GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

JOURNAL & NEWSLETTER, FALL 2024

Loyola Marymount University

Theological Studies

Earn your master's degree in our highly recognized and accredited graduate theological studies programs.

Theology or Pastoral Theology

Learn more about our wonderful scholarship packages and open house events.

Learn. Lead. Serve.

Graduate Theological Studies Program

bellarmine.lmu.edu/gradtheo

Jennifer.Scott@lmu.edu

310.338.7772

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL STUDIES JOURNAL & NEWSLETTER

FEATURES

Introduction to Graduate Theological Studies Journal and Newsletter, Fall 2024

Jesus chided the religious authorities of his day because he said that they could "read" the signs of simple things like the weather, but couldn't "read" the far more important "signs of the times" (Mt. 16:3). It is still a powerful challenge – because one of the primary tasks of theology is also to read the "signs of the times", and to engage scripture, tradition, and the theological imaginatioan to discern how we are called to "read" – and then respond - to those times.

As the articles in this edition of the Joural indicate, LMU students, alumni, and faculty are deeply engaged in that work of trying to read signs of the times, and the articles selected for this issue are snapshots of their labor. What are some of these signs?

The future, for example, is filled with challenges! As a community for peoples of—and from—all nations (Mt. 28:19; Acts 2: 10-12), the Catholic Church continues to be enriched by the diverse experiences and unique theologies of the people who make up this large part of the Body of Christ. In the United States, about 45 percent of Catholics identify as Latino/a. That number is growing. Consequently – this is a highly significant "sign of the times". So, in her article, "Recognizing the Blessing of a Latino/a Religious Worldview," LMU Theology Professor Nancy Pineda-Madrid discusses the unique gifts that Latino/a Catholics bring to the Church. She demonstrates how popular Latino/a religious practices such as the *Posadas* and the *Dia de los Muertos* stand on par, theologically, with the more rationalistic and verbal formulations of Euro-American Catholicism. In the process, Pineda-Madrid encourages all Catholics, regardless of background, to recognize, honor, and celebrate the blessing they bring to the Church.

But some "signs" indicate warnings. In the midst of this diverse, growing, and changing US Latino/a Catholic community, LMU Theology Professors Brett Hoover and Cecilia González-Andrieu argue that there is a special need to facilitate access to theological education for *young Latino/a leaders*. In their article, "The World Needs Young Latina/o Leaders," Hoover and González-Andrieu introduce us to "Haciendo Caminos", a partnership of Catholic graduate schools of theology—including LMU—that is responding to the need to increase access to graduate theological education for young Catholics serving Hispanic communities. Funded by the Lilly Endowment, Haciendo Caminos is a promising new initiative that is already bearing much fruit.

Surely another "sign of the times", however, is ministry to those under highly stressful and challenging service careers. Also in this issue, we learn how Matt Domyancic, an alumnus of LMU's MA in Pastoral Theology program, has placed his theological education at the service of a ministry for first responders (e.g. emergency service workers). A former first responder himself, Matt is well acquainted with the unique struggles first responders face. Matt's concentration for his MA was "spiritual direction." Now, he helps first responders learn to value their career experiences as integral parts of their sacred stories.

This issue features a trio of articles by our Graduate Theological Studies students, all drawn from presentations that they each made at various gatherings or conferences. Note how each of these also point to how we must discern different "signs". For example, Darya Jones reflects on her own spiritual practices of "paying closer attention" and "becoming painfully aware." Jones views these as the building blocks for a contemplative ecology that can support one's stewardship of the earth as God's Creation.

Continuing the theme of Creation, Fr. Reuben Adzakey explores one of the most challenging "signs" of the modern time – namely how the growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) may impact Christian theological reflection on Creation. Adzakey's article is a reminder that there are ethical and theological implications to technological advancements, including AI. Finally, Br. Ignatius Williams offers a phenomenological-theological approach to interfaith dialogue based on Emmanuel Levinas' notion of "otherness." Williams argues that in interfaith dialogue, each party carries an ethical responsibility to value the difference and uniqueness of the other parties without either reducing or totalizing them. Given these conditions, Williams believes productive interfaith dialogue can occur.

Prof. Daniel Smith-Christopher offers some brief thoughts on the release of his new book: *Keir Hardie, The Bible, and Christian Socialism* (2024, T&T Clark/ Bloomsbury, London) which examines one of the founders of the British Labour Party (now overwhelmingly swept back into power in the UK after 14 years), Keir Hardie (1856-1915) and how this largely self-taught working class Scot took his Bible very seriously indeed. Are there equally compelling "signs" in looking backwards in history as well as forward to the future?

This issue of *Graduate Theological Studies Journal and Newsletter* concludes with a timely article by LMU Theology Professor Jonathan Rothchild, "Why Theological Education Still Matters." Recent years have seen a sharp decline in student interest in the humanities (the arts, literature, philosophy, etc.). This decline has been felt acutely in college departments of theology and religious studies, and has led many institutions to shutter their programs altogether. Surely a deeply concerning "sign" of the times, indeed! Drawing on recent publications by theologians and religious studies scholars—including LMU professors—Rothchild argues that there are signs of hope amidst the crisis. In a world driven by impersonal forces such as the market, theological and religious studies programs strengthen their emphasis on community, belonging, access, equity, inclusion, and dialogue. Rothchild also points out that LMU Theological Studies students, alumni, and faculty are hard at work leading and developing their professional and scholarly associations, their dioceses and archdioceses, and their churches and classrooms. Rothchild's article affirms the value of the work we do at LMU Graduate Theological Studies, and encourages us to keep doing it.

There is, however, one last important note. As one of the primary themes of this issue is discerning the future – including the challenges of AI – we have chosen to illustrate this issue with a number of AI generated art! We will identify which ones were generated, and what the 'prompt' was that we fed into the machine! AI is upon us!

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Graduate Theological Studies Journal and Newsletter*. We appreciate your interest in theological studies, and we also look forward to hearing from you and collaborating with you!

Jennifer Scott, editor

Recognizing the Blessing of a Latino/a Religious Worldview

Nancy Pineda-Madrid

"... blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." (Matt 13:16)

Informed pastors and engaged parishioners have heard many times over that US Catholic parishes are blessed by the active presence of diverse communities of Catholics. But, as many pastors know firsthand, bringing diverse communities together can be perilous work. Needless to say, language and cultural differences contribute significantly to the challenge. Misunderstandings and confusions abound. But, when thoughtfully done and with the help of God's grace, this work can lead to experiences of church that are both momentous and lasting.

While many ethnic and racial groups contribute to the diversity of the US Catholic Church, more often than not Latinos/as comprise the largest part of the mix. Catholicism is undergoing a significant shift. It is increasingly *less* a faith community made up of peoples from predominantly European ancestry, and *more* one made up of peoples of Latin American ancestry as well as peoples from Africa and Asia. The gifts borne by Latino/a Catholics matter a great deal. Not only are these gifts transforming the church of today, but also they will play an increasingly significant role in revitalizing US Catholicism in the coming decades. So, what do Latino/a Catholics have to contribute to parish life? How might a Latino/a religious worldview enrich US Catholicism?

Popular Religion

Popular religious practices (or popular Catholicism) offer the preeminent entree into a Latino/a religious worldview. These practices include the dramatic reenactments of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (drama of Mary's apparition to Juan Diego in Mexico in 1531), of the *Pastorela* (a shepherds play which portrays the struggle between good and evil), of the *Posadas* (drama of Mary and Joseph's journey in search of shelter just before Jesus' birth), of *La Via Dolorosa* (drama of Jesus' trial and crucifixion), among others. In addition to dramas, practices also take the form of rituals and symbols: for example, the creation of the *Nacimiento* (the Nativity scene which always includes animals and elements from creation like the stars), the *Pesame a la Virgen* (the offering of condolences to Mary after Jesus' death), the *Dia de los Muertos* (an altar to remember the lives of those who have gone before and to anticipate the resurrection), and the *Altares en Casa* (a home altar for regular prayer). These religious practices cultivate and deepen the faith of Latino/a Catholics by engendering a way of knowing both God's nearness and Latinos'/as' place in the world. An analogy may prove helpful. Before books were readily available, many in Europe learned their Catholicism by studying their church's stained-glass windows and sorting out the stories they depicted. In Latin America, the faithful learned Catholicism through dramas, symbols, and rituals.

Yet, how these practices are understood can be problematic. On the one hand, far too often uninformed pastors dismiss popular religious practices as superstitious, immature and syncretistic, and thus a distortion of the authentic practice of Catholicism. And, on the other hand, many devout Latino/a Catholics find themselves unable to articulate why and how their practices affirm the Catholic tradition rather than corrupt it. Each represents too limited an understanding of the gift of popular religion. Popular religious practices, rightly understood and celebrated, deepen our understanding of Catholicism, reminding us of forgotten dimensions of a rich tradition.

The phrase "popular religious practices" carries a particular meaning. The term "popular" does not refer to common, widespread, in vogue and the like. Rather, it means that the pertinent dramas, symbols, and rituals are *of the people*. Those who create and continue to practice popular religion are *the people*, more particularly, the people who have been pushed aside to the margins of society and of the church by those who carry decision-making authority. A cursory reading of the history of Latinos/as in the US Catholic Church reveals a long narrative of exclusion and disregard by church officials. Appropriating their Catholic beliefs through popular religious practices was, and is, a thoughtful strategic alternative.

Making the Faith One's Own

Popular religious practices have served as a long-term strategy for Latinos/as to hold onto their Catholic beliefs. These practices, while distinctive, are not necessarily opposed to official church teaching

and practice. But, unlike other practices of piety (e.g., the rosary), popular religious practices typically have not been promoted by the clergy or the Church hierarchy. Even so, as a strategy, popular religious practices are a blessing to the US Catholic Church. They are a reminder that to keep faith vibrant and alive, believers must appropriate their beliefs in a tangible manner, through a concrete practice. In short, *all* Catholic believers need to seek out practices that they themselves judge to be meaningful and life-giving as well as authentically Catholic.

Although these practices are creations *of the people*, their orientation is deeply consonant with the Catholic faith. Celebrations of the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* not only recall the 1531 Marian apparition, but they also offer an ideal occasion to examine the grace-filled experience of Pentecost and the birth of the church (Acts 2). This apparition marks the birth of the Catholic faith in the Americas, (see, for example, the writings of Virgilio Elizondo).

While piñatas today have taken on widely divergent meanings, the origin of the piñata is an excellent historical example of a potent popular religious practice and of Catholic catechetics in action. In the early Mexican Church, catechists invented the piñata as a means for teaching the struggle between good and evil. Piñatas were constructed as depictions of the devil. Blind-folded children were given a bat and spun around before being allowed to strike-out at the elusive piñata. Not only were children in effect blind and dizzy, the piñata itself was moved around. All of this was designed to teach how confusing and difficult it can be to challenge evil, to transcend temptation and to dismantle our hubris. Additionally, fighting evil was a community project – everyone took a turn at the piñata. When the piñata was finally broken open and evil "conquered," God's grace (symbolized as the candies spilling out) became more generously available to all. All present are welcome to gather up the candies. Thus, participants learned that fighting evil was worth the arduous effort not only for the one fortunate enough to crack open the piñata, but for the community at large. This is a good example of a religious practice reflecting basic Catholic theology.

Perceiving God's Presence in Human Struggles

Through popular Catholicism, Latino/a Catholics havecontinuously discovered the very real presence of divine mystery in the midst of their experiences of suffering, of yearning, of joy, of betrayal, of mourning—in other words—through the whole range of human struggles. For example, the ritual of the *Posadas* interprets the biblical journey of Mary and Joseph as they searched for a shelter for Jesus' birth and were turned away (Matt 2:7). As a religious practice, the *Posadas* have enabled participants to reflect on our need for shelter and our longing for hospitality. Participants led by "Mary and Joseph" move from front door to front door of various homes asking for shelter. Several times they are turned away before they eventually are welcomed in. Frequently, undocumented workers or the very poor lead the group of participants because they know firsthand the experience of being turned away repeatedly and disregarded. Other participants play the role of innkeepers who respond to requests for shelter with, "No. You are not welcome here," giving these participants an opportunity to reflect on the times they have refused to help those in their path who were in need.

Therefore, popular religious practices are a gift not only because they offer a strategy for making the faith one's own, but also because they serve as a spiritual discipline which enables participants to see more clearly and experience more fully God's active presence in the nitty gritty of their lives. The discipline of seeing God in the nitty gritty of our lives can expand our religious imaginations and make us aware of the multiplicity of meanings that give shape to our religious experience. When mindful practitioners engage in this discipline and then reflect on their experience, their faith and their relationship with God mature. Such practice supports their journey toward the abundant life that Jesus promised us (John 10:10).

Manifesting the Sacramental Principle

Popular religious practices offer more than a strategy, more than a way of seeing God in our human struggles. In Catholic parlance, they extend a tangible manifestation of the sacramental principle. The sacramental principle is a hallmark of the Catholic tradition. Throughout history Catholics have consistently held that God can and does manifest Godself through the material world in particular concrete ways. Popular religious practices extol the larger truth of the sacramental principle. When Latino/a Catholics create an altar in their home and decorate it with flowers, pictures of nature, symbols representing something they enjoy (i.e., miniature guitar), as well as pictures of deceased relatives and saints, they are recognizing the concrete ways God becomes manifest through the material world.

As instances of the sacramental principle, popular religious practices invite participants to become more keenly aware of the material world as God's creation. Over time, this keen awareness seeps deeply into our consciousness, developing in

us a reverence for creation. Thus, we reshape who we are in the world. We are changed. We become increasingly attuned to what is authentically beautiful in this world. Authentic beauty, wherever it exists, reflects God's imprint. And it is this beauty that animates us to struggle for the good in our world, and to yearn for the truth in our lives.

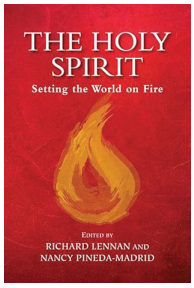
Recognizing the Blessing

As mentioned above, popular Catholicism serves as a preeminent portal into the Latino/a religious worldview, which, where it thrives and flourishes, contributes mightily to US Catholicism. A Latino/a worldview can transform our understanding of the Catholic tradition and in the process engender a more complete and richer portrait of that tradition. Latino/a Catholicism offers as much because of its distinctive historical trajectory.

The historical roots of Latino/a Catholicism vary significantly from those of Euro-American Catholicism. The Catholic faith came to Latin America almost two generations before the Council of Trent, which means that its origins grew out of the medieval, Iberian Catholicism thriving in Spain in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. This pre-Tridentine Catholicism expressed its truths predominantly in symbols and rites, and reflected an organic, cosmological, synthetic worldview. To a large degree, Latino/a popular Catholicism traces its origins to this period. On the other hand, Euro-American Catholicism finds its beginnings in the post-Tridentine world of Europe where, generally speaking, Catholic leaders fashioned a much more rationalistic and verbally precise faith in response to the challenges put forward by the Protestant reformers. Today, most US parishes reflect an ethos informed by these beginnings, an ethos largely shaped by the culture of modernity. The Catholic tradition, in its fullness, contains both historical trajectories and the wisdom each one bears.

The challenge for the US Catholic church is for all Catholics, irrespective of their ancestry, to recognize the blessing they bring to the church, and to honor and celebrate it. If we can celebrate the religious practices that gave birth to our understanding of Catholicism, then we are better able to recognize the blessing that others bring. Even Latino/a Catholics must be challenged to take seriously and to honor their own religious birthright. Far too often, Latino/a Catholics buy into the misjudgments made by Euro-American Catholics who erroneously, and ignorantly, view popular Catholicism as a superstitious expression of faith. A Latino/a religious worldview is vital to the future of US Catholicism—not because Latinos/as make up close to half of the current US Catholic Church but because the integral, organic religious worldview intrinsic to Latino/a Catholicism offers a much-needed critique to the hyper-individualism run amok in today's world. Indeed, Latino/a Catholicism is a much-needed blessing for our time.

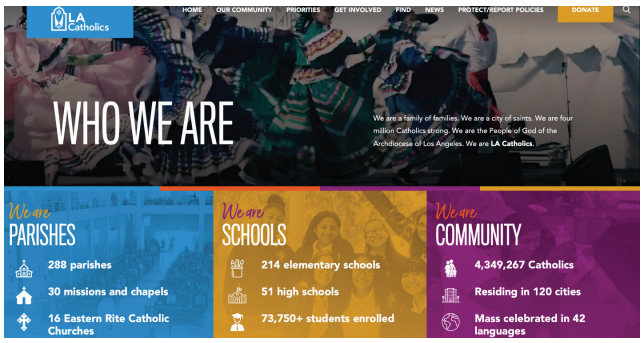
This article was originally published in *Church*, vol. 23 no. 4. (Winter 2007), 5-8.



Nancy Pineda-Madrid is the T. Marie Chilton Chair of Catholic Theology at Loyola Marymount University, and president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. Dr. Pineda-Madrid studies the Latino/a faith experience and the possibilities that Catholic theology offers in response to the world's injustices.

LMU & LA ARCHDIOCESE FORMING, LEADING, AND SERVING THE LARGEST LATINX POPULATION IN THE USA

Los Angeles Archdiocese



The Los Angeles Archdiocese is the largest Catholic diocese in the nation and has the most concentrated Latino population.

- 4 Million Catholics total
- 228 Parishes with Latinx Ministries
- 2,969 Million Latinx Catholics

*Sources: V Encuentro, "Key Demographic, Social, and Religious Statistics for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles," 2018
USCCB.org

LMU ALUMNI LATINX

- **Ellie Hidalgo**, ’12 | MA Theology | Co-Director, Discerning Deacons.
- **Ernesto Vega**, ’16 | MA Pastoral Theology | Coordinator of Spanish Adult Faith Formation.
- **Carmen Ramos**, ’22 | MA Theology | LA Archdiocese Diaconate Formation, Coordinator of Pastoral Formation.
- **Leo Mendoza**, ’22 | MA Theology | PhD student in Integrative Studies in Ethics and Theology at LMU Chicago.

LMU Highlights

24.6% Hispanic / Latino Enrollment
By: LMU Stats

TOP 2% In Diversity
By: College Factual, ‘21

No. 8 “Best Catholic College”
BY NICHE.COM 2023

No. 3 Promotion of Latina/o Student Success
BY EDUCATION TRUST ‘17

Distinguished LMU Latinx Faculty & Alumni

- **Allan Figueroa Deck** SJ, S.T.D, Ph.D. Co-founder and first president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS)
- **Cecilia González-Andrieu,** Ph.D President-Elect of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS)
- **Jennifer Owens-Jofré**, Ph.D. Treasurer of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS)
- **Nancy Pineda-Madrid,** Ph.D. President of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA)

The World Needs Young Latina/o Leaders.

Brett Hoover, PhD. and Cecilia González-Andrieu, PhD.

"The Church and the world need you, the young, as much as the earth needs the rain."

- Pope Francis, World Youth Day, August 6, 2023

More than two decades ago, one of us walked into a meeting of the Comité Hispano at a Catholic parish in New York City. That lay leadership council, serving the community gathered around the weekly Spanish mass, included people from nine different countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Puerto Rico. Only one person on the comité had been born on the mainland United States. Even then, however, those leaders could see that the future may look different. The immigrant community knew that the teens and young adults of the community were often US-born, fully bicultural and bilingual in English and Spanish

More than a quarter century later, the demographic story of Hispanic/Latino Catholics at the national level has to some extent followed this trajectory. Immigrants remain a crucial part of that story, and the Catholic Church must continue to welcome and form immigrants as pastoral leaders. But today nearly two thirds of Latinx people in the United States were born here. With that shift comes an intense need to call US-born or US-raised Hispanics into church leadership. They will lead their own community forward, but also the Catholic Church in the United States as a whole, since the Catholic community under thirty is already majority Hispanic, and the community at large is soon to follow.

There are obstacles to the emergence of this young leadership. Many young people who have been encouraged by their community toward ministry—primarily lay ministry but also as clergy or religious—have trouble imagining themselves in the leadership role. The leaders they have seen often do not look like them. Those leaders have been white, or international clergy, or revered abuelas, or middle-aged Spanish-dominant immigrants who sacrifice much to accompany their own community. For these young people, a good number of their friends no longer call themselves Catholic, though lots still practice elements of the faith. Some grew up in economically struggling households, or are starting families of their own, and they cannot see a pathway to securing the education they know they need to serve the Church effectively. There is a desire for theological education, but the possibility of accessing it seems very far from reality.

The other one of us has a very different story, being a first-generation immigrant who came to the United States as a child refugee. From that vantage point decades ago, a college education seemed very out of reach, and yet, a commitment to the care and flourishing of the Latino community provided the fire to persist in the spirit of ¡si se puede!. The US Hispanic/Latino community is a community accustomed to living in a precarious state of in-betweenness, constantly navigating the instability captured by the phrase, "ni de aquí ni de allá" (belonging neither here nor there). It is this insight–that far from being a deficit the "in-betweenness" itself is a great gift–that has helped US Latinas/os reach out across differences to make present more variegated and complex ways of understanding each other and faith. Latinas/Latinos in the United States daily cross the difficult terrains of languages and customs, marginality and invisibility; this daily experience is shaping a way of being people of faith that is unique, liberative, and committed to the common good. Four decades after its first articulation by the first generation, US Latina/o theology today continues to offer a great gift to the Church by inviting others into a vision that its founder, Fr. Virgilio Elizondo, called "new being," that passionate sense of mission and purpose forged by the light of the Gospel after being battered by experiences of non-being.

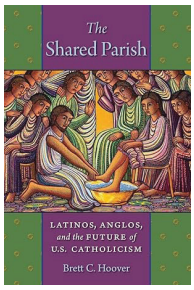
Today, as the community struggles with multiple questions, including the ways to name itself (Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latine or Latinx), there is a sense that as Pope Francisco likes to say, we are entering a "new epoch." This new time, with its unfolding questions and possibilities, is already upon us. It needs young leaders who are from the community and who are devoted to the flourishing of the community.

In the midst of all this, Latinx leaders and allies from 18 Catholic universities across the United States, including Loyola Marymount University, have been paying attention. Our institutions already had graduate programs for ministry and were noticing some particular challenges. For instance, for more than a decade, LMU's graduate program has had no majority group, and it is now clear that Latinas and Latinos have generally been the largest single demographic group. For a long time, research has pointed to barriers to graduate theological education for aspiring leaders in Latinx communities, which is something Latina/o theologians across the country have been calling attention to for many decades. So, when the opportunity came up, we at LMU enthusiastically participated

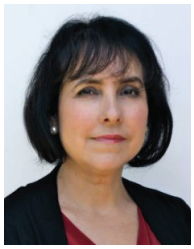
in the creation of the Haciendo Caminos (Making Pathways) network. Led by the University of Notre Dame and Boston College, and funded by the Lilly Endowment, committed professors and administrators at these schools formed the Haciendo Caminos network to encourage and support the educational advancement of those who wish to serve the Hispanic community.

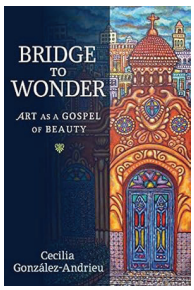
As a program, Haciendo Caminos has a number of components. A national summit dedicated to discernment gathers college students and recent graduates annually to invite them to think more deeply about a career in lay ministry, or even as priests or religious (and to meet others doing the same). Haciendo Caminos also provides member schools with funds for recruiting young people in the community, hoping to bridge the gap between institutions of higher learning and young Latines who are dedicated to the wellbeing of their communities.

Finally, and crucially, Haciendo Caminos provides fellowships that US-born or raised young Catholics serving in Hispanic communities can use in order to enroll or stay enrolled in graduate theological education toward ministry leadership. Both of us serve on the steering committee that advises the Haciendo Caminos national leadership, and we have seen firsthand the way these fellowships make a difference for prospective and current students. The fellowships bring graduate theological education within reach for students without generational wealth, for those who are supporting their families, and for those who are working for the Church at modest salaries. As of the date of this publication, we at LMU have had five graduate students receive the Haciendo Caminos fellowships. We know they are already doing great work in both the classroom and the community and are looking forward to the many ways they will serve the needs of Latinas/os nationwide. They are eager to welcome others into our graduate program in Theology who are comprometidos to the flourishing of Latinas and Latinos in the United States. Information about Haciendo Caminos can be found at: https://haciendocaminos.nd.edu/



Brett C. Hoover, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Pastoral and Practical Theology at LMU for the Theological Studies department. Dr. Hoover focuses on how Christian life, practice, and ministry shape and are shaped by both social and cultural context as well as interpretations of the Christian (especially Roman Catholic) tradition. He teaches courses on ministry, immigration, faith and culture, and US Catholicism.





Cecilia González-Andrieu, Ph.D., is a leading scholar of theological aesthetics, which she proposes as a way to bring communities together, respect and celebrate otherness, and lift the theological insights of those who know and express themselves from the peripheries.

The first gathering of Haciendo Caminos partner institutions. Boston, May 2023. Courtesy from Haciendo Caminos webpage: https://haciendocaminos.nd.edu/

Alumnus of LMU Graduate Theological Studies Helps First Responders Navigate Deeper Healing

Quinn Roberts

To say Matt Domyancic has taken an untraditional path to becoming a chaplain would be an understatement. "I am what many people would call an outlier," says Matt.

Talk to him for just a few minutes, and you are immediately drawn in by his passion, thoughts, and ideas for his work and what he's been through. It's shaped the person he's become.

He's been introspective ever since he was a child growing up in Pittsburgh. He meditated while sitting in the woods and journaled throughout middle school and high school. Matt looked up to his father, a deeply religious man, his entire life.

"He was hard on me and demanded a lot, but I was allowed to express my emotions. I wanted to understand myself and others," shares Matt. "My dad taught me that being yourself is cool. I had so much role-modeling from my father, I wanted to continue to grow as a person and an athlete."

That's exactly what he did. A standout football player in high school and college, Matt spent two years at the Air Force Academy and then at Colgate University, where he played football (middle linebacker position) and powerlifted.

He was living exactly as he wanted to at the beginning of his 30s. He'd become a police academy instructor, a SWAT officer, and a strength and conditioning coach at Georgetown University, where he led the sports ministry. It was then that his world was turned upside down. He sustained an injury and had surgery—which, in hindsight, he never should have undergone. He was then put on medication that caused him to become obese and unable to control his bodily functions.

Matt no longer recognized the person he'd become. Instead of falling into a deep hole, he chose to do something with this new development in his life—relying on the things he used to do growing up. He moved to the South Bay 14 years ago, beginning a path of functional and integrative medicine to get off the medication he'd been taking since his surgery. His goal was to become a healthier person both physically and emotionally.

Matt earned a pastoral theology degree from Loyola Marymount University in 2018 and began doing chaplaincy work soon after that. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he worked with first responders at a rehab facility.

His concentration in pastoral theology was spiritual direction, which is an emphasis on spirituality and psychology. The work is about helping people become more aware of where the experiences of God, peace, love and meaning are showing up in their daily lives—whether pleasant or painful.

"We numb, distract and subconsciously self-medicate rather than deal with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. Cops can see dozens and hundreds of these things during their career," says Matt. "If you see others suffer, it's a moral injury that needs to find an outlet to heal."

His ultimate drive comes from wanting to help others. He can especially relate to first responders on a professional level, but also on an emotional level—knowing the mental toll it can take after a while.

"Matt is larger than life," says retired Manhattan Beach Fire Department Captain Dave Shenbaum. "He walks the walk and talks the talk. He's built authentic relationships with so many in the company because of how much time he spends at the firehouse just talking, working out, and going on ride-alongs."

Dave, who worked as a fireman and paramedic for 29 years, calls Matt a rock star who's found his true calling. Dave says he's been heavily influenced by Matt in many ways. "He helped me find more purpose and value in my life. While I was still working, that allowed me to get perspective on the right work-life balance. What cannot be overstated is what a great listener he is—reflective and very patient."

Many first responders know Matt on a first-name basis and see him come around often—not just when things are bad. He hopes that will eventually get first responders to open up to him—about what they've experienced on the job as well as anything going on in their lives.

I do everything on a volunteer basis," Matt explains. "I offer 24/7 confidential support and try to be a good listener at times of crisis intervention, but I also text, call and meet one-on-one when they are off duty so people will tell their sacred stories, knowing I'll listen, hear, understand, and see them without judgment."

You would never know it with the way he supports others in need, but Matt still deals with the effects of his surgery, including pelvic floor and intestinal nerve damage. Because of that, it takes him a few

hours in the morning to prepare for the day. To help, he takes advantage of cold plunges and the sauna and float tank at Pause wellness studio in El Segundo. If those he counsels are interested, they sometimes go with him.

"All of us need to use the challenging circumstances in our lives as our psychological, emotional and spiritual weight lifting to get stronger," says Matt. "It's often the painful experiences in our lives—which may be out of our control—that can teach us the greatest lessons."

In addition to affecting lives all over Southern California, Matt has also worked with police officers and firefighters from the Kansas City area. He's the chaplain and peer support for a surf nonprofit that brings first responders from Kansas City to Orange County. Through that organization, he got connected with the chief of police in Kansas City, who asked him to speak at a SWAT conference in front of 600 tactical officers.

While it was a much bigger crowd than he was used to, Matt accepted and spoke for nearly two hours. He got a lot of great feedback, hearing from people that it was like he was talking directly to them.

"Everything I do with first responders is to try to destigmatize and have them get in touch with their feelings," he shares. "You can be sentimental, emotional, tender and loving but still be an alpha male."

Ultimately, Matt's goal is to offer free wellness events integrating various aspects of fitness and martial arts, mindfulness and yoga, small group sharing and fellowship. He hopes to provide a variety of platforms where first responders learn to use their unique career experiences as a spiritual path rather than allowing them to result in a breakdown, which happens often in these professions.

"It's how you live your life, how you listen to them that they know you care about them," says Matt. "And maybe, just maybe, they'll open the door a little bit to trust you along the way."

To donate to Matt's cause, visit globalassociates.org/matt-domyancic.

This article originally appeared in *Southbay* (division of the Golden State Company), an online publication, under the title: "A Former Linebacker, SWAT Officer and Police Academy Instructor Helps First Responders Navigate Deeper Healing."

LMU Graduate Theological Studies 'Bible and the Blues' Excursion Course!

Join us in summer for LMU's Graduate Theological Studies *one-week intensive emersion* graduate theology course entitled, **The Book of Lamentations and the Legacy of "The Blues"** taught by LMU's Old Testament scholar and professor, Dr. Daniel Smith-Christopher! Where? In the heartland of the Blues...Memphis, Tennessee!

And why compare the Book of Lamentations to "The Blues"??

Lamentations is arguably, "Hebrew Blues". We learn more about the Lament and Mourning traditions of the Hebrew Bible, and we compare this genre to one of the most powerful musical gifts of the African-American experience to the world – the tradition of "The Blues", and specifically, "The Delta Blues" (Blues from the Mississippi Delta region as the river heads to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico).

A Contemplative Ecology: Remembering Our Stewardship

Darya Jones

Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have [stewardship] over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." -Genesis 1:26 (New Revised Standard Version).

Practices, spiritual or secular, often are shaped by methods. And methods have no meaning outside of the practices they shape. These two ideas, method and practice, are interrelated. Our spirituality and our practices of ministry also should be interrelated: they shape each other and renew each other over time. Admittedly, it was a challenge for me to understand how to make sense of this interrelationship. It was not until I read Douglas Christie's *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology,*[1] that I suddenly found inspiration for thinking about my own spiritual practice of "paying closer attention." I realized that my spiritual practice can be strengthened by what Christie calls a "contemplative ecology," and by what Pope Francis calls "becoming painfully aware."[2] My method of paying attention and of becoming more painfully aware led me to realize what I was becoming more aware of: the state of our earth, and the disastrous effects of climate change that we have very actively contributed to as a result of not remembering our stewardship of creation.

I will comment more fully on the passage from Genesis regarding our stewardship of creation. However, before I do that, I want to outline this paper. Since this paper is reflective, I will begin by detailing my pastoral/ministerial practice. Then, I will follow with a theological reflection of how my practice aligns with Christie's and Francis' thought by examining Christie's book and Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Both of these works are appropriate for my theological reflection because they address my ecological concerns and my method of paying attention. The case study that provides the backdrop for my theological reflection is my time camping in

1 Douglas Christie, The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

2 Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home (Vatican City, Vatican Press, 2015). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Joshua Tree National Park. Finally, I will address the implications of this paper and the future of its lessons.

Practice: The Art of Attention

The practice I have chosen to examine closely is "paying attention." While paying attention sounds like an easy task, it requires a level of focus that goes beyond simple comprehension. Paying attention means internalizing our reality and reflecting on it in new ways that shape how we live in the world as a result of our newfound attention to what is. I am connecting newfound attention with the idea of cherishing the world as my awareness of what it means to be a steward of the earth grows. We can pay attention to many things. For the purposes of this paper, I am highlighting my attention to what it means to be stewards of this earth against the backdrop of climate change.

At the beginning of the semester, I had a rough idea of what it meant to pay attention. However, I was not clear on what paying attention would look like as a practice. Last fall, I took a graduate course entitled "History of Christian Spirituality." I left that class wanting to understand better what it meant to pay attention, since it was a theme we addressed. I spent the year leading up to that class trying to better understand this paying attention practice. I read many of Christie's articles hoping to find the answer. It wasn't until I thought about paying attention within the context of climate change that I finally understood what this practice means and why it matters so deeply.

Like the book of Genesis, let's start at the beginning. For Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the book of Genesis details the event of God creating the cosmos, including our world. The creation story in Genesis serves as a counter-narrative to the Babylonian creation stories that spoke of gods at war with other gods as they created the world we live in. The ancient Hebrews would have been familiar with these Babylonian narratives. Genesis, by contrast, speaks of a God who creates the cosmos as a place where humanity has stewardship of the earth they call home. Genesis tells us that God declared God's creation as 'good.' This positive affirmation of God's creation tells us the intention behind this story: The creator of all things wanted goodness and asked that we as stewards of the earth care for "our common home. "[3] In some editions of the Bible, the word *stewardship* is translated as *dominion*. Dominion means sovereignty or control. Therefore, some translations of Genesis lead us to believe that we are to have sovereignty or control over the earth and all that live here. Stewardship, by contrast, means care-for or supervision-over.

When I learned what it meant to pay attention, I realized that I also could pay attention to what it would mean to care for this earth I live on. It is not to say I didn't care before, or that climate change is a new idea to me. Rather, I learned to pay attention more fully to the literal earth-shattering reality of climate change against the backdrop of my theology. Genesis, in other words, could help me better understand my role on our earth as I pay closer attention to what God has asked of me: to remember my stewardship of this earth. Put another way: God has asked me to become "painfully aware[4]" of what it means to care for this planet I call home.

Paying Attention: Knowledge and Action

Since paying attention is a practice, I had to learn how to hone my skills. Developing skills is a lifelong journey of growth with challenges. My main challenge can be understood in two parts: knowledge and action. When I first visited Joshua Tree National Park, it was merely a place where friends from church went camping. It was a fun spring activity that reminded us all of summer's arrival in the coming month. I didn't yet see the spiritual aspect of Joshua Tree. I was clueless regarding what it meant to pay attention to this place which I would soon realize is sacred. I couldn't pay attention to what I didn't know. After taking this course, I realized that definitions are central to a practice. A practice is informed by what we mean by the practice we set out to do. We have to know what we are doing or engaging in before we can get better at our practice. Towards the beginning of the semester, I thought I knew what paying attention was, so I set out on my way with a vague definition in my mind. It wasn't until I read the class assignments with care that I realized my definitions were faulty at best.

The second part of the challenge is the action. Now that I have a clearer idea of the knowledge, it is the daily practice of learning how to immerse myself in the larger whole that challenges me. I needed to learn the art of attention-by-doing while also living in a capitalist society that puts accomplishment, profit, and the accumulation of wealth above Genesis' call to stewardship of the earth. This affects the individual as well as our earth, which suffers at great cost with this polarizing reality that capitalism demands of us. I began asking myself how can I be a steward of the earth when my most immediate fear is what my life will be after graduation? How will I make a living that can sustain me financially? While those are questions I continue to grapple with, they affect my ability to put my practice of paying attention to the test.

Along with this seemingly divided attention is another challenge: learning to hold both issues with grace. I can pay attention to climate change as well as my financial security. While these challenges are difficult, they are not impossible to engage. Fortunately, where there are questions, there often are answers. To answer my

3 Francis, Laudato Si'.

4 Francis, Laudato Si, 19 & 159.

questions about paying attention to the larger whole in which I live, I now turn to the work of Christie and Francis and examine the art of attention through their lenses.

Reflection

What does it mean to pay attention? There are many definitions, and for this paper, I will focus on what Christie offers.[5] Christie tells us that *prosoche* is the art of paying attention. More specifically, it means cultivating an awareness of our world as a whole so as to respond with compassion and responsibility for the world we live in.[6] *Prosoche* is the embodied practice of Genesis' call for stewardship.

Prosoche is also connected to our sense of wonder.[7] When we cultivate a sense of wonder or expectancy, our senses are more focused. This allows us to be present to all that is around us. This sense of wonder allows us to reorient ourselves to life's greater purpose, a potential union with all that is created. This is God's initial call for humanity. When we live in a state of wonder—which contrary to belief, is not lost in childhood—we can deepen our focus and see the world as an immersive whole of which we are a part.

The last time I went to Joshua Tree, I remember experiencing this kind of *prosoche*: I was in utter wonderment of all that was around me. The desert landscapes looked radically different to me through the lens of wonder. The stars seemed more alive, and the campfire had a sense of giving in a new way. Yes, a campfire by nature "gives fire," which provides both heat and light. I felt a new sense of the earth truly providing for me and my fellow campers. Of course, to build the fire, we had to work with the earth's resources, but it was a reciprocal relationship. We built the campfire, and the natural resources provided us with both warmth and light. This give and take relationship adds to the sense of wonder. How amazing that when we work with the earth, we are so given to. This relationship with the earth reminds me of another idea out of the Christian contemplative tradition: *metanoia* or change of heart towards God.

In thinking about what it means to both pay attention and remember our stewardship of the earth, I am also thinking about what the Greek word *metanoia* can mean in this context. *Metanoia,* or conversion, means we reorient our "entire being"[8] to God. This can apply to a particular place, such as Joshua Tree. When we take on the task of stewardship, we intentionally engage our faculty of *metanoia.* We choose to care for this home while we think about that home in relation to God. This allows our heart to change direction from that of mere observation to engagement. We begin to notice a level of grace that exists in all things. Our Jesuit brothers and sisters like to say that God is in all things. This is what they mean: our change of heart coupled with our new sense of *prosoche* allows us to see God in all things. When I go back to Joshua Tree next spring, I know I will see it in a new way. My sense of *metanoia,* I hope, will be stronger. I want to change my heart so I also can see God in all things, particularly in the natural environment.

In 2015, Pope Francis wrote the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which ushered in a new era for Catholicism as it served as the wake-up call about climate change. The Catholic Church could no longer ignore the pressing concerns of climate change, despite the fact that previous popes wrote encyclicals also calling for immediate change in how we treat the earth.[9] Why did it take until 2015 for the Church to wake up in to climate change? I suspect part of the reason is that we understood Genesis 1:26 to mean *dominion*, rather than *stewardship*.

Our relationship with nature changes profoundly when we think we have dominion over it. Pope Francis brings awareness to this when he writes, "We have come to see ourselves as [the earth's] lords and masters, entitled to plunder [the earth] at will."[10] When we think we are entitled to do with the earth as we please, there is no cause for concern over how to care for the earth. Pope Francis has brought our awareness to this tragic fact. He calls it a "painful awareness."[11]

When we become painfully aware, we then can change what we are doing and chart a new course of healing. Our goal, the pope advises, should be to "turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it."[12] When we make ecological concern our own concern, we have a greater chance at solving the problem before us. Pope Francis is calling on all of us to pay attention to the issue of climate change, but also to pay attention to what we can do to heal "our common home."[13] This means we need to change how we live in this world. Our actions need to go from mass consumption to recycling, composting, and limiting our waste. By waste, I mean we need to think about how we use our resources and how we re-use those resources. Do we fill landfills or do we repurpose materials? Do we throw food away or do we compost what we can so as to give back to the earth? This reflects both a personal and communal effort to heal our earth.

Conclusion: Telos as Reimagining Paradise

Paying attention is as much about the questions we now ask as it is about the attention we give to what is here in front of us: each other, the planet, and God's

5 Christie, Blue Sapphire.

6 Christie, Blue Sapphire, 14.

7 Christie, Blue Sapphire, 10.

8 Christie, Blue Sapphire, 11.

9 Pope Paul VI wrote about ecological concerns in 1971, Pope John Paul II also wrote on this issue in 1979, and Pope Benedict XVI also wrote about these issues in 2007.

10 Francis, Laudato Si', 2.

11 Francis, Laudato Si'.

12 Francis, Laudato Si', 19.

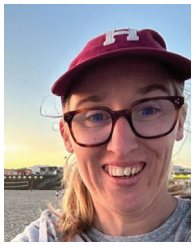
13 Francis, Laudato Si', 17.

role in both of these things. A question I now have: what does it mean to ask deeper questions of ecological renewal and stewardship given what I now know? Christie suggests that Christians could take seriously the idea that paradise is all around us, something we can know, grasp, and inhabit "in this present reality."[14] He asks us to reimagine "the contemplative practice of paradise" as we pay close attention to climate change and all that we have done to harm our planet. In a word, Christie is asking us to imagine being stewards of this earth.

If I imagine practicing paradise, I realize that all my future trips to Joshua Tree will serve as clear reminders of what God wants for us: to care deeply for our common home. Joshua Tree is one of many national parks, but it is only so because we have chosen it to be that way. Our choices make or break our reality and our earth. Only when we pay attention can we be become aware of these truths. While paying attention is not easy, it is doable.

I know that my future Joshua Tree trips will be different now that I have a clearer idea of what it means to pay attention. I wish to be painfully aware as Pope Francis advises. I want nothing more than to be a steward of this beautiful place we call earth. God called humanity to take up this request. I am willing.

14 Douglas Christie, "Practicing Paradise: Contemplative Awareness and Ecological Renewal," Anglican Theological Review 94, no. 2 (2012): 281.



Darya Jones is a student in the Graduate Theological Studies program at LMU. The foci of her studies—Liberation Theologies, conflict resolution, and mediation— were inspired by her work in Nonviolent Communication.

STUDENT OPINION PIECE:

The Impact of AI on the Christian Notion of Creation

Reuben Kwasi Adzakey

In recent discussions of Artificial Intelligence (AI), a significant issue has been whether AI has a place in theology and our conversations about or understanding of God. Many point out that AI is no longer the stuff of science fiction. The power of AI is reshaping our lives in ways that were unimaginable just a couple decades ago.[1] One of Pope Francis' themes, "Artificial Intelligence and Peace," suggests that the Pope himself recognizes the profound impact of AI on the world.

While some think AI enhances the God-human relationship, others argue that AI estranges humanity from God and decentralizes God from human life. Already we can feel the growth of AI in our churches and liturgical worship. A choir director does not need to sit down and go through the hymn books to select songs for Sunday Mass. With the help of Amazon-Alexa, a choir director has access to all the hymns that suit the various parts of the liturgy. From this perspective, AI may be seen as a tool for enhancing God-human relationships. Now, the issue is whether theology or religion in general should embrace AI, or leave AI to the sciences and other disciplines.

AI seems to facilitate the tasks of life, but must it be allowed into God-human interaction? For me, I prefer to take the advice of St. Paul, "All things are good but not all things are expedient" (1 Cor. 10: 23). One aspect of the God-human relationship where I see AI making an impact is the Christian notion of Creation. What will be the consequences, in the medium and long term, of these new digital technologies on the theology of Creation? This issue is important to our theological conversation because AI, whether we accept it or not, has come to stay. How then can theology explore AI within the framework of Creation and human intelligence?

AI and God-talk

We cannot gainsay the fact that AI makes the word of God more available to believers. Some

1 Nathan Lents, "The Theology of Artificial Intelligence," Psychology Today, May 10, 2019, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beastly-behavior/201905/the-theology-of-artificial-intelligence.

digital applications can help us in our prayers and worship because they provide easy access to the words of prayer. Today, it suffices to enter a topic for a sermon or homily, and you will have a lot of samples to choose from and use. For example, in Poland, a Catholic engineer named Gabriele Trovato created *Santo*, the first ever Catholic robot. *Santo* is programmed with 2,000 years of knowledge about the Catholic faith and aims to assist worshippers who cannot physically attend church.[2] While this might facilitate access to daily Mass and religious literature, it also encourages the spirit of individualism that engulfs our communities today and weakens social bonds. This gradually erodes the essence of community and encounter in Christian life: the robot seems to tell us or give us what we want in the comfort of our homes. AI can alienate humanity from the Christian community and from God.

Can the regular consultation of this robot enhance our understanding of God? The danger I see is that we reduce theology (God-talk) to an abstract and rationalized conversation rather than a means of nourishing faith. When Christian theology moves away from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and instead relies on AI, we downplay the Holy Spirit as a source for theology and as the revelatory power of God in Creation.

Christian theology must be dynamic, and this dynamism may be expressed in its ability to respond to the signs of the times. One of the signs of *our* times is the upsurge in AI. Modern rationalism fueled by AI demands that Christian theology present its message dialectically, subjecting it to modes of research and discussion that are considered philosophically and scientifically acceptable. The danger inherent in this approach to theology is that God is reduced to a machine, like any other manifestation of AI (ChatGPT, Google Gemini, etc.), providing us with prearranged, predetermined answers. This reduces Christian theology to 'talking about God' without 'talking to God.' We cease to discover and experience God in a renewed way when the only way we seek knowledge about him is through the consultation of various forms of AI that reproduce preconceived results. God is not a machine.

Generative AI, for example, relies on the already-existing collective body of current knowledge, which is very limiting. God's immanence creates novel and dynamic forms of being, of doing, and of knowing through relational encounters. These insights have been present in the Judeo-Christian tradition since the beginning, as we see in the biblical book of Genesis. We cannot reduce or domesticate God's transcendence. AI attempts to belittle God's power of Creation.

Creation Out of Nothing

The basic Christian theology of Creation is that God created the world out of nothing (Creation ex nihilo). God spoke and all things came into being. This doctrine stands at the root of the Christian understanding of the relationship between God and the world.[3] The Bible says God made us in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26) and he breathed into humankind (Gen. 2:7). God has shared his identity with us, and we perceive God through Creation.

AI, in fact, does not create. It only makes or reproduces what is already in existence. The verbs "to create" and "to make or to reproduce" may seem synonymous, but I posit that they are not. The verb "to create" has an undertone of originality. Above all, humanity has a natural inclination toward God. This inclination moves us to function according to his rules, guidelines, and commandments. In contrast, designers or developers have constructed AI with inbuilt algorithms that we must obey so that our AI outlets function well.

Everything God Created is Good

The Bible relates that God created heaven and earth and everything that is in them. The Bible continues to say that everything God created is very good (Gen. 1:31). This does not preclude the possibility that divine Creation is a continuing process. God gave power to humanity to be fertile and multiply. I see AI as a share in God's mandate for humans to participate in God's creative power. However, when AI creates the impression of correcting God's Creation or rendering the Creation better, I see the theology of Creation under threat.

Pope John Paul II has cautioned about distorted perspectives of the relationship between body and person. We must pursue our development as full persons and not manipulate or sublate the body as AI suggests is a possibility. The attempt of human beings to create another artificial human to answer questions and carry out more complex tasks may be seen as an effort to make life better, but this can raise doubts in the mind of a believer that God is the all-knowing Creator. It gives us the illusion that we can live without God after all. In the Christian tradition, this is one of the characteristics of sin. Sin causes us to deny our need for God and this is where I see AI leading us. AI seemingly puts everything at our beck and call, and this does not give a true reflection of the natural order of Creation.

2 "Artificial Intelligence and Religion: Exploring the Impact and Challenges," Communication Generation, accessed June 11, 2024, https://www.communication-generation.com/transhumanism-and-god/?amp=1.

3 Justo Gonzalez, Essential Theological Terms (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 41.

AI and the Natural Order of Creation

When AI distorts the natural order of Creation, it is an affront to God's mind and purpose. Christian theology teaches that human beings are made of body and soul. The way we look and function portrays the beauty of Creation. AI that attempts to recreate human beings to look more beautiful and more intelligent and to have more cognitive abilities than natural human beings is not intent on perpetuating God's purpose. If God intended the universe to be studied and understood within the limits of human knowledge, how can AI favor the Christian's search for God in Creation? If human knowledge is limited, how can AI improve or increase what God has already done?

A typical example of the attempt of AI to distort God's purpose in Creation is transhumanism and cloning. The aims of the transhumanist movement are summed up by Mark O'Connell in his book *To Be a Machine*: "They believe that we can and should eradicate ageing as a cause of death; that we can and should use technology to augment our bodies and our minds; that we can and should merge with machines, remaking ourselves, finally, in the image of our own higher ideals."[4] This poses a challenge to theology, and might be framed as a distortion of the *imago Dei* and the dignity of humanity. I see it as a distortion of the divine will when human beings see themselves as capable of augmenting or changing God's order of Creation.

God is the origin of Creation, and all things subsist out of God's will. The doctrine of Creation claims that in God's mind things have a purpose. Things subsist by God's sustaining grace and things move towards God's intended end.[5] In his message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis reiterates Sacred Scripture's attestation that God bestowed his Spirit upon human beings so that they might have "skill and understanding and knowledge in every craft" (Ex. 35:31). Human intelligence is an expression of the dignity with which the Creator has endowed us. The question is, does AI accept and acknowledge God as its source?

I was reading an article in the *National Catholic Reporter* on Saturday, March 2, 2024, entitled: "Sundance Film '*Eternal You*' examines AI, death and intensity of human grief." In the article, the writer cited American sociologist and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sherry Turkle, who suggested that the industry of AI is promising what religion has been unable to deliver.[6] A comment like this strongly suggests a shift from searching for meaning in God or religion to searching for meaning in AI. AI discredits the Christian belief in the creative power of God.

AI pretends to provide solutions to all human problems. It intends to make life as easy and as comfortable as possible. This forces even Christians to feel that knowledge of God is irrelevant to human life nowadays. Looking at the trajectory of AI in terms of Creation, AI undermines faith in God's creative power. It downplays the power of the human mind and human ingenuity that are natural to humanity. Instead of drawing inspiration from God the Creator, we have recourse to AI. AI may not be a reliable source of theology.

Conclusion

In short, AI is contributing immensely to human life. We enjoy many medical advancements today thanks to AI. The reservation I have about AI is that we cannot predict the full aftermath of its overuse. If AI can give credit to divine wisdom by working to serve God's purpose, if it does not overlook the omnipotence of God by attempting to manufacture babies and other human beings—thus creating a world of its own full of illusions—then it is doing a tremendous service to the theology of Creation. But AI as a prearranged program does not enable us to enjoy the dynamics and variety of God's Creation.

AI changes the tastes and ambitions of humanity. It does not allow us to enter a new dialogue with God but limits our search for

4 Robin McKie, "No death and an enhanced life: Is the future transhuman?," The Guardian, May 6, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/may/06/no-death-and-an-enhanced-life-is-the-future-transhuman.

5 Justo Gonzalez, Essential Theological Terms, 42.

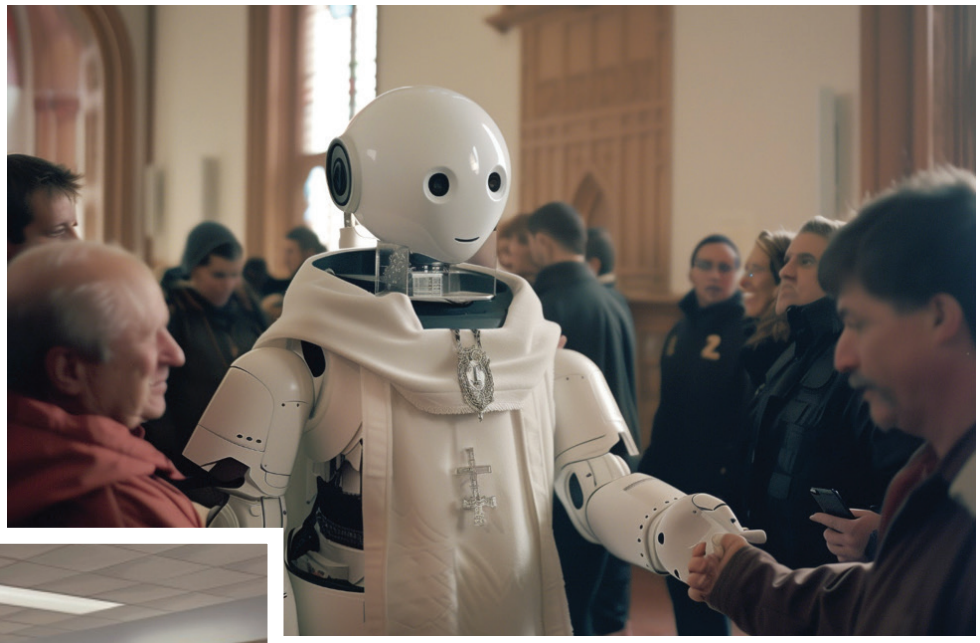
6 Jose Solís, "Sundance film 'Eternal You' examines AI, death and intensity of human grief," National Catholic Reporter, March 2, 2024, https://www.ncronline.org/culture/sundance-film-eternal-you-examines-ai-death-and-intensity-human-grief.

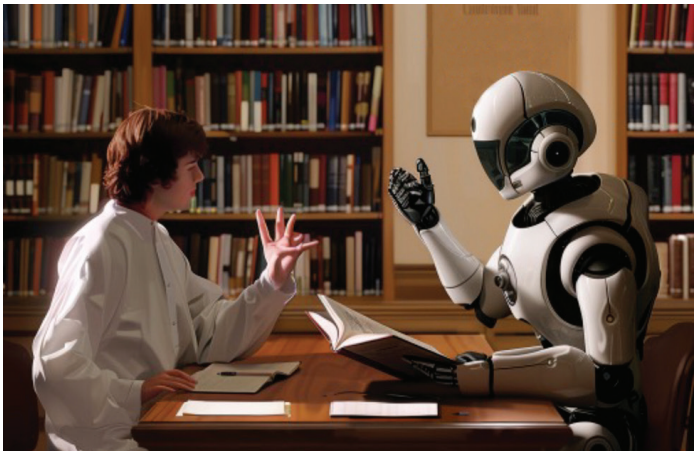
and knowledge of God. Though I concede that AI is very useful in many spheres of life today, my own view is that AI should not be introduced into the God-human interaction, which is at the center of Christian theological reflection. AI should be used prudently and sparingly.

Reuben Adzakey is a Catholic Priest from Ghana and a student in the Graduate Theological Studies program at LMU. His area of focus is comparative theology. Fr. Adzsakey brings a curious mind to the study of religions, and wants to discover how other religions shed light on his own faith tradition. Fr. Adzsakey's Master's Thesis is on the religious education of children in Christian-Muslim interfaith families in Ghana.

Discerning the Future: Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Theological Studies Education

Because another theme of this issue is AI, we decided to give AI a spin! ALL the images in this issue were created using the AI Image generator known as "Midjourney" accessible through DISCORD. Most AI Art generators do a few free pics, but then charge for more. We simply fed in instructions related to the theme of the issue – encountering others, AI and Theology, and these were some of the most interesting images! Enjoy (or be frightened... they were produced in about 60 seconds!!!).





Levinas' Otherness: Towards Communal Living and Interfaith Dialogue and Postmodernism

The plurality of religions raises a number of complex issues in today's globalizing world. In particular, lack of understanding others and failure to identify points of agreement where love, justice, and trust triumph—despite differences—are causes for concern. Unresolved issues like these have the potential to spark violence and religious conflict. The risk of individualism, a barrier to communal living and a meaningful existence, lies beyond the divide. Solipsism, one aspect of postmodernism, renders one unable to coexist with others, which makes building interpersonal bonds and engaging in interreligious discourse difficult. Thus, it becomes imperative to address the issue of interfaith dialogue and the danger posed by postmodernism to its success.

Interfaith dialogue focuses on rediscovering points of agreement amid differences rather than merging various religions into one. Research on interfaith dialogue is expanding. These studies have mostly looked at interfaith relations and global perspectives,[1] interfaith dialogue difficulties and prospects,[2] and inherent challenges and necessary conditions for interreligious dialogue,[3] among other related issues. Despite the significant contributions this research makes to the fields of religion and interfaith dialogue, there are few studies that examine how ethics and theology can help address interfaith issues in the context of postmodernism. Emmanuel Levinas' hermeneutic of otherness, a phenomenological-theological approach, is a strategy that could be useful.

In light of the influence of postmodernism, the present study attempts to analyze how Levinas' notion of otherness can inform communal living and give interfaith dialogue a boost. Given the goal, suffice it to say that the task at hand does not offer a systematic strategy; rather, it encourages a rethink of options that engenders responsibility within Levinas' theoretical framework. The key issues investigated and explored are: 1) Levinas' hermeneutic of otherness, a phenomenological-theological approach, 2) issues confronting interfaith dialogue and the characteristics of postmodernism, and 3) Levinas' otherness - a response to communal living and interfaith dialogue amid postmodernism.

Levinas' Hermeneutic of Otherness: A Phenomenological-Theological Approach

Various philosophers have explored the concept of otherness, each with a unique perspective. The differences lie in the ways that otherness ought to be approached and responded to. The contemporary European philosophical tradition, in particular, treats otherness from an ontological perspective, the totalizing of the "other" into the "same" (or "the self"), which shapes how otherness is conceptualized.[4] Levinas, however, revolutionized the traditional approach by conceptualizing otherness within an ethical framework. Levinas' position in favor of an ethical approach compared to an ontological way of encountering beings—or others—suggests a paradigm shift. Although Levinas separated from conventional Western philosophy, the hermeneutic of otherness that he proposed is not immune from the influence of his contemporaries.

Husserl and Heidegger undoubtedly influenced Levinas' phenomenological thought. Husserl conceived of the other in terms of epistemology, a descriptive rather than explanatory approach to the ways things appear.[5] Husserl's phenomenology revolves around subjective experience and the reduction of external influences, employing pure consciousness and intuition as the basis to gain knowledge about external realities. The epistemological approach to viewing realities was repudiated by Heidegger, Husserl's student. For Heidegger, knowledge of things or the consciousness of objects is insufficient; hence, he proposes an ontological concept, a hermeneutic-

1 Pavlos E. Michaelides, "Interfaith Dialogue in Global Perspective and the Necessity of Youth Involvement," Asia Europe Journal 7, no. 3-4 (2009): 449-462.

2 Gerard Hall, "The Call to Interfaith Dialogue," Australian eJournal of Theology (2005): 1-22.

3 Catherine Cornille, The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue, (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 9.

4 Jonathan Rothchild, "Self, Otherness, Theology, and Ontology: A Critical Engagement between Tillich and Kristeva, Levinas, and Bataille," Bulletin of The North American Paul Tillich Society 30, no. 3 (2004), 34.

5 Edmund Husserl, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, trans. F. Kersten (Hague: Nijhoff, 1982), 75.

interpretive phenomenology that highlights "Dasein," being in the world, or having to be open, a self-disclosure. Dasein is conceptualized in two ways: Dasein stands back from its occurrence, not disclosing the self.[6] And Dasein stands out in openness, a disclosure of being.[7] To understand being, Heidegger employs the ontica and the ontological. The latter pertains to the meaning of being and how entities are intelligible entities, while the former connotes facts about entities. Based on the difference, Heidegger posits that "ontic knowledge can never alone direct itself to the objects because, without the ontological, it can have no possible whereto."[8] Reexamining Heidegger's disclosure of being, Levinas sees it as an unsuitable framework for characterizing the other since "the absolute experience is not disclosure but revelation: a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the other."[9] Against an epistemic approach, Levinas argued that the relationship with the face of the other is neither an object-cognition nor a signification ascribed to the other by a knowing subject.[10] Instead, the other conveys meaning independently of any situation. The lack of preference for either an ontological or an epistemological approach is based on the premise that both obstruct the self from having an authentic encounter with the other.

Levinas' Notion of Otherness

Some clarification of Levinas' terms is necessary at the outset. For Levinas, *the Same* is synonymous with "the Self," while *the Other* connotes the "other person." *Alterity* is the "state of otherness," the uniqueness that depicts how the self and the other are distinct and irreducible. Alterity distinguishes oneself from another. Given that the other is not equivalent to the self, respect for the other plays a paramount role in Levinas' ethics. Although an immediate relationship may be formed during a face-to-face encounter, the intimacy and interaction do not erase the difference that exists between the self and others as the subjects of a relationship. Levinas' ethics subverts what he sees as a conventional metaphysics that attempts to turn the Other into the Same.

While the goal of conventional Western philosophy is, in theory, to unfold the Other, in practice, the Other loses its otherness as it unfolds. Levinas' philosophy perceives how the Other is approached as a problem in Western philosophy. Thus, he posits ethics as the first philosophy.[11] It implies an ethical responsibility towards the other. A responsibility, "for what does not even matter to me or which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as face."[12] The *face*, or "other person's face," along with his or her existential condition, commands and summons me into responsibility before even reflecting on or thinking about it. This directive and call to ethical responsibility towards the face of the other precludes any sort of mastery-seeking where our freedom asserts its sovereignty.[13] A desire or mastery-seeking that tends to override the other reduces the otherness of the other. When the self encounters the other from that stance, an incomplete encounter occurs. The fundamental question is: how does one respond to the other? The way the other is perceived has a significant impact on the answer to the question. Levinas' ethical thought advances how the other ought to be perceived, approached, and responded to. To encounter the otherness of the other, the other has to be encountered in his or her world. Approaching the other from one's own world rather than from the other's own world prevents an authentic encounter. Transcending the inauthentic encounter so that the otherness of the other is fully encountered entails regarding the other's otherness as absolute, depicting "other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other. Other with an alterity that does not limit the same, for in limiting the same, the other would not be rigorously other."[14]

Although the other appears to be a stranger, he or she is not devoid of existential and essential freedom. As a free moral agent, the other remains unique and irreducible. "The other manifests itself by the absolute resistance of its defenceless eyes. . . . The infinite in the face . . . brings into question my freedom, which is discovered to be murderous and usurpatory."[15] While the freedom of the subject may not always be the utmost freedom, "the heteronomy of our response to the human

6 Michael Gelven, A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, 2nd ed. rev. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 49.

7 Daniela Vallega-Neu, Heidegger's Contribution to Philosophy: An Introduction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 11-12.

8 Soren Overgaard, "Heidegger's Concept of Truth Revisited," Nordic Journal of Philosophy 3, no. 2 (2002): 76.

9 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alponso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 65-66.

10 Levinas Totality and Infinity, 75.

11 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 304.

12 Emmanuel Levinas, Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 95.

13 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 84.

14 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 39.

15 Emmanuel Levinas, Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism, trans. Sean Hand (Evanston, IL: Northern University Press, 1989), 294.

other, or to God as the absolutely other, precedes the autonomy of our subjective freedom."[16] Hence, any attempt to reduce the other or exercise authority over the other obstructs the possibility of a meaningful dialogue and relationship. Encountering the other does not mean the dissolution of the same into the other and vice versa, such that the self or the other loses identity, but acknowledging the differences that distinguish the other from the self.

The self, in the context of the other, connotes a relatedness that neither undermines nor subjugates. Rather, it calls forth an ethical responsibility that seeks for the good of the other: "The self finds its meaning, not centered in itself as an ego establishing its individual freedom and power, but as a self facing the other person who calls the self out of its center to be ethically responsible."[17] Despite potential distinctions, the other is not seen as an alien object. Rather, relatedness is the premise for approaching the other. A genuine meeting is conceivable even in the presence of obstacles that exist when facing the otherness of the other. This potential is predicated on comprehending the other via alterity, which negates treating the other as a reducible object. While the goal of encountering the otherness of the other aimed at comprehending the unknown in order to be more fully responsible, care must be taken to ensure that crucial information about the other is neither bypassed nor misjudged. The other will remain unknown if important details or the other's constitutive content are circumvented or misinterpreted. If that happens, the inclination to relate to the other will likely result in a reaction rather than a response.

Levinas' Phenomenological-Theological Approach

Rethinking the preceding discourse, the link between the self and the other underscores not just an ethical responsibility that is attentive to the other but a responsibility that knows no bounds and expects nothing in return. It implies "a responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself."[18] This is because the other is not merely other but an absolute other; hence, responsibility towards the other becomes an obligation. If it were only a mere other, ethical responsibility would either diminish or no longer be necessary but contingent. The manner of relating to relatively others differs from how the self (or "same") relates to the absolute other. A meaningful relationship that is ethically inspired and transcendental in nature is only possible with the absolute other.

For this reason, ethical responsibility is not solely a responsibility for its sake. But because this other possesses or reflects a transcendental reality, i.e. God, responsibility becomes necessary. The self therefore perceives the absolute other both here and now, beyond the physical distance and proximity that reveal the otherness of God in the other. In the face of the other person, there is God: "In the face, the Other expresses his eminence, the dimension of height and divinity from which he descends."[19] Since God's otherness is revealed in the other, it follows that God is inherently present in the other. The implication is that, in relating to the other, God is related too. This suggests the interconnectedness between human and divine relationship.[20] "There can be no 'knowledge' of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth."[21] One cannot claim to relate to God while neglecting the other, who is physically present. To attain the former is possible with the absolute other that bears God's image. A relationship with God without the other is pointless; rather, relationship with God highlights relationship with the other that engenders ethical responsibility for the other.[22] Said otherwise, relationship with God presupposes relationship with the other because the otherness of the other exemplifies God's otherness. Thus, the possibility of engaging Levinas' ethical thought theologically is inherent in this otherness of God, and it goes beyond a mere "philosophical primacy of the idea of infinity."[23] Furthermore, Levinas' concept of alterity, when situated in the context of the other, provides sufficient grounds to engage with his ethics theologically, so that ethics inspires theology.

Exploring in detail key features that informed Levinas'

16 Emmanuel Levinas, Face to Face with Emmanuel Levinas, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 27.

17 George Kunnz, The Paradox of Power and Weakness: Levinas and an Alternative Paradigm for Psychology (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 34.

18 Emmanuel Levinas, The Levinas Reader (New York: Blackbell, 1989), 83.

19 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 262.

20 Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 106.

21 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 78.

22 Richard Kearney, States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 189.

23 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 26.

phenomenological-theological thought will be insufficient without a look into his Jewish background, which offers salient information that shaped his thought. As a Jew, the Talmud and the Hebrew scriptures impacted his writings and thoughts positively.[24] Furthermore, the Holocaust episode, anti-Semitism, and the persistent tension between different religious traditions may have contributed to shaping his idea of ethics, which is geared towards an ethical-theological approach. The horror of the Holocaust and other forms of violence that reduce the other to a mere object are some of the instances where the otherness of the other is neglected, trampled, and cruelly harmed. Such examples of violence underscore the inhumanity of the same in the face of the other. When the other's existential condition remains unheard, unchallenged, and unsolved, violence against it continues.

Resolving the issues theologically may seem inadequate without an ethical responsibility that is oriented towards the other. This is not to suggest that theological concepts have no ethical basis. Theology, when understood correctly, possesses ethical bases. However, if doing theology ends only in theoretical or onto-theology, then the praxis associated with doing theology may be neglected. Hence, ethical responsibility as understood by Levinas can inspire theology and throw light onto the theological endeavor. Since Levinas is neither in favor of ontology nor onto-theology that is theoretical anchored, what may seem suitable is ethics as a basis for informed theological tasks. Response toward the other becomes unconditional such that the self is inspired by God and ethical responsibility. It implies transcending one's own autonomy with an orientation toward the other.[25] The act of transcending one's own autonomy for the sake of the other in connection to the infinite or the otherness of God present in the other is itself the very reinforcement of theology in Levinas' ethics. The theology in Levinas' ethics can be inferred through the responsibility that is anchored in justice and love towards the other. Responsibility of such kind, since it is unconditional, breaks the limits of language and culture.[26]

Although Levinas considered justice as a priority that needed to be tailored in everyday existence in relation to the other,[27] the idea of love remained imperative.[28] For Levinas, love was neither *eros* nor infatuation but pure and uncontaminated love, devoid of any discrimination towards the other. The kind of love Levinas portrays is *agape*, which highlights the love of God and neighbor. The love of God and neighbor is central to all true religion. A religion without love is not a religion. To love God and the other unconditionally "is a commandment, a duty, and only if recognized as such is love theologically relevant."[29] In that light, love of one's neighbor is nothing but responsibility. Neighbor connotes the other person or the face of the other. Thus, "the face of a neighbor signifies for me an unexceptional responsibility, preceding every free consent, every pact, and every contract. It escapes representation."[30] In the face of the other, the indwelling God overflows our conscience with a responsibility, "You shall not kill."[31] In other words, the face of the other speaks out in either unspoken or spoken words, "do not kill me." While the other may appear vulnerable, the self is called not to take advantage, kill, or subjugate, but to assume an ethical responsibility that safeguards and cares for the other in a way that the other and the self can co-exist peacefully without suspicion or prejudice. In that light, dialogue becomes a welcoming avenue rather than a threat. An illustration of that reality is exemplified by Levinas:

> The presence of the face coming from beyond the world, but committing me to human fraternity, does not overwhelm me as a numinous essence arousing fear and trembling. To be in relationship while absolving oneself from this relation is to speak. The Other does not only *appear* in his face, as a phenomenon subject to the action and domination of a freedom; infinitely distant from the very relation he enters, he presents himself there for the first as an absolute.[32]

To be ethically responsible to others affirms that the self exists not for the self alone but for others. In that context, "responsibility no longer designates the subject's authorship over its actions within a closed egological economy,

24 Glenn Morrison, "A Critical Review of Michael Purcell's Theological Development of Levinas' Philosophy," The Heythrop Journal 44, no. 2 (2003): 150.

25 Richard J Bernstein, "Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy," in The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 264.

26 Asher Horowitz, "How Can Anyone Be Called Guilty? Speech, Responsibility, and the Social Relation in Habermas and Levinas," Philosophy Today 44, no. 3 (2000): 305.

27 Emmanuel Levinas, Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 107.

28 Levinas, Entre Nous, 104.

29 Werner G. Jeanrond, A Theology of Love (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010), 108.

30 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 88.

31 Emmanuel Levinas, Collected Philosophical Papers, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 55.

32 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 215.

but rather designates the other's demand on me. The author becomes the respondent...I am responsible for the other."[33] The other is the very reason for my existence; thus, responsibility towards the other is not something forced upon me but an obligation requiring my unconditional response. This is because "the Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated."[34] Given that the self exists for the other, the notion of solipsism or individualism that negates the other is incompatible with Levinas' "self for the other." To exist for the other implies love of neighbor, grounded in ethical proximity.

Levinas' Love of neighbor is traceable in the New Testament: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second most important commandment is this: Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Mk 12:30–31). This is also found in the Islamic tradition, as a call to live out the values of love.[35] The love of God and neighbor is what binds most, if not all, religious traditions.

Levinas' idea of love is inseparable from justice. Where there is true love, justice prevails. A case at hand is Levinas' response to philosophical and theological discourse, as documented by Peperzak,[36] which indicates Levinas' incorporation of the book of Jeremiah 22:16: "He did justice to the poor and unhappy, and that benefited him. This is surely what is called to know me, says the Eternal." "Truly I say to you: What you did to one of the least of my brethren, you did to me" (Matthew 25:40).

Love as an ethical responsibility is not reserved for those with whom the self is familiar; it must open to the stranger and vulnerable. Love always promotes inclusiveness rather than exclusion. Since God's alterity is reflected in the alterity of others, love of neighbor implies love of God and does not exclude anyone. Levinas' love of neighbor and its interconnectedness to love of God are influenced by his idea of the infinite, reflected in his ethical framework. Loving one's neighbor as one's ethical duty to the other creates a foundation for a sustainable relationship, which cannot exist unless one first takes on this obligation. Ethics-driven relationships foster communication, which open the door to discourse. "The relation of proximity is the original language and it is the ethical relation that is presupposed by all communication."[37]

Dialogue with the other will remain an illusion, if not impossible, without first expressing an ethical responsibility that underscores ethical relation and proximity. In the absence of these features, engaging with the other becomes difficult because the self appears to the other as a terror and outsider that seeks to annihilate rather than protect. Similarly, when situated in the context of religion, relations and dialogue become difficult and, in some cases, may spark violence, unless each religion is able to rediscover their truest identity, which is nothing but love and responsibility for the other. When religion fails to embrace and live out its core value of love amid the differences, conflict ensues. The outbreak of conflict among different religions is often the primary reason for interfaith dialogue. Through interfaith dialogue, different religions are able to come to terms with each other and at the same time retain their uniqueness. While interfaith dialogue remains a promising approach in mitigating indifferences and conflict among religions, it is not devoid of problems that may hamper such a noble task.

Issues Confronting Interfaith Dialogue and The Characteristics of Postmodernism

Before exploring some of the prevailing issues confronting interfaith dialogue, the meanings and implications of dialogue need to be explored. Dialogue means different things to different disciplines and thinkers. For Gadamer, it is a form of language, text interpretations, and most importantly a "fusion of horizons" such that truthful agreement in dialogue is reached.[38] It "is a process of two people understanding each other . . . each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his points of view worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says."[39] Gadamer's idea of horizon is neither the subsuming of the self into the other nor subjugating the other but going beyond the immediacy to arrive at mutual agreement. A horizon therefore, "is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and

33 Francois Raffoul, The Origins of Responsibility (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 164.

34 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 215.

35 A Common Word, "Introduction to a Common Word between Us and You," An Open Letter (2007): 4-11.

36 Adriaan T. Peperzak, "The Significance of Levinas' Work for Christian Thought," in The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordman University Press, 2000), 190.

37 Horowitz, "How Can Anyone Be Called Guilty?" 295.

38 Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal (London: Continuum Publication Group, 2004), 301.

39 Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 347.

invites one to advance further."[40] It leads to a realization and deeper understanding.[41] Buber, however, sees dialogue in terms of an "I-thou" relationship, a communion with the other.[42]

Despite the differences, there are commonalities. Dialogue pertains to a shared interaction between two or more individuals or a particular group with another group, each being represented with a purpose of understanding the other amid differences and to foster common good, such that trust, respect, love, and responsibility flourish. In dialogue, "each must place himself at the disposal of the other, be able to listen to him with a desire to learn from him. The closer each approaches . . . and the more honestly each presents himself as he really is, the richer and more fruitful the dialogue."[43] This means that in dialogue, "no one side has a monopoly on the truth of the subject, but both need to seek further."[44] It is neither about winning nor losing but arriving at an enlightenment that serves the best interests of the parties involved. There is no loser in dialogue. Dialogue is not about "playing a game against each other, but with each other. In dialogue, everyone wins."[45] It differs from a discussion. In a discussion each individual or party aims to win, resulting in a rift. In contrast, dialogue aims to harmonize.[46] In that light it is a "conscious process, in which deliberate efforts toward understanding the religiously other or strange are implied."[47]

When dialogue is situated among different religions, it often is referred to as interfaith or interreligious dialogue. Both terms capture Levinas' idea of ethical encounter with the other, which does not imply mere conversation, but being responsible for the other as well.[48] Each religion that is party to a dialogue, with its own claimed truths, is unique. The very claims each religion holds influence the outcome of a dialogue either positively or negatively. In other words, responses and perceptions in dialogue, informed by the approaches employed, can enhance or mar religious dialogue.

Two well-known approaches to other religions are cosmopolitanism and fundamentalism.[49] The latter rigorously defends its own religious tradition and finds whatever dialogue project that appears incongruent with its tradition unacceptable. The former is open and embraces differences with no barriers. Considering the two approaches, the obvious fact is that fundamentalism, while it may not directly interfere with discourse, undermines the purpose of dialogue. It must be repudiated and avoided at all costs. In contrast, cosmopolitanism provides a fair framework that mitigates unforeseen challenges because it welcomes and embraces others. Cosmopolitanism accepts the diversity that exists among religions and is thus more receptive to religious discourse than fundamentalism.

Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism

Religions generally view religious truth as uniform, so other religions that do not belong to the sameness are perceived as either being misleading or lacking in some way.[50] Religious diversity, therefore, is contextualized on the contested truth claims. Religious views on the truth claims of other religions are grouped in one of three ways: Exclusivist, pluralist, and inclusivist.[51]

The *exclusivist* considers other religion to be false because of their differences or because they do not belong to the one professed faith.[52] The exclusivist sees their religion to be the only valid and true religion, while other religions are neither valid nor true. They exert supremacy over competing views and often appear antagonistic to possible dialogue on the premise that others do not belong to the one true religion. For the exclusivist, all dialogue is pointless unless its goal is to convert others to the one true religion. Exclusivism has been viewed to have two variants: "closed and open."[53] Open exclusivism maintains its perspective of superiority toward the religious

40 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 245.

41 David Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," International Journal of Philosophical Studies 17, no. 4 (2009): 527.

42 Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 51.

43 Suso Brechter, "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity," in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 4:128.

44 Leonard Swidler, Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding: Strategies for the Transformation of Culture-Shaping Institutions (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 20.

45 David Bohm, On Dialogue, ed. Lee Nichol (London: Routledge, 1996), 7.

46 Bohm, On Dialogue, 6.

47 Aasulv Lande, "Recent Developments in Interreligious Dialogue," in The Concept of God in Global Dialogue, ed. Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 32–33.

48 Emmanuel Levinas, Outside the Subject, trans. Michael B. Smith (StanfordCA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 43.

49 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Patterns of Faith Around the World (England: Oneworld Oxford, 1998), 124-125.

50 Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Religious Diversity: What Is The Issue?" in Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21.

51 Gavin D'Costa, "The Pluralist Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions," Scottish Journal of Theology 39, no. 2 (1986): 211-212.

52 Michael Peterson, et al., Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 262.

53 Douglas Pratt, "Contextual Paradigms for Interfaith Relations," Current Dialogue 42 (2003): 4.

other, yet remains open to the other in the hope that the other would be drawn in and converted. Closed exclusivism rejects any religious other. The problem is that since other religions are considered false, there may be a tendency towards annihilating the other by way of revolutionary action. In other words, closed exclusivism can trigger violence. For Jeanrond, any attempt to totalize the other into the same has to be repudiated.[54] It is consistent with Levinas' ethical framework, "I exist through the other for the other."[55]

The *pluralist* recognizes that no one religion has a monopoly on truth. Thus, there are many truths and many approaches of interpreting divine reality.[56] There are four kinds of pluralism: Common ground, common goal, complementarity holistic, and dynamic parallel.[57] Common ground pluralism holds that religious differences have a primary source from which all religions of the world are derived. Common goal pluralism maintains that although different religions depict various paths to salvation, they are all drawn to the "universal goal." Complementarity holistic pluralism views religious differences as complimentary in relation to a "universal whole." This differs slightly from dynamic parallel pluralism that sees religious differences as a "parallelism of religious phenomena."

Because it implies that there are several truths, pluralism engenders relativism. Relativism is a rejection of absolute truth, and is dangerous to truth itself. But the *inclusivist* believes that others, though they differ, possess some elements of truth, even if their possession of the truth is yet insufficient.[58] Pratt grouped inclusivism into three types: Gatekeeper, Incognitio Ubiquity, and Imperialist.[59]

Gatekeeper inclusivism allows for universal connections with other religious traditions, but the legitimacy of these connections can only be determined through one religion. While the religious other may enjoy a certain degree of the "Universal Truth," nevertheless, in order to receive salvation, the religious other needs to pass through the inclusivist's religion's gate. Incognito ubiquity inclusivism "allows for partial validity (truth value) as well as partial efficacy (salvific value) in respect of other religions."[60] Finally, the imperialist inclusivist permits the "partial truth validity and salvific efficacy in respect of others (but only those deemed 'authentic')."[61] However, because the truth in other religions is viewed as partial or inadequate, the tendency to absorb the other to the same without consideration of the other's uniqueness often becomes a problem. With each of these categories, when "my religion" becomes the only one that is true and valid, the goals and objectives of interfaith dialogue are jeopardized.

Issues of Interfaith Dialogue

Issues confronting interfaith dialogue that stem from the plurality of religions are multifaceted. Several issues merit special examination.

1) *Biases*. The lack of understanding of the other often leads to hasty generalizations that downplay the other religion. The outcome often leads to a strong opposition that eventually, in some cases, results in violence. The violence may not have occurred if, in the first place, there were no preconceived biases about the other. The presence of biases impedes understanding and puts dialogue at risk.

2) *Lack of respect*. Another issue is a lack of respect. When delegates of different religions attempt interfaith dialogue and fail to respect the faith professed by the other, dialogue ceases its objective and becomes an avenue for hostility and dominance. In the absence of equality and reciprocity of respect, dialogue becomes only subjective talk. In such a setting, it becomes impossible to engage in any meaningful discourse.

3) *The attempt to fuse different religions into one*. While there are differences, any attempt to fuse or portray the other as the same hampers the possibility of learning from each other and, more importantly, hampers the ability to engage in a dialogue that produces a sustainable relationship. This is because the other feels insecure on the premise that fusion will lead to the loss of identity and inherent values associated with the faith the other upholds. Under such a condition, dialogue is no longer seen as dialogue but as a disguised agenda intending to intrude and conquer. The outcome is usually resistance, which leads to unhealthy situations that both undermine the objective of dialogue and create barriers to any future engagement.

4) *Strict guidelines and requirements*. Dialogue generally fails when strict guidelines and requirements are established. The failure is due to guidelines that

54 Werner G. Jeanrond, "Toward an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love," in Interreligious Hermeneutics, Series 2, eds. Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 47.

55 Levinas, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, 114.

56 John Hick, An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 234–250.

57 Pratt, "Contextual Paradigms for Interfaith Relations," 7.

58 Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, Divinity and Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 19.

59 Pratt, "Contextual Paradigms for Interfaith Relations," 5.

60 Pratt, "Contextual Paradigms for Interfaith Relations," 5.

61 Pratt, "Contextual Paradigms for Interfaith Relations," 5.

may not favor all participating parties. Stringent guidelines can prove unfavorable to a free flow of dialogue where participating members can openly express their views about their faith.

Characteristics of Postmodernism

Postmodernism poses a danger to interfaith dialogue and relations. It rejects moral principles, encourages relativism, and upholds divisions.[62]

Postmodernism often is characterized by relativism and skepticism of modernism's "grand narrative." In a broader sense, postmodernism "is a rejection of the Enlightenment project, the modern technological ideal, and the philosophical assumptions upon which modernism was built."[63] Proponents of postmodernism repudiate universal truth claims and propose a multiplicity of ways for viewing and interpreting realities. Lyotard, one of its key proponents, defines postmodern as "incredulity towards meta-narratives."[64] It is an attempt to advance Wittgenstein's "language game."[65] Hence, it is a pattern of discourse, a reaction against the absolute truth claims or the basic assumptions about realities. Said another way, postmodernism as a pattern of thought "is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation."[66] The very makeup that shaped postmodernist thought includes "fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal 'totalizing' discourses."[67] Furthermore "the re-emergence of concern in ethics, politics, and anthropology for the validity of and dignity of 'the other' all indicate a . . . shift in 'the structure of feeling.'What all these have in common is a rejection of meta-narratives."[68] In light of postmodern features, the interpretation of reality becomes

> nothing more than what one makes of it. Furthermore, the rejection of meta-narratives is a great threat to knowledge and universal truth. This implies that there is no such thing as absolute truth, but instead, a plurality of truths. Such a position begs the question, how do we know anything for certain? Without a logical narrative, it is easy to be susceptible to erroneous conclusions about realities and the self. On the contrary, without the plurality of things, it is difficult to make informed judgments that differentiate truth from falsity. The challenge lies in the question of how we know things for certain.

Epistemological inquiry on "knowledge as justified true belief"[69] is a compelling starting point. But even at that, postmodernism rejects the necessary connection of reason and logic to the meaning impressed on things. Instead, from the perspective of postmodernism, meanings are viewed as contingent. Rather than a uniformity of meaning about reality, or about how truth is reached, postmodernism advocates for a range of differences. The danger is that there is no definite conclusion about meaning or a universal interpretation of reality, since there are no criteria or standards to gauge the correctness of meaning. Given the rejection of a "grand narrative" along with any standard of determining meaning and attaining knowledge, "postmodernism can be quite as exclusive and censorious as the orthodoxies it opposes."[70]

Postmodernism has influenced interfaith dialogue both directly and indirectly. First, the postmodern position of rejecting absolute truth is a threat to theological foundations about reality. Since postmodern interpretation of reality is subjective, "such schemas are inherently flawed, for they can never do justice to the diverse perceptions, experiences, and responsive interpretations that constitute the diverse religious narratives about the nature of Reality."[71] Thus, postmodernism affects the smooth flow of dialogue because it makes any possibility of arriving at a general consensus about reality difficult. Second, dialogue among different faiths may turn out pointless on the premise that such discourse has neither direction nor a set standard for determining and validating truth claims. Third, the exclusive nature of postmodernism makes it difficult to have positive regard for others. Consequently, it affects interfaith dialogue because participating members may knowingly or unknowingly view the other person as an outsider. Labeling the other on whatever ground has the potential to impede any possibility for a genuine dialogue

62 Douglas Pratt, "Pluralism, Postmodernism and Interreligious Dialogue," Sophia 46 (2007): 248.

63 Stanley J. Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 81.

64 Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

65 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 5-6.

66 Terry Eagleton, The Illusions of Postmodernism (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), vii.

67 David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 9.

68 Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, 9.

69 Mathias Steup, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology (New Jersey: Princeton Hall, 1998), 3.

70 Eagleton, The Illusions of Postmodernism, 26.

71 Pratt, "Pluralism, Postmodernism and Interreligious Dialogue," 254.

that can turn out to be advantageous to the group or the participating members. Fourth, the celebration of plurality of meanings and an interpretive approach to things, as opposed to absolute truth, obstructs openness and engenders skepticism about the other's truth claims. In a dialogue where members are suspicious of each other, there can be no meaningful and enriching dialogue. And lastly, the relativism associated with postmodernism has implications for morals. In a situation where moral relativism is advocated, the meaning of virtues is at risk. Moral relativism leads to many opposing and inconsistent interpretations of the word 'moral'. This can cause misunderstandings, making it difficult—if not impossible—to reach a mutual agreement in dialogue.

In light of these issues confronting interfaith dialogue today, it is pertinent at this point to consider possible responses within Levinas' matrix.

Levinas' Otherness - Communal Living and Interfaith Dialogue Amid Postmodernism

The essential premise in dialogue is that one must be open to the other and responsive to the other for the dialogue to strengthen both participants' faith. Such a condition is consistent with the primary goal of ecumenical dialogue and relations.[72] Openness is not just a mere openness, but a command to set aside whatever biases and preconceived or erroneous notions I may have about the other. A productive encounter with the religious other presupposes suspension of judgment. To suspend all forms of judgment implies being attentive to the other with empathy, altruism and a genuine attitude of "Here I Am."[73] When one is insensitive and lacks openness to the other, trepidation emerges and impedes dialogue.

For a response to be authentic, both willingness and availability are necessary conditions. This is because one can be available but not willing to assume responsibility, and one may be willing but not available. In that light, Levinas' "Here I Am," depicting availability, presupposes willingness to be open and responsive to the other, which is much different than passive availability. Thus, where interfaith dialogue is concerned, when members dispose themselves in a manner of availability for the other, trust and understanding flourish and serve as building blocks for interfaith dialogue.

Religions vary. But an attempt to reduce the other to the same undermines the chance of dialogue. For Levinas, the Other must not be reduced to the Same; reducing the other to the same is conquering the Other's uniqueness. However, dialogue can focus on finding common ground amid the differences. One plausible and compelling place to discover commonality is in the spirituality that is linked to each religion. For Levinas, regardless of the differences in religion, there is a trace of commonality that binds great religion, "there is no a single thing in a great spirituality that would be absent from another great spirituality."[74] In other words, a true religion possesses a spirituality that is identifiable in other true or great religions. This implies an interconnectedness among the world religions. When the inherent connectedness is realized and acknowledged, it leads to collaboration that positively shapes the direction of dialogue. For instance, the values of love and justice that reflect a transcendental reality are inherent in every true or great religion. Among the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the importance of love and justice are paramount. When such values are allowed to play their roles in their fullest, the eruption of violent religious intolerance will cease. Dialogue is possible when the parties work to identify commonalities instead of finding fault in attempts to pigeonhole or reduce the other to the same. Levinas draws out points of consideration:

> One must deliberately abstain from the convenience of 'historical rights,' 'rights of enrootedness,' 'undeniable principles' and 'the inalienable human condition.' One must refuse to be caught up in the tangle of abstractions, whose principles are often evident, but whose dialectic, be it ever so rigorous, is murderous and criminal.[75]

The exhibition of an authoritarian claim of superiority infringes upon the other's rights and threatens their existential condition. A portrayal of the Same to the Other in such a position devalues the Other. When pride and arrogance play out in dialogue, they do injustice to the essence of dialogue and impede the process of learning from the other. A sense of respect

72 Catherine E. Clifford, "Ecumenism: A Principal Concern of the Second Vatican Council," in The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II, eds. Catherine E. Clifford and Massimo Faggioli (Online edition: Oxford Academic, 2023), 285.

73 Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 106.

74 Emmanuel Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1998), 93.

75 Emmanuel Levinas, Alterity and Transcendence, trans. Michael B. Smith (United Kingdom: Athlone Press, 1999), 88.

and humility is necessary for true dialogue to occur. When humility is one of the conditions for dialogue, it spurs growth and makes learning from each other's faith possible.[76] Without humility and respect, dialogue loses its purpose and turns into a platform for animosity, especially when representatives of religions in interfaith dialogue exhibit disrespect for the faith professed by the others. Respectful dialogue is imperative regardless of differences. Disrespect towards the religious other often is due to lack of realization of the otherness of God in the other.

In the Christian tradition, all human beings possess God's image and are thus worthy of respect. The other in a religious dialogue is not an object, but a human being possessing God's image. Respect invites the self into a relationship with the other that does not undermine the other through any sort of derogatory remarks. The same in relation to the other is called to be respectful, even when the other may exhibit certain characteristics of vulnerability. In respecting the other, the self is respected too. Although for Levinas, ethical action towards the other expects nothing in return, "A responsibility without concern for reciprocity: I have to respond for an other without attending to an other's responsibility in regard to me."[77] Respecting the other is a duty, a responsibility the self owes to the other. Since I exist for the other, respect and care are necessary to interfaith dialogue. When the other is respected for what they are in terms of the faith they profess, they become more willing to engage in dialogue. For a greater degree of freedom and active participation among members, individuals need to feel welcome regardless of their faith. The issue of exclusivism endangers dialogue. Yet, genuine dialogue excludes no one. When the other is excluded, the other feels threatened and dehumanized. Such treatment, if unresolved, is likely to spark violence and extended conflicts instead of dialogue. Additionally, it is problematic when certain religions are underrepresented or treated as outsiders during interfaith dialogue. The issue of representation is being addressed by Levinas:

> The prohibition against representation would on the contrary suggest in the meaningful a transcendence in comparison to which that of intentionality was but an internment within self-consciousness. . . This transcendence is alive in the relation to the other man, i.e. in the proximity of one's fellow.[78]

Levinas' ethical imperatives to the other welcome everyone regardless of who they are and what faith they profess. Inasmuch as the other reflects God's image, the other is always welcome. The other deserves to be treated with an ethical responsibility that builds rather than annihilates. The premise is that "if we were exclusively beings, there would be no ethical imperative."[79] But since we are beings, ethical imperatives towards the other are necessary. The reason is, "the alterity of the unique is concretely the face of the other... not in its visibility as a plastic form, but in 'appresentation.' The thought awakened to the face of the other man is not a thought of . . . a representation, but from the start a thought for . . ., a non-indifference for the other."[80] There is always a connection of ethical dimensions to the other and to religion—broadly speaking—that is not restricted to a particular religion but nondenominational.[81] In that context, adopting a position where all religion's members feel safe and welcome fosters dialogue and enhances relationships aimed at the common good. An ongoing and inclusive dialogue is key to understanding and engaging responsibly with the other regardless of one's faith. It allows every member to feel welcomed and valued, and offers equal opportunity to learn from each other's religion in that way clarifies any doubt and misconceptions.

Conclusion

Levinas' otherness draws attention to ethical responsibility that is attentive to the transcendental and existential condition of the other. At the core of Levinas' ethics is an obligation that neither reduces nor totalizes the other but values the difference and uniqueness of the other. It acknowledges and celebrates the commonality that connects the self and the other, specifically, the religious other. Respecting the irreducibility of the other's "alterity" and refraining from totalizing the other, puts an end to any form of extremism tending towards violence, and leads to an ethical encounter necessary for dialogue. Embracing and living out such ethical responsibility, alongside other necessary conditions, mitigates problems often faced in interfaith dialogue. It allows for

76 Cornille, The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue, 9.

77 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, xv.

78 Levinas, Alterity and Transcendence, 126.

79 Bernstein, "Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy," 264

80 Levinas, Alterity and Transcendence, 139.

81 Richard A. Cohen, Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 187.

a more inclusive and meaningful dialogue among the different world religions.

Ethical accountability subverts postmodernism's negative influences and an individualism that negates the other. With an intentional ethical accountability, humanity begins to realize its truest purpose and its existence as a communal entity that ought to live harmoniously and care for the other through acts of love and justice, regardless of differences. Levinas' otherness offers not only a phenomenological-theological approach of responsibility to the other, but also methods of doing theology that equip theologians to engage in productive interfaith dialogue with religious others.

Bibliography

Bernstein, Richard J. "Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas,* edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 252-267. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Bohm, David. *On Dialogue*. Edited by Lee Nichol. London: Routledge, 1996.

Brechter, Suso. "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity." In *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II,* edited by Herbert Vorgrimler. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.

Clifford, Catherine E. "Ecumenism: A Principal Concern of the Second Vatican Council." In *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II,* edited by Catherine E. Clifford and Massimo Faggioli, 282-C17P59. Online edition: Oxford Academic, 2023.

Cohen, Richard A. *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Cornille, Catherine. *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue.* New York: Crossroad, 2008.

D'Costa, Gavin. "The Pluralist Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39, no. 2 (1986): 211-224.

David, Vessey. "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 4 (2009): 525-536.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Illusions of Postmodernism.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Alterity and Transcendence.* Translated by Michael B. Smith. United Kingdom: Athlone Press, 1999.

———. *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998.

———.*Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Translated by Sean Hand. Evanston, Illinois: Northern University Press, 1989.

———. *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*. Translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

———. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

———. *Face To Face with Emmanuel Levinas*. Edited by Richard A. Cohen. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

———. *Of God Who Comes to Mind*. Translated by Bettina Bergo Stanford. Stanford: Stanford University, 1998.

———. *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998.

———. *Outside the Subject*. Translated by Michael B. Smith. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

———. *The Levinas Reader.* New York: Blackwell, 1989.

———. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alponso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method.* New York: Crossroad, 1989.

———. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal. London: Continuum Publication Group, 2004.

Gelven, Michael. *A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time,* 2nd edition revised. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989.

Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996.

Hall, Gerard. "The Call to Interfaith Dialogue." *Australian eJournal of Theology* (2005): 1-22.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990.

Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989.

Horowitz, Asher. "How Can Anyone Be Called Guilty? Speech, Responsibility, and the Social Relation in Habermas and Levinas." *Philosophy Today* 44, no. 3 (2000): 295-317.

Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by Kersten, F. Hague: Nijhoff, 1982.

Jeanrond, Werner G. "Toward an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love." In *Interreligious Hermeneutics, Series 2.* Edited by Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, 44-60. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010.

Jeanrond, Werner G. *A Theology of Love*. New York: T & T Clark International, 2010.

Kearney,Richard. *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers.* New York: New York University Press, 1995.

Kunnz, George. *The Paradox of Power and Weakness: Levinas and an Alternative Paradigm for Psychology.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Lande, Aasulv. "Recent Developments in Interreligious Dialogue." In *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, edited by Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv LandeMaryknoll, 32-47. New York: Orbis Books, 2005.

Lyotard, Jean- François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Michaelides, Pavlos E. "Interfaith Dialogue in Global Perspective and the Necessity of Youth Involvement." *Asia Europe Journal* 7, no. 3-4 (2009): 449-462.

Morrison, Glenn. "A Critical Review of Michael Purcell's Theological Development of Levinas' Philosophy." *The Heythrop Journal* 44, no. 2 (2003):147-166.

Overgaard, Soren. "Heideggar's Concept of Truth Revisited." *Nordic Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2002): 73-90.

Peperzak, Adriaan T. "The Significance of Levinas' Work for Christian Thought." In *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Jeffrey Bloechl, 184-199. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

Peterson, Michael, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger. *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, second edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Pratt, Douglas. "Pluralism, Postmodernism and Interreligious Dialogue." *Sophia* 46 (2007):245-261.

Pratt, Douglas. "Contextual Paradigms for Interfaith Relations." *Current Dialogue* 42 (2003): 3-9.

Raffoul, Francois. *The Origins of Responsibility*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010.

Rothchild, Jonathan. "Self, Otherness, Theology, and Ontology: A Critical Engagement between Tillich and Kristeva, Levinas, and Bataille." *Bulletin of The North American Paul Tillich Society* 30, no 3. (2004): 31-42

Schmidt-Leukel, Perry. "Religious Diversity: What Is the Issue?" In *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought,* edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz, 17-26. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Patterns of Faith around the World*. England: Oneworld Oxford, 1998

Steup, Mathias. *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*. New Jersey: Princeton Hall, 1998.

Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt. *Divinity and Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon press, 2003.

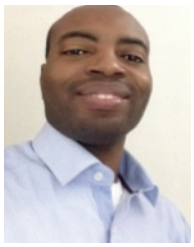
Swidler, Leonard. *Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding: Strategies for the Transformation of Culture-Shaping Institutions.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Vallega-Neu, Daniela. *Heidegger's Contribution to Philosophy: An Introduction.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

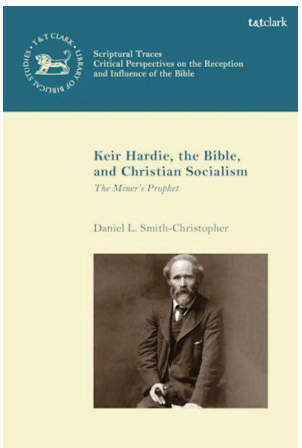
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M Anscombe. New York: Macmillan, 1953.

Wyschogrod, Edith. *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

Word, A. Common. "Introduction to a Common Word between Us and You." *An Open Letter* (2007): 1-29



Ignatius C. Williams is a graduate student at LMU. He majored in pastoral theology. His research interests include philosophy of religion, interfaith dialogue, moral theology, mental health, and transactional analysis psychotherapy. His study is the outcome of an award-winning project. Ignatius expresses gratitude to LMU's Department of Theological Studies and the pioneers of the Frederick Fellow Award, Loyola Marymount University.



Is there a "Proletarian" Reading of Scripture?
Thoughts on Keir Hardie's "Maverick" Biblical Studies.

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher

In a recent article, Biblical scholars Christopher Rowland and Ian Boxall explain that sometimes paying attention to unusual readers of the Bible can turn up quite interesting ideas, and thus we should be: "...open to a wide range of interpreters (marginal and even maverick as well as magisterial)."[1] Now there is a thought! "Maverick" interpreters of the Bible!!?? What – or *who* - might qualify as a "maverick" reading, or reader, of the Bible that is worth paying attention to?

How about an outspoken Scottish socialist, labor organizer, radical journalist, and one of the primary founders of the Labour Party? Sufficiently "maverick"? Recently, I have been reading a great many of the essays and editorials of the Socialist leader, Keir Hardie [1856-1915]. Given the recent election results in the UK where the Labour Party

1 Ian Boxall and Christopher Rowland, "Reception History" in The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation, ed. Steven McKenzie (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 206-215, here 207.

is once again elected after 14 years, and led by a Prime Minister named for Hardie, Keir Starmer, it seems especially timely to reflect on the fact that Hardie was not only an outspoken Christian, but among his (almost entirely self-taught) educational accomplishments was a very serious and interesting engagement with Scripture. As a Christian, he read widely, and thought deeply.

How serious was he about the Bible? While we may be used to political speeches that includes an occasional or vague religious sentiment – consider Hardie's speech, published in 1913, entitled, "Christ and the Modern Movement". In a 14-page essay, he made no less than 17 direct Biblical references. In fact, Hardie's talk takes up one of his favorite topics – contrasting the teaching and work of the modern church with the teachings and example of Jesus:

> sometimes I ask myself the question whether the Theologians have not built such a scaffolding of theological doctrine, dogma, and learning around the Christ as to obscure him from the view of the common people.[2]

Hardie then presents his image of Jesus, who was:

> ...a child born to working class parents ...living under a military despotism. The Roman soldiers were everywhere. A dictatorship supervened the making and administration of all their laws. Taxation was heavy and burdensome, poverty was rampant. We have that from the parables of the rich and poor. He could not have drawn a parallel from the hiring of the men in the market because no man had employed them unless He had known about the unemployed from actual experience...He spoke to the common people in the language of the common people...[3]

But Hardie is perhaps at his strongest when he calls for revolution based on Christian principles, affirming both inward and outward aspects of the message:

> Let me say to those of you of the working-classes, we must rescue Jesus Christ from the rich. He belongs to us in a special degree. The other side use Him as a mask behind which they go on violating His teaching, and if you were inclined to say that I am speaking of the worldly side of Christ's teaching, let me say that it was to do that that I came here. But you are apt to forget that there is a second side. I have felt the power of conversion to Christ. I know the peace that arises from a sense of sins forgiven...I ask you, then, my comrades, to believe me when I say that Christianity has its message not only for the past, but also for the present; that up to now that message has not found its embodiment in the modern Christian Church, but rather in the modern socialistic movement ...Let us work for what we know to be right, and if we are working in the spirit of humanity and for the good of humanity, we can claim Christ as the elder brother and the Great Comrade, and He will not forsake us in the hour of our necessity.[4]

There are a number of things that we can observe about what I have called Hardie's "Proletarian Exegesis" of the Bible.[5] Hardie reads the New Testament with an assumption that the situation of Jesus is not so different from his own, and he can thus interpret economic issues clearly. The poor in Jesus' day may have looked different, but Hardie still believed Jesus understood what poverty meant – and we read above, Hardie presented Jesus as the proverbial

2 P. 78, in Keir Hardie, "Christ and the Modern Movement," Christ and Labour, C.G. Ammon, ed., (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1913), 77-91.

3 Hardie, "Christ and the Modern Movement," 78, 80.

4 Hardie, "Christ and the Modern Movement," 89-91.

5 I should note that I am not necessarily arguing that Hardie's Biblical observations were all original to him – rather that as a voluminous writer, Hardie is an excellent source for what we may call Proletarian "exegesis" of the Bible. In my book, I take careful note of many of Hardie's allies who also had a keen interest in arguing Scripture as part of their socialist agitation, and many of Hardie's ideas are similar to theirs.

'working class hero'.

The growing field of "Reception History" (sometimes referred to as "Reception Criticism") aims to examine how the Bible has been read in a variety of interesting circumstances, and by a variety of interesting people. I confess that I had way too much fun writing my book on Keir Hardie, because time and again I found his reading of Scripture to be striking, insightful, and often downright challenging. So, I borrowed a term from the American Jewish radical, Michael Gold (1894-1967), who famously called for the rise of "Proletarian Literature", but warned that we would have to look in unusual places to find it and therefore encourage it to be produced! As I worked in quiet archives in the London area, reading through (often sadly crumbling) back issues of Keir Hardie's newspaper, The Labour Leader, I was impressed with how often, and with what conviction, he debated scripture with the religious leaders of his day! I am pleased to present to my colleagues and students (past and present) this new book for your consideration!

Why Theological Education Still Matters

Jonathan Rothchild

About ten years ago, I was attending a symposium on the future of theological education. A plenary speaker used the analogy of coal to describe the current state of theological education. According to several metrics, this metaphor conveying languishment is apt: the closures of theology/religious studies programs and seminaries, increases in religious disaffiliation, and diminishing numbers of students (e.g., enrollment at Association of Theological Schools [ATS] institutions has been declining or flat since 2005). More generally, various forces—ranging from neoliberalism to politicized rhetoric—have called into question the value of higher education (e.g., return on investment), the pursuit of scholarly inquiry, and practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the midst of these challenges, is there still a way forward for meaningful theological and pastoral education? Will theological education within the context of a university risk becoming ossified and obsolete? In briefly considering recent literature and ongoing initiatives in LMU's theology graduate program, I argue that there are reasons to be hopeful about the future of theological education.

Where Do We Go From Here?: Revisiting the Aims of Theological Education

Resources from theologians and religious studies scholars point to substantive features and future directions that resist reductionistic caricatures and narratives of decline. In his *History of Theological Education* (Abingdon, 2015), historical theologian Justo Gonzalez traces the trajectories of Christian theological education, characterizing the current state as a crisis. To redress this, he argues that theological education must return to the heart of the church, redefine the relationship between theological reflection and pastoral practice, and continue to transform in practical ways that include the entire community of faith. Similarly, Yale theologian Willie James Jennings emphasizes the importance of community in *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging (Eerdmans, 2020)*, particularly the unification of dissimilar, even incongruous, fragments in theological education. He articulates a key objective of theological education: "Theological education must capture its central work—to form us in the art of cultivating belonging."[1]

Womanist theologian Emily Townes similarly speaks to the importance of confronting unjust structures and promoting inclusivity in theological education, where institutions should "build community and make it larger and larger, to open up the doors and the windows and have a whole lot more people around the welcome table than

1 After Whiteness, 14.

what we have so often."[2] Building community requires the fostering of dialogue. Comparative theologian Michelle Voss Roberts holds that "[c]omparative methods will be increasingly important as theological schools prepare religious leaders for a pluralistic world."[3] Pluralism invites opportunities for theological engagement with the wider university and public arenas. In advocating for an "open circle" in The *Future of Catholic Higher Education* (Oxford, 2021), Fr. James Heft forges a via media—between a secular marketplace of ideas and a completely *ad intra* approach—that upholds Catholic tradition and doctrine in dialogue with scholars of other religions and principles of academic freedom.

LMU's Ongoing Initiatives: Community, Dialogue, and Collaboration

LMU's MA (Theology) and MA in Pastoral Theology programs are not immune from the aforementioned challenges, but we seek to be intentional in promoting increased access, collaborative community-building, sustainable dialogue, and innovation. A $1 million dollar Lilly Endowment Inc. grant, administrated jointly by the Theological Studies department and LMU's Center for Religion and Spirituality, will help increase access to theological and pastoral education for historically underrepresented and/or younger populations across Southern California. LMU is also one of 18 Catholic institutions participating in the *Haciendo Caminos* program designed to support Latino/a Catholic students pursuing graduate theological formation for ministry. This year, LMU graduate students—Katherine Orozco, Natalie Mejia, Jorge Ibarra, David Dominguez, and Alondra Larios Jimenez—received an aggregate total of $110,000 in funding from the program. Moreover, the *Say Something Theological* journal, founded by Prof. Cecilia González-Andrieu in 2017, continues to publish original scholarship by undergraduate and graduate students.[4]

Collaboration with students continues after graduation. The graduate program benefits from its coordination with the Graduate Program Advisory Council (GPAC), which is constituted by alumni, current students, and community leaders and led this year by Deacon Sonal Seneviratne and Carlos Cruz-Aedo. Alumni of the program hold archdiocesan, diocesan, and parish leadership positions, and several faculty sit on commissions within the Los Angeles Archdiocese (including Prof. Layla Karst on the Liturgical Commission and Profs. Roberto Dell'Oro and Nancy Pineda-Madrid on the Theological Commission). These relationships extend the impact of theological education and foster—as Justo Gonzalez puts it—"[t]he purpose of theological education [that] is to irrigate the land around it."[5]

Forging new frontiers in theological education, faculty contribute interdisciplinary, interreligious, and intersectional scholarship that addresses questions and debates in the academy, church, and wider publics. Among a myriad of other works, recent faculty publications have examined the spiritual significance of community,[6] racism and the church,[7] and sources for Black Catholic liturgy.[8] Theological Studies faculty have been leaders in shaping discourse in theology and religious studies. Prof. Amir Hussain recently completed his term as President of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), and Prof. Nancy Pineda-Madrid currently serves as President-Elect of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA). Prof. Cecilia González-Andrieu received the CTSA Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Award this year for her contributions to "woman-defined scholarship and liberating action on behalf of women in the church and/or the broader community."[9]

These scholarly pursuits are inspired and informed by conversations in the classroom. Faculty continuously work to provide continuity and innovation in the curriculum. In addition to courses covering premodern and contemporary topics, thinkers, and themes in Scripture, systematic theology, theological ethics, pastoral/practical theology, spirituality/ spiritual direction, historical theology, liturgical theology, and comparative theology, recent graduate courses have addressed emerging questions and methodologies (e.g., Prof. Roy Fisher's "Toward

2 Quoted in Benjamin Wayman, "Imagining the Future of Theological Education," The Christian Century, February 24, 2021, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/features/imagining-future-theological-education.

3 Michelle Voss Roberts, "Comparative Moments: A Comparative Theological Orientation for Theological Education," Religious Education 115, no. 3 (2020), 343-348, at 347.

4 For further information, see: https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/saysomethingtheological

5 As quoted in Wayman, "Imagining the Future of Theological Education."

6 Anna Harrison, Thousands and Thousands of Lovers: Sense of Community among the Nuns of Helfta (Cistercian Publications, 2022).

7 Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, and Elizabeth T. Vlasko, eds., Why We Can't Wait: Racism and the Church (College Theology Society) (Orbis, 2023).

8 Kim Harris, M. Roger Holland II, and Kate Williams, eds., The Fire This Time: A Black Catholic Sourcebook (GIA Publications, 2023).

9 For further information, see: https://ctsa-online.org/Awards.

an LGBTQ Theology;" Prof. Brett Hoover's "'The Nones' Religious Disaffiliation") as part of a responsive and inclusive pedagogy.

Concluding Reflections

The LMU graduate program remains cognizant of the challenges faced by theological education (and higher education in general). The debates over the efficacy of coal (in literal and symbolic ways) as a viable mode will persist, but the program will continue to explore methods of learning, teaching, and researching in theology and religious studies that emphasize access, diversity/intersectionality, equity, inclusion, community, dialogue, and transformation. We are committed to engaging in dialogue with intersecting phenomena: Catholic doctrine and practices; ecumenical and interreligious partners; a broad range of scholarly methodologies, interpretive/hermeneutical lenses, and fields of study; the sacred texts, rituals, and practices of diverse religious traditions; the signs of the times, the lived realities of persons, just/unjust social structures, and all their moral complexities; and the full spectrum of the Catholic intellectual tradition (the sciences, law, the arts, and the Ignatian imagination). The future of theological education requires that, as Pope Francis encourages, we "encounter others"[10] authentically and appreciate the ways theological education can help sustain us, others, and our communities.

10 See Pope Francis, "Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, For a Culture of Encounter," Libreria Editrice Vaticana, September 13, 2016, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160913_for-a-culture-of-encounter.html

Dr. Rothchild is Professor of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University. His research analyzes contemporary moral issues and social and legal structures through the lenses of Christian theology and ethics.

Article Contributors:

Reuben Adzakey
Cecilia González-Andrieu
Brett Hoover
Darya Jones
Nancy Pineda-Madrid
Quinn Roberts
Jonathan Rothchild
Daniel Smith-Christopher
Ignatius Williams

Editor

Jennifer Scott
Administrator of LMU
Graduate Theological Studies

Layout Design

Linton Valdock
Graphic Designer
Campus Digital Graphics

Cover Photo

Courtesy of LMU

Associate Editor

Peter Bennett
Teaching Professor in the Department of Theology
and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
is published by
the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts
at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA.
For more information, visit:
bellarmine.lmu.edu/gradtheo
or call 310.338.7772

Loyola Marymount University
Theological Studies