker "Coexist" that shows the crescent moon representing Islam for "C," a peace symbol for "o," a male/female symbol for "e," the Star of David representing Judaism for "x," a pagan symbol for the dot on the "i," a yin-yang symbol for "s," and a cross representing Christianity for "t" (Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: "Coexist" bumper sticker.[24]

This sparked a debate about whether the bumper sticker captures pluralism or instead "religious correctness." While some students maintained that it does illustrate acceptance and understanding of other religions, others disagreed. One student remarked, "I think most people

[23] Eck, *A New Religious America*, 70.
[24] Peacemonger, "Coexist in Interfaith Symbols Bumper Sticker," accessed January 7, 2018, https://www.peacemonger.org/S001--Coexist-in-Interfaith-Symbols-Bumper-Sticker_p_2658.html. Used with permission.

tend to believe that 'my freedom to my religion should be protected most, and I'll just put this bumper sticker on my car so people don't think I'm disrespecting their beliefs.'" She suggested that, at best, it represents a form of tolerance that is still insufficient.

Although they debate the degree to which Americans value pluralism, my students clearly do. They appreciate the orchestral image that Eck describes as "the symphony of society, each retaining its difference, all sounding together, with an ear to the music of the whole."[25] As one of my students wrote, "By comparing society to a symphony Eck is pointing out how different everyone and the groups within society are to each other but with collaboration amongst each other they are able to produce beautiful harmonies." Having paid close attention to the particularity of each Asian religion, my students appreciate the importance of not eliding such differences. They look forward to working together with different religious practitioners and creating harmonies through such interreligious encounters.

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[25] Eck, *A New Religious America*, 58.

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Interreligious Environmentalism: Pragmatic Projects and Moral Competencies that Address Climate Change

Kristi Del Vecchio

The academic disciplines of interreligious/interfaith studies and religion and ecology share substantial common ground: scholars in both fields claim interdisciplinarity, activist tendencies, and relationality to be key characteristics of their respective disciplines. Scholars within interreligious/interfaith studies name environmentalism among issues that transcend religious affiliation or creed, and scholars within religion and ecology recognize that environmental issues mobilize interfaith partnerships and collaboration. However, little academic research has intentionally brought the work of these two (relatively new) fields into conversation. As such, this paper explores how interreligious projects are addressing the global threat of climate change, and attempts to discern which moral competencies emerge from these various projects. To do so, I utilize the framework of pragmatic pluralism to analyze environmental projects within interreligious spaces, and ultimately identify six shared moral competencies: 1) showing solidarity with disenfranchised communities and religious minorities (particularly Indigenous Peoples), 2) demonstrating individual or communal leadership, 3) facilitating opportunities for relationship building, 4) participating in hopeful storytelling/narrative, 5) taking interpersonal or communal risk, and 6) resisting burnout and emotional despair.

Keywords: interfaith, interreligious, ecology, environmentalism, climate change, pragmatism

Framing Story: Flooded with Interfaith Encounter

In Fargo-Moorhead, where I spent my undergraduate years, springtime has become synonymous with flooding. The metropolitan area consists of two cities divided by the Red River of the North, which separates Minnesota from North Dakota and flows northward into Lake Winnipeg across the Canadian border. A historic flood struck the area in 2009, overwhelming local infrastructure and gaining national press. But the flood's underlying cause—changing weather patterns, including an accelerated thaw on our side of the border that brought unprecedented volumes of water upstream into Canada, where the river was still frozen—was not often discussed. Once rare occurrences taking place about once a century, drastic floods have now become commonplace in Fargo-Moorhead. Indeed, since the beginning of a wet climatic cycle in 1993, the Red River had passed into a flood stage at least once per year.[1]

Predictions pointed toward another major flood in 2013, when I was nearing the end of my undergraduate career, and I was eager to do my part in the community's preparatory efforts. I helped organize an interfaith service project to fill sandbags—an effective first line of defense for protecting homes, businesses, and other buildings from water damage. The event was scheduled

[1] "Why is the Red River of the North So Vulnerable to Flooding?," North Dakota State University, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://www.ndsu.edu/fargo_geology/whyflood.htm, and "Climate Change in Minnesota: 23 Signs," last modified Feb. 2, 2015, Minnesota Public Radio, accessible at http://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/02/02/climate-change-primer.

for early April, right before the thaw. Those of us organizing the interfaith event promoted it widely, but we didn't have a great sense as to who would attend.

By way of context, my alma mater, Concordia College, is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), and is described by many as "pervasively Lutheran." A majority of the school's students, faculty, and staff identify with the tradition, and the presumed universality of Lutheran values has often been described as marginalizing to those associated with minority worldviews, such as Evangelical Christians and non-religious students. In fact, during my time at this institution, efforts to create a secular student group *and* an Evangelical student group were twice rejected by college staff and administration. Both groups raised different concerns: atheists appeared to challenge the school's Lutheran mission with religious apathy or rejection, whereas Evangelical students represented an intimidating zeal in promoting a worldview that derived from a particular Biblical interpretation above all others. While both the non-religious students and Evangelical students experienced difficulty with gaining recognition on campus, this shared plight did not lead to a spirit of solidarity between the two groups. Instead, they perceived each other with some amount of distrust and skepticism.

For this reason, the arrival of student volunteers on the morning of the interfaith service project felt particularly powerful. Those who had turned up in the greatest numbers were, to my surprise, the Evangelical Christian students and the non-religious/atheistic students. As we gathered in the meeting location to depart for the sandbagging facility, it became clear that we all felt committed and called to address this urgent situation in our community, albeit for different reasons. While the joining of these three disparate groups—Lutheran, Evangelical Christian, and non-religious—admittedly led to something of an awkward bus ride, we nonetheless set out for a productive and collaborative day at the sandbagging facility.

Introduction

I lead with this story to demonstrate a learning that guides this paper: that important and urgent issues—including environmental ones—have the power to forge new partnerships, particularly between individuals or communities who would not normally interact.[2] This project also seeks to put into conversation two relatively young academic fields that deal with issues raised in this story: religion and ecology, on the one hand, and interfaith and interreligious studies on the other.

Synergies between these two fields already exist. Scholars within interreligious and interfaith studies have named environmentalism as an issue that transcends religious affiliation or creed, and scholars within religion and ecology recognize that environmental issues are beginning to mobilize interfaith partnerships and collaboration. Furthermore, scholars in both religion and ecology and interfaith/interreligious studies claim interdisciplinarity, activist tendencies, and

[2] Eboo Patel defines "interfaith cooperation" as the productive engagement of people who "orient around religion differently." Although imperfect, this definition is meant to be inclusive of those who identify as religious, spiritual but not religious, agnostic, humanist, or atheist, or those who identify with multiple traditions. Patel also means for this phrase to be inclusive of *intra*faith dynamics (denominations within one tradition, i.e., between Baptists and Catholics), as people may still identify with the same broad religious tradition yet "orient around" different beliefs and practices. See Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 39.

relationality to be key characteristics of their work. Yet relatively little research has been done with the intention of bringing the work of these two academic fields into conversation. To further draw connections and advance this conversation, this paper will explore pragmatic environmental projects that take place within interreligious spaces, and analyze the moral or ethical competencies that emerge from these projects.

I borrow the term "moral competencies" and the framework of pragmatic pluralism from environmental ethicist Willis Jenkins. In his 2013 text *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*, Jenkins employs the phrase "moral competencies" to refer to the skills, tactics, and knowledge that religious and philosophical communities employ to creatively address climate change.[3] One of Jenkins' main assertions is that scholars should study environmental projects within religious settings *before* naming or establishing the moral or ethical competencies that undergird these projects. Although writing from within a Christian context, Jenkins advocates for a framework of pragmatic pluralism, which invites a diverse range of ethical and religious constituents (who do not necessarily share a common worldview or creation narrative) to cooperatively confront the shared problems that climate change presents.[4] In this way, pragmatic pluralism provides a helpful framework for connecting the fields of interreligious/interfaith studies and religion and ecology.

As such, the goal of this paper is to analyze the moral and ethical competencies that emerge from interreligious environmental organizations or centers by utilizing the framework of pragmatic pluralism. I have selected three organizations to analyze within this framework—Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary—because of their robust efforts in this space. By way of methodology, I reviewed each organization's official literature and promotional materials, including annual reports, mission statements, programmatic information, press releases, and interviews with their founders and lead staff. From this analysis, I argue that the following six moral competencies, which emerge across the work of all three organizations, inform environmental projects in interreligious contexts: 1) showing solidarity with disenfranchised communities and religious minorities (particularly Indigenous Peoples), 2) demonstrating individual or communal leadership, 3) facilitating opportunities for relationship building, 4) participating in hopeful storytelling/narrative, 5) taking interpersonal or communal risk, and 6) resisting burnout and emotional despair. After discussing how the aforementioned organizations elevate these moral competencies in their interreligious environmental work, I draw upon recent scholarship from within religion and ecology and interfaith/interreligious studies to provide additional exposition about each of these six competencies.

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[3] Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 18.

[4] Jenkins draws upon the philosophical pragmatic tradition to articulate his approach: "This book takes a broadly pragmatic approach to religious ethics. It starts from concrete problems and works with the ideas and practices generated from reform projects attempting to address them. It investigates how projects use their beliefs and practices to simultaneously sustain and revise some tradition of life by creating new opportunities for meaningful moral agency in the face of overwhelming problems. By interpreting those projects in light of the disciplinary arguments surrounding the problems they address, it intends to test and improve their experimentation. On this approach, ethics is a form of collaboration in the process of moral and cultural transformation that makes agents become competent to the problems they face." Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, 8.

Review of Three Interreligious Environmental Organizations: Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary

Interfaith Power and Light

Interfaith Power and Light (IPL) is a national organization based in California, with local affiliates scattered across the country. The mission of IPL is "to be faithful stewards of Creation by responding to global warming through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy."[5] Founded more than a decade ago, this organization helps address global warming through grassroots education within 40 U.S. states, reaching an estimated 18,000 religious communities. In this regard, IPL has a supportive network of diverse religious communities that integrate sustainable practices and advocate on issues of public policy at the local, state, and national level.[6]

At its inception, IPL was not considered an interfaith organization. In an interview with IPL's founder Reverend Sally Bingham, environmental ethicist Lucas Johnston records that IPL was originally a fledgling environmental group that focused only on Episcopal churches. At that time, in the late 1990s, it was called Episcopal Power and Light (EPL). Reverend Bingham and a lay practitioner laid the foundation for EPL by approaching Episcopal churches in California to promote Christian-based creation care and stewardship, which included asking churches to buy renewable energy from a local utility company, foregoing the fossil-fuel alternative. By the year 2000, EPL had brought renewable energy to approximately sixty Episcopal churches in California, and even had begun to partner with non-Episcopal Christian congregations through the California Council of Churches. Once this ecumenical Christian partnership was established, Reverend Bingham recalls, the next transition towards becoming an interfaith organization happened relatively quickly. Unitarian and Jewish congregations across California began to ask if they could take part in this effort to utilize renewable energy. In 2001, the organization changed its name to Interfaith Power and Light, and its outreach and collaborative partnerships changed accordingly.[7]

IPL's current work consists of spearheading a number of national programs and campaigns that are consequently adopted by its congregational and institutional partners. Through one such program, the Cool Congregations Program, IPL encourages houses of worship to undergo projects that will reduce their carbon footprints throughout the year. In 2015, seventy-six congregations and places of worship accepted this challenge, taking steps to improve building insulation, update heating and cooling appliances, adopt renewable energy, plant organic gardens, install rain barrels, compost food scraps, and recycle waste. IPL estimates that these congregations jointly prevented five million pounds of greenhouse gases from entering the atmosphere—the equivalent of the energy used in about 250 American homes.[8] IPL certifies and honors "Cool Congregations" on a tiered scale, offering awards to congregations that have achieved 10%, 20%, 30%, and 40% of total carbon reduction.

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[5] "Mission and History," Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www .interfaithpowerandlight .org/about/mission-history/.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2013), 134–36.

[8] "Cool Congregations," Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.coolcongregations.org.

These national challenges take shape across local areas in diverse ways, directed by the contextual needs and goals of the religious communities involved. This is exemplified in one impressive story from IPL's 2015 annual report. For the past five years, the Washington State IPL affiliate has partnered with the Lummi Indian Nation (the original inhabitants of Washington's northernmost coast) to protect native lands and water.[9] In 2015, both groups worked together to stand against proposals for coal-export terminals along the Pacific Coast, which would cause an increase in levels of toxic coal dust and pollution on mostly tribal land. It was proposed that North America's largest coal-export terminal be placed at Xwe'chi'eXen (also known as Cherry Point), located in the far northwest corner of Washington. The Washington IPL affiliate and the Lummi Nation partnered to build awareness and advocate to their local government, presenting research that coal-export terminals are known to increase asthma and cancer rates among residents in surrounding areas. Both communities celebrated a huge victory in May of 2016 when the Army Corps of Engineers denied the necessary permits to build the coal-export terminal at Xwe'chi'eXen, stating that "it would have adverse impacts upon the Lummi Nation."[10] Stories like this exemplify that IPL has created space both locally and nationally to address pressing environmental issues across religious and cultural divides.

GreenFaith

A second organization crossing religious and philosophical lines to address climate change is GreenFaith, whose mission is "to inspire, educate and mobilize people of diverse religious backgrounds for environmental leadership."[11] With the tagline "Interfaith Partners for the Environment," GreenFaith's work is inspired by its members' shared beliefs that "protecting the earth is a religious value, and that environmental stewardship is a moral responsibility."[12] To achieve this mission, GreenFaith houses a number of programs that equip organizers to implement sustainable practices in their places of worship. GreenFaith is increasingly partnering with minority religious groups in the U.S., including Hindu, Muslim, and various Native American/Indigenous communities. Its website offers environmental statements from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim perspectives, exemplifying the breadth of communities with whom the organization works.[13]

GreenFaith has identified three core values that distinguish and define the organization: spirit, stewardship, and justice. The first, spirit, recognizes that religious traditions make space for "the sacred" to exist in nature—be it in their traditions' texts, or in the experiences that religious believers have in nature. As an organization, GreenFaith addresses this first value by encouraging environmentally themed worship, as well as celebrations of creation within congregations. The second core value, stewardship, speaks to an individual's or community's capacity for action. Recognizing that religious communities may have unsustainable habits, GreenFaith works to

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[9] "Annual Report 2015," Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/DN-IPL-AR-FINAL-e-file-copy.pdf.
[10] Ibid.
[11] "Mission and Areas of Focus," GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.greenfaith.org/about/mission-and-areas-of-focus.
[12] Ibid.
[13] "Religious Teachings on the Environment," GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.greenfaith.org/religious-teachings.

provide resources that help conserve energy, food, and water. The final core value, justice, acknowledges that some communities and individuals in the U.S.— namely African Americans and those living in poverty—are disproportionately affected by climate change. To address this, GreenFaith commits to education and advocacy work around issues of environmental justice.

GreenFaith executes the three core values of spirit, stewardship, and justice through its various organizing and advocacy efforts. Highlighting one such example, GreenFaith organized a national campaign called "First 100 Hours Vigils" in late January 2017, encouraging interfaith gatherings, reflections, prayers, and services during the first 100 hours of Donald Trump's presidency and the new U.S. administration. The campaign's published materials on the vigils read, "During [these] first 100 hours . . . it's vital that people of faith show our love for the Earth, and our commitment to people, planet, and communities."[14] In a report following the event, GreenFaith organizer Estrella Sainburg wrote that 68 multi-faith vigils were organized across the country, many of which were hosted in collaboration with local Interfaith Power and Light affiliates. Sainburg's report notes that while the programming of each vigil varied, "what did not waver was support for a clean environment."[15]

In another, more localized effort, GreenFaith sponsored a group to travel to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation (Cannonball, ND) in response to an invitation from Native American Elders for faith leaders to show their support during the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protests. The GreenFaith Fellows in attendance included religious and lay leaders within Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Unitarian Universalist, and Native American communities. Reflecting on her desire to travel to Standing Rock and demonstrate solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, GreenFaith Fellow and Unitarian Universalist Zeb Green stated:

> My ancestry traces back to the European settlement of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia. My family has been in North America since the beginning of colonization; we were responsible, in one way or another, for pain and suffering that Europeans brought to the First Nations. . . . I can't undo the past; I have to learn from it and avoid making the same mistakes. I will not turn away from those that are asking for my help. I can't ignore the Indigenous voices saying our culture is still hurting their communities. . . .[However,] I have no desire to shame my ancestors. I intend to honor them and the gifts they have given me. What better way is there to honor someone than to help make amends for their transgressions.[16]

Many of the non-Indigenous GreenFaith travelers attending Standing Rock did so to show solidarity and support for a historically abused and vulnerable group in the U.S. Another Christian GreenFaith Fellow, Beth Ackerman, was at Standing Rock when the protest efforts came to fruition. On December 4, 2016, the Army Corps of Engineers (under President Obama's administration) announced that they would not grant the permit to drill the pipeline under the

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[14] "First 100 Hours Vigils," GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.greenfaith.org/programs/environmental-justice/first-100-hours-vigils.
[15] Estrella Sainburg, "100 Hours and 68 Multi-faith Vigils," last updated Jan. 27, 2017, GreenFaith, accessible at http://www.greenfaith.org/programs/environmental-justice/100-hours-vigils-summary.
[16] "GreenFaith at Standing Rock," GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, at http://www.greenfaith.org/success-stories/greenfaith-at-standing-rock.

Missouri River on native lands.[17] Ackerman summarizes, "The celebrations were mighty and conveyed a sacred victory."[18] The attendance of the GreenFaith fellows, at the invitation of Native American faith leaders, illustrates the potential that organizations like GreenFaith have to help members of different religious traditions organize and pool their resources to address urgent environmental causes.

Center for Earth Ethics (CEE) at Union Theological Seminary

The final organization profiled in this analysis, the Center for Earth Ethics (CEE) at Union Theological Seminary, opened its doors on Earth Day of 2015. Spearheaded by Karenna Gore—an attorney, journalist, author, and the daughter of Al and Tipper Gore—CEE "envisions a world where value is measured according to the sustained well-being of all people and our planet" and works to do so by "cultivat[ing] the public consciousness needed to make changes in policy and culture that will establish a new value system that is based on this vision of the world."[19] To actualize this mission, CEE engages religious traditions and communities guided by social ethics to create a framework for eco-justice. Its programs are designed to concretely address environmental issues of the day, including financial divestment and the inclusion of minority voices in interfaith settings (particularly Indigenous voices).[20]

As articulated on its website, CEE is currently executing four main programs: the Eco-Ministry initiative, the Sustainability and Global Affairs initiative, and the Original Caretakers initiative, and the Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement initiative. Beginning with the first, the Eco-Ministry initiative seeks to connect religiously diverse faith leaders with environmental leaders, towards the end of affecting local, national, and global change.[21] Through this initiative, CEE leverages its seminary affiliation by hosting conferences that focus on ecological competencies in religious education. One such conference, called "Faith and Ecology in Seminary Education," took place in December of 2016, in partnership with the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Green Seminary Initiative, the Center for Earth Ethics, and the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (based in Jerusalem). This conference sought to convene diverse religious leaders concerned with environmental degradation, and trained participants on relevant environmental competencies.[22]

A second program developed by CEE is called the Sustainability and Global Affairs initiative. Through this initiative, CEE connects its local environmental work to global

[17] Unfortunately, the circumstances have since changed. On February 7, 2017, President Donald Trump signed an executive order authorizing the Army Corps of Engineers to proceed with the creation of the DAPL without requiring an environmental impact assessment.
[18] "GreenFaith at Standing Rock."
[19] "Home," Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://centerforearthethics.org/.
[20] "Programs," Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://centerforearthethics.org/#programs-intro.
[21] "Eco-Ministry," Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://centerforearthethics.org/programs/eco-ministry.
[22] See "Faith and Ecology Seminary Education Conference in New York City, December 14, 2016," The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.interfaithsustain.com/faith-and-ecology-conference-in-nyc/.

sustainability efforts, including those specified within the UN Sustainable Development Goals.[23] Historically, scholars at CEE have conducted research projects that connect local environmental issues (such as health and sanitation) to the development goals that the UN articulates, analyzing how the UN's Development Goals may or may not inform local issues. In this way, the Sustainability and Global Affairs initiative concerns itself with environmentalism-in-practice, rendering international procedures accountable to local communities.

CEE's third program is called the Original Caretakers initiative, in which sustained, intentional partnerships with Indigenous Peoples are prioritized. This initiative was initially created for two primary reasons. First, Indigenous communities carry generations of experience and wisdom around environmental care, yet the academy (and the U.S. more broadly) has largely failed to honor this knowledge. Second, CEE recognizes that Indigenous populations are some of the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change—including poverty, hunger, and illness. In this way, the Original Caretakers initiative "supports the work of faith-keepers in Indigenous communities and seeks their guidance for [CEE's] educational programs."[24]

The fourth and final program developed by CEE is the Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement initiative. Recognizing that people of color and low-income communities are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, this program seeks to work "at the intersection of social equity and the ecological crisis."[25] Through this initiative, CEE connects faith leaders to national and global climate discussions, in an attempt to inform and empower local communities to address the challenges that climate change presents. In this way, the Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement initiative, alongside the Eco-Ministry initiative, Sustainability and Global Affairs initiative, and Original Caretakers initiative, demonstrates CEE's commitment to timely and urgent environmental issues in interreligious spaces.

Emerging Moral and Ethical Competencies within Interreligious Environmentalism

Upon reviewing these three interfaith-focused environmental organizations, it is clear that each exemplifies Willis Jenkins' description of "pragmatic pluralism." The religious actors and constituencies involved with these organizations may differ when it comes to values, worldviews, or creation narratives, yet they nonetheless collaborate to address local or national environmental issues. Although each organization's work is contextually situated and executed, these institutions each display a shared set of six important moral competencies: 1) showing solidarity with disenfranchised communities and religious minorities (particularly Indigenous Peoples), 2) demonstrating individual or communal leadership, 3) facilitating opportunities for relationship building, 4) participating in hopeful storytelling/narrative, 5) taking interpersonal or communal risk, and 6) resisting burnout and emotional despair.

[23] "Sustainability and Global Affairs," Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://centerforearthethics.org/programs/sustainability-and-global-affairs/.
[24] "Original Caretakers," Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://centerforearthethics.org /programs/original-caretakers.
[25] Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement," Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://centerforearthethics.org/programs/environmental-justice-civic-engagement.

I have drawn these conclusions by analyzing the work of Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and discerning shared themes across these organizations, but aspects of each moral competency are also discussed by scholars such as Lucas Johnston (religion and ecology), Oddbjørn Leirvik (interreligious/interfaith studies), and Eboo Patel (interreligious/interfaith studies). As such, I will draw upon these thinkers in this analysis, alongside scholar-practitioners such as Sallie McFague, Joanna Macy, and Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, to further articulate each of the six identified moral competencies. McFague, Macy, and Abdul-Matin are environmental scholars or advocates in their own religious communities (Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim, respectively), but tend to "look beyond" the parameters of their religious traditions to discuss the possibility and value of interreligious collaboration for environmental causes. In this regard, I draw on these three scholar-practitioners to offer concrete examples that complement the more theoretical work of Johnston, Leirvik, and Patel.

Moral Competency (1): Showing Solidarity with Disenfranchised Communities and Religious Minorities

Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary all emphasize partnerships with disenfranchised or minority religious communities. More specifically, each organization has sponsored programs or created sustainable partnerships with Indigenous Peoples. In the case of Washington Interfaith Power and Light, the state's local affiliate, a five-year partnership between IPL and the Lummi Indian Nation prevented the construction of pollution-causing and even toxic coal-export terminals along the Pacific Coast. GreenFaith similarly sponsored a diverse range of religious leaders and practitioners to travel to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota to protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline, a localized environmental issue that would have compromised water safety on Dakota and Lakota Sioux land. On more of a broad-based organizational scale, CEE has launched the Original Caretakers initiative, which seeks to honor Indigenous wisdom and experience around environmental care that is so often ignored in the U.S.

The focus on minority religious traditions across these interreligious environmental projects is laudable. Organizers across these initiatives cite the fact that disenfranchised communities in poverty—a disproportionately high percentage of which are Indigenous Peoples—are most severely affected by environmental problems such as barren soil, polluted water, and toxic waste. The examples from IPL and GreenFaith illustrate this: in both cases, land that belonged to Indigenous Peoples was designated for development that would compromise water, land, and air quality. Beyond the realm of activism or environmental projects, CEE's Original Caretakers initiative also works with a board of Native American advisors in an effort to combat a form of interfaith solidarity that focuses solely on religious majorities or Abrahamic traditions.

Much of Oddbjørn Leirvik's writings in his book *Interreligious Studies* focuses on the vulnerability and rights of religious minorities. (Leirvik focuses especially on vulnerable Muslim communities in a Norwegian context.) Leirvik elevates the issue of power and domination in interreligious spaces, which is another reason for working in solidarity with religious minorities or disenfranchised communities. He states, "It would be too simplistic to talk about interreligious

dialogue in civil society as a dominion-free activity."[26] Leirvik challenges interreligious actors to be critically aware of who is included or excluded in these dialogues, activities, or enterprises.[27]

While Indigenous Peoples and communities are currently elevated in the work of these three organizations, environmental issues are exacerbated for other disenfranchised groups in the U.S. as well, most notably people of color. Scholars in religion and ecology are now well aware of the phenomenon of "environmental racism," which manifests through the increased pervasiveness of environmental risks or catastrophes in areas of the U.S. with higher percentages of racial minorities. As conveyed in a groundbreaking study by the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice in 1987, race was found to be the most significant variable associated with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities.[28] This report thus found that African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Asian Americans constitute racial communities in the U.S. that have been most affected by the placement of hazardous and toxic waste.[29] Thus, defending the rights and health of these and other marginalized communities is an important moral competency for environmental projects in interreligious spaces.

Moral Competency (2): Demonstrating Individual or Communal Leadership

Leadership skills such as consensus building, group facilitation, mobilization, and relatability are important for those who hope to effectively organize interreligious environmental projects. As exemplified in the projects that Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary conduct, leaders and organizers are needed to plan, execute, and facilitate the group's activities. However, not all leadership looks the same; it manifests through a variety of different roles. In some of the examples listed above, interreligious contingents included official representatives of religious communities; in others, lay practitioners took initiative to spearhead the advocacy or organizing work that needed to be done.

In his review of two sustainability initiatives in interreligious spaces, environmental ethicist Lucas Johnston emphasizes that leadership skills are paramount for success.[30] One of the first leadership qualities Johnston notes is the ability to engage in "worldview translation" to ensure that multiple constituencies are incentivized to participate in the project. Johnston summarizes: "Worldview translation is . . . a laborious process. It requires engaging citizens who are the targets of sustainable development, discernment of their interests, and the creation of materials and programs that foster their actualization."[31] Within interreligious spaces, leaders would be tasked to know enough about other traditions to appropriately speak to their values in order to draw them into the environmental project at hand. In this sense, worldview translation is a key trait in ensuring the mobilization of diverse constituencies.

[26] Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 31.
[27] Ibid., 2.
[28] United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*, 1987, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML1310/ML13109A339.pdf, xiii.
[29] Ibid., ix.
[30] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 133–59.
[31] Ibid., 151.

Worldview translation also leads to consensus building. Understanding the "language" of each participant's tradition, including their incentives for participating in environmental projects, a leader in this space would work to build consensus on the basis of shared ideas, goals, and values. Eboo Patel, writing within the field of interfaith/interreligious studies, notes that leaders in this space would shape interfaith activities that "bring together a wide range of people who orient around religion differently in compelling projects that highlight shared values and create space for powerful sharing, storytelling, and relationship building."[32] This leadership skill is quite relevant in environmental spaces. In his review of Interfaith Power and Light's work, Johnston notes that one of the organization's first tasks was to investigate resources within various traditions that speak to stewardship of creation, which could then be marketed in an effort to recruit a wide range of participants.[33]

Alongside worldview translation, one of the perhaps unspoken leadership qualities needed in interreligious environmental spaces is the ability to be relatable. In both religious and environmental spaces, high-stakes values and moral considerations are at play. Navigating or facilitating these value-laden projects involves some level of sensitivity. Overpowering the group for the sake of "leadership," be it through words or actions, is something that both scholars and practitioners warn against. Patel notes that self-righteousness can taint one's best intentions: "To be an effective social change agent, people have to want to listen to you. And for that to happen, you have to make yourself relatable."[34] Similarly, Muslim environmental activist Ibrahim Abdul-Matin argues that advancing the group's mission "should not depend on the loud mouthing of any priest or imam. Nor should it be the rabble-rousing of any one activist group or individual protest."[35] In this way, environmental leaders in interreligious spaces must have a level of self-awareness of their own relatability, taking care to represent the group with a level of humility and deference.

Moral Competency (3): Participating in Hopeful Storytelling and Narrative

Storytelling has long been a tactic in the separate spheres of interreligious and environmental organizing. Brought together, storytelling in interreligious environmental spaces avoids fear-laden stories of environmental destruction and despair in favor of elevating a moral imagination where diverse constituencies can work productively together to protect the resources upon which they depend. In this way, storytelling is used to define and share a vision as well as to inspire individuals toward action. Thematically, these stories tend to focus on interconnection—both among people as well as between other parts of the natural world.

Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics depend on storytelling. This focus may manifest as a specific focus of training, or as an integrated characteristic of each group's programming. For example, as part of the "Ground for Hope Initiative" hosted by GreenFaith and Interfaith Power and Light, a workshop in North Carolina explored how

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[32] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 146.
[33] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 142.
[34] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 158.
[35] Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches About Protecting the Planet* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), 17.

storytelling allows people to build relationships with other interreligious actors. It was also named an important skill for getting to know local and state legislators for advocacy purposes.[36] Similarly, in recognition of Earth Day 2015, Interfaith Power and Light solicited stories from its network of affiliates about how their constituents celebrated the day. The organization received dozens of responses, many of which spoke to the interfaith-focused environmental projects that their network engaged in throughout the course of the day.[37] The collective power of this story-sharing exercise helps to remind organizers and activists that their efforts—which may seem small and disconnected—are actually a part of a larger, organized movement.

Scholars within interfaith/interreligious studies and religion and ecology also speak to the value of storytelling in environmental spaces. Functionally, these stories provide a hopeful vision of the future, and serve as a means for getting people involved and engaged. In his analysis of Interfaith Power and Light and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), Johnston explores how stories were frequently used as a motivational tool, and how they "contribute to the cultivation of a religious metanarrative of sustainability, often grounded in optimistic, empathetic anthropocentrism."[38] In this way, stories are used to generate new "moral imagination" amongst diverse constituencies, creating a shared vision for a diverse group of stakeholders to work together towards a shared cause.[39]

Storytelling in interreligious environmental spaces not only casts a vision, but it can also be used as a means to inspire action and engagement. Speaking from an interfaith context, Patel notes that narrative should be used strategically to motivate a group of invested people, encouraging them to take part in shared work.[40] Johnston conveys a similar sentiment, noting that strategic narratives in interreligious spaces not only inspire hope, but move people in the direction of responsible environmental behavior.[41] Drawing on his experience engaging in environmental organizing within Muslim and interfaith contexts, Ibrahim Abdul-Matin also emphasizes the power of storytelling to inspire action. In *Green Deen*, he states:

> *We need to tell our stories*. This book presents stories of Muslims and other people of faith who have demonstrated by their actions that they are willing to be actively engaged in protecting the planet Earth. Their inspiring stories serve as a guide to living a Green Deen [i.e., sustainable lives as Muslims] and show us how harmony can be built amongst all of creation. My hope is that, through these stories, you the reader will understand that we are, in fact, here with a purpose. I want you to be inspired by that purpose and the role that you can play.[42]

Abdul-Matin makes it clear that stories can be used as a tool for inspiration, while simultaneously motivating listeners to participate in this effort.

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[36]"Storytelling Workshop, *Ground for Hope*," GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.greenfaith.org/files /gfh-charlotte-2012/richard-fireman-storytelling-advocacy/at_download/file.
[37]"Your Earth Day Stories," May 1, 2015, Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http: //www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/?s=your+earth+day+stories.
[38] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 15.
[39] Ibid., 29.
[40] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 140.
[41] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 15.
[42] Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 15 (emphasis in original).

Whether used as a tool for inspiration, action, or both, stories within interreligious environmental contexts tend to avoid sentiments of despair and environmental destruction. This focus on "positive" storytelling is not meant to sugarcoat the dire realities of climate change, nor to promise environmental utopia as a result of one's participation in an activity or project. Rather, scholars and practitioners in this space have noted that fear and negative imagery tend to be more demotivating than action-inducing. Johnston conveys as much in his survey of two interfaith organizations that focus on environmentalism, noting that leaders tend to shy away from negative imagery because—while they adequately induce fear and concern—they do not ultimately produce positive change.[43] In *Green Deen*, Abdul-Matin shares a similar perspective, stating that "fear is one way to motivate people, but it [often] leads to despair."[44]

Thematically, interreligious stories in environmental contexts tend to focus on interconnection or interdependence. In interreligious settings, the framework of interconnection can be used to emphasize our human connectedness and dependence on one another to achieve common goals.[45] In an environmental context, interdependence speaks to our fundamental reliance upon non-human entities and systems that for these practical reasons are worth defending. One example of such a narrative comes from Sallie McFague, who, in writing from a Christian perspective, draws upon the theme of interdependence to create a vision that is relevant to her audience. She writes of the "univerself"—a concept based on kenotic, or self-emptying, theology, to underscore "the radical interdependence of all with all . . . emphasizing losing one's life for others."[46] This type of narrative reminds us that our actions do indeed impact others, whether we intend them to our not, and motivates us to choose to lead lives that influence others positively, or at least reduce the unintentional harm we cause.

Moral Competency (4): Facilitating Opportunities for Relationship-Building and Partnership

Collaborative partnerships are key to interreligious projects, environmental ones included. Strategic and productive partnerships do not emerge by chance, however; they must be built by those invested in the project at hand. As the organizations and centers discussed in this paper demonstrate, opportunities to build these types of relationships are often nurtured through the vehicle of shared work, such as advocacy, activism, or project execution. The Washington Interfaith Power and Light affiliate and Lummi Nation demonstrated the power of interreligious partnerships in preventing the issuance of permits required to build a coal-export terminal on native lands. Similarly, GreenFaith provided the opportunity for relationship-building through its "First 100 Hours Vigils," which resulted in nearly 70 gatherings, reflections, prayer vigils, and services to demonstrate interfaith solidarity for environmental causes. The Center for Earth Ethics' Eco-Ministry initiative also works to connect and train religiously diverse faith leaders in enacting local, national, and global environmental change. In each of these programs and initiatives, we see the power of collaborative engagement toward a shared goal.

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[43] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 146.
[44] Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 187.
[45] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 139.
[46] Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 150.

Partnerships in interreligious environmental spaces must be built on a willingness to engage empathetically with diverse others, prioritizing interpersonal interaction and active collaboration. In his review of two interreligious environmental organizations, Johnston summarizes that empathetic engagement with other people or communities, which included "getting outside one's own perspective [and] attempting to comprehend (not endorse) the deep values and core beliefs of others," was the most important aspect of successful partnerships.[47] This type of partnership carries with it a foundation of intellectual humility, wherein interreligious partners respect one another enough to demonstrate openness to their ideas and worldviews, believing that they may indeed have something to learn from one another.

While a spirit of empathetic deliberation is key to interreligious partnerships in environmental spaces, the willingness to negotiate differences between each party's concerns need not be sacrificed. Environmental concerns are typically complex and contextual, making one-size-fits-all solutions difficult to imagine. Thus, interreligious partners need to spend time learning about the needs of the other stakeholders involved, and work together to negotiate plans that can be mutually agreed upon. Johnston found that forgoing this sometimes cumbersome and lengthy process often leads well-intentioned partnerships to fail.[48] Indeed, the building of trust that leads to each stakeholder's willingness to discuss values, priorities, and both short- and long-term goals is one of the most important facets of any successful partnership.[49]

As the profiled organizations and centers exemplify, shared environmental activities can serve both as means and ends of interreligious partnerships. Relationships can be built towards the end of executing a project, or the execution of a project may be what builds trustful and long-term relationships. In either case, an emphasis on shared work is crucial. This view is affirmed by the work of environmental practitioners like Abdul-Matin, who speaks to the value of building interreligious partnerships to achieve environmental goals:

> One way to make such interfaith connections is through work—in community gardens, in Gulf cleanup efforts, in deconstructing old buildings and salvaging useful materials. Through work we form operational and emotional bonds that build community around our shared love of God and the planet. Service is the bond that connects people of all faiths. In the environmental movement, it will be incumbent upon Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other faith congregants to connect in a spirit of service to our shared Earth.[50]

In his work as a Muslim environmentalist, Abdul-Matin has been inspired by the potential of interfaith partnerships, which may lead to a greater mobilization of concerned individuals. This view is affirmed in the work of Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics, as well that of scholars such as Lucas Johnston in his review of interreligious projects.

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[47] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 196.
[48] Ibid., 143.
[49] Ibid., 150.
[50] Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 16–17.

Moral Competency (5): Taking Interpersonal or Communal Risks

Collaborative partnerships are key to advancing interreligious environmentalism, but the risks that both communities and individuals take in making themselves vulnerable to each other should not be ignored. This moral competency is not directly discussed in the online materials of Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, or the Center for Earth Ethics. Within the programs that each of these organizations run, however, we can see where risks may be taken: negotiating high-stakes or potentially charged projects between diverse constituencies (i.e., divestment), navigating potentially irreconcilable differences, or dealing with interpersonal tension or conflict. Scholars such as Johnston, Patel, and Abdul-Matin also respectively speak to the possibility of interpersonal or communal risks in environmental and interreligious spaces.

Speaking first to the possibility of communal risk, Johnston notes that collaboration and partnerships between two groups require vulnerability, a spirit of generosity, and the willingness to be changed. When discrete religious groups decide to enter a partnership with integrity, Johnston notes, this typically challenges members of the community to risk losing the comfort of their shared norms and values.[51] Communal risk also manifests in both groups' expressions of their deep beliefs and core values, with the possibility of being changed as a result of this level of vulnerability. Building trust across lines of difference requires vulnerable interactions, wherein groups may reveal their core values, concerns, and hopes. In any genuine exchange about values and beliefs, both groups run a legitimate risk of adapting or evolving as a result of knowing and understanding their partners. In an interview that Johnston conducted with Martin Palmer, Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, Palmer put this idea succinctly: "Partnership is actually about the risk [that] you might change."[52]

Partnerships may lead to communal risk or change within groups, but they also require individuals to step outside their comfort zones. Patel argues that interfaith leaders require a quality that he calls "grit." Because interfaith organizing requires the risk of working with people you may disagree with on foundational concerns, Patel warns, "you are going to encounter prejudice, tension, disagreement, and conflict along the way. Occasionally, this will be of the ugly sort. With some frequency, it will be directed at you."[53] While this type of encounter would hopefully be the exception rather than the rule, the negotiation of core values—environmental ones included—involves personal risk that may not always be rewarding.

Abdul-Matin describes personal risk as "meeting people where they're at" to make collaborators comfortable or willing to work with you. Partnership may at times require stepping back to educate those with less experience or know-how. On the flip side, if you are the one lacking information or experience, it may require the admission that you need additional support. To this point, Abdul-Matin succinctly summarizes, "I learned that to meet people where they're at, you must leave your comfort zone."[54] Johnston conveys a similar sentiment with his concept of "an ethic of personal risk," wherein interreligious partners are expected to extend moral consideration

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[51] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 23.
[52] Ibid., 139.
[53] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 157.
[54]Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 186.

by "stretching the 'self' to include others (ethnic, cultural, ethical, or non-human), through an expanded understanding of 'neighbor.'"[55] Successful sustainability leaders in interreligious spaces, Johnston argues, are thus willing to risk their own comfort to approach their diverse partners with humility and vulnerability, in an effort to empathetically consider (but not always agree with) their worldviews or values.[56]

Moral Competency (6): Building Resilience to Resist Burnout and Emotional Despair

Long-term organizers in interreligious or environmental spaces are familiar with the burnout that can emerge as a result of lackluster results, little advancement, and emotional despair. Thus, it is no surprise that Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics each address this topic in their programs and initiatives. The resilience of faith-based environmental organizers after Hurricane Katrina was a key theme at GreenFaith's 2016 "North American Convergence" conference hosted in New Orleans.[57] In the "First 100 Hours Vigils" program hosted by GreenFaith and numerous Interfaith Power and Light affiliates, many local groups spoke to the need for communities to come together and resist despair. Organizers of one vigil in Minneapolis advertised the event with the following description:

> Now more than ever, we need to craft a narrative and practice of resistance and resilience. We do so by being in community, bringing our full selves to the table, and calling on the wisdom and stories of our diverse faith traditions. Join us for an evening of reflection, ritual, song, and community to cultivate the sustenance we need to respond powerfully in the year ahead.[58]

Like GreenFaith and IPL, the Center for Earth Ethics has sponsored programs related to resilience. Taking cues from the People's Climate Movement, the Center for Earth Ethics has sponsored People's Climate Resistance Story Circles to encourage communities to pause and reflect upon their motivations as environmental organizers.[59]

Within the scholarly community, Joanna Macy—a scholar of Buddhism and deep ecology—is one of the leading thinkers on building resilience against emotional numbness and burnout. One of the primary vehicles for this effort is her workshops hosted through the Work that Reconnects Network, an organization that she helps to cultivate and organize. Macy speaks to the importance of "honoring our own pain" in engaging with these issues, offering a set of exercises that encourage group sharing of frustration, anger, and sadness about climate change. Regarding the value of this exercise, Macy claims that by daring to experience our own pain, "we learn the true mean of compassion: to 'suffer with'...What had isolated us in private anguish now opens

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[55] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 154.
[56] Ibid., 14.
[57] "North American Convergence 2016: New Orleans, Louisiana," GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.greenfaith.org/success-stories/new-orleans-convergence/?searchterm=resilience.
[58] "Vigils for the Earth during the first 100 hours," Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/vigils-for-the-earth-during-the-first-100-hours/.
[59] For more information on climate resistance story circles, see "Commit 2 Respond," Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://www.uumfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Commit2Respond-Climate-Justice-Month-2017-Toolkit.pdf.

outward and delvers us into the wider reaches of our inter-existence."[60] In this way, Macy utilizes collective storytelling and lament to help build a broader community of concerned individuals, a tactic that for many can lead to more resilient and long-lived environmental practices.

Through her experience leading the Work that Reconnects Network, Macy also has come to depend on relationships as a source for resiliency. Reflecting upon an interfaith retreat that focused on the environment, Macy writes:

> We were people with different cultural and religious backgrounds, yet, despite the differing tradition systems to which we belonged, the prayers and affirmations that spontaneously arose in that circle expressed a common faith and fueled a common hope. Those words bespoke a shared commitment to engage in actions and changes in lifestyle on behalf of our Earth and its beings. They expressed a bonding to this Earth, going beyond feeling sorry for the planet or scared for ourselves. They were an affirmation of relationship—relationship that can be spiritually as well as physically sustaining, a relationship that can empower.[61]

Relationships in and of themselves can be sources of sustenance and resistance, perhaps even more so with religiously and philosophically diverse groups and individuals. Macy recognizes the strength in diversity as well, stating, "Diversity is a source of resilience. This is good news because this time of great challenge demands more commitment, endurance, and courage than any one of us can dredge up out of our own individual supply."[62]

While resilience-building is key to interreligious environmentalism, it is worth noting that everyone has their limits. Speaking about his work creating interreligious spaces, Patel emphasizes that everyone gets to "draw their own lines."[63] For some, the line to fatigue, burnout, or despair may be a few steps farther than for others, but it is important to give space to the diverse needs and limits of the group, and for individuals to feel comfortable expressing these limits. Because we are playing the long game, as Patel would say, this work should be done humanely, with self-care and resiliency in mind.[64]

Conclusion

This paper employed the framework of pragmatic pluralism to identify moral and ethical competencies relevant to interreligious environmentalism. Reviewing the work of three environmental organizations that utilize interreligious methods—Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary—reveals a shared set of six moral competencies: showing solidarity with disenfranchised communities and religious minorities, demonstrating individual or communal leadership, participating in hopeful storytelling

[60] "The Spiral," Work that Reconnects Network, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://workthatreconnects.org/spiral.
[61] Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2007), loc. 1510–1514 of 3179, Kindle.
[62] Ibid., loc. 355–357 of 3179, Kindle.
[63] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 158.
[64] Ibid., 159.

and narrative, facilitating opportunities for relationship-building and partnership, taking interpersonal or communal risks, and building resilience to resist burnout and emotional despair.

It is worth noting that at any given time—within the context of a particular project—some of these moral competencies may be more salient or relevant than others. Additionally, within the context of a particular project, some competencies may intersect or, conversely, come into tension with one another. One example of this interconnection can be seen between storytelling and resiliency; while these two moral competencies may have distinct traits, in some cases storytelling was used *as a form of* resilience-building. Speaking to possible tensions, we can see how the moral competencies of avoiding burnout (on the one hand) and demonstrating leadership (on the other) could perhaps lead to conflicting goals: it can be difficult to prioritize mental or emotional well-being when there is simply too much work to be done.

Each of these moral competencies emerged by analyzing the work of the three organizations, but their definitions can be reinforced by drawing upon the work of scholars in both religion and ecology and interfaith/interreligious studies. Thinkers like Lucas Johnston, Oddbjørn Leirvik, and Eboo Patel illuminate how these moral competencies are relevant in both environmental spaces and interreligious spaces. By bringing these thinkers into conversation with one another, we can gain a more complete understanding of how to create successful interreligious partnerships to address environmental concerns. Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary are all testaments to the profound and impactful work that is possible when these concepts are indeed united.

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Blessed Transgression: On Serving Communion to Jews[1]

Jon Paul Sydnor

The sharing of religious rituals across religious boundaries is increasing. More and more, we invite our religious neighbors to practice our rituals, and they invite us to practice theirs. In this autobiographical essay, I will reflect on my Christian community's experience of inviting Jews to take communion, and the surprising results of that invitation. First, I will sketch the working theology of ritual operative in our church. Then, I will describe the event of shared worship and shared ritual participation. I will conclude with an analysis of the event based on interreligious thought and ritual theory. This analysis will lead to a positive, ethical prescription: religious traditions should selectively embrace interformation—interreligious transformation through shared religious practice, especially ritual practice.

Keywords: Jewish-Christian relations, Eucharist, Communion, ritual studies, liturgical theology, interreligious studies, interfaith

Jews, Christians, and History

Introduction

On August 12, 2014, in Walpole, Massachusetts, a small, progressive Jewish gathering, the Sharon Family Chavurah, joined a small, progressive Christian gathering, Grace Community Boston, for a shared worship service. The leaders of each group had agreed to perform a ritual with and for the other group. The gathered participants were free to observe the others' ritual, or participate in it, as they preferred. The two groups met in the home of the progressive Christian pastor, Rev. Abby Henrich.

Usually, writing on interreligious ritual participation focuses on participating in the others' rituals. In this instance, I would like to reverse that and focus on inviting others to participate in our own rituals. What is it like to invite someone of a different religion into your community's sacred spacetime? What is it like to practice your own ritual alongside the religious other? For me, serving communion to Jews was a powerful experience; more powerful, perhaps, than it would have been to serve communion to a Buddhist or Muslim. Below I will explain why.

Nowy Targ, Poland

Certain aspects of my personal biography influence my experience of inviting Jews to take communion. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Poland from 1992 to 1994. Prior to World War II

[1] I would like to thank Axel Marc Oaks Takács and the anonymous reviewers, whose constructive criticisms dramatically improved this article.

Poland was about ten percent Jewish. By the end of the war it was about one percent Jewish, and now it has very few practicing Jews.[2]

Figure 1: The author with his host sister, Agata Ligas (now Stramek), in traditional Polish highlander garb (1993).

The town that I lived in, Nowy Targ in south-central Poland, about an hour and a half south of Krakow, had been 20% Jewish prior to the war.[3] When the Nazis invaded Poland, they either slaughtered the Jews of Nowy Targ on site or shipped them away to death camps. A memorial downtown, where German soldiers gunned down hundreds, marks the horror. During the German occupation, Nazis vandalized the Jewish cemetery.

Prior to World War II, the Jews in Nowy Targ had been a vital community, simultaneously distinct and integrated. After World War II, and the resulting establishment of the State of Israel, most were dead or gone.[4]

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[2] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (2007), s.v. "Poland: Independent Poland."
[3] Czeslaw Brzoza, "The Jews of Nowy Targ in the Inter-War Period," The American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.aapjstudies.org/index.php?id=45.
[4] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (2007), s.v. "Poland: After World War II."

I imagine a pre-war Nowy Targ with synagogues, Jewish traders and merchants, where children spoke Yiddish on the streets, youth studied Hebrew at home, and families read the Torah with devotion. But I knew only a homogeneous Nowy Targ, 99% Polish and 99% Roman Catholic.

To intensify the sense of loss, Nowy Targ is only about an hour and a half away from Auschwitz, or Oświęcim in Polish. I went there twice, once with a class from my school and once when my parents visited. Auschwitz can't be understood. Auschwitz silently insists that the human capacity for evil is absolute, and it will leave your emotions and intellect agitated until you accept this plain fact.

Reminders of Polish Jewry and their extermination are everywhere in Poland. You can visit the Museum of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Warsaw, or Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter in Kraków. Whenever I visited a friend in the Peace Corps, in another town, they would have their own local history to relate—this is where the Jews lived, that's where they were killed, that store over there used to be a synagogue, the Jewish cemetery is on the far side of town. If you know Polish history, then you know that something is missing, and it's missing everywhere you go. There is—pardon the cliché—an inescapable presence of absence. Missing persons stroll the streets, and when you feel agitated to find them, and recover them, you realize that you can't. You are powerless, and you now walk in a hidden tragedy.

Tragedy, affect, and thought

Due to these experiences, the Shoah has a very affective dimension for me. After living in its epicenter for two years, it became a concrete event, not a historical abstraction. The Shoah is not just something I think about or ponder, it has become something that I feel. My indirect experience has increased my sympathy for those who were directly affected—the survivors and the bereaved.

Of course, these experiences also changed my attitude toward Judaism. I acquired a defensive attitude on behalf of the tradition, an abhorrence for historical Christian persecution of it, and an increased allergy to anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in all their forms—historical, cultural, biblical, theological, etc. I read the Gospel of John in Poland and its anti-Semitic passages disturbed me—and changed my biblical hermeneutic. When America's Southern Baptist Convention announced its plans to convert Jews, I got angry.[5]

Grace Community Boston

Now, let me speak a little about how we came to celebrate worship with the Sharon Family Chavurah. Quite simply, my wife knew one of the congregants, who put her in touch with the chavurah's 80-year-old female cantor. They willingly agreed to meet with us.

[5] Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Jewish Evangelism," accessed January 21, 2017, http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/655/resolution-on-jewish-evangelism.

Figure 2: Nowy Targ: Pictures from a Bi-cultural Town by Anna Majorczyk. (Credit: Wirtualny Sztetl)

On the night that we met together, the two groups first shared a meal and got to know one another, then gathered for worship. The leader of the Jewish community performed a Shabbat evening home ritual. She invited the Christian children to participate, and all of them did.

The Christian pastor, Rev. Abby Henrich, had to choose what ritual to perform at this shared service. A full disclosure is warranted here: The pastor of Grace Community Boston is my wife and I am the theologian-in-residence. However, when making decisions of consequence such as this one, the pastor rarely consults with the theologian-in-residence.

Nevertheless, multiple safe options occurred to her—lighting prayer candles, *lectio divina* over a Hebrew text, writing one's regrets and sins on paper then burning them. She had the option of performing a generically spiritual rather than specifically Christian ritual. But generic spirituality isn't risky enough for the characteristically bold Rev. Henrich, who never plays it safe.

Communion

She chose to serve communion instead. The Lord’s Supper. Eucharist. The central Christian ritual from which Jews have been excluded, 99% of the time, for the past 2,000 years. The central Christian ritual that probably most Jews would have no interest in joining. A Christian ritual that made their decision to observe or participate a big deal.

Why did Rev. Henrich choose communion instead of a politically safer, theologically simpler, and historically less fraught Christian ritual? As she explained to her jittery husband, communion is the chief means of grace in the Christian church. It is the symbolic action that expresses God’s incarnate love for humankind. It symbolizes God’s action for us, God’s presence with us, and God’s purpose for history.

Abby did not want to share a lesser ritual with our Jewish friends. She didn’t want to do something that we normally don’t do because Jews were present. The purpose of sharing ritual is to share one another, not to change ourselves into interreligious digestives. Crossing boundaries might be easier if we hide our differences behind a more politically, theologically, and historically palatable mask. But it would not be as authentic. Grace Community Boston is a Christian

community that takes Christian communion every week. Honesty demanded that we share ourselves through shared communion.

A Working Theology of Ritual

Broken history, ritual power

Sharon Family Chavurah and Grace Community Boston inherited a tragic world, and that tragedy persists in our day. We regularly learn of the vandalism of Jewish cemeteries, threats to synagogues, a surging neo-Nazi movement, anti-Semitic websites and social memes, intractable interreligious conflict in the Holy Land, and ignorant statements by atavistic Christian thought leaders. Our uncontrollable, everyday world is not what it should be. As faith communities, we did not want to socialize ourselves or our children into these patterns. We wanted to resist, to re-pattern ourselves, to be transformed.[6] And we shared a hope that this endeavor would be more successful through our shared effort and trust in God. Stated differently, we placed our hope in union with the religious other, and in a supernatural power that, like us, seeks the healing of history.[7]

As the communities' leaders determined how we might heal these wounds, they turned to shared ritual. To understand why they did so, we must propose a working theology of ritual, augmented by a working theology of interreligious ritual participation, or "inter-riting" as Marianne Moyaert calls it.[8] Inter-riting offers a shared experiential intimacy that exceeds any thought about it. The world is broken but, as Jonathan Z. Smith has observed, religious ritual can momentarily perfect our environment, allowing us to momentarily *experience* the way life should be. Then, we can carry the memory of this perfection back into the everyday, where inspired memory repairs a broken world.[9] Certainly, this was one goal of our communities as we gathered. In a world of error and division, we wanted to attend to one another, briefly yet deeply.

Our leaders chose inter-riting for its transformative power. Ritual at its most powerful engages the entire person—mind, body, senses, imagination. *Significata*—meaningful actions and emblems that saturate performance with emotion—elevate ritual's effectiveness.[10] Ritual at its most effective is something that you do with your whole self, which produces holistic feeling. As a result, any thinking about ritual will derive from the doing of ritual, from embodied experience, not disembodied thought. The doing of ritual may lead thought from reason to rumination, and theologians may even translate ritual experience into doctrinal concepts, but ritual resists the separation of thought from body. Translation is diminution. So, explanatory conceptualizations of

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[6] Lisa Schirch, "Ritual, Religion, and Peacebuilding," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, eds. R. Scott Appleby, Atalia Omer, and David Little (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2–3, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199731640.001.0001.

[7] Peter Collins, "Religion and Ritual: A Multi-Perspectival Approach," *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588961.001.0001.

[8] Marianne Moyaert, "Introduction: Exploring the Phenomenon of Interreligious Ritual Participation," in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations*, eds. Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 3ff.

[9] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 53–55.

[10] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 28–29.

ritual will never contain ritual, which inevitably resists interpretative closure.[11] Ritual exceeds cognition, just as reality exceeds system.

Axel Michaels and William S. Sax have drawn attention to the efficacy of religious performance. Paralleling their thought, Grace Community Boston has a pragmatic concept of ritual. Since ritual resists reduction to doctrine, it need not be "true" in the sense that a propositional statement might be "true." At the same time, since (for us) the primary purpose of ritual is pastoral, and pastoral needs change with pastoral circumstances, the performance of ritual need not hew closely to any pre-existing pattern. We adapt rituals over time. We don't have to "get it right," as does an ordained Roman Catholic priest consecrating the Eucharist. But we hope that it "works," as does medicine on a disease.[12]

Due to the evocative nature of ritual, our liturgical practice is *creative*. Just as architecture can evoke God in space, ritual can evoke God in time. And, as gracious as God is, the skill of the architect and the skill of the ritualist influence the evocative power of their creations. This power is fundamentally aesthetic: Grace experiences "truth" in ritual as help, sustenance, reconciliation, repair, and healing—not as correspondence to doctrinal demands or conformity to traditional formulas. James Baldwin best describes our ritual ideal: "They sang with all the strength that was in them, and clapped their hands for joy. There had never been a time when John had not sat watching the saints rejoice with terror in his heart, and wonder. Their singing caused him to believe in the presence of the Lord; indeed, it was no longer a question of belief, because *they made that presence real*."[13]

Invitation to communion, invitation to community

Baldwin was very much worshiping with his own, but interreligious ritual hospitality invites the other to transgress. In the Jewish-Christian relationship, this invitation is particularly fraught given two millennia of aggressive, sometimes violent, persecution and proselytization of Jews by Christians. Horrified by this history, not a soul at Grace sought to convert our Jewish guests. Christian attempts to convert Jews appall us. Likewise, our Jewish guests had no interest in converting us, or converting themselves. By sharing rituals we may have been inviting one another into our own sacred spacetime, but only for a visit, not to stay.

Moreover, at Grace we don't even use the terms "convert" or "conversion" because they are too categorical. Humans are never this or that—we are a stew of qualities. We exist as an intersection of innumerable roles, drives, fears, virtues, vices, memories, hopes, desires, and associations. At Grace, some of our members find religious stimulation in science, some in Buddhism, some in charitable service, others in justice work. Some are rationalistic and others are enthusiastic. As a community, we have no essence—we are a dynamic collective of individuals.

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[11] Pamela Klassen, "Ritual," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5–9, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195170214.001.0001.
[12] Axel Michaels and William S. Sax, "Performance," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2–3, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198729570.001.0001.
[13] James Baldwin, *Go Tell It On the Mountain* (1952; repr., New York: Dell Publishing, 1985), 7. Italics added.

As dynamic, we try to stay in spiritual motion. The concept of conversion suggests event, as if you have shifted from unchanging status A to discrete, unchanging status *B*. But the concept of journey suggests *process*, as if you are always seeking, always growing, hence never the same. At Grace, when we discuss our spiritual life together, we prefer the term "journey."[14] Favoring process, participants at Grace are naturally suspicious of simplistic categories, inflexible claims, and unchanging dogma. We prefer fluid experiential terms like healing, meaning, and purpose, as well as challenging ethical terms like charity, justice, and service. Together by grace, we try to be transformed and always transforming.

As we entered the historically challenging reality of Jewish-Christian relations, our primary concern was ethical. We tried to abide by the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Luke 6.31). The Golden Rule is an important ethical plumb line for anyone involved in interfaith relations. At the same time, it is an inadequate guide since religious practitioners hold varying attitudes toward otherness.[15] A very open religious person may be willing to practice the rites of her neighbors, and to invite them to practice her own. She may believe that, to the cosmic God, all boundaries are humanly manufactured fictions. Hence, transgression enacts the divine imagination. Others may interpret boundaries as divinely imposed safeguards that preserve truth, scripture, or community. For them, transgression may imply contamination. They may not want to invite her to practice their rites; they may not want to be invited to practice hers.

Christianity is the majority religion in America. For a majority religion to invite a minority religion into shared worship is different from a minority religion inviting a majority religion into shared worship. The majority invites from a position of numerical strength and cultural reinforcement. The minority lacks these bulwarks.[16] Any simplistic application of the Golden Rule to interreligious ritual participation will inadequately account for the complexity and ambiguity of the invitation. We may invite and be invited, but we must do so with great respect and humility. As Ruth Langer notes, interreligious hospitality is a skill that requires discernment, especially in Jewish-Christian relations.[17]

Communion as ritual, ritual as communication

By choosing to serve communion, Abby was emphasizing the *communicative* nature of ritual. Oxford linguist J. L. Austin, resisting logical positivist concepts of language, focused on the role that language plays in felt human relationships. According to Austin, the primary purpose of language is not to convey verifiable or falsifiable information. Language is rarely a container for data, so its proper goal is rarely descriptive precision. Instead, language is a creative activity, a social cause with social effects. Language creates feeling, provokes action, signals intention, and reveals emotion. A speech-act can threaten, warn, promise, or assure. Sometimes, a sentence will

[14] Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, eds. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4–9.
[15] David A. Kunin, "Multifaith: New Directions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 104–106.
[16] Sheila K. Marshall and Carol Markstrom-Adams, "Attitudes on Interfaith Dating Among Jewish Adolescents: Contextual and Developmental Considerations," *Journal of Family Issues* 16 (November 1995): 794–796. This article describes American Jews' concerns regarding cultural assimilation as a minority group, and how those concerns influence attitudes toward interfaith dating and its potential consequence of interfaith marriage.
[17] Ruth Langer, "Parameters of Hospitality for Interreligious Participation: A Jewish Perspective," in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue*, 211–213.

utilize formal syntax and precise language to convey information, but that is only one thing that language can do.[18]

Figure 3: The cantor (not seen here) and an assistant light Shabbat candles for the children.

Similarly, the primary purpose of ritual, as Grace interprets it, is not precise repetition of a ritual grammar. For us, ritual is not a technology that only works if properly performed, as a positivist sentence only works if it accurately states a proposition. Instead, we endorse the communicative *power* of ritual. Rituals, whether they include language or not, do things. Baptism reminds our congregation of the infinite value of the new life before them, and the infinite love of God for that life. Laying on of hands communicates our community's concern for the suffering and offers God's healing and protection, of and through us. Weddings remind us that relationships are not utilitarian contracts between signatories; they are sacred commitments and celebrations of joy. The point of ritual is not just to remind us of these "truths"; as Baldwin makes clear, the point of ritual is for us to *feel* them.

[18] Michaels and Sax, 3–4.

Open table

There was an added complication to Abby's decision, which made the choice even more fraught. When Grace Community Boston formed in 2010 as an independent, progressive, emergent (experimental) Christian community, we had many discussions about who we wanted to be. Amongst other things, we clearly wanted to be *open*. We wanted to center ourselves on Jesus Christ, yet remain open to the Holy Spirit working in other faiths. We wanted to have an identity with porous boundaries; we wanted to be an "us" without a "them."[19]

As progressives, we engage and alter tradition according to our norm: the agapic, universal love of God revealed by Jesus Christ. This unconditional love draws us forward into the Kingdom of God. Traditionally, Christian communion has been an exclusive ritual. But, since Grace's primary source of inspiration is God's future, we feel free to break with tradition. In many ways, this breaking with tradition is traditional. As Tom Driver notes, rituals change through history. They are created in times and places according to the need of those times and places; as needs change rituals change.[20] A new world will need new rituals, and any community moving toward the Kingdom of God strides toward a new world.

In celebrating the openness of history to God, Grace Community Boston opened its table to all—we welcome everyone—adult or child, baptized or unbaptized, faithful or doubtful, even Christian or nonchristian. Our invitation to communion has no exclusive wording, which might demand that participants be baptized, or believe in transubstantiation, or accept Christ as Savior. Instead, we say generally, and said on this particular occasion (I paraphrase since Abby leads worship conversationally), "The only people excluded from our communion table are those whom Jesus himself would exclude and that is nobody. All are welcome."[21]

For us, an exclusive ritual cannot express the universal love of God. So, we have opened the ritual; we have changed our practice. By adopting the new practice, we have invited the new ritual to offer us new knowledge—embodied, experiential, communal, *ritual* knowledge—and, in this case, *interreligious* knowledge.[22] We weren't just inviting our Jewish guests to *watch* us take communion. In a constitutive expression of our open theology, we were inviting our Jewish guests to *participate in communion with us*.

Inviting our Jewish guests to participate in communion risked multiple misunderstandings. Our guests, most of whom were meeting us for the first time, could have interpreted it as an attempt at proselytization. They could have interpreted it as clumsy outreach by naïve liberals who are overly impressed with their own openness. They could have interpreted it as inhospitable, forcing them to risk offense by refusing their hosts' generosity. And they could have interpreted it as a threat to the continuation of Judaism, which Alan Dershowitz asserts is more threatened by

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[19] Stephen Edmondson, "Opening the Table: The Body of Christ and God's Prodigal Grace," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 224.
[20] Tom F. Driver, "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual," in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996. 182.
[21] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Table and font: Who is welcome?," accessed January 10, 2017, http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Examples_of_Communion_Invitations.pdf.
[22] Driver, "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual," 183.

contemporary openness and assimilation than medieval exclusivity and ghettoization.[23] Would this be just one more example of insensitive Christian triumphalism in the hard history of Jewish-Christian relations?

Figure 4: Rev. Abby Henrich leads the second half of the joint service. Cantor Iris Jacobs sits behind her.

Universalist imagery

The open table heightened the import of Abby's choice to serve communion, but another decision alleviated it somewhat. When we started Grace Community Boston, in addition to choosing an open table, we also discussed the imagery we would use for communion. Crucially, we allow all children to take communion unconditionally. As soon as a child can digest solid food, they are welcome to be brought forward for communion.

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[23] Alan M. Dershowitz, *The Vanishing American Jew: In Search of Jewish Identity for the Next Century* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 6–9.

Children tend to think literally. The capacity for metaphorical thought develops with age and life experience. Since we were serving communion to very young children, we became concerned that their literal interpretation of Eucharistic imagery would make them think that we were all, literally, cannibals.[24]

In order to investigate, we asked our parishioners what they remembered about communion from their childhood. The results disturbed us. The body and blood language of the Eucharist had conjured up some gruesome imagery. One parishioner thought that her church had Christ's corpse in the back room, behind the apse, and from this corpse carved up the body and drained out the blood for each week's service. Others had similar memories and were convinced that they were eating and drinking (or their parents were) the literal flesh and blood of Jesus. And they remembered being, let us say, discomfited by this regular occurrence.

Grace Community Boston believes that all good theology is pastoral theology, so we were more than willing to adapt tradition to this pastoral discovery.[25] In the invitation to communion, and in discussion of the meaning of communion, we began to avoid body and blood imagery, emphasizing instead remembrance of Jesus' absolute ethical courage, the presence of Christ among us through table fellowship, and the promised eschatological banquet at which all will be filled. Like the early church, and like many contemporary emergent churches, communion became similar to an agape meal or love feast—we replaced wafers with large chunks of fresh-baked bread and goblets of grape juice.[26] Utilizing pastorally revised yet biblically grounded language, we began referring to the elements as the "Bread of Heaven" (John 6.51) and "Cup of Salvation" (Psalm 116.13, see also I Corinthians 10.16). As we made these changes, we found inspiration in Isaiah:

> *On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare*
> *a feast of rich food for all peoples,*
> *a banquet of aged wine—*
> *the best of meats and the finest of wines.*
> *On this mountain he will destroy*
> *the shroud that enfolds all peoples,*
> *the sheet that covers all nations;*
> *he will swallow up death forever.*
> *The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears*
> *from all faces;*
> *he will remove his people's disgrace*
> *from all the earth.*
> *The Lord has spoken.*
>
> *In that day they will say,*

[24] James Geary, *I is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes The Way We See the World* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012), 158.
[25] Jon Paul Sydnor, "Christ Was Not an Inerrantist, so Christians Should Not Be Either: How Jesus Read His Bible," *Open Theology* 2, no. 1 (August 2016): 757.
[26] Marianne Moyaert, "Religious Pluralism and Eucharistic Hospitality," *Liturgy* 31, no. 3 (April 2016): 49–50.

> *"Surely this is our God;*
> *we trusted in him, and he saved us.*
> *This is the Lord, we trusted in him;*
> *let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." (Isaiah 25.6-9* NRSV*)*

Following these deliberations, Grace Community Boston ended up with an open table, minimal body and blood language, and Isaiah's banquet imagery for our celebration of communion.

These changes made it easier to invite our Jewish guests to take communion. Other traditions' theology and practice of the Eucharist make such invitation more difficult. For example, the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of ontological transubstantiation, independent of the participants' experience, renders Eucharistic hospitality toward Jews problematic. First and foremost, Jewish dietary law forbids the consumption of certain animals' blood (Leviticus 7.26). This prohibition has been inferentially extended to human blood. Indeed, the strong halachic prohibition against blood consumption makes Jesus' declaration at the Last Supper, "This is my body . . . this is my blood" (Luke 22.19-20), startling.[27] Roman Catholic liturgical practice and Jewish law conflict in this instance. Generally, the feasibility of interreligious ritual participation depends on the ritual under consideration, the role that ritual plays in the host community, and the guest community's potential interpretation and experience of the ritual.

Interreligious trepidation

Despite the power of ritual, or perhaps due to the power of ritual, I felt conflicted about Abby's choice to serve communion. I'm much more cautious by nature than Abby is, so I probably would have played it safe. And due to my academic background, I knew that interreligious rituals can go wrong, particularly in a context as historically fraught as Jewish-Christian relations. Anya Topolski, a Jewish philosopher married to a Catholic theologian, notes the pain they experienced as an interfaith couple mourning the loss of their young daughter, Hannah. The tragedy was inherently horrendous, but insensitive leaders, competing calendars, exclusive traditions, conflicting symbols, and different interpretations of death all complicated the bereavement process. In the end, friends, family, and faith helped the distraught couple through their pain, but not without missteps.[28]

On the one hand, inviting our Jewish neighbors to take communion with us could lead to hurt feelings and harmed relationships. On the other hand, this event could be a daring and important opportunity for healing the rupture between these sister faiths, or between two small communities therein, at least. Maybe we could repair a little part of the world.

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[27] Michael J. Cahill, "Drinking Blood at a Kosher Eucharist? The Sound of Scholarly Silence," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 32, no. 4 (November 2002):168–189.
[28] Anya Topolski, "Mourning the Loss of My Daughter: The Failure of Interfaith Bereavement Rituals," in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue*, 195–204.

Figure 5: Peaceable Kingdom by Edward Hicks. (Credit: Wikicommons)

Serving Communion to Jews

Sharing sacred time

So, what happened that night? The gathering began with a shared meal and informal conversation. A certain interreligious comradery arose between the two communities, as both shared their struggle to reconcile Enlightenment rationality and progressive politics with contemporary faith.

The cantor went first, and the Chavurah and Christian community together participated in the lighting of Shabbat candles, unison prayer, and song. The children were enormously pleased to hold real live candles, as children always are. Grace, as an open and unthreatened congregation, participated freely and universally.

To be clear, we participated in the Jewish worship *due* to our Christian faith, not *despite* our Christian faith. Marianne Moyaert describes the tensive relationship between openness and identity, and the fragility of our religious truth when placed into relationship with the other's

religious truth. Drawing from Ricoeur, Moyaert asserts that this tension is unsolvable: no algorithm can determine beforehand to which religious truth we should be open or to which religious truth we should be closed. We are free, vulnerable, and dynamic, hence fragile: "The condition of human existence is characterized by an irremovable tension between what is given and what is possible."[29]

Our congregation's participation in the Jewish ritual reflects an implicit theology that largely concurs with Moyaert's. We are much more interested in what is possible than what is given; hence, our identity is processual. We have purposefully not adopted any confession or creed because, as one parishioner volunteered, "If we came up with one we would just outgrow it in a few years." Our defining metaphor for spiritual life is journey; the image suggests that we are engaged in Moyaert's "hermeneutical project that never ends."[30] But we fully embrace this fragile, dynamic identity. As an emergent church that prioritizes growth over stability, we seek out those experiences that change us. Religious isolation might protect our identity, but it would also halt our journey. Seeking to move onward, we view con-fusion (the unstable situation produced by interreligious fusion) as a state of great potential.

Returning to the shared worship, the service then shifted to the Christian portion, which also consisted of song and prayer. Rev. Abby Henrich explicitly advised our Jewish sisters and brothers that everyone was *welcome* to take communion but no one was *expected* to take communion. She consecrated the elements in her usual hospitable way, which avoided reference to the body and blood of Christ (referring instead to the "Bread of Heaven" and "Cup of Salvation," as noted above), emphasized Isaian eschatological imagery, and explicitly opened the table to everyone present. Remarkably, approximately half of the 20 Jewish congregants came forward. The Jewish couple in front of me, for example, looked at each other quizzically, nodded, and went forward together. Another Jewish friend of ours, who frequently came to our church service because he loves sacred music, but had never taken communion before, went forward for the first time.

The outcome was wholly unanticipated. We were surprised, warmed, and perplexed. We felt that something important had happened, in our little house, between our two little congregations. But we weren't sure what, or why. The Jews' confident faith, even after historical catastrophe, amazed us. Their trust, after millennia of Christian persecution, humbled us. And we marveled at their courageous openness despite threatened-minority status.

Please note that the Jews' affirmation of our communion was entirely pluralistic—they were all faithful to their tradition and remained faithful to their tradition (as we found in our later meetings with them). No conversions took place, *thank God*. Both communities were celebrating particularity, creating community across difference rather than striving for a bland homogeneity.

As the two groups conversed after the joint worship service ended, the energy level was high and the mood positive. Victor Turner would say that we had transcended *societas* (the injured everyday order) to experience *communitas* (energized social solidarity). This heightened state of consciousness is in itself anti-structural, challenging things as they are by conjuring things as they

[29] Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 278–281.
[30] Ibid., 281.

can be.[31] In our instance, we had ritually enacted our moral convictions of solidarity, flooding cognition with emotion, thereby transforming a propositional command (thou shalt respect the religious other) into an inspired passion (love for religious other as neighbor).[32] For millennia, Christian communion was an event that separated Jews from Christians. But this night, it was an event that brought a few of them together.

Afterwards, as the collective effervescence settled down, the Christians were too polite to ask the Jews why they had taken communion. We just wanted to enjoy each other's company, and no one wanted to break the spell. As I mentioned above, there was one Jewish man who frequented our church because he loves sacred music. It was his wife, a friend of Abby's, who had arranged our shared worship service. A couple of months later, that man's mother died. My wife went to sit *shiva* with the family, and saw several of the congregants again, many of whom remarked warmly on our shared time together. So, the *communitas* may have been effervescent, but apparently it wasn't ephemeral. Something real had happened, perhaps something enduring.

What are the implications of this event for interreligious relations in an ever-globalizing world? What do we learn, comparatively, theologically, and spiritually, by inviting the religious other to participate in our own religious rituals?

Before I begin to address these questions, let me offer a brief note on method. This essay is phenomenological and autobiographical. Indeed, it might even be solipsistic, since it focuses primarily on my thoughts and feelings about taking communion with Jews. Everything that I'm about to write is from my own perspective. You can ask the question, "But what about their perspective?" That is an entirely legitimate question, and I'd love to do ethnographic research to answer the question, but it would also be a different essay. With that caveat, let us proceed.

Interpreting Ritual Transgression

Magic and meaning

Ritual theorists interpret ritual as magic, or as a meaning-making activity, or as both.[33] From the perspective of faith, the Christian communion that our Jewish guests participated in was a *meaning-accessing* activity. We did not manufacture meaning from nothingness or from pre-existing material, as the term meaning-making suggests. Instead, we accessed a pre-existing meaning that was there by grace. Thus, ritual is symbolic action in the Tillichian sense of the word. For Tillich, a symbol does not just point to a reality beyond it; a symbol participates in and mediates that reality. A symbol is ontologically amplified by the reality it points to, the very same reality that in-forms the symbol. A symbol receives power from elsewhere and shares that power with us. Hence, our experience of a symbol always exceeds what we would expect, what the material object alone might promise.[34] The symbol invites us beyond it, indeed beyond our own conventional, everyday life, into a richer way of being.

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[31] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1995), 131−165.
[32] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 30.
[33] Driver, "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual," 72-174.
[34] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 42–43.

This definition of symbol enriches our understanding of religious ritual as symbolic action. Any ritual action is greater than the sum of its parts. In fact, it is *other than* the sum of its parts, because it *participates* in a reality beyond the actions themselves. Or, more accurately, a reality beyond the actions participates the ritual, actualizes it, and amplifies it into what dreary materialism suggests it could not be. Understood this way, symbol becomes a portal, not into another world, but through which another world flows into this one. Religious ritual sacralizes the mundane so that ordinariness becomes enchanted.[35]

With this ritual theory in mind, the experiential success of our interreligious rite has important implications. Clearly, Grace Community Boston is working with a nonmagical concept of communion. That's why we, as a community, felt so free to revise the words of institution. The precise working of the formula does not make communion what it is. According to our sacramental theology, the *feelings* it produces, feelings of communion with God and one another, make it what it is. We are spiritually pragmatic. Communion is an opportunity for our community to remember Jesus, feel the Spirit, and anticipate God's future, which we then work toward. Since our rituals are not technologies, they do not demand rare ingredients or precise formulas, and we do not anticipate that they will produce any supernatural outcomes unmediated by community.

The choice of our Jewish guests to participate suggests a similar interpretation of ritual, although a different sacramental theology. Perhaps they anticipated that, by acting in the same way, by performing the same ritual action, they would feel something analogous—certainly not the same thing that the Christians were feeling (none of whom were feeling the exact same thing), but something similar in kind. Perhaps our Jewish guests saw the ritual as an act of inclusion after millennia of exclusion, hence as a symbolic act of healing. Perhaps their participation was an expression of existential solidarity, a recognition that our religious traditions are distinguishable but inseparable. Or, maybe they agreed that a power greater than our own courses within the universe, whose greatest desire is to help us, to love us, and to be loved by us. Maybe this power can heal even the most gaping historical wounds. Maybe it can repair the world, if we allow it to *form* us.

Flowing across borders

As we have seen, for those communities open to interreligious practice, the sharing of ritual offers a powerful opportunity for interformation. By extending the right hand of ritual fellowship, we invite flow across borders—not just one way, but both ways. Interreligious ritual hospitality is reciprocal. It makes transgression *our* business and *their* business, thereby putting us on equal footing with the other methodologically (though never historically or politically).

With regard to experience, inviting the other to participate in your most meaningful rituals makes an implicit assertion: that we can share religious feeling across religious boundaries, that my depth is accessible to your depth. As noted above, my religious feeling will not remain the same as it crosses into the interpretative field of the other. But the other's activated sympathetic imagination may catch a glimpse of my religious life, a glimpse that may provoke the other to even more fruitful

[35] Driver, "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual," 176–177.

wonder.[36] By practicing interreligious ritual hospitality, we assert that this attenuated knowledge is not only possible—it is worthwhile. Crucially, Jews and Christians who share sacred space and worship together on occasion note that such sharing does not produce assimilation. Instead, it leads to "a richer appreciation of one's own tradition, a deeper respect for the theology and practices of the other, and a growing ability to articulate one's own commitments."[37]

God and human boundaries

In interreligious ritual participation, we are acting and feeling across religious boundaries. We are transgressing the borders of identity and interpretation that separate us from one another. Are these boundaries of identity real, or are they simply semantic markers by which we demarcate human communities? Are they ontological or functional?

Interreligious ritual participation asserts that religions are not isolated islands of religious experience, amongst which commerce is impossible. Instead, religions have *experientially permeable borders*.[38] They are distinguishable but interpenetrating. Based on the intersubjective evidence gathered during our shared religious rites, God is not a monarchist who wants one religion, one rite, and one experience. Nor is God a separatist who acknowledges multiple religious rites but demands their segregation. Instead, God is a *federalist*—she wants difference *and* unity, particularity *and* solidarity, distinction *and* transgression, freedom *and* cooperation. She wants us to be ourselves, yet "pass over" into one another.[39] She wants difference that flows.

The efficacy of a religious ritual for a practitioner of another religion suggests that the dividing lines between religions are social conveniences, not ontological realities. They are more humanly constructed than divinely ordained. Jews can take communion and it will work. That is, for some, it will heal, support, quicken, inspire, or center. A Christian religious identity is not a necessary ingredient for a Christian religious ritual to help someone. Instead, the Christian religious ritual can work for non-Christians who are open to its mediating power. Naturally, this capability now applies, selectively, to diverse rituals from diverse religions. By applying criteria of evaluation, we can attempt to discern ahead of time which rituals invite participation and which do not. If the ritual is relevant, and its practitioners are open, and we see in the ritual some promise—then it just might help, no matter where the ritual is from or where we're from. Even if the ritual is other to us, or we are other to the ritual, it can still transform.

Ratification by the other

The particularity of the other—their sacred difference—need not scandalize us. Overemphasis on otherness and difference and their challenge to our assumptions can make us forget the benefits of diversity. Certainly, new relationships will relativize our particularities.

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[36] Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1966), 549–554.
[37] Samuel N. Gordon and Stephanie Perdew VanSlyke, "A House of Prayer for All People: Can Jews and Christians Share Ritual Space?," *Liturgy* 25, no. 1: 38–46 (2009), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/04580630903209835.
[38] Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 315.
[39] Jon Nilson, "Doing Theology by Heart: John S. Dunne's Theological Method," *Theological Studies* 48, no. 1 (March 1987): 69–82.

Isolation may grant us the certainty of obviousness, and relatedness may deprive us of that false and stultifying comfort. But thankfully, relativization does not have to result in attenuation. Instead, it can produce *amplificatio*n. Amplification occurs through sheer difference—*a* is more in relation to *b* than *a* is alone; it becomes, at least, *not b*. This added quality of being *not b* also grants *a* an internal expansion, a heightening of its own qualities that is experienced as increase in being. We become more in relation to the other than we are in isolation. Fullness presumes contrast.[40]

The other grants *amplification* by the sheer act of existing, but the other can offer *ratification* by the willing affirmation of our own particularity. Interreligious ritual hospitality offers a unique demonstration of this possibility. For when "they" participate in "our" ritual—voluntarily, seriously, meaningfully—they provide a ratification of our own difference. They declare our particularity rich in potential as they declare our ritual rich in meaning. And if a ritual's meaning can spill out of that ritual's community, then its power derives from a source beyond the subjectivity of its host community. The meaning comes from *beyond* us and them, and declares this origin by making itself available to *both* us and them. Now "they" no longer scandalize us with our own particularity; instead, they celebrate our particularity with us, providing it with their own legitimation, a legitimation hailing from them and through them.

This legitimation is particularly powerful. Usually, the same ratifies us within an atmosphere of homogeneity. Indeed, the same frequently seeks out sameness simply for the communal ratification of individual opinions that homogeneity provides. When we rely on sameness for reinforcement, we experience difference as a destabilizing intrusion. Heterogeneity denies communal values of their obviousness, and homogeneous communities can react angrily to this loss.[41]

But interreligious ritual hospitality reverses this situation. When the other joins your ritual with seriousness and vulnerability, then the other actually serves to affirm your particularity even as they present a contrast to it. This affirmation of your particularity does not affirm its exclusiveness or hegemony, since their uniqueness always exists alongside your own. But it does affirm your ritual's effectiveness and, by implication, your tradition's potency. Hence, the existence of an other's particularity does not need to compromise the worth of one's own. They exist side by side, and in that neighborly existence, they ratify one another.

When you practice your own rituals with your own community for a long time, you can start to wonder, "Are these rituals just our own little fantasy world, our own eccentric, idiosyncratic language, intelligible only to ourselves, devoid of any meaning other than what we manufacture for it?" But when someone from another religion participates in your ritual, and seems to benefit from it, then suddenly your community's ritual acquires more universal power and relevance. Maybe it doesn't just work for you. Maybe it just *works*.[42]

In their choice to participate, in a certain way, our Jewish guests were saying "This ritual works. This ritual does something important. This is worth doing. For us, at least this once."

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[40] Jon Paul Sydnor, "Complementary Reasoning and Interreligious Dialogue: A Case Study in Interdisciplinary Reflection," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 15, no. 2 (2005): 173–175.
[41] Ali Rattansi, *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98–104.
[42] Driver, "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual," 171–173.

Difference within ritual experience

So, when our Jewish sisters and brothers took part in our Christian communion, it ratified the efficacy of our ritual. As we briefly noted above, they could not have experienced it in the same way that we did. They are not disciples of Jesus, they do not think that he is a peculiarly transparent window onto God, their interpretation of God's intention for history is different from ours.[43] These differences will produce a different experience of communion, but they do not reduce our Jewish guests' participation to empty mimicry or an act of mockery.[44] What pervaded the room at the time was solemn respect and surprising solidarity.

In fact, we can be sure that everyone in that room had a different experience of both rituals, Jewish and Christian, since ritual experience is as diverse as ritual experiencers. But this diversity does not compromise the unity of practitioners. Instead, diversity of experience is a methodological resource, providing an abundance of interpretations by which we can better conform theology to God's vision.

I am fortunate enough to teach near the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, to which I frequently send my students. If a student cannot attend the MFA with our class, then I allow them to go later, with one caveat. Since I subscribe to Josiah Royce's concept of the Community of Interpretation, I ask that they go with another student and converse throughout the visit. According to Royce, only communal interpretation allows us to progress from simpler to "higher stages" of communal being, characterized by greater humanity.[45]

Applying this hermeneutic to the experience of art, I ask my students to place their experience of the work into conversation with their partner's experience of the work, in the hope that the resulting dialogue will enrich each individual's experience. In other words, I hope that intersubjectivity will inform subjectivity. Indeed, this is a quality of great art, be it visual, literary, or musical: the meaning will always overflow any one individual's interpretation; hence, it demands a Community of Interpretation. Faced with this inexhaustible surplus of meaning, we turn to others in order to plumb the depth and breadth of the work. Through interlocutors we learn more, and by learning more we become more. The other, and the other's difference, expands our own being.

At its best, inter-riting produces a Community of Interpretation, providing a glimmer of insight into the ritual experience of the other, and maybe even a clearer vision of one's own ritual experience. This glimmer acts as a window onto another possibility of being, of which the participant was previously unaware. Most importantly, it suggests the possibility of a world in which difference is harmonious, like the notes in a musical chord, the colors in an abstract painting, or the words in a majestic poem.[46] God's fulfillment of time is unimaginable, although Isaiah paints a powerful picture of it. Nevertheless, through interreligious ritual participation, we may be able

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[43] Moyaert, "Religious Pluralism and Eucharistic Hospitality," 53–54.
[44] Ibid., 54–55.
[45] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 315–318.
[46] Jon Paul Sydnor, "The Dance of Emptiness: A Constructive Comparative Theology of the Social Trinity," in *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection*, ed. Michelle Voss Roberts (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 37–38.

to experience it a little. We may have all been looking through a mirror dimly, but what we saw was beautiful.

By way of consequence, interfaith leaders should, as Kenneth Burke advised, "Use all that can be used."[47] Due to the spiritual benefits of interreligious ritual participation, it should serve as an important interfaith practice. Like every method, it presents opportunities, poses dangers, and enforces limits. It engages the whole person, including the body and its senses, allowing us to think as an embodied, feeling consciousness. It frees interreligious experience, partially and briefly, from the linearity of language that characterizes intertextual approaches. It offers its own form of knowledge, knowing through activity, which can resonate well beyond the limited spacetime of the ritual itself. It can change our interpretation of life and our conduct in life, because it arises from life.[48]

Interreligious ritual participation as interformation

All good theology is pastoral theology—theology that helps us to negotiate the depths of life, theology that makes us more alive, theology that meets us where we are but does not leave us there.[49]

Similarly, all good religious ritual is pastoral religious ritual. Interreligious ritual participation is a pastoral practice that deepens practitioners' relationship with God and one another. Boundaries blur as a shared ritual event offers a shared experience of the sacred and a shared transformation. Now, the ritual has changed both communities. It has changed them through its own meaning-accessing power, but it has also changed them because they accessed this meaning together, having joined hands across difference. God transgresses religious boundaries and blesses us through that transgression. Interreligious transformation occurs. *Interformation*—spiritual growth with and through another religious community—is possible. No longer may we interpret the religious other as a threat to our faith. Difference is a stimulant, not a contaminant. Through interformation, the religious other becomes our spiritual ally and an accelerant toward God.

In the end, we do not know what the outcome of interformation will be. Interreligious ritual participation is like a true conversation. If we give ourselves over to it, then no one controls it, and no one knows where it will go. Yet there is a certain exhilaration in this communication, in which two selves lose themselves to a new creation. Shared, absorbed creativity implies both trust and hope: trust of the other, and hope for difference to create beauty. Eventually, the conversation will end and the two will return to themselves, possibly transformed. Interformation will not produce what we expect, but it might produce what we need, God willing.

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[47] Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 259–261.
[48] Theodore W. Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, 331–333.
[49] Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 143.

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Teaching Interreligious Encounters. Edited by Marc A. Pugliese and Alexander Y. Hwang. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 366 pp. ISBN: 9780190677565. $99.00.

While on a bus heading to my university in Dublin, I noticed one of my students sitting in a nearby row. She is preparing to be a post-primary (secondary) teacher of religious education and music. Without hesitating, I handed her the book under review and suggested it would be useful for her upcoming semester-long teaching practice in January. Traffic through Dublin was stop-and-go. She took a photo of the cover and then read from the book until we finally reached our stop. "This is really useful," she said, smiling and handing it back to me. "Thanks."

That simple exchange alone likely says more than anything that will follow in this review. We don't pass on to our students (and future teachers, no less) books we don't recommend or value.

Teaching Interreligious Encounters is a useful and diverse collection of twenty-two essays seeking to theorize, build, analyze, and promote interfaith encounters through the insights, experiences, and courses of practitioners and experts from a range of faith traditions, including Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and Taoist. The book is divided into five parts: Theorizing Encounters, Designing Encounters, Textual Encounters, Practical Encounters, and Formational Encounters. The book's aim supports holistic, interdisciplinary, and varied approaches to instilling, encouraging, and supporting interfaith learning and development within different contexts. It is edited by Marc A. Pugliese, Assistant Professor of Theology and Religion at Saint Leo University, and Alexander Y. Hwang, adjunct faculty member in the Theology Department at Xavier University. The work is of particular value to those (like my student above) who are training to become, or have recently become, teachers of religious education, religious studies, or theology. However, even seasoned practitioners and lecturers in world religion or interfaith dialogue will find helpful suggestions or possibilities to incorporate into their own classes.

For example, I appreciated Marianne Moyaert's candid grappling with whether and how to expand her approach to scriptural reasoning to include Buddhists, Hindus, and others deemed outside the Abrahamic (or even theist) tradition (p. 88). As her dialogical approach— rooted especially in the writings of Paul Ricoeur—encourages such daring and widespread interaction, her students and her own teaching are rewarded in the process. Devorah Schoenfeld and Jeanine Diller begin their contribution, "Using *Hevruta* to Do and Teach Comparative Theology," by praising the value of "teaching disagreement based on the traditional Jewish method of *hevruta* study" (p. 163). A typical way of studying in a yeshiva, such a practice helps students develop critical questioning skills, highlights the requirement to defend arguments, and reminds students of the need for diverse and pluralist approaches. We may not always agree, as the Sages of the Talmud testify, but in their searching and seeking of the truth, they are united in a path for wisdom. One can see how this approach would be particularly useful in a comparative theology context, but would also be applicable to most of the classes we teach, especially as we want to form independent, but knowledgeable (and humble) learners and future leaders.

Speaking of leaders, Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer highlight the benefits and methods of teaching interfaith leadership, a skill that is needed beyond the classroom, trickling into community roles and forums and more and more job positions and public institutions. As we live in an increasingly diverse and religiously pluralist world, we need interfaith leaders at all levels of society.

As with many other chapters in this book that advocate the comparative theology approach of Frank Clooney or the case-studies approach highlighted by Diana Eck and Harvard's Pluralism Project, Patel and Meyer suggest using current events as case studies in interreligious engagement, dialogue, and conflict (p. 306). While it is useful to incorporate the case studies set forth on the Pluralism Project website or in books like Regina Wentzel Wolfe and Christine E. Gudorf's *Ethics and World Religions: Cross-Cultural Case Studies* (strangely omitted from the book's bibliography), turning to contemporary events can make these issues seem particularly fresh and appealing. Another suggestion that had me thinking of my own world religions module was Hans Gustafson's inclusion of interfaith community partnership aspects within his relevant courses (p.147). While I require my students to visit at least three different religious places of worship, Gustafson's suggestions had me thinking about, and considering, other methods to use in the future.

That future will be increasingly interfaith and interdisciplinary. Over a decade ago in a job interview I was asked how I would teach Christology at a Catholic university. After outlining core biblical, early Church council, and theological texts and figures, I added sections on Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist interpretations, critiques, and representations of Christ. One of the panel members incredulously asked, "Now, WHY would you do that?" Such a question, surprising then, would be even more embarrassing now—or should be.

I also think again of my student from the bus. The students she will teach in the future, even while likely in a Catholic school, will be more culturally and religiously diverse than today's students. She will not only have daily interfaith encounters within her classroom, but will also be instructing and training the next generation, whose religiously pluralist context will be all the more standard and normative. To help foster and sustain such a world, however, requires study, immersion, and exploration in various religious cultures, traditions, texts, and sacred sites—guided, most importantly, through interpersonal and face-to-face encounters. *Teaching Interreligious Encounters* will be an important resource for my student in that process and journey.

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The Concept of Self in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity and Its Implication for Interfaith Relations. Kiseong Shin. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017. 178 pp. ISBN: 9781532600951. $18.40, paperback.

Citing the example of his personal experience of religious-based conflict in South Korea, the author proposes that "the very heart of these religious traditions and their teachings can, indeed, be interpreted to serve the cause of peace and harmony in multi-faith societies" (xi).

The "disinterest in God in Buddhism and its denial of Self" are cited as the main obstacles held by those skeptical of the possibility for genuinely harmonious religious pluralism (xi), and in direct address to the latter obstacle, the author chooses the notion of Self for enquiry into interreligious relations, proposing that ideas of Self—as well as a few other assumptions and presuppositions—can "be interpreted for communal life in multi-faith societies" (xi).

The author, Kiseong Shin—an independent scholar and assistant pastor at Korean United Methodist Church of Astoria in New York—treats a difficult topic in the short space of four chapters, as he presents notions of Self under the aspects of atman in Hinduism (particularly that of *Advaita Vedanta*), *anatta* in Buddhism (particularly that of the Theravada tradition), and *soul* in Christianity.

In the first chapter, on *atman*, Shin notes the massive "internal plurality" inherent in Hinduism that makes it difficult to characterize the religion singularly, but proposes several basic commonalities of its traditions. Common in Hinduism is the distinction between eternal self (*atman*) over against the transitory body made of matter (*prakriti*), and the illusion (*maya*) that arises when one identifies one's self with the latter (12). Liberation is gained via *moksa*—the liberation from birth and rebirth—in the form of "reidentification of oneself with the eternal *Brahman*" (12).

Much in this chapter is centered around a deep metaphysics of being in which one comes to realization of her/his essential "true nature" that finds its home in becoming one with the divine (15). One who has achieved this reintegration becomes free of all attachment, and "neither hates nor desires" (16).

There is a helpful section in which the author distinguishes key notions in the understanding of self in three Vedanta schools: *Advaita Vedanta* of Sankara; *Visistadvaita* of Ramanuja; and *Dvaita Vedanta* of Madhva (25–27). Shin's focus is on the first of the three: the *Advaita Vedanta* of Sankara (788 CE–820 CE), which he characterizes as "nondualism" in its identification of self with the ultimate being, *Brahman* (25), the "transpersonal ground of all reality, being-itself," understood as "absolute consciousness" (29). For the author, an important element of Sankara's philosophy is that his "concept of self connotes a holistic understanding of the human being in its interconnectedness with all other beings," which "helps in the enhancement of human dignity" (47). "The Brahman centeredness does not annihilate individuality," in the estimate of Shin, "but unites it through participation or communion" (47). Shin proposes that this view could address the political oppression, social isolation, and economic exploitation experienced, for example, in the caste system still recognized in India, which effects the marginalization of such faceless persons as the Dalits (48).

In chapter 2, Shin turns his attention to the notion of no-self (*anatta*) in Theravada, and emptiness (*sunyata*) in Mahayana Buddhism—ideas that arise out of Buddhism's proposal that all existence is transient and impermanent (50). Shin draws from Buddhist scholar Lynn de Silva in his exploration of the Theravada notion of *anatta* (55–64), with an emphasis on the notion of dependent origination or interdependency, particularly as outlined in the *Majjhima Nikaya* (61–64). In the ephemeral flux of being, all is arising and passing away, including the being of a static self. Shin states that Mahayana picks up where Theravada left off; the emptiness of the latter is transformed into potency in the former, and meaning is constructed through the freedom of persons in their engagement in the affected interrelatedness of the world (65).

Shin turns to the soul in Christianity in chapter 3, stating that amid the lack of consensus in Christian tradition regarding the matter, he will instead incorporate a "biblical understanding of self or soul," maintaining that such does not espouse the dualism that developed in later tradition in its dialogue with Greek philosophy (92). Careful and detailed attention is given to the polysemous words with which Scripture articulates human beings as psycho-somatic entities: the Hebrew words *nephesh* and *basar*, and the Greek *psyche* and *soma* for the Old and New Testament views, respectively (92 *ff.*). The Greek influence on subsequent, post-Scriptural development in Christian theological anthropology is articulated with two very brief treatments of Plato (111–113) and Aristotle (113–114), followed by consideration of early church doctrine as such is developed in Justin Martyr, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas (114–126). This is followed by a brief section on "Contemporary Challenges," in which Shin presents a number of very short excerpts from scholars who engage process theology (John B. Cobb, Paul Ingram, and Jay McDaniel); those who engage the intersection of theology and psychology and/or biology (Warren S. Brown, Joel B. Green, Malcolm Jeeves, Leslie A. Muray, and Nancey C. Murphy); and others including Charlene Burns, Brevard S. Childs, and Shirley C. Guthrie.

The work comes to its conclusion as Shin makes a sound case for the presence of a robust interrelationality and communality in notions of self in the traditions explored in the work.

This is an informative and accessible account of an immense topic. Shin recognizes this vastness, and is judicious in selecting his specific topics and texts, which he presents in a balanced way.

The book could have been improved by the inclusion of Catholic and Orthodox perspectives in Christianity, given their emphasis on "image and likeness" in human creation, and on the original goodness that precedes original sin. Similarly, dialogue with feminist, liberationist, and other perspectives that have the nature of person and self as central issues would have enriched the book.

Though this work is no doubt interesting for those who value a philosophical approach, it could be wondered if this metaphysical line of enquiry is the best fit for the noble impetus that motivates the author (i.e., his assertion that "the very heart of these religious traditions and their teachings can, indeed, be interpreted to serve the cause of peace and harmony in multi-faith societies" [xi]). No doubt a fine (and necessary) ground has been set by the metaphysical groundwork presented here, though I feel another chapter could have been helpful. Here perhaps Shin could have applied his results to the more concrete notion of "person" in distinction to self—

i.e., the individual, sentient being existent in time and place. Shin does this at certain points throughout the work, but a summative chapter would have been helpful for the reader, drawing together the dynamics of personal freedom and decision in the concrete, particular agent, rather than her/his common—though abstract—metaphysical essence and its eschatological orientations. After all, culpability and the commendable are attributable only to individuals, not abstract essences. Peace and harmony are effected by persons, not essences.

This is a helpful contribution on an important topic for interreligious dialogue. It can serve as an introduction to, in the author's words, "the very heart of these religious traditions" (xi), helping the reader to listen for points of synchronicity in the beat of their diverse pulses.

John W. Gibson

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Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection. Edited by Michelle Voss Roberts. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. 326 pp. ISBN: 978-0823274673. $27, paperback.

The result of a 2014 conference at Wake Forest University School of Divinity, *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection*, edited by Michelle Voss Roberts, exemplifies the best of current comparative theology. Written for pastors, students, and academics, this collection of essays serves as a multivalent exercise in comparative theological study and constructive engagement with religious pluralism. In Roberts' introduction to the volume, she instructs the reader as to the aim of the collection: "It aims at the transformation of neither the comparative reader alone, nor the academic study of religion, but he contemporary practice of theology" (8). Transformation is a consistent theme throughout the volume. Contributors do not merely offer interesting comparative reflections on their chosen traditions, texts, and figures, but rather use the comparative method as an opportunity for enriching fidelity, instigating transformation, and cultivating responsibility in daily life. In this way, comparative theology offers theologians and laypersons alike the opportunity to confidently embrace religious pluralism because of its capacity to construct new frameworks for a shared life together.

Constructing a shared life together in a pluralistic society is easier said than done, however. The five themes chosen as the focus of comparative study in the volume highlight this tension. Contributors engage the themes of divinity, theodicy, humanity, Christology, and soteriology—themes that delve deep into the heart of long-contested questions about religious authority, exclusivism, and ultimate truths. But particularity, nuance, and charity guide each contributor as they seek a constructive way forward in their engagement of these contested themes. The work is organized under these five headings, with two scholars offering comparative theological reflections on those themes. Each section ends with a response from a third scholar, bringing together the previous two reflections as a way to enliven further questions, offer constructive critique, and imagine future possibilities for engagement and relationship. Readers are thus invited into a conversation, not only between the comparative theologian's choice of texts or figures, but among the scholars themselves as the engage each other's work.

The work begins with an exemplary engagement on the theme of divinity. Jon Paul Sydnor engages Christianity and Buddhism, allowing them to dance together to offer a Buddhist-enriched understanding of the perichoresis of the social Trinity. Elaine Padilla brings together the Aztec understand of "teotlizing" with Karl Rahner's model of the God-cosmos relationship. Both essays seek to "transform both self and texts" (51), as explicitly stated by Padilla, in the way both scholars place their beliefs and traditions into conversation with another. Kristin Beise Kiblinger's response pushes both Sydnor's and Padilla's arguments into deeper complexity by placing them in conversation with process theologian John D. Caputo, revealing the inherent tensions present in trying to describe God in the midst of plurality. Kiblinger affirms both Sydnor's and Padilla's desire to describe God "as a plurality unified by relationship and love," but notes that Caputo's thought challenges the ability to describe God altogether (80). Rather, Caputo pushes humanity toward a robust consideration of our conditioned-ness as a way toward a more democratic and just politics. Kiblinger encourages comparative theologians to embrace Caputo in order to temper theology's tendency toward unconditioned ultimates. While provocative, Kiblinger's encouragement is necessary for the comparative theologian and layperson alike to consider, especially when confronted with the competing claims of various religious traditions.

In the second section, "Theodicy," Klaus von Stosch engages in dialogue as a Christian with his Muslim colleague, Navid Kermani. Von Stosch reflects on Kermani's development of God's terror and beauty—these simultaneously instill love for God and enable the believer to protest against suffering. But these reflections on terror and beauty quickly turn troubling when von Stosch acknowledges Kermani's proclivity in his dramatic productions to depict God's love as a penetrating, dark, even violent force. Von Stosch attributes this depiction of the dark side of God's love to Kermani's inability to solve the problem of theodicy, writing that "he struggles, he wants to debate, he shows desire—in a word: he confronts theology with life" (100). And though Kermani may confront theology with life, I am left questioning what kind of life is generated by a penetrating, violent, and dark God.

Wendy Farley's response to the theodicy essays, including an essay by Jeffrey Long, shares my concern. Farley asks why "metaphors of domination should so structure the way we think about evil and suffering" (130). She helpfully points out that theodicy is stuck in paradigms imported from human relationships, and these relationships are predicated upon patriarchal understandings of sovereignty and submission. Farley ultimately concludes that importing human domination paradigms onto God leaves us "compelled to praise and revere God for practicing what, in human beings, are the most destructive and horrifying impulses" (140). Rather than accepting divine darkness and violence as inherent to God, Farley would have us protest against theologies that attribute that violence to God.

The third section, "Humanity," is particularly refreshing in the way that the comparative scholars approach the topic. Holly Hillgardner, in reading Hadewijch, a thirteenth-century Christian Beguine, and Mirabai, a sixteenth-century Hindu woman, develops an account of humanity predicated upon the primacy of longing. Hillgardner's reading concludes that by lingering in longing, new "possibilities for mutual, non-possessive relationships with the other" come into view (165). Given theology's long history of authoritarian domination of others, Hillgardner's comparative offering decisively shifts human engagement toward mutual and respectful relationships and away from dominating, possessive interaction.

Perhaps the most challenging essay comes from Marianne Moyaert in the fourth section, "Christology." Moyaert considers the image of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 after the Holocaust. Sh critiques Christian theologian Jürgen Moltmann's attempt to read Isaiah 53 in light of the Shoah. Though Moltmann attempts to formulate a Christology starting with the Jewish suffering of the Shoah, Moyaert ultimately concludes that he jumps too quickly from suffering to triumph in Christ's death and resurrection. As a corrective, Moyaert offers Emmanuel Levinas' call to responsibility in the face of immeasurable suffering. It is in this "responsible relation with the other" that one sees a trace of God (228). For Moyaert, if Christology is to have any meaning, then it must be grounded in responsibility. Moyaert's essay ends poignantly. With whom will the Christian identify, she asks, "with the suffering of Christ or with his sleeping disciples, who simply let this happen, despite Jesus's plea with them to stay awake during this night?" (233).

Hugh Nicholson's response to the Christology essays pushes Moyaert's argument even further, by taking up the Isaiah text as a challenge for the "presumptions of any community, Christian or Jewish, that finds itself in a position of power," going so far as to call out the Israeli state's treatment of Palestinian civilians living under military occupation (243). Nicholson's

constructive engagement takes Moyaert's claims seriously, revealing just how tenuous and difficult it can be to cultivate responsibility, to stay wakeful, and to be vigilant in the pursuit of justice.

The final section, "Soteriology," ends with excellent contributions from Joshua Ralston and Sharon V. Betcher. Both essays reorient soteriological conversations away from end points (i.e., who is "saved"?) toward the processes and pathways of salvation. Formation and transformation, then, become the focuses of salvation. Shelly Rambo's response to Ralston and Betcher, however, brings the focus on salvation back to end points. Even though comparative theology presses steadily forward, Rambo notes that the rise of religious fundamentalism and its obsession with violence between religions calls for the attention of comparative theology to reflect on ends and endings. However, Rambo approaches eschatology through the lens of trauma and brain studies. Eschatology, Rambo rightly asserts, is a doctrine that incites fear and uncertainty—it is an affective doctrine. So if these emotions and affects come with the terrain of ends and endings, then Rambo wonders if "perhaps Christian theologies of ends can provide orienting practices in the midst of uncertainties" (306). Rambo is advocating for theological practices that help us to live in the midst of peril and fragility. She calls on comparative theologians to turn to aesthetic practices as a way to ground interreligious encounter in the midst of religious violence and daily peril. Instead of relying primarily on rationality and reason, Rambo asks us to reshape our moral imagination, and thus, imagine a different future in the midst of a violent present.

Indeed, many of the essays found in *Comparing Faithfully* already have heeded Rambo's call toward the affective, aesthetic dimension of theological and spiritual engagement. Throughout the volume the reader will find scholars engaging poetry, literature, and song to expand their theological categories, to challenge their reasoned assumptions, and to help them envision a way forward in relationship with religious others. Those who hope to contribute to sustaining comparative theology would do well to follow Rambo's call to the imagination, for it is only by engaging the full spectrum of human experience that one may hope to cultivate a new world in the midst of uncertain ends. This volume exemplifies the best of comparative theological engagement, assisting its readers to imagine new horizons of friendship and flourishing in a pluralistic, tenuous, and fragile world.

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