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15 February 2012

Dear Dialogue Partners,

2011 was a year of foment throughout the world, and most notably in the Middle East. From Tunisia to Egypt to Libya, governments fell to newly invigorated citizens seeking changes in their countries.

These profound political changes are accompanied by new questions about religion. What role does -- and should -- religion play in countries transitioning toward greater democracy? Is religion itself a force for democratic change, or does it, at least in its more traditionalistic forms, hold the potential to institute a new form of autocracy? What roles did religion already play in recent revolutions -- and what roles has it played in revolutions past?

In this issue of the *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, we hear from authors with a variety of backgrounds and areas of expertise seeking to give us a vision into the role of Religion and Revolution. Melissa Heller's article offers a description of an effective course structure for creating Jewish-Christian dialogue by fostering intense study-partner relationships. Eric Hoenes's work describes the use of Liberation Theology eschatology by rural Guatemalan Maya. Brandon Withrow contextualizes Mary Astell, a mid-seventeenth to early-eighteenth century English religious writer who has often been described as a feminist, as a case study in the importance of attention to context for religious messages of social change. Brendan Ozawa-de Silva juxtaposes a seminal Zen Buddhist philosopher and one of the most celebrated Christian theologians of all time in an unexpected and illuminating discussion of what makes for "Prophetic Courage." Overturning long-held assumptions about the limitations of the pluralist hypothesis, Aimee Upjohn Light pioneers the way for a new approach to resolving the seeming contradictions within pluralism with lessons from liberation theology. Finally, in a special model of dialogue, *State of Formation* scholar Lawrence A. Whitney responds to Light's article with care and new perspective.

We look forward to engaging in dialogue with you about these articles -- and gaining a clearer understanding for ourselves of religion and significant political changes.

Sincerely,

Joshua M. Z. Stanton and Stephanie Varnon-Hughes
Founding Editors in Chief

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Mary Astell's Unlikely Feminist Revolution: Lessons on the Role of Religion in Fighting for Gender Rights in 18th-Century England, By Brandon G. Withrow

Abstract
The Christian philosopher and theologian Mary Astell (1666-1731) called for a counter-intuitive feminist revolution, which included the education of, and Protestant monastic community for, women (as an alternative to marriage), while simultaneously affirming a wife's submission to her husband. This thinker argued that the Bible does not discuss gender equality, while simultaneously basing a large portion of her case for equality on Trinitarian theology. Astell's religious nuances are reminders that the *modus operandi* of change is relative to the cultural and religious expectations of the world one is working in and the future one is seeking.[1]

Following September 11, 2001, Americans were reintroduced to the world of the Middle East and along with this came the realization that gender discussions, questions of what constitutes gender-focused oppression, and how to bring about greater rights for women could not be answered by transplanting the ideals of Western feminism overseas. Transforming an entire culture's view of women requires more than changing the mind of its male leaders; it demands sympathetic attention to the religious concerns of the women within that culture.

The Christian West has not been without its own long history of differences of opinion on what constitutes gender oppression and how to address it within a religious context. This paper looks at the prominent philosopher and theologian, Mary Astell (1666-1731), as an example of an unusual plea for a feminist cultural revolution. In her day, Astell's call was radical enough to draw severe criticism from male objectors, but nuanced enough to confuse some scholars today.

One might expect that a turn-of-the eighteenth-century, Anglican, Christian woman whose life was regularly informed by the teachings and liturgy of the church might approach her challenge to gender inequality in society from several angles. She might appeal to Scripture as her vindicator, or to Whig political theory, as its rallying cry focused on individual rights and privileges for the people. Either might be an expected direction for many feminists in her day that were hoping to overthrow male authority in the church or in the household. Instead, the nuances of her religious revolt defy these expectations.

This defiance of what a feminist is and how activists have attempted to accomplish the task of equality within the West is a reminder that the work of feminism is inseparable from cultural and religious contexts. It is a noble thing for groups of differing religious backgrounds and a joint concern for human rights to come together for change. It cannot be assumed, however, that the method for progress is always the same regardless of one's context. Successful and lasting change demands a sensitive ear and deference to the culture and religious concerns of others. It may also lead to unexpected insight.

When one looks at Astell's brand of Christian feminism, there are three surprising points. First, according to Astell, Scripture has little to no interest in the gender conversation. Secondly, while Astell appeals to the Cartesian view of the immaterial soul to defend gender equality, her religious argument is centered on the orthodox insistence of the equal divinity of the Father and Son. Lastly, resulting from her Trinitarianism, Astell argues that married women should submit to their husbands as all submit to the magistrate. Each of these points, as it will be shown, are windows into the

complexities of her world and break away from contemporary feminist expectations of how one might approach social reform in her day.

Among scholars, Astell has drawn significant interest since the mid-1980s. Ruth Perry's 1986 biography, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An English Feminist*, began this flurry of work, and today specialists in political theory, feminism, and philosophy are all discovering her writings.[2] As will be seen, Astell is able to argue for the transformation of the social structure of England and yet maintain its stability. In Astell's view,women are to be educated, free to remain single and therefore be their own family heads. Society need not fret, however, as she is not calling for the destabilization of the family; after all, those who are already married should remain so.[3] Any and all assumptions about the nature of her feminism first have to be checked against her religious concerns.

Astell's Feminism and the Bible's Silence on Equality

Mary Astell, whose public persona was reclusive, frumpy, and overly pietistic, lived just a few doors down from the seventeenth-century's most notorious bisexual and so-called "Roman whore," Hortense Mancini (1646–99), the Duchess Mazarin.[4] In the last years of the seventeenth-century, Mancini was a shell of her former, diva self. Her husband, the wealthy Duke Armand de la Meilleraye, was an unstable Christian extremist. His compulsive behavior ventured into the absurd: he went so far as to mutilate the genitals of nude statues and forbade his maids from milking cows due to its perceived obscenity. Fearful the Duchess might find another lover, the Duke locked her up at home.

Mancini's divorce in 1666 and 1676 memoir left her to the mercy of Charles II, who provided a comfortable life, with a pension of £4,000 a year, in Chelsea.[5] Not long after Astell moved into her Chelsea home (1686), King William ended Mancini's pension. Her death in 1699 revived discussions of the debacle and led Astell to revisit the infamous memoir in the form of her book, *Some Reflections on Marriage,* published the following year.

Some Reflections examined the Mancini tragedy with Astell's usual gift for nuance. In 1706, Astell added her famous preface to the book, in which she engaged the traditional arguments for male authority and supposed natural superiority.[6] In this preface, Astell briefly engages the biblical arguments against gender equality with John Locke, "The Learned Paraphrast," as a main target.[7]

Like many biblical scholars of his day, Locke believed the Bible taught the natural inferiority of women. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, the Apostle Paul argues for the use of a head covering for women who are prophesying in church. In this passage, Paul indicates that a woman who does not cover her head dishonors her husband (11:5), and a man who has long hair dishonors Christ, his head (11:4, 14). The troubling quote raised by Locke was found in 11:3, which reads (in Astell's King James Version): "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ." For Locke, this can only mean that a woman is in subjection to a man's superiority.[8] Astell took notice of this point and engaged it.[9]

In *Some Reflections*, Astell is emphatic that Locke's Scriptural support proves more than he intends. She argues that Paul's only mention of what is true of men and women in nature is found in 11:14: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" With some cheek, Astell asserts that in this statement, "there is much more said against the present Fashion of Men's wearing long Hair, than for the Supremacy they lay claim to."[10] Astell reminds the reader of Paul's real point is in 11:11-12: "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God." As she writes, "the Relation between the two

Sexes is mutual, and the Dependence Reciprocal, both of them Depending intirely [*sic*] upon God, and upon Him only; which one woul'd think is no great Argument of the natural Inferiority of either Sex."[11]

More emphatically, Astell argues that the discussion of the natures of men and women is ultimately not a concern of the Bible, but philosophy. "Disputes of this kind, extending to Human Nature in general," writes Astell, "and not peculiar to those whom the Word of God has been reveal'd, ought to be decided by natural Reason only." The Bible "shou'd not be Interessed in the present Controversy, in which it determines nothing, any more than it does between the *Copernican* and *Ptolemaic* Systems."[12]

Despite her protestations, she is aware of a few difficult passages beyond 1 Corinthians. She handles these swiftly, arguing that these passages are not prescriptive, but only descriptive:

> But what says the Holy Scripture? It speaks of Women as in a State of Subjection, and so it does of the *Jews* and *Christians* when under the Dominion of the *Chaldeans* and *Romans*...But will any one say that these had a *Natural Superiority* and Right to Dominion? that they had a superior Understanding, or any Pre-eminence, except what their greater Strength acquir'd?[13]

If the Bible intended universal statements on male superiority and rule in its history, she notes, it would hardly have praised figures like Deborah, the judge of Israel (Judges 4-5). This passage, she writes, "overthrows the pretence of *Natural Inferiority*." "More might be said," she writes, "but one wou'd think here is enough to shew, that whatever other Great and Wise Reasons Men may have for despising Women, and keeping them in Ignorance and Slavery, it can't be from their having learnt to do so in Holy Scripture."[14]

Theology: Trinity and Gender Equality

While modern discussions among Christians on gender equality are often driven by exegetical questions, for Astell, this is far from central, and this makes her argument for change not only surprising, but a reminder to others about the necessity of religious literacy. Scholars often see Astell's argument for gender equality as starting with René Descartes' mind-body dualism.[15] Descartes argued that the immaterial soul (mind) is distinct from the body. Men and women might be different physically, reasoned Astell, but the immaterial is without distinction.[16] Ruth Perry writes that "Cartesian rationalism was the very cornerstone of her [Astell's] feminism...the base upon which she built the rest...."[17] Patricia Springborg adds that "as long as women had souls, however they might be disqualified as bodies, they had the same right to self-improvement...."[18] The non-gendered immaterial nature put men and women on level ground intellectually, so as long as the mind remained connected to the immaterial.

However, Astell's argument for immaterial equality does not end simply with Descartes' philosophy. Despite her conclusion that Scripture is not directly concerned with the subject of gender, she still has a serious religious basis for immaterial equality, and Astell turns her attention to Locke once again.

Locke's materialism, or concept of "thinking matter," was in opposition to Descartes' immaterialism and alarming for orthodox theologians. Locke challenged orthodoxy by admitting the possibility that God could give thinking power to matter, eliminating the need for the immaterial soul.[19] Writes Locke: "It is possible, *i.e.* involves no Contradiction, that God the omnipotent immaterial Spirit should, if he pleases, give to some parcels of Matter, disposed as he thinks fit, a Power of Thinking...."[20] For Astell, this cut to the heart of Cartesian dualism, gender equality, and ultimately, Trinitarian

orthodoxy.

In the seventeenth century, a favorite theological target was that of Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), an Italian theologian, materialist, and anti-Trinitarian, who rejected the divinity of the Son.[21] Being a creedal minimalist, Locke also never endorsed the full immaterial divinity of Christ.[22] This point was important enough for Astell that by her second edition of the *Christian Religion* she gathered all sections covering Locke from the body of her book and turned them into a substantive appendix examining Locke's potential Socinianism.[23]

The issues Astell had with Locke's "thinking matter," particularly in relationship with Descartes' mind-body dualism, have been, and continue to be, tackled in the literature.[24] In addition to that discussion, the affirmation of the Son's deity and immaterial equality with the Father was also an essential point for her egalitarianism. While Christ submits to the Father, he is still equal immaterially. In *Some Reflections* she addresses this theological point by discussing 1 Corinthians 11:3, where the Father is said to be the head of Christ. Astell argues that the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, which reads "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," speaks to their equality in substance. While Paul (1 Corinthians) states that the head of every woman is a man, he also says that the Father is the head of Christ. Astell reminds the reader that Paul is not insinuating natural "inequality," between women and men any more than he is between Christ and the Father, since it is evident "from the Form of Baptism, that there is no natural Inferiority among the Divine Persons, but that they are in all things Coequal."[25]

In *Christian Religion*, Astell again appeals to the baptismal formula. "Now we know that there can be no inequality in the Divine Nature," she writes, "as the Scripture says nothing of a *Made GOD*...GOD is One...."[26] The immaterial equality of the Son with the Father is a model for the immaterial equality of men and women. Astell spends several pages in her "Appendix" demonstrating the creedal position that Christ is a "Divine Person" and "of the Substance of His Father."[27] Scripture may not be concerned with specific statements on gender equality, but for Astell religion is still central to it. Her brand of cultural revolution can only be understood against this theological background.

Trinitarianism and a Counter-Intuitive Revolution

Astell's feminism receives attention today because of its counter-intuitive approach to changing society. Rejecting the idea that the Bible was interested in the discussion of gender and calling for the establishment of educational institutions for women (first proposed in 1697 in her *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*) were risky. In her day, most men believed that women lacked the mental aptitude for an education, but according to Astell: "If GOD had not intended that Women shou'd use their Reason...He wou'd not have given them any, for He does nothing in vain."[28] God is "no Respecter of Persons," as she writes. He gives out "Sense" to both men and women "with an Impartial Hand."[29] She also believed women should have the right and power to refuse marriage. The pressures of society made this nearly impossible as it was necessary for survival, but Astell proposed something like a Protestant monastic community for women to focus on learning and freedom.[30]

For all her brash challenges, however, Astell was still a Tory. In a modern world, one might expect someone with her positions to try to undermine those who oppressed the women of society with marches, tweets, and pseudonymous blogs on The Huffington Post. Astell supported the divine right and rule of the monarch, including the monarch of the family. How is this possible?

In *Some Reflections* Astell writes, "If *all men are born free,* how is it that all

Women are born slaves?"[31] Springborg's reading of this statement leads to labeling Astell "a theorist of 'freedom from domination'" and insisting that she cannot be "an out-and-out" royalist.[32] The statement, as Sharon Achinstein points out, has a very different point to it than what is understood by Springborg. "Astell's theological program is to defeat the *premise* of this theorem," she writes, "humans are not, in her mind, 'born free.'"[33] Achinstein convincingly argues that Astell believes that no one is born into a state of freedom. All human beings are born in subjection to God: "Astell sees hierarchy in Christian marriage not as a natural, but as a divine institution," argues Achinstein. This means that "inequalities between men and women perceptible in the world are not a matter of divine command to Adam, but merely a historical fact, a matter of custom and prejudice."[34]

Moreover, her Tory political views are fueled by her Trinitarianism. The Son and Father are equal, but the Son still submits to the Father. In *Christian Religion,* Astell writes that the Son is God's "condescension to Human Infirmity" and an example of obedience.[35] All humans should be like Christ and submit to their authorities, as she sees it. Christ can willingly submit, she argues, without destroying his equality.

Some non-conformists in England believed Christ was an example of a rebel, but Astell firmly rejects this. In her *Moderation Truly Stated* (1704), she writes that there cannot "be a more illustrious Example of Obedience both in Church and State, to Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical Parents, as well to His Heavenly Father, that the Blessed JESUS was."[36] Likewise, women are free agents, but their freedom, like Christ's, is to serve God. "Liberty for women consists in freedom of the will," explains Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, "or the freedom to decide for themselves between good and evil."[37]

In all of this, Astell is a prime example of a Western feminism that runs counter-intuitive to modern expectations. This perhaps makes her brand of revolution unlikely to succeed or more of an interesting artifact. It could also be understood as a reminder that inter-religious dialogue on shared issues of concern need to continually take into consideration that the *modus operandi* of change is relative to the cultural and religious expectations of the world one is working in and the future one is seeking.

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[1] Special thanks belong to my research assistants, Joshua Arthur and Eric Worringer, for their excellent work.

[2] Even her most lauded work, *The Christian Religion as Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England* (1705, 1717, 1730), has only been republished as an "Appendix." Jacqueline Broad of Monash University is currently working on a critical edition. See http://arts.monash.edu.au/philosophy/staff/jbroad.php [accessed online on 8-12-2011].

[3] This is based on her reading of the New Testament.

[4] Leslie Carroll, *Royal Affairs: A Lusty Romp Through the Extramarital Adventures That Rocked the British Monarchy* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 224.

[5] Christine Mason Sutherland, *The Eloquence of Mary Astell* (Calgary, Alberta, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 81.

[6] Mary Astell, "Some Reflections on Marriage," in *Astell: Political Writings (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought)*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: New York, 1996), 7-31 (hereafter referred to as *SRM*).

[7] William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson, eds., *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith* (Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2007), 81. Originally, scholars did not realize this was Locke. Patricia Springborg (Astell, *SRM*, 20, n. 26) wrote that it was either Sir Robert Filmer (1595-1653) or William Nichols (1664-1712). Mark Goldie is the first to make the connection.

[8] John Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians and Second Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians* (Cambridge: Brown, Shattuck, and Company, 1832), 140.

[9] William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson, *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith,* 81.

[10] Astell, *SRM,* 12.

[11] Astell, *SRM*, 13.

[12] Astell, *SRM,* 13. All quotes are to the original. Archaic English grammar and spelling have been preserved.

[13] Astell, *SRM,* 14-15.

[14] Astell, *SRM,* 24-28.

[15] Current discussions are focused on her interactions with Cambridge Platonist, John Norris, but are beyond the scope of this article. For more analysis see Mary Astell and John Norris, *Letters Concerning the Love of God (Early Modern Englishwoman: a Facsimile Library of Essential Works)*, eds. E. Derek Taylor and Melvyn New (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 1-41; E. Derek Taylor, "Mary Astell's Ironic Assault on John Locke's Theory of Thinking Matter," *Journal for the History of Ideas* 62 No. 3 (July 2001): 505-22; Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge, 2002): 90-113; Eileen O'Neill, "Mary Astell on the Causation of Sensation," in *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith*, 145-64.

[16] Sue Vilhauer Rosser, *Women, Science, and Myth: Gender Beliefs from Antiquity to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 40.

[17] Ruth Perry, "Radical Doubt and the Liberation of Women," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18 No. 4 (Autumn 1985): 491.

[18] Patricia Springborg, *Mary Astell: Theorist of Freedom from Domination* (New York: Cambridge, 2005), 14.

[19] For more see, John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota, 1983).

[20] John Locke, *Mr. Locke's Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter* (London: H.C. and Churchill, 1696), 430.

[21] Edwin McCann, "Locke's Theory of Substance Under Attack!" *Philosophical Studies* 106 (2001): 93.

[22] Michael Alexander Stewart, *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, Vol.3 of *Oxford Studies in the History of Philosophy* (New York: OUP, 2000), 112.

[23] Astell and Norris, *Letters Concerning the Love of God,* 3.

[24] Patricia Springborg "Mary Astell (1666-1731), Critic of Locke," *The American Political Science Review* 89 No. 3 (Sept. 1995): 630.

[25] Astell, *SRM,* 11.

[26] Mary Astell, *The Christian Religion As Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England Containing Directions for the Due Behavior of Women in Every Station of Life* (London: W. Parker, 1730), 44 (hereafter, *CR*).

[27] Astell, *CR,* 305.

[28] Astell, *CR,* 5.

[29] Astell, *SRM*, 26, 21.

[30] Sutherland, *Eloquence,* 82

[31] Astell, *SRM,* 18.

[32] Springborg, *Theorist of Freedom*, 1, 33.

[33] William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson, *Mary Astell: Reason Gender, Faith*, 20.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Astell, CR, 97-98.

[36] Mary Astell, Moderation Truly State: or, A Review of a Late Pamphlet, Entitled Moderation A Vertue with a Prefatory Discourse to Dr. D'Aveanant Concerning His Late Essays on Peace and War (London: J.L. Rich Wilkin, 1704), 13-16, 59.

[37] Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1400-1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 284.

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Notes on a Maya Apocalypse: Eschatology in the Guatemalan Civil War, By Eric Hoenes del Pinal

Abstract
The second half of the 20th Century saw much of Latin America undergoing intense periods of political instability and violence resulting in major social and political changes. Responding both to this uncertain political climate and the call to openness initiated by the Second Vatican Council, several theological movements began to take shape within Latin American Catholicism that sought to re-imagine the present and future of the Catholic Church. Critical to these projects was a re-figuration of salvation history that could better account for the social and political inequalities faced by many Latin American Catholics and that could respond to the immediate needs of marginalized peoples. This paper examines how Liberation Theology can be said to have proposed an eschatology that was responsive to social and cultural experiences of marginalized groups in Latin America and explores the legacy of this movement in the light of the extreme violence of the Guatemalan Civil War.

Apocalypse

Mention the words "Maya" and "apocalypse" together and you are likely to spur a conversation about 2012, the end of the Mayan long count calendar, planetary alignments and ancient prophesies about the end times. This paper is not about that. Rather, the topic that I want to take up here, in a very preliminary and incomplete fashion, is how the eschatological imaginary of a late 20th Century Catholic theological movement— Liberation Theology— articulates with the catastrophic political violence experienced by Mayas during the Guatemalan Civil War, which lasted from 1960 and 1996, but saw its most intense period in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although neither Liberation Theology nor the Maya population I deal with here are explicitly or actively millenarian, I think that scholarship on millenarian movements can help us understand the former's motivations and the latter's experiences and shed some light on the topic of how Christian apocalypticism and especially millenarianism can serve as a tool for people to think through the moral ills and ontological hazards of their times and the promise of an eventual cure for them. To see how millenarianism might play a role in this context we need to take an intellectual detour to set the stage for the relationship between eschatology, social mobilization, and political violence.

I start from Norman Cohn's well-known thesis that millenarian movements are always both religious and social movements, and that they tend to flourish under specific social conditions: namely when social instability is exacerbated to an unbearable degree[1]. Under these conditions, a millenarian prophet's promises of the end of the world and subsequent establishment of a new order may be highly attractive and prompt people to abandon whatever attachments to the here-and-now they may hold in hopes of a better existence after the apocalypse. Cohn argues that millenarian thinking hinges on believers' expectation of an event that will bring about salvation that is a) miraculous, b) collective, c) terrestrial, d) imminent, and e) total. Cohn argues that taken together these five characteristics mark this mode of Christian soteriology as distinct from non-millenarian formulations[2]. This mode of thinking, he continues, only becomes an attractive option to people who have become radically socially "disoriented," that is, when their minimal expectations of what the social order ought to be like are completely subverted and they are left either unsure of their place in the world or certain that they constitute the extreme margins of society. To support his argument, Cohn offers up case studies of millenarian movements that took shape in medieval Europe as society shifted

from a manorial to a commercial system. This shift entailed economic changes that required people to alter their expectations about how to subsist and survive, and also subverted the expected social relations of dependence between peasants and the nobility. Thus a major change in the mode of production coincided with the dissolution of central social and political institutions. Among those who were left anchorless, who found the social institutions they were used to gone or altered beyond recognition, the discourse of millenarianism found fertile ground. It's not hard to see why in the worst of social conditions the promise of a new, just social order becomes attractive, but what's really important for this model is that it is in some sense that initial experience of social disorientation—that dissolution of the normal order of things—which opens up the possibility of the apocalypse's total miraculous transformation. That is to say, the experience of radical social change makes the idea of transcendent spiritual change plausible.[3]

Though Maya had been marginalized by the state, subject to frequent and sustained indignities and injustices, and had lived in economically precarious conditions for centuries, traditionally there were also local village-level institutions that counterbalanced their oppression. Writing at mid-century before the Civil War, Eric Wolf described rural Maya as living in "closed corporate communities"[4], that, though they might depend on non-Mayas (*Ladinos*) for access to agricultural land and capital, nonetheless operated more or less independently and were self-sustaining social and political units.[5] However, the Guatemalan Civil War devastated rural Maya life and placed these social institutions in serious peril, especially during the "hot period" of political violence in the 1970s and 1980s. Going by Cohn's model, then, Guatemalan Mayas might have been a population among whom millenarian movements abounded during this period.

According to the documents produced by the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH, *Comisión para el esclarecimiento histórico*) over 200,000 people were killed and 45,000 were "disappeared" during the conflict. Ninety-three percent of these acts of violence happened at the hands of the military, and eighty-three percent of those who suffered them were ethnically Maya. Between 1962 and 1996 there were over 620 massacres in the country, half of which occurred during a three-year period in the early 1980s. 430 villages were destroyed. 1.5 million people were internally displaced and 150,000 sought refuge in Mexico. Untold numbers were raped and tortured, to say nothing of the millions who suffered the insecurity of living in such conditions. This all happening in country with a population of around 8 million[6]. Add to this an earthquake that struck the country in 1976, killing over 20,000 people and leaving over a million temporarily homeless, and Guatemalan Mayas' world must have seemed dangerously close to collapse.

Yet in the face of this world-shattering violence, no major millenarian movements emerged, at least not any that would fit Cohn's model.[7] But we do find important religious changes occurring among the Maya that, though they might not be apocalyptic or millenarian *per se*, implied (if not outright depended on) new configurations of Christian eschatological thinking. What we see are, on the one hand, critical reinterpretations of the role of salvation in Catholicism—ones that take into account the world-shattering effects of state-sponsored violence and attempts to make good on the promise of a kingdom of God on Earth— and, on the other hand, the rapid growth of pneumatic religious denominations (Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in both their Catholic and Protestant forms) that promised experience-near proof of salvation. Though I will treat only the former in this paper, I think that both of these developments can in part be analyzed in terms of our discussion of apocalypticism.

To return briefly to medieval Europe, Randolph E. Daniel has suggested that not all medieval apocalyptic movements can properly be characterized as revolutionary in Cohn's sense[8]. Rather, many of these movements are better understood as "reformist" movements that, even though they explicitly mobilize the rhetoric and imagery of the Christian "End Times," aren't so much motivated by a narrative of the complete destruction of extant social institutions and their replacement by a new order in the kingdom of God as they are by reshaping ("enhancing," he says)[9] the world via reform and correction of people's practices. Their eschatological model, it would seem, is one of continuity rather than absolute rupture, and their primary concern is to purify the Church (and by extension perhaps the political order, as well) as a means of enabling the fulfillment of prophecy. This sort of movement remains apocalyptic, however, in the sense that it proposes that some critical event has to happen in order to transform this world into the kingdom of God. That is, an apocalyptic event is needed to spur the purification necessary for the fulfillment of the millennium.

This reformist apocalypticism, Daniel argues, tends to be more of a feature of clerical thinking and writing than of charismatic preaching and is likely to take root among people who have a vested interest in the continuation of at least some established institutions. It is important to note that several of his exemplary cases fit into a tradition that envisions a messianic sacral ruler, suggesting that adherents to such movements aren't seeking a complete rupture with the present social order, but rather change within it. It is following out this strand that I think we can see apocalyptic thinking among Latin American Catholics in the 20th Century.

A Latin American Theology

There was nothing particularly millenarian or apocalyptic about the Second Vatican Council; however, the broad-based reforms it introduced set the stage for the principles of Liberation Theology, which I will argue can be understood as apocalyptic in a limited sense. Though certainly it had an impact elsewhere, Liberation Theology is often thought of as an originally Latin American response to the challenge set forth by Vatican II to find new ways of engaging the laity[10]. Its roots can be traced to the combined experiences of Latin American Catholics and a generation of European and North American-born clergy who arrived in the region at mid-century as part of an effort by local dioceses to spread orthodox Catholicism. Though much of Latin America had exhibited a streak of anticlericalism from the late 19th Century through early 20th Century, by mid-century many states, Guatemala included, had begun to ease restrictions on the Catholic Church and incorporate it into modernization projects (through schools, programs to promote cash-crop production, etc.). While local oligarchs were sometimes suspicious of the Church's involvement, seeing it as a potential pole of oppositional political power, they also saw that it could serve as an instrument for solidifying the extant social order. [11]

To make up for the deficit of personnel that had resulted from earlier restrictions placed on the Church,[12] many dioceses sought to bring in young clergy from abroad to work in rural areas. The recruits tended to be political conservatives, committed to an anti-communist ideal as much as to missionary work. Many had been trained in or at least exposed to the "new political theology" that emerged in Europe following World War II, which posited that faith, far from being a solely private affair, should be cultivated as a feature of public life, and that the Catholic Church ought to be an instrument for social action as well as spiritual development.[13] Although this formulation might suggest the beginnings of a progressive religious movement, proponents of this brand of political theology tended to side with established authorities. They had as their main goal finding ways to justify the power of nation-states via theological means and in

doing so to provide a counterargument to the ideal of the secular state which had uncomfortable resonances as a defining feature of Communism. However, these political commitments would be tested by the social reality that many of these missionaries encountered in Latin America.

The case of Father Luis Gurriarán as documented by Beatriz Manz is illustrative of what happened on the ground.[14] In 1958 Fr. Luis, a Galician member of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, was recruited to lead a mission in the highland Department of El Quiche. Fr. Luis had been recruited because of his youth, commitment to missionary work, and, importantly his political affiliations: he was at the time a vocal anti-communist and a supporter of the Franco regime in Spain. However, the stark reality he encountered in his mission work— the levels of abject poverty, the institutionalized inequality, and the general exploitation of K'iche'-Maya people— led him to revise his political commitments. The ideal that he, as a representative of the Church, was morally and ethically bound to not only minister to the souls of his congregation but also to take some interest and responsibility for their worldly needs remained, however. Fr. Luis, and others like him who had come with the expectation that their primary task was to preach religious orthodoxy, came to recognize the futility of doing only that and decided to use their position to help local people find the means to organize themselves and improve their lots in life.

This sort of secondary "conversion" experience and interest in social work as a part of missionary work dovetailed with a series of extant local programs (such as Catholic Action in Guatemala) that had set up structures of increased lay participation and leadership independently of Vatican II. While these earlier programs had originated from a desire to spread orthodox Catholicism and oversee the practices of local populations (seen as necessary to correct the spiritually dangerous "syncretic" faith practiced by indigenous communities), the institutional changes that they introduced placed a great deal of authority in the hands of parishioners, at least in so far at the day-to-day workings of the congregation were concerned. Importantly, too, they created a structure of institutional authority that favored younger members of the Church who might have more of a vested interest in changing the status quo, even if just at the level of their own villages and hamlets. Moreover, it opened up the possibility of more broad-based mobilization by placing young leaders in dialogue with their peers in other municipalities, creating for the first time a shared sense of ethnic and class identity that extended beyond the local community.[15] By the time priests started officiating Masses in the vernacular (Spanish at first and later Mayan languages, which have since become standard), the idea that parishioners ought to play a greater role in guiding the Church's work was well-established in a number of congregations.

This conjunction of foreign-born priests influenced by a socially-conscious political theology and the activities of local populations organizing new structures of authority would promulgate ideals of popular participation and social critique in an attempt to correct a social system rife with inequalities based on class and ethnicity. Of course these local efforts required some level of institutional support and ratification to become effective, and they found them in the theology that emerged from the Second General meeting of the Conference of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) held in Medellín, Colombia in 1968.

The goal of CELAM, first convened in 1955, was to try to create some basis for a unified institutional identity and an agenda for the dioceses in the region. The conference's meeting in Medellín, however, was the watershed moment for establishing the tenor of Latin American Catholicism with its formal adoption of the "preferential option for the poor."[16] This doctrine posited that a critical component of Christianity is that its adherents show compassion for and look after the spiritual as well as material

wellbeing of the poor. One of the ideas proposed at Medellín was that the social reality of Latin America was marked by two evils— "external dominance" and "internal colonialism" — which made it impossible to lead a good life, and thus made salvation onerously difficult (if not altogether impossible) to achieve.[17] The Church, they argued, had a duty to call attention to and help fight these twin problems. It was held that the Church could no longer tolerate the misery of its faithful in the here-and-now and only promise an end to suffering in the next world. Instead, the Church would take an active role in aiding them to improve their lives, which would in turn help them practice their faith with full human dignity. Thus, from a theological perspective, salvation came to be intimately tied to social development projects that would both drive and be driven by lay participation in Ecclesial Base Communities or CEBs by the Spanish initials.[18]

A full examination of how this was justified theologically is beyond the scope of this paper, but I want to briefly set out four of its key points here.[19] 1) Like the political theology that preceded it, Liberation Theology proposes that there is a single "plane" of human history, rather than separate temporalities for the here and now and the spiritual realm. This in part justifies the political engagement of the church. 2) This vision of world history implies that the Church's work is always already engaged in social and political matters and one cannot separate spiritual work from that fact. As a corollary it calls for a close examination and critique of the historical effects of Church (non-)involvement in worldly matters. 3) The notion of a singular plane of existence suggests the kingdom of God can be at least partially realized in this world, and the Catholic Church, as the direct line of spiritual authority (i.e. from Jesus to Peter and on down through the papal lineage) has a privileged role in bringing this about. 4) In order to do so it must combat sin, which in this reading is fundamentally understood as being a condition of alienation.[20] There are spiritual, psychological, and, critically, political dimensions to sin, and thus liberation must be cultivated across all of these domains to ensure humankind's salvation. Because these domains are interdependent, too, part of the project of salvation *has to* occur in this world, that is to say, in the material economic and political conditions of the living and in their subjective experiences of being in the world, as much as it does in their spiritual development.

Recognizing that social conditions in Latin America are such that they produce major impediments to its people's ability to express their proper humanity, and that systems of inequality exacerbate and compound them, Liberation Theologians argued that working towards social justice through advocacy and protest was a tangible means of working towards the fulfillment of salvation. And indeed Gutierrez says that, "the historical, political liberating event *is* the growth of the Kingdom [of God] and *is* a salvific event; but it is not *the* coming of the Kingdom, not all of salvation. It is the historical realization of the Kingdom and, therefore, proclaims its fullness."[21] Thus, though Liberation Theology does not go so far as to claim that political liberation is the *sine qua non* of bringing about the end times, it does give politics an important role in the fulfillment of Christian prophecy. Importantly, too, in re-imagining the conditions of the coming of the kingdom of God, it broke with contemporary orthodox understandings of the apocalypse and millennium.

Liberation Theology's understanding of the Catholic Church's role in political life placed it in direct conflict with the Guatemalan state's increasingly reactionary stance against any form of social organizing that might have a hint of socialism. Catechists and priests, seen as community leaders and thus potential political opponents of the state, became suspected agents of the guerilla forces and were placed under surveillance by the military and in many cases became the direct targets of violence.[22] Under these circumstances,[23] Liberation Theology became quite dangerous to adhere to in principle, and more so to put into practice.[24] The Commission for Historical Clarification report,

"1,169 victims of disappearance, torture and death [were] members of the church" which includes 921 catechists, 17 priests, 27 male religious workers, 5 female religious workers, and 193 parishioners."[25] In the end the state's coercive physical force overcame Liberation Theology's moral force. Monsignor Juan José Gerardi's assassination in 1998, two years after the signing of the peace accords that ended the war and on the eve of the presentation of the final report of the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI) project, violently signaled that Liberation Theology's promise had not been fulfilled.[26] Likewise, Liberation Theology's importance to Catholicism more broadly waned during the Papacy of John Paul II, whose vision of the Church placed emphasis not on collective action, but personal communion with the divine.

Eschaton/Conclusions

Among the Q'eqchi'-Maya with whom I worked between 2003 and 2005 in the Alta Verapaz region of Guatemala, Liberation Theology has little ideological import. Its traces remain, though. In the parish center's library old works by Marx, Althusser, and Gustavo Gutiérrez lay gathering dust and mildew. On the other hand, there has been a lot of work done by deeply committed people to make sense of the catastrophic violence of the war, to ensure that the suffering of its victims not be forgotten and that some measure of justice be enacted. Some of the dead are remembered as martyrs, occasionally memorials are held for entire villages, and an attempt has been made to rebuild what was destroyed. Sometimes, too, individual traumas are just barely covered up by a return to normalcy. And there is still a great deal of inequality, violence and social insecurity, though this is now primarily at the hands of street gangs and organized crime, and not the military.

However, the CEBs remain in place and Liberation Theology's main legacy— its promise of social justice left unfulfilled— might be how the very existence of these groups transformed the institutional organization of the parish. The Q'eqchi'-Maya in the parish, accompanied and supported by a new generation of foreign priests (many of whom are from Africa, Asia, elsewhere in Latin America), have continued to look for ways to express their faith in a manner that reflects their social reality. For some, this has meant a cultural turn. Drawing on a newer theological tradition known as Inculturation, they have sought to find ways in which autochthonous Maya culture might become the basis for a new vision of Catholicism— a project that intersects with the interests of ethnic political mobilization under the rubric of the Pan-Maya Movement.[27] Others have sought out the experience-near "pneumatic" spirituality[28] of Charismatic Catholicism as a means of more deeply engaging with their God. Both of these forms of Catholic participation seek to purify and reform their Church in their own way. Their projects are aimed at transforming the ways that their adherents inhabit and make sense of the world. If this legacy is not properly millenarian it is still in some sense concerned with the unfolding of Christian history and the roles that people may play as they approach that heralded, but ever delay horizon of a kingdom of God.

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[1] Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium (Revised and Expanded Edition)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[2] Ibid., 15. Cohn's implication, of course, is that the inverse of these five points characterize non-millenarian thinking about salvation. A salvation that is individual, deferred to another time and place, and that depends on a person's actions (even if it is just a holding a deep and abiding faith) in this world, would be characteristic of mainline Christianity, and would suggest a very different soteriological imaginary than that of the millenarian.

[3] This model may also help to explain why extremely materially poor, but otherwise socially stable populations tend to be resistant to apocalyptic thinking. It is worth noting that a similar argument is presented by Marshall Sahlins' work on the colonization of Hawaii and Joel Robbins' work on conversion to Pentecostalism in contemporary Papua New Guinea. In both of these cases an initial event that lays bare the fissures in what is emicly considered a whole and total social system sets the conditions for the possibility of radical social change following the introduction of foreign ideologies and institutions. Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985); Marshall Sahlins, "The Economics of Develop-Man in the Pacific," *Res* 21(1992). Joel Robbins, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[4] Eric Wolf, "Closed Corporate Peasant Communities in Mesoamerica and Central Java," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (1957).

[5] Of course, this is true only in very broad terms, as the country has historically relied on the extraction of Maya labor, and contact between Mayas and Ladinos in urban centers is more frequent, but the general point stands.

[6] Diane M. Nelson, "Reckoning the After/math of War in Guatemala," *Anthropological Theory* 10, no. 1 (2010).

[7] This is not to say that there were none, see Felicitas Goodman's account of one in Chiapas. Felicitas D. Goodman, *Maya Apocalypse: Seventeen Years with the Women of a Yucatan Village* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

[8] Randolph E. Daniel, "Medieval Apocalypticism, Millennialism and Violence," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 1 (2002).

[9] Ibid., 276.

[10] Daniel H. Levine, *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[11] Kay B. Warren, *The Symbolism of Subordination: Indian Identity in a Guatemalan Town* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978). This would have also coincided with the time when Protestantism was starting to get a foothold in the region.

[12] One estimate says that there was one priest for every 30,000 people in Guatemala in 1950. Richard N. Adams, *Crucifixion by Power: Essays on Guatemalan National Social Structure, 1944-1966* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1970).

[13] Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), 30-31.

[14] Beatriz Manz, *Paradise in Ashes: A Guatemalan Journey of Courage, Terror, and Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[15] Richard Wilson, *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala: Q'eqchi' Experiences* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

[16] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988)., xxv; Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Poverty of the Church (Medellín Document)* (Medellín, Colombia: CELAM, 1968).

[17] Edward L. Cleary, *Crisis and Change: The Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 42.

[18] Ricardo Bendaña Perdomo, *La iglesia en Guatemala: Síntesis histórica del catolicismo* (Guatemala: Artemis-Edinter, 1996); Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

[19] For a full discussion of these points see Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions*, 28-29.

[20] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*.

[21] Gutiérrez, 104. Emphasis in original.

[22] Ricardo Bendaña Perdomo, *Ella es lo que Nosotros Somos y Mucho Mas: Síntesis Histórica del Catolicismo Guatemalteco, II Parte: 1951 - 2000* (Guatemala: Librerías Artemis Edinter 2001); Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions*; Ricardo Falla, *Quiché Rebelde: Religious Conversion, Politics, and Ethnic Identity in Guatemala*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001); Wilson, *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala: Q'eqchi' Experiences*.

[23] The same was true in El Salvador, Nicaragua and elsewhere in the region. Phillip Berryman, *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

[24] Liberation Theology had few supporters in the Vatican. Pope Paul VI issued an encyclical in 1975 that cautioned Latin American bishops against allowing their CEBs from becoming too politicized, see David Lehmann, *Struggle for the Spirit: Religious Transformation and Popular Culture in Brazil and Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1996), 75. John Paul II was sharply critical of the political aspects of Liberation Theology, and, though it is beyond the scope of my expertise, it would be worth thinking considering the role of his own experience with the rhetoric of Marxism in Poland might have influenced his response to the movement in Latin America. Likewise, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's (now Pope Benedictine XVI) wrote several works denouncing Liberation Theology as head of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.

[25] Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, *Guatemala Memoria del Silencio: Tomo IV. Consequencias y efectos de la violencia*, vol. IV (Guatemala: United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), 1999), 112.

[26] I realize I haven't discussed the state's perspective on the conflict here and I certainly don't feel compelled to offer a justification for it, but it's worth noting that in some sense the state apparatus might have also been working under an apocalyptic schema—that of the Cold War which pitted capitalism and communism against each other in final battle of political/economic ideologies.

[27] Edward F. Fischer, "The Pan-Maya Movement in Global and Local Context" (1996); Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[28] Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

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Jewish-Christian Encounter Through Text: an Interfaith Course for Seminarians, By Melissa Heller

Abstract
What happens when rabbinical students partner with Protestant seminarians and commit to a sustained and in-depth study of biblical text?

A lot.

They seek commonality. They tell stories. They bring their vulnerabilities. They are offered a new lens through which to view their sacred texts. They are challenged to articulate their beliefs and explain aspects of their tradition to their study partners, often helping them to clarify their relationship to their own tradition, to their sacred literature and to God. As a semester progresses and trust develops, they share their challenges. They question their partners. They come to appreciate their differences, and to respect them.

As the interactions deepen between the pairs, and among the group, so too does understanding. What results is a broadening of their definitions of "Jew" and "Christian" to include nuance, narrative and diversity.

Properly training clergy for service in today's world means giving seminarians opportunities and tools for interfaith engagement. This article describes a course I have developed and continue to co-teach as part of my work in the Department of Multifaith Studies and Initiatives at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC). Titled "*Hevruta*: *Jewish-Christian Encounter Through Text,*" the course brings together RRC students and Christian seminarians to study in interfaith pairs. Using the *hevruta* model, a beloved and traditional Jewish method of study, the students engage deeply with one another, and with the Hebrew Bible, which serves as a base for their explorations. The course has been offered between RRC and two different seminaries, one mainline and one evangelical.

After providing some background on RRC's interfaith work, this article will describe the goals and structure of the course, and some of the learnings that resulted for both students and instructors.

This experience has wider implications than for just Protestant and Jewish seminary instructors. It offers a successful methodology that leads to meaningful interfaith learning predicated on relationship-building, that can be tailored for use by other educators and religious leaders.

Introduction

The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) has a long history of commitment to inter-religious learning. Stemming from a foundational openness to the beauty and wisdom that other religions may offer, and guided by the practical understanding that to be a rabbi today is to be a leader in a *multifaith* world, the study of others' religious traditions is an integral part of the RRC curriculum.

Founded in 1968, RRC was the first rabbinical school to require its students to take classes on other religions in preparation for ordination. In the early years of the College, students simultaneously received rabbinical training at RRC and studied at

Temple University's Department of Religion, which offered them the opportunity for deep learning about world religions. Beginning in 1982, when the College relocated to a suburb of Philadelphia and away from the Temple Campus, it began to develop its own Department of Religious Studies. In the last three decades the course offerings within the department have evolved significantly, and include among others, classes in Christianity, Jewish-Christian Dialogue, Islam for Rabbis, Eastern Religions, and Religion and Science.

In 2007, the Department of Religious Studies, under the long-time direction of Rabbi Nancy Fuchs Kreimer PhD, became the Department of Multifaith Studies and Initiatives. Reflected in the name change was a pioneering commitment: to create new models and opportunities for meaningful engagement for students with their peers in other religions. The receipt of a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation that same year and its ongoing funding have supported these efforts in numerous ways. With the stated goal of "infusing interfaith understanding into the culture of RRC," these grants have allowed RRC to greatly expand its program- to include coursework, internships, scholar in residence series, salon programs, retreats for emerging religious leaders and several other co-curricular projects.

In its dedication to this work, RRC is a part of a larger movement to bring interfaith awareness to seminary education. Among rabbinical schools in the United States that also make inter-religious education a part of their mandate, at least two others are also incorporating the *hevruta* model into their programs.

A partnership between Hebrew College (HC) and Andover Newton Seminary (ATS,) which share a campus in Newton, Massachusetts, also places *hevruta* study at the center of their shared initiatives. Like RRC and its partners in Philadelphia, HC and ATS offer semester-long courses co-taught by faculty from each school. Other HC/ATS projects include "interfaith student leader fellowships, peer study groups, and informal learning and ritual observance opportunities."[1]

The "Muslim-Jewish Text Study Program", an initiative of Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Los Angeles, in collaboration with the Omar Ibn Al Khattab Foundation, USC's Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences and NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change, uses *hevruta* study to bring together "peers and professionals" to engage in four months of paired study and discussion, in order to "enable learning about each faith." Similar to the courses mentioned above, it is also co-led by religious instructors from each tradition. In contrast, the HUC program is not a seminary course, but rather includes Jews and Muslims "of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, educational levels and institutional/organizational affiliations."[2]

The department of Multifaith Studies and Initiatives at RRC also offers Jewish-Muslim courses and programs, and uses *hevruta* study as an integral component in many of them.

What is *Hevruta*?

Hevruta is a traditional Jewish approach to study, in which partners engage in a sustained relationship over a text. The process itself dates back to the rabbinic period; its roots preserved in the Talmud- a compilation of Jewish oral teachings about law and practice collected in written form in the 6th century CE which takes the form of an ongoing conversation among religious scholars.

The word *hevruta* comes from the Aramaic word for "tie together" which gives us in Hebrew the word *haver/havera* (friend) and *havurah* (friendship circle.) *Hevruta* partners work out loud, studying the text in great detail, and wrestling together over its interpretations and implications.

A rabbinic tale reveals the nature of *hevruta*:

"The story is told that when the great Rabbi Yochanan was mourning the loss of his intellectual rival and beloved study partner, Resh Laqish, he cried out to another rabbi: "You are not like Resh Laqish! Resh Laqish, when I said something, he would have twenty-four problems with what I'd said, and I would have to find twenty-four solutions for his questions – and by this process of questioning and answering, the subject became clear."[3]

As the story reflects, a meaningful *hevruta* experience is by no means solely an academic exercise. It is a personal, emotional, and relational experience-with three parties involved, the two learners and the text.

Hevruta study is an integral part of the RRC experience. It is common for rabbinical students to have several *hevruta* partners at a time in support of learning for their courses but also for learning *lishma*-for its own sake. Often *hevruta* pairs will choose to study in the *beit midrash*, literally, a "house of learning" that becomes abuzz with the voices and energy of the gathered learners.

The particular process for study will differ among pairs. As a general approach, students take turns reading the selected text aloud, stopping after each verse to ask questions. As they study, they may ask:

What is the plain meaning of the text?
What does the text intend to convey?
What are its values?
What are its assumptions?
What is missing in the text?
What is troubling about the text?
What is compelling?

Hevruta study is growing in popularity beyond the walls of seminaries and yeshivas. Many congregations and Jewish organizations are incorporating this approach into their programming. Academic studies analyzing its methodology and effectiveness are growing in number.[4]

RRC's Interfaith Partners

Lutheran Theological Seminary of Philadelphia (LTSP)

RRC and LTSP have enjoyed a long history of collaboration in both formal and informal ways. Over the last decade, students from the two seminaries have taken classes together, participated in community interfaith programs, and for a time, students from each school were coming together on their own to study the Book of Psalms. Building on an already strong relationship, RRC and LTSP jointly offered *Hevruta: Jewish-Christian Encounter Through Text* for the first time in the Spring of 2009. Like RRC, LTSP has a religious studies course requirement that its students must fulfill in order to graduate/become ordained. Participation in this course is one way LTSP students can satisfy that obligation.

Rabbi Fuchs-Kreimer and I approached LTSP with the basic conception of the course in hand and the funding to pay my co-instructor, The Rev. Dr. Wilda Gafney, Associate Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament. Dr. Gafney, is an ordained Episcopal

priest, and a member of the historic African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia. She is also a member of the Dorshei Derekh Reconstructionist Minyan of the Germantown Jewish Centre, in Philadelphia. Her interest in "how Jews and Christians interpret the texts they hold in common,"[5] and her own powerful experiences in interfaith engagement guide her strong commitment to this work.

Palmer Theological Seminary (PTS)

The relationship between RRC and PTS did not exist before our proposing this course to them. This newer partnership speaks to our conviction that our partners must continue to expand beyond those who have historically been seated at the interfaith dialogue table. As far as we knew, no Jewish seminary had before attempted this kind of semester-long engagement with an evangelical school.

At a recent conference I attended on the state of inter-religious education in the American seminary context, Steven Graham of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) reported on the constituency of his institution. He noted that the makeup of ATS Christian seminaries is roughly 40% Mainline Protestant, 40% Evangelical Protestant, and 20% Roman Catholic/Orthodox. But he then went on to point out that 60% of the *total number of students* are enrolled at the Evangelical Protestant schools.[6] Our collaboration with PTS acknowledges that evangelical seminarians are an important and growing demographic.

My Christian counterpart at *PTS* was Emmanuel Itapson, PhD, Associate Professor of Old Testament. Professor Itapson received his PhD from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the training institution for the Reform Jewish Movement. Thus, he was himself a great ambassador to Jewish text and tradition and modes of study, and another fitting partner with whom to chart a new course.

RRC and PTS jointly offered *Hevruta: Jewish Christian Encounter Through Text* for the first time in the Spring of 2010, and plan to partner to offer it again next Spring.

Instructor Process and Course Structure

Aside from the role I assumed as administrative coordinator, working with Drs. Gafney and Itapson was, in both cases, truly a collaborative experience. Both professors had extensive personal experience with the process of *hevruta* study and each agreed with enthusiasm to participate. Our shared sensibilities on text study, and the priority that inter-religious engagement takes in our lives and our work, made these partnerships a pleasure. In neither working relationship was there conflict at any point, but rather only openness and energy as we guided the class from week to week. In some ways, our greatest trial each year was administrative, as we sought dates that worked for both schools' academic calendars on which class sessions could be held.

Dr. Gafney and I met for several planning sessions prior to the Spring of 2009, when the course was first offered with LTSP. We began by drafting the goals, which have remained in place for subsequent offerings of the course:

- To help students to develop **deeper understanding** their partners' tradition, including an increased familiarity with textual resources within each religion
- To support students' continued **spiritual formation**, by offering an opportunity to understand their traditions/beliefs contextually
- To support students in **relationship building**, both personal and professional in the local community of emerging religious leaders.

Dr. Gafney and I then went on to determine the course structure and written requirements:

Study partners were randomly assigned and met for a total of nine guided *hevruta* sessions over the course of the semester. Sessions began with an introduction to the texts by one of the instructors (we assigned ourselves to take the lead in facilitating the class sessions on alternating dates). Instructions and specific questions to guide the study sessions were provided. Students then spent the next hour or so studying in pairs. The class would then reconvene at the end for discussion that gave students an expanded context for their explorations, as they learned how the other pairs engaged the text. Class then ended with one of the instructors offering instructions for preparation for the next class session.

Students were responsible for submitting weekly one-page journal entries that were emailed to both instructors, which gave students a chance to process what came up in discussion. These timely submissions were invaluable to the instructors in helping us to facilitate the course, as they allowed us to respond to individual students and/or the group and to address issues and opportunities as they arose.

Students wrote a final paper, in which they responded to a set of questions that prompted them to consider the impact of this work. This lengthier assignment gave them an opportunity to look back on the experience and reflect further on the hopes and anxieties they brought into the class, what they learned about their partners' sacred texts (*and* about their own), challenges and surprises they encountered along the way, and to consider any future commitments they sought to make in the handling of sacred texts.

The goals and overall structure of the course remained primarily the same in the second year. The manner in which I worked with Dr. Itapson, and the way in which we shared leadership of the sessions, was also similar.

Course Content

Two of the most important ingredients to a successful *hevruta* relationship are trust and respect, both of which take time to develop between partners. Acknowledging this, the course is designed to support that developmental process.

Students began by sharing a dinner hosted by RRC. As students arrived for the first session they were encouraged to eat and to begin to get to know their new classmates in a less formal manner. Students were then officially introduced to their partners and then the larger class by way of icebreaker exercises that allowed each person to share briefly a bit about why he/she was sitting in the circle.

A significant amount of time was then devoted to an introduction to the character and process of *hevruta* study. As noted above, this method is familiar to RRC students. Students from LTSP and PTS were equally enthusiastic about this approach to text study, though for most of them it was a new experience. While they certainly had all worked with study partners during their time at seminary, the degree to which a text is analyzed in depth (literally word by word) and the high value placed on posing questions to one another, were novel approaches.

The texts chosen for study throughout each semester varied in length from a few verses, to an entire book, depending on our goals for the session. We sought to expose the students to a range of genres, making sure to include selections from Torah, Writings and Prophets. Changes from semester to semester were motivated by, among other factors, a desire to connect the chosen texts to the calendar and liturgical cycles.

Students began by sharing texts that were easier to pursue in common and gradually worked toward studying more challenging texts. Early in each semester students were asked to bring a favorite text from Hebrew Scripture, and a related or supporting text that offered commentary from their respective traditions.

Student journal entries reflected an appreciation of beginning from a place of comfort:

"I found it extremely helpful that we each were assigned to bring a piece of text that speaks to us personally. It was much easier for me to talk about a text that I have spent some time with and explored prior to this class, and I got the impression that [my partner] felt the same way. The natural awkwardness that permeated our first meeting dissipated greatly as we were able to connect over our mutual passion for study. In fact, being able to see our shared passion made me feel more open and curious." RRC Student (first cohort)

For the final discussion for the "bring a favorite text" session, students were asked to consider how the conversation with their partner had informed their understanding of the text each had brought. In her journal, a student commented on the value she found in this charge:

"*By insisting that we address the texts that each of us had brought (as opposed to the texts our partners brought) the instructors forced us to face whether we had really invited our partners to challenge us or teach us about our own texts." RRC Student (second cohort)*

Keeping in mind the shared identity among students as emerging clergy, texts were assigned each year that prompted discussion on some of the biblical models of leadership. Around the time of Passover, the first cohort looked at Moses and Miriam in the Exodus narrative. The following spring, a text from Amos was presented, and students had the opportunity to discuss how their emerging ministries and rabbinates might come to incorporate social justice work.

A session on biblical poetry and the shared allegorical interpretation of The Song of Songs highlighted points of convergence between the traditions while at the same time presenting lessons about the subjectivity of translations, genres within the canon and about the joint history of suppression of female power and sensuality.

Towards the middle of both semesters, texts were assigned to highlight places where our traditions diverge significantly. For example, a study of the Servant Songs in Isaiah offered students the opportunity to look at texts with a strong tradition of Christological interpretation. This was an opportunity not only to bring Jesus more pointedly into the conversation, but also to elicit a discussion of the process by which texts become canon or apocrypha for each religion.

The final session included dinner hosted by our respective Christian partners, a bookend to the hospitality offered at the beginning of the semester. Students also participated in a closing ritual that allowed them an opportunity to offer gratitude and blessings to one another.

Accessibility

It is infrequent in this country for Jews to have the "home court advantage," but such is the case for the RRC students in regard to accessibility of the biblical text in its original form. Students at RRC must demonstrate a high level of proficiency with the

Hebrew language prior to being accepted into the rabbinical program, and then study Hebrew for several additional years.

The degree of knowledge of Hebrew has varied among the Christian seminarians who have taken the course. LTSP does have a requirement that their students take one semester of Hebrew, and many of the LTSP students had completed the introduction to biblical Hebrew. During the that course, the students learn the Hebrew *aleph-bet*, the fundamentals of the grammar and work on translation of text, all in support of building exegesis skills. In contrast, *PTS* does not have a Hebrew requirement, though it is available as an elective course to interested students.

It is purposeful that there are no prerequisites for students to enroll in the *Hevruta* course, based on the belief that all of the students are literally *amateurs*, lovers of text, who have an authentic relationship with the text and meaningful insights to offer to their partners-working from both Hebrew and English. Nevertheless, "unequal access" to Hebrew text is a reality that presents challenges. We have found that it need not be a permanent obstacle to meaningful dialogue between partners, but this requires work on the part of both members of each pair. Students are charged to be mindful of the roles they are taking on in the relationship, and to make themselves responsible for helping their partner find entry into the text.

In her journal, an RRC student acknowledges the need to navigate a more balanced relationship:

"I may have jumped too intensely into teaching mode, which I often tend to do especially in Bible and especially in texts that I may have taught before. I look forward to learning, exploring and listening to different and unfamiliar texts and points of view." RRC Student (first cohort)

Goal #1 Deepening Understanding

In the first couple of weeks, the students' journal entries reflected a collective mix of emotions and intentions. Across the board and across the semesters students articulated their excitement, their hope for gaining deeper understanding and of developing a relationship with a peer. Their experiences were characterized by what Samir Selmanovic has termed "holy awkwardness" as they sought to navigate a new relationship.[7]

One student reflected:

"I think we were all a bit tentative in our challenges of one another. I hope we will continue to be respectful, but not to a fault. Hevruta is likened to swords sharpening one another. Though I don't tend to think of myself as an implement of violence, I like the metaphor of constructive, productive, respectful challenge." RRC Student (first cohort)

A few RRC students acknowledged a "defensive posture" coming into the class as a result of some prior experiences. Others admitted having preconceived notions about how Christians do or do not hold the Hebrew Bible as sacred. And, in the course held with PTS, some RRC students admitted to some anxiety that they might be "witnessed to" by their evangelical peers.

Some of the Christian students noted their lack of clarity over the extent to and manner by which they should be bringing Jesus into the conversation. As one *PTS* students explained, "it was my fear that he would think that I wanted to 'preach the Gospel' to him/her in a non-honoring way."

For many, the initial unease gave way to comfort and excitement about the possibilities for exploration and new revelation, as reflected here:

"At first, it was slightly awkward for me, because in a sense I felt as if I were trying to defend and/or give credibility to what I thought the text was saying. In the back of mind, as I was sharing, I made up [my mind] that my theological opinion would surely be different from [my partner's.] Through our conversation, however, I felt liberated to put my theological reasoning aside and focus more specifically on the splendor of God in both of our texts. As we both reflected on the question and shared our stories of how God was with us and gave us hope, inspiration, and assurance through the various texts, I could see more clearly that what we had in common was far greater than what we did not." –LTSP Student

"Each study session with [my partner] takes us deeper into the text, into our curiosity about one another and each other's faith tradition, and into the spaces where we differ, which is where the energy and excitement (and fear of what we will encounter) lie. When we first met, we were a bit shy and polite, almost like a first date when you are excited and want to make a good first impression, and most of all do not want to get off on the wrong foot. Now we jump right into our dialogue, not wanting to waste a second and I feel slightly annoyed when someone comes to the door of "our space" and says we have to stop!...Anyway, the conversations now are beyond intellectually stimulating – they are soul stirring!" RRC Student (second cohort)

Quickly, preconceived notions began to be challenged. Of the two cohorts, the RRC/PTS group had the steeper learning curve. Among the lessons learned for the RRC students: that some evangelicals are open to non-fundamentalist interpretations of biblical text. Among the PTS students: that not all Jews consider themselves "chosen."

Students also expanded the depth and breadth of their knowledge of textual resources within each tradition. Though the course centered on studying the Hebrew Bible, RRC students were often introduced to New Testament passages that their partners would bring in to serve as commentary. Similarly, the Christian seminarians were exposed range of rabbinic texts also providing interpretation to the biblical texts.

Student journals began to convey a profound new learning and a drive to have the wisdom of the other tradition inform their own religious paths.

"This experience has impacted me in several different ways. The first is realizing that my dialogue partners need to be bigger than just Christian books and writers. I need to consider reading other canonical sources so that I have a bigger view of the Bible. I think so much of what I learned in seminary was to learn how to use the Christian resources for exegetical work. Which is helpful in the beginning of the journey of learning how to deal with text. However, for me my desire is to take the Bible out of the small box that I have put [it] in. When I limit the study of the text, I think it also puts unfair limits on God." PTS Student

Most powerful for students were the occasions when the chosen text would serve as a springboard to offering students glimpses of the "lived traditions" of their partners. Understanding the particular ritual or liturgical context in which a text sits creates a grounding effect. Over the course of the semesters this took many forms: a description of the clearing of the altar on Maundy Thursday, the chanting of piece of Torah, an invitation to attend a worship service. Through sharing of the significant

events/occasions in their own lives, students further offered insight to their partners. For example, the death of a relative of an RRC student led to individual and communal conversations about Jewish and Christian practices of mourning.

Goal #2 Spiritual Formation

Our narratives about our own religious identity, practice, and belief are often firmly rooted. We can better understand what it is we do and think when we are asked to explain it to someone outside of "the tribe." Interfaith *hevruta* gives students a chance become aware of the stories they tell:

"We arrived with our own assumptions that were typical for our own faith traditions, we had one story to tell. But, because of the way the class was set up we were open to exploring those assumptions and perhaps even giving them up so that we could learn a new story." PTS Student

and to analyze them:

"The thing I love about having conversations like this one is that it forces me to reevaluate that which I take for granted. When "everyone" believes as you do, it's easy to stop thinking critically about your own ideas. It was nice to talk about such things with someone who was coming from a different place. I suppose this is the whole point of Hevruta." PTS Student

As students' relationships with certain texts began to be informed by their partners' questions and insights, they began to write about what it is like to see an old and familiar text through a new lens. Not only were they asked to explain what they believe, but they were also asked to entertain alternate interpretations.

"In our first class I have already found appreciation for the hevruta text study process. Two students engaging the text with sincerity, respect, patience and an appreciation for interpretation differences created an atmosphere for challenging our preconceived notions of the text and a chance to carefully pay attention to every word of the text. I have read Exodus 33:12-23 many times, even so with my "haver," I uncovered a new understanding about the relationship between God and Moses". PTS Student

Students were also presented with new models for engaging with text:

"As Christians most of us do not argue with a text very well, let alone find fault with one. If I have come to appreciate anything about the Jewish relationship to the biblical text, it is the willingness to hold it as a dialogue partner and at the same time, very holy." PTS Student

"I also noticed some differences between the ways in which we approached our respective texts. I am beginning to realize just how much I have been trained to approach text by looking for "problems" that can be leveraged to generate new meanings. I do this reflexively, even when I have to create the "problems" myself. [My partner] seemed to approach the text in a different, perhaps more direct way. Rather than trying to gain a foothold in the text by actively problematizing it, [she] seemed to be more able to immerse herself in the flow of the story and ask her questions from inside. I look forward to learning more about hers process and the tools that she has

available to her from her tradition." RRC student (first cohort)

This work offers new language through which to conceive of a relationship with the Divine. Despite initial anxieties about working partially in Hebrew, many of the Christian students began to describe a growing awareness of the role translations play in their understanding of texts.

"My experience with hevruta, although very brief, gave me one valuable insight; I want to be the best student of the Bible that this life will afford me. I was amazed at how my partner could read the Hebrew text in its original language and uncover what seemed to be unlimited possibilities of translation and revelation." LTSP Student

Jewish students were also influenced by their partners' vernacular. For example, some Jewish students began trying out the words "grace" and "calling," bringing another dimension to their theological explorations. Some RRC students wrote about experiencing "holy envy," particularly regarding the extent to which their Christian peers relate an intimate relationship with God.

To be sure, envy is part of the experience, but so is joy:

"I've discovered my pleasure in working with Christian colleagues whose understanding of God's workings are much more interpersonal than mine. Perhaps they are giving voice to something I hold deep inside, but to which I give no ear. Perhaps I vicariously enjoy their vivacious partnerships with God. I've reflected quite a bit on this anomaly and find no envy of their form of faith. Only joy in experiencing it with them." RRC Student (second cohort)

Some of the shifts experienced by the students were subtle. In the case of one student with a strong evangelical identity, it was gaining the consciousness halfway through the semester to frame the ideas she was sharing with her partner by saying "the way I understand this is…" as opposed to offering a declarative statement of the truth.

Other were more profound. For an RRC student who converted to Judaism as an adult and who had grown up with a father who was "quite rigid in his Christian practice and dogma," the opportunity for engagement with an evangelical peer who was securely rooted in faith but open minded proved to be a cathartic experience. She wrote:

"[My hevruta] has been exactly the right study partner to enable me to re-encounter Christianity and Christian text in a way that has been both informative and healing for me. She is deeply rooted in her tradition and able to share it in a straightforward way about how it informs her life, but with no judgment that this is the correct path for everyone. I have experienced only deep respect and genuine curiosity from her in our exchanges." RRC student (second cohort)

As reflected in the words below, these alterations are not without their struggle. There can be a lot at stake: one's entire belief system. It takes courage to really, truly show up.

"Accordingly, I will more lightly hold my "ownership" of the biblical texts knowing that they belong to both our traditions and that things I take for granted in reading the Hebrew Bible (e.g., the concept of original sin) are not universally assumed. This still murky insight is paradigm shifting for me. At present, I remain in the somewhat uncomfortable liminal space between certain old paradigms and (through the grace of

God) coming to new ones." PTS student

"In our discussion I began to feel an unexpected shift within me, an opening. I didn't suddenly change my views on abortion, but I became more open to seeing the "pro-life" position as understandable and, dare I say, valid. The "take away" for me was again the power of hevruta to cause us to look at things differently, through our partner's eyes. " RRC Student (second cohort)

A session toward the end of the semester was reserved for students to bring in a text they found personally challenging. Some students brought texts that elicited conversations about the difficulties of working to hold on to tradition while at the same time making it relevant and meaningful for our day.

"For me there is always this constant struggle between doing things the way we have always done them or should we modernize our ideas. It begs the question how does one determine what things should be changed?" PTS Student

Other texts highlighted personal challenges with theodicy. Though the conversations that ensued were difficult ones, students found comfort in learning that their counterparts shared in the struggle.

"In the end, we are both humans struggling with the same big questions, and finding that we come up short in the answers department. Our salvation is asking the questions together. This is where I find God, in the space where we are sharing our struggles with the text and the unanswered questions. I guess if I had to choose, I would choose to 'not know' together, than to have absolute certainty alone." RRC Student (second cohort)

Still many other texts highlighted the spiritual challenges faced by emerging clergy: humans responding to a Divine call to leadership.

"I think…that if I had had a discussion about this prior to seminary, I would have been really uncomfortable and would have worried about questioning what I always had thought about God… And while I still think of God as a loving God, I realize that it's okay to question my assumptions about what I had always thought about the Bible and what it says. Especially now, as one who will be going into leadership within the church, knowing that it seems that even God was still finding the way to be an effective leader, makes me feel better about knowing that I am still learning, and will still be figuring out how to be a faithful leader."-LTSP student

The goal of this particular session was not to mitigate the ache students feel when engaging these texts. Just as during the "bring a favorite text" session, students are asked to consider how their relationship to and understanding of the challenging text is informed by the learning they did with their partners, but that is not the same as liking the text more. In their explorations students were not working to salvage the texts, though that did happen in some cases.

Goal #3 Relationship building

"That was the most important strength of the class, for me: that I cultivated a soul relationship with another human being, with a different perspective, that we became

important to each other, and that encountering the other allowed both of our souls to expand. "RRC Student (second cohort)

Students participating in the *hevruta* course were committing to more than a class for which they received credit, they were committing to a person for whom they had to show up—literally and figuratively—week after week. Quickly, students cultivated a sense of responsibility for one another.

Over the two semesters a total of thirty-six students participated in the course, each with his/her own set of personal narratives, sensibilities and belief systems. While this paper focuses on some major tropes of the class, the experience of each *hevruta* pair was informed by the countless factors that made each person—and thus the pair—unique.

Each of the pairs was successful to the extent that they realized the stated goals for the course. But that is not to say they all accomplished the same things. The beauty and complexity of the *hevruta* relationship is that learning happens on many levels and the distribution is different for each pair. Some stuck close to the texts. Others digressed, using the text as a catalyst, often to spur sharing of their individual stories. Some invested time in the relationship outside of the *hevruta* sessions, welcoming a partner to a Shabbat dinner, to services, to meet their families. Some were far apart theologically, and worked hard to make space for their partner's beliefs. Others were very close theologically, and worked hard to identify issues on which there might be tension. For some, the association lasted only as long as the class. For most pairs, however, it has endured.

Even as they anticipated no longer being able to meet face to face, many students wrote about the ways that they would continue to bring their partner along with them. More than one Christian student revealed that they now ask: "WWMPD-What Would My Partner Do?" Practically speaking, as students move into their ministries/rabbinates they will have a resource on whom they can call as they engage in interfaith work within the communities they serve.

Future Directions

Students have had not only an impact on each other, but on the direction the course has taken. While the overall structure and requirements of the course have stayed the same, insights and suggestions gleaned from the students have led to some innovations.

One example was the inclusion of a short prayer or blessing offered by a student at both the beginning and end of each session, after an LTSP student expressed in her journal the want to set apart the space and time as sacred. This addition has become a fixture in the class. Student feedback has also, to some extent, influenced texts chosen for study for subsequent offerings of the course.

Another development has been the participation of ordained clergy and other religious professionals as auditors. Our courses have included a rabbi, a minister, a PhD student at the seminary and the editor of a religious journal. Their voices have added an additional layer of richness to our conversations.

This course works so well for seminarians, in part because the participants share both a love of sacred text and a path to religious leadership. Nevertheless, this experience has implications wider than the seminary context. The process, predicated on relationship building can be tailored for use by educators in a variety of settings, to include community adult education programs, and college campus interfaith initiatives.

Indeed, the contents of the Hebrew Bible have held the interest of a lot of people (beyond seminarians) for thousands of years. In my experience as an educator in other

settings (congregational, chaplaincy, and undergraduate courses) individuals have found meaningful, instructive and at times provocative, the chance to explore these texts and be in conversation about them across religious traditions, whether they have formal study experience or not.

"Make for yourself a teacher, and also acquire for yourself a study partner." ***Pirke Avot 1:6***[8]

My collaborations with both co-instructors were also *hevruta* partnerships, where the main text was the course itself. Our time together while students were off studying was spent in various ways: fine-tuning the next week's session as we responded to what was coming up in journal entries, sharing our own personal stories, and wrestling over text ourselves.

For both partnerships energy arose around navigating the boundaries of this work. For example, Dr. Gafney and I explored the role of ritual in interfaith engagement as we together crafted our final class session. We chose water as the medium, aware of the important symbolism attached to it in both traditions. We sought to create a new ritual that evoked the spirit of each tradition but belonged to neither of them. At the final class session students washed each other's hands in the spirit of hospitality but also to symbolize renewal, marking the end of the course also as a of commitment to continued deep engagement with persons of other faiths.

To be sure, the rabbis of the period during which the Mishna was compiled (2nd-3rd centuries CE.) would not have conceived of a ritual in which Jews and Christians washed one another's hands. Nor, did they have Christians in mind when they directed that one should "make for oneself a teacher, and also acquire for oneself a study partner." Nonetheless, I have learned it is my strong belief that Jewish-Christian learning has the potential to push one beyond learned narratives and beyond fixed frameworks, offering insights that may not be accessible by simply studying with those within the "tribe."

In closing, I turn to the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who has written of his belief in a "divinely created diversity." He sees truth as "multiple, partial, reflecting different perspectives on reality."[9] In seeking to find out what other truths people had to offer about God and humanity, the students and instructors who participated in these *hevruta* courses came to find that moments of revelation are available to us across our traditions- in both the universal, and the particular.

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[1] http://www.hebrewcollege.edu/home-page-features#share-texts-build-trust (cited 11/29/2010)

[2] http://www.huc.edu/newspubs/pressroom/article.php?pressroomid=468%22 (cited 11/29/2010)

[3] Translation by Yair Lipshitz, Paideia Scholar in Residence 2006-2007, Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem, Bava Metzia 84a).

[4] Orit Kent, *Interactive Text Study and the Co-Construction of Meaning:* Havruta *in the DeLeT Beit Midrash*, PhD Dissertation, 2008. Elie Holzer, 75:2, 130-149. "Either a Hevruta Partner or Death: A Critical view on the Interpersonal Dimensions of *Hevruta* Learning," *The Journal of Jewish Education*.

[5] (LTSP bio)

[6] The source of the numbers is the ATS database which compiles information from the Annual Report Forms from the member schools.

[7] Samir Selmanovic is the founder of Faith House New York.

[8] *Pirke Avot*, literally *Chapters of the Fathers*, is a collection of ethical teachings that comprises the first section of the Mishna, a codification of Jewish oral tradition and law, compiled in the 2nd-3rd centuries.

[9] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002.

Prophetic Courage and the Will of God: Comparative Ethics through the Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Nishida Kitaro, By Brendan R. Ozawa de Silva

Abstract
This article focuses on two concepts, each charged with a distinct ethical valence and ambiguity, namely "courage" and "the will of God," and approaches them from a comparative perspective. A discussion of either concept by itself could involve the interplay between the philosophical, ethical, mystical, and religious; here, I bring them together in the hope that each may shed light on the other, focusing especially on their conjuncture in what I call "prophetic courage." There are many ways in which the word courage is used, and in some of them, a courageous act can at the same time be called an unethical act. When we speak of truly great courage, however, we tend to associate it with the ethical and the good. Here I will be concentrating on prophetic courage as a type of great courage, and hence one that is profoundly connected to the question of the ethical.

This comparative enterprise focuses especially on two individuals, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Nishida Kitaro, to draw attention to the way in which these seemingly disparate thinkers hit upon conceptions of the ethical and the will of God that are remarkably similar in certain ways, and that are then echoed by other figures, who will also be explored here. As one would expect, there are significant differences between the views of these individuals and the languages they employ. Bonhoeffer was a Christian pastor and theologian in Germany who was executed by the Nazis for his alleged complicity in a plot to assassinate Hitler. Nishida was a schoolteacher in Japan with a background in Zen Buddhism and is considered the founder of the "Kyoto school" of Japanese philosophy. While their differences cannot be downplayed, bringing these two voices into dialogue can illuminate common ground and help towards developing a theological and philosophical language that is both richer and more encompassing. Both these figures, in their own ways, pointed to a possibility of journeying (through religious practice and self-cultivation, most importantly the cultivation of love) increasingly towards a place where ethical action stems not from a static understanding of "good and evil" or "right and wrong," but from a dynamic understanding of (and, on a deeper level, even fusion with) a truth and reality that reveals the very distinction between self and other (and hence self-interest and other-interest) as merely provisional in nature. In that sense, although neither figure is traditionally accorded the status of being a "mystic," one could certainly argue for the presence of a particular mystical dimension to their thought. Examining this dimension of their thought in comparative perspective may challenge some of our conventional notions of ethical discourse as well as help us to engage the concept of the "will of God" at a time when this concept seems fraught with danger.

The Will of God in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*

Bonhoeffer opens a section of his unfinished work, *Ethics*, which he wrote while in prison, with the bold claim: "The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge."[1] Bonhoeffer is arguing here that ethics based on the knowledge of good and evil cannot overcome the criticism that it places human beings at the center and makes them the locus for final ethical decisions. To do so is to fail to recognize that human beings are "fallen" and hence limited and relativized by being situated historically and

geographically in time, place, and culture – that they are, in Paul Tillich's terminology, "finite." Because human knowledge is limited, it is imperfect, and so human judgments are inevitably hindered by bias, ignorance, self-interest, and subjectivity.[2] As Nietzsche pointed out so forcefully, this compromises any autonomous ethics we might devise. In a 1929 lecture Bonhoeffer noted, drawing from Nietzsche, whom he studied closely,

> The Christian gospel stands beyond good and evil. Nor could it be otherwise; for, were the grace of God to be subordinated to human criteria of good and evil, this would establish a human claim on God incompatible with the uniqueness of God's power and honor. There is a profound significance in the Biblical attribution of the fall to humanity's eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The original – one might say childlike – community of humans stands beyond their knowing of good and evil; it rests on the knowledge of one thing alone, God's limitless love for humanity. Thus it was by no means Fr. Nietzsche who first penetrated 'beyond good and evil', even though it was on this basis that he denounced the 'moral poison' of Christianity. But, however much it may have come to be obscured, this insight belongs to the patrimony of the gospel itself.[3]

Yet, we may ask ourselves, is there any (non-nihilistic) alternative to human knowledge of good and evil? Would there be any other basis for ethics, Christian or otherwise?

Bonhoeffer answers yes, and he points to the example of Jesus. Jesus' actions, Bonhoeffer argues, were not dictated by ethical "knowledge," but by union with God. As Bonhoeffer writes, "This will of God is His life. He lives and acts not by the knowledge of good and evil but by the will of God. There is only one will of God. In it the origin is recovered; in it there is established the freedom and the simplicity of all action."[4]

We may react to the concept of the "will of God" in a number of ways. We might regard it as a return to a kind of heteronomous ethics, one that looks to a source outside individual human reason for its authority, in a sense a return to the middle ages.[5] But this would clearly be a misunderstanding of Bonhoeffer, who is fully aware of the pitfalls of such an approach. Alternatively, we might dismiss Bonhoeffer as a naïf, or worse, a fanatic. After all, to use language such as "the will of God" is to invite danger, raising as it does images of extremism, hearing voices in one's head, obstinacy, violence, or a delusional or suggestive personality. Even apart from that, what of the staggering epistemological questions? To speak of the will of God is to raise the question of how one would discern what that will might be, as well as *who* would discern such a thing. It might seem safer to avoid the concept altogether.

This would certainly be true if we limited ourselves to a simplistic understanding of the will of God. But what may be both safer and *better*, and in that sense more ethical, is to strive towards a deeper understanding of the will of God than that employed by those seeking to legitimize their questionable actions through an appeal to a higher power. This is precisely the understanding that Bonhoeffer argues against when he writes that the will of God is not solely heteronomous, because it is not a principle or a command, or even a set of principles or commands. Rather, the will of God is a "living truth," which therefore necessitates that our truthfulness "must assume a concrete form in the world."[6] The will of God – and hence also truth and ethical action – is not fixed, not enshrined in principles such as the straightforward observation of the Ten Commandments in any and all circumstances of life. On the contrary, for Bonhoeffer the will of God is a dynamic command that springs from creative unity with God and is based on concrete love worked out in each and every situation. His words seem chillingly appropriate in today's world:

> It is only the cynic who claims "to speak the truth" at all times and in all

> places to all men in the same way, but who, in fact, displays nothing but a lifeless image of the truth. He dons the halo of the fanatical devotee of truth who can make no allowance for human weaknesses; but, in fact, he is destroying the living truth between men. He wounds shame, desecrates mystery, breaks confidence, betrays the community in which he lives, and laughs arrogantly at the devastation he has wrought and at the human weakness which "cannot bear the truth." He says truth is destructive and demands its victims, and he feels like a god above these feeble creatures and does not know that he is serving Satan.[7]

One could argue that Bonhoeffer is relativizing truth, but it would be more correct to say that he is contextualizing it and at the same time setting it free from the bonds of the limitations of human reason. By reversing some of Bonhoeffer's negations in the passage above, we can infer that for him "living truth" is not fanatical, that it does make allowances for human weaknesses, that it preserves the living truth between people, that it embraces or at least tolerates shame, mystery, confidence, and community, that it does not wreak devastation, that it does not create victims, that it involves humility, and that it does not allow itself to be subverted into the service of evil. This is especially important, as it distinguishes Bonhoeffer's understanding of the will of God from the way this concept is used by to justify fanaticism, violence, and intolerance. At the same time, because living truth is not a simple set of principles to be imposed regardless of the circumstances or the specific needs of those involved and affected, it is complex. To deny this complexity is to succumb to the notion of "cheap grace," which takes the easy way out by omitting that being ethical, being courageous, and telling the truth are hard won and must be practiced, learnt, and cultivated.[8]

> "Telling the truth," therefore, is not solely a matter of moral character; it is also a matter of correct appreciation of real situations and of serious reflection upon them... Telling the truth is, therefore, something which must be learnt... the ethical cannot be detached from reality, and consequently continual progress in learning to appreciate reality is a necessary ingredient in ethical action... It is a question of knowing the right word on each occasion. Finding this word is a matter of long, earnest, and ever more advanced effort on the basis of experience and knowledge of the real. If one is to say how a thing really is, *i.e.*, if one is to speak truthfully, one's gaze and one's thought must be directed towards the way in which the real exists in God and through God and for God.[9]

This aspect of painstaking ethical self-cultivation and the goal of a vision solely directed towards God, exemplified by the last sentence above, suggests the mystical character of Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics. Yet Bonhoeffer also acknowledges the danger of his approach. A misunderstanding of the "living truth" could easily lead to subjective rationalization or self-delusion. That danger, however, is not reason enough to forsake this path for a simpler alternative. What is necessary, Bonhoeffer cautions, is "attentive discernment of the particular contents and limits which the real itself imposes on one's utterance in order to make it a truthful one. The dangers which are involved in the concept of living truth must never impel one to abandon this concept in favor of the formal and cynical concept of truth."[10] In a critique of purely heteronomous ethics, Bonhoeffer writes:

> Our relation to God is not a "religious" relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable – that is not authentic transcendence – but our relation to God is a new life in "existence for others," through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks,

> but the neighbor who is within reach in any given situation. God in human form… "the man for others," and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent.[11]

Thus Bonhoeffer is careful to dissociate the will of God from conscience, which, he says, "pretends to be the voice of God."[12] Conscience, it would seem for Bonhoeffer, already reflects the post-lapsarian state of human reason; it involves discerning right from wrong and constructing a static set of rules and principles that guide behavior, sanctioning some and prohibiting others. What is deemed "right" by conscience, however, is actually that which alleviates frustration and moral chaos; it is that which relieves the ethical tensions and dilemmas that plague a person caught in a difficult situation. The will of God, in contrast, is not a negative command, one that prohibits, but rather that which embraces all things and everything, and hence contextualizes and de-absolutizes all things (from a false human tendency to absolutize) by refusing to abstract them from the "real"; in this way it "invalidates" traditional knowledge of good and evil. At the same time, the will of God may not result in the mental relief that doing the "right" thing yields to the person of "conscience." Again we see here an important distinction that Bonhoeffer is drawing between his ethics and a morality of "right vs. wrong" as determined by human reason and emotion.

This leads to an acceptance of God's will, but not an acceptance of evil. God's will is connected to the struggle against evil towards good, from disunity, disruption, chaos, and meaninglessness towards unity. It is not an acceptance that says to everything and everyone, "It doesn't matter," thereby invalidating meaning, but one that instills meaning and moves towards deeper meaning. It points not to the unimportance of all these moments, but to the ultimate importance of each moment. Because the will of God can never be simply coterminous with conscience or an individual's limited reason, it is not a fall back to autonomous ethics. It is based rather in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, whom Bonhoeffer calls "the man for others." Neither autonomous nor heteronomous, Bonhoeffer's ethics speaks for the unity between the individual's will and God's will, the imitation of Christ, and is therefore always relational, and always an ethics for the other.[13]

The Will of God in Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good*

It might seem that Bonhoeffer's ethics, with its emphasis on the will of God and the importance of the *imitatio Christi*, is interesting but ultimately irrelevant in non-Christian contexts. Yet I would contend that it achieves even greater relevance when placed in a comparative framework. Bonhoeffer himself was seized by the idea of a "religionless" Christianity and what he called "a world come of age" (*mündige Welt*). In other words, like Tillich and others, he was looking for the relevance of Christianity in the modern world. When his ideas are compared to those of thinkers from other traditions, they resonate surprisingly far beyond the domain of Christianity.

Like Bonhoeffer, Nishida Kitaro also sought to develop his own philosophical and religious tradition while remaining true to it. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan adopted the European university system, and the discipline of philosophy became fully "Westernized." As a schoolteacher removed from the university environment, Nishida wondered if there was an alternative to this wholesale abandonment of Japan's philosophical-religious tradition in favor of Western thought. Accordingly, he set out to bridge the gap between East and West. His first work, "An Inquiry into the Good," gradually became one of the most important Japanese philosophical works of the 20th century, and Nishida was eventually credited with having begun what became known as the "Kyoto school" of Japanese philosophy.[14] In his later work, Nishida became

increasingly concerned with resolving the philosophical and ethical problems articulated by Kant and Aristotle through a combination of his own original philosophical thinking and the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.

Ethics is of central importance in Nishida's philosophy. Yet while Bonhoeffer writes of ethics as uniting with the will of God and becoming "for others," for Nishida, writing from a background in Mahayana Buddhism, there is no fundamental break between the self and the other. This does not render talk of "self and other" or "subject and object" meaningless; rather, these terms must be understood as describing movement along a continuum, a difference in degree rather than kind. Rather than essentializing such categories, they are seen as being inherently relative. Thus for Nishida knowledge and love is in fact the movement of the subjective out of itself towards and into the objective:

> To say that we know something simply means that the self unites with it. When one sees a flower, the self has become the flower. To investigate a flower and elucidate its basic nature means to discard all of the self's subjective conjectures and thereby unite with the basic nature of the flower.[15]

In fact, Nishida is arguing (against Sartre, for example) that true freedom does not reside in pure subjectivity but rather in becoming more and more "objective," an idea that may resonate with Bonhoeffer's idea of being "for others." Later in the same section, he continues:

> If we are purely subjective, we can do nothing. The will is able to realize itself only by according with objective nature... Thousands of years after their deaths, Sākyamuni and Christ still have the power to move people only because their spirit was truly objective. Those without a self – those who have extinguished the self – are the greatest.[16]

Again we must keep in mind that for Nishida there is no subjective will independent of objective nature (as in a Cartesian dichotomizing of mind and body, for example), and no objective nature independent of subjective will (as in some versions of materialism).

In such a nondualistic philosophy, what might it mean to speak of the "will of God"? Despite the Zen Buddhist and hence atheistic starting point of his thought, Nishida did come to find it necessary to speak of God.[17] It is not clear whether this introduction of God into an otherwise heavily Buddhist-influenced philosophy was an attempt to make his philosophy more intelligible to western readers, or whether, like Alfred North Whitehead's incorporation of God in the course of his development of process metaphysics, it seemed necessitated by the direction of Nishida's philosophy itself. In any case, for Nishida God is clearly not "that being greater than which there is no other."[18] Rather, God is "the foundation of the universe" and "the base of reality," an idea more in line with Tillich's view of God as "the ground of being" or certain aspects of Karl Rahner's theology.[19] In fact, like Bonhoeffer, unification with the will of God is the only true good for Nishida; in his nondualistic view this is at the same time equivalent with knowing the true self, which he equates with knowing ultimate reality. He writes:

> [I]n actuality there is only one true good: to know the true self. Our true self is the ultimate reality of the universe, and if we know the true self we not only unite with the good of humankind in general but also fuse with the essence of the universe and unite with the will of God – and in this religion and morality are culminated. The method through which we can know the true self and fuse with God is our self-attainment of the power of the union of subject and object. To acquire this power is to kill our false self and, after dying once to worldly

> desire, to gain new life. (As Muhammad said, heaven lies in the shadow of the sword.) Only in this way can we truly reach the realm of the union of subject and object, which is the ultimate meaning of religion, morality, and art. Christianity calls this event rebirth, and Buddhism calls it *kenshō*.[20]

In bringing Nishida and Bonhoeffer into dialogue in this way, we must be wary of certain pitfalls. First, we must recognize that for Nishida, as with Bonhoeffer, unity and the ethics based on it are not purely intellectual. Instead, Nishida writes of the need to bring into harmony the intellect (knowing), emotions (feeling), and volition (willing), and is critical of much of western philosophy for having subordinated the latter two to the first. Here it is important to recognize that the rejection of dualism between subject and object, as with the rejection of an inherent dualism between mind and body, is not merely an intellectual rejection in nondualistic philosophies such as Nishida's.[21] Instead, as Nishida writes in the above section, and as other Japanese philosophers such as Yuasa Yasuo have emphasized, realization of the unity of subject and object (and of mind and body) is actually something to be attained through spiritual practice, and this is no easy task, hence the rigorous training in meditation and other self-cultivation practices common in religious traditions such as Mahayana Buddhism.[22]

The death to worldly desire in Buddhism can therefore be seen in line with the same death in Christianity. It is not a detachment that leads to a lack of feeling and love towards the other, but rather a recognition of transience of the other and self that leads to an increased love for the other and self as interconnected. The movement inward to what Nishida calls the true self, and true self-authenticity, is therefore at the same time a movement outward to the other, to being for the other. Nishida sees the lives of Jesus and Buddha as examples of this, in their recognition of the transience of the current state of affairs, which allowed them to be "for others."[23]

At the same time it would also be a dangerous to emphasize the autonomous aspect of Nishida's view (he writes, "our self-attainment"), for it is God as unifier who draws us into unity. Therefore, it is not something that we can do entirely by ourselves. According to Nishida, we need to unify ourselves with God's will, but we need God to unify us with God. These two ideas—the inward movement to the true self also being an outward movement to the other, and the idea that it is both we who seek to unify ourselves (autonomously) and God who unifies us with God (heteronomously)—which seem to be paradoxes, are prevalent in the mystical traditions of Christianity and other religions.

The Will of God and the Mystic

That speaking of "the will of God" can lead into murky waters, both ethical and religious, is not only a recent misgiving. Kant, an important figure against whose thinking the ethics of Bonhoeffer and Nishida must both be weighed, seems to have rejected the idea as impractical and dangerous. In his introduction to a collection of Nishida's *Last Writings*, David A. Dilworth writes that for Kant,

> The Gospel command, the "law of all laws," presents the moral disposition in its complete perfection. And yet it remains only "an ideal of holiness… unattainable by any creature," an archetype which we should strive to approach and to imitate in an uninterrupted moral progress… Thus once more, in the spirit of preventing both religious and moral fanaticism, Kant repudiates the validity of the concept of "a spontaneous inclination" to virtue which is free of the constraining feature of moral duty… Thus he pours invective on "Mohammed's paradise or the fusion with the deity of the sophists and mystics, according to

> the tastes of each."... Kant's positive thesis concerning "the moral destiny of our nature" is thus articulated in opposition to what he calls "fanatical theosophical dreams," that is, "a hoped-for complete attainment of holiness of will" in this life.[24]

Yet one wonders whether by opposing these two positions in such a dichotomous manner Kant ends up rejecting too much. Does accepting the possibility of attunement to the will of God necessarily require an abandonment of discernment, reason, and moral development? Neither Nishida nor Bonhoeffer seem to think so. Although Kant's position certainly gives less leeway for those who would abuse this concept for justifying unethical actions, does it also shut the door on the fuller ethical and spiritual development that Bonhoeffer and Nishida are envisioning, and that is envisioned by the so-called "mystics" Kant disparages?

It may be helpful to turn briefly to the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, a mystic who certainly recognized the dangers of self-deception inherent in the path to unification with God's will. In *The Interior Castle*, Teresa devotes an entire chapter (6.3) to the problem of discerning whether locutions are from God, or from the devil, or from one's own imagination. Like Bonhoeffer, she emphasizes that there are no easy answers in dealing with this; continual discernment is necessary, and this discernment is not solely intellectual. Discernment of the ethical is only the first step, however. The next is action upon that discernment. What is necessary along this path, as the soul moves closer to God, according to Teresa, is great courage:

> And His Majesty, as one who knows our weaknesses, is enabling the soul through these afflictions and many others to have the courage to be joined with so great a Lord and to take Him as its Spouse. You will laugh at my saying this and will think it's foolishness; it will seem to any one of you that such courage is unnecessary, and that there's no woman so miserable who wouldn't have the courage to be married to the king. I believe this is true with respect to kings here on earth; but with respect to the King of heaven, I tell you there is need for more courage than you think. Our nature is very timid and lowly when it comes to something so great, and I am certain that if God were not to give the courage, no matter how much you might see that the favor is good for us, it would be impossible for you to receive that favor.[25]

Like Bonhoeffer, Teresa wrote in the face of danger. As a woman and a *converso* (a descendent of Jewish converts to Christianity) in sixteenth-century Spain, she repeatedly faced suspicion and accusations of heresy for speaking about her mystical experiences and spiritual practices. The description of her speech as prophetic by others further brought her under the eye of the Inquisition.[26] At that time many other women had already been burnt at the stake for professing similar ideas. Bonhoeffer had to live out his convictions about what it meant to "tell the truth" in situations where it was not easy to do so. Similarly Teresa wrote, "We are in a world in which it is necessary to consider the opinions others have of us in order that our words take effect."[27] Both had to recognize the dangers inherent in speech. At the same time, her certainty in God is such that ethically she can, like Luther, do no other:

> If when I'm in prayer or on the days in which I am quiet and my thoughts are on God, all the learned men and saints in the world were to join together and torture me with all the torments imaginable, and I wanted to believe them, I wouldn't be able to make myself believe that these things come from the devil; for I cannot.[28]

Teresa addressed *The Interior Castle* to nuns seeking to know God, and she repeatedly states that it is God who must draw them, and that it is God who will give them the courage, who will encourage them.[29] She insists that she can achieve nothing on her own. In this she echoes the sentiments of mystics across religious traditions, who have often pleaded that they can do nothing good by themselves, but rather it is God in and through them who acts, speaks, prophesies. This is seen as exemplified in Jesus, who says, "I and the Father are one," and whose prayer is always one of acceptance: "Thy will be done."

Throughout history such claims of unity have met with misunderstanding and martyrdom. The Sufi mystic al-Hallaj was tortured and killed for saying, probably in an ecstatic mystical state, "I am the Truth," which in Islam, since "Truth" is one of the names of God, is equivalent to saying "I am God." Yet the "I" in such claims is most likely spoken from a place of unity where it merges with the divine "I," and the question of who is speaking is problematized. In such union, speech is by necessity prophetic speech. The same al-Hallaj wrote in a poem, "I call You, nay, rather You call me to You."[30] Al-Hallaj's line poses in a brilliantly succinct way the two issues we are dealing with here: how to understand that which stands on the fine line between the autonomous and heteronomous, and how to understand the "I" vs. "You" or subject-object dichotomy when we begin to break down that dichotomy to speak of unity. In Japanese Buddhism, in a way somewhat parallel to discussions in the west such as that around Pelagianism, this very problem became the subject of debate between a position of *tariki* or "other power" (that which saves one from beyond) and *jiriki* or "self power" (one's own effort).

In the language of the Christian tradition, to be united with the will of God is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to have "the mind of Christ." Here the corporate, communal element is important. In a sermon delivered at Boston University, theologian Robert Neville connects this concept with the issue of the slippery boundary between self and other.[31] Drawing attention to Matthew 25, where the risen Christ says that when his followers fed, clothed, or healed the least of his family, they did it to him, Neville points out:

> When Jesus says "I," "me," "my," and "mine," it can mean "them," and sometimes "you." When Christians take on the mind of Christ, we need to be very careful when distinguishing between ourselves and others. Those others, they are ourselves. The logic of self that distinguishes between self and other gets scrambled in the mind of Christ.[32]

Neville then quotes 1 Corinthians:

> Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.[33]

This leads Neville to say that "spiritual maturity… is not merely some kind of special knowledge but rather living one's whole life as filled with the Holy Spirit."[34] In other words, it is not gnosis, nor is it a matter of principles and rules to be learned and followed in every situation, but rather a life of discernment that is led by God. This must be a life that is for others, for loving others *is* loving Christ. As Neville says,

> For the spiritually mature, led by the Spirit to dwell in those depths, every hungry, thirsty, destitute, and imprisoned person is Christ—God creating. For the spiritually mature, their own first-person suffering and death are only God creating. From the depths of God there *is* only God creating, bringing from

nothing the brilliant suns, the fragile earth, the human journey...[35]

Prophetic Courage

We have taken a long route through the valleys of ethics, unity, and the will of God before coming now to speak directly about prophetic courage, but there was a good reason for doing so. Prophetic courage is the natural destination of our journey. If we consider the prophets of Israel as an example, their behavior was ethical and was concerned with the ethical, yet this ethical was not simply the worldly ethics of "good and evil" prevalent and contemporary at their times. In fact, it is typically against the popular views and norms (often a hypocritical, legalistic understanding of ethics) that they rail. And such prophets are accepted, if they are accepted at all, as mouthpieces of God. What they speak is the word of God, but their actions also embody that word. The same holds true for the way Jesus is understood in Christianity, Muhammad in Islam and the Buddha in Buddhism: the traditions that came from them recognize that a transcendent truth came through these individuals, but also that their lives embodied it, and therefore that it is valuable and indeed necessary to imitate their lives.

Prophetic courage requires two things: discernment of the ethical and action upon the ethical. For Nishida and Bonhoeffer, both of these are part of the unification of self with God. This is where Nishida's concept of the unification of the intellect, emotions, and will becomes especially important. A purely intellectual discernment of God's will is no discernment at all. To do the will of God, to act ethically, and to engage in an attentive discernment that continually breaks out of the inertia of unthinking habit and patterns of comfort must require great courage. For great courage, like the words of the prophets, speaks to the people and, embodying the will of God, reveals to the people the will of God. In unity with God, there can be no disunity between life and language, word and deed. If that behavior or speech comes from the point of unity with God's will, then it will contain an element of the prophetic.

"The kingdom of God is near," Jesus cries out, "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Prophetic courage speaks from unity with God and calls to unity with God. That is why it always consists of two elements: one encouraging, the other critical. The criticism is that there is disunity between humanity and God, but the encouragement is that unity is possible, and that indeed God desires that unity and is calling humanity back. The two elements are present in the single line "Return, faithless Israel," repeated throughout the book of Jeremiah. The tone of prophetic speech is often one of lamentation. This is the tone of the Qur'an when it is recited, just as it is the tone of Thomas Tallis's setting of the Lamentations of Jeremiah: "Jerusalem, converte ad Dominum tuum" (Jerusalem, return to your Lord). Or in the words of Rabbi Abraham Heschel:

> The world is a proud place, full of beauty, but the prophets are scandalized, and rave as if the whole world were a slum. To us, a single act of injustice – cheating in business, exploitation of the poor – is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us, injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets, a deathblow to existence; to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world...
> The prophet is a person who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden upon his soul, and he is bowed and stunned before humanity's fierce greed. Frightful is the agony of humankind; no human voice can convey its full terror. Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world.[36]

In speaking of unity, however, there is the danger of remaining on the level of separate identities and thinking that these separate and distinct entities (of self and other, or self and God) are unified, whereas in fact the aim of religious cultivation as seen in the perspectives covered in this article may lie in realizing in one's life the provisional nature of that separation itself. In other words, the seemingly insurmountable barrier between self and other, which forms a basis for a "normal" system of ethics, which will therefore naturally distinguish between what is in the interest of the self as distinct from that which is in the interest of others, is surmounted in true realization of reality itself (Bonhoeffer and other Christian figures would say "in Christ" or "in God"), which reveals the provisional (and hence not final, not ultimately real) nature of that barrier.[37] What is then truly ethical is action that emanates from that "place" of realization, not action that still operates as if such provisional distinctions were ultimately real and final. It should be clear that although this could be seen as the true meaning of "doing the will of God" (and this is the very point I am making a case for), it is fundamentally different from the actions of a fundamentalist claiming to do the will of God based on a cynical understanding of truth. In the former case, to harm another is understood as being no different from harming oneself, and to love another is to love oneself. In the latter, self and other remain separate, disconnected, and unrelated, and the individual "doing the will of God" sets up the dangerous dichotomy of himself and God on one side, and the world and others on the other side, a situation that can only result in violence in subtle or not-so-subtle ways.[38]

What we are here calling prophetic courage, therefore, is that which springs from this place of interconnection. Although it is individually experienced, prophetic courage by definition, since it specifies a degree of union with the divine, extends beyond the individual and becomes trans-individual, even trans-historical. This is so because courage comes from the ability to identify with something other than oneself: another person, an ethical cause, and ultimately, in the case of prophetic courage, the will of God. The call to unity is a call to all humanity. The mother who risks her life for her child expresses her strong identification with her child; the stranger who risks his life for her child may express an even broader identification with humanity.[39] In this identification, the self moves from concern regarding its own self-preservation towards the preservation of the other out of a love that is in itself a recognition of unity and commonality with the other.[40] Just as Bonhoeffer spoke out for Jews in Germany, whom he called "the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ," and in so doing was also speaking out for humanity and thus for Germans as well, and just as the messages of Christ, Buddha, and Muhammad are open to all people, truly ethical identification must extend *beyond* one's own tribal group – be it religious, ethnic, national, socioeconomic, sexual, or otherwise – to the place of the other. It is this broader identification with the other that prophetic courage both embodies and encourages others to embody.

In times such as these when suicide-bombings and other acts of supposed martyrdom are prevalent, this point is especially important. There is no easy formula for courage, no straight path to martyrdom, and no set of principles for ethical action. The ethical problems of our day are not to be relegated to black and white categories of "good and evil," as Bonhoeffer points out at the beginning of his book. Now, at a time when many shun any talk of the "will of God," it is necessary that this concept not be relinquished so easily to those who misuse it for the simplistic justification of actions that are self-serving and which take place according to prescribed lines. No one can dictate to another what the will of God is, and any attempt to do so may be merely a pretense for masking one's own will.

It may be that the path of the individual who seeks to unite his or her will with that of God is more likely that of shame than of glory. As the hymn in Philippians says, Christ "humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place." The way of the prophet is not to die in glory in the name of an other power relegated to the status of a principle, but to walk and die in humility, sometimes even what others would consider shame, and yet to find in that apparent shame true dignity.

What enabled Bonhoeffer to exhibit such dignity, such pride, in the shameful conditions of his cell, waiting to be executed for treason? In *Ethics* he writes of a freedom, a simplicity, and a wisdom that come from union with God's will:

> Because the simple man knows God, because God is his, he clings to the commandments, the judgments and the mercies which come from God's mouth every day afresh. Not fettered by principles, but bound by love for God, he has been set free from the problems and conflicts of ethical decision. They no longer oppress him. He belongs simply and solely to God and to the will of God. It is precisely because he looks only to God, without any sidelong glance at the world, that he is able to look at the reality of the world freely and without prejudice. And that is how simplicity becomes wisdom. The wise man is the one who sees reality as it is, and who sees into the depths of things. That is why only that man is wise who sees reality in God.[41]

A love which is dynamic and in a continual process of self-emptying and creation must fit correctly for each situation. Furthermore, we see this love configured in the paradox we encountered before: "without any sidelong glance at the world… he is able to look at the reality of the world…" Such love is not easy; it requires the greatest courage. If love means emptying oneself as Jesus did, an act of kenosis, or moving out of the self and into the other until the self is no more, as Nishida describes it, then this love would be terrifying. It will not come easily, even if we decide to journey down that path, for it involves surrender and, though not death of the body, the death of the self.

The Cost of Courage

This is a high form of courage, indeed, and it may not be for everyone.[42] It is certainly not something to be prescribed to people for immediate action, but rather something to be cultivated over a lifetime, to be neared gradually, consistently, and with patience. As Bonhoeffer writes in *The Cost of Discipleship*:

> The life of discipleship can only be maintained so long as nothing is allowed to come between Christ and ourselves, neither the law, nor personal piety, nor even the world. The disciple always looks only to his master, never to Christ *and* the law, Christ *and* religion, Christ *and* the world. He avoids all such notions like the plague. Only by following Christ alone can he preserve a single eye.

Teresa fills much of *The Interior Castle* with descriptions of the sufferings the soul will endure for union with God, and Nishida is likewise candid about the difficulty of those who would journey along the path. He writes that one must follow "the most solemn internal demands":

> This is diametrically opposed to self-indulgent decadence and, contrary to what one might expect, it is an endeavor of difficulty and pain… Only when we thoroughly eliminate the subjective fancies of the self and unite with a thing can

> we satisfy the true demands of the self and see the true self... Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).[43]

Despite its high demands, the ethical embodied in, and called for by, prophetic courage seems never to be opposed to true happiness. Both Bonhoeffer and Nishida criticize the view of ethics that bases itself on duty and laws and hence the proscription of actions, since such a view places ethical behavior in opposition to happiness. For them, to do the good is to be truly satisfied and deeply happy, despite the pain and discomfort it may entail. According to the accounts, Al-Hallaj, despite being tortured horrendously and dismembered, praised God to his last, as did Stephen, the first Christian martyr, in the book of Acts. Those who witnessed Bonhoeffer's final days before execution later said that he was completely at peace, and his final recorded statement is the exemplification of prophetic courage: "This is the end – for me, the beginning of life."[44]

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 21.

[2] Bonhoeffer points to the example of "the Pharisee": "The Pharisee is that extremely admirable man who subordinates his entire life to his knowledge of good and evil and is as severe a judge of himself as of his neighbor to the honor of God, whom he humbly thanks for this knowledge. For the Pharisee every moment of his life becomes a situation of conflict in which he has to choose between good and evil." Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 30. Bonhoeffer's point does not regard so much the historical Pharisees of Jesus' time, but rather an archetype for human behavior.

[3] Quoted in Giles Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche. On the Piety of Unbelief* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 5. Fraser notes, "In this Bonhoeffer is simply seeking to restate what he takes to be 'orthodox' Lutheran theology; namely, that freedom is the very essence of salvation, and salvation is only possible 'beyond good and evil', beyond, that is, the devious delusions of ethical self-righteousness." Ibid., p. 5.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 33f.

[5] Medieval ethics is typically characterized as "heteronomous," that is, founded upon a divine or institutional authority, rather than upon the "autonomous" basis of human rationality characteristic of modernity, exemplified by Kant.

[6] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 359.

[7] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 361.

[8] "Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins." Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 43.

[9] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 359f.

[10] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 361.

[11] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 381f.

[12] "Conscience… presupposes disunion with God and with man and marks only the disunion with himself of the man who is already disunited from the origin… For conscience life falls into two parts: what is permitted and what is forbidden." Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 28.

[13] This view resembles Emmanuel Levinas's view of ethics as being "for others."

[14] The "Kyoto school" has been discounted by a number of American scholars for its supposed alignment with the fascist right-wing in Japan leading up to and during World War II. This is unfortunate if it has resulted in fewer people paying attention to the most important development in Japanese philosophical thought in the 20th century. It may even be misguided and based on questionable evidence, as Graham Parkes has argued. See Graham Parkes, "The putative fascism of the Kyoto school and the political," *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1997, pp. 305-336.

[15] Nishida Kitaro, *An Inquiry into the Good*, transl. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 77.

[16] Ibid., p. 77.

[17] In fact, Whitehead presents a view that could be included in this study, if space permitted, since he rejects notions of "God in the image of an imperial ruler, God in the image of a personification of moral energy, [and] God in the image of an ultimate philosophical principle." Instead, he suggests an alternative, of which he writes: "It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world. Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious to morals," and he says of God, "he is not *before* all creation, but *with* all creation." Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (The Free Press: New York, 1978), pp. 342-3.

[18] Nishida writes, "God is the foundation of the universe. As said before, I do not regard God as a transcendent creator outside the universe, for God is the base of this reality. The relation between God and universe is not like the relation between an artist and the artist's work; rather, it is the relation between a noumenon and a phenomenon. The universe is not a creation of God but a manifestation of God." Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, p. 158. Elsewhere he writes, "What is the nature of God, who in this sense is both the unifier of the universe and the foundation of reality? That which governs spirit must be the laws of spirit... a single unifying power underlies these phenomena. If we call this unifying power personality, then God is the great personality at the base of the universe... The universe is an expression of God's personality." Ibid., p. 161.

[19] Such as in Rahner's concept of prevenient grace. Rahner writes, "Our whole spiritual life is lived in the realm of the salvific will of God, of ... prevenient grace, ... an element within ... consciousness ... which remains anonymous as long as it is not interpreted from without by the message of faith. Even when [one] does not "know" it, ... [one] always lives consciously in the presence of the God of eternal life." Quoted in Anne Carr, "Karl Rahner" in Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, eds, *A New Handbook of Christian Theologians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 379f.

[20] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 145. He also writes, "to actualize and fulfill our personality means to become one with this underlying power." Ibid, p. 132.

[21] For a recent investigation of how Mahayana Buddhism addresses questions regarding dualism and the mind/body relationship, see Chikako Ozawa-de Silva and Brendan Ozawa-de Silva, "Mind/Body Theory and Practice in Tibetan Medicine and Buddhism," Body & Society, vol. 17, no. 1 (2011): 95 -119.

[22] Chikako Ozawa-de Silva, "Beyond the Body/Mind? Japanese Contemporary Thinkers on Alternative Sociologies of the Body" in *Body & Society*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2002): 21-38.

[23] Nishida writes, "It is only when we exhaust the intellect and feeling that the true demand of personality-sincerity arises in us; it is only when we exhaust all of the power of the self, when the consciousness of the self nearly disappears and one is not conscious of the self, that we see the activity of the true personality." Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, p. 133f.

[24] David A. Dilworth, "Introduction: Nishida's Critique of the Religious Consciousness," in Nishida Kitaro, *Last Writings. Nothingness and the Religious World View* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 12f.

[25] Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, 6.4.1-2. She concludes the following chapter with the paragraph: "Well to get back to the courage that is necessary, does it seem to you that this is so trivial a thing? For it truly seems that because the soul loses its senses, and doesn't understand why, it is separated from the body. It's necessary that He who gives everything else give the courage also. You will say that this fear is well paid. So do I. May it please His Majesty to give us the courage so that we may merit to serve Him, amen." Ibid., 6.5.12.

[26] "This characterization of Teresa as a prophet would seem complimentary, and indeed after her death it was adduced as evidence for her canonization. Yet in mentioning

prophecy, which from those not already designated as saintly the Inquisition defined as a form of blasphemy, it accused Teresa of heresy." Carole Slade, *St. Teresa of Avila. Author of a Heroic Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 21.

[27] Teresa of Avila, *Foundations*, 8.7, quoted in ibid., p. 1.

[28] Teresa of Avila, *Testimony*, 1.26, quoted in ibid., p. 32.

[29] As William Desmond writes, there is a being encouraged that always comes before the courage and that underlies the courage. The words of Nishida and Teresa point to this primary encouragement as coming from God. They also point to the possibility that union with the will of God might involve, in Desmond's language, the *conatus essendi* falling back into the *passio essendi*, that is, the individual's courage coming perfectly into line with the divine encouragement.

[30] Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil. Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 34. Schimmel calls this the "secret of the *oratio infusa*: God's address to man precedes man's calling to God (as God's every activity precedes human activity)."

[31] Robert C. Neville, "The Tough Part of the Mind of Christ," sermon given at the Boston University School of Theology matriculation ceremony, Spring 2001.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 3-5.

[37] In his chief work on ethics, H.H. the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso, writes of the foundational nature of compassion for ethics in a way that resonates very much with Bonhoeffer's concept of being "for others." H.H. the Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millenium* (New York: Riverhead Trade, 2001). In a talk delivered at Emory University on March 22, 2007, on the Dalai Lama's view of compassion as a basis for ethics, Geshe Thupten Jinpa, a leading Buddhist scholar and long-time interpreter for the Dalai Lama, began his remarks by noting that unlike western ethics, which is based upon a fundamental division of self and other, the Dalai Lama's position must be understood within the context of a tradition (in this case Mahayana Buddhism) that sees self and other as interdependent and connected. Therefore benefit to onself self is never completely separate from benefit to others; and harm to oneself is not completely separate from harm to others. For a recent article on the relationship between compassion and ethics described by the Dalai Lama, including recent interdisciplinary and scientific research on the topic, see Brendan Ozawa-de Silva, Brooke Dodson-Lavelle, Charles Raison and Lobsang Tenzin Negi, "Compassion and Ethics: Scientific and Practical Approaches to the Cultivation of Compassion as a Foundation for Ethical

Subjectivity and Well-Being," *Journal of Healthcare, Science and the Humanities* vol. 2, no. 1 (2012):145-161.

[38] It is informative that in the Buddhist tradition, in those cases when violating an established ethical norm is dictated by attention to the very real and concrete circumstances at hand, the agent of such an action must take full responsibility on him- or herself for the consequences of the deed. Peter Harvey writes: "A final application of the concept [of skilful means] is in the ethical sphere, referring to the idea that Buddhist ethical precepts may sometimes be broken if this is an unavoidable part of a compassionately motivated act to help someone. Thus the Mahayana has a greater tendency than the Theravada to adapt the precepts flexibly to circumstances, though such an approach is not completely absent in the Theravada. Thus, in recent years, when the monastery of the Thai meditation master Ajahn Chah was overrun by a swarm of red ants, causing misery to all, he finally allowed the army in to spray insecticides. When the other monks questioned him on the acceptability of this, he simply said 'I take full responsibility – don't you worry about it!', i.e. he was willing to suffer the karmic results of an act which allowed normal monastic life to resume." Harvey goes on to say, "Mahayana texts differ on the degree of permissiveness allowed to Bodhisattvas." What seems crucial here is that the act is motivated out of great compassion, and that the bodhisattva is willing to accept full responsibility for act, even if it means that he or she will be reborn in hell. Thus, there should be no room for using this line of thinking to "justify" one's own actions that are harmful to others. This is a subtle and difficult point, but I am trying to present in this paper that it is precisely this kind of increased attention to such subtlety, which requires courage, discernment, and brutal honesty about one's motives, all cultivated over a lifetime, that is called for. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134f.

[39] This is shown in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Nishida writes, "Fundamentally, the center of the self is not limited to the interior of the individual: the self of a mother is found in her child, and the self of a loyal subject is found in the monarch. As one's personality becomes greater, the demands of the self become increasingly social." Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 139.

[40] The idea of an ethics based on the "other" instead of the self has been taken up most notably by Emmanuel Levinas, and it is interesting that many of his conclusions resemble the thoughts outlined in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*.

[41] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 70.

[42] We might call prophetic courage alternatively the courage of the saint, if we understand "saint" as Panikkar writes: "God calls everybody to be divinely perfect, i.e. holy. Each person receives his personal vocation to sanctity. But only the saint answers fully to that divine call and freely accepts, wills, loves to be this living Temple of the Holy. Each saint is, in consequence, a kind of Revelation of God, he has a message to deliver, though not always with words, he is an instrument of the Divine, he is the Man (and Woman) in whom God, who is Love, finds not only His resting but also His acting place. True sanctity is not so much God-realisation on Man's part, as Man-realisation on God's part." Raimundo Panikkar, "Preface" in Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, transl. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), p. xii.

[43] Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 134f.

[44] Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, eds, *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (1995), p. 44.

Is Jesus on the Side of the Non-Christian?

By Aimee Upjohn Light

Abstract

In his *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* response to my piece *Hick, Harris and the Demise of the Pluralist Hypothesis*, John Hick continues to advocate a meta-approach to religious multiplicity which ignores the problems inherent in such a quest. Condemning tradition-bound approaches as "dogmatic theology,"[1] Hick remains unaware of the promise of progress which is yet unmined within the religions themselves. Specifically, this article proposes that by returning to Christianity as a rebellious religion of liberation—with a founder who witnessed to God's absolute commitment to the oppressed and marginalized—we avoid the problems which undermine the pluralist hypothesis and the abstract, ontologically based positions which follow it. Further, we reap the good which pluralism was meant to accomplish, specifically the affirmation of multiple religions and the status of their members. The return to confessionally-based approaches is already taking place within inter-religious dialogue and theology of religions.[2] Making sure that this return is *not* a return to abstract Christian dogmatism and instead serves the aims of Hick's pluralism should be the work of this generation of scholars. This article begins to point at how, for Christians, we can radicalize the current methodological paradigm shift to confessional, tradition-bound approaches and at the same time save this work from suffering the same problems as pluralism. We need to give our confessional return the content of liberation theology.

Though both liberation theologies and inter-religious dialogue in the Christian West are theological movements centrally concerned with social justice, the wisdom and methodology of liberation theology has not yet been often or thoroughly brought to bear on inter-religious work.[3] Why this should be the case when Paul Knitter as far back his 1988 essay in the seminal book *The Myth of Christian Uniquesness* called for the joining of liberationist and inter-religious work remains an open question.[4] Yet when Christians do bring the understanding of liberation theologies to bear on inter-religious dialogue, the problems of Hick's pluralist hypothesis and the continuing problems which plague Jacques Dupuis's and S. Mark Heim's work can largely be solved. In fact, applying the understandings and commitments of liberation theology to inter-religious dialogue is an extension of Dupuis's and Heim's crucial methodological shift back from the pluralist quest for a meta-narrative of religion to a creative but nevertheless confessional approach. Dupuis and Heim are absolutely correct that in the face of pluralism's shortcomings we must return to our own tradition and its resources. Yet instead of returning to abstract onto-theologies as Heim and Dupuis do, themselves developed with the exclusionary interests of the tradition at heart, we ought to use the resources of the tradition which call the tradition itself to its own highest standards. These resources are to be found in liberation theology's understanding of Jesus as on the side of the marginalized, oppressed and powerless. Thus, following Dupuis and Heim's methodological paradigm shift, we return to a tradition-informed approach to inter-religious dialogue. Yet unlike Dupuis and Heim, we call upon the facet of our tradition that demands a preferential option for the poor, marginalized, and excluded as absolutely willed by God. By joining the methodological paradigm shift already taking place in the inter-religious conversation with the commitment of liberation theology to the marginalized, we arrive at the inter-religious table in the Christian-dominated West ready to say that Jesus is on the side of the non-Christian.

This article will describe the inter-religious conversation which has culminated in

Dupuis's and Heim's similarly flawed onto-theology, and then examine the commonality between and the specific problems which plague each position. The suggestion will then be made that we re-start the quest for a satisfactory position on religious multiplicity from precisely within the revelation of our own tradition: not by beginning with traditional abstract ontologies which cannot help but confer outsider status to persons who espouse different worldviews, but by beginning with the insight and wisdom of liberation theologies, specifically feminist and post-colonial theologies of liberation. In these theological worldviews, it is precisely persons who are oppressed, marginalized, and vulnerable because they do not inhabit the dominant paradigm who are understood to be the ones whose side God has taken. In the inter-religious conversation, it is typically the religious "Other" who is the outsider. She is the one whom our exclusivist, inclusivist and even pluralist and post-pluralist worldviews render either forsaken or included in the religious narrative derivatively, with status only as second-class, inferior citizen.[5] The legacy of liberation theologies for inter-religious work is that, when the religious "Other" is understood as the marginalized and vulnerable one, she takes on the status of the very presence of God. Jesus, because he is on the side of the marginalized, is literally on the side of the non-Christian. Outsider-Insider status is reversed, and it is we who inhabit the dominant narrative who are faced with the quest for belonging in the kindom[6] of the one who takes the side of the subaltern, the One whom we call God. By using the resources of feminist and other liberation theologies, we avoid the problems faced not only by the pluralist hypothesis, but the post-pluralist positions which follow in its wake.

From the history witnessed to in de las Casas's *Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies*[7] to the understanding which dominates many Western religious education classes today, the exclusivist understanding of who may and may not achieve salvation has functioned with disastrous consequences. Though the thought that persons who, simply by virtue of their birth, have not been given the live option[8] of being Christian and thus cannot go to heaven is unpalatable to many, generations of Christians have been brought up with just this idea. In the midst of this widespread understanding appeared the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council.

The Council's documents, especially *Nostra Aetate*[9] and *Gaudiem et Spes,*[10] clearly and deliberately articulated a contrasting vision. "Inclusivism," as this position was christened, held that non-Christians can indeed go to heaven. The good Buddhists, the devout Hindus, Jews, and Muslims could all attain salvation. What was and remains somewhat unclear is whether these religions were understood to function independently for their members as mediators of salvation by the agency of the Holy Spirit or whether these persons were understood to be saved derivatively though the mediatorship of the Church itself.[11] Analysis of the Conciliar documents is far beyond the scope of any article, and is indeed the subject of numerous dissertations and books. What is necessary to note for the present purpose of tracing the Western, Christian trajectory of inter-religious work is that—whatever interpretation we give the documents of Vatican II—inclusivism was a radical new proclamation on the part of some Christians that persons outside our faith tradition could be saved.

Exciting and progressive as inclusivism may have been, it was soon apparent that there were aspects of the position that were far from affirming of the value of non-Christian traditions and their members. Though these outsiders might attain salvation, we were still left with the vision of a God who chose to reveal the good news only to some, and who left the majority of persons over time in ignorance and delusion about both the nature of God God's self and the religious end for which human beings are destined. Though better than damning the majority of the world's population over time to hellfire, this conjectured state of affairs left us with the view that most people—even

saved people—live in error. Worse yet, we were left with an ungenerous God.[12]

Out of this dissatisfaction was born the pluralist hypothesis. Most systematically put forward by John Hick in his seminal work *An Interpretation of Religion*,[13] pluralism held that all religions put their adherents in relationship with the same ultimate reality, which Hick called the Real, and that they help their members attain the same religious end, which Hick formulated as the transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.[14] To date, there exists no more than cursory analyses of pluralism's shortcomings, yet even these broad-stroke critiques[15] were enough to hasten the demise of the pluralist hypothesis. It is worth spending time looking into the internal inconsistencies that do, in fact, plague the position. The generalizations to date were enough to call post-pluralist positions such as those of Dupuis and Heim into being. Yet when we are confronted with the more concrete particularities of the problems in Hick's pluralist hypothesis and the trajectory of inter-religious work which his position has spawned, we cannot help but realize the continuing need to construct an alternative to the abstract onto-theological inter-religious positions which we have followed to date.[16]

First, there is nothing "plural" about the pluralist hypothesis, for it affirms itself to the exclusion of the religions with which it actually conflicts. Thus pluralism is better called "unilism," as it is another exclusionary truth claim. Second, Hick cannot offer the pluralist hypothesis as one of his mythological, transformational truths and hence cannot recommend his own position. Third, even if Hick somehow manages to offer pluralism as a mythologically transformational truth, pluralism's very appeal to a mythological theory of truth in order to avoid conflicting truth claims—whether between religions or between itself and particular religions—fails to conceal an actual reliance on a propositional theory of truth. Pluralism is then subject to the same critique which succeeded against pragmatic theories of truth, and Hick's mythological theory of religious truth falls apart. Finally, the pluralist hypothesis turns out to be a religiously non-realist position, shattering any confidence we might have in the veracity of religious experience. Instead of explaining religions, pluralism explains them away.

First, though the aim of the pluralist hypothesis is to affirm multiple religions, it actually contradicts them all, affirming only itself as the right metaphysical understanding. In the words of Paul Griffiths, "I know better what you are doing than you know yourself."[17] Pluralism understands the religious object beyond and behind the formulations of all the religions as "the Real," and the religious end behind all formulations as the transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. This construal of a nebulous something that then explains the understandings of each tradition and a goal behind heaven, moksa, and Enlightenment is extremely appealing in its evening out of multiple religions' truth claims to partial formulations of a greater religious object. Yet the Christian does not understand herself as referring to this nebulous "Real," but to the God who incarnated uniquely and absolutely in Jesus Christ. The Muslim does not take himself to be praying five times daily to this Real who gives equal access to itself through Hinduism and Judaism as it does through Islam. The Jew does not pray nor does the Buddhist meditate so that she can attain transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness as the supreme religious goal. However appealing Hick's formulations may be, the Real as the universal religious object and the transformation from self- to Reality-centeredness as the universal religious end contradict both the formulations and self-understandings of the world religions about their religious objects and religious ends. The Muslim does not understand himself to be praying to "the Real" and headed for a transformation to "Reality centeredness." Instead, he prays to Allah, who is the only God and understood most adequately in Islam. The Theravada Buddhist does not believe she is in relationship with "the Real"

and destined for "Reality centeredness." In fact, she may understand these concepts as illusions of permanence which must themselves be overcome. Even the Christian, whose religious background not-so-covertly fuels Hick's vision of the Real and persons' religious end, does not understand God nebulously as "the Real." Instead, she takes God to be the specific God of Jesus and the historical Christian tradition. Thus instead of affirming multiple religions, pluralism contradicts each and every one to the degree it makes particular truth claims. Called "pluralism" to denote its honoring of multiplicity, Hick's pluralist hypothesis is better called "unilism," since the pluralist must endorse her own formulation of the universal religious object and religious goal to the exclusion of all other formulations.[18] Instead of affirming multiple religions, pluralism denies them all to the degree which they diverge from the pluralist vision in favor of religious specificity.

Second, the force of Hick's pluralist hypothesis comes largely from its belief that religious understandings are true not to the degree that they explain things correctly, but to the degree that they transform their members to Reality-centeredness. Even if a religion turned out to be right about its delineation of God or Allah or Kalpic cycles, the religion's correctness would be irrelevant. The measure of a religion's truth is its transformation of people away from self-centeredness, not whether the religion "gets things right." Ordinarily one thinks of a strong connection between proper understanding and proper behavior or being in the world: I correctly understand the pane of glass in front of me is a window, not a door, so I exit the room another way. Hick severs this connection between true belief and proper conduct or outcomes. One might believe, falsely, that the Great Pumpkin created the world and is coming at midnight to save us.[19] If this belief leads the person to let go of self-centeredness and become focused on a vague source of the universe and engage in good works, this Pumpkinite religion would be true according to Hick's vision. Thus it is not the veracity of the proposition "Jesus saves" or "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet" which makes Christianity or Islam true, but the degree to which their members become oriented towards the Real and away from their own self-interests. The way this takes place is through spiritual practice—prayer, meditation, right living, and participation in community worship and devotion. Yet the pluralist hypothesis does not impel us to particular forms of life or practice. There is no community of pluralists who pray, meditate, live in certain ways, or practice devotion to the Real together. Thus, the pluralist hypothesis cannot recommend itself as one of these transformationally or mythologically true positions. Instead, it can only recommend itself as a propositional truth claim about the nature of what is. In fact, it seems clear that this is what Hick offers pluralism as, yet as a literal or propositional truth, pluralism is then subject to serious challenge on Hick's own grounds.

As a literal truth, the pluralist hypothesis cannot be a position to which we should convert, because it is not transformationally true. Literal truths do not engender what Hick calls an "appropriate attitude" as a response to the Real. To recap: whether or not a religious account of the world corresponds to the way things are is irrelevant for Hick. Instead, religions are important and true according to how they cause members to live. Pluralism's explanatory power is thus irrelevant or at least unimportant. The question is: does pluralism lead people to altruistic spirituality? Insofar as there is no community of pluralists worshipping and engaged in charitable works, it seems pluralism is not "true" in Hick's religious sense. Thus we should not practice pluralism, but our own religions, which are those which lead to transformation. According to Hick's own standards, insofar as pluralism goes against the particular grain of our own traditions and does not issue in spirituality, only explanation, we must choose our own traditions instead of pluralism because they will center us on the Real.

Even if Hick somehow manages to argue adequately that pluralism has

transformational power and is thus a type of mythological truth worthy of our conversion, Hick's idea of a mythological truth still conceals a reliance on a propositional theory of truth and, as such, falls apart. It is subject to the same critique leveled against Richard Rorty's pragmatist theory of truth. Like Rorty's pragmatist understanding, Hick's version of "truth" attempts to eschew correspondence theory in which a sentence is true to the degree it matches what exists in the world or describes a state of affairs. By substituting the understanding of religious truth as that which transforms, Hick hopes to avoid the clash between religious truth claims, holding them together as different but equally effective ways of changing people's attitudes. Like Rorty's understanding of truth as that which is useful for navigating the world, Hick believes "truth" has to do with assertions' usefulness and effects.

A common critique of Rorty's pragmatist theory of truth unfortunately applies equally well to Hick's mythological understanding. While the pragmatist attempts to claim that truth is functional, working within a system only within which it obtains, he must at the same time claim that "this pragmatist understanding of truth" is true. The attempt to say that sentences do not link up with the world in a one-to-one correlation is violated by the required belief that the pragmatic understanding of truth corresponds with the world is in exactly this way.[20]

Hick's mythological theory of truth also requires that the mythological theory of truth corresponds with the way things are, or assent to the proposition that "the mythological theory of truth is true." It thus conceals a reliance on exactly the propositional or correspondence theory of truth that it seeks to avoid. The pluralist hypothesis cannot insist on a mythological theory of truth, for the concept itself is self-refuting.

Pluralism's final shortcoming is perhaps its most serious. In order to hold that religions equally access this nebulous Real behind their formulations, Hick maintains that we can say absolutely nothing of it. The Real is beyond all of our concepts, all of our language, beyond the act of thinking itself. What this means is that we cannot even predicate causality of the Real.[21]

Hick bases his Real on the Kantian noumenon, the *ding an sich* or thing in itself behind the way a thing appears to us as phenomenon. Hick is, however, beyond Kantian in his views.[22] The Real is absolutely unknowable. It is untouchable by our concepts. Even saying that it "exists" is going too far. Positing it is, according to Hick, merely the simplest way to account for the world religions. The Real is Hick's minimalist pluralist hypothesis: that which is the least required to explain religious diversity. What Hick does not note is that, though he tries to eschew religiously factual predications, he must rely on veridical experience of the Real which itself depends on the predication of causality. We must be able to at least predicate causality of the Real in order to sensibly claim that it is acting upon us and members of other traditions.[23]

By refusing to ascribe anything—and this must include causality—to the Real, Hick loses his hold on veridical religious experience. If we cannot say of the Real that it acts on us, then we cannot trust our experience, which says that it is the Real which is acting upon us. We could be imagining, engaging in wishful thinking or hallucinating. Hick's whole work is based on trusting experience. Trust in the streams of religious experience is the basis for his project, the starting point of his work. Just as it is rational for non-believers to trust in their lack of religious experience or their experience that de-verifies religious hypotheses, and just as it is rational for people to trust their everyday experiences that planes fly, balls bounce, and dogs bite, it is rational for persons with religious experience to trust or believe in that experience. Without trust or belief—or any reason to believe in--in religious experience, there is no reason to explain the myriad religious experiences of which we have knowledge with the hypothesis of the Real.

A simpler explanation might be that experiences of any nature are all illusory since religious experiences are so widely divergent. If religious experience is not trustworthy, there is no reason to posit a something behind all the religions. Instead of affirming the legitimacy of the diversity of religions as responses to their common object, pluralism severs the link between religious experiences and their proposed explanation. Pluralism substitutes a foreign explanation for religious experiences which are understood according to one' s own tradition. What we have in Hick is a case of religious non-realism, where there is nothing behind religion, and no reason to explain it as more than wish-fulfillment or fantasy. By formulating the Real in the way Hick does, we cannot say that it exists, and thus lose the explanation for the multiplicity which we were trying to explain. Pluralism is ultimately bad news for each and every religion, not the good news for multiplicity which it was intended to be. Instead of explaining the multiplicity of religions, pluralism explains them away.

Pluralism's flaws are serious enough that it seems impossible for us to adopt the position as our own with any intellectual integrity. Its lure for some time was also, however, strong enough that scholars were hard pressed to put forward any alternative vision. So pressing was the desire, yet so out of reach was the possibility of a unifying and affirming vision of religious multiplicity, that arguably the only systematic attempt made between the 1989 advent of Hick's *Interpretation of Religion*, the 1997 appearance of Dupuis's, and then the 2001 publication of Heim's work, was by Schubert Ogden in his book, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*[24] In this work, Ogden countered the pluralist hypothesis with the weaker claim not that there *are* multiple true religions, but that there *may* be. The breadth of Ogden's scholarship and his deep understanding of the literature up until that point ensured that he would not repeat the logical inconsistency already seen to be at the heart of pluralism—yet his modest proposal was hardly a satisfactory development.

Thus it was eight years later that Jacques Dupuis courageously published his book *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*.[25] Monumental in its status as a work written by a prominent Roman Catholic priest which sought to affirm the independent value to the world's religions, Dupuis's work was sweeping in scope. Dupuis anchored his proposal solidly in his work as a Patristics scholar, tethering his constructive vision to the pneumatology of Iranaeus. Just as Iranaeus held that the *logos* was at work in the Greek philosophers and in Judaism, Dupuis held that the *logos* and the Holy Spirit continue to be at work in the religions of our day. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Confucianism, and other traditions are all vehicles of delivery for the grace of God and the attainment of salvation for their members.

Even if we read the documents of the Second Vatican Council as holding tenuously to the necessity of Jesus himself and the Holy Spirit for the salvation of members of non-Christian religious traditions, Dupuis is clearly a radical step beyond *Nostrae Aetate* and *Gaudiem et Spes*. When read in the context of later Church documents—*Dominus Iesus* (*DI*) and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (*DP*) in particular, documents which certainly depart from Vatican II—in flavor if not seeking to reverse its teachings outright. Dupuis's proposal cannot but be seen as courageous. To hold clearly that non-Christian religions are mediators of salvation without the necessity of the Church acting as middleman clearly counters the spirit of *DI* and *DP*, both of which represent a political shift within the Church that had already gained great momentum at the time of Dupuis's work. That he was sanctioned should have come as no surprise.[26]

What is fascinating about Dupuis's inclusive pluralism is that he seeks to hold together both orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and does an extremely clever job. By appealing to the pre-incarnate *logos* and then the Holy Spirit as the activity within non-Christian religions, Dupuis accounts for religious multiplicity as actively willed by God. Inclusive

pluralism sounds very much like it is affirming religious multiplicity by recourse to traditional Christian teachings.

Such, unfortunately, is not *quite* the case. Though for many the following critique may not be upsetting, for the very persons Dupuis's proposal is meant to appease and enlighten—traditional Catholics, especially the hierarchy—the critique makes inclusive pluralism an unacceptable option. While Dupuis accounts for multiple religions by using the traditional notions of the Holy Spirit and preincarnate *logos*, he separates the preincarnate *logos* from the person of Jesus, effectively creating a fourth person of the Trinity.

While the *logos* did pre-exist the incarnation, the two are ontologically inseparable in Catholic teaching. Salvation is not mediated by some free-floating, independent agent called "the word" who then just happened to take form as this person from Judea who was the son of Mary. Instead, the *logos* is absolutely and essentially tied to the person of Jesus, and the incarnation is a necessary part of the *oikonomia*, God's bringing about of salvation for humanity. The *logos* is the pre-existent third person of the Trinity, who is one with Jesus incarnate. Dupuis separates the two so that the one may be at work before the advent of the person of Jesus, and in communities and persons with no historical relationship to the one we call savior. Only after Jesus may one say that the logos incarnate is at work.

Thus traditionalists must fail to be satisfied. On the other side of the coin, and more relevant to the narrative of inter-religious work under discussion, Dupuis's move to account for religious multiplicity by recourse to our own ontology is methodologically identical to the move made by S. Mark Heim in his book *The Depths of the Riches*. Both seek to give independent soteriological[27] value to the multiple religions, but *this value is accounted for by our own ontology*.

Thus in Dupuis's inclusive pluralism, non-Christian religions are truly effective mediators of salvation, but this is explained in terms of their mediation of two persons of the Christian Trinity. While these traditions may be valuable apart from Christianity, their own self-understanding remains terribly misguided about the nature of what they are accomplishing and how they are accomplishing it. Though Dupuis holds that Christians can and ought to learn from Buddhists and Hindus and Jews because they have wisdom-responses to God we may not yet have attained, it is nonetheless the case that their ultimate explanations of the world and its source and end remain at the very least partial, and at the very worst misguided. Though granting separate value to religions apart from their participation in the Church, inclusive pluralism still accounts for the existence of multiple religions by recourse to our own abstract ontology. Non-Christian religions remain secondarily or derivatively good, with their value derived from participating in a vision of which they do not consider themselves a part.

Thus Dupuis's inclusive pluralism is objectionable both to magisterial adherents concerned with orthodox understandings of the unity of Christ incarnate and the *logos*, and also to those on the quest for a truly affirmative understanding of the status and dignity before God of non-Christian religions and their members. Whichever audience Dupuis's *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* is thought to best address, the progress it makes is tempered by the problems it creates given the concerns of either group.

S. Mark Heim offers an alternative post-pluralist vision in his book *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*[28] in which he uses the relational nature of the Christian Trinity as a whole to account for religious multiplicity. Especially exciting to feminists and followers of contemporary Greek Orthodox thinking on the Trinity,[29] Heim's multiple religious ends thesis affirms that different religions are giving primacy to and responding primarily to different aspects of God's nature, and that

the religious ends that members of these religions seek are relationships with the different *personae* of the Trinitarian God. While only Christians attain the fullness of salvation in union with the blessed Trinity as a whole, Jews and Muslims have sought and come into communion with God the Father; Hindus with Christ as incarnation; and Buddhists attain Nirvana, which is participation in the space between the persons of the Trinity. Cleverly giving non-Christians the ends they desire and preserving the Trinitarian formulation of God, Heim's M.R.E. thesis is novel in its approach. For the first time in inter-religious conversation, a Christian is finding a way to hold that non-Christians actually attain their specified religious ends. Instead of attempting to affirm the religions themselves, or the value of their members in our own framework, Heim affirms the existence of the ends each religion points its members towards.

Yet because these ends are accounted for by the Christian Trinity, union with the entirety of God's nature must still be privileged as the fullness of salvation. Anything other than the beatific vision is a partial and thus inferior manifestation of relationship with God. After the appealing idea that multiple religious ends are but *different* ways of relating to God, Heim resorts to ranking the ends. After Christians, Jews and Muslims fare best, as their relationship with God the Father is the next fullest participation in divine life. Hindus are next in line in Heim's evaluation, as relationship with God incarnate is still better than the relationship with God experienced by Buddhists—participation in the nothingness, the space between the persons of the Trinity which makes the *personae* possible. Ultimately, Nirvana is but a small taste of participation in divine life.

Heim is forced into this problematic ranking by the thesis that it is, as in Dupuis's inclusive pluralism, our Christian ontology which accounts for non-Christian religions, or in this case ends. Both inclusive pluralism and the M.R.E. thesis are methodologically identical in reaffirming that non-Christian religions—whether in their salvific efficacy or efficacy at attainment of other religious ends for their members—are accounted for by the God of Christian understanding. Heim's non-Christians attain the ends they seek, but similarly to Dupuis's inclusive pluralism, they do so because of their participation in the rightness of an abstract ontology which is different from their own. They get what they want, but not for the reasons they think. This is far from granting multiple religions and their members equal status. Again, affirmation of difference is derivative and grants only second-class status to the Other and her tradition.

The conundrum of post-pluralist inter-religious positions is that they remain on the quest for an abstract, ontological explanation that will affirm religious systems which stand in conflict with their own. The critique of pluralism as "unilism," its failure to recommend itself over religiously transformational positions with their concomitant ways of life, its reliance on a propositional theory of truth, and its disclosure as a religiously non-realist position ought to be enough to halt the quest of this narrative trajectory which has been shown to instantiate further internal inconsistency. The attempt to work outside of or invert our own abstract, onto-theological thinking results in self-contradictions, for we cannot at the same time hold that our explanation is right and that other, conflicting explanations are right. This is the insight that drove Dupuis and Heim back into a confessional stance in the first place. Yet by turning to confessional *ontology* rather than the radical example of Jesus which we find in liberation theologies, Dupuis's and Heim's creative and courageous work becomes subject to the self-contradiction which plagued Hick's onto-theological pluralism.

We need not attempt to get beyond or invert our own religious traditions to achieve the inter-religious affirmation so many have sought. We do, however, have to abandon the quest for an abstract ontological explanation, and turn instead to other resources which do the work we seek. Herein lies the gift of liberation theologies,

especially feminist and postcolonial theologies, for Christians and those whose work is informed by Christianity. When we approach our tradition from the call of the marginalized, the oppressed, and the vulnerable, we hear the cry for justice. We hear the message that the God we understand to have revealed God's very self in the crucified, broken one is clearly the God of the poor. God did not choose the incarnation as a way to reveal power, wrath, and glory. Instead, God chose to reveal God's very self as open, receptive, and loving to the persons society judged unwelcome: the sick, the shunned, the powerless who were so by virtue of their station in life. Whether because of ethnicity (the Syrophoenician woman in Matthew 15 or the Good Samaritan of Luke 10), their sex (Mary and Martha sitting with Jesus in Luke 10, the woman anointing Jesus' feet with her hair and oil in Luke 7:44, the woman at the well in John 4:1-26), their work (the tax collectors and prostitutes mentioned in Matthew 21:32 who will be going to heaven), or their health conditions (persons suffering from leprosy or other conditions in Luke 7:21-2), in Christianity we believe that God affirmed that it was *these* persons who were and remain God's chosen people.[30] It is not the rich, not the accepted, not the powerful—not the "insiders" who inhabit the dominant paradigm of success and belonging on whose side God revealed God's self to be. Instead, God is specially on the side of those whom the dominant paradigm of this fallen world casts out to the margins. Further, God witnessed to us by example that God is found in the suffering, broken persons society crucifies for calling out for a new vision and way of life. Those whose messages are *not* heard, *not* adopted as truth by those in the majority, are where God incarnates God's self. We need not attempt to escape or invert our ontological theory as Hick and then Dupuis and Heim did. Instead, we can draw from the heart of our tradition in the person of Jesus to affirm the worth and standing and privileged epistemology of those outside the dominant narrative—in this case the non-Christian and her religious tradition.[31]

Within the intra-Christian theological narrative of liberation, these people are the landless, the poor, women, persons of color, Latinos and Latinas, gay men and lesbian women, H.I.V. positive persons, and the homeless.[32] When postcolonial theory comes to the fore, these people include the colonized, the raped, those whose cultures and ways of thinking have been eradicated by invading societies whose visions and ways of life were thought to be superior. Whatever stripe of liberation theology we look to, the call is for attention to and care for the weak as the locus of God and God's saving presence.

In the words of Kwok Pui Lan, postcolonial theology is a "reading strategy and…practice which seeks to unmask colonial [or dominant] epistemological frameworks, unravel Eurocentric [or dominant] logics, and interrogate stereotypical cultural [or dominant] representations."[33] It is a way to lay bare the prejudices and cultural stereotypes that cover up the good news of God's liberating message. In the words of Elizabeth Johnson, feminist theology seeks the good of "women and all marginalized persons."[34] Throughout liberation theologies from Gustavo Gutierrez[35] to Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz,[36] from Kwok Pui Lan's postcolonial message to Rosemary Radford Ruether's feminist ecological work,[37] the call is made to see God where God resides: in the suffering of powerless creation.

When we carry the methodology and insight of liberation theologies outside the intra-Christian dialogue to inter-religious work, the oppressed, vulnerable, shunned outsiders are clearly those—when viewed from the economically dominant Christian West—who do not share our religious vision and economic resources in the Christian West. To the degree one feels or claims superiority, by the methodology and insights of liberation theology, she must hold that those who fall outside the dominant narrative are privileged. If we are to look for God's very presence in those who inhabit the margins of society and belongingness, then there is no better place to look than to those categories

of person who have been sidelined by our Christian claims which are now the dominant narrative in the West and too often unconsciously influential in the developing world.[38] Whether exclusivist, inclusivist, pluralist, or post-pluralist, these models guaranteed and continue to guarantee that anyone who disagrees with Christian ontological explanation is an outsider: someone whose participation in the good news is at worst impossible and at best derivative and secondary through the sheer force of our dominant narrative. Liberation theology has worked for the good of the economically poor, women, women of color, Hispanic women, and the colonized, to name but some categories of the vulnerable. It is now being put to use to work for the well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons. It is time to put liberation theology's insight and commitment to work in the inter-religious arena so that persons who are marginalized by their practice of religion—who suffer discrimination, condemnation, shunning, and lack of power due to their inhabiting of a marginalized group are similarly seen as occupying a privileged epistemic location.

Thus the corrective to tradition-based inter-religious work is simple: turn to the example of Jesus himself, not the theory which later came to explain him. Reject the abstract onto-theological approach. In adopting the insight and methodology of liberation theologies in our approach to inter-religious work, we reverse the narrative of alterity. She who was thought to embody absence comes immediately to signify divine presence. She who was the one left out, whom we thought was the problem of the "Other" which needed solving, is the insider and locus of God's special presence. Though like the Pharisees who were the privileged class of Jesus' day we Christians in the West may not be receptive to the liberating message, our resistance ought not block the clear wisdom that is available to inter-religious work from liberation theology. She who is marginalized, excluded from the dominant narrative, is exactly the presence of God. When the message of liberation theology—that God is on the side of the oppressed—is carried to inter-religious dialogue, the result is clearly that we must say that the God of Jesus is on the side of the non-Christian.

If it is the non-Christian who is the marginalized one and the marginalized are God's chosen people, where does this leave the Christian? Are we of the dominant narrative now the subaltern? The beauty of the Christian message is that there is enough God to go around. The rich man may have a harder time, but it is possible that he, too, will enter the kindom of heaven. Women were among Jesus' followers and most beloved friends, yet James and John left their worldly situation and became followers as well. Gentiles became swept up in the movement, and the Good Samaritan is clearly one whom Jesus helps up as an example—without his ever having changed his beliefs or status as one with the resources to help the downtrodden. Christianity is potentially good news for all, even the privileged, if they are willing to follow Jesus' example of behavior toward the weak and disincluded. The understanding of God as abundant across categories, not stingily present, needs reclamation. This is why some of us remain confessional Christians (meaning practicing, believing, participating), even when our tradition has been used and continues to be used for harm.

Dupuis and Heim are a significant step forward, because their systems allow that God wills the way of the religious "Other." She is not merely saved—or does not merely attain her religious end—*despite* the system to which she belongs. She attains her religious fulfillment *because* of her own religion. Her salvation or attainment of religious end is a direct consequent of the way God willed her into being through God's own nature. Whether through the Holy Spirit or the function of various persons of the Trinity, God intentionally reaches out to all persons, thus eviscerating the problematic consequence of holding to the typical Trinitarian God who ignores the vast majority of God's created people over time.

We do not, however, have to juryrig our own ontology. Doing so got both Dupuis and Heim into difficulties. For Dupuis, the preexistent *logos* became separated from the incarnate Christ, creating a fourth person of the Trinity. Further, non-Christians remain misguided about their religious beliefs and ends, continuing the tradition of a God who chooses or allows most persons to live in ignorance and error. For Heim, non-Christians get different but lesser religious ends than salvation, the very concept of human nature is called into question, and non-Christians are again wrong about their religious beliefs. The creative, courageous work of both Dupuis and Heim shows that the continued attempt to work with abstract ontology in order to grant insider or equal status to persons outside our religious traditions is as problematic as it is helpful.

Dupuis's and Heim's methodology is, however, crucial. In the face of pluralism's internal problems, turning away from the quest for a meta-position on religions is imperative, even if they only went so far as to return to a tradition-bound ontology. Yet we must radicalize the content of that turn. Let us turn back to our own tradition but turn that tradition on its head. The witness of Jesus himself gives us license to do just this, and the methodology and commitment of theologies of liberation show us what to do. Jesus is on the side of the marginalized and powerless, the non-Christian. We need look no further than the self-understanding of the one who theory would tell us is the mediator of salvation to find our greatest resource for affirming the religious Other.

My response to Hick is that I am not a dogmatic Christian theologian. I am, and others of this new generation of scholars are as well, heartbroken fans of the pluralist hypothesis. In the wake of its shortcomings, we are scrambling within our own inescapable traditions to find the resources to approximate the goods which Hick's all-inclusive Real and the transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness were meant to accomplish. In my own tradition, the radical God of Jesus comes to the rescue. She has taken a preferential option for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Christianity is our dominant narrative. God is on the side of the non-Christian.

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[1] Hick actually writes that *I* am a "dogmatic Christian theologian," something that made my head of department laugh and which, since I teach at a Roman Catholic university, I will save to one day use to defend myself to the bishop. Ad hominem quips aside, one can understand Hick to be saying by extension that when one does what I suggest one cannot help but do—namely, restrict the quest for affirming religious multiplicity to tradition-informed approaches—one is doing dogmatic theology.

[2] The distinction in terminology is important, and worthy of an article examining the evolution in the use of these two terms. "Inter-religious dialogue" has, for some time, been taken to mean inter-religious engagement done from a neutral stance, in which one does not privilege her own tradition's truth claims. "Theology of religions," on the other hand, meant engagement from a standpoint with commitment to one religion. Today the two are difficult to separate, as the trend in "inter-religious dialogue" is to engage in conversation from a standing in one's home religion. See, for instance, much of the work in *The Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue*. I deliberately use the terms "inter-religious

dialogue" and "theology of religions" here to include both recent conversations which are now overlapping and becoming one as confessional approaches dominate the work.

[3] Jeannine Hill Fletcher's book *Monopoly on Salvation: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (NY: Continuum, 2005) begins to challenge this claim. As more women and liberation theologians become engaged in the inter-religious work which is today taking off like wildfire—see, for instance, the two new journals *The Journal of Inter-religious Dialogue* and *The Journal of Comparative Theology* devoted to the topic—it is to be hoped that the gap between these two facets of systematic theology will close.

[4] It is characteristic of institutional power structures that movements which share commitments are kept separate from each other, with the understanding that the aims of both cannot come about so that a person has to choose his or her commitments. Take, for example, the movements for women's ordination and married clergy within the Roman Catholic Church. It is frequently conceded by moderate members of the hierarchy that we may, one day, see married clergy. Thus we will never need women priests, or so the argument goes. Pitting one group demanding equal rights against another, what is often called the "divide and conquer" method, is common and effective. And when an institutional religion is so all-pervasive in its exclusionary tendencies—from silencing radical calls to social and economic action in Latin America to excluding women from the priesthood and non-Christians from equal standing before God—it is difficult to imagine the dominant thinking and practices in even one of these subjects changing, let alone all of them. Thus many of us come to do inter-religious work *or* liberation theology *or* feminist theology *or* eco-theology. We feel we will be more effective in bringing about change if we focus our efforts on one facet of injustice. And while this may be true in the short run, separating calls for justice, which are all rooted in similar understandings of the God of radical presence, love and justice belie the truth that the entire order of privileged hierarchy needs to change. Imagine a Church in which traditional liberation theologians, feminists, womanists, mujeristas, queer theorists, eco-theologians and people doing inter-religious work all stood together shouting "Justice!" How much more powerful we would be all standing together. Ensuring this does not happen is the business of institutionalized systems of injustice, and the very reason why "cross-over" between religious discourses is imperative.

[5] This will be especially problematic for Heim's Multiple Religious Ends Thesis, in which non-Christians achieve religious ends derived from the Christian Trinity and which are thus inferior to full Christian understanding of God and full soteriological attainment. The worst part of Heim's M.R.E. thesis is that if God knowingly creates persons who will only have the option of choosing non-Christian religious ends, God has created persons for different, unequal ends. If one takes teleology seriously, being slotted for different, more and less valuable ends destroys the idea of human nature, and has the potential to justify ranking the value and potential uses of what is ordinarily—nowadays, at least—considered equally valuable human life. See *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), throughout.

[6] I deliberately use the term "kindom" instead of "kingdom" following feminist and liberation theologians, most recently the authors in *Shoulder to Shoulder: Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology*, Edited by Susan Abraham and Elena Procario-Foley (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010). Because *king*dom signifies hierarchical domination and

the continuation of unequal relationships between subjects, feminist and other liberation theologians are trading this term in for *kin*dom to signal the existence of right relationships at the coming of the eschaton.

[7] Bartholomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

[8] William James first coined the term "live option" to refer to what choices are actually possible and realistic for people in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Classic Books International, 2010), throughout.

[9] Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non Christian Religions* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1965).

[10] The Catholic Church, *Gaudiem et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965).

[11] It seems clear that the Council documents are deliberately and exceedingly careful to juxtapose these two possibilities. There are certainly places in *Nostra Aetate* especially where it sounds very much as though religions are agents of grace in their own right, yet others where Jesus and even the Church are clearly said to be necessary agents of mediation. Though there is a vociferous movement in the Roman Church today to be "conciliar,"—code for re-reading Vatican II in such a way as to negate the independent value of non-Christian religions—this movement is indubitably historically inaccurate. Whether we accept Vatican II or reject its nuanced articulations, we ought certainly to take the Council for what it was: a radical moment in the history of Christianity, and one which had great confidence in the present workings of the Holy Spirit.

[12] Gandhi is reputed to have first coined this phrase regarding the paucity of incarnation in Christianity.

[13] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[14] Though it is the subject of another article, it should be strongly noted that this formulation of spiritual transformation is extremely problematic when viewed in light of Valerie Saiving Goldstein's seminal piece "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40: 100, Issue 2, April 1960 and much feminist theology which comes after her work. Several essays in the collection *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies From the* Underside, Edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engels (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998) as well as the first three essays in *Shoulder to Shoulder: Frontiers in Catholic Feminist* Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) are all strongly rooted in Saiving Goldstein's critique. These are but the first two of many feminist works which come to mind as tracing their heritage back to what has come to be known as the logic of "the sin of hiding." Serene Jones, in her *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000) 193 and following, continues to make extensive use of Saiving Goldstein's observations, and highlights the many feminist theorists and theologians who surround her and who work to honor the subjectivity of women. Hick's understanding that the problematic human condition can and should be universally

characterized as self-centered utterly ignores Saiving Goldstein's thesis that women (and other marginalized persons) suffer not from self-centeredness but a lack of self. To suggest that all persons should work towards becoming less self-centered and move towards centering on the Real fails to take into account that women and other marginalized persons first need to develop a sense of self, a centered subjectivity which is to be honored before God or the Real, before we might rightly be directed to become more outwardly centered, even towards the Ultimate. To encourage persons who lack developed subjectivity to become more selfless is to exacerbate, not ameliorate, their sin. Thus feminists accuse Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as the Christian tradition at large, of basing all sin in the sin of pride. This understanding makes the spiritual situation of women worse rather than helping them towards soteriological transformation, as those who already behave in selflessly self-destructive ways are urged to give more to others rather than take stock of and honor their own flourishing. See again Serene Jones's *Cartographies of Grace* throughout. Because Hick, just like Niebuhr, universalizes selfishness or self-centeredness as the universal human condition, his thinking is vulnerable to the same critiques that have problematized Niebuhr's work and much Christian theology.

[15] The first of these critiques was made by Paul Griffiths, both in his lectures at the University of Notre Dame in the summer of 1993, and then in his book *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994). Though he does not mention Hick by name, see his critique of esoteric expressivism and its internal incoherence. Also see Delmas Lewis's article "On Grading Religions, Seeking Truth, and Being Nice to People—A Reply to Professor Hick," in *The Journal of Religious Studies*, 19 (1983): 75-80. S. Mark Heim was clearly also aware of pluralism's problems and working towards his counter proposal when he wrote *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1995) which was then followed by his constructive vision of multiple religious ends accounted for by the Trinity in *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[16] An even more detailed analysis of the pluralist hypothesis's shortcomings will be presented in the forthcoming book *Pluralists, Feminists, Panentheists: The Cosmological Shift Behind Inclusive Theologies*. At this time, an abbreviated version of the critiques which nonetheless contains the essence of what is at stake should be convincing enough.

[17] Griffiths used this wording in lectures at the University of Notre Dame in the summer of 1993.

[18] Interestingly, the Anglo American philosopher Nicholas Rescher makes a similar point in his orientational pluralism. See Nicholas Rescher *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Rescher is also used by S. Mark Heim in his *Depths of the Riches*, see footnote 5.

[19] This is, of course, a variant of Paul Griffiths's famous example in *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

[20] This criticism is made by Daniel Dennett, Hilary Putnam, and Paul and Patricia Churchland, to name but a few.

[21] Hick should admit that a few things can be predicated of the Real—causality, that it engenders the appropriate responses which he says constitute the attitudes of the religions and that it exists. This would protect pluralism against non-realist charges. Even limited predication would, however, clearly make use of a propositional theory of truth, which is what Hick attempts to avoid.

[22] Kant at least held that the transcendental concepts like number applied to the noumenon, which is Kant's idea upon which Hick is basing the Real. Though no concepts apply to the Kantian divine, Hick is using the noumenon instead of the divine as the Real. Thus he seems to be taking Kant a step further by excluding all predication of the noumenally-based Real. It seems fair to say that being an inconsistent Kantian is what gets Hick into trouble.

[23] Hick does not give an adequate explanation of how the Real acts on us, which is exactly the point. While it is supposed to be the cause of all religions, he cannot even predicate that it exists, let alone how it acts.

[24] Schubert Ogden, *Is There One True Religion or Are There Many?* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992). S. Mark Heim also wrote the book *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), but this book was far less of a systematic vision than a critique of positions to date and the beginning of his thinking on both the work of Nicolas Rescher and the Trinity—both central resourses for his later work *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (see also footnote 11).

[25] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001).

[26] We laughed in a Ph.D. seminar I taught, when we noticed that many covers of students' newer copies of *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Ends* had been misprinted. Though Dupuis was eventually cleared and the book re-printed with a warning in the front, these book covers read only *Toward a Theology of Religious Ends,* omitting the word *Christian*, and it was surmised that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith might have gotten to the publishers since Cardinal Ratzinger became Pope!

[27] In Heim, of course, we cannot speak about "soteriology," because the term is Christocentic. Heim is not asserting that non-Christians attain salvation, but rather that they attain their own ends through the agency of the Trinity. Better, in Heim one ought to speak about "ends-attaining" value, but this is perhaps too awkward to be viable in writing.

[28] Ibid.

[29] I have in mind the hybrid group of Trinitarian theologians following Catherine Mowry Lacugna who turn to relational ontology. In Lacugna's book *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), Lacugna made extensive use of John Zizioulas's work, especially that which culminated in his *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997). *God For Us*, though it was not a self-professedly feminist work—and Lacugna

herself in 1993 lectures at the University of Notre Dame declared that she was not a feminist theologian—was the advent of relational ontology in Roman Catholic thinking. Many Catholic feminist theologians are indebted to Lacugna, though not all realize that she was the first to introduce the relational ontology which is now sometimes taken for granted and which is operative in Heim's Multiple Religious Ends thesis.

[30] Many of these figures have also been retrieved as having great significance in ways the patriarchal Christian tradition has overlooked or covered up. The woman at the well accepts Jesus as the messiah and goes and converts her people—something prophets do. The woman who anoints Jesus' feet foretells his death, for anointing with oil was a practice surrounding burial—also the function of a prophet. For how and why we have withheld this title from women in the Bible, see Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

[31] Of course one cannot escape the confines of her or his social-historical, epistemic location, and must always acknowledge the role which this location plays in the reading of texts, including and perhaps especially sacred texts. Yet the move to privilege a Biblically rather than a dogmatically or doctrinally-based Christianity which is here proposed ought not to be seen as threatened by the problematic of hermeneutics. Instead, by returning to text which is always and everywhere shaped by reader commitments but which indisputably contains multiple stories about the one who reaches out to the marginalized, we prioritize the stories which—no matter how they are interpreted—multiply witness to Jesus (whatever his status or our location) as committed to the oppressed. This return to a Biblically based Christianity is one way to be a confessional Christian, but will be challenging to those traditions—e.g. Catholicism and Anglicanism, for example—which are rigorously bound by dogmatic confessions.

[32] It is Marcella Althaus-Reid who has now pushed liberation theology past its own margins. She not only included gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons in the call for justice, she intersected Latin American social and economic theologies of liberation with sexuality. Althaus-Reid thus engenders a new, multivalent vision of liberation. This methodology—of crossing concerns which ordinarily remain bifurcated—is an excellent example of the vision suggested in the first footnote of this article that liberation theology meets inter-religious work. See Marcella Althaus-Reid, ed., *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* (Chippenham: Anthony Rowe Ltd., 2006) See also my review in Blackwell's *Reviews in Theology and Religion*, Spring 2010.

[33] Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p.2. I add the language of "dominant" not to detract from the postcolonial project but to re-cast attention to the common, broader commitment of all liberation theologies in their particularity. One should never detract from the particularity of the postcolonial project, as to do so reinstantiates the Eurocentric bias which is at issue. Thus I consciously use Kwok Pui-Lan's to make my inter-religious point about the usefulness of liberation theologies, but do not want to appear to usurp or take lightly the importance of the particularity of her work.

[34] Throughout her book *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), this definition of feminism and feminist

theology has become commonplace. See also Serene Jones's *Cartographies of Grace*, previously mentioned, especially the introduction.

[35] See, among other works, his *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

[36] See both *En la Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology, 10th Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003) and her short essay on the remnant in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, Edited by Mary Potter Engels and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

[37] See, from among many other examples, her *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

[38] See, of course, the blossoming work in postcolonial theory. A main theme in poco theory is how indigenous people are unwittingly formed by the colonizer's culture, religion and mentality and that it is crucial to actively resist the colonizer's imaginative mindset and retrieve indigenous religion, culture and self-understanding. Whether this is possible and how retrieval is itself subject to the imprint of colonialism is, of course, the problem.

Dialogue in Practice: a Special Section of *The Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue*

Current American discourse on religion and ethics is primarily defined by established leaders – ministers, rabbis, academics and journalists. There is an entire population of important stakeholders without a platform: the up-and-comers. To remedy this, *The Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Hebrew College, Andover Newton Theological School, and The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions have joined forces to create *State of Formation*, a forum for up-and-coming religious thinkers to draw upon the learning that is occurring in their academic and community work, reflect on the pressing questions of a religiously pluralistic society, and challenge existing religious definitions.

State of Formation is a community conversation between leaders in formation. Together, a cohort of seminarians, rabbinical students, graduate students, activists and the like – the future religious and moral leaders of tomorrow – are working to redefine the ethical discourse today.

In this section, Lawrence A. Whitney, a writer from *State of Formation* engages with Aimee Light's article, "Is Jesus on the Side of the Non-Christian?" In this exchange, we find modeled a frank exchange of ideas, new perspectives, careful querying, and a sharing of background and interest—the very best of dialogue.

"Poor Jesus: No Place to Stand," a Response to Aimee Upjohn Light's Essay: " Is Jesus on the Side of the Non-Christian?" By Lawrence A. Whitney

We owe Aimee Upjohn Light a debt of gratitude for her identification of an important contemporary trend in interreligious dialogue and for her nascent articulation of a theological position to support this trend. In this response I aim to introduce some distinctions in order to render a more complex view of the sector of theology in which interreligious dialogue resides at present and to raise some concerns about Dr. Light's theological position. But before turning to the response proper, allow me to register the ambiguous position of a respondent in the midst of an ongoing conversation between Light and John Hick:[1] one is wont to feel a bit the third wheel, so to speak. The role of a respondent, thus, is that of the awkward interjector seeking to disrupt the discussion such that the circle of conversation might be widened.

Light spends the bulk of the present article rehearsing a set of arguments and counterarguments within the pluralist position among theologies of religions. This sentence requires unpacking. First, Light is identifying a particular trajectory among pluralist positions. This is to say that there is more than one way to be a pluralist, and that the strain of pluralism Light takes issue with is that most closely associated with perennialism, and within the perennialist camp that associated with John Hick. Alternatively, it is possible to be a sociological pluralist, i.e. to simply recognize the fact of increasing religious diversity and interaction. Or one could be an activist pluralist and claim that in spite of their differences, members of religious traditions have enough in common to be partners in working toward a better world. My own proclivity is toward comparative pluralism, which acknowledges that religious traditions and their practitioners are similar and different in a variety of respects, and that both the similarities and differences are fruitful grounds for engagement. Other options are available as well. Critiquing the perennialist pluralist camp is hardly novel, and John Hick is singled out for critique in particular by Heim and others, perhaps most notably Gavin D'Costa.[2] Finally, writing off the perennialist pluralist position too quickly is likely a mistake given its historical strength in the mystical strains of so many of the world's religions.

Second, Light engages with a number of thinkers across several related fields, the contours of which are important for understanding their goals and motivations. On the one hand there are philosophers of religions who are attempting to provide a philosophical framework for understanding the multiplicity of religious traditions and how they can best be rationally understood together. Hick is clearly in this camp, with his pluralist perennialism, as is S. Mark Heim in his early work, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*,[3] in which he provides the philosophical basis for the multiple religious ends thesis. There is an important distinction between this group, which seeks to provide a philosophical framework, and theologians of religions, who are instead trying to provide what Light would term a confessional framework for understanding the multiplicity of religious traditions. Theology of religions seeks to understand religions on the terms of the tradition the theology purports to represent. This is the work undertaken by both Dupuis and Heim in his later volume, *The Depth of the Riches*. It is important to note that Heim functions, alternately, in both camps, which is not to blur the distinction but rather to acknowledge that he can operate with different motivations and goals appropriate to the hat he is wearing at the time.

Neither philosophy of religions nor theology of religions, though, is necessarily intended as grounds for interreligious dialogue. They are, instead, what they claim to be,

namely attempts to understand religions in their diversity, as opposed to strategies to bring representatives of religious traditions to the dialogue table. An excellent example of what would constitute the latter is Catherine Cornille's recent book, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*.[4] Furthermore, it is not clear that the logical inconsistencies of perennialist pluralism necessarily require demurring from all theoretical, (i.e. abstract and ontological), considerations when attempting to interpret religions. The Cross-Cultural Comparative Religious Ideas Project hosted in the 1990s here at Boston University employed a proto-pragmatist methodology, (as opposed to the Rortian neo-pragmatist method Light rightly critiques), to develop a variety of vague categories that can serve as the basis for mutual understanding amidst both similarity and difference in multiple respects.[5]

Turning to the all too brief constructive section at the end of the article, Light is to be commended for her constructive appropriation of liberation theology into the project of theology of religions. (To be clear, I understand her here operating as a theologian of religions, not a theorist of interreligious dialogue). Nevertheless, there are two challenges to liberation theology that deserve attention. First, liberation theology is currently deeply out of favor, to the point of persecution, by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, thus calling into question whether it can serve as a helpful framework for Catholics to understand other religions, let alone as a basis of interreligious dialogue.[6] Second, and sociologically speaking, liberation theology at the moment is demographically a minority position within Roman Catholicism and Christianity more broadly; as Peter Berger likes to note, the Roman Catholic church opted for the poor, and the poor opted for Pentecostalism.

This leads to a final point that should be on the table for conversation out of Light's article. If the discipline of religious studies has taught us anything over the course of the past century, it is that religions are not monolithic. Not only do different people appropriate their traditions differently, but also a single person is likely to appropriate the symbols of their tradition (or traditions) differently in different circumstances. This means that throwing all of our eggs in the liberative Jesus basket risks leaving out the atoning Jesus, the cosmic Christ, and Jesus the teacher of wisdom, among other symbols of Jesus that have been integral to the Christian tradition to different degrees at different times and in different circumstances.[7] This is to say that Jesus is not any one thing only, and that Jesus cannot be said to stand in only one place. Neither can Jesus' followers interpret the world in light of Jesus in only one way, or be expected to share in any one common interpretation. The problem with confessionalism is not in its contrast with pluralism, but instead is that it overstates the ability of any tradition to speak with one voice, and of any theologian to represent the tradition as a whole.

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[1] The article to which the present response is offered is the third installment in a conversation begun by Light in "Harris, Hick, and the Demise of the Pluralist Hypothesis." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. 44.3 (Summer 2009): 467-70. Hick

responded to Light in John Hick. "A Brief Response to Aimee Upjohn Light." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. 44.4 (Fall 2009): 691-92.

[2] Gavin D'Costa. *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000). ed. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: the Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990).

[3] S. Mark Heim. *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

[4] Catherine Cornille. *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*. (New York: Crossroad, 2008).

[5] Robert Cummings Neville, ed. *Ultimate Realities, The Human Condition,* and *Religious Truth*. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001). See also the project website at http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/proj_crip.htm

[6] Consider, for example, the plight of Roger Haight especially regarding his book *Jesus: Symbol of God*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999).

[7] Robert Cummings Neville. *Symbols of Jesus: A Christology of Symbolic Engagement*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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