

Creative, Critical, and True: Training Students to Improvise Responsibly with Biblical Text: A Pragmatist, Spirit-led Model

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CREATIVE, CRITICAL, AND TRUE:
TRAINING STUDENTS TO IMPROVISE RESPONSIBLY WITH BIBLICAL TEXT:
A PRAGMATIST, SPIRIT-LED MODEL

A dissertation

By

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ABSTRACT

CREATIVE, CRITICAL, AND TRUE: TRAINING STUDENTS TO IMPROVISE RESPONSIBLY WITH BIBLICAL TEXT: A PRAGMATIST, SPIRIT-LED MODEL

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In this dissertation, I argue that Bible education is best understood as training students to improvise responsibly with Scripture. I explore this pedagogical model by reflecting on my experience as a Bible instructor at Cristo Rey New York High School, an inner city Catholic school. The goal of a Cristo Rey education is the integral liberation of students. In the language of liberation theology, to be “integrally liberated” is to survive and to thrive on all levels – material, cultural, psychosocial, and spiritual.

Learning to improvise responsibly with Scripture helps students to grow in integral liberation. It helps them develop the capacity to perceive and to act with greater freedom, discernment, and commitment. It helps them to handle and interpret the Bible in ways that are creative, critical, and true. Here being true means more than being factually accurate; it means being true to the text, being true to the needs of one's interpreting community, and being true to the inner promptings of God's Holy Spirit. Responsible improvisation connects Biblical interpretation with artistry, with problem-solving, and with the construction of counter-cultural spaces.

This dissertation supports a pedagogy for improvising responsibly with Scripture in four different ways:

- It uses the theory of Situated Learning to understand teaching as a form of training for practice.

- It uses Augusto Boal's critical pedagogy, known as "Theatre of the Oppressed," to help teachers imagine what training for responsible improvisation might look like.
- It uses the Pragmatist theology of Donald Gelpi, SJ as an overarching philosophical framework which links norms, inquiry, and semiotics with a theory of Spirit-led interpretation.
- It outlines and evaluates a teaching unit on the Gospel of Matthew, to construct a warrant for this pedagogical model.

I conclude by discussing the implications of this pedagogy for Catholic educational ministry and ministerial training.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Matias Anom Bramanti Wibowo.

Terima kasih kepada yang tersayang Anom!

CHAPTER I. IMPROVISING RESPONSIBLY WITH SCRIPTURE: INTEGRAL LIBERATION IN THE INNER CITY CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

I. Introduction: A Little Biblical Magic

“You know what that story is *really* about,” offered Mark. Mark was one of my fellow religion teachers at Brother Edmund Rice High School, Harlem, USA. Sitting there in the Library as we waited for one of our (marathon) faculty meetings to begin, we were discussing Jesus’ multiplication of the loaves and the fish, he a passionate Black Catholic from the Gulf Coast, I a White gay man determined to make a difference through religious education. Mark continued, “It’s about sharing. The ‘miracle’ was that – when Jesus and his disciples brought out their stash of food – the crowd felt empowered to share their stashes as well. There’s nothing magical about it.” But I was headed down a different track. On my mind was a conversation I’d had with Randall Styers a few years before. Randall had suggested that present-day capitalism and the ancient doctrine of transubstantiation promote radically different approaches to the world.¹ In a cultural milieu that values positivist science, Randy said, it is difficult to think coherently about transubstantiation; at best it is a special exception to the laws of nature and common sense, at worst it is sheer “hocus pocus.”² But in an alternative cultural setting, the Eucharist embodies that deep and powerful magic which reaches out to us from before

¹ He has published his research on the critical history of magic, science, and superstition in Western Europe in Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

² One frequently proposed etymology for “hocus pocus” is a corruption or parody of *Hoc est corpus [meum]* “This is [my] body,” the Latin words spoken by a Catholic priest over the bread at Eucharist. The parodic potential of this phrase is underlined in anti-Catholic polemic as early as the mid 17th century. See “Hocus Pocus,” *The Open Court: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea* 18, no. 4 (April, 1904): 252-253.

the foundation of the world, from “the stillness ... before Time dawned.”³ I offered up this lengthy digression and ended by linking it back to our Biblical passage. “I think that Jesus’ actions *are* a little bit magical. If the bread is just bread, you can commodify it. But if it’s *usually* bread – except sometimes, it turns into *God* – then you can’t commodify it quite as easily.”

Our friend David from the Science Department had been listening to this conversation with interest. A native of Jamaica, David had studied science and popular education in the former Soviet Union. Just as the principal called our meeting to order, David got in the last word: “I agree with John,” he said. “You can’t fight capitalism without a little magic.”

The words of my socialist colleague have stayed with me: “You can’t fight capitalism without a little magic.” They articulate something important about the cultural and spiritual dimensions of our struggle against dehumanizing forces. They suggest the power of Scripture to conjure new visions and new, more just practices. They push back at – without completely rejecting – “critical” approaches to Scripture. They accept “this-worldly” interpretive strategies, but they resist a positivism that shuts the door on Divine interventions, that is, interventions which are to all reasonable evidences beyond the realm of human possibility. They suggest that a shift in our interpretive models might open up new vistas for teaching, for theory, and for action that promotes liberation and justice.

³ “[T]hough the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of Time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation.” C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005 [original 1950]), 169.

In this dissertation, I offer a new model for teaching Scripture that I hope will help students, catechists, and theological educators keep open that door to inspired and inspiring engagements with the Bible. I propose that *teaching the Bible to Christian students is best understood as training them to improvise responsibly with Scripture*.⁴ To use more direct and evocative language, I propose that Christian religious educators should teach students how to *interpret the Bible in ways that are creative, critical, and true*. In this context, being true means more than being factually accurate; it means being true to the text, being true to the needs of one's interpreting community, and being true to the promptings of the Holy Spirit that can guide the interpretive process.

It may seem strange to speak of improvisation in the same breath as teaching Scripture, where the focus is so often on critical scholarship and the studied interpretation of texts.⁵ One definition of improvisation focuses on spur of the moment performance; it underlines that to “im-pro-vice” is to act “without fore-seeing,” as the Latin origin of the term implies.⁶ Thus, for many people improvisation can seem a mysterious skill of creating words, melodies, or performances ex nihilo – of composing out of thin air. But there is another key aspect of improvisation: “to fabricate out of what is conveniently on

⁴ Ilan Gur-Ze'ev of the Faculty of Education, University of Haifa, Israel has used the phrase “responsible improvisation” to describe a post-modern, peace-making pedagogy rooted in Jewish sensibilities and the “negative theology” of Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer. While his proposal has some affinities with my own, I work with different theological premises and pedagogical commitments. See for example Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, “Adorno and Horkheimer: Diasporic Philosophy, Negative Theology, and Counter-education,” *Policy Futures in Education* 8, no. 3 & 4 (2010): 298-314.

⁵ For the argument of this paragraph, see Bruce Ellis Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics: Jazz Lessons for Interpreters,” in Kevin J. Vanhooser, James K. A. Smith and Bruce Ellis Benson, *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 193-210.

⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the word “improvise” and its English derivatives to 17th century French *improviser* and the Italian *improvisare*; it stresses the use of the term for verse, music, oratory, or any behavior that is “extempore,” “impromptu,” “on the spur of the moment,” or that simply “provide[s] for the occasion.” *Oxford English Dictionary / OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, March 2015), s.vv. “improvise,” “improvisare,” <http://www.oed.com.proxy.bc.edu/view/Entry/92882> (accessed March 29, 2015).

hand.”⁷ As theologian and musical theorist Bruce Ellis Benson points out, “this definition . . . much better reflects actual improvisational practice” and provides a valuable insight into both the composition and the interpretation of texts – including Scripture.⁸

In the past few decades, scholars of the humanities and of the social sciences have started using this sense of improvisation to model human behavior more broadly. For these scholars, the tools, materials, concepts, and opportunities at hand both fund and delimit the possibilities for human action. They argue that we are neither boundlessly free nor mechanically determined in realms like religious expression,⁹ ethical practice,¹⁰ gender expression,¹¹ artistry¹² or daily living;¹³ instead, we are embedded in webs of physical, cultural, and spiritual possibility.

If this line of thinking is valid, then improvisation may also be helpful in modeling the process of teaching and learning about Scripture. A model, as Sallie McFague has written, is “a metaphor that has gained sufficient stability and scope so as to present a pattern for relatively comprehensive and coherent explanation;” it is a developed metaphor that helps us “understand . . . many things.”¹⁴ In this dissertation, I offer improvisation as a model for understanding how Christians interpret and work with Scripture. I further suggest that teaching Scripture is best modeled or understood as

⁷ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 2003), s.v. “improvise.”

⁸ Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics,” 95-196 and n. 15.

⁹ In addition to Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics,” see Thomas E. Reynolds, “Improvising Together: Christian Solidarity and Hospitality as Jazz Performance,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43, no.1 (Winter 2008): 45-66.

¹⁰ Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).

¹¹ “Gender . . . is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint.” Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

¹² Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: Improvisation in Art and Life* (New York: Tarcher / Putnam, 1990).

¹³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), esp. xii – xv.

¹⁴ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 34.

training students to improvise responsibly with the Bible. I argue that teaching Scripture means training students to “make something” of Scripture – both with the concepts and contexts already to hand, and with the tools, data, and broader perspectives that can be provided by good teaching and committed reflection.

I develop this pedagogical model from within a particular educational setting: Cristo Rey New York High School (CRNYHS) in Spanish Harlem, New York City, USA, the inner city Catholic high school where I most recently taught. There are at least three good reasons why CRNYHS can help us imagine how a Biblical pedagogy for responsible improvisation might work in a broad range of settings: its holistic pedagogical vision, its student body demographics, and the religious backgrounds of its students and families.

First, Cristo Rey schools in general are committed to graduating students who are “open to growth, religious, intellectually competent, loving, committed to justice, and work experienced.”¹⁵ This goal represents in a North American context what liberation theologians have called “integral liberation” – the work of promoting Gospel values so that individuals and their communities can survive and can thrive on all levels, material, cultural, psycho-social, and spiritual.¹⁶ In Cristo Rey schools, poor and working class students work at entry-level white collar jobs in order to fund their college prep

¹⁵ “Graduate at Graduation Statement” in G. R. Kearney, *More Than a Dream: The Cristo Rey Story: How One School’s Vision Is Changing the World* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 2008), 365.

¹⁶ Here I disagree with the assessment of Bridget Couture that “the Cristo Rey Network practices assimilation and domestication, rather than transformation for humanization and liberation,” and that “Cristo Rey is actually cementing oppression through assimilating the oppressed into the dominant culture.” Bridget Grady Couture, “A Freirean Critique of the Cristo Rey Network’s Transformation: Assimilation or Liberation?” (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2007), 91, 93. Establishing clear learning criteria that include mastery of the forms of the dominant culture is not only Freirean in spirit and practice (e.g., Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach*, Expanded Edition, [Boulder: Westview / Perseus, 2005], 132-133) but – more importantly – essential for the survival of oppressed peoples who cannot avoid living in a dominant society.

educations; these schools encourage respect for religion and culture while preparing students to succeed materially and transform their society.

Second, religious educators should pay close attention to pedagogies that arise from poor and working class contexts. If developed with care and attention, these pedagogies can benefit from the “hermeneutical privilege” of those who live far down the social ladder. That is, they can shed light on broader social dynamics, revealing how inequity affects oppressed and non-oppressed populations alike.

The third reason is more specific to my particular experience at CRNYHS. All of my students were practicing Christians or from families with a Christian background during the three years I taught there.¹⁷ A model of religious education that responds effectively to such a context must be ecumenical, speaking cogently across Christian denominational boundaries. As Catholic high schools have opened their doors to more and more students with non-Catholic and non-Christian backgrounds, the need for an *inter-religious* model of faith formation that works in a Catholic setting has also grown more acute. Though I cannot explore the point in this paper, I believe that my model can fit this need also, if retooled to deal with texts and traditions from other faiths or philosophical systems.¹⁸

¹⁷ The Christian denominations represented included mainly Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals and Evangelicals. The one exception, a Freshman year student from a devoutly Muslim family, was withdrawn from the school during the first few months of the school year; one of the many reasons that his parents withdrew him was their unwillingness to let him be present in a Christian church or to observe any Christian religious activities. Although Cristo Rey schools do not require students to “be Catholic” or adhere to Christianity, they do expect non-Christian students to embrace the culture and ethos of the school. Sorting out the difference between these two stances is possible, I propose, but beyond the scope of this dissertation. I suggest that one way of doing so is to trade on the category of “guest” or, to use the Biblical terms, *ger tôšab* “resident alien” and *paroikos* “foreign sojourner”. See for example Nm 9:14, 15:15-16; 1 Pt 2:11.

¹⁸ Points of departure for such a broader pedagogy would include at least the following: (1) a broader and more detailed account of sacred writings, objects, and traditions across cultures, times, and religious perspectives; how do different groups characterize the materials with which their adherents improvise in the course of religious practice? (2) a clearer theology of hosting and guesting upon which to ground

In the chapters that follow, I argue that teaching the Bible for adolescent Christian faith formation is *best* understood as training students to improvise responsibly with Scripture. The adverb *best* in the preceding thesis carries significant philosophical and methodological weight. It speaks both to what “is” and what “ought to be,” both to description and norms. In a descriptive sense, I argue that teaching is always a process of training; that it is always a process of training for improvisation; and that improvisation always carries a kernel of responsible action. In a normative sense, I argue that teaching the Bible for Christian faith formation ought to enhance the capacity of improvisers to interpret responsibly. The dissertation supports my argument in five different ways.

1. In this chapter, I explain my proposal and the teaching experiences on which it is based. In the first half of the chapter, I introduce the Cristo Rey setting within which I developed the Biblical pedagogy that I here theorize and refine. In the second half, I begin to locate and unpack that pedagogy in terms of academic disciplines and relevant terms. I explain more concretely what I mean by “*training students to improvise responsibly with Scripture.*” I also describe what I mean by “integral liberation,” and by “interpretations that are creative, critical, and true.”
2. The next chapter answers the question: “*Why consider teaching a program of training?*” I use the theory of Situated Learning to outline the religion

interreligious hospitality in Catholic institutional settings; perhaps a theology of the “Order” of Guests that could supplement and extend the Christian tradition of “Holy Order” (today Deacon, Presbyter, and Bishop are the three orders that receive the most theological attention, but in ancient times Catechumens, Penitents, and others were both theologically and sociologically pertinent). On holy order as an ecclesial value, see Thomas H. Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 29. For two suggestions on reimagining an ancient “order” to serve contemporary pastoral needs, see Joseph G. Schaller, “The Order of Penitents: Theological and Pastoral Directions,” *Worship* 64 (1990): 207-224; M. Therese Lysaught, “Practicing the Order of Widows: A New Call for an Old Vocation,” *Christian Bioethics* 11, no. 1 (April, 2005): 51-68.

classroom as a place of training, where students learn to master different interpretive practices in the midst of intersecting communities. I show how my model accurately reflects the teaching and learning dynamics of high school classrooms. A situated learning perspective helps educators identify specific areas where their interventions can help students become better, more responsible Scriptural improvisers.

3. Chapter Three answers the question, *“How can you train students for improvisation?”* In this chapter, I correlate my educational model with the popular educational technique known as Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). TO brings together critical pedagogy and creative expression to help participants improvise artful and liberating social actions; it has proven both powerful and enduring in a broad range of class and cultural settings. I use TO as a generative metaphor to help teachers imagine more deeply and richly what training students for responsible improvisation might look like.
4. Chapter Four steps back to take in a broader perspective. It answers the question, *“Is this pedagogical model coherent? How does it all hang together?”* In this chapter, I use the Pragmatist theology of Donald Gelpi, SJ as an overarching framework. I relate the concepts of “interpretation,” “creativity,” “responsibility,” and “norms” with each other, and with a theology of God’s Holy Spirit. Using Gelpi’s semiotic realism as a conceptual framework shows how my pedagogy is not only conceptually coherent, but also convincingly rooted in the Christian intellectual tradition.

5. Chapter Five presents a detailed example of teaching the Bible for responsible improvisation. It outlines the process of preparing and teaching a chapter from the Gospel of Matthew. It also argues that a warrant for improvising responsibly with Scripture can be derived from the Gospel itself.

In short, I argue that “training students to improvise responsibly with Scripture” is a justice-grounded, empirically accurate, pedagogically compelling, intellectually coherent, and eminently Christian approach to teaching the Bible in Catholic schools. I conclude by discussing the implications of such a model in the context of Catholic educational ministry and ministerial training.

II. Cristo Rey: A Window into North American High School Education

Understanding the shape of teaching and learning at Cristo Rey New York suggests how a pedagogy of responsible improvisation addresses the religious and educational needs of high school students in 21st century North America. It sheds light on the role that a Biblical pedagogy can play in the holistic education of North American high schoolers in general. It also sheds light on the way that responsible improvisation can function within the religious educational classroom.

A Sketch of the Cristo Rey Setting

I started working at Cristo Rey New York in 2004, the year we first opened our doors on East 116th Street in Spanish Harlem. The student population at Cristo Rey New York is materially poor but culturally rich. While the school has now grown to encompass four class years, student demographics have remained essentially the same as when we first opened with a Freshman class of 100 students:

The average income of their families is \$30,000, with an adjusted available income of approximately (\$6,500).¹⁹ The student population of 385 is 79% Hispanic, 18% African-American and 3% other²⁰ [with slightly more females than males]. Most students are Catholic (76%) but students are not required to be Catholic or Christian to attend the school. Almost all of our students are immigrants or children of immigrants, and they represent 25 countries and territories.²¹... Although our tuition price is the lowest in New York City, 86% of our families can not pay the full amount and depend on financial aid.²²

Cristo Rey students take the same kind of academic courses as most students in urban Catholic high schools (including four years of formal religion class); they participate in the same kinds of extracurriculars and sports. They also work five days a month at entry-level, white collar jobs in order to fund their college prep educations.²³ These Corporate Work Study salaries are paid directly to the school (which also functions as an employment agency) and cover more than 70% of annual operating expenses. The rest of the funds needed to run the school come from donations and from tuition on a sliding scale. Every family pays some tuition (in 2004 each CRNYHS family paid between \$200 and \$2000 per year) if only to mark their solidarity with the school as a project.²⁴

Because each job is shared among four students rather than being held individually,

¹⁹ Parentheses *sic*. “Adjusted available income” represents the disposable income of the family after basic expenses are met. CRNY uses the Private School Aid Service (PSAS) to calculate disposable income. As the PSAS website notes, in calculating adjusted available income “[t]he income and assets of the family are taken into account, as well as the size of the family, age of the parents, the number of children attending tuition charging schools, the state and/or metropolitan area where the family resides, the value of parents’ assets, and the number of working parents. ... The information is then analyzed using formulas developed to calculate need based on a moderate standard of living for the geographic area of the applicant.” “About Us,” <https://www.psas.org/index.aspx?ViewMode=A>, accessed 27 Oct 2014.

²⁰ In September 2004, the first Freshman class at Cristo Rey New York were all Latino or Black.

²¹ Cristo Rey New York High School, “Our Students,” <http://www.cristoreyny.org/program/student-body>, accessed 23 Oct 2014.

²² Cristo Rey New York High School, “Donate,” <http://www.cristoreyny.org/support/donate>, accessed 23 Oct 2014.

²³ Each grade is divided into at least four cohorts for work purposes, and all the students in a cohort follow a similar class schedule. For example, one cohort will work every Tuesday plus the first Monday of the month; a second cohort will work every Wednesday and the second Monday of the month; and so on. In this way, one job placement is consistently covered by the same four students, each working a particular day of the week. The school day and school year are slightly extended to make up for time spent at work so that students can continue to meet State and local requirements for time spent in class.

²⁴ To “have some skin in the game” as the faculty and administration often put it.

students are often reminded that their success (or their failure) on the job carries serious consequences for the other students who share that placement, and for the school as a whole. Funding for facilities, supplies, extracurriculars, and so on all depend in large part on student income. Students are well aware that they keep the doors open at a Cristo Rey school.

Just as importantly, employment gives students access to the skills and habits of the adult office workplace. Students gain important entry-level skills, not least of which is a familiarity with professional-class culture – a familiarity that will help them negotiate university and the work world beyond. Weekly pre-work training modules include topics such as workplace diversity, professionalism, and initiative; regular in-person reviews with the Corporate Work Study staff fill out a rigorous program of work-based reflection and training. While their Work Study grade is not averaged into their overall GPA, it remains part of their record; students must pass Corporate Work Study (and not be fired by their employer!) to remain at school and to advance into the next grade.²⁵

Cristo Rey teachers are committed to building informal relationships with students, in which student success at school, on the job, and in future employment are a key focus for discussion and strategy. For example at CRNYHS each teacher regularly accompanies a set group of about ten students either to or from work one day a week. An afternoon trip might entail meeting students at the reception of a Wall Street office building, sharing a Subway ride back to school after a long day at work (for both teacher and student), and talking informally about job placements, about studies, and about

²⁵ For an example of Corporate Work Study policies, see the “CIP [Corporate Internship Program] Parent & Student Handbook” of San Miguel High School, the Network high school in Tuscon, AZ. Available at <http://sanmiguelcristorey.org/>, under the Corporate Internship tab, accessed 26 November 2014.

students' lives both inside and outside of class. Teachers also liaise with parents to support students in their school work and job placements.

Safety, Culture, and Human Development: Student Needs from an Inner-City Perspective

A pedagogy for responsible improvisation is true to the needs and the hopes of the students who are doing the improvising. The Cristo Rey setting sets in sharp relief some key challenges that high school students across North America tackle: the challenge to secure their wellbeing, the challenge to sort out their cultural identity, and the challenge to navigate their personal processes of adolescence and growth.²⁶

The first challenge that I discuss is financial and physical security. Many Cristo Rey students feel the stress of significant responsibilities to help keep their families financially solvent. Most Cristo Rey families are working class, and some are quite poor. As the adults around them are stretched thin, Cristo Rey students often become the primary childcare providers for siblings, cousins, or neighbors' children; they sometimes take on part time work to meet family expenses; and they often perform significant amounts of housework (especially, though not only, the girls).

Cristo Rey demographics reflect the socioeconomic realities of many Latino and Black teens. The National Center for Children in Poverty reports that 60% of Hispanic and Black teens, and 54% of teens whose parents are immigrants, live in "low income"

²⁶ The parallels between my list and Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" are evident: Maslow begins with "physiological" and "safety" needs as the most basic, then goes on to list the need for "love and belonging," for social "esteem" and for "self-actualization" as sequential and necessary for human wellbeing. However, I do not imply that one category must be met before the next can be addressed; I imply only that each of them is essential to the wellbeing of teenaged students. Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); cf. L. Tay and E. Diener, "Needs and Subjective Well-Being around the World," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 2 (2011): 354-365.

families.²⁷ Hispanic Catholic parents report much lower income, much lower rates of home ownership, and much higher rates of debt in comparison to White Catholic parents.²⁸ In addition, 38% of Hispanic high school students and 65% of Black students live with only one parent or with neither parent;²⁹ in many cases all the responsible adults in the household work outside the home.

Of course, anxieties about financial security are by no means limited to poor and working class students. Data collected during the Great Recession (beginning in 2007) show high levels of economic anxiety among adults across the spectrum of income. As many as two-thirds of US adults surveyed in 2009 thought they were moving backwards financially – including 60% of middle-income respondents.³⁰ In fact, inflation adjusted wages have been shrinking for most Americans since 1973, even as working hours increase.³¹ Adult financial anxiety regularly affects children and teens: many studies

²⁷ In comparison, the proportion of white teens in low income families across the nation is 28%. The National Center for Children in Poverty considers any family at or below 199% of the Federal threshold as “low income.” In 2012 the Federal poverty threshold for a family of four in the contiguous United States was \$23,050. By that measure a family of four (two parents + two children) that earns \$45,869.50 per year is a “low income” family. According to Dr. Amy Glasmeier of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in 2014 a “living wage” for a family of four in New York City is \$67,323. Y. Jiang, M. Ekono, and C. Skinner, “Basic Facts about Low-income Children: Children Aged 12 through 17 years, 2012,” National Center for Children in Poverty (February 2014), nccp.org/publications/pub_1091.html, accessed 5 June 2014; Amy Glasmeier, “Poverty in America Living Wage Calculator: Update 3-24-14,” <http://livingwage.mit.edu/>, accessed 27 Oct 2014.

²⁸ Ken Johnson-Mondragón, “Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry in the United States,” *Perspectives on Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry*, Publication 6 (Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2010): 3, www.feyvida.org/documents/Perspectives6.pdf, accessed 20 October 2014.

²⁹ For White students, that number drops to 27%. The data is for teens aged 12-17 from the US Census bureau’s 2011 update. Allison Stewart and Kelleen Kaye, *Freeze Frame 2012: A Snapshot of America’s Teens* (Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012), 21, <https://thenationalcampaign.org>, accessed 30 Oct 2014.

³⁰ Ariel Kalil, “Effects of the Great Recession on Child Development,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 650 (November 2013): 238.

³¹ “The average [American] employee now spends 200 more hours per year on the job ... than he or she did thirty years ago,” writes Juliet Schor in 2004. But average family income improved “only slightly” in this period, and only through that “dramatic increase in the number of hours worked and the share of families in which both parents worked.” Juliet B. Schor, *Born to Buy* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 10; Jean Anyon, *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement* (Routledge: New York and Milton Park, 2005), 18.

show that “parents’ subjective perceptions of economic downturns ... predict higher levels of children’s behavioral problems and lower levels of achievement.”³² As Kenda Creasy Dean notes, especially among teens from more *privileged* backgrounds parental insecurity can easily translate into deep seated anxiety and reduced resiliency.³³

Cristo Rey students also face other threats to their sense of security. Young people of color are particularly prone to have the course of their education and entry into professional employment interrupted or threatened. Pregnancy and dropping out are more common for Black and Hispanic students.³⁴ In addition, “current estimates suggest that more than half of the immigrant Latino/a youth [in the US] ... are undocumented.”³⁵ When undocumented students must hide their legal status from Cristo Rey teachers and Corporate Work Study employers (as some confided in me that they had), their present anxiety and their fears for the future only grow more potentially paralyzing.

Many Cristo Rey students have family or friends who are in prison, who have suffered from violent crime, or who have been killed. Some flirt with gang involvement, and many have friends and family involved in gang life. Here too their situation reflects broader trends. In 2010, Hispanic youth aged 10-24 were more than 4 times more likely to be murdered than white youth; Black youth were more than 17 times more likely to be

³² Kalil, “Effects of the Great Recession on Child Development,” 237.

³³ Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 206.

³⁴ In 2012, young Black and Hispanic women were more than twice as likely to become pregnant than their White peers. In 2013, 5% of White youth, 8% of Black youth, and 12% of Hispanic youth aged 16-24 around the country had dropped out of high school, a figure that does not include Black and Hispanic youths in prison. Elizabeth Wildsmith et al., “Adolescent Health Highlight: Teen Pregnancy and Childbearing,” Publication number 2013-05, Child Trends (Dec 2013), 3, <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Pregnancy-and-Childbearing-updated-12-131.pdf>; Child Trends, “High School Dropout Rates” (last updated October 2014), <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=high-school-dropout-rates>, accessed 30 Oct 2014.

³⁵ Johnson-Mondragón, “Perspectives on Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry,” 3.

murdered.³⁶ Incarceration rates among Black and Hispanic youth have doubled between 1980 and 1999;³⁷ Hispanic students are more likely to be incarcerated and to be gang members than their White peers.³⁸ Hispanic students are also more likely to consider or attempt suicide than either their White or Black peers.³⁹ And physical safety is an issue for US high school students across the board. In a 2011 survey, 40% of high school boys and 24% of girls had been in a physical fight in the preceding twelve months; 26% of boys and 7% of girls had carried a weapon in the past 30 days.⁴⁰ In a 2013 national study, 19.6% of all students were bullied; 17% had “seriously considered” attempting suicide; and 10% of those who were dating had experienced relationship violence – all during the 12 months before the survey was conducted.⁴¹ In short, for Cristo Rey students, as for many other high schoolers, threats to financial and personal security are not far away.

The second challenge that I discuss is the task of sorting out a sense of cultural identity and belonging. As Erikson long ago pointed out, adolescence brings with it particular challenges around belonging and individuation.⁴² Where one culture dominates and others suffer differing levels of disenfranchisement, the struggles of subaltern

³⁶ In a 2011 nationally-representative sample of youth in grades 9-12, “Among 10 to 24 year-olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans; the second leading cause of death for Hispanics; ... Homicide rates in 2010 among non-Hispanic, African-American males 10-24 years of age (51.5 per 100,000) exceeded those of Hispanic males (13.5 per 100,000) and non-Hispanic, White males in the same age group (2.9 per 100,000).” CDC, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, “Youth Violence: Facts at a Glance, 2012,” <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/yv-datasheet-a.pdf>, accessed 30 Oct 2014.

³⁷ Child Trends, “High School Dropout Rates.”

³⁸ Johnson-Mondragón, “Perspectives on Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry,” 4.

³⁹ A higher percentage of Hispanic teens as compared to White and Black teens “seriously considered attempting suicide” in 2013; a higher percentage of Hispanic and Black teens as compared to White teens attempted suicide in 2013. Laura Kann, et al., “Youth Risk Behavior surveillance - United States, 2013,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 63, no. 4: 11-12, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>, accessed 28 Oct 2014.

⁴⁰ CDC, “Youth Violence: Facts at a Glance, 2012.”

⁴¹ Kann et al., “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance,” 11.

⁴² For a summary of the adolescent identity crisis as Erik Erikson describes it, see Walter E. Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006 [original 1986]), 51-52.

adolescents to set their cultural bearings can become even more difficult – how, in which settings, and to what extents should they assimilate, accommodate, or resist?⁴³ These questions can become even more confusing when multiple cultures share the same social space. Consider the level of linguistic diversity at CRNYHS: over a three year period, I taught students whose primary languages at home were Spanish (in its various Western Hemisphere dialects), Black English, several West African languages, Albanian, Chinese, working class “Spanglish” and working class English (both in their New York City regional dialects). In every case, students were also learning to speak and write Standard American English in its professional register both through classroom instruction and by emulating models in their office settings. Consider the diversity of family backgrounds. While some Cristo Rey students come from families that identify with a single ethnic group, many have parents and other relatives from different countries, or from different regions within those countries. Consider the diversity of religions. My students who were observant Christians might experience vibrant Catholic parishes, or more staid forms of Catholic worship, or intensely engaging Evangelical or Pentecostal forms of worship and church life. At school they experienced yet another type of religious culture: the one we construct in our Cristo Rey liturgies and classrooms. Thus Cristo Rey students engage with a variety of cultures in the midst of which they must negotiate often conflicting pressure from peers, parents, and teachers – pressures to be authentic and solidary (but to and with whom?), pressures to be unique or “true to themselves” (but how?).

⁴³ Antonia Darder, *Culture and Power in the Classroom: Educational Foundations for the Schooling of Bicultural Students*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 44-64; cf. Tuyen D. Nguyen, “Immigrant Asian Youth and Cultural-Identity Challenges: Implications for Pastoral Counseling Practice,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 60, nos. 1-2 (2006): 59-67.

This too is not unique to Cristo Rey students. Most teens today encounter a number of cultures, often mediated by a mass-marketing system that has mastered the skill of simultaneously differentiating the cultural marketplace and propagating ever more fluid subcultural identities.⁴⁴ Through carefully pitched sales of music, video, and commodities, corporations reinforce established boundaries of ethnicity and culture while simultaneously working hard to transgress those boundaries in order to expand their markets. This affords teens a great deal of freedom in buying (or pirating) cultural products with which to shape and try on shifting cultural identities. But it can also result in confusion, even inter-group violence, as students look for a larger identity to which they feel that they can belong.⁴⁵

The third challenge that Cristo Rey students share with all North American adolescents is the task of transitioning from childhood to responsible adulthood. They must learn to handle new emotions, greater autonomy, and critical decisions that can have lasting – even irreversible – effects on their lives. Like teens of previous generations, today’s teens must learn to manage school, friends, and neighborhood, sexuality, addictive substances, and a path toward a future career. But they must do so in a social context that over the past hundred years has become more complex, less predictable, and more poorly signposted for all its members, youth and adult alike.⁴⁶ Compared to the post-World War II era, making a living has become more precarious and unpredictable,

⁴⁴ For a good overview of these tensions, see Lene Arnett Jensen, “Coming of Age in a Multicultural World: Globalization and Adolescent Cultural Identity Formation,” *Applied Developmental Science* 7, no. 3 (2003): 189–196.

⁴⁵ See Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), esp. 169-174. For an account of the sophisticated methods marketers use to target teens and children, see Schor, *Born to Buy*.

⁴⁶ As Robert Kegan argues, many adults find ourselves “in over our heads” keeping up with the complexities and levels of responsibility demanded by contemporary society. *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1994).

often marked by the challenge to “retrain” and shift careers – perhaps more than once – within one’s working lifetime.⁴⁷ In a digitally connected world, different cultures and value systems are to an unprecedented extent juxtaposed with each other, jostling for dominance and raising questions about gender roles, sexual mores, and religious truth that undermine confidence in the legitimacy of received social structures and ideals. Crises of worldwide proportions (ecological, medical, cultural, and socio-political) are delivered to the TV sets and computing devices of teens and adults at an often bewildering pace.

In addition, contemporary children and teens are the most marketed-to and market-oriented young people in human history, a fact that has profound effects on their desires and behaviors.⁴⁸ The question here is not whether teens should – or ever could – live in a space free of outside influences. To the contrary, as this dissertation insists, all our desires and identities are deeply influenced by the forces around us and the options available to us. The questions are: Who should determine those forces and options? What counterbalances can be put into play? How can a project of counter-formation become more coherent and more sustained?

Creating An Alternative Community: An Educational Challenge for Cristo Rey Teachers

A pedagogy for responsible improvisation takes seriously the context of that improvisation: in this case, the Catholic high school as a community. Researchers have found that schools which articulate and cultivate a “community” consciousness tend to be

⁴⁷ Guy Standing writes of a new “global ‘precariat’, consisting of many millions around the world without an anchor of [employment] stability. ... They are prone to listen to ugly voices, and to use their votes and money to give those voices a political platform of increasing influence.” *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 1.

⁴⁸ Schor, *Born to Buy*.

successful by a number of different measures. They generate satisfying social connections, academic success, and good quality of life for teens and adults. They demonstrate the power to transform student lives.⁴⁹ The elements of a Catholic high school community include personal connections (student-student, teacher-student, and teacher-teacher); shared experiences (e.g., common curriculum; assemblies, rituals and liturgies; clubs, teams and activities; retreats); and a shared sense of mission and vision, of commitments and core beliefs.⁵⁰

CRNYHS provides a good model for the creative and critical construction of such a learning community. We consciously built our community on mandates imposed from the outside, and on images and stories that we selected. We organized the curriculum to meet the testing requirements for New York State high school diplomas. We were also guided by the norms of the Cristo Rey Network, a nation-wide coalition currently numbering 28 high schools in 27 US cities, established in 2003 to set standards and provide institutional support to Cristo Rey model schools.⁵¹ And we embraced the spirit of liberation theology and the Jesuit models of liberationist schooling that inspired the first Cristo Rey high school to open in 1996.⁵²

⁴⁹ Anthony S. Bryk and Mary Erina Driscoll, "The High School as Community: Contextual Influences and Consequences for Students and Teachers" (Madison, WI: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, 1988), 1.

⁵⁰ These are the three "core features" of a Catholic school as community that Bryk identifies. Anthony S. Bryk, "Lessons from Catholic High Schools on Renewing Our Educational Institutions," in Terence McLaughlin, Joseph O'Keefe, and Bernadette O'Keefe, eds., *The Contemporary Catholic School: Context, Identity and Diversity* (London: Falmer / Taylor & Francis, 1996), 28-29 *et passim*.

⁵¹ Across the US, Cristo Rey schools enroll about 9,000 students working in 1,800 corporate settings. Student and family demographics across the Network mirror those at CRNYHS: 96% of students are young people of color, and their average family income is \$34,000 a year. Cristo Rey Network, "2014 Snapshot," <http://www.cristoreynetwork.org/page.cfm?p=353>, accessed 30 Oct 2014.

⁵² The chief model is the Fe y Alegría network of schools for vocational and academic education which began in Latin America. See Federación Internacional Fe y Alegría, "History," <http://www.feyalegria.org/en/about-us/history>. "Fr. John P. Foley, SJ, president of the Cristo Rey Network, credits Fe y Alegría for inspiring the creation of Cristo Rey in the United States." Annie di Mattina, "Fe y Alegría Educates Children Who Live Where the Streets Have No Name," *Partners* [Midwest Jesuits;

A pedagogy for responsible improvisation reinforces among students the values and practices of such a learning community, while training them to use the elements of that community as creative starting points for their own interpretive work. At CRNYHS, themes and images from the Latin American liberationist traditions – especially as mediated through Jesuit connections – are particularly strong.⁵³ The founding principal, Bill Ford, is the nephew of Maryknoll sister Ita Ford: one of the four American churchwomen who were murdered in 1980 in El Salvador at the hands of US backed, rightwing government forces. Her image and those of her three fellow-martyrs are prominently displayed in the halls. Also prominent is the image of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, gunned down in 1980 after publically exhorting soldiers to heed the dictates of their conscience rather than the orders of superior officers. In the year that CRNYHS opened, Romero was the subject of a school wide mural project, part of that year's fine arts curriculum. The story of Jesuit priest and martyr Rutilio Grande, a close friend of Romero, was also part of this mural project. Finally, the images of the UCA martyrs hold a prominent place in the hallways of the school. These six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter were murdered in 1989 for their links to San Salvador's University of Central America, with its focus on liberation theology and left-

Chicago/Detroit and Wisconsin Provinces] (issue 3 of 2011): 29. http://www.jesuits-chgdet.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Partners_SP06-I-Missions.pdf, accessed 29 Oct 2014. On the influence of Liberation Theology on Fe y Alegría, see Jeffrey Klaiber, SJ "Fe y Alegría in Peru: Solidarity and Service in Catholic Education," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 5, no. 2 (2013): 144-160. On the transition from a Latin American to a US socioeconomic setting, see Kearney, *More than a Dream* 31, 32, 231.

⁵³ Several scholars have framed the Cristo Rey model in terms of Latin American and Black liberation theologies. For example, Paul Green, "African Americans in Urban Catholic Schools: Faith, Leadership and Persistence in Pursuit of Educational Opportunity," *Urban Review* 43, no. 3 (2011): 436-464. Osmar Aguirre discusses the Cristo Rey model in terms of an "integral liberating evangelization," combining liberation theological sources with reflections by the Catholic Magisterium. Osmar R. Aguirre, "Following Jesus Christ to the Margins: Understanding and Evangelizing Second Generation Latino Youth in the United States," (D.Missiology, Pontifical Gregorian University, 2012), 172-174.

leaning social critique.⁵⁴ We celebrate the work, spirit, and memory of all these liberationist martyrs at our school-wide prayer service for All Saints / All Souls / Dia de los Muertos. At the 2004 celebration of All Saints, the students created large posters with the names and faces of each of these spiritual heroes.⁵⁵ As is the tradition in Latin America, when the name of each martyr was called, a student held up that martyr's image and the congregation called out, "*¡Presente!*" "Present!" The stories and names of these martyrs are also referenced regularly in messages by the principal and other teachers at weekly assemblies and in spontaneous prayer.

A religious pedagogy that trains students to improvise responsibly recognizes the formative power of the images, rituals, and texts that the religious environment makes available. It affirms the values and the origin stories that teachers, administrators, and students learn to tell and retell, as well as the histories, talents, and practices that different stakeholders bring to the school and the classroom. And it gives students freedom to work with, transform, even play with those cultural elements. It charges teachers to make those elements as available as possible, to give students permission to work them over, and to provide critical purchase to do so in thoughtful and serious ways. It sets aside time to reflect on and critique those materials in light of fundamental commitments.

⁵⁴ The four murdered churchwomen were Ita Ford, M.M., Maura Clarke, M.M., Dorothy Kazel, O.S.U., and laywoman Jean Donovan. The martyrs of the UCA (University of Central America, San Salvador) were the Jesuits Ignacio Ellacuría, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Segundo Montes, Amando López, Joaquín López y López and Juan Ramón Moreno (all teachers at the UCA), their housekeeper Julia Elba Ramos and her daughter, Celina Mariceth Ramos. For the details of these and other murders during El Salvador's civil war, see Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, Belisario Betancur, chair, "Report of the UN Truth Commission on El Salvador: From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador," 1 April 1993 ([New York: United Nations]).

⁵⁵ We also honored them as the spiritual founders of our CRNYHS project at a separate "Founders' Day" Eucharist, where we reflected on their work and their lives.

III. Educating for Integral Liberation

Before going on to describe this pedagogy in greater detail, it is helpful to lay out more clearly its norm, goal, and vision, which I describe as “integral liberation.” Integral liberation means being saved and made whole on all levels: physical, material, cultural, psycho-social, and spiritual. As Peter Phan notes, “the concept of ‘integral,’ ‘total,’ ‘comprehensive’ salvation of the whole person and of all persons” is one of contemporary theology’s “great contributions” to Christian thinking and practice.⁵⁶ Since the late 19th Century, both Catholic and Protestant leaders have linked “spiritual salvation” and “material well-being” more holistically in their official theologies.⁵⁷ This is certainly true in Catholic teaching, where the Catechism links these two terms explicitly: “[Jesus] redeemed [humankind] *from the sin that held them in bondage*. ‘For freedom Christ has set us free’ [Gal 5:1].”⁵⁸ According to the Catholic bishops of Latin America:

The Church criticizes those who would restrict the scope of faith to personal or family life; who would exclude the professional, economic, social, and political orders as if sin, love, prayer, and pardon had no relevance in them.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 24.

⁵⁷ Phan discusses this trend in Catholic magisterial statements since the 1970s; in the work of the World Council of Churches since 1973; and the Lausanne Movement of evangelical churches since 1982. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 20-25.

⁵⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [henceforward CCC], 1741, emphasis added. The Catechism entry reads in full: “Liberation and salvation. By his glorious Cross Christ has won salvation for all men. He redeemed them from the sin that held them in bondage. ‘For freedom Christ has set us free.’ In him we have communion with the ‘truth that makes us free.’ The Holy Spirit has been given to us and, as the Apostle teaches, ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.’ Already we glory in the ‘liberty of the children of God.’” Cf. Gal 5:1; Jn 8:32; 2 Cor 17; Rom 8:21. In discussing “Human Freedom in the Economy of Salvation,” (Part III, Section 1, Chapter 1, Article 3, section heading ii) the Catechism also remarks that “the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions that are needed for a just exercise of freedom are too often disregarded or violated.” CCC, 1740. Phan notes that “the recent emphasis on action on behalf of social justice and peace as an integral and constitutive element of the church’s evangelizing mission represents a momentous reversal of the medieval paradigm of mission with its spiritualizing and individualizing concept of salvation.” Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 24.

⁵⁹ General Conference of Latin American Catholic Bishops, Puebla Document, 515. “The church, as Pope Paul VI stated and as was reaffirmed at Puebla, ‘has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions Of human beings, among whom are many of the church’s own children; the duty to help bring this liberation

Instead, as the Catholic bishops of Asia have taught, the Church “faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord ... in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all.”⁶⁰

Catholic liberation theologians have gone even further, describing integral liberation as both the path and the ultimate goal of discipleship. For such thinkers, to struggle toward integral liberation for oneself and for others is to walk in the way of Jesus – beginning with service to the poor and leading to new life in God.⁶¹

The concept of integral liberation is particularly helpful to inner city high school religious educators in at least two key ways. First, it invites teachers and students to notice how experience is *integrated* – distinct yet related – across different levels of student life. Theologians have named these levels in different ways. Paulo Suess writes of “the material (adaptive system: production), the social (associative and political system: relationships) and the ideological (interpretive and communicative system: word).”⁶² Gustavo Gutierrez speaks of the social, economic and political level where structures can bring rich life or impose early death; the psychological, cultural and consciousness level

forth in the world, to bear witness to it and make sure it is total. None of this is alien to evangelization.” Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation*, trans. by Theodore Morrow (Melbourne: Dove; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 2-3, citing Puebla 26 and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 30. “The Church strives always to insert the Christian struggle for liberation in the universal plan of salvation which it proclaims.” *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 38; cf. Puebla 483. See Boff, *The Lord's Prayer*, 4.

⁶⁰ Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, in Gaudencio B Rosales, C. G Arevalo, and Franz-Josef Eilers, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences: Documents from 1970 to 1991* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis and Quezon City, Manila: Claretian, 1992), 287-288.

⁶¹ Jon Sobrino, “Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator,” in Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, eds., *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts in Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993 [English]), 458. For Boff, the goal of Christian faith and practice is “a liberation so complete that it creates ... a salvation that history itself cannot bring forth ... [but that] has already begun here on earth.” Boff, *The Lord's Prayer*, 4.

⁶² Paulo Suess, “Inculturación,” in Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, eds., *Mysterium Liberationis: Conceptos Fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación* (Madrid: UCA Editores / Editorial Trotta, 1990), 385, emphasis added.

where ideology and prophetic vision do their work; and the “fundamental” or spiritual level, where God’s gratuitous love penetrates our lives, healing us from fear and sin.⁶³ The point is that money and materials, institutions and culture, the arts and media, book learning, psychology, and spirit each plays a role in the development and well-being of students, and that teachers must structure curricula that can have a positive impact on all levels.

Secondly, the concept of integral liberation invites teachers and students to put *liberation* at the center of teaching and learning. The challenges to students’ survival and full human flourishing are real and present. From the inner city schoolhouse to the private prep boarding school, some teens “make it” and some teens do not. Some learn how to navigate the tensions of safety, belonging, and growth that the high school experience represents; others adapt self-destructively; and others fail to adapt (with sometimes fatal consequence). A focus on integral liberation reminds us that student action to survive and to thrive is not an issue for post-graduation, not an issue to be relegated to optional service projects outside of class or performed after school. A pedagogy for integral liberation gets students involved right now, more deeply, more consciously, in their own struggle to grow and to flourish.

IV. Improvising Responsibly with Scripture

In a context of integral liberation, the pedagogical model that I am proposing aims to train students to improvise responsibly. As I describe it, this process of responsible improvisation entails three basic moves: appraising a situation, developing competencies

⁶³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, 15th anniversary edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988 [Spanish original, 1971]), 22-25.

and resources, and creating effective, informed interventions. In this section, I give a preliminary outline of what it means to improvise responsibly with Scripture.

(1) The first move is to appraise the situation. In *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, David White helpfully characterizes this process in terms of helping students “listen to their hearts” and “look more deeply” into the realities before them.⁶⁴ When they attend to a given situation, what moves them? What excites them or makes them uneasy? What brings on unspeakable boredom, and why would it do such a thing? Appraising also means critical inquiry: asking questions about causes and effects. How did this situation come to be? How is it connected to other realities? What would happen if things did not change?⁶⁵ Students interrogate the situation with all the tools already at their disposal and with new tools that the teacher provides, discovering new questions, and awakening energies and desires for change.

(2) The second move is to develop capacities and resources with which to mount a response. In a pedagogy for improvising responsibly with Scripture, these capacities and resources center on the Bible. Students become familiar with Scripture. They come to know what Scripture contains and how it has been used in different circumstances. They gain a sense of the complexities and subtleties with which preachers, scholars, and liturgists have employed sacred texts – how the Bible can be used to exhort and to argue, to celebrate and to grieve. They discover the power of Scripture – how it can be used for good and for ill. This is the place to introduce students to different methods in Biblical

⁶⁴ *Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005).

⁶⁵ Thomas Groome helpfully outlines the types of “critical reflection” that correlate to these three questions respectively: “analytical and social remembering,” “critical and social reasoning,” and “creative and social imagining.” See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 188-190.

study: historical-critical, psychological, and rhetorical readings; Bible as literature; Bible as prayer. It is also the place to refine even further the habits of inquiry that feature prominently in move number one, since Scriptures too must be thoroughly “appraised” for their value, usefulness, and fit in addressing particular situations.

(3) The third move is to create effective, informed interventions that use Scripture to meet real-life needs. Using Scripture for integral liberation means using it to help students survive and flourish. It means helping students develop the habit of bringing Scripture effectively and convincingly to bear here and now, for their lives and the benefit of others.

What could this pedagogy look like in the Cristo Rey setting I have described? I offer a few initial examples of increasing complexity to suggest the kind of work that this pedagogy entails. An ad hoc example comes from my first year of teaching at Cristo Rey New York. Tensions developed between our students and another group of young people from a school down the street. We spent a class-session on the following topic:

Should students carry weapons on the way to and from school? It’s our school policy that carrying a weapon will result in expulsion. Does that policy make sense? Is it more reasonable to trust in God for our safety, or to carry a knife?

The conversation was intense and wide ranging. Did God “save” the four martyred church women from violence? (Are they in heaven? Would they inspire us today in the same way if they had not been murdered? Does the inspiration they give make their deaths worthwhile?) Can God “save” us from violence in Spanish Harlem? Which do we *really* believe in: the power of violence to save us, or the power of God? Together we appraised an exigent situation; we assessed the value of traditional stories; and the

students all came to their own decisions – whether to break the school policy, or to put their faith in a higher nonviolent ideal.

A more structured example might invite students to read their own office realities in terms of the power dynamics that they discover in Scripture. The story of King Saul and his young rival David are the Biblical material with which to work. Such a project could begin with a thick description of students' Corporate Work Study office setting, perhaps using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, perhaps using graphic organizers like diagrams and charts. The goal is to understand more deeply the work relationships in the office from their perspectives as working teens. The reading assignment is a close study of the David and Saul narratives in 1 Sam 8 – 2 Sam 1, comprising a multi-week unit of academic work. Students and teacher together would plumb the stories to explore themes like ambition, courage, envy, depression, respect, unfair treatment, loyalty, even suicide. Since perspective-taking is a key adolescent skill to be mastered on the road to adulthood, students could also explore the historical-critical insight that these narratives contain both pro-Saul and pro-David materials. The final product could be a group skit on office conflicts offered during one of the Corporate Work Study training sessions; or an individual "personal policy statement" essay about the right way to get ahead at work.

A year-long curriculum that trains students to improvise responsibly with Scripture should train them to be creative, critical, and true with religious traditions in general. The Freshman religion course that I developed at Cristo Rey New York reflects just such a curriculum. It located Scripture study squarely in the broader Cristo Rey program of Bible, liturgy, and selected traditions in the service of integral liberation. We opened the academic year with a quarter on the Catholic high school experience. We

spent the first two weeks on liturgy: specifically through a critical exploration of the readings and symbols in our September all-school Opening Mass. Students of every religious persuasion at Cristo Rey New York are encouraged to participate in school-wide Eucharists and prayer services, at the level they felt most at home: as readers, musicians, artists or ushers; as planners, providers of input to the homilist; as participants in the long, celebratory processions that suffused the liturgy with symbols of school life. These Eucharists and prayer services included the September Opening Mass, the Mass of All Saints / All Souls / Dia de los Muertos, services for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Ash Wednesday / Reconciliation, a commemoration of the Central American Martyrs, and a year-end celebratory Eucharist.

For each liturgy, I had the students read, reflect, and comment upon the Scripture readings one or two days in advance. After the liturgy, I asked them to journal on a symbol, phrase, ritual action, or emotional response that caught their attention. I also invited them to make recommendations for future liturgical music, activities, or themes. I passed these along to the campus ministry team (of which I was a part) and let students know when we used their suggestions.⁶⁶

My classes spent the remaining three quarters of Freshman year focused on the Old Testament, reading almost all of Genesis through 2 Kings (the “history” of Israel from creation through the Babylonian Exile) plus a final module on poetry and prophecy. I focused each unit of Biblical material on a different dimension of teenage life:

⁶⁶ The first quarter continued with an introduction to ethical reasoning through a close reading of several essays on teenage practices in life and faith. We read three chapters which I selected from Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002), and one chapter that students got to choose for themselves. The capstone assignment for that unit was a challenge to try enacting several of the practices they read about, and to write a short paragraph about what happened and what (if anything) they learned from the experiment.

Existential Questions (Gen 1-11); Family Dynamics (Gen 12 – 50; Patriarchs and Matriarchs); Freedom and Rules (Exodus – Deuteronomy); and Power Issues (Judges – 2 Kings).

The year ended with a capstone project which exemplifies the kind of responsible improvisation that I am proposing. I broke the students into groups and asked them to choose four different challenges that they face as teenagers. I asked them to think about and pray about these challenges in light of our classroom discussion and in light of their religious upbringing (both at home and in their local church settings). I then asked them to formulate responses to each of these challenges: how should teens like themselves tackle these problems? They were first to formulate these responses individually, and then by consensus as a group. (Where consensus proved impossible, I asked them to present their differing conclusions.) Finally, I asked them to support these various responses *through the use of the stories, phrases, and history that they had learned in our common exploration of the Bible*. Each group created an electronic presentation to share their responses and their reasons with the class; I encouraged them to share their work with parents and family as well.

A pedagogy that trains students to improvise responsibly with Scripture begins *in medias res* with student realities, Scriptural materials, and current practices all receiving equal weight in the creative mix. It helps students explore the Biblical material in terms of its affordances and limitations, its capacity to illuminate student experience, and its capacity to be put to use in compelling and effective ways. It develops students' ability to "read" and "write" Scripture across multiple settings. It invites students to analyze and to act in ways that integrate work, culture, and religion with teenage life.

The teacher has great power and responsibility in this kind of pedagogy. She prepares the physical, mental, and spiritual space. She selects the Biblical materials, the processes, and the themes that she judges will make the educational encounter fruitful and germane to her students. To do so effectively, she must investigate her students' reality attentively, to discover the themes that are likely to resonate as relevant and pressing. She must also know her Bible well enough to understand which passages and approaches will fit with those themes – passages that can deepen students' current perceptions or challenge them; passages that can direct imagination or expand it.

In the process of improvising creatively and responsibly with Scripture, it is not the case that “anything goes.” To the contrary, Scripture, the norm of integral liberation, and the witness of student realities all play a role in shaping the process and the product, with each subject to reflective critique if and when challenges and mis-fits arise. The teachings of Catholic officials,⁶⁷ the weight of Christian tradition, the words of the Bible, and the promptings of reason are all central elements in a Catholic practice of working with Scripture; still, I argue that genuine Catholic practice must always be led by the *pneuma*, the Spirit of God,⁶⁸ and must always be open to the new readings and writings that She prompts (cf. Isaiah 43:19).⁶⁹

⁶⁷ The *magisterium* or “teaching authority” of the bishops.

⁶⁸ “Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.” *Dei Verbum* 12, quoting Jerome, *Ad Galatas*, 19-20. For the importance of spiritual discernment as a model in theological reflection on ethical norms, and a critique of the ways in which the Holy Spirit and spiritual discernment have been neglected in favor of legalistic, “Word”-centered norms, see John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), esp. chapter 8, “A Pattern in Renewal?”

⁶⁹ “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” NRSV.

V. Method, Disciplines, and Definitions

In sum, this dissertation is a theological and professional reflection on religious educational practice. As a piece of theological reflection it begins with practice, applies social analysis, plumbs the religious tradition for relevant correlates, and recommends a model that can make future practice more faithful and fruitful.⁷⁰ As an exercise in reflective professional practice it frames and then analyzes a model of teaching. Donald Schön has described the reflective practitioner (in this case the reflective educator) as a teacher who develops and then interrogates the repertoires, exemplars, and metaphors that guide her professional work, refining them or developing new ones to fit better the context and needs of the teaching situation.⁷¹ The dissertation engages this kind of reflection by proposing that teaching Scripture is best understood as training for responsible improvisation, and then by interrogating that model to see whether and how it sheds light on the practice of high school Bible teaching.

The academic field to which I hope to contribute with this dissertation is Practical Theology. My essay reflects the key markers of that maturing discourse as Bonnie Miller McLemore has recently sketched them: it is a “contingent ... analysis of faith in action” that claims the social sciences as a key contributor to theological method; it “describes

⁷⁰ I adapt this four-part summary of the process of theological reflection from David White’s description of discernment and James and Evelyn Whitehead’s rendition of “See-Judge-Act” methodology. White outlines four steps to discernment: (1) listening to one’s heart, (2) seeing the situation clearly, (3) remembering and imagining alternatives from one’s religious tradition, and (4) acting to make a difference. The Whiteheads outline three steps: (1) attending to faith, experience and culture; (2) allowing the three to illuminate and critique each other; (3) taking action based on those reflections. Particularly important to the Whiteheads is the contribution of the social sciences to the insights of contemporary culture. David White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005); James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, Revised Edition, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 1995), esp. 58-61 on the importance of social science.

⁷¹ Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

how people live as people of faith in communities and society” and it “considers how they might do so more fully;”⁷² it focuses on local context, concrete situations, embodied action, practices, experience, formation, performance, witness, and ministry.⁷³

In developing the proposal that teaching the Bible is best understood as training students to improvise responsibly with Scripture, I bring together two disciplinary perspectives that can often conflict: on the one hand, a *social scientific perspective* in the form of Situated Learning theory, critical pedagogy, and historical-critical studies of Scripture; on the other hand, a *Christian theological perspective* rooted in Biblical witness, speculative Trinitarianism, and spiritual discernment for action. Social scientists are frequently wary of normative arguments that rely on religious tradition. Theologians are frequently wary of models that explain human behavior through sheer cause and effect. What holds my proposal together is the philosophical framework of Christian semiotic realism. In Chapter IV, I develop this framework more fully as a form of Pragmatist Christian theology. Here I simply point out how it mediates between scientific and theological stances by subsuming both disciplinary perspectives into an overall philosophical framework of creative hypothesis and rigorous inquiry. As James and Evelyn Whitehead point out, “In every era of Christian history, theology has found itself in dialogue with the dominant intellectual categories of its time;”⁷⁴ if the categories of this era are the sciences – and the Whiteheads among many others argue that they are⁷⁵ –

⁷² Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “The Contributions of Practical Theology,” in idem, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2012), 14, 17. For Practical Theology’s “strong affinity with the social sciences,” (idem, 17), cf. 10-12 and the many social-scientifically oriented chapters in the rest of *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (particularly chapters 8, 9, 11-14, 17, 20-24, 40-42).

⁷³ Miller-McLemore, “The Contributions of Practical Theology,” 14.

⁷⁴ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 58.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

then a philosophy in line with the sciences would provide a cogent and fitting intellectual framework for the project of Practical Theology. Gelpi's Christian semiotic realism is just such a philosophy. It emphasizes that every claim and experience (whether scientific or religious) must be *interpreted*; that those interpretations can be judged against *data*; and that those judgments can further be validated according to the *norms* of our developing thinking. It also emphasizes that this process of proposing and testing is in fact what humans normally do if allowed to grow and think clearly and freely, liberated from sin and oppression.

I complete this introduction by presenting provisional reflections and definitions concerning the key terms in my pedagogical proposal: *responsibility*, *improvisation*, and *Scripture*; *interpretation*, *creativity*, *critical thinking*, and *truth*. As I work through the different chapters, each element that I describe here will, I trust, become more clearly delineated, more concretely illuminated, and more richly related to all of the others. If this dissertation is successful, a strong argument will emerge that teaching Bible well really means teaching students to improvise responsibly with it, to create Scripture-based interventions that are both critically sharp and true to real-life needs.

Creativity and Improvisation (and Interpretation)

I describe creativity and improvisation as two different perspectives on the basic human activity of problem solving. Both creativity and improvisation involve putting together different concepts or objects in order to produce a novel result that is appropriate to a particular context. For some, creativity implies sudden inspiration, a bolt from the blue, an idea that springs fully formed from the brain; for some, improvisation seems like a mysterious skill that belongs only to musicians and specialist actors. These impressions

owe much to Romantic-era notions of genius⁷⁶ and to contemporary art industry norms.⁷⁷

But researchers cogently argue that creativity is essentially a social and contextual phenomenon,⁷⁸ and that improvisation is an integral part of everyday life.⁷⁹

To be creative is to imagine, express, or produce an original work.⁸⁰ Creativity connotes association + novelty + context.⁸¹ No one would call a well-worn habit “creative;” and few would praise a solution as “creative” if it had no connection to the problem at hand. Creativity begins when a thinker juxtaposes whether consciously or subconsciously two or more thoughts that had previously seemed unrelated (e.g., the concept of God and a cuckolded husband;⁸² a series of passages that all use the name

⁷⁶ The idea that inspiration and creativity are linked to (often troubled) genius owes a great deal to 18th and 19th century Romanticism. See Bruce Ellis Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics: Jazz Lessons for Interpreters,” in *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads*, Kevin J. Vanhooser, James K. A. Smith and Bruce Ellis Benson, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 195-196.

⁷⁷ “Even just a century ago ... alterations to notes, elimination of movements, or significant changes in orchestration were comparatively common” in classical music performance. ... Indeed, the further back one goes in the performance practice of classical music, the fewer restrictions there are, with the result that the performer becomes an increasing contributor to the final result of the piece. Contemporary performance practice of classical music is – in relation to the musical tradition out of which it grows – comparatively rigid.” Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics,” 202. Similar arguments can be made about the eclipse of improvisation in the theater, and the eclipse of improvised and amateur music by the advent of mass produced musical recordings.

⁷⁸ Keith Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁷⁹ See de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, “The Nature of Improvisation,” 1-48 and “Other Uses of Improvisation,” 266-269, in *Improvisation, Hypermedia and the Arts Since 1945* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997).

⁸⁰ Creative: “productive;” “characterized by originality and expressiveness; imaginative.” *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 4th Edition (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), s.v. “creative.” Also: “originative;” “inventive, imaginative; ... involving imagination or original ideas as well as routine skill or intellect.” *Oxford English Dictionary / OED Online* (March 2015), s.v. “creative, adj.,” <http://www.oed.com.proxy.bc.edu/view/Entry/44072?rskey=VC31NR&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed March 31, 2015).

⁸¹ This is the basic argument in Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity*.

⁸² Cf. Hosea 1-3.

YHWH;⁸³ the person of Jesus and the image of a black woman.)⁸⁴ But creativity further implies that the thinker has sorted through non-viable juxtapositions and finally settled on a gambit that fits.⁸⁵

Improvisation connotes creativity within a context of established community practice. With improvisation the set of given materials is limited, and the parameters are prescribed by a tradition (e.g., a genre, a religious confession, an artistic school). A good improvisation is recognizable *as* something: as an *example of* x, as an *execution of* y. It bears a noticeable resemblance to what came before. The richer one's repertoire and context, the more thoroughly practiced the artist, the greater her familiarity with the materials – the more sophisticated the improvisation can be.

Closely related to creativity and improvisation is issue of interpretation – a key term when engaging the Bible. I define interpretation very basically as the activity of rendering one thing in terms of another.⁸⁶ To interpret an object of interest is to explain it in other words or in a new format, to re-present it in a way that makes sense to the people involved. Some scholars portray interpretation as a process that is profoundly different from the methods of thinking which underwrite most daily life; they may even insist that

⁸³ The “Documentary Hypothesis” of J. Wellhausen identifies many passages from the Pentateuch that use the name YHWH for God as originating from a now lost “J” source.” For the history of this hypothesis and its reception, see Alexa Suelzer and John S. Kselman, “Modern Old Testament Criticism,” in *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1119 ff.

⁸⁴ “Jesus of the People,” by Janet McKenzie, winner of the 1999 National Catholic Reporter contest for contemporary images of Christ. See <http://www.janetmckenzie.com/joppage1.html>, accessed 27 May 2014.

⁸⁵ For a sketch of this overall process, including the interplay between conscious and “latent” periods of problem-solving, see Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity*, 58-70; Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 93-95; James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 87-89; Sharon D. Parks, “Imagination: The Power of Adult Faith,” in *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 104-126.

⁸⁶ Interpret: “to expound the meaning of;” “to explain;” “to render.” *Oxford English Dictionary / OED Online* (March 2015), s.v. “interpret,” <http://www.oed.com.proxy.bc.edu/view/Entry/98205?rskey=rPfmUf&result=2> (accessed March 30, 2015).

“interpreting” a text, artwork, or Scripture, is different than “explaining” a natural phenomenon.⁸⁷ (In this view, while the former requires knowledge of an object’s history and cultural background, the latter requires scientific method.⁸⁸) This line of thinking may have clarified some conceptual muddles that arose in the wake of the modern dichotomy between the humanities and sciences, but it raises conceptual problems of its own.⁸⁹ It also creates a pedagogical problem. It introduces an unnecessary elitism by suggesting that interpretation is *defined* by the in-depth research of seasoned scholars. In contrast, I argue that anyone can interpret a cultural artifact – although that interpretation may prove *more or less true*: true to the artifact and its history, true to the interpreter’s community of practice, true to the best norms of our common humanity.

My point here is not to downplay the importance of scholarly research in the process of interpreting Scripture, but to underline the simultaneous importance of different interpretive contexts: the text’s history, the text’s internal dynamics, the text’s present-day use and audience, and so on. Interpretation is a natural process, a native skill to enhance and refine. We interpret things all the time. We explain a statement in other

⁸⁷ Also problematic is the way that some scholars conceive the relationship between interpretation and use. In this line of thinking, to “interpret” a story from Scripture means to give an account of its form and its context, to explain how it works as a narrative, how it fits with the texts all around it – but to “use” that story is simply to apply it, regardless of its original historical or literary context. See Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 57; Sandra Schneiders calls this process “accommodating” a text to its applied setting; she also distinguishes it sharply from true textual “interpretation.” Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd Edition (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier / Liturgical Press, 1999), 163-164. In fact, it is important to remember that interpretations are always directed towards use. See Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982). Of course, uses are certainly made stronger and richer when enhanced by robust accounts of an object’s history and former meanings. For a similar approach to my own on the question of “interpretation” vs. “use” of the Biblical text, see E.W. Conrad, “The Bible and Culture: The Role of Text in Interpretation,” *Canon & Culture* [Korea] 1 (2007): 43-69, esp. 55-63.

⁸⁸ See for example Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), Ch. II, “Interpretation,” 41-74; Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, esp. 17-25, 97-178; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

⁸⁹ See Ch. IV, “The Holism of Experience,” esp. footnote 35.

words; we render a poem as literary criticism; we transpose artistic creations from one genre into another; we turn rhythm into movement and dance. By underlining the validity of popular, non-academic interpretive practices, I hope to develop with lay people what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza envisions for scholars of Biblical Studies: an “intercultural-... emancipatory-radical democratic” project that incorporates doctrinal, historical, and other approaches into a liberation-oriented Biblical praxis.⁹⁰

What is more, “interpretation is inherently improvisatory,” as Bruce Ellis Benson has cogently argued.⁹¹ This is evident when “interpreting” music. The freedom to change notes, chords, and other notations is integral to jazz performance; but even in Classical music certain notations are routinely ignored in performance.⁹² To interpret a Classical score, the musician must work out how to address each note and phrase: with the instruments and the skills at her disposal, within the parameters of the written score, and if working within an ensemble, in the context of her peers and the conductor’s direction. The musician is *always* an improviser, never a high-fidelity performance machine.⁹³

⁹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza identifies four “paradigms” that operate within academic Biblical Studies today: (1) the religious-the*logical-Scriptural paradigm; (2) the critical-scientific-modern paradigm; (3) the cultural-hermeneutic-postmodern paradigm; and (4) the emancipatory-radical democratic paradigm. She argues that the first three paradigms (doctrinal, historical, and intellectually playful) should retain their integrity while being coordinated within an intellectual space committed to radical, democratic emancipation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

⁹¹ Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics,” 200.

⁹² “In performances of Beethoven symphonies, for example, his metronome markings are routinely ignored. Why? The answer is: that’s just part of performance practice in classical music. So even the score as notated is not necessarily *fully* authoritative.” Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics,” 202, original emphasis. Is there a parallel here with the way that certain textual emendations are routinely adopted with little or no comment when reading Scripture?

⁹³ Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics,” 201-202.

The same is true for textual interpreters: their success does not hinge on repeating the text, but on generating cogent renditions that fit the interpretive setting.⁹⁴ Benson's comparison between interpreting scores and interpreting Scripture makes this point clear:

To say that interpretation is improvisatory is to emphasize the role of interpreters in "fleshing out" the meaning of the text. Given that texts never "mean" by themselves and so must be "resuscitated" each time they are read (or performed) by interpretation, the role of the interpreter (or performer) is crucial. As I've argued, the interpreter who is fully committed to the goal of respecting the text and the author's intentions is never simply "repeating" the text (or score). If texts and scores are "underdetermined" [that is, if their ability to make sense and generate meaning require the application of data from *outside* the text], then the reading that results from an interpretation is *always* improvisatory. ... Having said that, there are clearly varying confines as to the "improvisation" that takes place – whether in performing jazz, classical music, or Shakespeare, or in reading the Old Testament. The limits on improvisation in bebop are not the same as those in New Orleans jazz. Nor is a pastor allowed to "improvise" on 1 Corinthians for a sermon in the same way that Paul was "allowed" to improvise Old Testament and early Christian texts in composing 1 Corinthians. There are ways in which an improvisation can be deemed "faithful" to a text and in which it can be deemed "unfaithful."⁹⁵

To improvise responsibly with Scripture is to render it creatively, critically, and truly within a context of established community practice. This is the premise of my pedagogical model. The following chapters describe how community practices shape such improvisation, how those practices can be molded into a powerful pedagogy, and why educators can embrace this whole process as an integrally liberating and bona fide Christian endeavor. For now, I emphasize that every interpretation is both creative and improvisational.

⁹⁴ This is, for example, how Sam Wells frames the practice of Christian ethics. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).

⁹⁵ Benson, "The Improvisation of Hermeneutics," 205.

Critical Thinking and Responsibility

To be critical is to be careful and exacting in discernment and judgment.⁹⁶ I define critical thinking as the practice of solving problems responsibly.⁹⁷ In academic settings, critical thinking is often conceived as a mixture of Socratic dialogue and formal logical theory.⁹⁸ James Fowler connects critical thinking with the ability to embrace a critical-historical view of the Bible, and to move beyond a child-like Biblical literalism.⁹⁹ But these understandings of critical thinking are too narrow.¹⁰⁰ Together with other educational theorists, I suggest that critical thinking is the ability to solve complex, contextualized problems within a tradition or community practice.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Critical: “characterized by careful, exact evaluation and judgment.” *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, s.v. “critical.”

⁹⁷For an educational theorist’s discussion of critical thinking and cognitive science, see Daniel T. Willingham, “Critical Thinking: Why Is It So Hard to Teach?” *American Educator* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 8-19, <http://www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/summer2007/index.cfm>, accessed 15 May 2012. For a social history of the “Critical Thinking” movement in American higher education and educational policy, see Kerry S. Walters, “Introduction: Beyond Logicism in Critical Thinking,” in *Re-Thinking Reason: New Perspectives in Critical Thinking*, ed. idem (New York, SUNY Press: 1994), 1-22.

⁹⁸ A typical example of this approach is William Hughes and Jonathan Lavery, *Critical Thinking: An Introduction to the Basic Skills*, 4th edition (Peterborough, ON; Plymouth, UK; and Sydney: Broadview Press, 2004). For an illuminating comparison between this vision of what it means to “critical” and the broader, more political vision championed by the proponents of “critical” pedagogy and the Frankfurt School of “critical” theory, see Nicholas C. Burbules and Rupert Berk, “Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits,” in Thomas S. Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler, eds., *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 45-66.

⁹⁹ Fowler describes this as “Stage 4 / Individuative-Reflective” believing and connects it with late adolescence. Cf. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995 [original, 1981]), 174-183; he uses the words “critical reflection,” “critical awareness,” and “critical capacities” to describe this stage on 162, 173, 177, 179, 180, 188.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Burbules and Berk, “Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy.”

¹⁰¹ On the tradition-based nature of critical thinking, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988). A convenient summary and sympathetic critique of MacIntyre’s position on the tradition-constituted nature of rational traditions can be found in John Flett, “Alasdair MacIntyre’s Tradition-Constituted Enquiry in Polanyian Perspective,” *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 26, no. 2 (1999/2000): 6-20. For further theological reflections on the tradition-bounded nature of reason, see Linell E. Cady, “A Model for a Public Theology,” *Harvard Theological Review* 80, no. 2 (1987): 195 ff.

Problem solving includes logical and metacognitive (“thinking about thinking”) strategies; but it also requires a thick knowledge of the underlying subject and a familiarity with the context of practice. Investigators who are unfamiliar with a scenario, problem, or subject will be hard pressed to distinguish incidental data from underlying patterns; hard pressed to tell normal readings from anomalous findings; hard pressed when exploring all angles even to recognize what constitutes the “other side” of an argument.¹⁰² What is more, different traditions of inquiry (such as physics, literary studies, history, and theology) have their own norms of evidence and their own understandings of legitimate inference which have evolved over the history of the discipline.¹⁰³ Solving problems responsibly in each of these traditions involves holding oneself accountable to its particular norms.

My definition of responsibility is holding oneself to account.¹⁰⁴ This implies norms to which one is accountable and an audience to which one may give an account. Even “integrity,” the act of being responsible to oneself, implies an audience of at least one, i.e., me. If I am to give an account of my behavior, I must have the cognitive and communicative tools to understand it, to unpack and express a comparison between the

¹⁰² Willingham argues that for the vast majority of people, the ability to employ critical thinking successfully is tightly linked their familiarity with an area of practice. The exception to this general statement is “people with extensive training, such as Ph.D.-level scientists” who “are better able to deploy critical reasoning with a wide variety of content, even that with which they are not very familiar.” Such people seem to become adept with problem-solving scenarios and gambits across a broad range of practical areas. Willingham, “Critical Thinking,” 14 n. 4.

¹⁰³ For example, classical physics distinguishes between particles in motion and waves, while quantum physics conflates them; Boolean logic eschews contradiction, while mainstream (orthodox, Chalcedonian) Christianity makes the union of opposite natures in Christ a central touchstone of faith.

¹⁰⁴ Responsible: “liable to be required to give account, as of one’s actions;” “able to make moral or rational decisions and therefore answerable for one’s behavior;” “showing good judgment or sound thinking,” *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, s.v. “responsible.” Here I anticipate the definition of responsibility that Donald L. Gelpi develops in *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship between Nature and Grace* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

norm and my work. To be responsible, then, I must have the ability to articulate; I must have the “ability” to “respond.”

Scripture

The scriptures of a community are its sacred writings.¹⁰⁵ Roman Catholic teaching defines “Sacred Scripture” as “the books of the Old and New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts.”¹⁰⁶ In this dissertation, I do not focus on which books or passages belong inside or outside a denomination’s present Biblical canon. I focus instead on how believers treat sacred texts, or to put it another way, on how believers treat texts as sacred.¹⁰⁷ A model for teaching Christian students to improvise responsibly with Scripture attends to the ways that sacred texts function within Christian communities. Ancient prophecies, stumbled-on sacred verses, deeply loved stories, overarching dictates, Biblical dicta and tropes: all of these are of central importance to a Biblical pedagogy that takes serious the present and past practices of Christians with their sacred writings, because all of these have helped Christian believers to discern what God wants them and others to do. I note that the period during which Jewish and Christian Scriptural canons came to be settled spans many centuries before and after the lifetime of Jesus.¹⁰⁸ Long before Jesus’ followers had developed and fixed the current body of

¹⁰⁵ Scripture is “a sacred writing or book” or “the sacred writings of the Bible.” *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, s.v. “Scripture.”

¹⁰⁶ Dei Verbum 9, 11. For details of the Roman Catholic canon, see Raymond E. Brown and Raymond F. Collins “Canonicity”, in Brown et. al., *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, 1034-1054.

¹⁰⁷ For a helpful overview of current discussions concerning the practices that define a particular text or cultural object as “scripture,” see Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ For example, in the late First Century C.E., the Sadducees seem to have embraced only the Torah (“the Law”); the Pharisees embraced the Law and the Prophets (including a corpus of oral Law which the Sadducees rejected); the Qumran community honored its own writings and revelations, while revering the Law and Prophets (though preserving them in varied recensions); Jesus-believing communities treasured the Law and the Prophets (including some presently non-canonical books of prophecy such as that of 1 Enoch; see Jude 14-15), as well as compositions and traditions about Jesus. From a strictly Jewish perspective, “Only at the very end of the Second Temple period—and more specifically in the decades

literature that constitutes the Christian New Testament, they were employing the words of Jewish tradition – and traditions about Jesus – to make sense of their world.¹⁰⁹ In my discussion of Scripture, I want to underline the similarities between ancient Christian practices with sacred texts and traditions, and modern practices that see Scripture as a canonized, fixed set of sacred texts. I propose that a process of improvising responsibly with communal, norm-setting texts and traditions is recognizable in both Matthew's text-interpretive practice, and in the Biblical interpretive practices that my proposed pedagogy puts forth. In this way, I seek to warrant my pedagogical practice of Scriptural improvisation by appealing to the practices found in the Scriptures themselves.

This approach highlights the formative power of Scripture as a script for ongoing performance. Where Scripture has normative status, it plays a key role in the “process of education-enculturation.”¹¹⁰ It shapes “textures, gestures, signs, ... material products,

leading up to the bar Kosiva rebellion of 132–135 [C.E.] —does there seem to have been some desire to overcome the textual pluriformity of books regarded by most ancient Jews as part of the “sacred writings” delivered to Moses, David, and other ancient prophets of Israel.” Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE-400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19. The Greek and Latin Christian churches had established a fairly uniform list of sacred Scripture by the third and fourth centuries C.E., but for modern day Protestants and Catholics, the shape of the canon was fixed only since the mid-sixteenth century. One way to grasp the convoluted nature of canonization across time and place among Jesus believers is to trace the history of reception of 1 Enoch. The Ethiopian Church includes 1 Enoch in its Old Testament canon to this day. Jude 14 quotes 1 Enoch and describes it as “prophecy” (but Clement and Origen, church fathers of the late 2nd century C.E., list Jude itself as a book of “disputed” canonical status). The Epistle of Barnabas 16:5 cites 1 Enoch explicitly as “Scripture,” but Barnabas was eventually excluded from the New Testament canon of every modern Christian communion. (To confuse the matter even further, Barnabas appears to have been considered canonical by many Christian scholars and scribes until as late as the fourth century, when it was included in Codex Sianiticus). See Raymond E. Brown and Raymond F. Collins “Canonicity”, in Brown et. al., *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, 1041, 1043; Dennis C. Duling and Norman Perrin, with Robert Fern, ed., *The New Testament: Proclamation and Paranesis, Myth and History*, 3rd Edition (Forth Worth : Harcourt Brace College Publishers 1994), 494; Lake Kirsopp, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912-1913), 1:339.

¹⁰⁹ Even when reading and writing were less widespread than today, the Christian Scriptures functioned as sources for the culture's oral (and visual) universe of discourse. For this dynamic in Medieval Christianity, see Meg Twycross, “Books for the Unlearned,” in *Themes in Drama 5: Drama and Religion*, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 75-76.

¹¹⁰ David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 276.

ritual ... and performances, expressivities, orientations, ethics, and politics;”¹¹¹ its words and images allow for “mutual recognition, the making of judgments, and the acknowledgment of [common] constraints.”¹¹² In short, it functions as a social and cultural “script”¹¹³ – as material that both funds and shapes possible improvisations. In this sense, Scripture is not a text to be enacted verbatim, but a set of key words, proverbs and formulas, mental schemas, and social scenarios that shapes the communities and identities of its interpreters. And if it shapes them, it can also *re-shape* them: as “counterscript,”¹¹⁴ as tool for resistance,¹¹⁵ as resource for integral liberation.

Truth

Critical thinking, creativity, and improvisation all require us to be “true” to our context, to seek out data about the reality around us, to frame our interpretations accordingly. Acting responsibly requires telling “the truth,” and it requires us to be true to

¹¹¹ Vincent L. Wimbush, “Introduction: TEXTureS, Gestures, Power: Orientation to Radical Excavation,” in idem, ed., *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 2008), 3.

¹¹² Burton Mack, “Scriptures, Myths, and Power; The Bible at Work - Chapter One; Signifying Scriptures,” *Postscripts: The journal of sacred texts & contemporary worlds* 5, no. 1 (2009): 21.

¹¹³ See Hongdang Meng, “Social Script Theory and Cross-Cultural Communication,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 17, no. 1 (2008): 132-138; Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, “Cultural scripts: What are they and what are they good for?” *Intercultural Pragmatics* 1, no. 2 (2004): 153-166. Walter Brueggemann adopts this notion of script as a key element in his thinking. Among the fundamental “theses” by which he frames his approach to the Bible are: “(1) Everybody has a script;” “(2) We are scripted by a process of nurture, formation and socialization;” and “(3) The dominant script of both selves and communities in our society, for both liberals and conservatives, is the script of therapeutic, technological, consumerist militarism that permeates every dimension of our common life.” Walter Brueggemann, “Counterscript: Living with the Elusive God,” *Christian Century* 122, no. 24 (29 Nov 2005): 22.

¹¹⁴ See Brueggemann, “Counterscript” 22-28. Wimbush similarly speaks of the power of Scripture to “de-center, de-form, and de-construct.” Wimbush, “Introduction,” 5.

¹¹⁵ Michael Carr argues that the sacred writings of Judean culture were originally assembled to “resist the onslaught of the Greco-Roman world ... The phenomenon, especially within Judaism, of Scripture as a tightly bounded concept is a phenomenon of cultural resistance. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 276, 275. In a similar vein, much of early Christian New Testament literature can be framed as a form of Jesus-centered ideological resistance to Roman imperial rule. See for example Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2002), 63 ff.

our word. Scripture, if it lives up to its promise, shapes our practices and beliefs in ways that are “true.”

In support of my pedagogy for integral liberation, I frame truth in terms of context, practice, and norms. Truth is the norm to which one strives to be responsible, when practicing responsibly in a particular context.¹¹⁶ Mine is a Pragmatist model of truth, as I explain more fully in Chapter IV.¹¹⁷ Here I point to three key situations that illustrate truthful behavior in action: when we bear faithful witness; when we act with loyalty and commitment; and when we warrant our statements convincingly.

To be true is to bear faithful witness to reality in a solid, reliable way. Bearing witness or giving a testimony is not simply stating a fact or expressing a feeling. A testimony, a proper confession (of one’s guilt, of one’s innocence, of one’s experience or faith) is an interpersonal “moral summons” that calls listeners to attention, commitment, and action.¹¹⁸ It puts one’s self – even one’s very life – on the line. It makes one

¹¹⁶ Here my terminology differs from that of Gelpi, who defines “truth” as “the verified interpretation of reality,” Donald L. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ: Rethinking Christological Faith and Commitment* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 605. Gelpi is anxious to employ the rhetorical weight of the term “truth” as a bulwark against relativism (especially Pragmatist relativism). I am more concerned to harness the rhetorical power of the term “truth” to support the pedagogical give-and-take of classroom inquiry – even if such conversation and inquiry does not lead all my students to common agreement when interpreting a Biblical text. In this way, I am closer to Sandra Rosenthal’s interpretation of Peirce’s understanding of “truth,” Sandra B. Rosenthal, *Charles Peirce’s Pragmatic Pluralism* (SUNY Press, 1994), esp. Ch. 1, “World, Truth, and Science.”

¹¹⁷ In this dissertation, I take a Classical Pragmatist approach to truth, but there are many other approaches. For example, one might distinguish between philosophical *idealists* (“the world is a human construct”) and philosophical *realists* (“the world is really out there”). A *correspondence* theory of truth holds that statements are true if they copy or conform to reality. In a *coherence* theory, statements can only be true by reference to other signs, symbols, statements, or systems – any realities “outside” the system of meaning are irrelevant. Some theorists seem to argue that truth exists only in production or “*performance*” of new data and ideas. *Deflationists* argue that ascribing “truth” to a statement adds to it nothing of actual consequence. See Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). For a theological perspective on truth similar to the one that I lay out in this dissertation, see Christine D. Pohl, *Living Into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 111-158, esp. 115-116.

¹¹⁸ Rebecca S. Chopp, “Theology and the Poetics of Testimony” in Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney and Kathryn Tanner, eds., *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (Oxford; New York: American Academy of Religion / Oxford University Press, 2001), 64. Cf.

accountable to others.¹¹⁹ A testimonial conception of truth puts critical thinking at the service of just action.¹²⁰

For this reason, to be true is also to be loyal and faithful; it is commitment to the integral wellbeing of others. These others can be human persons, or they can be ideas, natural creatures, cultural objects.¹²¹ To be humane, to act “truly” towards these others, means discerning and acknowledging their value; figuring out how to nurture their emergence; deciding how far to go to conserve them; knowing how to get out of their way.

Finally, to be true is to be verified, to be the holder of some evidentiary warrant, to be faithful to the data at hand.¹²² We check our claims against data; we assess individual and communal witnesses; we deduce and extrapolate based on the data; we employ norms of wisdom and lore; we evaluate the norms we employ. For Christians this body of data and reported experience includes the promptings of God and God’s Holy Spirit, which we encounter through prayer, Scripture, and common life. John Dewey remarks that a “competent inquiry” takes all data and questionings seriously, and tries to come up with some “warranted assertions.”¹²³ These assertions are only ever

Rebecca S. Chopp, “Bearing Witness: Traditional Faith in Contemporary Expression,” *Quarterly Review* 17, no.3 (Fall 1997), 193; Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” trans. by David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan, *Anglican Theological Review* 61, no. 4 (October 1, 1979): 435-461.

¹¹⁹ Chopp, “Bearing Witness,” Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony.”

¹²⁰ See Chopp, “Theology and the Poetics of Testimony.” In a similar vein, Walter Brueggemann does not “want modern objective scholarship to be the arbiter of theological imagination.” “*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* Revisited,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* vol. 74 (2012): 36.

¹²¹ Here I anticipate Gelpi’s discussion of “selves” as “autonomously functioning tendencies” – that is, as entities or organisms that have a history and a dynamic of “their own.” See Donald L. Gelpi, SJ, *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians, Volume II: The Sacraments of Ongoing Conversion* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press / Michael Glazier, 1993), vii; cf. idem, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 60.

¹²² “Verify”: from Latin *verificare*, literally “to make true.”

¹²³ John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), 8-9. The discussion of warrant among classically minded American Pragmatists centers around the process of practical inquiry and the notion of “warranted assertability;” this discussion has had some impact among

provisional;¹²⁴ but the data of experimentation and inquiry inevitably teach us more and more what reality is like.¹²⁵ As Rebecca Chopp points out, warranted assertability “depends upon dialogue, determination, community, and persuasion.”¹²⁶ Claims of truth should grab the interlocutor and the community integrally, on the levels of logic, affect, and call to commitment.

For the Cristo Rey Bible classroom, an initial warrant for asserting this Pragmatic definition of truth can be constructed from our common usage of English, and from the Biblical material we study. In English usage “truth” means “conformity to reality” and “honesty.” “It is true” can mean “it reflects fact, it is legitimate, it has hit its target, it is straight and not crooked, it conforms to the model or ideal.” “She is true” adds a further connotation: “she is faithful, she will not mislead or betray us.” And one’s “troth” is one’s pledge of fidelity (even to the point of engagement to marriage).¹²⁷ “Truth” also has a strongly practical meaning in the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity.¹²⁸ In the

Christian theologians like Rebecca Chopp, Ronald Thiemann, and Thomas Groome. There is a different discussion of “warrant” that has drawn significant attention in the past few decades among analytical philosophers. In this tradition, warrant is usually seen as that which distinguishes “knowledge” (= “justified true belief”) from a mere “lucky guess.” This analytical approach can generate more confusion than clarity, because it separates justification and verification from the idea of “what is objectively true”; it focuses attention away from the process of testing hypotheses against available and acquirable evidence. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993) and idem, *Warranted Christian Belief* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000); for yet a different use of “warranted assertability” that is of similarly limited use, see James Kraft, “An Externalist, Contextualist Epistemology of Disagreement about Religion,” *Ars Disputandi* 9 (2009): 11-30.

¹²⁴ As Dewey would have it, all knowledge is “part of an enterprise that is continually renewed, or is a going concern.” Dewey, *Logic*, 8-9.

¹²⁵ Thiemann remarks, “I . . . want to argue that there are procedures for settling beliefs and justifying claims to truth. The concept of ‘warranted assertability’ stands opposed to foundational theories of truth but not to the notion of justifi[cation and] tru[th in itself].” Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985), 178 n 4.

¹²⁶ Rebecca Chopp, “Theological Persuasion: Rhetoric, Warrants and Suffering” in *Worldviews and Warrants: Plurality and Authority in Theology*, ed. William Schweiker and Per M. Anderson (Lanham; New York; London: University Press of America, 1987), 19. Cf. Fulkerson, *Places of Belonging*, 21, 118.

¹²⁷ See *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, s.vv. “true,” “truth,” “troth.”

¹²⁸ For the semantic ranges of *’mn*, *alētheia* and related words which are rendered in English as “truth”, see Alfred Jepsen, *’āman, Theological Dictionary of the O.T.*, ed. G. Johannes Botterwick et al., revised ed. [for vols. 1 and 2] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974) 1: 292-323; H. Wildberger, *’mn, Theological*

Hebrew and Aramaic Scriptures, the word-group that English translators most often render as “truth,” “true,” and “truly” has a concrete, interpersonal force. It is based on the root *’m n*. The words are *’āman*, *emeth*, *emunah*, and related cognates, including the exclamation *Amen!* The forms and meanings range over these senses: “firm, continuous, lasting;” “faithful, reliable, able to be entrusted with responsibility;” “believable, inspiring belief;” “investigated and accurately reflecting reality.” In the Septuagint, these terms are most often translated by the Greek words *alētheia*, *alēthēs* / *alēthinós*, *alēthōs*.¹²⁹ These words are also common in the New Testament, where they are regularly translated into English as “truth,” “true” and “truly.” In New Testament usage, the senses range from “conformity to reality,” to “faithfulness,” to “divine truths / revelations” or “Gospel life.”

The preceding paragraph is exactly the argument that a Biblical pedagogy rooted in responsible improvisation might produce. It is an argument or apologia that arises from a real-life question in the context of a Bible high school classroom (“What model of truth best allows for a liberating interpretive practice?”). It builds on community and Biblical

Lexicon of the Old Testament, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westerman, trans. Marke E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:134-159; Ian W. Scott, “Truth,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006-2009), 5:681-686; Rudolf Bultmann, “Aletheia, etc.: Greek and Hellenistic Use,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 1: 238-251. The classic argument that the “Semitic” conception of truth is concrete and relational, while the “Greek” conception of truth is theoretical and abstract, can be found in W. Pannenberg, “What is Truth?” in *Basic Questions in Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 2:1-27 (original 1962). A prudent caveat to this kind of linguistic-cultural essentialism can be found in A.C. Thiselton, “Truth, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Collin Brown et al, eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency/Zondervan, 1986) 3:874-901. Granting his reservations, there is nevertheless a clear difference in semantic range between the Hebrew *’mn* and the Greek *alēth-*; Thiselton’s efforts to minimize the differences between these two semantic ranges are not always convincing, and sometimes quite strained.

¹²⁹ Sometimes the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, abbreviated LXX) translates the putative Hebrew root in *’mn* by the Greek words *pistis* “trust, faith, belief” or *pisteuō* “I believe.”

warrants. And it builds up the capacity of both writer and readers to argue their case in a Christian language of inquiry.

CHAPTER II. SITUATING MYSELF AND MY STUDENTS: THE RELIGION CLASSROOM AS A TRAINING GROUND FOR RESPONSIBLE INTERPRETIVE PRACTICE

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the inner city Catholic high school classroom which provides the context for my pedagogical proposal. In this chapter I use Situated Learning (SL) theory to argue that such a classroom is best described as a training setting where students learn to master interpretive practices at the intersection of different communities. After presenting the origins of SL theory, and the basic dynamic by which it frames the learning process, I use the different dimensions of learning which SL theory brings into relief to make my case: that “training” is not only an accurate way to describe teaching from an SL perspective, but that it is an excellent way to highlight the kinds of teaching that enhance students’ abilities to improvise responsibly with Scripture.

II. The Theory of Situated Learning

SL theory is a social scientific framework for clarifying the way that learners acquire know-how, information, and a sense of identity through their participation in communities of practice.¹³⁰ It is “an emerging body of ideas concerning both the nature of learning and the design of learning experiences.”¹³¹ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger first formulated SL theory in their 1991 monograph *Situated Learning: Legitimate*

¹³⁰ The roots of SL theory lie in sociology and others of the social sciences. Influences include Marx and the learning theories of Vygotsky, recent sociologists like Bauman, Bourdieu, and Giddens (see Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 38, 48-54); and a variety of other psychologists, sociologists, and constructivist social critics (see Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 279-284 nn. 1-11).

¹³¹ Hillary McLellan, “Situated Learning: Multiple Perspectives” 5, in *Situated Learning Perspectives*, ed. idem (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications, 1996).

Peripheral Participation.¹³² Since then, SL theory has been developed and expounded in a number of scholarly writings;¹³³ it has had an impact in the fields of cognitive science, organizational development, group work, faith formation, and formal and informal education.¹³⁴

Lave and Wenger elaborate SL theory by studying the dynamics of apprenticeship.¹³⁵ They examine five specific case studies: the informal training and self-commissioning of midwives in the rural Yucatan; the formal crafts-training of youthful tailors in Liberia; the training of quartermaster/ navigator inductees in the US navy; the credentialing and on-the-job instruction of supermarket butchers in the US; and the struggle for a practice of sustained sobriety within Alcoholics Anonymous.¹³⁶ One benefit of this apprenticeship focus is the ability to examine the dynamics of learning by bracketing out the tendency to focus on direct instruction. This allows hypotheses about learning *per se* to emerge, which then suggest fresh ways to improve pedagogical design.¹³⁷

¹³² Lave is an anthropologist who has studied the dynamics of apprenticeship, learning, and practical mathematics in communities throughout the developed and developing world. Wenger is a researcher and professional consultant who has studied the dynamics of learning in corporate, government, and classroom settings.

¹³³ E.g., Jean Lave and Seth Chaiklin, eds., *Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context*, (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1993); Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); McLellan, *Situated Learning Perspectives*.

¹³⁴ Mark K. Smith, "Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger and communities of practice," *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*, (2003, 2009) www.infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.htm, accessed 30 May, 2014; Jane E. Regan, *Forming a Community of Faith: A Guide to Success in Adult Faith Formation Today* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2014), 63-101.

¹³⁵ Lave and Wenger note that apprenticeship has a checkered history across time, place, and different societies – sometimes it has been profoundly exploitative, sometimes fairly benign and geared toward producing a more egalitarian community of practice, *Situated Learning*, 63-64.

¹³⁶ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 59-87.

¹³⁷ As social scientists, Lave and Wenger emphasize the *descriptive* force of SL theory; they insist that their perspective accurately captures key dimensions of the process of learning. "Undoubtedly, the analytical perspective of legitimate peripheral participation could - we hope that it will - inform educational endeavours by shedding a new light on learning processes, and by drawing attention to key aspects of learning experience that may be overlooked. But this is very different from attributing a prescriptive value

Lave and Wenger conclude that learning is most accurately understood as a movement toward fuller participation in a community of practice: the process by which newcomers slowly learn the ropes until they too are old hands.¹³⁸ From a SL perspective, to learn anything is to acquire new abilities for acting and speaking within particular environments.¹³⁹ It is to develop new skills and habits for using, in socially meaningful ways, hands, feet, voices, and facial expressions, tools, words, mental constructs, and so on. In the concrete give and take of participation learners acquire new abilities, data, and insights. They learn how to be an office worker or a college prep student; how to make the grade, or how to avoid doing homework; how to be straight, gay, Latino, or Christian; how to interpret the Bible; how to be creative and critical; how to be free.

In this way, SL theory recasts learning from a special, occasional process of formal study in set-aside contexts, to “an integral and inseparable aspect” of the social worlds we inhabit.¹⁴⁰ It “shift[s] the analytic focus from the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world,” from “cognitive process to the more

to the concept of legitimate peripheral participation and from proposing ways of ‘implementing’ or ‘operationalizing’ it for educational purposes.” *Situated Learning*, 41.

¹³⁸ Lave and Wenger define learning as “legitimate peripheral participation.” Each term characterizes an integral part of the process in their estimation. Learning only happens when participants develop a place for themselves in a community (this is what makes it legitimate) and when that experience is one of movement from lesser to greater mastery (this makes it a journey through some periphery to a more full-fledged type of performance.) *Situated Learning*, 35-37. While the language of “legitimate peripheral participation” helpfully highlights the basic nature of learning as a slow growth in participation, it obscures the ways in which many people connected with learning communities are marginalized and excluded from the learning process. Lave and Wenger admit that the question of “unequal power relations” is not developed in their discussion of legitimate peripheral participation. *Situated Learning*, 42. For this reason, I avoid using “legitimate peripheral participation” in this dissertation, where issues of marginalization and empowerment are a central concern.

¹³⁹ “We emphasize the significance of ... learning as participation in the social world. ... Learning is a process of participation in communities of practice, participation ... that increases gradually in engagement and complexity.” Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 43.

¹⁴⁰ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 31, 35.

encompassing view of social practice,”¹⁴¹ and from teacher as master instructor to teacher as skillful orchestrator and “structurer” of a community’s learning environment.¹⁴²

Defining Practice, Community, and Culture

In SL theory learning, practice, and community are correlative concepts. Learning means fuller participation in practice, and practice means an established pattern of behavior that exists within a particular community.¹⁴³ A practice is a constellation of habits, tools, skills, and materials, of dispositions, knowledges, identities, and lore that takes shape and endures over time.¹⁴⁴ Because a practice is a pattern or habit, it does not exist apart from human performance; but in the context of human performance, it takes on a life of its own. Because it is a constellation of elements, a practice is not an iron-

¹⁴¹ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 43.

¹⁴² Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 94.

¹⁴³ Lave and Wenger do not explicitly define “practice” in *Situated Learning*. However, they do speak of a new orientation in social sciences to “practice-centered approaches.” These approaches reject dualisms between structure and agency, body and mind, and instead underline the role of negotiation and improvisation in human behavior (16); they “ascend” from the thinly abstract and theoretical to grapple with the richness of concrete social phenomena (38); drawing from the work of Bourdieu, Giddens, and others, they emphasize embodied habits, normalizing social forces, the agents embedded in context, and the socio-historical shaping of human life. (50-51). Wenger defines “practice” more explicitly. In describing the practice of insurance claims processing, Wenger says: “practice connotes ... doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do;” it “includes both the explicit and the tacit,” the “manual” and the “mental,” the “theoretical” and the “practical.” Practice includes “the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations and contracts [I]t also includes ... implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions and shared world-views. ... Even when it produces theory, practice ... [remains an] embodied, delicate, active, social, negotiated, complex process of participation.” Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 47-49.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 126 ff. Alasdair MacIntyre’s influential definition of “practices” is different: “Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially constitutive of that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd Edition (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1985), 187. Scholars like MacIntyre and Clifford Geertz have over-emphasized the coherent, rational and symbolic dimensions of practice. See Ted A. Smith, “Theories of Practice,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 247. I argue that teachers must also understand the embodied and non-rational dimensions of practice. See Catherine Bell, “Action and Practice” in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 69-93; Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39 ff.

bound system. To exist it must be reproduced; thus it contains wiggle-room, space for variation, fissures where creativity and resistance can work.

A community of practice is a group of people marked off by, and engaged in, a particular set of practices. Such a community shares a set of common, boundary marking behaviors; a sense of common history; and a set of common projects or work. It is marked by human-scale communication, interactions, and processes.¹⁴⁵ It persists “over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice.”¹⁴⁶ Communities of practice overlap and interact in multiple ways, especially in complex societies like North America. For example, the same young person can belong to a family, to multiple classrooms, to a school, and to one (or more) congregations. From the individual’s perspective, we negotiate multiple practices, multiple social situations and identities; from the perspective of the community, each member can have multiple viewpoints, multiple internal and external commitments.¹⁴⁷ In addition, individuals and face-to-face groups interact with larger, more diffuse groupings – like the community of Americans, or of English speakers, or of Roman Catholics.

Although Lave and Wenger avoid the value-laden language of “normativity,”¹⁴⁸ it is clear that how norms or criteria function is of central importance to SL theory. Norms

¹⁴⁵ I limit the scope of my use of the term “community of practice” to communities in which face-to-face interactions are an integral part of defining practices. For example, a student’s family can be seen as a community of practice. Its practices include loving and care-taking; the running of a household together; the sharing of memories, hopes, plans, and dreams. The dynamics of larger, diffuse communities like those mentioned at the end of this paragraph may evince common practices, but provide fewer insights into the structuring of classroom practice for integral liberation.

¹⁴⁶ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 98; cf. 52-4, 115; Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 145-213.

¹⁴⁷ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 98.

¹⁴⁸ Lave and Wenger completely avoid the words “norm” and “normative” in *Situated Learning*. Wenger speaks of “norms” in *Communities of Practice*, only to point out the differences between norm-focused theories of social life and a more comprehensive SL approach. *Communities of Practice*, 12, 82, 280, 293). For Lave, the entire quest for a more social theory of learning is designed to undermine invidious and disenfranchising distinctions between normal and “sub-normal” learners. Jean Lave, “Teaching, as Learning, in Practice,” *Mind, Culture and Activity* 3, no. 3 (1996): 149.

allow us to judge progress towards mastery by comparing present practice to exemplars.¹⁴⁹ SL theory points out that most norms are embodied in products and models (artefacts, processes, and human beings), and that many function at the “gut” level. For example, both I and my students conveyed tacitly much more than we could ever express through explicit discussions about norms. We exuded countless subtle bits of information about the proper way to hold oneself before others (bodily “*hexis*”) and the proper sense of what is attractive, refined, or subpar (the “habitus” that governs our tastes). I certainly brokered access to the *hexis*, habitus, and practices that mark off the world of professional identity;¹⁵⁰ and they were often delighted to broker my access to their world of shifting teen cultural norms.

Among us, we generated a set of habits and expectations that marked off and characterized our particular classroom dynamic. Lave and Wenger speak of the local “culture of practice”¹⁵¹ which marks off each distinctive community:¹⁵²

who is involved; what they do; what everyday life is like; how masters talk, walk, work, and generally conduct their lives; how people who are not a part of the community of practice interact with it; what other learners are doing; and what learners need to learn to become full practitioners. It includes an increasing understanding of how, when, and about what old-timers collaborate, collude, and collide, and what they enjoy, dislike, respect and admire. In particular, it offers exemplars (which are grounds and motivation for learning activity), including masters, finished products, and more advanced apprentices in the process of becoming full practitioners.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Lave and Wenger do speak of “exemplars.” *Situated Learning*, 95, 97, 106.

¹⁵⁰ For the classic use of the concepts *hexis* and habitus, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1984). For the dynamics of habitus in the US, see R.A. Schwarzer and D. B. Holt, “Distinction in America? Recovering Bourdieu’s Theory of Tastes from Its Critics,” *Poetics* 25, no. 2 (November 1997): 93-120.

¹⁵¹ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 95.

¹⁵² Lave, “Teaching, as Learning,” 151.

¹⁵³ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 95.

Some understandings of culture underline its aspect as an all-embracing, integrated complex of symbols and meanings; from this point of view, culture is portrayed as the bounded set of beliefs and behaviors that shapes the world-view of a distinct social group. SL theory, however, analyzes culture at the local level, and views it in terms of practice. From this perspective, culture is the ongoing performance of symbols, habits, and meanings within a group whose social edges can be sharp or fuzzy.¹⁵⁴ As Peter McLaren writes, people do not so much “inhabit” a dominant or subaltern culture; more accurately, they “live out class or cultural relations” in the concrete groups and settings which they inhabit – sometimes in more purist ways, and sometimes with various degrees of hybridity.¹⁵⁵

My High School Classroom Community of Practice

My class was a concrete, face-to-face community of practice of about 25-30 people that I and my students constructed each year. What held this community together was first and foremost the schooling experience: the schedule, the rules of discipline, the decisions, pressures, and repercussions that put students and teacher there week after week. Within that overall structure, multiple social and cultural curricula were always at play.¹⁵⁶ One of them was the explicit curriculum of learning to read Scripture for integral

¹⁵⁴ For these differing understandings of culture, see Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 25-58. Tanner does not see Christianity as a “culture,” but as a type of cultural movement that has existed and maintained its identity across numerous ethnic, cultural, and sub-cultural groups. *Theories of Culture*, 93-155.

¹⁵⁵ Peter McLaren, “Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts,” in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, Second Edition, ed. Antonia Darder, Marta P. Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 66; cf. Antonia Darder, *Culture and Power in the Classroom: Educational Foundations for the Schooling of Bicultural Students*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 44-64.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 122-133. Of course, a multiplicity of factors also affected me as their teacher: diffuse groupings and institutions like the academic discipline of Biblical Studies, the different standards of school policy and Network norms, the pressure to remain within recognizably Catholic forms of practice and belief.

liberation. But the high school classroom also represents an ambient training-ground in performing identities of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, home culture, and youth/ethnic subculture.¹⁵⁷ Constantly (sometimes consciously, sometimes below the level of articulation), students read the context, the teacher, one another, and themselves vis-à-vis these different curricula in order to pitch their performances for desired results.¹⁵⁸ Will they be “model students,” “class clowns,” or passive “sponges”? In which affinity clusters will they find a space “safe” enough to make high school life psychosocially survivable?¹⁵⁹ In which ways will they try to shine, whether in line with the different identities on offer, or athwart them?

In addition, students brought their own knowledges about Scripture with them into our Bible classroom. For example, they already have access to Biblical interpretations (from a range of popular Christianities including their experience of the parish, the home, and sometimes “the old country”); they have access to professional pastors at the churches they often attended; they have access to professional exegetes, theologians, and historians (through popular media like Wikipedia, the History Channel, and so on). The classroom also hosted the curriculum of the broader school community – the images, stories, rituals, and practices that distinguished our particular school’s identity. It hosted the broadly academic curriculum of how to study and master book learning, how to write essays and pass quizzes and tests. The data and practices of my

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Lave, “Teaching, as Learning,” 159-161.

¹⁵⁸ The choices adolescents make concerning which group norms and which teacher norms to conform to at school are indeed most often subconscious – that is, unarticulated. Cf. Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 70, 75. That does not mean that teens are incapable of articulating these choices and bringing them to conscious reflection.

¹⁵⁹ Clark argues convincingly that for many mid-adolescents, a “cluster” – a small scale group of close knit friends who share time, interests, and group identity – is the “safe space” and “social self-defense mechanism” without which high school students cannot survive socially and psychologically. *Hurt 2.0*, 59-73 and ff.

daily lessons jostled for place among the great many practices that comprised my Bible classroom.

III. Teaching as Training from an SL Perspective

SL theory frames learning in terms of communities and practices. That is, it frames learning in terms of identity-defining constellations of tools, rules, materials, and behaviors. What does this suggest about ways to structure a pedagogy for integral liberation in a Cristo Rey Bible classroom?

The most important implication of a SL approach to teaching is that teaching means helping students to *master practices*. If learning means learning a practice, then the classroom is a forum for practical training. Practices include the skill of handling and recalling information, of course, but they include much more: establishing a sense of identity and belonging, solving problems in concrete situations, emulating models, tackling intersections, adjusting performance, negotiating norms. This implies an important corollary: that mastering practices is also a key element in moving towards integral liberation. In other words, SL theory puts integral liberation into a practical pedagogical framework. It suggests that surviving and thriving means practicing and mastering different, layered ways of being. Not all these ways of being are integrally liberating, but integral liberation will always include a process of learning and deepening one's ability to practice. Finally, SL theory suggests that classroom practices can be designed to foster mastery or to impede it, to welcome more and more students into a practice, or to weed out failures and promote the elite. This is true of both implicit and explicit classroom practices. Both classroom habits and explicit assignments can be shaped to welcome new practitioners or to daunt them. Are the habits and the explicit

curriculum of a classroom designed to facilitate mastery? If not, how can they be adjusted?

SL theory shifts the focus of teaching from direct instruction to the orchestration and structuring of the learning environment. The teacher can shape the classroom culture of practice by formulating rules (especially rules that she too will follow), by making certain practices easier and others more difficult, by furnishing the learning space with certain materials and not with others. The teacher can “scaffold” particular practices until they become “second nature” to students by organizing assignments with clear rationales, with aids and direction that are readily available, and with plenty of opportunity for rehearsal. From the perspective of SL theory, the teacher begins to look more and more like a trainer, for example, like the coach of a high school sports team.

In fact, high school coaching provides a helpful analogy for SL-guided teaching in a high school classroom.¹⁶⁰ Consider the case of a student baseball team. In such a setting, multiple goals and “curricula” clearly intersect: student recruits seek friendship, status, victory, and “personal bests;” coach and players strive to embody values of sportspersonship, competition, and teamwork, of school spirit and love of the game. At the same time, mastering baseball gives an overall structure to the learning experience. It provides the learning community (the team) with its defining practice.

Of course training has its pitfalls as an educational metaphor. It can suggest (fairly powerful) trainers socializing their (fairly powerless) trainees. It can suggest habituating students to rote behaviors, or shaping them through behavioral conditioning that uses extrinsic rewards or threats of punishment and shame. (Think of training animals, or

¹⁶⁰ For this analogy, I am indebted to Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), esp. 37-70.

toilet training.) It can suggest indoctrination that is designed to suppress independent thinking and to reinforce blind, even lethal obedience. (Think of “Basic Training.”)

Focusing on the dynamics of “*good* training” can mitigate these negative connotations while illuminating the kind of teaching that prepares students to improvise responsibly with sacred texts. It does so in six helpful ways. It underlines how learning entails developing native capacities and refining available “material.” (That “material” in the case of sports training is the trainee’s own talents and physical endowments). It underlines how learning is a path from novicehood to mastery. And it underlines how learning entails not just verbal recall, but the practice and application of verbal knowledge. Even more, good training implies processes that are aptly structured for learning; an openness to both the expected and the unexpected; a capacity to reimagine the norms of one’s own practice.

Training: Developing Native Capacities

First, training develops students’ existing capacities. Training for a sport is about structuring processes that allow students to develop and hone native skills. The coach organizes a regimen of exercises that help players develop their strength, engage their muscle-memory, and attend more closely to their coordination. Training is always a program to sharpen and deepen existing practices and skills. Students already know how to hit a ball, but training helps them do it more precisely, more consistently, with greater control, in a way that is strategically coordinated with others so that larger goals can be accomplished. In a similar way, students already know a great deal about religion and their social reality. They know how to read, how to deploy words and images, how to problem-solve. Religious training guided by a SL perspective seeks to help them perform

and reflect more precisely, more consistently, and more purposively in the classroom and other social settings. It seeks to inflect their existing practices in particular, integrally liberating directions.

Training: Achieving Mastery

Second, the goal of training is to achieve mastery.¹⁶¹ From an SL perspective, mastery is the ability to engage constituent parts of a practice with fluency and ease. Mastery may begin with rules and procedures, but its aim is to internalize certain skills and certain visions of excellence in a way that is flexible and strategically aware: to become an expert practitioner who can draw on habit and repeated experience in order to think critically and solve problems “on her feet.”¹⁶² Masters have developed a feel for the timing and the likely scenarios, a sense for responses that tend to be apt.¹⁶³ The master has internalized a particular practice to such an extent that she no longer struggles with its different parts, but can use it to achieve her own ends; she can play with the practice creatively; she can improvise with it convincingly and successfully.¹⁶⁴ Newcomers achieve mastery through a number of tactics: by mimicking master practitioners, by accepting direct instruction, by consulting with peers and near-peers,¹⁶⁵ by working

¹⁶¹ For Lave and Wenger’s characterization of mastery, masters, and masterful participation in practice, see *Situated Learning*, passim, but especially 47-54, 98-100, 105-109, 113-117.

¹⁶² For a description of “expertise” and the processes by which it is acquired, see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, *Mind Over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer* (New York: Macmillan / Free Press, 1986); Patricia Benner, “Using the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition to Describe and Interpret Skill Acquisition and Clinical Judgment in Nursing Practice and Education,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* 24, no. 3 (June 2004): 188-99. For an example of Benner and Dreyfus’ model in terms of professional pastoral expertise, see Kathleen Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), esp. 118-148.

¹⁶³ Cf. Hanks, “Foreword,” 20.

¹⁶⁴ Hanks, “Foreword,” 20. As Lave and Wenger point out, “Learning itself is an improvised practice: A learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice.” *Situated Learning*, 93; cf. 97.

¹⁶⁵ E.g.: “It seems typical of apprenticeship that apprentices learn mostly in relation with other apprentices. There is anecdotal evidence that where the circulation of knowledge among peers and near-peers is possible, it spreads exceedingly rapidly and effectively.” Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 93.

through different scenarios,¹⁶⁶ by turning new skills into habits, by reflecting rigorously on successes and failures.

My students were hardly empty vessels waiting to be filled with new ways of speaking or interpreting Scripture.¹⁶⁷ But they did lack some key habits of interpretation that training could hone to mastery. They lacked the practiced ability to compare and contrast different interpretations and interpretive strategies (sometimes even the ability to notice such differences at all.) They lacked a consistent taste for interpretation that takes integral liberation more fully into account. They lacked the sense of confidence in dealing with Scripture that comes with familiarity and repeated use.

Training: Words in Application

Third, training puts propositional knowledge in the service of application. In a sports coaching situation, propositional knowledge is essential. The trainee must learn the rules of play in their detail; she must understand the vocabulary of the game; if she wants to be treated like a real insider, she must even learn its arcana and lore. But she must memorize all these things for a purpose: to have them at her finger tips at just the right time.

¹⁶⁶ On the scenario as a framework for performance and mastery, see Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 53-64.

¹⁶⁷ On “banking education” and its view of students as “empty vessels,” see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2007 [original 1968]), 78. This stress on mastery is one of the key points of friction between SL theory and certain strains of liberationist theory and pedagogy. For example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza rejects apprenticeship and the master-student model of learning in her quest for an emancipatory, radically democratic practice of Biblical Studies. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 133-136. Freire, too, seeks the “suicide” of the teacher as the ultimate goal of an integrally liberating education. Cf. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 133. But he also organizes his pedagogy to produce literacy *mastery* for illiterate students. I explore this dynamic more fully in Chapter III.

In this way, training puts “knowing that” in the service of “knowing how and what for;” it puts knowledge at the service of real-life situations. By real-life situations I mean situations where participants have listened to their hearts, looked more deeply, and discovered the desire that something should be done. Numerous scenarios can move learners to act from the heart in this way: need, curiosity, appreciation of beauty, doubts about what should be done next, the chance to make a difference to others. Opposite to addressing real-life situations is the kind of learning in which students are sequestered from meaningful projects, where they are prevented from doing work that might actually matter (either to themselves or to others).¹⁶⁸ As Lave and Wenger point out, when “no field of mature practice [exists] for what is being learned,”¹⁶⁹ a “parasitic” learning culture develops, in which memorization and testing for recall become the most valuable of all skills to master.¹⁷⁰

Consider the role of language in the repertoire of religious practitioners. One key dimension of mastering religious practice is learning its speech: how to talk, what to talk about, what talking can (and cannot) accomplish.¹⁷¹ “Language is part of practice,”¹⁷² both talking about religious practices, as when studying them from books, and talking “within” then as a proper religionist.¹⁷³ Through traditional stories, key images, and stock

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 104-105, 111.

¹⁶⁹ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 112.

¹⁷⁰ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 112.

¹⁷¹ This paragraph summarizes the taxonomy of religious language types developed by Gabriel Moran, which identifies three different ways to speak or “language families” within Christian practice. “In the first family, language is used to show someone how to get to an end that is known and can be chosen. ... In the second family, language is used to heal a fragmented self so that choices are possible. ... In the third family, language is used to reflect back on the other two families.” Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversation on Contemporary Practice* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1998), 34. Here Harris and Moran are summarizing Gabriel Moran, *Showing How: The Act of Teaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 83-145.

¹⁷² Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 85.

¹⁷³ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 107.

exhortations, the religion teacher makes available exemplars of excellence, virtue, or wisdom. Story-telling, lecture, question-and-answer, or drill can be valuable here for providing and reinforcing these exemplars; students can hear and rehearse how to retell the community's history, how to reproduce its vocabulary and verbal habits. But there is more to using language religiously than simply memorializing classical forms. There is also a language of healing: through words and rituals of "praise, thanks, confession, ... mourning," and blessing, the teacher offers techniques to help students better express and integrate their feelings.¹⁷⁴ The goal here is to set right the spirit so that decisions and thinking are more clear. And there is also a language of theological inquiry whose goal is to make practice more reflective, coherent, and congruent to its own best ethical norms.

Training helps Bible students put words to work as raw material with which to create useful products. Lave and Wenger frame much of practice in terms of "production." They speak of "producing" meaning, relationships and discourses; of the "products" of apprenticed and expert activity (artifacts, attitudes, systems, skilled identities); and of the "reproduction" of the community of practice (its styles and its individual experts).¹⁷⁵ Creative production always depends on the existence of previous materials, with all the affordances and limitations those materials provide. Writing an essay or assembling a power-point about Scripture, making a Scriptural argument, composing a prayer, means creating a new cultural object by reworking old words, genres, rhetorics, and images from the Bible. As with training for sports activities, dependence on previous materials does not limit our capacity to work critically and

¹⁷⁴ Harris and Moran, *Religious Education Reshaping*, 34.

¹⁷⁵ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 58.

creatively; to the contrary, it enables it.¹⁷⁶ Every living language, tradition, or practice can contain enough wiggle-room, enough space for variation, to accommodate new forms of thinking and new, flexible responses.

To the extent that teaching develops students' native capacities, to the extent that it moves them towards mastery, to the extent that it helps them put words to work, teaching can indeed be considered a type of training. Reflecting on the nature of *good* training sheds light on three more dimensions of the learning and teaching process. Good trainers structure practice "transparently" so that they are not mystified but make clear sense. Good trainers habituate novices to respond flexibly to new material. And good trainers develop in their students the capacity to reimagine the norms of their own practice.

Good Training: "Transparent" Activities

Good training implies processes that are structured so that what students are learning makes sense to them. Lave and Wenger call such processes "transparent," because they make their "inner workings ... available for the learner's inspection: The black box can be opened, it can become a 'glass box.'"¹⁷⁷ Without developing the simile of "Bible as glass box" – a provocative but complex pedagogical analogy¹⁷⁸ – I point to

¹⁷⁶ For a fine reflection on this dynamic from the perspective of literary theory, see Ann E. Berthoff, *The Mysterious Barricades: Language and Its Limits* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Berthoff explores the implications of this perspective for creating written compositions in idem, *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1981).

¹⁷⁷ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 102.

¹⁷⁸ The metaphor of Bible as a textual machine – as a collection of textual functions – promises great insight into the numerous *mechanics* by which Scripture functions to norm our thoughts and behaviors. The challenge of using the metaphor in this dissertation is to clarify the way it aligns with my central image of "training for improvisation," a less mechanical, more artistic and organic trope. To align these two metaphors responsibly would require clearly articulating the relationship between machinery and improvisational artistry, a topic beyond the scope of this paper.

the value of transparent classroom processes. A transparent assignment or rubric makes clear what the learner must do, why this behavior is important, why it is best organized in this particular way, and how it forms part of a meaningful practice. This clarity is not solely the result of verbal explanation (although pointing out relevant norms and values can be an important part of transparent activities). It results from planning and structuring the procedure as a seasoned practitioner would do.

Consider the following example of a “transparent” assignment: asking students to write their own psalm. A teacher familiar with the genre knows that a psalm is a liturgical poem.¹⁷⁹ A liturgist who sets out to write a modern-day psalm might proceed in the following steps: (1) identifying a theme; (2) immersing herself in the liturgical tradition while consulting appropriate scholarship; (3) composing and refining a text; (4) employing it in communal worship; (5) evaluating its effectiveness for future use. A transparently organized assignment would be structured in a similar manner. For example:

- (1) Decide upon something to give thanks or praise God for, something to complain about or longingly remember;
- (2) Find out which Psalms fit that genre. Pick two and read them repeatedly over the course of a week. Take notes on them: how do you feel after reading them every day? What seems especially “poetical” or excellent about how they were written? Use the internet and the reference books in our class library to find out more about the Psalms you have chosen.
- (3) Write an original poem, with guidance from the composition handouts distributed in class. Three drafts – first, second, and final – will be due over the course of two weeks.
- (4) Post the completed psalm online, share it with your family, or submit it for an in-school prayer service.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ J. Clinton McCann, “Psalms,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. IV, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Introduction to Hebrew Poetry, Job, Psalms (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 641.

¹⁸⁰ For a similar process, see “Psalms - How to Write a Psalm” in the Curriculum section of the Fellowship Bible Church of Northwest Arkansas website. <http://www.fellowshipnwa.org/curriculum-visitors>. Accessed 6 Dec 2014.

(5) Ask the people who have heard or read it what they think of it. Write up their responses and your own reflections in a short essay.

Learning to write one's own psalm in this way – as a professional would write it – scaffolds students' ability to create products that exercise creativity and to make a difference on the cultural, intellectual, psychosocial, and spiritual levels.

Good Training: Negotiating Old and New

Good training implies processes that help students adjust to and embrace what is different. If this is evident in terms of absorbing new data and skills, it is also true in terms of absorbing data that is particularly unexpected, and of adjusting to novel perspectives. Master practitioners have learned how to respond flexibly to challenging situations; their training includes the kinds of exercises that prepare them for fresh new approaches. In this way, their practice can continue to address real-life situations, instead of becoming stale and sequestered.

This kind of flexibility is especially important in a classroom that hosts multiple cultures. For example, as Cristo Rey students combine the life of home, school, and office within themselves, they compare, contrast, and sometimes conflate disparate practices at both the conscious and subconscious levels. When is it correct to use “ghetto” dialect or Standard English? To make her political points more incisive, one student mixed erudite language with “Spanglish” in her entry for a local poetry “slam.” Is it acceptable to cross community politics with the academic strictures of the school day? Students spent several class periods one morning (Religion, English, Social Studies) hashing out whether to boycott classes in solidarity with nationwide immigration protests: many chose to walk out as a body for 15 minutes after lunchtime; others were convinced that the best use of their time was to stay in class. One example is aesthetic,

the other political and ethical; but both represent an emerging culture of flexible action at the intersection of different practices, styles, and norms.

By inviting students to pay attention to these dynamics and changes, the teacher can help students take better hold of their own thinking and doing. She can train them to negotiate diversity with integrity – that is, with coherence and with their own sense of personal style. This is what Antonia Darder has called the skill of “cultural negotiation,” in which students claim a *bicultural* position: identifying critically with their home culture, grappling with the dominant culture equally critically, and claiming their right to the heritage of both.¹⁸¹ This kind of training invites participants to discover, explore and interrogate their own cultural heritage, to “dig again” their own cultural “wells,”¹⁸² to value integral liberation on both the personal and the cultural levels. It rejects practices that erase cultural identities. It affirms the need “to sustain ... cultural and political integrity”¹⁸³ so that particular forms of wisdom do not disappear. It seeks to make ancient traditions available as possible perspectives from which to critique other ways of life. At the same time, it embraces the fact that students constantly remake, reinterpret, and perform their cultures. It models habits of reading and “writing” the Bible with a preferential option for materials from students’ own lives and heritage.

For example, Sandy Marie Angl s Grande celebrates Native American efforts at adaptive cultural survival that remain rooted in tribal communities “through memory,

¹⁸¹ Antonia Darder, “A Critical Theory of Cultural Democracy,” in *A Dissident Voice: Essays on Culture, Pedagogy, and Power* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 25-29.

¹⁸² Peter C. Murrell, Jr., “Digging Again the Family Wells: A Freirean Literacy Framework as Emancipatory Pedagogy for African American Children,” in *Mentoring the Mentor: A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire*, ed. Paulo Freire (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 19-58.

¹⁸³ Sandy Marie Angl s Grande, “American Indian Geographies of Identity and Power: At the Crossroads of Ind gena and Mestizaje,” in Darder, Baltodano, and Torres, *Critical Pedagogy Reader*, 185.

ceremony, [and] ritual,” through “traditional identity” and family connections.¹⁸⁴ She insists that the fresh wisdom and the re-constructed rituals which Native peoples develop should be firmly rooted in their cultures of origin but should also be used to elicit “collective political action” – action that responds to the crises that threaten all life.¹⁸⁵ Although Native American history and cultural perspectives are very different from those of many Cristo Rey students, this focus on culturally rooted, cross-cultural solidarity resonates with my pedagogical project. It speaks to the intersection of ancient tradition, integral liberation, and modern-day life. This kind of practice is hard to master. Embedding it as a defining part of community practice makes it easier to sustain.

Good Training: Coping with Changing Norms

Finally, good training implies an openness to adjusting one’s sense of what excellence or success is really about. It implies a process of continuing discernment in which learners (and teachers) can reimagine what is desirable. Not only do good trainees develop new performance capacities, they also develop the capacity to take on new values and norms. Robert Kegan provides a salient example. When recruiting for a high school sports team the good coach “stand[s] in the doorway of an alluring and valuable activity welcoming adolescents to a bounty of opportunity for increased personal competence, self-display, self-aggrandizement, and personal reward.” However, the good coach also structures the program and “holds” students through athletic and emotional challenges in such a way that they can develop both new levels of athletic competence,

¹⁸⁴ Angl s Grande, “American Indian Geographies,” 200.

¹⁸⁵ In this vein, Michael Charleston calls for a “New Ghost Dance” which “calls Native and non-Native peoples to join together and take action. ... [T]o establish harmony and coexistence of tribes with other societies in the modern world.” Quoted in Angl s Grande, “American Indian Geographies,” 199.

and a new sense of the value of working together.¹⁸⁶ “[O]nce hooked, ... the same adolescents discover, if artfully coached, that in order to get what they want,” they must master behaviors like teamwork, solidarity, and participation in strategic group planning.¹⁸⁷ Kegan describes this as a “tricky” learning environment in that it is

intensely meaningful to the current way its members construct their experience, [but] it also increases the likelihood that interacting with this environment will disturb this very way of constructing reality and promote its transformation.¹⁸⁸

While Kegan approaches this process of transformation from the standpoint of individual psychological development, I describe it as a shift in the shared norms of the learning community / community of practice. With this shift, adolescents begin to articulate, to “own” more consciously, and to share more explicitly with others the pleasures of complex social cooperation.

Describing this pedagogy more generally, Kegan encourages teachers to “welcome the concrete as a route to the abstract,”¹⁸⁹ and to organize the rules of classroom life in ways that anticipate students’ upcoming developmental capacities.¹⁹⁰ I describe this in terms of bringing students to the brink of their own capacities for articulation. In a similar way, I encouraged my students to tackle the double-edged challenge of a Cristo Rey education: that is, to be good corporate citizens, and to question the corporate paradigm; to enroll themselves in the Cristo Rey liberationist project, and to question their own commitments; to embrace the graduation goal of being “religious,”

¹⁸⁶ On the nature and function of a “holding environment,” see Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 43.

¹⁸⁷ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 47. Kegan characterizes this latter stage of community-mindedness as one that adolescents enter “gradually and with understandable ambivalence,” *ibid.* I suspect that the dynamics of self-reference and solidarity are somewhat different in settings like Cristo Rey, in which group struggle is an explicit and celebrated value both in school and in many of the spaces of ethnic and cultural resistance that students and their families inhabit.

¹⁸⁸ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 68.

¹⁸⁹ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 53.

¹⁹⁰ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 54-55.

and to question their religious traditions. We began this challenge with our first major assignment, the analysis of the September Opening Mass. In describing the goal of the assignment to my students, I offered a speech much like this:

At Cristo Rey High School, every student has to attend the school Masses; this is part of our policy. But I want you to be aware of what those Masses are trying to sell you, with their rituals, symbols, and words. Of course I want you to agree with the agenda those Masses are selling; I helped put that agenda together! But I want you to notice what I'm trying to sell you, so that you can decide for yourself if you want to buy it. Don't just swallow it without thinking twice.

The same kind of double-edged challenge applies to interpreting the Bible “both creatively and critically;” that is, in a way that embraces and runs with the text while also interrogating its meaning and assessing its apparent authority.

Understanding that norms can change, and thinking about how this can happen, is an important part of learning to improvise responsibly with religious traditions. As students examine the changing norms of their own practices in different environments, they can begin to notice how these changes are due in large part to the nature of practice itself. Practices are patterns or habits continually produced, reproduced, and adapted; thus there is constant “repetition with difference” in the ongoing performance of practice.¹⁹¹ Sometimes these differences arise as old forms are applied to new situations and new sets of material. Sometimes they accrue fairly randomly, and sometimes they represent conscious new twists. Sometimes they reflect revolutionary inflections of existing

¹⁹¹ For a representative discussion of “repetition” as the term has played out vis-à-vis “sameness” and “difference” in Postmodern Continental philosophy, see Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist, eds., *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), s.v. “repetition.” For repetition, difference, and the conscious reinscription of social norms, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary Edition (London: Routledge, 1999), 181-190. Linda Hutcheon uses the phrase “repetition with difference” to define parody in *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000 [original, 1985]), 32.

behavior.¹⁹² Practice inevitably generates new forms and criteria, sometimes even distinct new communities of practice.¹⁹³

For teachers and students investigating Scripture this perspective is particularly helpful. It sheds light on the Scriptures themselves and on the foundational stories we construct from their pages. Some scholars and teachers of religion chart a clear path from Jesus and his original followers, to Pentecost, Paul, and Catholicism. In Judaism, this straightforward thoroughfare runs from a putative “Council of Jamnia” where the sages regrouped after the Temple’s destruction in 70 C.E., through the rabbis, to the Mishnah and Talmud.¹⁹⁴ But close attention to the literary and archaeological residue of First through Third Century practices casts doubt on such clear-cut narratives. Re-imagining the history of our religions at the granular level of practices and face-to-face communities highlights both the accumulated differences and the radical shifts that have been part of that story. We can notice how Pharisaic associations and small conventicle of Jesus-worshippers assembled and changed; we can notice the sifting and cementing of disparate practices that took place in the aftermath of the Temple’s destruction; we can imagine how these changes produced distinct face-to-face groupings of “rabbinic” Jews and of “Christian” believers through the Second and Third Centuries C.E. and beyond. Students

¹⁹² Mary Elizabeth Moore employs this perspective on norms to great effect in *Education for Continuity and Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983). For an insightful account of one community forced to transform its norms radically in order to survive, see Jonathan Lear’s account of the cultural genocide inflicted on the Crow Indian Nation, and their struggle to go on. *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); discussion in Ted A. Smith, “Theories of Practice,” 252.

¹⁹³ Jean Lave, “The Practice of Learning” in Lave and Chaiklin, *Understanding Practice*, 13-17.

¹⁹⁴ For a constructive critique of this tendency in Christian scholarship and education, see Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist / Stimulus, 2000); for a critique from the perspective of Judaism, see Jacob Neusner, “Gerhardsson’s Memory and Manuscript Revisited: Introduction to a New Edition,” *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, New Series, 12 (1997): 171-194.

who can look at past and present and see the continuing development of norms may be freer to come up with their own variations on tradition, freer to explore how those variations might or might not actually work.

IV. Conclusion: Rescuing “Training” from Its Cultured Detractors

In this chapter, I have argued that “training” is not only a legitimate way to describe the process of education in general. I have also presented numerous ways in which “training” highlights aspects of good teaching that can prepare students to be responsible improvisers. The first step for a responsible improviser is to assess the situation by looking deeply and listening carefully to the heart-challenges which that scenario generates. Good training addresses this first step by structuring the situation so that learners can more likely be moved in ways and directions which *they* might not have expected, but which the *trainer* suspects may come to light. The second step for a responsible improviser is to develop capacities and resources with which to mount a response. Through transparent exercises and space for reflection, good training develops the learners’ capacities to tackle problems with words and with actions. The last step for a responsible improviser is to create effective, informed interventions. Mastery – the goal of good training – enhances the caliber of those interventions.

Educators who strive to be good trainers will engage their trainees on the dimensions of life and identity that matter most to the students; but they will also structure the learning environment to open up new student concerns and desires. They will develop existing capacities and cultivate existing identities; but they will also help students to put different identities in tension, and to consider new twists on old practices.

They will make rich material available to students, and organize exercises that help students to tackle it.

Some theorists have emphasized how training and socialization provides Christian identity with its practices, knowledge, and particular culture.¹⁹⁵ Others, while embracing the process of socialization, insist on the importance of critical distance, dialectical inquiry, and liberation from practices that may seem to be Christian but turn out in the end to be false.¹⁹⁶ This chapter embraces both approaches. It suggests that religious education is best understood as a process of *socialization for critical practice*.

It is easy to think of “training” as a type of formation that does not fully respect self-determination and critical thinking.¹⁹⁷ I argue that it makes more sense to speak of training as education in the best, critical sense of the word. It makes more sense to speak of “training students to become critical thinkers,” if critical thinking means solving problems in a way that is accountable to our best educational practices.

However, in recognition of the fact that “training” often carries connotations of rote thinking and indoctrination, it may be best to describe the pedagogy that I am

¹⁹⁵ Among the classic proponents of this position have been Horace Bushnell, C. Ellis Nelson, John Westerhoff, Craig Dykstra, Aidan Kavanagh, Berard Marthaler, and the theorists behind the Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. See Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass / Wiley, 1980), 116-121; Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 1989), 40-42, 99-100, 129-132, 138.

¹⁹⁶ See for example Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, 105-131.

¹⁹⁷ The relationship between socialization and education is controverted across a number of academic disciplines. Groome’s formulation of the proper relationship between socialization and critical education is somewhat different than mine: “If education is guided only by the interest of socialization, then it typically educates people for acceptance of reality as it is social mediated rather than for its transformation. ... For Christian becoming it is not a question of either socialization or education. We need a socialization process and a critical education in the midst of it.” *Christian Religious Education*, 127. Kegan, a pedagogically astute developmental psychologist, makes a similarly negative distinction between socialization and education in discussing the insights of radical social constructivists: “Socialization into a discourse community might be the fanciest version yet of substituting training for education” *In Over Our Heads*, 289

proposing as “*training for responsible improvisation*.” The word “responsible” emphasizes a morally engaged level of self-conscious behavior. The word “improvisation” undermines the connotation that rote behaviors are the trainer’s goal. Finally, the tensions between the three terms – training by dint of repetition + free creativity + accountability – make of the whole phrase an invitation to deeper reflection on what teaching the Bible could really mean.

CHAPTER III. HOW TO TRAIN A RESPONSIBLE IMPROVISER: TEACHING AS “JOKERING”

I. Introduction

In Chapter I, I described the educational context that gave rise to my proposal: that teaching the Bible to Christian students is best understood as training them to improvise responsibly with Scripture. In Chapter II, I argued that “training” is the best way to describe the educational project that I am proposing. In this chapter, I describe the program of popular education known as Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). I argue that the key practices at the heart of TO are also key practices for improvising responsibly with Scripture. I conclude that training students to improvise responsibly with Scripture means training them to act like performance artists in the spirit of TO.

TO trains participants in a genre of improvisational, dramatic performance which combines artistic acumen, social analysis, and liberationist action. Augusto Boal, the originator of the genre, speaks of the human being’s “vocation” to shape her own life creatively, responsibly, and freely.¹⁹⁸ Boal describes TO as:

a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions.¹⁹⁹

My argument is not that TO is an engaging, creative method which can enhance the teaching and learning of Scripture; it is, and I trust that my presentation will demonstrate

¹⁹⁸ The “self-knowledge” of human beings for Boal is not a merely a matter of self-*thinking*-self, but the consciousness of a person who is able “to imagine variations of his action, to study alternatives.” Augusto Boal, *Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, trans. by A. Jackson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 13.

¹⁹⁹ Boal, *Rainbow*, 14-15.

how that is true. Nor do I argue that TO should replace lecture, drill, and the many other methods that contribute to training for mastery. Instead, I argue that religious educators should structure their classrooms to resemble a TO experience. This makes sense because the six practices that are central to the art of TO are also central to the work of responsible improvisation: making materials available, refining perceptions, generating options, selecting responsibly, occupying space, and reflecting in action.

These practices are not unique to TO; they constitute a program for training anyone to be a good artist.²⁰⁰ But TO provides a particularly compelling artistic model for integrally liberating religious education. First, it is a *popular* program in two important senses of the word: it combines the image of theatrical improvisation – well established in popular consciousness – with a populist message that human beings are natural born artists, and that any person can learn how to improvise.²⁰¹ Second, TO is an explicitly *liberationist* project committed to the struggle against multiple oppressions; as such the process of social analysis is integral to its vision of artistry. Third, as a genre of *performance* art, TO lends itself to a helpful generalization. The point of TO is teaching students to improvise responsibly on human situations, that is, teaching people to “perform” responsibly tout court. In short, TO trains participants to be excellent amateur

²⁰⁰ Maria Harris has written eloquently how artfulness and creativity are integral to religious education. Taking my cue from her work, see for example Maria Harris, “Artistry” (Chapter 4), *Women and Teaching: Themes for a Spirituality of Pedagogy*, 1988 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York / Mahwah: Paulist, 1988), 60-76. Harris asks, “Is there anything an educator might do differently if she or he operated from the stance of an artist?” Maria Harris, “Religious Education and the Aesthetic,” *Andover Newton Quarterly* 16 (March 1976), 125.

²⁰¹ “We are all artists, but few of us exercise our aesthetic capacities. ... Even though some may not be capable of creating an Aesthetic Product which enlightens all of us, all are capable of developing an Aesthetic Process which enriches themselves.” Augusto Boal, *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed* (London: Routledge, 2006), 18, 39.

artists who can improvise liberationist interventions on stage and in life.²⁰² A TO inspired Bible curriculum makes Scripture available to those amateur artists.

I begin the chapter with a sketch of recent discussions within the fields of theology and critical pedagogy concerning theatre, art, and performance. I then introduce the roots of TO and describe its basic techniques. I explore the six key practices that TO shares with responsible improvisation, showing how those practices can also guide a pedagogy for improvising responsibly with Scripture. Finally I paint a portrait of the high school Bible teacher as “Joker” – Boal’s term for the facilitator of a TO experience.

II. Teaching, Religion, Art, and Performance

In this section, I describe where my project fits among academic conversations concerning teaching, religion, art, and performance. As classroom *techniques*, drama, theater, and performance have recently attracted some attention in Biblical studies and academic theology;²⁰³ in addition, drama and performance have drawn increasing interest as *themes* of theological inquiry.²⁰⁴ Several systematic theologians and ethicists emphasize how “performing” Scripture (rendering it anew), “improvising” behavior

²⁰² Here I use the word “amateur” in two senses. First, the participants are not necessarily professional actors, or by analogy professional theologians; they are learning to interpret situations and Scripture as excellent, masterful, *non*-professionals. Second, the amateur learns his art because *he loves it* (Latin: *amat*); both TO and a TO-inspired pedagogy of Scripture seek to engender gusto for interpretive intervention.

²⁰³ In Biblical Studies and theology, see Victoria Rue, *Acting Religious: Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies* (New York: Wipf and Stock, 2010 [original 2005]); Peter A. Pitzele, *Scripture Windows: Toward a Practice of Bibliodrama* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura / Alef Design Group, 1998); Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray, eds., *Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), esp. the entries numbered 102, 118, 122, 211, and 241; and the academic portal “Biblical Performance Criticism: Orality, Memory, Translation, Rhetoric, Discourse, Drama,” which has been active since at least February 2011, <http://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org>.

²⁰⁴ For theatrical imagery and performance theory in recent theology, see Wesley Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); Trevor A. Hart, “Art, Performance and the Practice of Christian Faith,” in *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 1-9; Natalie Carnes, “The Mysteries of Our Existence: Estrangement and Theatricality,” *Modern Theology* 28, no. 3 (July 2012): 402–422.

(rendering it fresh within established Christian parameters), and “dramatic” structures (scripts, plot, action, etc.) are integral to Christian faith and identity.²⁰⁵ These are themes I pick up on as well. In discussions of aesthetics and religious education, Maria Harris and Derek Webster have shifted scholarly focus from consuming / interpreting the religious dimensions of artworks, to the religious dimensions of creating a new work of art.²⁰⁶ In this dissertation, I extend their approach to include the performance of Scriptural products.

Drama and artistry have also attracted attention in the field of critical pedagogy. As Darder, Baltodano, and Torres remark, methods like TO bring to “educational practice in schools and communities” a sense of artistry that is often missing from other critical pedagogical approaches.²⁰⁷ They take special note of the work of Boal:

Boal’s contribution was to mark a significant turning point for those critical educators and artists who had become frustrated with what they perceived as, on one hand, the deeply theoretical nature of critical pedagogy and, on the other, the absence of more practical and affective strategies to enliven their work.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ A key early essay was Nicholas Lash, “Performing the Scriptures: Interpretation through Living,” *The Furrow* 33, no. 8 (August, 1982): 467-474. More recently Stanley Hauerwas and Sam Wells have written extensively on performance and improvisation in ethics: Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004); Sam Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (London: SPCK, 2004); Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA; Oxford; Victoria, Australia: Blackwell, 2004), with more than thirty different contributors on improvising faithfully with Christian tradition. Chief among scholars who have emphasized the dramatic dimensions of God’s salvific action is Hans Urs von Balthazar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison, 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988-1998 [German original 1973-1983]); for a critique of von Balthazar from a performance perspective, see Joshua Edelman, “Can an Act be True? The Possibilities of the Dramatic Metaphor for Theology within a Post-Stanislawskian Theatre,” in Hart and Guthrie, *Faithful Performances*, 51-72. Kevin J. Vanhoozer bridges in part this divide between divine theodrama and performative understandings of Christian identity in *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

²⁰⁶ Joyce Miller, “Using the Visual Arts in Religious Education: An Analysis and Critical Evaluation,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 25, no. 3 (2003): 200-213, discusses the work of Webster (in the UK) and Harris (in the US) in comparison to other uses of the visual arts in RE. For a practical theologian who has taken exception to the spectator-ly approach to aesthetics, see Heather Walton, *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* (London: SCM, 2014), esp. Part IV: “Poetics, Theology and Practice,” 131-185.

²⁰⁷ Antonia Darder, Marta P. Baltodano and Rodolfo D. Torres, “Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction,” in idem, *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, Second Edition (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 6.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

While Darder et al. are correct about the tenor of many critical pedagogical discussions, I emphasize how engaging the artistic (the practical, the affective, the creative) is a *return* to the foundational practices of critical pedagogy, at least as it has been framed by Paulo Freire, one of the germinal thinkers in the field.

Theorists have rightly emphasized the similarities between TO and Freire's critical pedagogy.²⁰⁹ Both Boal and Freire develop teaching methods which aim to enhance agency and promote social justice. They both seek to empower learners by posing problems instead of front-loading answers. They both employ dialogue; they both demonstrate respect for local cultures and for the knowledge of learners as well as teachers.²¹⁰ What is seldom remarked, however, is how Boal and Freire both value artistry as an element of critical pedagogy. Freire's teams of literacy educators publicly studied their students' reality in order "to *represent* to the people their own thematics in systematized and amplified form."²¹¹ For these teams, the first task was to "encode" reality so that students could "decode" it.²¹² With the help of local coinvestigators, they explored the key elements in the cultural landscape, and then expressed these elements via images, film, audio, or other communicative media. The point was to get students talking about and investigating these themes as agents rather than as passive recipients of

²⁰⁹ "It is impossible to speak and write about Theatre of the Oppressed without acknowledging Freire's profound influence. Though Boal and Freire presented together publicly only once – at the 1996 Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference – Boal often referred to Freire, when speaking of him, as 'my last father.'" Many TO practitioners are in "ongoing 'conversations' with Freire's ideas." Toby Emert and Ellie Friedland, "Introduction," in idem, eds., *"Come Closer": Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed*, Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education vol. 416 (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 2, 3.

²¹⁰ Tânia Baraúna Teixeira and Tomás Motos Teruel, *De Freire a Boal: Pedagogía del Oprimido, Teatro del Oprimido* (Ciudad Real, Spain: Ñaque, 2009), esp. 79-104.

²¹¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York and London: Continuum, 2007 [original Portuguese 1968]), 123, emphasis added.

²¹² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 110-124.

information.²¹³ Finally, they taught students how to express and interrogate these themes even further through reading and writing.²¹⁴ Now the students, as well as the teachers, had the tools to encode and decode the world for themselves. From a TO perspective, Freire's practice is best described as a kind of training in critical and creative expression; conversely, from a Freirean perspective, TO involves the entire learning community in the process of encoding and reading reality, and does so at a fairly early stage in the critical pedagogical process.

Critical pedagogues have also begun to draw connections between their work and Performance Studies.²¹⁵ My project obviously approaches teaching and learning from a "performative" angle. I will not engage in sustained conversation with the complex and emerging discipline of Performance Studies in this dissertation; I simply acknowledge that the dissertation touches on each of the three streams which come together in contemporary performance theory: the anthropological stream, which explores how performance generates structures of plausibility; the linguistic stream, which explores

²¹³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 115.

²¹⁴ See for example Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London, New York: Continuum, 2008 [original 1974]), 75-78.

²¹⁵ The turn to "practices" is relevant here as religious scholars shift focus from the formative power of beliefs to the formative power of performances. More specifically, see Peter McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Toward a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures*, 3rd edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999 [original 1985]); Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer, eds., *Teaching Performance Studies* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); John T. Warren, "Editor's Introduction: Performance and Pedagogy," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2007): 1-4, <http://liminalities.net/3-1/pedagogy.htm>. The field of Performance Studies has had little impact on conversations in Christian religious education to date. One exception is the German movement for "performative religious education," described in Hans-Günter Heimbrock, "Encounters in Diversity: Some Suggestions for a Dialogical Religious Education in Geir Skeie, ed. *Religious Diversity and Education: Nordic Perspectives* (Münster: Waxmann, 2009), 39-40. These German educators are rooted in a secular schooling context; they asks students to perform rituals and other religiously oriented actions in class, to help them learn "from" different religions. I have not been able to study this literature in depth. Another exception is the essay by Yolanda Y. Smith, "The Table: Christian Education as Performative Art," *Religious Education* 103, no. 3 (2008): 301-305, where she draws on the seminary course that she teaches to present a vision of pedagogy quite in line with my own.

how words can transform human realities; and especially the theatrical stream, which uses stagecraft as a model for thinking and action.²¹⁶

III. TO: Roots, Approaches, Techniques

The historical roots of TO lie in the 1950's when Augusto Boal (1931-2009), then a young dramatist and rising director, joined the low-budget Arena Theatre in São Paulo, Brazil – a populist and artistically ambitious ensemble.²¹⁷ Throughout the early 1960's, Arena's work became even more politically and artistically subversive. Arena produced agit-prop (propagandist theater) designed to stir up peasant activism; they staged retellings of Brazilian revolutionary history which melded docu-drama, popular music, and audience feedback. The military coup of 1964 led to growing repression, theatre closings, and eventually the torture of artists; Boal and his family went into exile in 1971.²¹⁸

From 1973 to 1986 Boal worked mainly in left-leaning South American nations and in Europe. It was at this time that he began to develop the arsenal of games and techniques which now form the heart of TO.²¹⁹ While working as head of theatrical

²¹⁶ Diana Taylor identifies these three streams in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 1-52. My hope is that this dissertation lays the groundwork for more sustained engagement between Religious Education and Performance Studies.

²¹⁷ For a succinct biography of Boal through the early years of the 2000 aughts, see Frances Babbage, *Augusto Boal*, Routledge Performance Practitioners (New York and Oxford, 2004), 1-33. For the last decade of his life and work, see Emert and Friedland, "Introduction," in idem, "*Come Closer*", 1-4, and Brent Blair, "The Complex: Theatre of the Oppressed, Trauma, and the Seventh Shift", in Emert and Friedland, "*Come Closer*", 32-45.

²¹⁸ Boal himself was arrested and tortured for three months, until letters from hundreds of worldwide artists gained his release. Babbage, *Augusto Boal*, 15-16.

²¹⁹ Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (New York: Routledge, 1992; 2nd edition, 2002); 48 ff. Boal's most important writings on the theory, practice, and history of TO are *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. by C. & M.-O. Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985 [Spanish original, 1974]); *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*; *Rainbow of Desire*; *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998); *Hamlet and the Baker's Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2001); and *Aesthetics of the Oppressed* (London: Routledge, 2006).

literacy for “ALFIN” in rural Peru (a short lived project in indigenous and multiple literacies), Boal fused his dramatic experiments with Freire’s critical pedagogy, creating “Forum Theatre.” In Forum, investigators develop a number of skits based on a real-life occasions of oppression. The group select the theme and the rendition that speaks most forcefully to their experience, working it into a well-crafted mini-drama. They then perform it, inviting audience members to interrupt the action and to replace the struggling protagonist. The goal is to get viewers acting and thinking, to get them to try their own hand at overcoming the oppressive situation. Together, the Joker / facilitator, the troupe, and the audience then discuss which interventions are likely to be most effective, given the situation described.²²⁰

While working in Europe, Boal developed a technique he called “Rainbow of Desire”²²¹ by incorporating elements of drama therapy into Forum. In order to tackle the internalized oppressions of middle-class Westerners, he helped participants turn those oppressions into images and characters that they then examine, deconstruct, and imaginatively transform.

With the return of democracy to Brazil, Boal moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1986. There he helped to found an international Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed. He became active in local politics, passing thirteen laws at the City Council level by using community based workshops rooted in TO techniques. Boal continued to develop TO as he traveled and taught around the world until his death in 2009.

²²⁰ For a basic description of Forum Theater, see Marie-Claire Picher, “Democratic Process and the Theater of the Oppressed,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 116 (Winter 2007): 82-83, 85; for a thorough exploration of its classical forms and techniques, see Boal, *Games*, 241-276.

²²¹ Sometimes known more colloquially as “Cop in the Head.”

Beginning in the mid-1990's, Boal's techniques and reflections began to gain prominence among critical educators.²²² Today, his germinal text, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, has been translated into at least 35 languages.²²³ Critical engagements with Boal and TO have begun to appear with more frequency in the literature of radical education, and now in theology, religious studies, and religious education.²²⁴ Even his most appreciative critics admit that Boal's writings often read more like "manifestos" than systematically grounded expositions.²²⁵ His own descriptions of the theoretical foundations of TO tend to suffer from a doctrinaire and reductionist Marxism,²²⁶ an ill-

²²² Several key events marked the mid 1990's as period as the beginning of English-language studies in Boalian technique. First was the publication of Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz, eds., *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, and Activism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); this was the first major study of Boal in English, including several essays on Boal and critical pedagogical issues. Secondly, the first annual Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed conference was held in Omaha, NE in 1995, with about 200 people in attendance; attendance reached a high of 800 when Freire was a featured guest in 1996, and continues to hover in the low hundreds, with visitors from nations across the planet (<http://ptoweb.org/aboutpto/>, accessed 15 August 2014; Brian Sonia-Wallace, "20th Annual Pedagogy and Theatre of The Oppressed Conference – report", <http://www.artsbeatla.com/2014/07/pedagogy-conf/> posted 9 July 2014, accessed 2 August 2014). Thirdly, several of Boal's books were first published, or republished, in English: *Theatre of the Oppressed* (republished 1993), *Games for Actors and Non-actors* (1992), and *Rainbow of Desire* (1995).

²²³ Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response* (Oxford and NY: Routledge, 2010), 48.

²²⁴ For an overview of these critical engagements, see "Appendix 2, A Short Bibliography: Boal in Pedagogy and Theology." Most recently, Peter Goodwin Heltzel has used TO as a model for prophetic ministry in *Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 122-145; Shannon Craigo-Snell has addressed the connections between performance, liberation, and theological reflection in *The Empty Church: Theater, Theology, and Bodily Hope* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 2014), esp. 68-89, 164-171 nn. Her thoughtful treatment was published too late for me to fully incorporate it into this dissertation.

²²⁵ Ronaldo Morelos, "Reviews: 'Aesthetics of the Oppressed'," *Australasian Drama Studies* (Oct 2006): 125-127.

²²⁶ Boal's overarching argument in support of his TO approach is that theatre was originally a community product which was expropriated by oppressive social classes, and which the great arc of history will inevitably restore to the people in these latter days (especially through the work of TO). See Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, xi-115. He lays the foundation of this argument in the early work of Hauser, which was a classic exposition of Marxist materialism in culture: Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, trans. Stanley Godman, 4 vols. (New York: Vintage, 1957). As Congdon notes, Hauser himself has abandoned the thoroughgoing materialism of his *Social History* in his more mature writings. See Lee Congdon, "Arnold Hauser and the Retreat from Marxism," in *Essays on Wittgenstein and Austrian Philosophy: In Honour of J.C. Nyíri*, ed. Tamás Demeter (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), 41-62.

fitting appropriation of psychological literature,²²⁷ and a free-wheeling approach to historical and scientific argumentation.²²⁸ But the *practice* of TO has proven pedagogically compelling, psychologically incisive, and adaptable. Furthermore it has been found to be robust enough to be used beneficially in multiple settings: prisons, war-zones, impoverished neighborhoods, youth outreach and public health programs, university classrooms, and ministry.²²⁹

Sources and Basic Approaches

In terms of theatrical sources, TO is rooted mainly in the Marxist theater of Bertolt Brecht,²³⁰ with strong influences from the character acting methods of Constantin Stanislavski.²³¹ Brecht believed that drama should instigate conflict instead of resolving

²²⁷ Dwyer suggests that the psychological model behind Boal's *Rainbow of Desire* is "weakly formulated, creating the potential for confusion when it comes to training would-be 'theatre therapists'"; specifically, it can easily lead to an individualistic analysis of complex systems of oppression. As Dwyer suggests, a systems and narrative approach to psychological therapy is more congruent with Boal's basic principles and practices in TO; the caricatured version of Freudian repression theory which Boal claims as his psychological perspective is much less helpful. See Paul Dwyer, "Though This Be Madness..? The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy," *Applied Theatre Researcher* 8 (2007): 1-12.

²²⁸ For example, for critiques of Boal's dubious reconstruction of Athenian dramatic theory, see Paul Dwyer, "Theoria Negativa: Making Sense of Boal's Reading of Aristotle," *Modern Drama* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 635-658, and Babbage, *Augusto Boal*, 47-51. For Boal's inventive explanation of the neuroscience of oppression, see his "*hypo-thesis*, i.e., less than a thesis" concerning the function of "crowns of neuron circuits," *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, 27-30. For a perspective on the neuroscience of acting that is thoroughly congruent with Boal's but engages the scientific literature more robustly, see Bruce McConachie, "Falsifiable Theories for Theatre and Performance Studies," *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007): 553-577.

²²⁹ Babbage offers a perspicacious account of Boal's accomplishments and theoretical shortcomings, while consistently pointing out the ways in which his arguments – if not always precise – remain basically insightful. See for example Babbage, *Augusto Boal*, 51, 55-59. For some representative examples of TO in different settings, see Emert and Friedland, "*Come Closer*"; see also Paul Dwyer, "Still Rehearsing the Revolution? 'Theatre of the Oppressed', State Subsidy and Drug War Politics," *Australasian Drama Studies* 50 (Apr 2007): 138-152; Anne Hickling-Hudson, "Theatre-Arts Pedagogy for Social Justice: Case Study of the Area Youth Foundation in Jamaica," *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 15, no. 2 (2013): 15-34; David White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach*, Youth Ministry Alternatives (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005).

²³⁰ On the influence of Brecht, see Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 83-115; cf. Babbage, *Augusto Boal*, 6, 35-65.

²³¹ On the influence of Stanislavski, see Babbage, *Augusto Boal*, 6, 8, 144; Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance*, 44; cf. Boal, *Games*, 29-40, 49.

it. Stanislavski urged actors to plumb their physical and emotional states in order to generate performances that are “both true to life and beautiful.”²³²

In terms of foundational principles, TO treats humans as natural born artists, and aims to help them reclaim the “means” of aesthetic “production.”²³³ It treats life as inherently theatrical, and it aims to help people become more effective actors, whether on stage or off.²³⁴ Participants generate images and scenes to express their desires, to analyze their frustrations, and to sort through possible plans of action. In this way, TO seeks to be a kind of “rehearsal” for revolution through democratizing the theater arts.²³⁵ It seeks to turn spectators into “spect-actors.” While many artists “break through the fourth wall” by having characters address the audience directly, Boal invites his spect-actors to move in the opposite direction – to occupy the stage, to describe their reality, to investigate it more deeply, and to practice the skills that are needed to change it.

To accomplish this, Boal develops a graduated system of exercises, games, and styles of performance. In the first stage of TO participants begin stretching and exploring their bodies through sound, movement, and word; they become more aware of “the body and its mechanisms, its atrophies and hypertrophies, its capacities for recuperation, restructuring, reharmonization.”²³⁶ In the second stage participants use their capacities to

²³² For a critical appraisal of Stanislavskian and Brechtian theater from one theological perspective, see Joshua Edelman, “Can an Act be True? The Possibilities of the Dramatic Metaphor for Theology within a Post-Stanislavskian Theatre,” in Hart and Guthrie, eds., *Faithful Performances*, 55-71, quote on 56.

²³³ Julian Boal, the son of Augusto and an accomplished TO practitioner in his own right, insists “I defend TO as retaking possession of the aesthetical means, as a way of retaking the means of production.” Quoted in Emert and Friedland, “Considering the Future,” in idem, “*Come Closer*,” 180. The elder Boal writes that “the poetics of the oppressed” is “the conquest of the means of theatrical production.” *Theatre of the Oppressed*, x.

²³⁴ “*The human being not only ‘makes’ theatre: it ‘is’ theatre. And some human beings, besides being theatre, also make theatre. We all of us are; some of us also do.*” Boal, *Rainbow*, 13, original emphasis.

²³⁵ “Maybe the theater in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without doubt a rehearsal of revolution. The truth of the matter is that the spectator-actor practices a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner.” Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 141.

²³⁶ Boal, *Games*, 48.

“emit” and “receive” messages in a series of games.²³⁷ The rubric of “game” here is important. Games need not be competitive, but they should be inviting and engaging; they have rules, but these rules only apply insofar as they make the game workable and interesting; the rules can be changed, but only through common, explicit agreement. In the third and most complex stage of TO, participants create visual and auditory performances – embodied artworks which they analyze and interpret.²³⁸ Considering each stage in detail can help flesh out a TO-based pedagogical model.

Exercises

Boal notes how habitus, *hexis*, and repetitive behavior can canalize thinking; he argues that limbering the body can have the opposite effect.²³⁹ His exercises encourage participants to “de-mechanize the body” in order to “de-mechanize the mind;” they encourage participants to practice moving, sounding, and speaking in flexible and unaccustomed ways. They raise hardened habits of movement to the level of consciousness in the very process of loosening them up.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 126.

²³⁸ Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 126, 131-155.

²³⁹ Recent research in neuroscience provides compelling evidence that our thinking is indeed thoroughly embodied, as Boal so strongly insists: “Scientists have demonstrated that one’s physical and psychic apparatuses are completely inseparable. Stanislavski’s work on physical actions also tends to the same conclusion, i.e. that ideas, emotions and sensations are all indissolubly interwoven. A bodily movement ‘is’ a thought and a thought expresses itself in corporeal form.” Boal, *Games*, 49. Viewing an action or an emotion, considering an action or emotion, and having or performing an action or emotion, all seem to be neurologically linked. See Pierre Jacob and Marc Jeannerod, *Ways of Seeing: The Scope and Limits of Visual Cognition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 228; Paula M. Niedenthal, Lawrence W. Barsalou, François Ric, and Silvia Krauth-Gruber, “Embodiment in the Acquisition and Use of Emotion Knowledge,” in *Emotion and Consciousness*, eds. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Paula M. Niedenthal, and Piotr Winkielman (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 23, 25, 30; Fred P. Edie, “Liturgy, Emotion, and the Poetics of Being Human,” *Religious Education* 96, no. 4 (September 1, 2001): 474-488; David Hogue, “Brain Matters: Practicing Religion, Forming the Faithfull,” *Religious Education* 107, no. 4 (July 1, 2012): 340-355.

²⁴⁰ Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 128.

For example, in an exercise called “Two by Three by Bradford,” participants pair up and start counting alternately to a set, odd-numbered total.²⁴¹ The pair continue long enough to establish a rhythm:

A: “One;” B: “Two;” A: “Three;” B: “One;” A: “Two;” B: “Three;”
 A: “One;” B: “Two;” A: “Three;” etc....

At a certain point, the Joker signals to participant A that she should replace the number “One” with a sound and a movement. This sound/movement, created without prior planning, becomes the new expression for “One,” which both participants must now replicate exactly. Thus,

A: “Zoink! [with flapping arms];” B: “Two;” A: “Three;”
 B: “Zoink! [with flapping arms];” A: “Two;” B: “Three;”
 A: “Zoink! [with flapping arms];” B: “Two;” A: “Three;” etc. ...

At the next signal, the next speaker in turn creates a completely different sound and movement to replace the word “Two” (for example “Boing! [with a hop]”), and so on until all the English number-words are replaced. After a roomful of mayhem, with frequent breakdowns into giggling, number-confusion, and laughter, participants discuss how difficult it is to “count” in a relaxed, conscious, and flexible manner: how deep-seated our training to follow patterns can be.

In another exercise, “Columbian Hypnosis,” one participant is mesmerized by a spot in the middle of the other’s hand. As the hypnotizer moves her hand, the follower maintains his distance and spatial orientation to that spot, tilting first this way, then that, moving his face and body up, down, backwards and forwards. Meanwhile, the hypnotizer is responsible for keeping the follower safe. After five minutes of gentle but rigorous

²⁴¹ Low numbers work best – three, five, or seven. See Boal, *Games*, 106-107. Many TO games and exercises receive their particular names for the places or groups in which they were first invented, discovered, or taught to TO practitioners.

contortion, hypnotizer and follower switch. Participants then describe what they noticed, and how it felt both to lead and to follow.²⁴²

Games

The game stage “develop[s] the expressive ability of the body” through interactive activities. “In our culture,” remarks Boal, “we are used to expressing everything in words, leaving the enormous expressive capabilities of the body ... underdeveloped.”²⁴³ Here I consider three games. The first, an icebreaker, can be used to introduce learners both to each other and to the practice of embodied learning; I have often used it on the first day of a high school class. The other two are fundamental to TO-inspired classroom practices, one in terms of building students’ expressive repertoire, the other in terms of building a classroom culture that includes explicit reflection on power.

The first game, ostensibly simple but powerful on multiple levels, is a basic Name Game.²⁴⁴ As participants stand in a circle, one volunteers to step into the middle. She says her name while creating an impromptu motion – for example a salute, a wriggle, a wave of the hand or a full turn in place. Then she repeats it: name and motion, simultaneously. The rest of the circle observes her closely, and then repeats her name and movement precisely, two times, while she watches from the middle of the circle. She returns to her place, and the next volunteer steps inside.

The power of this game becomes evident when the Joker asks participants how they felt in the game-playing process: waiting expectantly or reluctantly to volunteer,

²⁴² See Picher, “Democratic Process,” 83. Reflections typically include the following: “I felt safe / I felt vulnerable” (the follower); “I felt powerful / I felt responsible” (the hypnotizer); “I felt all of the above and more” (both).

²⁴³ Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 130.

²⁴⁴ This is a simplified version of “Circle of Names of Belo Horizonte” (described in Boal, *Games*, 107) as it is used by participants in TOPLAB, the Theater of the Oppressed training center in New York City.

standing in front of everyone making odd motions, struggling to get the volunteer's action precisely correct, listening and watching as a large group reflects your name and creative moves back to you. If time is short, or if the participants need support and direction, the Joker can prime them to attend to these dynamics when giving the initial instructions:

“This is a game about communication and paying attention, about bravery and deep respect. We'll need to be courageous and caring all at once: we'll need to get up and do things; to treat the volunteer's movement and name like a precious gift; to stop ourselves from rushing back out of the middle, long enough to notice and accept everyone's gift-in-return.”

As with all the exercises and games of TO, what may seem like a simple icebreaker can become an opportunity to explore emotion, power, and social relations.

The second game, “Complete the Image,” is a key part of TO's repertoire of artistic expression.²⁴⁵

- 1) Two actors silently create a static image by shaking hands; the group then projects meanings onto the image by free association: “They are friends meeting;” “No, they could be strangers;” “They are eyeing each other;” “They are smiling with their eyes.”
- 2) Each actor in turn steps out of the image and then returns with a different body position. For example, “A” steps out and comes back in kneeling; “B's” outstretched, frozen hand has become a benediction. “B” now steps out and comes back in, menacing; “A's” smiling supplicant has turned into a victim. The goal is to make this in-and-out movement as fluid as possible: not to “translate” analysis into bodily stances, but to respond with a mixture of nimbleness, creativity, and gut.
- 3) Having seen the model, the whole workshop now enacts the image-completing process, without attempting to project any meanings, in groupings of twos, threes or more. The process goes on for a few minutes. Discussion and analysis follow.

Again, this game functions in several dimensions. It explores how one image can generate a variety of meanings, depending on the sense which we project onto it. It

²⁴⁵ Based on Boal, *Games*, 139-140. For a version with more group interaction, see Picher, “Democratic Process,” 84.

demonstrates the power of an individual actor to transform a social setting simply by adjusting or repositioning her own stance.²⁴⁶ And it hones creativity, responsiveness, and problem-solving acumen in a bodily, non-verbal medium.

The third game, which Boal calls “The Great Game of Power,” introduces explicit reflection on power dynamics into the classroom community. I always played it with my students some time during the first week of class.

A table, six chairs and a bottle. First of all, participants are asked to come up one at a time and arrange the objects so as to make one chair become the most powerful object, in relation to the other chairs, the table and the bottle. Any of the objects can be moved or placed on top of each other, or on their sides, or whatever, but none of the objects can be removed altogether from the space. The group will run through a great number of variations in the arrangement. Then, when a suitable arrangement has been arrived at, an arrangement in which, by group consensus, one chair is clearly the most powerful object, a participant is asked to enter the space and take up the most powerful position, without moving anything. Once someone is in place, the other members of the group can enter the space in succession and try to place themselves in an even more powerful position, and take away the power the first person established [for example, towering over him, resting a foot on him, turning their back to him, and so on].²⁴⁷

In a classroom setting, this game invariably generates a conversation about student power, teacher power, and the other types of power that can circulate inside a class.

Because the game is concrete, the conversation remains concrete and accessible to participants of different experience levels and different capacities for verbal abstraction.

Performances

In the final stage of TO, participants begin to use theater to think collectively about situations, etiologies, goals, and strategies. Using their limbered-up bodies, they make social realities symbolically present so as to explore and analyze them in greater depth. The most basic theatrical form is “Image Theater,” where participants use limbs

²⁴⁶ Picher, “Democratic Process,” 84.

²⁴⁷ Boal, “The Great Game of Power,” *Games*, 163.

and faces, sound and movement, word and brief narrative to create images that become readable and interrogable texts.²⁴⁸ In “The Image of the Word” for example,²⁴⁹ multiple participants construct a composite image of a concept: for example “family,” “classroom,” “religion,” or “reading the Bible.” Unlike a tableau vivant or realistic pantomime, each participant demonstrates how it feels, what it means, or what they think of when that particular concept comes to mind. Spect-actors sculpt and place themselves in the image – sometimes in direct response or relation to others, sometimes apparently “all alone” or “on the fringe.” The group then analyzes the image. The Joker asks observers, “What do you physically see?” (Who is central? Who is marginal? Who is crouched low or standing high? What are the facial and bodily expressions?) She invites viewers to walk around and inside the image, then invites them to replace the self-sculpted participants, so that the image-makers too can look at the image (and so that the viewers can “try on” the physical shapes). The Joker then asks, “What do those physical attributes *mean*?” As with “Complete the Image,” each symbol – and the *mise-en-scene* as a whole – will generate multiple resonances and interpretations.

Next, the Joker invites each of the sculptures to become “dynamized” in a number of different ways. “That feeling / image that you are expressing, try to make it ten times more intense. ... Add a repetitive motion which expresses what you are trying to convey. ... Now add a repetitive sound. ... Now a repetitive word or phrase.” The Joker first directs the scene seriatim, dynamizing each sculpture in turn; then she asks all the sculptures to become dynamic at once.

²⁴⁸ For a basic description, see Picher, “Democratic Process,” 84-85; for a thorough exploration of forms and techniques, see Boal, *Games*, 174-216.

²⁴⁹ Boal, *Games*, 176-181.

Further extensions move spect-actors from their present reality in the direction of goals and desires. The Joker proceeds: “This is how you look at reading the Bible right now; please show us what reading the Bible would look like ideally.” Whether the ideal is joyful engagement or the ability to ignore Scriptural texts with impunity, the Joker helps sculptors and observers unpack and analyze it in detail. “Now move from the first, non-ideal image to the ideal image, but in a slow motion transformation. Now repeat the transformation in fast forward.” Details in the ideal pose start to shift subtly as spect-actors work out the process of transformation in physical terms. With each new image or dynamization, the Joker asks what the observers have noticed, how each sculptor has felt, and what this image reveals about the reality explored.

As Wanasek and Weinberg note, Image Theatre produces “a stimulating amalgam of observation, interpretation, discovery and desire.”²⁵⁰ It fosters dialogue without depending on verbal dexterity. It undermines (or at least it delays) the verbal associations that we habitually impose on particular concepts. It allows multiple points of view to arise. And it turns interpretation into a community project.²⁵¹

Boal describes a “Tree” of TO modalities that branch off from this central trunk of Image Theater.²⁵² Forum Theatre and “Rainbow of Desire” develop Image techniques into more complex performances, generating more complex interventions. “Newspaper Theater,” “Legislative Theater,” and “Invisible Theater” adjust Image, Forum, and Rainbow to particular settings: media literacy, group self-governance, and activism in

²⁵⁰ Wanasek and Weinberg, “The One-Line Play,” in Emert and Friedland, *Come Closer*, 85.

²⁵¹ Cf. Freitag et al., “The Boalian Communication Classroom: A conversation about the Body, Dialogue, and Social Transformation,” in Emert and Friedland, *Come Closer*, 77.

²⁵² Boal, *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, 3-7.

police-state situations (respectively).²⁵³ Other practitioners have added their own performance types to the Tree, for example “The One-Line Play,” “The Wheel [of Images],” “Theatre of the Oppressor,” and so on.²⁵⁴

IV. TO and Training for Responsible Improvisation

Through its exercises, games, and performances, TO trains participants for creativity, improvisation, and responsible action as I have defined and explicated those terms. In terms of creativity, it models a form of problem-solving in which participants explicitly generate novel associations that are tested against specific contexts. In terms of improvisation, it challenges participants to work on a given set of materials; it schools them to develop possible interventions from the situation and the possibilities at hand, and to do so by employing the techniques and the canons of a particular theatrical genre. In terms of responsible action, it disciplines participants to hold themselves accountable through a process of communal discernment; but this process also shapes their intuition about what might actually work. The more participants practice the art of TO, the more they can master the knack for developing interventions that fit. In this way, TO makes participants better “able to respond,” better able to intervene thoughtfully and to give cogent reasons for their interventions.

²⁵³ In “Newspaper Theater,” media presentations are analyzed from a critical point of view. “Legislative Theater” combines Forum Theater and parliamentary procedures to generate model or actual bills and laws; Boal developed this practice as a member of the Rio City Council. In “Invisible Theater” the actors “make a scene” in a public space – for example, erupting into a controversial argument, or refusing to pay their restaurant bill; while passersby watch the drama unfold, other TO participants strike up a conversation about what should be done. This type of practice fits political situations where direct critique is too difficult or dangerous to pursue. For a discussion of the Tree and its branches, see Boal, *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, 4-7. To explore the power and ethical perils involved in the subterfuge of “Invisible” theatre, compare Boal, *Games*, 277-288 and Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance*, 45-46, 49-52, 62.

²⁵⁴ See Wanasek and Weinberg, “The One Line Play,” 98-96 in Emert and Friedland, “Come Closer”; Weinblatt and Harrison, “Theatre of the Oppressor: Working with Privilege towards Social Justice,” 21-31 in idem; Alistair Campbell, “Reinventing the Wheel: Breakout Theatre-in-Education,” in Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, eds., *Playing Boal*, 53-63.

TO trains participants for responsible improvisation. It develops their native capacities. It helps them put words into action. It moves learners towards mastery, makes them more open to new material, and helps them articulate new visions of liberation – all through a set of exercises and games that build visibly towards compelling performance. It trains participants to identify and examine real life situations; it trains them to explore possibilities and limitations, developing both the raw materials and the flexible skills that are needed to plan interventions; and it trains them to rehearse interventions, and then to evaluate how well they turned out.

All of this makes TO useful not only as a source of good teaching techniques, but as an overall *model* for high school religious education, including education in Scripture. Such a model focuses on six practices which are central to both TO and to responsible improvisation:

- (1) making material available for improvisation;
- (2) perceiving situations with an eye toward their challenges and potential;
- (3) generating options for interpreting and transforming those situations;
- (4) selecting options that remain “true” to the setting, the players, and the material at hand;
- (5) occupying and taking charge of one’s learning environment; and
- (6) reflecting on performance in action.

I discuss each of these practices in turn, with examples of their implications for the high school Bible classroom.

(1) Making Material Available

In TO, the Joker and the participants assemble numerous “materials” to fund the process of improvisation. They bring postures, rhythms, movements, and sounds that they create. They re-represent (i.e., they make present in new iterations) the feelings, words, images, and scenarios that they hope to investigate and transform. These include the tools of their own thinking processes – concepts and labels like “power,” or “leader,” or “follower,” which they also analyze and transform as required. All these become the materials to sort out and work with as artists.

In a Scripture class that is modeled on TO, the teacher and the participants assemble Biblical material. They re-present, investigate, and transform this material as part of their efforts to address real-life challenges. Sometimes the re-presentations are simply moments when the text is read silently or aloud; but the text can also be performed dramatically, or made available through some other means. Performance methods can be used to explore the words, images, objects, and characters that comprise a Scriptural passage, and the motivations and backstories that the passage suggests.²⁵⁵ Students can also use performance to explore non-narrative themes. They can explore the nature of “justice” by creating a dynamic image of the word. They can stage a talk show interview with God’ *hesed* (loving-kindness, covenant love) as the main guest.²⁵⁶ They can role-play the different social and political positions implied in Biblical texts and their historical-critical reconstructions.²⁵⁷ Music, visual artwork, color and shape are other

²⁵⁵ Boal presents numerous variations for using games, exercises, and performance to help professional and amateur actors explore written scripts; he calls these “Hamlet variations” (Boal, *Games*, 69, 96, 102, 104, et passim).

²⁵⁶ Rue gives the example of embodying and interviewing Buddhist compassion, but the concept is the same. *Acting Religious*, 79.

²⁵⁷ Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, entries 102, 118, 122, 211, 241.

ways to re-present Biblical materials in class. For example, the text of Gen 22:1-19 (the “Binding of Isaac”) can be re-presented using colored construction paper and glue.

Without scissors, each student tears different pieces of colored paper into shapes that represent Isaac, Abraham, the stone altar, the sacrificial ram, and God; they arrange and glue the shapes onto a base piece of paper, and explain the meaning of each element (shape, color, and arrangement) in paragraph form on the back.²⁵⁸ Like any act of re-presentation, such exercises both develop the student’s expressive capacity and make Scripture available for further investigation. A TO-based model of teaching attends to both these dynamics with equal care.

Because most inner city Catholic high school students do not encounter Scripture as a regular part of their peer, family, and working cultures, and because the language of many Scriptural translations makes them difficult to understand and to use,²⁵⁹ making Scripture available in a Cristo Rey type classroom means making it more understandable and more familiar. Colloquial translations like the Good News Bible or the Easy-to-Read Version allow students to grasp and work with the plot, character, and imagery of Biblical narrative; for poetical passages like prophecy and wisdom literature, the translations used in worship may be better choices, since they allow students to echo some of the music of Scriptural poetry and some of its gravitas as sacred speech. Certain phrases should be introduced in both colloquial and classic translations: “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” / “bones from my bones and a body from my body”; “Am I

²⁵⁸ Public Affairs Television, *Talking About Genesis: A Resource Guide* (New York: Main Street Books/Doubleday, 1996), 114-115.

²⁵⁹ Different considerations apply in a setting where most students are already deeply familiar with the Bible, its narratives, and its peculiar language. In such a case, the challenge will not be to immerse students in Biblical text but to heighten different capacities for responsible improvisation: identifying real-life challenges more keenly, interrogating Scripture more courageously, expanding the ambit of what it means to be creative and critical with Scripture, and the ambit of people and viewpoints to which one must be true.

my brother's keeper?" / "Is it my job to watch over my brother?"²⁶⁰ Using multiple translations in this way makes classic phrases understandable, and also creates opportunities to discuss the politics of Bible translation and multiple canons. As often as possible, students should read the primary text, rather than reading textbooks, digests, or retellings of Scripture. They should read it closely and intensively, in what Walter Brueggemann calls a "pedagogy of saturation." The goal is to embed the themes, patterns, and "regular cadences" of the Biblical canon in the fabric of classroom culture,²⁶¹ so that Scripture becomes part of the ambient material that students explore, inquire into, and rework.

(2) Honing Perception

In TO, participants sharpen their ability to perceive situations.²⁶² Perception is a skill that can be sharpened with training and practice. From our earliest moments the brain collects and sorts data from the manifold of experience into more and more refined and differentiated categories: permanent objects rather than splashes of color; voices rather than background noise. Training and honing perception means noticing more and more of the detail and nuance that bear on the practice one is trying to master. In the visual arts, honing includes "training the eye" to see forms and colors that, at first glance, were hardly discernible.²⁶³ In a performance art like TO, honing perception means

²⁶⁰ Gen 2:23 and 4:9; the first translation is from the KJV, the second from the Easy-to-Read version.

²⁶¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 722, 746.

²⁶² For this section on training perception I am indebted to Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 119-141.

²⁶³ Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 129.

awakening and sharpening one's awareness of movement and proprioception, of sound and rhythm, of social power dynamics and space.²⁶⁴

In a Biblical pedagogy modeled on TO, the aim is to hone student perception of the text and its textures. With time and study, students begin to notice recurring themes and rhetorical gambits in the text (order and protest; faithfulness and resistance; the struggle against domination and the struggle to make God "all in all").²⁶⁵ They begin to notice "core testimonies" and "counter-testimonies" (God's faithfulness, solicitude, and liberating power; God's distance and bitter chastisements). They start to notice that Scriptural texts do not always agree with each other ("slaves, obey your earthly masters;" "for freedom Christ has set us free").²⁶⁶ They learn how to wrestle with such disagreements. They learn to see rough seams in the text (like the disparate stories about Saul and David); and they discover how those seams can provide eye-opening purchase on the text and on its applications.

Here too performance methods like TO can help students attend to Scripture more closely, help them recognize how and where it can cut into real life. For example, Victoria Rue invites students to embody the characters in the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar narratives through movement, sound, and (eventually) verbal performance:

In my biblical drama class, we spend three to four weeks on each story [in the cycle about Sarah and Hagar]. In the second and third weeks, once the students have read the Biblical passages, exegesis, midrash, and commentaries, we begin to improvise ...²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Cf. Jiwon Chung, "Theatre of the Oppressed as a Martial Art," in Emert and Friedland, eds., *"Come Closer,"* 143-146.

²⁶⁵ 1 Cor 15:28.

²⁶⁶ Col 3:22; Gal 5:1.

²⁶⁷ Rue, *Acting Religious*, 75.

She invites them to “interview” the characters, then to use the biblical story to create and play out improvised scenes. For example, in a student exploration of Gen 18:1-7, Sarah asks Hagar for help in preparing the feast for Abraham’s three visiting strangers; the result is an exploration of female relationships within a patriarchal environment.²⁶⁸ Rue also invites students to “rewrite” Scripture stories in a 21st century setting:

- Genesis 13 and 19: “the story of Lot and his family,” with “Mrs. Lot struggle[ing] to open up the restrictions of a gated community.”
- Genesis 16, 17, 21:1-21: “the story of Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar, transformed into childless Sarah and Abe making the decision to use a surrogate mother.”²⁶⁹

Rue’s courses are for undergraduates but her projects are easily adapted to the high school setting. Adjustments would include clear and detailed directions for each step of the process, selecting a limited but representative range of scholarly comments to share (e.g., selecting those points which seem most relevant to teenage concerns), and translating those scholarly inputs into language that the students can understand.

Teaching aids for honing textual perception include reading guides that help students name key themes and contradictions for themselves; and short, pithy commentary that directs students’ attention back to the themes, seams, and textures of the text. In preparing texts for classroom study and analysis, teachers may find commentaries from literary and rhetorical traditions of criticism particularly helpful; these focus not so much on historical reconstruction, but on the dynamics of the text as it stands – that is, on the text as the students and as their own audiences are most likely to encounter it.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Rue, *Acting Religious*, 80-83. Strictly speaking, this exercise is a practice in midrash: filling in spaces that have been shaped but till now left untold by the Biblical narrative. For an extended discussion of midrash as a teaching technique, see Pitzele, *Scripture Windows*, esp. 23-28; Pitzele’s book is filled with thought-provoking examples of imaginative midrash performances as venues for exploring and engaging with Biblical text.

²⁶⁹ These quotes are from Rue, *Acting Religious*, 83.

²⁷⁰ Good examples of this type of approach in Old Testament can be found in Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament Theology*; Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress

(3) Generating Options

In TO, participants cultivate the ability to brainstorm. The more a group practices an art like TO, the more comfortable they become venturing hunches and taking artistic chances with each other. TO multiplies hypotheses, interpretations and options at many points. Spect-actors multiply images (e.g., multiple renditions of “reading the Bible” in Image of the Word). They multiply variations on these images (e.g., dynamizing an image by adding movement, sound, words, and ideal transformations). They multiply readings of these images (collecting group wisdom on what they see in an image, and on all the different things which that image *could* mean). In the initial stage of a Forum production, they multiply examples of oppression, to determine which best expresses the most exigent experiences of the group. In the final stage of a Forum production, they multiply possible interventions, to determine which might best resolve a particular challenge.

In a Biblical pedagogy modeled on TO, students develop the habit of asking questions and formulating hypotheses as spontaneously as the evidence and their curiosity may lead them. Especially when working with authority-laden or numinous materials that form the basis of community identities, high school students need the kind of environment that invites audacious brainstorming, that courts frank and honest questions about communities’ foundational texts.

Press, 1978); and Public Affairs Television, *Talking About Genesis*. Scholarly works like those of Brueggemann and Tribble integrate address the “world behind the text” (the scholarship that has pieced together the history and origins of Scriptural passages) but focus their attention on the “world of the text” (the literary feel and impact of Bible books and passages as they appear in the canon today). Compilations of resources like *Talking About Genesis* provide engaging exercises and short, provocative essays and quotes. Both types of books belong on the Catholic high school Bible teacher’s bookshelf.

One way for teachers to foster this process is to help students demystify expert information. Teachers can do this by pointing students towards the same rough seams and curious parallels that gave rise to historical critical insights. Teachers can help students to understand the origins of this scholarly knowledge, and to decide for themselves whether these erudite hypotheses help make sense of the text and their world. Teachers can prime the pump of hypothesis by introducing interpretations that challenge naïve or conventional readings: the more challenging, the better! But teachers must also be careful to push these hypotheses only as forcefully as students can handle. When offered deftly, such varied material can be used to stretch student capacities and enhance improvisation.

(4) Remaining True to One's "Points of Departure"

TO trains participants to stay true to the settings, participants, and materials involved in the project of improvisation. Maria Harris describes this as remaining true to one's "points of departure." These are the objects, themes, and qualities from which an artist develops a new work of art.²⁷¹ Rather than over-determining an outcome from the start, the good artist learns how to let these points of departure "be what they must" in the creative process.²⁷² For example,

Too much or too little paint or water will not produce either the right color or the right texture. So too with clay: it can only do and be what clay can do and be ... [before] it will crack and break. ... [The artist] is thus placed in the position of knowing his or her materials thoroughly, pushing and pulling them as they are able to be pushed or pulled, and never violating their individuality as the distinct entities they are.²⁷³

²⁷¹ "Whenever a student was expected to produce an artifact, that artifact was related to some point of departure: a rock, a piece of bark, a live model, a theme. [The professors'] instruction would be accompanied by such direction as 'I want you to remain faithful to the object you're using this morning as a point of departure.'" Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 128; describing her class in "Art and Christian Education," Union Theological Seminary, New York City, 1969-1970, with Prof. Mary Anderson Tully.

²⁷² Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 154

²⁷³ Harris, "Religious Education and the Aesthetic," 126.

The task of the Joker includes structuring and managing the creative process so that participants can stretch themselves and their material without “cracking;” so that spect-actors can say and do what is needed without violating the integrity of the improvisation.

Remaining true to one’s points of departure means more than following set rules and procedures (although rules of thumb can be very helpful, especially during the early stages of learning for mastery, or as aids when the artist gets stuck).²⁷⁴ It means striking a felt balance between starting point and final product. Such a balance must be true to multiple points of departure, or accountable to multiple communities. In Chapter IV I give greater philosophical precision to this concept and to my use of “being true” in this way. Here I affirm with Harris that from an artist’s perspective, attending to one’s points of departure (rather than adhering to guidelines or conforming to doctrines) is the mechanism that best describes how one holds oneself to account *as an artist*.

In TO, bodies and situations are the key points of departure. The latitude of possible movement, the quality and aims of desire, the affordances of objects and scenarios, the gut feel of a memory or story are all points from which participants can start to explore and transform present reality. Most basic is the participant’s own body. TO invites participants “to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures and [resistant] knowledges.”²⁷⁵ It allows them to use the body to discover – not what they “really” think, feel, or want for themselves – but what *else* they may be thinking, feeling, remembering, or desiring beneath the level of their habituation. What lies beneath provides data that habitus, habit, and hegemony cannot easily dismiss. The body provides

²⁷⁴ Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 129.

²⁷⁵ Here I borrow the words of Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage/ Random House, 1980), 157.

wriggle room within which to see what kind of new insights and actions are possible.²⁷⁶

Consider how Victoria Rue explores Biblical poetry and prophecy through the body:²⁷⁷

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.' (Is 52:7)

What unexpected new data about the good news of salvation can come from our feet?

Rue invites students to explore this verse by taking off shoes and socks, and exploring their feet. She leads students through exercises of massaging, stretching, and attending to their feet; she invites them to consider the “beauty” of these tired and seldom focused-on bodily members.

The mechanics of TO games and performances are designed to keep spect-actors true to these points of departure. In TO, *fabula non facit saltus*: theatre makes no false leaps. Even hope must remain somehow continuous with the limitations and parameters set by the problem at hand. For example, the shift from reality to ideal in Image Theatre is rehearsed in a smooth and incremental way. The Joker, especially in Forum, interrogates any outcomes that appear “magical” rather than organically plausible: Is this solution true to the scenario and the participants? Processes and products that are not in some way recognizably true to their starting points are poor improvisations; they do not

²⁷⁶ “In the body’s battle with the world, the senses suffer. And we start to feel very little of what we touch, to listen to very little of what we hear and to see very little of what we look at” Boal, *Games*, 49. “We sometimes override our own senses – through which, without the intervention of words, we would perceive the signals of the world more clearly.” Boal, *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, 15.

²⁷⁷ At her “Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies,” workshop at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Conference in 2011, Rue invited participants to use Is 52:7 as I describe here. For a similar exercise in print, see her account of an assignment in which students use Buddhist gathas or attention-focusing mantras with both their feet and their hands. Rue, *Acting Religious*, 94-95.

“work” as TO games and performances; and they fall short of TO’s aspirations to rehearse and refine revolutionary practice.

In the high school Bible classroom, the list of points of departure includes students’ present exigencies and future hopes; the different cultures represented in the classroom; the promptings of students’ own bodies, minds, and spirits. Particularly relevant are the students’ religious experiences. Do students think about God? What do they think about Her? Do they feel God’s presence or absence? How do they respond when She does not (or does not seem to) show up? A TO based pedagogy makes no judgments about the possibility or impossibility of particular religious experiences. It treats all testimonies and hoped-for solutions as data to be interrogated and creatively explored.

Equally relevant as points of departure are the Biblical texts that the curriculum makes available. Staying true to a text in the style of TO requires a detailed, granular, visceral give-and-take with the passage. This privileges some styles of Scriptural interpretation over others. Some interpreters call for a more generalizing style of reading, which focuses on “large, systematic theological categories”²⁷⁸ like grace and promise/fulfillment; others call for a more particular style that attends closely to the details of pericopes, stories, and individual books.²⁷⁹ TO fits best with the latter. While individual TO techniques can be used to explore broad theological topics like “free gift”

²⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 729.

²⁷⁹ In *Theology of the Old Testament*, 729-733, Brueggemann outlines the tensions between a Christocentric (or perhaps, “Christomonist”) interpretation of the Old Testament, and an interpretation more oriented to “the ‘scandal of particularity,’ by which the Creator of heaven and earth has sojourned with the Israelite community and has self-disclosed in the odd and concrete ways of Jewishness.” (729) Although I cannot expand on the argument here, I propose that Brueggemann’s take on Old Testament theology – firmly rooted in the latter style of interpretation – provides a systematic foundation for approaching both Old and New Testaments in a Catholic high school classroom.

and “promise,” the arsenal of TO as a whole is oriented towards the detailed exploration of particular texts.²⁸⁰

(5) Occupying Space

TO trains participants to improvise responsibly by training them to take charge of their learning environment – to occupy it in new, more self-directed ways.²⁸¹ Spect-actors do not simply “occupy” space metaphorically by taking up air-time usually reserved for the expert or leader. To play the games and to take up their roles, they must occupy space physically; they must take center stage. The TO exercises that I have mentioned encourage participants to occupy the performance space expansively: moving to the center (Name Game), moving all around (Columbian Hypnosis), allowing their voices to carry loud and clear (Two by Three by Bradford). Other TO exercises require participants to be even more spatially and acoustically expansive, as their names suggest: “Without Leaving a Single Space in the Room Empty,” or “Carnival in Rio.”²⁸² The Great Game of Power explores the dynamics of spatialized power even more directly by inviting learners to structure, occupy, and disrupt positions of social strength.²⁸³

Of course, no high school setting is structured to allow students complete control of the classroom, for good pedagogical, ethical, and legal reasons. But a TO-inspired pedagogy gives students the repeated experience of temporarily occupying classroom space, and occupying it in novel ways that reflect not the teacher’s stance toward the

²⁸⁰ “The artist perceives and reveals unicities [particularities] hidden by the simplification of the language which names them and the senses which group them without perceiving them.” Boal, *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, 17.

²⁸¹ On the pedagogically liberating valences of the word “occupy,” especially in the wake of the 2011 “Occupy Movement,” see Joseph G. Ramsey, “Revolution Underground? Critical Reflections on the Prospect of Renewing Occupation,” *Socialism and Democracy*, 26, no. 3 (2012): 94, 98-100.

²⁸² Boal, *Games*, 127 and 104-5, respectively.

²⁸³ For more such explorations, see the series of seven games titled “The Invention of Space and the Spatial Structures of Power,” of which the Great Game of Power is one. Boal, *Games*, 162-164.

world but their own. By changing student behavior on the physical level, by releasing students from the leash that binds them to their seats, notebooks, textbooks, tablets, or laptops, this practice disrupts years-long processes of socialization. Just as children learn how to interact with the world first with their bodies, TO helps spect-actors retrain themselves to move and act differently. Just as the grade school physical discipline of sitting quietly in rows can lie at the root of one's sense of good order, introducing a classroom practice which makes room for a certain type of undisciplined movement develops habits that can slip the strictures of self-policing more often.²⁸⁴ This kind of retraining can have broad repercussions. Because of the integral connections among different levels of human experience, and because our experience originates in our socially situated physical bodies, a physical program of disrupting and retraining social behavior is one of the most dangerous – and the most potentially transformative – of pedagogical tools.

(6) Reflecting in Action

Finally, TO trains students to improvise responsibly by training them to reflect on their own performances. At the level of performance, TO requires participants to “see [themselves] seeing, observe [themselves] doing;” for Boal, this is the essence of theatrical practice.²⁸⁵ More than encouraging participants to reflect on their actions after the fact, performance means that the actor sees “the situation and sees himself in that situation.”²⁸⁶ The experience of consciously performing an action – noticing that one is acting, and noticing that one could act differently – is an experience of conscious

²⁸⁴ I use the word “undisciplined” here both in the sense of what is unruly and what is not yet refined by the conscious application of a specific creative genre.

²⁸⁵ Boal, *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, 117.

²⁸⁶ Boal, *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, 117.

choice.²⁸⁷ It makes spect-acting a clear example of what Freire calls *conscientização*, “the awareness of oneself as a knower,”²⁸⁸ the development of an interrogative, agential, and responsible stance towards one’s world. Of course, the potential for this kind of self-consciousness is inherent in all human activity. For example, at the conventional theater, “spectators can slip out of the [mindset] of performance to adjust their bodies in their seats or to mentally note that an actor’s costume fits poorly.”²⁸⁹ TO makes this awareness more available by treating each participant as a “creator, performer, audience member, and critic” all at once.²⁹⁰ This is learning in the spirit of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, whose staging embraces “magic while letting the wires show.” It is pedagogy in the spirit of Brecht’s “anti-illusionist” theatre, where the staged dimension of the performance is starkly underlined by using subtitle commentaries and jarring, bright lights.²⁹¹

In the context of a high school religion classroom, this kind of self-consciousness models how believers can be faithful without being naïve. It allows students to feel moved by their own staged performances and artistic creations. It helps them learn to handle technique and truth at the same time. Just as a minister does not lose her faith while attending to complex ritual performances, students who approach the Bible with a TO-based awareness can learn to think critically and feel passionately with Scripture at the same time. By examining the Bible, taking it apart, re-presenting it, and even re-

²⁸⁷ This is why some scholars who seek to undermine the static structuralism that has sometimes dominated social science theory have gravitated toward performance categories. Cf. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 6, 7.

²⁸⁸ Ann E. Berthoff, “Foreword,” in Paulo Freire and Donaldo P. Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (London: Routledge, 1987), xvii.

²⁸⁹ McConachie “Falsifiable Theories,” 559.

²⁹⁰ These are the “four artistic roles” that Harris lists as essential to any full iteration of creativity, both inside and outside the classroom. Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 149.

²⁹¹ See Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance*, 17-41; Babbage, *Augusto Boal*, 44.

writing it – all for the purpose of using it to express their feelings, commitments, and hopes – students can discover that critical approaches need not desecrate Scripture. To the contrary, they can allow Scripture to act even more powerfully.

Because high school students are beginning to explore more intensely and self-consciously the nature of their social and personal roles, this kind of performative consciousness can be particularly illuminating. It goes beyond the common trope of “unmasking” false self to reveal what lies “truly” beneath. By reflecting on spect-acted experiences, students can come to understand that being authentic includes being honest, but that it also includes being committed to an ongoing investigation. That investigation might very well change what we honestly want and feel, what we pray for, even what we believe. Understanding this can prepare adolescents for the more fully self-conscious experience of “owning” or holding their own commitments, rather than being unawarely held by the claims of family, cultural identity, or social group. In this way, rehearsing the process of self-conscious performance can prime teens for continuing discernment and for more complex types of responsible action, rather than cementing habits and norms in their current state.²⁹²

V. The Role of the Teacher as Joker

The master-of-ceremonies and facilitator of a TO session (the “difficultator” as Boal likes to say) is called the Joker. Like a Joker in a deck of playing cards, the vocation

²⁹² Sharon Ketcham argues that this quality of commitment does not characterize teenagers (not to mention many adults), who are still held in the grip of so many of their own psychosocial dynamics. While Ketcham is surely correct, it is also clear that teens *can* perceive and appreciate in themselves and in others the kinds of changes in belief that critical thinking and scientific method generate. Framing these changes as practices of commitment and inquiry, rather than as practices of unmasking falsehood to reveal rock-bottom truth, develops the kinds of habits that can lead to fully self-critical commitments. See Sharon G. Ketcham, “A Question of Capacity: Can Adolescents Practice Discernment?” *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 6 no. 2 (Spring 2008): 11-29; David F. White, “Dialogue toward a Practice of Discernment with Youth: A Response to Ketcham’s Question of Capacity,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 6, no. 2 (2008): 31-40.

of a Joker in TO is to generate previously unforeseen possibilities – new gambits that might, with each spect-actor’s participation, turn their cards into a more winning hand. That is, after all, the dream of every teacher – to make a difference – and it is especially so for teachers in inner-city Catholic high school settings like Cristo Rey, where the stakes of the game are so high.

A religion teacher who acts as a Joker behaves like a pastoral agent-provocateur. Her job is to be simultaneously unsettling and enabling. She channels creativity so that as many questions and ideas as possible may be aired and analyzed. She helps select the images and scenarios that have generated the most intense reaction and offers them up for deeper study. She listens to and reflects back to participants what they most seem to want to explore. She makes suggestive observations about how the symbolic discoveries of the group might relate to actions and consequences outside the learning environment. She challenges students to remain true to their various points of departure, (re)directing them to the text in order to deepen understanding and mastery, (re)directing them to their own families, communities, and heritage in ways that promote the welfare of all. Her role is “to keep dialogue open and to support each individual’s right to see, speak, and transform.”²⁹³ It is to “go where the participants want to go ... with honesty and curiosity;”²⁹⁴ but also distinguish fear and avoidance from creative and generative resistance.²⁹⁵ Her job is to understand the culture of the participants as clearly as possible and to plan investigations accordingly.²⁹⁶ It is to elicit – and challenge – the narratives

²⁹³ Wanasek and Weinberg, “The One-Line Play,” in Emert and Friedland, *“Come Closer,”* 88.

²⁹⁴ Wanasek and Weinberg, “The One-Line Play,” in Emert and Friedland, *“Come Closer,”* 94.

²⁹⁵ Thompson and Santiago-Jirau, “Performing Truth: Queer Youth and the Transformative Power of Theatre of the Oppressed,” in Emert and Friedland, *“Come Closer,”* 101.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Thompson and Santiago-Jirau, “Performing Truth,” in Emert and Friedland, *“Come Closer,”* 97-108.

that participants bring to and construct in the space.²⁹⁷ Sometimes, the role of the Joker is to facilitate “the shift from silence to speaking” – and that in itself is enough.²⁹⁸

In a classroom that trains students to improvise responsibly with Scripture, the Joker-like teacher models a style of critical inquiry that students can emulate too. She makes Scripture available so that students can create something relevant with it. She inquires into the text with students, not for them, unpacking its possible meanings and possible uses. She encourages students to ask daring questions of the text, and to generate daring hypotheses. In this way, she invites students to evict scholarly experts from their frequent positions of privilege. She does not presume that what scholars have written about Scripture (or what she has to say as the teacher) is what really matters; but she also invites students to assess the contributions of learned people, to weigh them for their relevance and power. And she holds students’ feet to the fire, asking “Does your hypothesis really fit with the text?” Finally, she invites students to pay attention to the power of their own artistic creations, and she models how faithful believers can be simultaneously creative, critical, and true.

VI. Conclusion

It makes sense to use TO as a pedagogical model in a Cristo Rey school. In line with the Cristo Rey model, TO seeks to foster participants’ capacity to survive and to thrive in the face of oppression; it seeks the integral liberation of students, their loved ones, and their communities. It makes sense to use TO as a model for teaching

²⁹⁷ Combatants for Peace, an Israeli-Palestinian TO collective, tackle stories where “the conflict originates, at least partially, in each side’s insistence that there is one true story. Boal often said in his workshops that a joker has to be a difficultator, not a facilitator. In TO all narrative have to be challenged; this is especially true for polarized TO work.” Chen Alon, “Non-Violent Struggle as Reconciliation,” in *Come Closer*, 169.

²⁹⁸ Blair, “The Complex,” in *Come Closer*, 43, cf. 41-43.

responsible improvisation: TO participants learn to improvise in ways that are true to the problem, and to the materials and people at hand. TO de-mechanizes the body, but does not de-skill it; it teaches participants a new language with which to speak, think, and solve problems; it builds new skills and habits for spontaneous expression and for in-depth analysis; it fosters agency, hones mastery, and cultivates the double-edged consciousness that characterizes the reflective practitioner at work.

A high school Bible course modeled on TO inserts Scripture into student experience so that the Bible becomes part of the raw material that students can draw on in responding to new challenges. In doing so, it implicitly promotes Scripture to equal status with the other realities of student life; but it also submits both life and Scripture to creativity and critical inquiry. The syllabus of such a course might open with the following lines:

This course is called “The Art of Reading the Bible and Reading the World.” In it, you will learn:

- how to understand the world around you more deeply by paying attention to it like a performance artist.
- how to understand the Bible more deeply by paying attention to it like a performance artist.
- how to take charge of your own thinking and learning.
- how to make a real difference, in your life and the life of your community, by using the Bible.
- how to express the new things you have learned in writing, performance, and action.

These goals specify the context and the materials of the performance artistry that students will learn. They also specify some particular outcomes to guide and focus students’ learning experience. By the time the course is over, students should have a sense – and be able to articulate in their own terms – how the course has taught them to improvise more responsibly with Scripture in the service of integral liberation.

Appendix

A Short Bibliography: Boal in Pedagogy and Theology

The following bibliography gives a sense of the growing critical reception of Boal's work and of Theatre of the Oppressed more generally, as well as a sense of its impact in theology and religious education.

On Boal and critical pedagogy, recent essays include

- Ricardo D. Rosa, "What Type of Revolution Are We Rehearsing For? Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Education*, eds. Michael W. Apple, Wayne Au, and Luis Armando Gandin (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2011), 240-253;
- the numerous pieces collected in Emert and Friedland, eds., *"Come Closer": Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed*, ed. by Toby Emert and Ellie Friedland, Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education vol. 416 (New York: Peter Lang, 2011)
- Deborah Mutnick, "Pedagogy: Critical Interventions: The Meaning of Praxis," in *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*, eds. Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 33-45;
- and Bruce McConachie, "Theatre of the Oppressed with Students of Privilege: Practicing Boal in the American College Classroom," in *Teaching Performance Studies*, eds. Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer, foreword by Richard Schechner (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 247-260.

The most perceptive of these are essays from the Emert and Friedland volume and the essay by McConachie.

For some excellent articles describing and analyzing TO work from a popular educational perspective, see

- Anne Hickling-Hudson, "Theatre-Arts Pedagogy for Social Justice: Case Study of the Area Youth Foundation in Jamaica," *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 15, no. 2 (2013): 15-34;
- Marie-Claire Picher, "Democratic Process and the Theater of the Oppressed," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 116 (Winter 2007): 79-88;
- Paul Dwyer, "Still Rehearsing the Revolution? 'Theatre of the Oppressed', State Subsidy and Drug War Politics," *Australasian Drama Studies* 50 (Apr 2007): 138-152;
- Sarah Twomey, "Contingent Conditions of Change: An Exploration of Feminist Theatre Practice," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 354-367.

An illuminating study of what can go wrong in a TO classroom experience is

- Suzanne Burgoyne, Sharon Welch, et al., "Researching Theatre of the Oppressed: A Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Project," *Mountain Rise* [Western Carolina University] 2, no. 1 (2005).

Early connections between Boal and religion / spirituality can be found in Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz, eds., *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, and Activism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994 [reprinted 1995]):

- Mady Schutzman, "Brechtian Shamanism: The Political Therapy of Augusto Boal," 137-156;
- Julie Salverson, "The Mask of Solidarity," 157-170;
- and Lib Spry, "Structures of Power: Toward a Theatre of Liberation," 171-184.

Theologies reflecting on Boal's work include

- Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012);
- and Shannon Craigo-Snell, *The Empty Church: Theater, Theology, and Bodily Hope* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 2014);
- Richard J. Piatt, "Faith Acts: Exploring the Possibilities for Theatre of the Oppressed and Liberation Theology," in Emert and Friedland, *"Come Closer,"* 117-126 is a good attempt at the reverse process – introducing theological themes into the discourse of TO.

At the intersection of theology and education, José R. Irizarry has made frequent reference to Boal:

- José R. Irizarry, "REA Presidential Address: Spaces of Inter-cultural Provocation for Religious Formation," *Religious Education* 103, no. 4 (July-September 2008): 396-408;
- and idem, "The Religious Educator as Cultural Spec-actor: Researching Self in Intercultural Pedagogy," *Religious Education* 98 no. 3 (Summer 2003): 365-381.

Particularly rich in both practical detail and reflection are

- Victoria Rue, *Acting Religious: Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies* (New York: Wipf and Stock, 2010 [original 2005]);
- and Susan Willhauck, "Crossing Pedagogical Borders in the Yucatan Peninsula," *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 12 no. 3 (July 2009): 222-232.

Useful for work with youth and young adults is

- David White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach*, Youth Ministry Alternatives (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005), see 128-130, 159-161, 170-171.

Boal's ideas are also circulating in Anglophone religious studies, theology, and ministry educational settings in unpublished forms:

- Thom Bower, "Here to Act: Using Theater Games as Rehearsal at the Intersection of Youth, Politics, and Social Action," Unpublished workshop paper delivered at the Religious Education Association Annual Meeting 2004;
- Tina Pippin, Victoria Rue, and John Falcone, "Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies," Pre-conference Workshop at the American Academy of Religion / Society of Biblical Literature 2011 Annual Meeting;
- and my own work: John P. Falcone, "A Performative Aesthetics for RE: Theater of the Oppressed and Neuroscience," unpublished workshop paper delivered at the Religious Education Association Annual Meeting, 2011; idem, "The Rainbow of Our Desires: Theological Reflection through embodied social analysis," conference workshop at the British and Irish Association for Practical Theology 2011 Annual Conference.
- TO-centered classes have recently been taught in at least two US seminaries (Fall 2013): Starr King School for the Ministry and at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

CHAPTER IV. CHRISTIAN SEMIOTIC REALISM: A PRAGMATISTIC THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

I. Introduction

In Chapter I, I introduced my proposal that teaching the Bible to Christian students is best understood as training them to improvise responsibly with Scripture. I described the context that gave rise to the argument, and offered provisional definitions for its key terms: creativity, improvisation, interpretation, critical thinking, responsibility, Scripture, and truth. In Chapter II, I explained why “training” is the best way to describe the educational project that I am proposing. I argued that teaching means teaching practices, and I introduced the concept of norm as an integral part of community practice. In Chapter III, I proposed a concrete model for this kind of training. In the spirit of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), a liberation oriented, populist art form, I argued that students should approach Scripture like improvisational performance artists. I argued that responsible improvisers assemble materials, hone their perception, brainstorm options, remain true to their artistic “points of departure,” take charge of their learning, and reflect on their choices; and I showed how these practices can inform a high school Bible classroom. In this chapter, I take a step back to frame my arguments in a broader perspective. I ask, “Is this pedagogical model coherent? How does it all hang together?”

I use the philosophical theology of Donald L. Gelpi, SJ (1934-2011) to sketch the fundamentals of a Pragmatistic Christian theology that can ground my pedagogy for responsible improvisation.²⁹⁹ To which norms should we be responsible? What is the

²⁹⁹ With Gelpi and others, I distinguish the “Pragmatism” of Charles Sanders Peirce (adjective: “Pragmatistic”) from the “Pragmatism” of the philosophical tradition that grew out of his insights (adjective: “Pragmatic”). The latter has led to the neo-Pragmatism of philosophers like Richard Rorty. See

basis of our norms? Are they connected to the processes of creativity and interpretation? What does it mean to claim that one description of reality is better than others, or even to claim that it is the “best”? By using the Classical American Pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce to unpack Christian experience,³⁰⁰ Gelpi answers these kinds of questions in a coherent way. I use his work to develop two key pieces of a conceptual framework that can hold my model of teaching the Bible together: (1) a Pragmatistic theory of interpretation that attends to sign-making and sign-reading dynamics, and (2) a Trinitarian theology that links interpretation to God’s Holy Spirit.

The chapter unfolds in three main sections. First, I offer a brief introduction to Gelpi and his work. Next, I describe how Gelpi’s systematic theology lays the groundwork for a theory of interpretation by unpacking four of his key philosophical insights; for each point I extend his discussion to support my pedagogical framework. Third, I describe Gelpi’s Trinitarian theology. Gelpi offers a Pragmatistic account of how the Christian God touches us through the work of the Son and the Spirit; I explore how semiosis (the sign-making-and-interpreting process)³⁰¹ fits into this Trinitarian model.

Donald Gelpi and His Theological Project

Gelpi was a philosopher, theologian and Charismatic Catholic. He grew up in Louisiana, and spent his professional formation mostly learning and teaching in the schools of the New Orleans and Missouri Jesuit Provinces. After his first experience of

Donald L. Gelpi, *Varieties of Transcendental Experience: A Study in Constructive Postmodernism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 253-258 and n. 64.

³⁰⁰ As Robert Corrington affirms, “Gelpi notes quite correctly that some creative theologians are now becoming seriously engaged with Peirce, especially insofar as they can stretch even further Peirce’s notion of scientific inquiry.” Robert S. Corrington, Review of *Varieties of Transcendental Experience* by Donald Gelpi, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 38, no. 3 (Summer, 2002): 461. I offer this chapter as part of that new engagement.

³⁰¹ < Greek *sēmeion* sign.

praying in tongues in 1968 (while a PhD student in American Philosophy at Fordham University), Gelpi turned to the Pragmatistic philosophy of Spirit developed by Josiah Royce as a framework for interpreting his experiences of God. Royce led him to the rest of the Classical American Pragmatist tradition.³⁰² Charles Sanders Peirce (semiotics, logic, and philosophy of science), John Dewey (education and democratic theory), William James (psychology and religious experience), George Herbert Mead (sociology), and their intellectual heirs.³⁰³ He moved to the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, CA in 1973, where he taught until his retirement in 2009.³⁰⁴ As a scholar, Gelpi authored more than a dozen articles and more than 20 books.³⁰⁵ He also helped to found both the John Courtney Murray Group (a research circle in US theological inculturation), and the Institute for Spirituality and Worship (a ministerial sabbatical program).³⁰⁶

³⁰² Gelpi has written extensively on the Classical American Pragmatist tradition. See for example Donald L. Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), esp. 121-157; and Donald L. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship between Nature and Grace* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001) esp. 137-260. Two good general introductions to Classical American Pragmatism are Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), esp. 1-88, 125-152; and John E. Smith, *Purpose and Thought: The Meaning of Pragmatism* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978).

³⁰³ The founding thinkers of Classical American Pragmatism wrote in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They include Pierce (1839-1914), Royce (1855-1916), Dewey (1859-1952), James (1842-1910), and Mead (1863-1931). As Richard Bernstein has pointed out, many philosophers of the past several centuries have taken a decisive turn toward “practice” or “pragmatism” broadly defined, including Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Hegel and Marx, not to mention more recent, self-proclaimed pragmatists such as Richard Rorty, Jeffrey Stout, and Cornell West. Cf. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 1-31.

³⁰⁴ See “In Memoriam: Fr. Don Gelpi, SJ., 1934-2011,” posted 05/06/201 (accessed 8 May 2011) <http://www.gtu.edu/news/in-memoriam-don-gelpi>; Obituaries, *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 8, 2011 (accessed on line <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/sfgate/obituary.aspx?n=donald-louis-gelpi&pid=150852556&fhid=6333#fbLoggedOut>); <http://www.gtu.edu/news/in-memoriam-don-gelpi>; Donald Gelpi, “A response to Amos Yong,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11, no. 1 (October 2002): 27-40.

³⁰⁵ See Amos Yong, “In Search of Foundations: The Oeuvre of Donald L. Gelpi, SJ, and Its Significance for Pentecostal Theology and Philosophy,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11, no. 1 (2002): 3-26.

³⁰⁶ Both these were based in the San Francisco Bay area.

Gelpi's goal was to lay out a Catholic "foundational Christology" in a 21st century, North American idiom.³⁰⁷ Building on Bernard Lonergan's conversion-oriented anatomy of the theological disciplines,³⁰⁸ Gelpi defines "foundational" theology as a norm-generating theory of "the forms, the dynamics and the counterdynamics of conversion."³⁰⁹ In other words, for Gelpi, the basic norms for Christian theological thinking are set by our always-developing answers to a traditional-yet-existential question: what does it mean to be really and truly converted to Christ?³¹⁰

Gelpi grounds his answer to this question in a metaphysics based on the scientific, semiotic, and philosophical reflections of Peirce.³¹¹ Metaphysics proposes root metaphors designed to clarify our thinking about the sciences, the humanities, and our everyday lives. The goal of metaphysics is to develop the best possible metaphors to model reality. As Peirce notes, "The idea of reality is that the facts are hard and will resist

³⁰⁷ See especially Donald L. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ: Rethinking Christological Faith and Commitment* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009) and idem, *The Firstborn of Many: A Christology for Converting Christians* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001). Cf. Yong, "In Search of Foundations," 4.

³⁰⁸ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 30-49; Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, v-xi.

³⁰⁹ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 588.

³¹⁰ "Foundational Christology reflects normatively on Christological knowing, i.e., on the experience of practical assimilation [conformity] to Jesus Christ in faith through the empowering enlightenment of his Breath." Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 542. Gelpi consistently uses the terms "breath" and "Holy Breath" (feminine in the Hebrew Bible and in the connected Greek texts about *Sophia*) to render traditional Christian references to "spirit" and "Holy Spirit." His reasoning is insightful and cogent: because of the overlay of Platonic, Aristotelian, Thomistic and Cartesian traditions in Western philosophical thinking, "spirit" has taken on a dematerialized, alienating, and ultimately unintelligible meaning. By altering us to the more concrete, interpersonal, and holistic imaginary of Jewish and Biblical thought, "breath" and "Holy Breath" make theology more intelligible. See Gelpi, *Gelpi, Encountering Jesus Christ* 9, idem, *Experiencing God: A Theology of Human Experience* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), ch. 4; idem, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 11-13.

³¹¹ Gelpi calls his approach a "contrite fallibilism" Gelpi, *Gelpi, The Gracing of Human Experience*, 138, 203, et passim. The term is Peirce's: "Indeed, out of a contrite fallibilism, combined with a high faith in the reality of knowledge, and an intense desire to find things out, all my philosophy has always seemed to me to grow." Charles Sanders Peirce, "A Fragment," c. 1897, in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 1-6 ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1935), vol. 7-8 ed. by Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 1.13-14.

our efforts to get rid of them.”³¹² Whether those facts are the feel of an encounter, or the data of an experiment, or the contents of a manuscript or a text, they provide the points of departure for a “realistic ... metaphysics of experience.”³¹³ Gelpi’s metaphysics addresses the qualitative and the quantitative dimensions of reality. It accommodates the cause-and-effect insights of modern social theories without abandoning the spiritual insights of religion and the humanism of the Enlightenment.

Today, Gelpi’s work is little known outside of Charismatic Catholic and Pentecostal theological circles. This is unfortunate, because his approach offers great promise. The scientific-philosophical temperament of his project – his dedication to accounting for the data of experience in whatever shapes and forms it emerges – allows everyday Catholics to investigate religion in ways that are accessible and intelligible to 21st century Americans.³¹⁴ It can also help believers reach across differences in class, culture, and piety-expression to build common understandings and make common cause for integral liberation. This makes it ideal as a philosophical and theological framework for a classroom instruction in a setting like CRNYHS.

II. Four Key Elements of Gelpi’s Christian Semiotic Approach

In this section, I present four elements of Gelpi’s theology that are particularly helpful in framing my model for interpreting Scripture responsibly. These are his views on the *holism* of experience, on the *process of interpretation*, on the nature of *norms*, and

³¹² Charles Sanders Peirce, cited in Stefan Alkier, “New Testament Studies on the Basis of Categorical Semiotics,” in Richard B Hays, Stefan Alkier and Leroy Andrew Huizenga, eds., *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 318 n. 29.

³¹³ Emphasis added; more fully: a “realistic, triadic, social metaphysics of experience,” Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 265. Gelpi calls Piece’s system a “realistic, scientific metaphysics,” and insists that what is required is a “realistic, theistic metaphysics,” Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 147, 208.

³¹⁴ Gelpi writes that his goal is to express orthodox Catholicism in a thoroughly “Yankee idiom” rather than the Greek idiom of Augustinian Neo-Platonism or Thomistic Aristotelianism. Cf. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 174.

on the *triadic* dimensions of metaphysics. I also extend and develop each of these elements in pedagogically and philosophically useful ways. I push Gelpi's holism in the direction of a thoroughgoing panentheism that recognizes God's presence in every human experience. I underline how the process of interpretation is creative – a dimension that Gelpi acknowledges, but consistently downplays. I unpack what it could mean to be committed to norms of truth in a pluralistic community of practice. And I draw out the links between semiosis and Gelpi's metaphysics, laying the groundwork for a Trinitarian approach to interpreting Scripture.

The Holism of Experience

Gelpi argues that life and reality are most coherently understood as an unfolding, *holistic experience*.³¹⁵ In this view, all that there is – the created universe and the God who creates it – is best understood as experience. To understand reality as experience allows us to focus on the different qualities of experience without ignoring its unity. It also allows us to investigate realities like Scripture, interpretation, and integral liberation without fragmenting them into incommensurable bits.

A holistic model keeps us alert to the integral connections among the levels of reality – from the subatomic, to the physical, to the psychic, to the spiritual and the social. It also draws our attention to the way that dynamics on each level evolve and emerge, one from another.³¹⁶ Simpler tendencies and laws give rise to more autonomous organisms and more complex organizations; environmental complexities and complex forms of

³¹⁵ For the importance of a holistic, Biblical conception of reality to Gelpi, see Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience* 3-65, 268. , 20, 24. For the importance of holism to his philosophical project, see his sustained attack on dualism in Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 3-65; cf. 268, where he underlines the importance of holistic, part-to-whole thinking in the construction of philosophical models.

³¹⁶ Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 168.

communication evolve in relation to each other; freedom and self-direction increases, from quantum randomness, to plants and animals, to creative and critical projects.³¹⁷ In Gelpi's account of these holisms, "autonomously functioning tendencies qualify as *selves*" and "selves capable of conversion" (that is, selves capable of taking decisions responsibly) "qualify as ... *persons*."³¹⁸ For example, a text is a "self" made of words, narratives, themes, and allusions which produces emergent and palpable effects when interpreted. A person is an emergent dynamic which arises from but exceeds her constituent parts. Mind and matter are not distinct, but continuous;³¹⁹ selves and spirits are not tightly bounded, but interpenetrate our physical and psycho-cultural spaces, diffusing habits, effects, and ideas.³²⁰ This holistic view of reality is grounded in contemporary science; it underwrites a Situated Learning perspective by focusing on the ways that identity and mastery arise through participation in the social world; and it directs our attention as teachers to the biological, psychosocial, and cultural elements that feed into our students' spiritual growth.

Gelpi's metaphysical metaphor is that reality is one grand experience. This helps avoid many sense-defying dualisms that can muddle our thinking and teaching. Dualisms "distinguish two interrelated realities in such a way that their real relationship to one another becomes subsequently inconceivable."³²¹ Dividing the world into "essence" and "accident" makes it hard to account for evolution – when does one "essence" turn into

³¹⁷ Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 155. For a semiotics that systematically incorporates the physical, biological and symbolic levels of existence, see Paul Cobley, "Semeiosis," 259-260 and idem, "Introduction," in Paul Cobley, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 3-13.

³¹⁸ Donald L. Gelpi, SJ, *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians*, vols. 1-2 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press / Michael Glazier, 1993), 2.vii, emphasis added.

³¹⁹ Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 151, 160-161, with copious references to Peirce.

³²⁰ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 60.

³²¹ Gelpi, *Divine Mother*, 11.

another? Dividing the world into “spirit” and “matter” is equally problematic – how does a ghost interact with a machine? Dividing inquiry into scientific “explanation” and humanistic “interpretation” makes it difficult to reason coherently.³²² Dualities like “soul/body,” “subject/object,” “rational/emotive,” and “objective/subjective” support many oppressive dynamics, especially in cultures which tend to privilege the former over the latter in each pairing. What is more, Gelpi argues convincingly that his nondualistic holism “accords better with Biblical images of the human” as a living, material being.³²³

There are further theological implications. If every last thing is experience, Gelpi frames God as “Supreme Experience.”³²⁴ God encompasses every real and possible experience. God knows both the limited experience of creatures, and the Trinitarian experience beyond. While God judges, decides and acts for God’s purposes, God also “knows” and experiences everything else; God experiences all our joys and our hopes, all our griefs and anxieties as Her own. Yet creature and creator are still qualitatively different. While God experiences everything, bounded creatures certainly do not. While God grounds my existence as experience, I cannot perform that same kind of grounding. In sum, Gelpi proposes a panentheism in which all things subsist within God, while God moves freely among and beyond them.³²⁵

³²² Cf. Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), Ch. II, “Interpretation,” 41-74.

³²³ Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 357. Cf. William L. Power, “Existential-Hayatological Theism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 61, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): 181-198. Power draws on the work of Tetsutaro Ariga (d. 1977) of the University of Kyoto, who contrasts Greek ontology (< *ontos*, “being”) with Hebrew “hayatology” (< *hayah*, “he is”).

³²⁴ For this paragraph, see Donald L. Gelpi, *Closer Walk: Confessions of a U.S. Jesuit Yat* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2006), 247-249, 339-340; Gelpi, *Divine Mother*, 91-101; Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 351-352; Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 467-471.

³²⁵ Gelpi embraces the term “panentheism” as early as 1984 (*Divine Mother*, 95) and as late as 2006 (*Closer Walk*, 249, 340). His most extensive discussion of panentheism is found in Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 468-71.

Gelpi's metaphysics of experience allows us theologically to underline the intimate continuity between God, creation, and human beings.³²⁶ If all that exists is experience, then we exist as parts of God's own experience, as parts of God's own life and dynamics. God's freedom and God's ultimate vision are already moving within us. To flesh out these panentheistic insights more fully, I employ Philip Clayton's "Panentheistic Analogy".³²⁷ Clayton argues that, analogically speaking, we can best model the universe as God's "body."³²⁸ Just as human persons are autonomous tendencies with both biochemical and self-conscious behaviors, God too is an autonomous tendency, at one with yet exceeding creation. Like all analogies, this one needs tweaking, as Clayton admits. For example, God creates the universe, God does not

³²⁶ Gelpi's writing on panentheism appears to be ambivalent. On the one hand, he is adamant that "in a metaphysics of experience" creation "stands within" God because "the reality experienced stands within experience, not outside of it." (*Closer Walk*, 340) Again, "the world exists in God as part of what the divine experience experiences." (*The Gracing of Human Experience*, 77) On the other hand, it is of paramount importance to him to maintain the distinction between Creator and creature: "*Pantheism* identifies God and creation. *Panentheism* insists on the distinction between God and creation, but holds that creation exists in God. 'In Him we live, move and have our being.' (Acts 17:28)." (*Closer Walk*, 340, emphasis added; cf. 248-249) Gelpi's exploration of panentheism seems to focus on three main points. First, as we have seen, the distinction between creature and Creator. In *The Divine Mother*, he writes: "Pantheism ... asserts that everything is God. Panentheism, however, asserts that God and the world are distinct realities but that everything that is not God exists in God." (95). His position is essentially unchanged twenty-two years later in *Closer Walk*, 340. Second, he focuses on the concern that too much continuity between Creator and creature can imply God's collusion with evil: "Like Royce, I found this world too riddled with evil to identify it pantheistically with God." (*Closer Walk*, 151). Finally, Gelpi seems to imply that identity between God and creation may undermine our conception of grace. (For Gelpi's unfortunate tendency to bifurcate "natural" and Christian "supernatural" life, see *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 469-470, and below.)

³²⁷ See Philip Clayton, "The Case for Christian Panentheism," *Dialog* 37 (Summer 1998): 201-208. Clayton's arguments convincingly address Gelpi's first and second concerns. Clayton points out that close identity between Creator and creature is no more (or less) problematic for resolving the problem of evil than theologies in which divine and creaturely "substance" are sharply distinguished; and that "the ontological difference between God and cosmos" can be rigorously and clearly preserved by distinguishing God's supremacy and infinitude from creaturely finitude.

³²⁸ Clayton argues that the God / universe relationship is similar (but not identical) to the relationship between person and body. For him, the regular "laws" of creation can be analogized to the autonomic functions of the body (except that God is fully aware of them), while God's "extraordinary" interactions with creation are analogized to the conscious decisions and actions of persons. Clayton holds that this Panentheistic Analogy provides "the conceptual resources to deal with the sort of divine presence that we recognize when we reflect on the nature of the Trinity -- the deep effect of world history on the divine persons, extending even to 'the crucified God' for whom the intimacy of salvation included even death. Since more powerful conceptual resources than the metaphysics of substances have now become available, theologians should now make full use of them." Clayton, "The Case for Christian Panentheism," 207-208.

emerge from it as persons do from their own bodies. As the ground of experience, God's ability to experience everything fully does not "flicker" or depend upon circumstance or creaturely level of awareness.³²⁹ But this analogy does help us to grasp a valuable truth: God's tendencies, vision, and will constitute and penetrate all our physical and psychic experiences. When we act, we act with God's "body," though our personal choices are our own. We can certainly frustrate God's vision; we can certainly "grieve [God's] Holy Spirit."³³⁰ But we can also cooperate with God's promptings as they emerge in our own bodies, feelings, and personalities, in our organizations and cultures; and we can structure learning experiences that invite such cooperation.

The Process of Interpretation

If indeed all we have is experience, how can we understand it? In this section, I take "understanding experience" to mean interpreting experience intelligibly, whether to ourselves or to others, and I use Gelpi and Peirce to explore the meaning of "interpretation" more deeply. If interpretation means rendering one thing in terms of another, it can also be seen as a semiotic (i.e., a sign-making) intervention in the ongoing flow of experience. Unlike an accident, which is devoid of intention, interpreting means rendering new signs intentionally. It means intervening by taking experience as sign, and turning it into a new sign.

³²⁹ For the circumstance-bound and "flickering" nature of human consciousness and freedom, see Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 75, 456-7.

³³⁰ Eph 4:30. All Biblical quotations are NRSV unless otherwise noted. On the way in which God's intimate connection with creation implies God's intimate suffering and grief, see John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God* (London: SPCK, 2001), 76: " 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning' (Romans 8.22ff): there is indeed a passion that creation is undergoing before its eschatological redemption, and the Spirit is party to that passion. ... The Christian God is a 'fellow sufferer who understands' not only because of divine participation in the life and death of Jesus Christ, but also because faith in the Spirit involves a belief in the Spirit's continued sharing in the travail of creation."

For Gelpi, the most important aspect of interpretation is its use in the process of inquiry.³³¹ Inquiry is disciplined interpretation – interpretation subjected to testing. The first step is making hypotheses on the basis of relevant evidence (these imaginative hunches are what Peirce calls “abductions”); the second is the listing of consequences (necessities, the act of “deduction”); the third is practical verification (testing hunches, the act of “induction”).³³² Each particular field of inquiry – physics, biology, history, literary criticism, theology – develops its own rigorous approaches and standards by which to guide hypothesis making and testing.³³³

But interpretation is more basic than inquiry. As Peirce understood, rendering one thing in terms of another is the creative and iterative process which lies at the heart of all human thought.³³⁴ Peirce called this basic process “semiosis,” or the making and interpreting of signs. Within some initial experience (that is, within some information-bearing reality), we discover a dimension worth noticing. We relate this dimension to some memory or idea, and present that relation as a sign. This creates a new event or dimension to be noticed and interpreted anew.³³⁵ Semiosis begins with abduction, a

³³¹ Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience* 140-143.

³³² See Gelpi, *Gelpi, The Gracing of Human Experience*, 141-143. It is the process of moving from examples to rules that most people would label “induction.” But for Peirce, moving from an instance to a possible rule is a flash of *abduction*; while testing multiple samples to establish the legitimacy of a rule is one part of the testing process, which he labels induction. See also “3. Deduction, Induction, and Abduction” in Robert Burch, “Charles Sanders Peirce,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/peirce/>, accessed 2 January 2015.

³³³ The view that interpretation means re-signifying any thing forward is more fully developed in Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001; original 1913), 239-362.

³³⁴ See Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 140. For an argument that self-consciousness is best interpreted as a process of sign-making-and-reading, see Vincent M. Colapietro, *Peirce's Approach to the Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

³³⁵ For a succinct description of Peirce's model of the semiotic process, see Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 199-202.

creative juxtaposition, a hunch about a possible connection. This abduction may arise from relatively free and random associative thinking; it may be guided by our emotions; it may be channeled through settled traditions and time-tested habits; or some combination of all the above.³³⁶ Abduction generates signs with abandon; deduction generates the type of signs that we recognize as necessarily connected; induction generates signs which describe even more complex relationships: patterns, abstract comparisons, the proving or disproving of hypotheses.³³⁷ While semiosis remains in the background of Gelpi's description of inquiry,³³⁸ Peirce gives it more prominence. Peirce insists quite correctly that "we have no power of thinking without signs."³³⁹

An interpretation is a sign, whether a single symbol or a complex, multi-volume discussion. A semiotic perspective highlights some key characteristics of the interpretive process. By exploring how interpretation is practical, continuous, communitarian, fallible, iterative, and creative, we can understand the process more clearly.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ As Gelpi and Peirce both point out, our abductions are not wholly random; they are somehow attuned to their objects (otherwise scientists would spend all their time sorting through random hypotheses, rather than testing plausible scenarios and achieving tangible results). Gelpi, *Gelpi, The Gracing of Human Experience*, 151, citing Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.628-631.

³³⁷ Gelpi describes abduction, deduction and induction technically as three forms of inference (sc., three forms of comparison) that "interrelate a rule, a case, and a result." In this, he follows Peirce. See Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 141.

³³⁸ It is clear that for Gelpi, the main point of interpretation is to achieve a "correct interpretation" of experience – more specifically, a rigorously tested rendition of spiritual realities. By focusing on Peirce's scientific quest for verification, Gelpi underplays the importance of creativity in the interpretive process; for example, he locates his discussion of creativity not in his explication of Peircean foundations, but in his treatment John Dewey's theory of art. See Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 212-219. Gelpi also passes over the insights of more recent philosophers of science such as Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); the questions these philosophers raise about the ways in which we pursue inquiry within our different paradigms, and about the process of paradigm shifts, require us to acknowledge both the creative and tentative dimensions of the inquiry process. Gelpi helps us in this respect by recognizing that every experience conveys a plethora of information; events possess "intelligibility" (cf. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 602 s.v. "significance"); and by insisting that "we perceive initially much more than we sense." Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 152 et passim.

³³⁹ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.262, in Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 140.

³⁴⁰ The first six come from Gelpi's reflections on the nature of *inquiry*; I find them applicable to the more fundamental dynamics of semiosis as well. Intent as he is on experiment and verification, Gelpi tends to

An interpretation is always in some sense *practical* because it refers to some reality and seeks to address it: an encounter with an object, with a text or a person, with a concept or an artwork, an encounter with God. Interpretations seek to address practical questions, whether those questions arise from need or curiosity or emotive response.³⁴¹ “Where is the light switch?” (Interpretation: “That looks like a switch, over there.”) “How should I respond to this beautiful new picture?” “What is the just course of action?” Interpretations target desired effects: to convey one’s idea, to change someone’s mind, to transform the situation from one state to another. The realistic, contextual dimension of every interpretive action points both to the object that the sign is interpreting, and to the intervention the sign will produce.

Experience and thinking are both *continuous*, so interpretation is continuous as well. Like experience, thinking spans a continuum. It emerges progressively and holistically, from the simple to the more complex:³⁴² from the vanishingly peripheral and subliminal to the focal; from sensation, to emotional feelings, to imagination and free association; from “gut” feelings and intuitive hunches to inquiry and structured, deliberative logic.³⁴³ As we inquire into any situation the facts emerge more and more clearly; our interpretations can change from vague impressions to more nuanced, more detailed signs. One important point here is that each different level of thinking – gut, intuition, emotion, artworks, detailed arguments, and so on – can offer real insights when given voice through the sign-making process.

avoid any systematic reflection on the fundamentally *creative* dimension of interpretation. Thus the last reflects a more Peircean view.

³⁴¹ Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 143, 146.

³⁴² Gelpi calls this dimension of his metaphysics of experience the “evaluative continuum.” Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 587

³⁴³ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 39-40.

Interpretation is *communitarian* or social because signs are embedded in a network of socio-cultural knowing and learning.³⁴⁴ The interpretive process is threefold: the *interpreter* always interprets *something* to *someone* – even if that someone is simply oneself.³⁴⁵ This makes semiosis inherently ethical, because every interpretive act has a goal, a motivation, an aim to achieve, an “other” whom we hope it will reach.³⁴⁶

Interpretation is also always *fallible*.³⁴⁷ Sometimes our signs prove inadequate to the object or challenge at hand; sometimes our hypotheses prove false to the data; sometimes prejudice, or ignorance, or muddle-headedness leads individuals or communities astray. Interpretation is only ever provisional; we must always be prepared for the moment when experience uncovers new questions, presents us with new situations, calls for new signs.

But this fallibility need not lead to skepticism because interpretation is also an *iterative* process. We compare and corroborate our interpretations over and over as we refine and adjust our concepts, as we tackle the data at hand.³⁴⁸ Interpretation is iterative in an even more profound way because thinking always implies using signs: each new sign or interpretation can only be understood and interpreted by yet a new sign. This makes interpretation deeply habitual –one of the most deep-rooted human habits of all. It

³⁴⁴ “Building on the insights of Peirce and Royce,” Gelpi concludes that “only a realistic, triadic, communitarian construct of human experience can do justice to Christian revelation.” Gelpi, *Turn to Experience*, 124.

³⁴⁵ As Peirce and Royce insist, the self itself is a triadic semeiotic process: *I interpret my past to myself* in light of my future purposes. See Royce, *Problem*, 244-246; Gelpi, *Gelpi, The Gracing of Human Experience*, 139-140; Colapietro, *Peirce’s Approach to the Self*. Here the pragmatists anticipate understandings of the socially constructed self such as underlie SL theory.

³⁴⁶ Thanks to Nancy Pineda-Madrid for pointing this out.

³⁴⁷ “The very structure of logical thinking forces the honest human mind to admit its fallibility.” Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 143.

³⁴⁸ Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 144.

is through plying habitually the network of fellow humans that we develop our own interpretive capacities – our capacities to think, talk, and use signs.

Finally, interpretation is *creative* – not only because it incorporates sign-making, but because signs are always made up out of something. Within Gelpi's metaphysical framework, every sign is “made of” experience. More concretely, signs consist of chalk on a board; of paint on a canvas; of words, phrases, or musical notes; of brain-based memories and thoughts.³⁴⁹

For Peirce and Gelpi, interpretation and inquiry come together to constitute a philosophical perspective of *semiotic realism*.³⁵⁰ Unlike the semiotic tradition that springs from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotic realism does not focus solely on the arbitrary ways in which “signifiers” can be related to what they “signify.”³⁵¹ Peirce points out that “a sign is something by knowing which we [come to] know something *more*.”³⁵² For Gelpi, that “more” has to do mainly with the object that the sign seeks to interpret.³⁵³ But it also relates to the desires and needs of the interpreters in their real-life situations. I emphasize how every interpretation can be checked and recalibrated against multiple

³⁴⁹ Gelpi touches briefly on creativity in the inquiry process at Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 145; he explores creativity in great depth when describing John Dewey's theory of art in Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 212-219, but true to his focus on inquiry as the verification of hypotheses, he fails to connect Dewey's thinking with the creative dimensions of semiosis.

³⁵⁰ Although Gelpi does not use the word “semiosis” frequently, he does frequently refer to the foundational nature of Charles Sanders Peirce's “semiotic realism” for his own philosophical theology. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 173 et passim. For more on Peirce's semiotic realism, see T. L. Short, “Commemorative Essay: David Savan's Defense of Semiotic Realism,” *Semiotica* 98, no. 3/4 (1994): 243-263.

³⁵¹ For a succinct review of the differences between de Saussure and Peirce, see Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth*, 100-111.

³⁵² Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 8.332, cited and discussed in Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 28, where Eco calls this “a fundamental principle in Peirce's semiotics.”

³⁵³ “Peirce, the practicing scientist, realized that ... the object of thought determines the way the mind thinks about it as a result of the way in which the object under study behaves. In Peirce's language, the object determines the interpretant, not the interpretant the object.” Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 140-141. On the relationship between “interpretant,” “object,” and “representamen” in the triadic Peircean model of the sign, see Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth*, 199-202.

points of departure: the interpreted object, the interpreter's aims, the needs of the community, the best ethical norms of everyone involved in the process.

To interpret a text, to inquire into its use and its functions, means to generate signs about it.³⁵⁴ By this definition, Christians have, and will continue to interpret the Bible in numerous and multiple ways. They search the Bible for theological and ethical norms; they poach images and words from the Bible to fund their cultural projects; they lift texts and themes from the Bible to support social and political agendas (from gay-bashing to gay liberation theology); they randomly open the Bible to find messages that make sense of their lives; they turn Bible stories and themes into rituals, sermons and erudite books in order to understand them more deeply; they drench themselves in Scripture, spinning out Christologies and Pneumatologies to test;³⁵⁵ they study and apply proverbs and narratives; they pray its readings and Psalms. Interpreting Scripture from a semiotic realist perspective means using it to make and read our own Biblical signs.

Norms, Conversion, and Truth

Semiotic realism provides a framework for connecting what is, with what ought to be. Gelpi argues that the data of experience and inquiry can teach us which directions are life-giving, and which lead down paths of dis-integration.³⁵⁶ This data includes spiritual and cultural traditions, classic persons and texts, existential and scientific discoveries.³⁵⁷ As a Christian, Gelpi turns to the experience of *conversion* to develop experience-based

³⁵⁴ Cf. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 592 s.v. "interpretation."

³⁵⁵ Christology: a systematic explanation of the meaning and nature of Jesus for Christian faith; Pneumatology: a systematic explanation of the meaning and nature of the Holy Spirit in for Christian faith.

³⁵⁶ Gelpi's and Peirce's approach harkens back to classical Catholic natural law thinking. See for example G. Trotter, "Is There a Distinctive American Version of Natural Law?" in Mark J. Cherry, ed., *The Death of Metaphysics; The Death of Culture: Epistemology, Metaphysics and Morality* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 151-166. I hope to explore these connections more deeply in the future.

³⁵⁷ On classic persons and texts, see David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 99-153.

norms.³⁵⁸ For him, conversion is more than a switch in religious identity. In some given “realm of experience,”³⁵⁹ conversion means “becoming responsible.”³⁶⁰ It means taking on adult obligations, and holding oneself to account. It implies the ability to account for our choices, to interpret them to ourselves and to others.

Gelpi identifies five forms of conversion.³⁶¹ (1) *Affective* conversion means taking responsibility for emotions, for discerning between healthy and neurotic attractions. (2) *Intellectual* conversion means taking responsibility for deliberate thinking – for the thoroughness with which we pursue questions, and for our courage in seeking the truth. (3) *Personal moral conversion* means taking responsibility for our actions in face to face life. (4) *Socio-political moral conversion* means taking responsibility for the broader institutional, cultural and social environments that our action or inaction constructs.³⁶² (5) The fifth form, *religious conversion*, seems for Gelpi more difficult to define.³⁶³ Gelpi

³⁵⁸ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 35.

³⁵⁹ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 40.

³⁶⁰ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 73. For Gelpi’s dependence on Bernard Lonergan’s understanding of conversion, see Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience*, 45-49.

³⁶¹ He isolates five “realms of experience” based on the “different kinds of habits” that “govern” them and the “different criteria in measuring responsibility and irresponsibility” that mark them. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 292-3; Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 39. Others might discern more than five such realms. For example, ecological consciousness may qualify as a distinct realm of conversive experience if the responsibilities to which the environment calls us can be ignored within other frames of conversion. Thus, while personal and socio-political conversion are normed by the rights of *persons*, ecological conversion would consider more carefully the rights of all *selves*, recognizing the needs of the biosphere and taking responsibility for its (and our own) survival.

³⁶² Gelpi calls these “natural” or “secular” conversions because they “prescind” from God’s historical action of sending Jesus and the Holy Spirit among us. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 292; Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 43-45, 115-118, 153-4, 595 s.v. “Natural.” His pragmatistic thinking breaks down into an unpragmatistic dualism at precisely the point in his discussion where he insists that grace and science are fundamentally separate: “the secular sciences . . . have nothing to say about divine revelation” because “the paschal mystery requires one to assent to it on the terms which the events in question demand,” that is, “only on God’s terms, and therefore in faith.” Gelpi, *Closer Walk*, 242, 252. This position fits poorly with Gelpi’s other, more Peircean insight that “the same logic which validates scientific reason also validates philosophical reasoning about religious realities.” *Closer Walk*, 155.

³⁶³ Gelpi is reticent about the dynamics of non-Christian religious conversion; yet he does acknowledge that this type of religious conversion exists, and he warns against assimilating it to Christian conversion. He suggests that the data that derive from such non-Christian religious conversions should be evaluated and interpreted case by case. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 40; and Gelpi, “Two Spiritual Paths: Thematic Grace vs. Transmuting Grace (Part 1),” *Spirituality Today* 35, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 241-255. However, he

calls Christian conversion “a specific kind of religious conversion”³⁶⁴ in which believers take responsibility for exposing their affections, their minds, and their relationships more and more fully to their experience of Jesus. Gelpi describes how Christian conversion “heals,” “perfects,” “elevates,”³⁶⁵ and “universalizes”³⁶⁶ the other four types of conversion as Christians, as believers allow their experience of Jesus to heal their shame, to awaken their sense of the beauty that faith and love represent; as they allow it to stir up their hopes for a just, peaceful world.³⁶⁷ I propose that “integral liberation” is the best way to describe the results of Christian conversion in a setting like CRNYHS. Integral liberation can likewise be described as the healing, perfection, elevation and universalization of emotional, intellectual, moral, and social life. In this dissertation, then, I define (5) *religious conversion* as taking responsibility for our roles in God’s project of integral liberation.³⁶⁸

affirms that inter-religious dialogue/engagement has uncovered many “shared beliefs and shared religious practices” among Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, native peoples, and others. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 499-502. Even here, however, Gelpi tends speak in persistently theistic terms. For the beginnings of a more developed discussion of non-Christian conversion from a Gelpian perspective, see Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003).

³⁶⁴ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 40. Cf. Gelpi, *Closer Walk*, 163: “Christian conversion exemplify[ies] a species of religious conversion.”

³⁶⁵ E.g.: “Christian hope seeks to heal, perfect, and elevate human hopes ... in the process of ongoing conversion which justifying faith begins.” Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 115.

³⁶⁶ E.g.: “Christian hope perfects natural hopes by universalizing them.” Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 117.

³⁶⁷ Christian conversion adds a certain resurrection hope to the norms of affective conversion; a certain narrative and doctrinal subtext to the norms of intellectual conversion; a particular vision of justice and love that moves morality toward the Kingdom of Heaven. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 44; see further 41-44, 619-621.

³⁶⁸ The world contains many such projects, each one a religious or ethical tradition complex and diverse in itself. For example, a particular version of Judaism might focus on *tikkun olam* or on the mitzvot of Torah. See Lawrence Fine, “Tikkun: A Lurianic Motif in Contemporary Jewish Thought,” in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding--Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, Vol. 4, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 35-54. A particular version of Buddhism might focus on universal compassion or on extinguishing the self of self. See Masao Abe, “Buddhism,” in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Our Religions: The Seven World Religions Introduced by Preeminent Scholars from Each Tradition* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 69-137.

Gelpi's reflections on conversion help us identify a broad set of norms for discerning true interpretations from false ones.³⁶⁹ Like every aspect of understanding reality from a viewpoint of semiotic realism, our norms are always developing. Being a responsible interpreter, being true to one's points of departure, means checking our interpretations for a healthy sense of emotion and beauty, for intellectual courage and rigor, for interpersonal care and justice, for compatibility with integral liberation. It means being true to the materials we are using and the data we gather. It means figuring out how to help different "selves" to survive and to thrive. Every self needs a loyal interpreter, as Nell Morton has put it, to "hear" him, her, or it "into speech."³⁷⁰ Some selves (like persons who are very young, very old, mentally disabled, traumatized) are less able to be fully articulate. Some (like texts, cultural objects, communities) need human persons to articulate their selfhood and their needs; if we want them to survive and to enrich our own experience with beauty, if we value the different ways in which they illumine and critique our own ways of life, then we must interpret them responsibly.³⁷¹

Being a responsible interpreter means keeping our best vision of integral liberation in sight. In an interreligious community of practice, different members will not at first share a common vision of human flourishing. But even when students share many religious, class, and cultural assumptions, a critical educator remains true to the

³⁶⁹ Gelpi's use of the word "truth" is narrower than mine. For him, truth pertains mainly to the verification of statements against gathered data; science, not artistry, is the model for truth. "The intellectually converted invoke norms of truth and falsity, of adequacy and inadequacy. Truth and falsity judge specific propositions and beliefs. True propositions [correctly] interpret the way reality behaves; false propositions do not." Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 293. "Truth" is "the verified interpretation of reality." Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 605.

³⁷⁰ Nell Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

³⁷¹ Cf. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 293.

differences in the classroom; she acts as a “difficultator” by sharpening distinctions and challenging students to articulate the norms implicit in their daily practice. The process of sorting out norms requires a particular type of conversation that creates a framework in which norms can be identified, a conversation in which participants can clarify what is at stake.³⁷² This is the process of “practical reasoning.” As philosophers like Charles Taylor have argued, practical reasoning starts with the interlocutor’s own premises in order to establish a new form of explanation that is more adequate to the material and the conversation partners at hand.³⁷³ It focuses on clarifying our thinking, on moving from one intellectual position to another in a way that represents some sort of “epistemic gain.”³⁷⁴ Arguments from practical reasoning show that one description of reality is more comprehensive, more explanatory, or less confused than another. The new approach may explain problematic or anomalous data better than the old one; it may solve a conceptual impasse that seemed inevitable in the previous theory; it may point out and overcome blind spots or implicit contradictions in the previous perspective.³⁷⁵ These types of arguments rely on new abductions to establish common frames of reference; they create the “best” description of reality that is available in a given conversation.

³⁷² Charles Taylor distinguishes two basic types of arguments. The former he calls “foundational” and “apodictic;” these are arguments which rely on shared premises; the latter he calls “practical” and “comparative;” these are arguments where the premises themselves are at issue. For the differences between foundational and practical arguments, see Charles Taylor, “Explanation and Practical Reasoning,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 34-60.

³⁷³ There are links to this understanding of practical reasoning in one of the germinal essays of Classical American Pragmatism, Charles S. Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (January 1878): 286-302; it is developed more rigorously in the writing of Alastair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor. See Alastair MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science,” *The Monist* 60 (1977): 453-472; Charles Taylor, “Explanation and Practical Reasoning.”

³⁷⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 72; “Explanation and Practical Reason,” 42.

³⁷⁵ Taylor, “Explanation and Practical Reason” 43-55.

In the end, the process of sorting out norms will start to look like a debate among insider practitioners; but from beginning to end, it requires an openness to new perspective and new articulations of norms. In these conversations, the teacher can use Gelpi's reflections on conversion as her contribution to the process of practical reasoning, but this does not imply that the teacher's premises about norms of conversion will correct students' faulty premises; to the contrary, it suggests that both teacher and student will learn something from their dialogue concerning reality. It suggests that new, richer interpretations will teach us all "something more." I emphasize the capacity of Peirce's logic to handle this kind of pluralism within a community of inquiry. Peirce acknowledged that profoundly different perspectives on reality can lead to profoundly different experiences.³⁷⁶ But he also insisted that human sociability and the communitarian nature of interpretation would always lead interpreters to

compare notes ... and if we never do compare notes, and no third party talks with both and makes the comparison, it is difficult to see what meaning there is in saying we disagree.³⁷⁷

A pedagogy rooted in semiotic realism embraces pluralism by conceiving classroom dialogue as practical reasoning.

A Triadic Metaphysic

The attentive reader will not fail to have noticed the presence of triplets in Gelpi's and Peirce's intellectual projects: *abduction*, *deduction*, *induction*; an *interpreter* conveys *something to someone*; $Sign_1 \rightarrow Abduction \rightarrow Sign_2$. For Peirce and Gelpi, these triadic elements are not incidental. They reflect a deep, three-fold aspect of reality that shows up

³⁷⁶ Sandra B. Rosenthal, *Charles Peirce's Pragmatic Pluralism* (SUNY Press, 1994).

³⁷⁷ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 4.62 in Rosenthal, *Charles Peirce's Pragmatic Pluralism*, 11.

in multiple settings. In this section, I explore how this three-fold aspect unfolds within Gelpi's metaphysics of experience, and within the dynamics of Peircean semiosis. I draw out the links between these two perspectives, laying the groundwork that connects the process of interpreting Scripture with the Christian vocation to share in God's own Trinitarian life.

With Peirce, Gelpi parses every experience in three basic dimensions: (1) qualities; (2) facts and decisions; (3) tendencies, symbols, and mind.³⁷⁸ Peirce names these dimensions generally as the categories of "Firstness," "Secondness," and "Thirdness."³⁷⁹ Firstness means the quality of an experience (e.g., its redness, its smoothness, its happiness, the impression it makes as a "self"). Firstness is the "particular suchness" of an experience;³⁸⁰ it can be relatively simple (e.g., "red") or simultaneously holistic-yet-complex (e.g., "Jesus"). In its most basic form, Firstness suggests freedom and unstructured potentiality; qualities unbounded by form or by pattern; the pool from which experience wells forth.

Secondness is the facticity of the experience (there it is, hitting you in the face). Secondness marks some potential suchness as a concrete reality with an impact; it can be a force that impinges upon us, a form that constrains our behavior, a decision, the weight of a settled habit. Secondness suggests limit and specificity: not anything, but this particular thing.

³⁷⁸ See Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ Jesus Christ*, 66 and Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 153-154.

³⁷⁹ For a basic description of the three categories, see Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 153-4; John E. Smith, *Purpose and Thought*, 127-140.

³⁸⁰ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 66.

Thirdness is the tendency of an experience. Thirdness suggests emergence, direction, or mind. Examples of Thirdness include quantum probability and natural laws, ingrained habits and personal character, life-giving or death-dealing social dynamics, acquired skills and cultural memes. (In a key difference from the “dialectical” view of reality that is espoused by Hegel and Marx, Thirdness emerges from and correlates, but does not synthesize or supplant the First and Second dimensions.)³⁸¹

Gelpi proposes a grand metaphysical abduction: he posits these three basic categories as the elements of every possible experience, including human personhood and the experience of God.³⁸² All that exists is experience; but each experience has three real dimensions. They are not reducible to each other, and they are not arbitrary figments of language or thought.³⁸³ The flavor of every experience is one thing, the fact of the experience is another, and its direction is still yet another. No one can have an experience that lacks Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness; at the same time, these categories never exist “by themselves.”

As I detail below, these three categories allow Gelpi to interpret the Christian Trinity itself. Here I emphasize how this kind of triadic metaphysics has implications for the Christian concept of “spirit.” A personality, a community, a composite whole, does

³⁸¹ See Carl Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 153-154.

³⁸² For some correlations of the three categories with different aspects of experience, see John E. Smith, *Purpose and Thought*, 127-140; Gelpi, *Gracing of Human Experience*, 153-156. For a convincing argument about the correlation of First-, Second- and Thirdness to abduction, deduction and induction respectively, see Wim Staat, “On Abduction, Deduction, Induction and the Categories,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 232-233. My thanks also to Professor Zeke Finkelstein of City College and The Brecht Forum in New York City, whose 2012 popular educational Brecht Forum course in the philosophy of Peirce helped make these correlations more clear to me.

³⁸³ The reality of Thirdness is a key element in Peirce's system and in the Classical Pragmatist platform against nominalism. For Peirce, the rejection of nominalism was a key step – perhaps *the* key step – in the refinement of his pragmatic metaphysics and his overarching philosophy of science. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ Jesus Christ*, 20, 64-5; Smith, *Purpose and Thought*, 16, 137; Staat, “On Abduction, Deduction, Induction and the Categories,” 232-233.

have a unified quality, a Firstness; but that unity emerges from its Thirdness, its dynamic tendencies to cohere, to develop, to act. These tendencies influence us and interact with each other on the level of habit and mind. Spirit is the “interiority” of individual and social experience – a powerful set of dynamics that can at times be wholesome and healthy, and at other times be deeply destructive.³⁸⁴ Spirits like addiction or internalized oppression can take hold and persist for generations, entrapping us in debilitating patterns. High school Biblical educators can describe addiction, or racism, or unbridled marketing in terms of such negative spirits or “demons,” turning New Testament exegesis from the spooky and Hollywoodesque toward real, concrete teenage experience. This opens new ways to talk about God’s Holy Spirit (capital “S”) and the various non-divine spirits (lowercase “s”) in our experience from a panentheistic perspective: all spirits partake of God’s Spirit, but some do so mainly to God’s grief.

III. Gelpi’s Trinitarian Model

In this section, with the philosophical theology I have so far presented, I link God’s Word, God’s Spirit, and the interpretive process. I argue that interpretation is a form of human participation in God’s Trinitarian life. We participate in that divine dynamic by opening ourselves to the experience of God’s life within us; by growing in God’s likeness in conformity with God’s Son through God’s Spirit; and by becoming responsible interpreters.

This chart summarizes some of the triadic correlations I have so far discussed:

Firstness	Secondness	Thirdness
Quality	Fact	Tendency
Possibility	Particularity	Direction

³⁸⁴ For example, the New Testament speaks of “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” Eph 6:12. For a thoughtful exposition of this rich sense of “spirit,” see Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

These correlations extend to the level of the sign-making process. Every sign contains an element of Firstness, of Secondness, and of Thirdness. Gelpi's key theological contribution to my argument – and his most significant contribution to speculative theology – is correlating Peirce's three basic categories with the Christian experience of Trinity:³⁸⁵

Firstness	Secondness	Thirdness
The key <i>dimension</i> of the sign; the aspect of the object that the sign brings to mind.	The sign itself as an object that is <i>there</i> .	The interpreting <i>symbolization</i> that connects the ground and the experienced event.
Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Source ³⁸⁶	Agent ³⁸⁷	Interpretive "Mind of God" ³⁸⁸
From whom every aspect of being God arises.	Through whom God becomes present to creation.	By whom God and creation come to understand God.

Drawing from Scripture and Catholic theology, Gelpi parses the Trinity through the three categories. "The Father always functions as the aboriginal source,"³⁸⁹ sending God's "two hands" – the Son and the Spirit – into the world to create and to save.³⁹⁰ The Son

³⁸⁵ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 448-9, 474-7. For an initial attempt at this correlation, see Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 83-123. Yong adopts and expands upon Gelpi's Peircean interpretation of the Trinity, especially as it related to pneumatology. Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 91-96.

³⁸⁶ Gelpi calls the Father is the "eternal source of creative efficacy," Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 474. The Nicene Creed affirms the first person of the Trinity as "Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth."

³⁸⁷ Gelpi writes, "The Son, who functions within the Trinity as the eternal source of obediential efficacy, in giving himself to the Father and the Breath insures that whenever the triune God *acts* on creation, they *act* through the Son in creating, saving, and judging the world." Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 474-475, emphasis added. The Nicene Creed affirms of the Son that "through him all things were made;" cf. John 1:3; Col 1:16.

³⁸⁸ For Gelpi, the Spirit is the "mind" of the Father and the Son. " 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Corinthians 2:16) See Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 45-60, esp. 47; 75; Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 466; and below.

³⁸⁹ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 449.

³⁹⁰ Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 64; Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 159. On the "two hands" of God, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV. Pref. 4. and Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 64.

does the Father's will obediently as God's creative and saving Word.³⁹¹ The Spirit "functions as the cognitive link between the Father and the Son, and therefore as the mind of God;" She "illuminates the Son by revealing to Him His filial relationship to the Father, the moral demands of life in the kingdom, and the scope of the Son's saving mission;"³⁹² She "endows" God with divine omniscience, and makes the mutual self-gift of Son and Father "self-consciously personal."³⁹³

So the Father is a model of Firstness. Within the economy of salvation, the Father – loving wellspring of all possible qualities and experiences – is the source to which the revelation of Christ and interpretive gist of the Spirit refer.

The Son is a model of Secondness – the Word of God (Hebrew: *Dabar*; Greek: *Logos*) who dwelt among us concretely as action, as decision, as fact.³⁹⁴ Within the economy of salvation, the Son is the definitive, experienced event,³⁹⁵ the way that creation and salvation "went down" in the past and continues to unfold into the future. The Son is God's particular, concrete self-communication.³⁹⁶ By doing the will of the Father, he becomes the "symbolic expression" of the Godhead in practice,³⁹⁷ the pointer

³⁹¹ Cf. Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 64; Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 449.

³⁹² Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 449.

³⁹³ "Through evaluative response an experience becomes present to itself and to its world. The divine [interpreter] is, therefore, revealed as the source of divine self-awareness." Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 118.

³⁹⁴ Cf. Jn 1:14.

³⁹⁵ The "definitive" nature of God's self-revelation in Jesus is a key theme in the recent and important Vatican declaration *Dominus Iesus*; this "definitiveness" rests in "the words, deeds, and entire historical event of Jesus ... as human realities" lived by the Second Person of the Trinity. *Domine Iesus* 6. Congar amplifies this theme of the Word's *definitive* dimension: "The Word brings definition." Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (London: Chapman; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 130. Of course, claiming that Jesus' revelation was definitive in no way implies that our *interpretations* of that revelation can ever be final.

³⁹⁶ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 476. Especially since the mid-twentieth century, Catholic theology has understood "revelation" not simply as the conveyance of propositions *about* God, but more broadly as God *communicating Godself* to humankind: Stephen Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), esp. 23-24; Avery Dulles "Faith and Revelation" in Francis Fiorenza and John Calvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 98.

³⁹⁷ Gelpi, *Committed Worship*, 1.166.

to who God really is. Gelpi echoes a long tradition of Biblical and theological reflection which describes the Word of God as “living and active” (Heb 4:12), “effective,” “proclamatory,” “forceful,” “reconciling,” and “saving.”³⁹⁸ He traces this vision of the efficacious Word in the post-Biblical theological literature through Irenaeus, Basil of Caesarea, and the fourth century Roman apologist Victorinus.³⁹⁹

The Spirit is a model of Thirdness. From the beginning, the Spirit has illumined God’s ways to humankind, and has nudged created beings toward God’s vision of wholeness. She pervades all of creation with Her perceptive presence and dynamizing power,⁴⁰⁰ and within the continuing economy of salvation, She prompts new symbols and new understandings. The Old Testament, according to Gelpi, describes God’s Spirit “as a divine principle of saving enlightenment,” the “source of gracious illumination,” “the transcendent wisdom of God.”⁴⁰¹ God’s Spirit is life and religious consciousness; She

³⁹⁸ These words come from Congar, but they are in complete agreement with Gelpi’s trinitarian Christology, as I describe it below. “According to the Bible, the word of God is not an explanatory principle of the rational nature of the world;” it is God’s decision, “God’s act.” See Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, 11-13, quotes on 11. For more detailed Biblical citations, see Metropolitan Maximos Aghiorghoussis, “The Word of God in Orthodox Christianity,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31, no. 1-2 (March 1, 1986): 86-91; J. D. A. MacNicol, “Word and Deed in the New Testament,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 5, no. 3 (September 1, 1952): 237-248.

³⁹⁹ The alternative speculative vision, which interprets the Logos as the mind of God, begins with Justin Martyr, and develops through Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. This second tradition locates God’s mind in the Word and God’s love and will in the Spirit. On these two contrasting trajectories in Trinitarian thought, see Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 60-66; Gelpi, *Committed Worship*, 1.170-171. Although it has come to dominate Western theology, the tradition in which Logos = mind and Spirit = love/will has become a stumbling block for religious education. For example, this bifurcation is arguably at the root of Thomas Groome’s efforts to resurrect “conation” in the realm of religious educational theory as a term for wisdom, converted desire, and thoughtful “remembrance” of our existential “being.” See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 26 ff. For Gelpi, this line of Trinitarian thinking is “a direct consequence of [the illegitimate] Platonization of the Johannine Logos.” He concludes that “this particular strain in post-Biblical pneumatology ought to be abandoned as a theological aberration” since “it distorts a fundamental aspect of the Biblical witness.” Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 65.

⁴⁰⁰ Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 48-49.

⁴⁰¹ Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 45. For his analysis of Old Testament references to the Spirit of God, Gelpi relies heavily on George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (Paulist Press, 1976), a well-regarded (if somewhat dated) general overview.

inspires “practical wisdom,” prophetic vision, “creative insight”, leadership, and appropriate prayer.⁴⁰² In the New Testament witness, God’s Spirit conceives Jesus, initiates his public ministry, and opens our eyes to God’s purposes.⁴⁰³ She “frees the heart and the mind to recognize Jesus” and God’s work of salvation in him.⁴⁰⁴ The Spirit “illuminates,” “animates,” and “supports” Christians; She moves us to trust in God’s love; She binds us together in like-minded community; She shows us how to conform to Christ’s model; She pours out individual gifts and capacities; She teaches us the truth about God.⁴⁰⁵

For Gelpi, God’s Holy Spirit is also God’s mind, just as Thirdness is spirit and mind among humans.⁴⁰⁶ The Spirit is the “mind of God”⁴⁰⁷ who “searches everything,” even God’s depths.⁴⁰⁸ This is “the same mind ... that was in Christ Jesus,”⁴⁰⁹ laying out a

⁴⁰² Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 46-7.

⁴⁰³ A key synoptic passage for Gelpi is Luke 10:21-22: “At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, ‘... no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’ See Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 52. Compare here the observation of Yves Congar that, after Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan, after the Spirit descends, Jesus “was able to express in an entirely new way, in the perspective of his mission, his consciousness, at the human level, of his quality as the Son of God, and of his condition” as God’s Suffering Servant. Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, 88.

⁴⁰⁴ Montague notes a similar characteristic of God’s Spirit in action from the Old Testament. Montague, *The Holy Spirit*, 77-110.

⁴⁰⁵ Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 50-6.

⁴⁰⁶ Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 58-59. For Gelpi, the writings of Paul in particular frame the Spirit as “the mind of God and of Christ.” Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 45.

⁴⁰⁷ That is to say, the Spirit is the “mind” of the Father and the Son. “‘For who has known the mind [*nous*] of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind [*nous*] of Christ.” (1 Cor 2:16) Gelpi uses “mind” in the holistic Biblical sense: “the entire continuum of evaluative responses” that persons can have to experience. See Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 466.

⁴⁰⁸ 1 Cor 2:10.

⁴⁰⁹ Phil 2:5: “*Touto phroneite ... ho kai en Christō Iēsou.*” Gelpi does not cite this passage in his discussion of “Spirit as mind of God” in *The Divine Mother*. (Perhaps it is too pan(en)theistic for his taste.) Nevertheless, I would argue that it sheds light on Gelpi’s philosophical / theological interpretation of spirit and mind. Neither Gelpi nor I would argue that there is a one-to-one correspondence between theological ideas and the New Testament lexical witness. “The Biblical writers ... saw reality with coherence often enough. But they were poets, prophets, preachers, religious historians, apocalyptic visionaries, community leaders, not speculative theologians with the systematizing passion of philosophers.” (Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 45) Whether the word is *nous* “mind, intellectual faculty,” *phroneō* “to think, to be of a ‘mind,’” or some other expression, Gelpi’s theological hunch is that the Spirit dimension of Godhead implies thinking, understanding, tending, desiring and willing – just as it implies these functions in human beings.

plan for cosmic salvation, inviting humankind to conform and be saved.⁴¹⁰ These efforts to cast the Spirit as Thirdness (“illumination,” “mind”)⁴¹¹ buck a centuries-long trend in Christian theology that identifies God’s mind with the *Logos*, which in Ancient Greek connotes “reckoning, proportion, explanation, theory, principle, reason, and reflection” as well as “word.”⁴¹² Gelpi rejects this tradition as a Greek philosophical encroachment upon fundamentally Jewish perspectives, and presents *Dabar* (Word) as God’s powerful agent. He points to other Scriptural terms that represent the dimension of mind: in Hebrew *nephesh* “breath”, *neshamah* “life”, *rûah* “wind, breath, spirit;” in Greek *pneuma* “spirit, breath, Spirit of God.” Still, Gelpi’s Peircean conception of “mind” insures that we do not read the effects of the Spirit as “merely” cognitive or ideational.⁴¹³ Because mind is a dimension of Thirdness, it is habit, dynamic, and appetite; it is the tendency to think, decide, and act. What is more, just as Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness are not independent, but coinherent in every experience, so too Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct yet inextricably one.⁴¹⁴ Thus mind is inseparable from Second- and Firstness; God’s mind never works “on Her own.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁰ Phil 2:6-11.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 45, 56.

⁴¹² Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon, With a Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), s.v. *logos*.

⁴¹³ Because Gelpi is anxious to buttress his point that the Holy Spirit can be modeled as God’s “mind,” he tends to underemphasize the concrete, forceful, material dimensions of mind that his own Peircean metaphysical model embraces. This tendency is only exacerbated when others read Gelpi’s proposals as if his conception of “mind” signified a force that had impact only between one’s two ears. For such a misreading, see J. J. O’Donnell, “The Trinity as Divine Community: A Critical Reflection upon Recent Theological Developments,” *Gregorianum*, 69, no. 1 (1988): 5-34, esp. 24.

⁴¹⁴ To bolster his case for Trinitarian thinking in the earliest witnesses to Christian faith, Gelpi points to instances in the writings of Paul that evince a firm – but as yet inchoate – intuition that the Spirit is intimately connected with Jesus, e.g., “the Lord is the spirit” (2 Cor 3:17) and Jesus “became a life giving spirit.” (1 Cor 15:45). Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 57.

⁴¹⁵ Gelpi argues at length that we should understand the Holy Spirit as the principle of intra-trinitarian self-consciousness; but “enlightenment” and “illumination” is only “one of the themes” that the Biblical witness ascribes to the Spirit. Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 45, emphasis added. Gelpi does not deny that God’s Spirit is also God’s power, life, impetus and love.

In a panentheistic model of the Trinity, the Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness of human experience are grounded in the reality of God. In the classical, Greek-influenced theistic tradition, the being of God the Father holds all of creation in existence. In a Christian Pragmatistic panentheism, the Father *is* every quality we experience – whether healthy or tragically tainted. In the classical, Greek-influenced tradition, the Logos is the blueprint of creation. In a Christian Pragmatistic panentheism, the Logos *is* every concrete decision or action, in the fact of each being's existence – whether “conform[ing] to his glorious body” (Phil 3:21)⁴¹⁶ or nailed to the cross of our sin.

But a Christian Pragmatistic panentheism maintains the distinction between the fundamental dimensions of our experience *in* God, and our relation *to* God as emergent human persons and selves. All humans experience God through the Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness of every experience; this is our experience *in* God. As Christians, we also relate *to* God; we relate as emergent selves to the supreme “self” that is God. In addition, a Christian Pragmatistic panentheism maintains the difference between other human experiences and that of Jesus. In classical Christian theology, Jesus relates to the Father as one divine person to another; God's Spirit is Jesus' mind. The quality of my personal experience is clearly different – for example, my mind and God's mind do not always align. But as a Christian I do relate *to* God the Father *through* the two divine persons Son and Spirit. I relate to God the Father through God the Son who came to live with us, leaving behind an ongoing legacy of words, rituals, love, and action. And I relate to God the Father through the promptings and out-moving ripples of God's Holy Spirit in conscious and subconscious life.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Alternative reading, NRSV; the principle reading is “conformed to the body of his glory.”

⁴¹⁷ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 498.

The Jewish and Christian traditions offer abundant testimony to different experiences of spirit / Spirit. For example, in the Old and New Testament witness, the human “spirit” is the locus of steady spiritual growth through *askēsis* (spiritual exercise and study).⁴¹⁸ This perspective plays out in the understanding of *pneuma* found in the writings of Paul’s and Luke/Acts.⁴¹⁹ The same perspective is also evident in the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls community, whose intellectual connections to Early Christianity are becoming more and more clear: at Qumran, assiduous study allows God’s holy spirit to enlighten the spirits of those who pore over sacred texts.⁴²⁰ At the same time, the New Testament often suggests that faith in Jesus prompts a dramatic “additional endowment” of Spirit, including the many charisms or gifts of the Spirit that build up the Christian community.⁴²¹

The Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit “upon all flesh”⁴²² proves the Spirit both gentle and wild. She generates unexpected phenomena,⁴²³ moving people through witness and persuasion.⁴²⁴ She affects the consciousness of human persons and organizations,⁴²⁵ moving individuals and communities to hypothesize, to interpret, and to judge. She brings individuals of all types together without erasing their individuality.⁴²⁶ As Gelpi

⁴¹⁸ See Jack Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), esp. “The Spirit and the Cultivation of Virtue,” 15-70.

⁴¹⁹ For example, Luke reports how John the Baptist “grew and became strong in spirit,” Lk 1:80, John R. [Jack] Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 241, 422-27.

⁴²⁰ Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 185-9.

⁴²¹ Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 422-27.

⁴²² Acts 2, esp. 2:17-18; cf. Joel 2:28.

⁴²³ “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” John 3:8.

⁴²⁴ “Now when they heard this [Pentecostal preaching of Peter’s], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’” . . . Those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.” Acts 2:37, 41.

⁴²⁵ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 498.

⁴²⁶ This is a major theme in Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress 1994; German original 1992).

argues, the Spirit is a “personalizing” agent,⁴²⁷ not an impersonal vector or force-field. As Michael Welker and John Polkinghorne add, the Spirit establishes *personal* relationships, attuned to each self in the cosmos:⁴²⁸ gracious to those in line with God’s vision, compassionate to those in travail, directing and corrective to the wayward.⁴²⁹ She “differentiates creative from unjust differences and restructures them ... in a way that allows for the development of both the many and the one.”⁴³⁰ Through emergent patterns that human planning could never anticipate or contrive, the Spirit turns cacophony to symphony (rather than into unison or silence).⁴³¹

While developing a fully panentheistic theology of God’s Holy Spirit is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I do propose that “to interpret” is to participate in God’s inner life. This is nowhere more evident than when Christians interpret the Scriptures through the “persuasive wisdom and illumination” of God’s own Spirit.⁴³² It is a long-standing tradition that “Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written.”⁴³³ One final correlative schema helps us to specify the relationship between Scripture and Spirit:

⁴²⁷ Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 119.

⁴²⁸ Cf. J. C. Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God: A Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2001), 72-73, 76-77, 96-97.

⁴²⁹ Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 76-7.

⁴³⁰ The first half of this quote is from Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 87; the second half is from John J. Markey, O.P., “Clarifying the Relationship between the Universal and the Particular Churches through the Philosophy of Josiah Royce,” *Philosophy & Theology* 15, no. 2 (2003): 306.

⁴³¹ Cf. Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 259.

⁴³² Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 498. The intimate relationship between revelation and the interpretive Spirit has been an important theme in Christian theology since its beginnings. As Benedict XVI notes in the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, “there can be no authentic understanding of Christian revelation apart from the activity of the Paraclete. This is due to the fact that God’s self-communication always involves the relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit, whom Irenaeus of Lyons refers to as “the two hands of the Father”. *Verbum Domini* 15; cf. the scriptural and patristic reflections assembled in *Verbum Domini* 15-16.

⁴³³ *Dei Verbum* [The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation] 12, citing and summarizing several papal and Patristic sources. For further citations, see Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, 24-5; idem, *Tradition and Traditions* (London and New York, 1966), 91 and n. 1, 387 and n. 1. From a Protestant perspective, Michael Welker writes, “It is ... the Holy Spirit who causes these testimonies – the partial,

Firstness	Secondness	Thirdness
Father	Son	Holy Spirit
The <i>Ground</i> (of a sign)	(the sign as) <i>Fixed / Written Event</i>	The <i>Interpretative Action</i> (linking Ground and Event) ⁴³⁴

The analogy between “the Divine Word made flesh” and “the same word made book” is also an ancient part of Christian and Catholic tradition.⁴³⁵ The Bible is a model of Secondness, a trace of God’s many qualities, a form that constrains our theological inquiries through its particularities – through the hard, resistant data of the text. The link between Jesus as Word of God and Scripture as Word of God is not merely a form of cognitive slippage. It is a fundamental Christian abduction: both the Bible and the life of the Savior come to us as divine semioses. When Christians interpret the Scriptures in converted and normative ways, the upwelling S/spirit within us conforms to the Spirit of God.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how a framework of semiotic realism helps a pedagogy of responsible improvisation with Scripture hang together in a coherent way. Combining the metaphysics of experience, the theory of semiosis, and the process of rigorous inquiry links creativity, improvisation, critical thinking, norms, responsibility, and truth.

even fragmentary and conflicting experiences and insights – to *point to* the reality of God, to reflect it. As soon as this happens, and to the extent that this happens, we are justified in speaking of an *inspiration of Scripture*. ... This action of the Spirit that leads to God’s word being heard, meeting with a response, being taken up and producing fruit has, following Calvin, been called the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*.... This ‘internal testimony of the Spirit’ has also been designated ‘the secret testimony’ (*testimonium arcanum*).” Welker, *God the Spirit*, 276-277, original emphasis.

⁴³⁴ David Savan, “C.S. Peirce and American Semiotics,” in Michael Shapiro and Michael Haley, eds., *The Peirce Seminar Papers: An Annual of Semiotic Analysis*, vol. II (Providence: Berg, 1994), 179-208.

⁴³⁵ For example, St. Ambrose insists that “the body of the Son is the Scripture which we have received.” *In Lucam* 6.33, cited in *Dei Verbum* 13. Cf. “The words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech, just as the word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the weak flesh of human beings, became like them.” *Verbum Domini* 18.

Gelpi offers a conceptual framework in which experience is a continuous process of semiosis – the making and interpretation of signs. We respond to the qualities, facts, and patterns that we encounter; we generate new signs by combining existing materials in new ways; and like spect-actors practicing TO, we interpret the re-presentations that we have created.⁴³⁶ Every part of experience is a sign which can be interpreted, questioned, clarified, and re-presented. The interpretations can tell us something more: something more about the reality which stands behind that sign's shoulder, something more about our own vision as sign-makers, and something more about the effects that the sign could have if we deployed it in different ways.⁴³⁷ Making semiosis responsible means making it accountable to our best standards of health, rigor, caring, and integral wholeness. Has the process – and the sign it has generated – been emotionally healthy (not twisted)? Has it been intellectually courageous (not cowardly or lazy), morally caring (not selfish or oppressive), religiously committed (not indifferent to integral liberation)? These norms to which we hold ourselves true are themselves moving targets; they cannot be discovered a priori. But they do reveal themselves as we inquire into the lives of the objects,

⁴³⁶ The triadic nature of inquiry in TO and Freirean pedagogy is little remarked, perhaps because Freire and Boal framed their work so squarely in the language of “dialogue.” But that dialogue is clearly triadic: the teacher and student repeatedly interpret the object of study to each other with more and more richness and precision. For a good initial attempt to explore the triadic nature of Freirean pedagogy in Peircean terms, see Floyd Merrell, *Viver Aprendendo: Cruzando Fronteiras dos Conhecimentos com Paulo Freire e Charles S. Peirce* (Ijuí, Brazil: UNIJUÍ, 2008); thanks to Prof. Merrell for sharing his English language manuscript of this book with me, “Living Learning: Crossing Borders and Pragmatizing Knowledge with Paulo Freire and Charles S. Peirce.”

⁴³⁷ Peirce's “Pragmatic Maxim” states: “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.” Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.402. Peirce came to regard this maxim as the “logical key to grounding a realistic, scientific metaphysics” as his thought matured. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience*, 145-146. While Peirce and Gelpi focus their attention on the way that the Maxim clarifies *meaning*, other Pragmatists correctly add that meaning is intimately related to *effects*. See further John E. Smith, *Purpose and Thought*, 50-77; Richard Rorty, “The Pragmatist's Progress,” in Umberto Eco, ed. Stephan Collini, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 89-108.

organisms, and projects with which we are working. They become clearer the more we pursue them, the closer we approach to mastering a particular practice.

Teaching the Bible is best understood as a process of training for responsible semiosis. Responsible semiosis with the Bible implies solving problems within a tradition based and bounded by Scripture, and a community practice that takes Scripture's witness seriously. Responsibility means keeping those solutions true to our points of departure. Mastery means being able to talk about and reflect on our points of departure. It also means that we have internalized healthy norms of artistic creation. A Christian semiotic realist perspective specifies this "internalization" more precisely by locating the norm of Thirdness and the dynamics of integral liberation within us, at the most fundamental level of our experience. It suggests that our spirit is God's Holy Spirit, even if we grieve God's Spirit by our failures to grow and heal. Our task in cooperating with God's work of salvation is to direct our native capacities, to fine tune them in line with God's Spirit, and to redirect them when they are blunted or twisted. In the next chapter, I show how Christian Scripture itself warrants this approach of responsible improvisation – how for Christians, God's Holy Spirit is a spirit of healthy, responsible semiosis.

CHAPTER V. IMPROVISING RESPONSIBLY WITH MATTHEW: PREPARING, PLANNING, AND EVALUATING AN INSTRUCTIONAL UNIT

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I gather up the pedagogical and philosophical insights that I have developed so far and apply them to a concrete example. I describe how a teacher devoted to integral liberation might prepare herself to train high school Bible students in the art of responsible improvisation. I provide a specific example, detail how she might plan a curricular unit. And I evaluate the extent to which that unit as planned may be true to three key points of departure: to the Biblical text under discussion, to the divine interpretive Spirit, and to the high school students involved.

To illustrate the planning process, I develop a unit based on the Parable Discourse (Mt 13:1-52). I develop it in light of the curricular goals that I sketched at the conclusion of Chapter III – that is, as part of a Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) inspired high school Bible course: “The Art of Reading the Bible and Reading the World.” The student goals in such a curriculum are (1) to understand the world around them more deeply by paying attention to it as performance artists; (2) to understand the Bible more deeply by paying attention to it in a similar way; (3) to take charge of their own thinking and learning; (4) to make a real difference, in their lives and community, by using the Bible in writing, performance, and social action. Accordingly, I structure the unit around a capstone project that pulls together and focuses different elements from the Parables Discourse into a concrete intervention which students perform. I set out to design a project that can speak to the heart – a project that can meet needs, satisfy curiosity, express itself beautifully, and make a real difference.

The chapter unfolds in three main sections. After this introduction, I discuss how teachers can prepare themselves to remain true to the Spirit, to the classroom community, and to the Biblical text. The middle part provides a detailed description of a model unit on Mt 13, with notes on the processes of planning, teaching, and assessment. In the final section I turn to evaluation. First I offer a detailed argument that the unit has remained true to the text and the interpretive Spirit; then I offer some preliminary reflections on whether the unit as I have designed it can be true to students that it should serve. Finally, I review the entire example to evaluate whether and how my pedagogical model – “training for responsible improvisation” – may have shed light on the teaching of this passage, and on the practice of teaching Bible in general.

II. Cultivating Our Capacity to Teach Truly

How can high school teachers hone their own practice of mastery as Biblical Jokers? How can they prepare themselves to remain more consistently true to the Spirit of interpretation, to the classroom community of practice, and to the text?

Remaining True to the Spirit: Conversion, Responsibility, and Teacher Formation

The first part of this section uses Gelpi’s analysis of conversion to describe how high school Bible educators can take greater responsibility for their own formation as teachers. It lays out four ways to cultivate the capacity to train students in the art of responsible, improvisational Biblical interpretation. In this way, it addresses the practices and habits that a teacher can cultivate to remain true in spirit as she interprets Scripture and trains others to do so; that is, it addresses the way in which teachers can align themselves with the inner promptings of God’s Holy Spirit, Who lead us toward health, individual personhood-in-community, deeper insight, and integral liberation.

Gelpi's discussion of the forms of conversion suggests four kinds of work that teachers can undertake. *Affective conversion* means taking responsibility for discerning between healthy and twisted attractions and senses of beauty; this suggests that Scripture teachers might seek to cultivate healthy practices in their ritual life, i.e., with the symbolic actions that inform them most deeply. *Personal and social moral conversion* means taking responsibility for our actions towards others; Scripture teachers who value integral liberation might thus seek to cultivate friendships that cross social lines. *Intellectual conversion* means taking responsibility for the thoroughness and courage with which we pursue questions, and struggle for truth; this suggests that Scripture teachers might cultivate a practice of ecumenical Biblical study, crossing lines of denomination, doctrinal expression, and style of prayer. *Religious conversion* is broadest and deepest: it means taking responsibility for our roles in God's project of integral liberation. This suggests that Scripture teachers might greatly benefit from rigorous rehearsal in liberationist practices of interpretation. If Gelpi is right that interpretation is the chief mark of God's Holy Spirit – that tendency, symbol, and mind is the chief dimension of Divine Thirdness at work in the world – then cultivating these four practices can enhance our ability to act in alignment with this Trinitarian Person, our ability to be true to Her gist.

In the first place, I speak of deepening one's participation in healthy liturgy and prayer. Catholic Church teaching recognizes the importance of this practice when it calls on believers to exercise "full, conscious and active participation" in communal Christian ritual activity.⁴³⁸ Just as students in the Cristo Rey setting are formed by the different

⁴³⁸ Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), no. 14, in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1: *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1975). To

types of liturgical involvements that are available to them, teachers can allow liturgy to shape them and inform them more deeply by attending regularly at a home parish or church community; by serving as readers, musicians, artists, or ushers; by participating as planners or ritual performers. Participating in healthy rituals with fellow Christians shapes our habits of action and perception at the visceral and affective level, as healthy symbols and styles permeate our own habits. It also helps shape us at the level of consciousness, as we learn to talk more articulately and cogently about our interpersonal and social Christian norms.⁴³⁹ Looking to myself as an example, during my time at Cristo Rey, I participated in a Christian community with explicit commitments to healing, to nurturing adult responsibility, and to integral liberation. I became integrally involved in the liturgical life of Dignity New York, a prophetic and pastoral community of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Catholics and their allies.⁴⁴⁰ My weekly worship at Dignity strongly influenced my teaching and campus ministry at Cristo Rey, as did my work as a planner and participant in Dignity's creative liturgies and public prayer actions for justice and peace. My participation provided energy and passion; critical perspectives on oppression and liberation; creative ideas. At the same time, some of the rituals that I

translate the Latin "ad plenam illam, consciam atque actuosam liturgicarum celebrationum participationem," Flannery's translation, "full, conscious and active participation," is more accurate than the alternative and somewhat tendentious translation which is sometimes offered ("fully conscious and active participation").

⁴³⁹ On the formative power of liturgy and prayer, see for example Gordon Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 1999); Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA; Oxford; Victoria, Australia: Blackwell, 2004).

⁴⁴⁰ For Dignity as a national movement, see www.dignityusa.org; for the local New York chapter, see www.dignitynewyork.org. An illuminating account of Dignity and its flavor as a liturgical, social, and prophetic community can be found in Leonard Norman Primiano, "The Gay God of the City: The Emergence of the Gay and Lesbian Ethnic Parish," in Scott Thumma and Edward R. Gray, eds., *Gay Religion* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 7-30. Primiano describes the culture and history of Dignity Philadelphia, but his account parallels much of the ethos and history of the New York community as well.

experienced there were shaped by dynamics that were not fully informed by the tendencies of conversion. Here the Scriptural call to discernment is helpful: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1Jn 4:1). By exposing ourselves consciously and diligently to settings where the Spirit moves freely and fiercely, we as teachers allow Her style to shape our own repertoire, and hence to shape the experiences of our students.

In the second place, I speak of consciously cultivating solidary friendships. As liberation theologians have long pointed out, the most important obligation that privileged Christians have toward the poor and disenfranchised, is to love them. This love includes the kind of rigorous analysis that intellectual and political-moral conversion implies: seeking, in the spirit of Hélder Câmara, not simply to feed the poor, but to root out the causes of their life-threatening poverty.⁴⁴¹ At the same time, it also includes the basic dimension of making friends with the people whom as educators we serve and teach. There is a skill – perhaps it is an eschatological calling – to fall innocently, fastly, and clear-headedly in love with each student. Cultivating real affection and compassion for our students and their families, for their hopes and their dreams, can prepare us as teachers to interpret the Biblical text truly and faithfully where they are concerned. Of course, this cultivation of solidary friendships must be carefully negotiated in classroom situations, because teachers have more social and institutional power than students. As adults we are called to exercise the kind of emotional and interpersonal awareness that

⁴⁴¹ “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.” Hélder Câmara, *Dom Helder Camara: Essential Writings*, ed. Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 11.

children and teens do not yet fully possess. As teachers we are called to build friendships with students that guard attentively against harm and abuse.

The challenge of cultivating solidary friendships across boundaries of privilege extends beyond life at work, to the rest of our personal lives. For example, I was a White, professional-class teacher who worked with Black, Latino, and disenfranchised students and families. Do I have close friends who are Black, Latino, and disenfranchised, and if not, why is that so? Because the roots of division – race, class habitus, differences in ethnicity or culture or legal residency status – can run very deep in our socialization and family upbringing, building real friendships across these kinds of differences requires dismantling deep habits and fears. For example, cultivating a friendship with a peer who is Black will eventually lead me to face questions about my own White privilege, questions about the ways that I get to ignore race at times and places where my Black friend cannot. Will I choose to explore those experiences? Will I share my memories and thoughts about my own racist family and friends? Will I share my feelings of awkwardness around race – knowing that in doing so, I expose the racism that I myself have internalized? Working to build real friendships across boundaries of privilege opens space for the Spirit to move more powerfully both in my personal life and in my classroom teaching. Instead of using up class time to do the spade-work of solidarity, I can make it part of my homework, and take the benefits with me into class.

In the third place, I speak of ongoing Biblical study whether formal or self-directed. As a Scripture teacher who wants to stay true to the Spirit in an ecumenical, liberation-oriented setting, I have tried to read Scripture, and read about Scripture, from ecumenical and integrally liberating points of view. This kind of Scriptural learning has

added significantly to my teaching repertoire. The best resources that I have encountered have combined solid exegesis with astute pastoral, educational, and social reflection. In my discussion of curriculum planning below, I suggest Catholic and mainline Protestant resources that can make Biblical texts more accessible to high school teachers. Here I list Evangelical resources which suggest how high school Bible teaching can be both true to the text, and true to an ecumenical classroom environment. These resources sidestep denominational differences around Biblical inerrancy or around the historical reliability of Scripture, and focus instead on integrally liberating readings and reading strategies. For example, Bob Ekblad's *Reading the Bible with the Damned* encourages close narrative and literary readings of Scripture that bring up issues of personal and social moral conversion.⁴⁴² In one chapter, he describes reading about Abraham's troubled family dynamics with Bible students who have family troubles of their own.⁴⁴³ Abraham passes his wife off as his sister; he takes a young concubine to his bed; he abandons the girl and their son to the desert. Should we emulate Abraham – or have those stories been placed in the Bible specifically so that we might learn from his mistakes? Does Scripture simply present moral examples, or does it also include counter-examples? Another example is Jack Levison's *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith*.⁴⁴⁴ Levison presents learned but face-value readings of liberating, Spirit-led practices from the Old and New Testament. He explores three types of Biblical scenarios: the cultivation of skill and virtue; reflection on ecstatic experience; and the Spirit-led interpretation of Scripture.

⁴⁴² Bob Ekblad, *Reading the Bible with the Damned* (Louisville: Westminster, 2005).

⁴⁴³ See Ekblad, "God Empowers the Down and Out: Non-heroic Readings of the Patriarchal Narratives," in *Reading the Bible with the Damned*, 61-92.

⁴⁴⁴ Jack [John R.] Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

Whether one reads the characters and situations that he analyzes as historical reports or as fictional / redactional constructions, the fact that they appear in the Scriptures makes them powerful resources for training students in ecumenical high school settings.

In the fourth place, I speak of rigorous rehearsal in liberationist interpretive practices. Teachers (just like their students) can understand, attend to, and engage their materials like performance artists. It is by mastering such a practice themselves that they become models for their students' own mastery. Mastery is the ability to engage constituent parts of a practice with fluency and ease; the ability to draw on habit and repeated experience in a way that is flexible and strategically aware. The key to mastery is reflective rehearsal. Analysis is part of this process, as we "rehearse" our own work in our own minds. It is helpful to journal, to take notes on our lessons at the end of the day or the end of the unit, to notice the places where our teaching is rigid, and to notice where it flows like an art. But even more, mastery requires repeated practice. The most direct way to train Bible teachers for responsible improvisation is to give them the visceral experience of responsible improvisation. Through TO or similar practices – through exercises, games, and performances (especially performances involving Scripture) – teachers can begin to discover the habits of thinking and action that they want to demechanize. They can begin to discover the flexible strengths that they want to build up. They can begin to hone their perceptions of the text, of their students' experience, and of the free, fierce ways that interpretation and liberation may be moving within their own hearts.

Remaining True to the Interpretive Community: Student Premises, Student Potential

Remaining true to the interpreting community in a Cristo Rey high school Bible classroom means taking seriously both students' cultural presuppositions about Scripture and their ability to investigate Scripture more deeply. Kathryn Tanner argues that a "plain sense" reading of Scripture begins with the "consensus reading," that is, the "community's unselfconscious habit" of interpretation.⁴⁴⁵ A plain sense reading quickly opens out, however, into correlative questions about the deeper, non-plain-sense meanings that might be conveyed by the text.⁴⁴⁶ Tanner's empirical approach to plain sense understandings – she sets out to investigate how people read Scripture rather than to establish *a priori* how they should read it – sits well with a pedagogy that seeks to be true to the readers involved. It identifies and honors the common sense dimensions of current readings; it also keeps teachers on the look out for questions and doubts that can generate deeper inquiry. Surveys show that most Christians in the United States – Protestant and Catholic alike – expect the Bible to provide life guidance and reliable knowledge about God; this is their plain sense approach to the text.⁴⁴⁷ In addition, the

⁴⁴⁵ Kathryn Tanner, "Theology and the Plain Sense," in Garrett Green, ed., *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 63. Tanner represents a critical take on "Yale School," post-liberal theology which is compatible with practical theological underpinnings of this dissertation. In determining the "plain sense" of a Scriptural text, she advocates "a theological procedure whose closest analogue" is a "sociological and anthropological investigation of communal practices." Tanner, "Theology and the Plain Sense," 60; cf. idem, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), esp. 38-58.

⁴⁴⁶ Kathryn Tanner, "Theology and the Plain Sense."

⁴⁴⁷ A 2007 Baylor University poll found that 25% of Christians surveyed who had an opinion on the topic believed "The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word ' for 'word, on all subjects;" 42% of Christian respondents held that "The Bible is perfectly true, but it should not be taken literally, word-for-word. We must interpret its meaning." A Gallup report averaging poll results for 2005-2007 found that 21% of Catholics surveyed believed that the Bible is the "actual word of God, to be taken literally, while 61% of Catholics believed the Bible was simply "inspired" by God. Aaron B. Franzen and Jenna Griebel, "Understanding a Cultural Identity: The Confluence of Education, Politics, and Religion within the American Concept of Biblical Literalism," *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 4 (2013): 521-543; Frank Newport, "One-Third of Americans Believe the Bible Is Literally True: High inverse correlation between education and belief in a literal Bible" (Princeton: Gallup News Service), 25 May 2007,

populist, egalitarian approach to the Bible that characterizes many North American believers encourages them to interpret Scripture according to their own conscience and experience. This sentiment, which may have been rare before the Protestant Reformation, is now part of the dominant “Yankee idiom”⁴⁴⁸ of North Americans culture. An attitude of *claritas Scripturae*, “the conviction that scripture is clear in itself,”⁴⁴⁹ is deeply appealing to many North American Christians.

It seems fair to surmise that Christian high school students similarly expect to grasp from the Bible both stories about God and rules by which to live life correctly. It seems fair to surmise that they, too, might expect Scripture to make “common sense.” The high school curriculum builds on the capacity for such common sense-making by encouraging students to construct their own arguments and opinions about texts, and by insisting that they support their arguments with evidence from the text they are reading.⁴⁵⁰ In other words, a literate, North American high school student is primed to think that Scripture could very well be revelatory; that it should be understandable; and that the evidence-based strategies which he is learning in English and History class (such as close reading, word-study, literary approaches, and research into context and content) could also help him when reading the Bible to figure out “what the text really means.”

At the same time, remaining true to student culture as a point of departure can be complicated when studying the Bible ecumenically, because Catholic and mainline

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/27682/onethird-americans-believe-bible-literally-true.aspx>, accessed 29 Jan 2015.

⁴⁴⁸ The phrase is from Donald L. Gelpi, *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship between Nature and Grace* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 174.

⁴⁴⁹ Wayne A. Meeks, “Literalism, Common Sense, and the Price of Dogs,” *The Yale Review* 94 (2006): 6.

⁴⁵⁰ For a discussion of the use of evidence across the high school writing curriculum, see James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, “Using Evidence in Writing: A Policy Research Brief produced by the National Council of Teachers of English,” *Council Chronicle* [National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL] 22, no. 2 (November 2012): 1-3, especially the sources cited in nn. 3 and 4.

Protestant scholarship on the origin and historical reliability of Scripture often comes into conflict with the perspectives of Evangelical and Pentecostal students. Evangelicals and Pentecostals – both lay and scholarly – embrace many of the interpretive approaches that Catholics, mainline Protestants, and secular interpreters would also embrace. These include close reading, careful word-study, many literary approaches, and much of the historical research into context and content that characterizes Biblical scholarship today.⁴⁵¹ However, the tradition of historical-critical scholarship – the tradition that has dominated university and mainline Protestant Biblical Studies from the late 19th Century onward, and has shaped most of Catholic scholarship since the mid 20th Century – is less welcome by Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Historical-critical scholarship is built on the canons of literary analysis and of modern historiography; it brackets out supernatural factors like miracles, prescient prophecy, and the role of God in composing prophetic oracles. It dissolves Scriptural texts into their hypothetical constituent sources. It finds pseudonymity and prophecies *ex eventu* all over the Bible. Evangelicals and Pentecostals rarely embrace the source-critical dimensions of this scholarship, because they can undermine believers' confidence in the value of Scripture as a reliable, eye-witness account.

In an ecumenical high school religion classroom that is committed to students' integral liberation, I have become convinced that the priority should not be specifically to proselytize for (or against) a source-critical reading of Scripture. The priority is to make

⁴⁵¹ For a review of the scholarly “historical-grammatical” method that has shaped Evangelical scholarship for centuries, see J. S. Sexton, “Emerging Church Hermeneutics and the Historical-Grammatical Method,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 53, no. 2 (2011): 158-159; Raymond F. Surburg, “Presuppositions of the Historical-Grammatical Method as Employed by Historic Lutheranism,” *Springfielder* 38, no. 4 (March 1975): 280-287.

Scripture and Scriptural scholarship available; to hone students' perception of Scripture; to generate rhetorical options; to help students respond to their lives through the Scriptures in ways that are more creative, more critical, and more responsible. For example, when I set out to convey the Four Source hypothesis of Torah redaction, I presented the lesson as a textual problem rather than as the textual dimension of an existential issue. I laid out the discrepancies in Genesis (multiple creation stories, conflicting details in the Noah narrative) and showed students step by step how scholars deduced the presence of different sources. While my most intellectually curious students responded positively to these lessons, other students found them confusing, and showed little ability to retain or make sense of what they had "learned." However, the class as a whole responded with animation when we discussed Gen 1 and 2-3 in terms of their existential impact. Even students from more strictly Bible-believing traditions embraced the notion that these two stories, incompatible though they might appear, could convey important and distinct "deeper meanings" of great relevance to their teenage lives.⁴⁵²

I argue that in ecumenical settings committed to liberation, it is best to begin with plain or common-sense readings of Scripture that link Biblical passages to real life situations. Next students and teachers together can dig deeper, through closer reading and text-based reflection. Finally, teachers can add source-critical scholarship to the classroom discussion, opening up further avenues of reflection and dialogue. This graduated approach initiates conversations where most students are at, rather than starting the discussion from the work of source- and redactional-scholarly experts.

⁴⁵² I had a similar experience in my Sophomore sections, where I taught the Two Source solution to the Synoptic Problem. While some students found the textual problem curious, others did not warm to the topic at all.

Questions of accessibility and ecumenicity also take on concrete dimensions in the area of textbook selection. On the practical level, textbooks like the Bible are a significant investment for economically marginalized families; at the same time, selecting a common text for all students allows teachers to avoid constant in-class confusion and debate over different translations. When a Cristo Rey Freshman buys a Bible, it should serve her well for at least her four years of high school; it should make the Scriptures available for classroom study and for personal devotion. Comparing two options illustrates the kinds of issues involved in selecting the particular Bible edition as the mandatory student text. Consider on the one hand *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* by St. Mary's Press (a progressive and respected Catholic high school publisher); this edition uses the Good News translation (GNT).⁴⁵³ Consider on the other hand *The Holy Bible with Deuterocanonicals / Apocrypha* by the American Bible Society (a mainly Protestant organization that cultivates strong partnerships with the Catholic Church); this edition uses the Contemporary English Version (CEV). Even in terms of translation, one of these popular versions is more accessible than the other.

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water.

(Gn 1:1-2 GNT)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was barren, with no form of life; it was under a roaring ocean covered with darkness. But the Spirit of God was moving over the water.

(Gn 1:1-2 CEV)

The CEV offers a less complicated sentence structure. While the GNT translation contains two subordinate clauses (“when God ...,” “The raging ocean that covered ...”), the CEV is more paratactic: it contains no subordinate clauses, only short sentences or

⁴⁵³ *Breakthrough: the Bible for Young Catholics, Catholic Edition* (Winona, MI: St. Mary's Press, 2006).

independent clauses linked with coordinating conjunctions like “and” and “but”. The CEV also uses simpler vocabulary: “barren ... no form of life ... covered” instead of “formless ... desolate ... engulfed.” For students with less exposure to high registers of English, and for students who are not native speakers of English, the CEV allows more unfettered access to Scripture.

In addition, teachers should think carefully about the para-textual apparatus that their editions of the Bible will provide. For example, when introducing the New Testament and the Gospel of Matthew, *Breakthrough!* makes the following points:

An old tradition says it was the Apostle Matthew ... who wrote [the Gospel that now bears his name] ... but no one knows for sure. ... It is believed that Mark was written first. The writers of Matthew and Luke probably used Mark as a starting point in creating their Gospels. That is why these three Gospels have some very similar stories. ... [S]ome letters that say they were written by St. Paul or St. Peter may have been written by other early Christians.⁴⁵⁴

The American Bible Society text also provides introductory material to the New Testament and the Gospel of Matthew that helpfully highlights theological themes, but it avoids source-critical topics;⁴⁵⁵ in this way, it neither advocates nor impugns source-critical approaches to Scripture. In a Cristo Rey setting, the American Bible Society’s CEV edition may be the better choice as a mandatory textbook, with the implicit sense of hegemonic approval that the use of a mandatory text always implies. This choice would place a greater burden on the teacher who must then resource the classroom discussion with different materials in order to broach source-critical dimensions of the text.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ *Breakthrough*, 1379, 1377-1378.

⁴⁵⁵ *The Holy Bible with Deuterocanonicals / Apocrypha* (New York: American Bible Society, 1999), [1298] recto and [1299] recto.

⁴⁵⁶ The same issues of sensitivity apply in an ecumenical high school setting where students can handle more challenging translations. For example, should classes that read the NRSV use editions where scholarly essays lie inside the covers of Bible, or should they use editions that include little or no scholarship, relying on the teacher for secondary readings?

Remaining True to the Text: Attentive, Informed Reading and Scholarly Comment

How can a teacher prepare herself to remain true to the text as a point of departure in her high school classroom? For myself, when preparing a text for instruction the first step was always to read the text and to re-read it closely. To this discipline, a teacher brings all the tools of responsible, critical thinking that she has acquired as a mature reader over time: lenses of historical knowledge, political analysis, psychological theory, Christian doctrine, and so on. For the religion teacher with a basic liberal arts education, many of these tools will already be internalized; in fact, a good number of high school religion teachers possess these – and only these – kinds of training, since they will have little formal theological coursework under their belts. A 1998-2000 survey of US Catholic high schools found that only “57.1% of religion teachers [had] completed an undergraduate or graduate major in theology, religious studies, or religious education,” and “86% of administrators responded that there are too few qualified religion teacher candidates in their geographical area.”⁴⁵⁷ Even so, many solid and succinct exegetical resources are available to the literate and interested Bible high school teacher: texts and commentaries that can sit on her home or classroom shelf as a ready reference for herself and her students. A short list of these references might include *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* (with its solid introductions, sidebars, and references at a teenaged reading level), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* and *The Catholic Bible: Personal Study Edition* (both with equally fine background materials),⁴⁵⁸ the *New Jerome Bible*

⁴⁵⁷ Timothy J. Cook and William J. Hudson, “Toward the Professionalization of Catholic High School Religion Teachers: An Assessment of Religion Teaching as a Profession,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 9, no. 4 (June 2006): 413, 400.

⁴⁵⁸ Michael D. Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Fully Revised Fourth Edition (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2010); Jean Marie Hiesberger, ed., *The Catholic Bible: Personal Study Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Commentary;⁴⁵⁹ and the *Women's Bible Commentary*.⁴⁶⁰ Still, while making use of these secondary resources, I returned always to the text itself with its interpretive and improvisational possibilities; I trusted that diligent reading would allow me and my students to be prompted responsibly by the Spirit.

The text of Mt 13:1-52 is a discrete pericope in the Gospel of Matthew with a clear beginning and a clear end. It is commonly labeled the “Parable Discourse” (Mt 13:1-52), the third of five major speeches that Jesus presents in Mt.⁴⁶¹ Relying on key points in the compositional structure of the pericope, one might lay out the Discourse as follows.

Jesus goes out to teach “the crowds,” who are so numerous he must address them from a boat. He tells them the Parable of the Sower – whereupon the disciples ask him, “Why do you use nothing but stories when you speak to the people?” Jesus responds with a short speech and a Bible quotation from Is 6:9-10. He explains the Sower parable; and he tells three more parables about “the kingdom of heaven”: The Mustard Seed, the

⁴⁵⁹ Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Bible Commentary* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990). Recommending this commentary to teachers is Christine Schmertz Navarro et al., *Teaching Activities Manual for The Catholic Youth Bible* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000), 10; recommending it to teens are Michael Pennock, *Encountering Jesus in the New Testament* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009), 275 and Daniel Smith-Christopher, *The Old Testament: Our Call to Faith and Justice* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2005), 254.

⁴⁶⁰ Carol A Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012).

⁴⁶¹ In this chapter, I use “Mt” to refer to the Gospel of Matthew, and “Matthew” to refer to the evangelist. The five major Discourses in Mt are often listed as the “Sermon on the Mount” (Basic Teaching, Mt 5-7), Discipleship (Mt 10), Parables (Mt 13:1-52), Community (Mt 18), and End Times (Mt 24-25). See Dennis C. Duling and Norman Perrin, with Robert Fern, ed., *The New Testament: Proclamation and Paranesis, Myth and History*, 3rd Edition (Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers 1994), 341. For the characteristics that separate the Discourses from the rest of Mt's text, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-1997), 2:370-372. Hereafter “Davies and Allison.” See also Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989-2005 [German original, 1985-1997]), 2:228-232 with the literature cited there. Hereafter, “Luz.”

Leaven, and the Wheat and Tares. Marking the midpoint of the periscope, Matthew inserts one of his formal “Fulfilment Quotations:”

Jesus used stories when he spoke to the people. In fact, he did not tell them anything without using stories. So God’s promise came true, just as the prophet had said,

“I will use stories to speak my message
and to explain things that have been hidden
since the creation of the world.” (Mt 13:34-35 CEV)⁴⁶²

The second half of the pericope occurs once Jesus has gone back “inside” (13:36). Now that he is alone with his disciples, they ask him the meaning of the Wheat and Tares Parable. Jesus explains, and offers three more parables about the kingdom of heaven: The Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Dragnet. The entire Discourse culminates with a dramatic question and answer between Jesus and his close followers:

Jesus asked his disciples if they understood all these things. They said, “Yes, we do.” So he told them, “Every student of the Scriptures who becomes a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like someone who brings out new and old treasures from the storeroom.” (13:51-52 CEV)

By way of comparison, the NRSV reads:

And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (13:52)

The narrative of the Gospel then picks up immediately: “When Jesus had finished telling these stories, he left that place. ...” (13:53 CEV).

To analyze the passage more deeply, I turn to easily accessible secondary sources. Benedict Viviano in *The New Jerome Bible Commentary* provides an exegesis of the Parables Discourse that underlines its importance and begins to suggest specific foci for teaching:

⁴⁶² The “fulfillment” language is clearer in the NRSV: “This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet ...” (Mt 13:35).

The third great discourse (13:1-52) consists of seven parables and some explanations of them. Structurally this is the center and high point of the entire Gospel. Everything is concentrated on the kingdom, which, however, remains mysterious (13:11). All the material up to v 35 has a parallel in Mark or Luke. But from v 36 on Matthew goes his own way. This shift is indicated by a move from public speaking to a more intimate discourse to the disciples in the house. ... The evangelists themselves probably composed parables to illustrate aspects of Jesus' teaching as well as reshaped his parables to fit new circumstances.⁴⁶³

Reading the Discourse with Viviano's commentary brings to light some key themes and vocabulary: "understanding" and "explaining;" "the kingdom of heaven;" the parables as similes for the kingdom; the parables as events or compositions in themselves. Viviano draws particular attention to the structural elements at the middle and the end. Since the story begins with Jesus addressing the crowds from a boat, the editorial comments and the fulfillment citation in Mt 13:34-35 seem to receive special prominence, coinciding as they do with a key transition from outdoors (boat and crowds) to indoors. This suggests that Messianic proof text at 13:35 may be an important element in this pericope. (So does Jesus' lengthy paraphrase and quote of Isaiah in Mt 13:13-15).⁴⁶⁴ The question, answer, and parable at the end of the pericope are also particularly striking. By speaking of "the student of Scripture who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven," the closing parable easily prompts high school students to ask, "Could this parable be talking about me?" Comparing the NRSV translation prompts two more, related questions: "Is Jesus calling on me to be a 'scribe'?" and "What in the world could that mean?"

⁴⁶³ Benedict Viviano, "The Gospel according to Matthew", in Brown, et al., *New Jerome Bible Commentary*, 655.

⁴⁶⁴ Jesus paraphrases Is 6:9-10 in Mt 13:13 and goes on to quote the entirety of Is 6:9-10 in the subsequent two verses, 13:14-15. For questions about whether vv. 14-15 are authentic to Mt or a spurious later addition, see Davies and Allison, 2:393-394. Because Jesus essentially summarizes these verses in 13:13, their presence or absence have little bearing on discussions about Matthew's – and Jesus' – citational habits.

Consulting the commentaries more deeply actually sharpens this tension.

According to Viviano, not only does Mt 13:52 “suggests the existence and activity of Christian scribes in Matthew’s church ([cf.] 23:34),”⁴⁶⁵ it is also a democratic mandate for disciple-like creativity:

“every scribe who has been discipled” ... is a parable about making parables, a metaparable that invites the reader/hearer to enter the parabolic process through creating new parables to add to the ones just given.⁴⁶⁶

For Viviano, the main point of this last parable is the invitation to compose one’s own parables. The *Catholic Study Bible* presents a different perspective.

This saying about the Christian scribe cannot be taken as applicable to all who accept the message of Jesus. ... The church of Matthew has leaders among whom are a group designated as “scribes” (23:34). Like the scribes of Israel, they are teachers. It is the Twelve and these their later counterparts to whom this verse applies. The scribe... instructed in the kingdom of heaven ... provides in his own teaching both the new and the old as interpreted and fulfilled by the new.⁴⁶⁷

Both readings underline the mandate to reinterpret and propagate Jesus’ message. But does Jesus address this mandate to all his followers, or only to select teachers with special authority? This conflict of interpretations can be exploited to great benefit in a high school classroom. It provides an opportunity for a genuine co-investigation in which teacher and students can explore together which interpretation rings more true to the text and to their own situations and hearts.

III. Constructing the Unit: Capstone Project and Lessons

The process of constructing this unit entails correlating the particulars of the text, the insights of secondary resources, and the reality of the students. It is an iterative process of abduction and hypothesis-testing in which the teacher identifies themes and

⁴⁶⁵ Viviano, “Gospel according to Matthew”, 657.

⁴⁶⁶ Viviano, “Gospel according to Matthew”, 657.

⁴⁶⁷ *Catholic Bible: Personal Study Edition*, ad loc. 13:52.

lines of inquiry that might speak to her students. These topics become the vehicles for making Scriptural material available to students so that they can engage it in artful and responsible ways.

The prominence of v. 53 makes this verse an appealing focus for the unit's capstone project. Structurally it is the punch-line of the discourse; thematically it is a fascinating "metaparable;" existentially it provides a plausible reference to the very students who are studying Scripture. For this reason, I would use v. 53 to frame a final project by asking students "to bring out new and old treasures" by writing their own, Biblically-based parables concerning the Cristo Rey setting. This in turn structures my entire unit as I prepare students to tackle the task. For example, to make Jesus' parables available as creative material with which the students can improvise the unit could include close readings of each of the parables. To make sense of the two references in Mt 13 to the "fulfillment" of Scripture – apparently part of the meaning of the "old things" in v. 53 – the unit could address the dynamics and legitimacy of proof-texting, a topic of some relevance to teenagers and to believers in general. In addition, several cross-references to Old Testament allusions *within the parables themselves* are pointed out by Viviano and by the footnotes in the CEV edition; this includes allusions to 2 Esd 7:97 and Dn 12:3 (at Mt 13:43), and allusions to Ps 104:12, Dn 4:1-28, and Ez 17:22-24 (at Mt 13:32).⁴⁶⁸ Together with the proof texts in Mt 13:14-16 and Mt 13:35 they too are examples of "bringing out new and old treasures;" thus the project could include studying

⁴⁶⁸ Allusions are at play in other verses within the Parables Discourse, for example "the gnashing [NRSV]" or "gritting [CEV] of teeth" (Mt 13:42, 50; cf. Ps 112:10); and "the flaming furnace" (Mt 13:42, 50; cf. Dn 3:6, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21. If the teacher does not make the connection between "the flaming furnace" and "the fiery furnace" in which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown (Dn 3), well-versed Protestant students may very well do so on their own.

and practicing the art of Biblical allusion. Finally, according to a source-critical analysis, the Discourse includes a reworking of Mk 4:1-20, 30-34 (and possibly 4:26-29 as well).⁴⁶⁹ Is this another dimension of Jesus' instruction to "bring out new and old treasures from the storehouse" of tradition? Is this another way to improvise responsibly with the Biblical text? The unit could ask students to evaluate for themselves what kinds of "improvising" Mt 13:52 really authorizes.

What follows next is a (slightly tongue-in-cheek) exemplar of the completed project which students can and use as a rough guide, to emulate and outdo:

...

The Cristo Rey Parable Project

In teams, students will create a parable and accompanying explanation describing an important aspect of the kingdom of heaven as it needs to be understood here in CRNYHS. The format is as follows; examples are shown in *italics*.

1. The Parable of the _____ X _____

e.g., The Parable of the Ball-point Pen

- 2. An **artwork** that illustrates the Theme of the parable appropriately. (This may be visual or computer based; if the latter, it must be pre-approved by the teacher and displayed as a QR code.)**



3. Jesus said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like"

Jesus said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a ball-point pen that someone started

⁴⁶⁹ Viviano, "Matthew," 655-656; see also Luz 2:228-265, esp. 231-232, 253.

writing with. At first nobody thought her writing was any good. But the more she wrote, the more impressed everybody became.

4. His students came to him and said, “Explain to us the story about the X.”

Then Jesus answered, “....”

His students came to him and said, “Explain to us the story about the ball-point pen.” Then Jesus answered, “Many teenagers think that being a good Christian is about going to church and not having sex. But religion is also about respecting other people and taking them seriously. Students at Cristo Rey need to start treating each other with more respect. Just like me, they should serve each other, and not just worry about being served (Mt 20:28).

Jesus’ “answer” should not give a piece-by-piece description of the parable.

Instead, it should explain why this parable is important for students and teachers at CRNYHS today. It must mention Cristo Rey High School by name and it must make at least one reference to a Bible story or quote.

Passing projects will be posted on the Religion Department Bulletin Board for one week. Teachers and members of the student body can read them and respond; the most thoughtful responses will also be posted on the board.

5. Lastly, each student will write a **paragraph completing this sentence and explaining their answer: “As teenagers we should / should not use stories when we talk about our religious beliefs, because”**

...

Providing a concrete model helps to “scaffold” the project by showing students what a finished product might look like; it also helps them see how each of the lessons (below)

contributes to the final product. The lessons, in turn, bring together the text and the interpretive community around specific passages, in more granular detail.

Lessons for Days 1 and 2 allow students to engage the Parables discourse as a unit and the different parables individually; they invite students to discern how these parables may be relevant to teenage life. Here it is helpful to use a simple and systematic method of close reading for personal engagement that students can practice and memorize for future use. For example, the “Swedish Marking” or Vasteras Method encourages students to mark Scriptural texts with four different symbols, and then share their reflections:⁴⁷⁰

- ı candle: the text has given me a new insight
- ▲ upward arrow: the text tells me about God, or comes to me as “good news”
- ▼ downward arrow: the text reminds me of a need that I have, or a challenge I am facing
- ? question mark: I don’t understand what the text is saying; I need to ask a teacher, look it up, or think about it a lot more.

After marking the passage, writing down their reflections, and sharing select thoughts in pairs and/or large group discussion, students break into small groups to study one parable or set of parables more intensely. At this point, Image Theatre can be used – with the help of a structured worksheet or graphic organizer, the small groups can identify two or three key terms from their parable, and use them to create, dynamize, and analyze an Image of the Parable. Next, the students might use reference materials from the classroom library that the teacher curates and provides to explore the use of parables in general, and in

⁴⁷⁰ This systematic method of reflecting on sacred texts was developed for lay-led Bible study in Västerås, just west of Stockholm. See Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002), 25-26.

Jesus' teaching. Finally, the students develop short presentations which (a) reflect on the overall genre of "parable," (b) explain the meaning of their particular parable(s) as they have explored them through Image Theatre, and (c) answer a question that the teacher has framed to connect their parable(s) to teenage life today. For example:

- Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:3-9, 18-23). What are the different types of soil in teenage life?⁴⁷¹
- Parables of the Pearl and the Treasure (13:44-46). What is the toughest thing for teenagers to give up in exchange for the kingdom of heaven?⁴⁷²
- Parables of the Wheat and Tares, and the Dragnet (13:24-30, 47-50) How should we deal with trouble makers?
- Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven (13:31-33) In what situations might teens find encouragement and spiritual support where they might least expect it?

Engaging the text in this way builds on students' plain sense reading and reflecting capacities. It invites the sharing of expert knowledge on the students' own terms. It also opens up space to question the text – for example, I found that students often used a "?" to signify the following reaction: "I don't understand why Jesus would say this ..."

Day 3 is an analysis of proof texting, which plays an important role in Mt 13 and an equally important role in the lives of many believers (Christian and otherwise) today. This lesson studies the proof texts in Mt 13 closely to determine where they come from, how they have been cited, and how they have been used. Is it OK to paraphrase a citation to prove your point? Are these texts predictions or explanations? How do teens use proof

⁴⁷¹ Cf. *Breakthrough*, "Pray It! Are you good soil?", sidebar, 1404.

⁴⁷² Cf. *Breakthrough*, "Are you willing to do whatever it takes to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven?", footer, 1406.

texts today – or how do proof texts get used on teens? Is the practice of proof texting legitimate? After touching on all these questions in classroom discussion, students can write a well-structured paragraph answering one of them and explaining their answer.

The lesson for Day 4 concerns the evocative power of Biblical allusion, and provides students with practice in that craft. It focuses attention on the allusive intertexts that occur in Mt 13. What if anything might these textual echoes add to the point or the power of Jesus' words in 13:32 and 13:43? A good way into this conversation is to study the use of Biblical intertexts in popular artwork today. Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" provides an excellent example.

I've heard there was a secret chord
 That David played to please the Lord
 But you don't really care for music, do you?
 ...
 Your faith was strong but you needed proof.
 You saw her bathing on the roof;
 Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you.
 She tied you to a kitchen chair
 She broke your throne, she cut your hair,
 And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah ...⁴⁷³

This passage, so rich in religious language and secular image, fuses the Biblical story of David, adulterous Psalmist and king, with the tale of Samson, and the story of a present-day broken love. After listening to and studying this modern passage, the class can generate a list of Biblical stories; students can then write a short poem or "spit" some "verses" alluding to one or more of these stories. This kind of exercise helps students develop the habit of citing Scripture in creative, targeted ways.

⁴⁷³ Alan Light, *The Holy or the Broken: Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley & the Unlikely Ascent of "Hallelujah"* (New York: Atria / Simon and Schuster, 2012), ix. Originally released in 1984, it has now been covered multiple times to international acclaim. My thanks to the audience members at the 2014 BIAPT meeting, who suggested this example and this whole of line musical inquiry in their comments on a previous version of this chapter.

Day 5 addresses the rationale for parable-making that lies at the heart of the unit project. It focuses on a close reading of Mt 13:52. What does Jesus mean by “bringing out new and old treasures from the storeroom”? What are the possible meanings for “bring out,” “new,” “old,” “storeroom,” and “treasure”? In the end, each student paraphrases the parable for herself by using the meaning for each word that makes the most sense to her. With this new version of the parable (as she has defined it) in hand, she imagines one way in which she might fulfill this saying as a responsible Christian young adult. Here too, Image Theatre can be used. The teacher might invite a representative sampling of student volunteers to create and analyze their reaction to the Parable, or she might invite the whole class or *en masse* to explore for themselves the different visceral dimensions of being a well-trained teenage Biblical scribe. Discussion follows.

Day 6 broaches the source-critical question by discussing the similarities between the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Using the cross references noted in the CEV edition section headings within Mt 13, the teacher addresses the theory that Matthew has reworked Mark as a source. Teacher and students together note Matthew’s putative redactions and discuss what they might mean. The question is: “Does Jesus intend us to rework the Bible and to retell his stories in such a redactional way?” In other words, do Christians go too far by putting new or remixed words into Jesus’ mouth? Students who answer, “This goes too far!” can petition the teacher to adjust the parameters of the unit project. The final several days of class work are devoted to groups working on the project itself, and to group presentations of completed projects.

For each element of the unit, and for its capstone project, a well thought out process of assessment and grading can help both the teacher and the students remain focused on the goal of making a real difference through creative, critical Scriptural work. One way to accomplish this is by using detailed grading rubrics. The best rubrics contain well chosen, well articulated categories which help students to gauge their own progress. These categories are teaching tools in themselves, in that they underline the most important (gradable) elements that a particular assignment contains. The categories for grading different assignments should reflect key parts of the unit's strategic goals.

- The categories for grading the capstone project might include “creativity,” “content,” “organization,” “mechanics,” “responsible message,” and “applicability to CRNYHS.”
- In the grading of different individual writing exercises like Vasteras readings and paragraph-length essays, the categories can highlight close reading of Scriptural text. Do students' markings and written reflections show thoughtful engagement with Mt 13? How many pieces of evidence are used in the paragraph on proof texting, and how well are they used? How complete is the modern day paraphrase of Mt 13:52, and how clear is its application?
- Grading small group presentations on the particular parables in Mt 13 might cover the following: Does the presentation show comprehension of the assigned background reading? Does it identify key images from the assigned parable and communicate its basic themes? Does it make multiple connections between the parable and modern teenage life?

- In grading the allusive poems and rap snippets for creativity, the categories might address questions of novelty, aptness, and eloquent execution in the links drawn between ancient Scripture and present-day life.

The more thoughtful and explicit the outcomes that the teacher has articulated and shared from the beginning, the more clearly both students and teacher can measure work products against their specified norms.

The teacher can also assess the unit's impact as part of the overall curriculum. This kind of measurement can be attempted in one-on-one end of year interviews, written reflections, and course evaluations where students assess their own growth in Bible familiarity, and where they get to assess the course and the teaching as well. What, if anything, do the students remember about this unit at the end of the year? How, if at all, has this unit helped them in understanding and expressing their faith? These sorts of reflections and assessments can also be attempted by means of Image Theatre; for this reason, digital photos and written records of the observations and discussions that students generate can be valuable resources in a classroom that uses TO. For example, students might revisit the ways that they expressed "Classroom," "Religion," or "Reading the Bible" in September. Has anything changed in the way that they now image those concepts in June?

IV. Evaluating the Results

The process of teaching, like the process of inquiry, benefits from deeper reflection and from ongoing testing of our working hypotheses. How can the teacher test even further the extent to which a curricular unit has been "true" to its points of

departure? In what ways has the unit that I have described here been true to the text, true to the Spirit of interpretation, and true to the classroom community?

A Teaching Project That Is True to the Text

For example, do teachers who ask students to write new parables and to place them in the mouth of Jesus remain true to Matthew's Gospel, or in the artistry of their pedagogical practice, have they lost the thread of Matthew's Christian witness? Submitting the premise of this unit to Biblical scholarship is a key way to test it more rigorously against the data of the Matthean text. Here I offer a three-fold argument that my capstone project has been true to its textual point of departure. Specifically, I contend in this section (1) that Matthew presents Jesus as a creative and responsible reworker of Scripture; and (2) that Matthew's Jesus enjoins his disciples to go and do likewise. In the next section, on being "True to the Spirit," I make the final point (3) that the Gospel of Matthew supports an interpretive model which warrants modern-day Christians to follow suit.

Firstly, then, I argue that throughout his Gospel story, Matthew presents Jesus as a creative and responsible reworker of Scripture. The way that Jesus quotes Mc 7:6 in Mt 10:34-37 shows how Jesus' scriptural citations in Matthew often contain a significant twist. Jesus says,

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set
 a man against his father,
 and a daughter against her mother,
 and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
 and one's foes will be members of one's own household.
 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁴ For the remainder of this section, Scripture translations are drawn from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

In the center of the quotation (vv. 35-36), Jesus reproduces a part of Micah's ancient lament for a society from which "the faithful" and "the upright" have disappeared (Mc 7:1-7):

For a son dishonors a father,
a daughter shall rise up against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,
the enemies of a man are the men in his house. (Mc 7:6 NETS)⁴⁷⁵

By changing the structure of Mc 7:6 so that all three familial pairs are governed by the same verb *dichazō* "to set against, to divide in two," Jesus gives greater emphasis to the idea of splitting; he also connects the Micah quotation with his previous statement that to follow him can split one's family as if by "a sword."⁴⁷⁶ By replacing the phrase *hoi andres hoi en tō oikō autou* "the men in his house" with *oikiakoi* "members of one's household,"⁴⁷⁷ Jesus links the Micah passage to his earlier pronouncement in Mt 10:25: "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household [his *oikiakoi*]!"⁴⁷⁸ The upshot of these changes is to reframe the thrust of the Scripture that Jesus has cited. No longer is it merely a lament about the sad state of society, from which only God – or the Messiah – can save us.⁴⁷⁹ Jesus proposes that family conflict is the expected *consequence* of the Messiah's arrival. The Messiah

⁴⁷⁵ NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint. Because this passage is paralleled at Lk 12:53, it appears to be drawn from the Q source; but the versions of it in Mt and Lk are quite different. Luz 2:107-108 and Davies and Allison 2:219-220 note that Matthew's version of the Micah text differs from the LXX, and that Matthew may have had the MT in mind when quoting or rendering v. 36.

⁴⁷⁶ Luz 2:110 and n. 39. The word *dichazō* "to split" appears nowhere else in the New Testament.

⁴⁷⁷ Mc 7:6 LXX *hoi andres hoi en tō oikō autou*; Mt 10:36 *hoi oikiakoi autou*.

⁴⁷⁸ In the New Testament, the word *oikiakos* occurs only in these two verses in Mt.

⁴⁷⁹ This is the clear implication of Micah's lament, which ends: "But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for God my savior; my God will hear me." (Mc 7:7 LXX) It is also the way in which Micah's lament was interpreted in the Jewish literature around Jesus' own time – as a description of the moral and social catastrophe that would mark the End Times, a catastrophe that the Messiah would rectify. Davies and Allison, 2:219-220. At the same time, it is possible that citing this passage is actually meant to bring the broader Old Testament context and Mc 7:7 LXX to mind: a disciples ought not look to family and friend non-believers, but only "look to the Lord [Jesus]" as "savior."

will not save us from these divisions; to the contrary, being part of Christ's household will *cause* these kinds of splits!⁴⁸⁰

In addition, Matthew's Jesus is creative and conservative in the way that he uses Scripture to re-prioritize Scripture. For example, as Sheri Klouda has argued, Jesus' interpretive strategy in Mt seems to be to "uncover the latent principles acting beneath the surface" of Torah injunctions.⁴⁸¹ Jesus himself affirms, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). Jesus' arguments in Mt are carefully and Biblically reasoned. Thus, when the Pharisees complain that his hungry disciples are contravening Sabbath strictures by plucking and eating grain (Mt 12:1-2), Jesus responds with three Scriptural points:

- (1) He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests.
- (2) Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the Temple is here.
- (3) But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice', you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath." (Mt 12:3-8)

The first point refers to an incident in 1 Sam 21:1-6 involving King David, considered a "prophet" in First Century C.E. Judaism (cf. Acts 2:30). The second refers to a law in Lv 24:5-8 whereby the Temple priests must arrange bread and incense on the Sabbath. The third reference clinches the claim with God's words in Hos 6:6. In Mt 12:3-8, Jesus uses citations from both the Law and the Prophets to establish a basic principle for his halakhic system: that some Scriptural values – like "justice and mercy and faith" (Mt

⁴⁸⁰ Luz, 2:110-111.

⁴⁸¹ Sheri L. Klouda, "Applying Fishbane's Hermeneutical Strategies: Aggadic Exegesis in Matthew's Use of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:21-48)," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 46, no. 3 (2004): 28.

23:23) – are more central or “greater” than others.⁴⁸² He uses a similar strategy to tackle questions of divorce in Mt 5:31-32 and 19:4-8.⁴⁸³ There he implies that God’s ideal plan “from the beginning” (Gen 1-2) is the real “commandment” (cf. Mt 19:7) of Torah; it takes precedence over the Torah’s legal “allowances” to human frailty concerning divorce (Dt 5:1-28:68).⁴⁸⁴ Here too Jesus uses one part of the Torah to clarify and “relativize” another.⁴⁸⁵

The second part of my argument is that Matthew’s Jesus enjoins his disciples to rework Scripture in similarly creative and responsible ways. A close reading of the Parable Discourse and other relevant sections in Mt suggests that – as Viviano has argued – Jesus does indeed urge his disciples (his *mathētai* “students, apprentices”⁴⁸⁶) to follow suit with their own Scripture-based reworkings and arguments. While Jesus conveys his message (*tauta panta* “all these things”) to the crowds in riddles (13:34), the disciples receive special understanding; “For this reason [*dia touto*],” Jesus explains, “I speak to [the crowds] in parables ... that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand’” (Mt 13:13). The two phrases *tauta panta* “all these

⁴⁸² Luz 2:181-183. As Davies and Allison point out, Jesus employs a sophisticated rabbinical argument in Mt 12:1-7: he begins with a haggadic or narrative example to make his point, but since narrative cannot settle legal issues, he adds a legal example (via *qal vahomer* or a fortiori argumentation) and completes his argument with a divine injunction drawn from the prophets. Davies and Allison, 2:313.

⁴⁸³ Mt 5:31-32 and Mt 19:4-9 are linked not only by their similar content, but by the repetition of key terms and turns of phrase from 5:32 in 19:9. The exception for “unchastity” in Jesus’ argument against divorce is best understood in the following way: divorce is allowed in such cases, but remarriage is strictly forbidden. See Luz, 2:493-494.

⁴⁸⁴ That is, Jesus does not abrogate Moses’ words. While the Pharisees wrongly interpret Moses’ instruction as a “command” (19:7); Jesus explains Dt 5:1-28:68 as an “allowance” or concession (19:8). Luz, 2:490; Davies and Allison, 2:14-15.

⁴⁸⁵ The term is from Luz, 1:232.

⁴⁸⁶ On enduring sense of “apprenticeship” in the semantic range of the Greek word *mathētēs*, see Kit Rengstorff, “*mathētēs* [etc.]” in Gerhard Kittel et al., ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 4:416, cf. 441.

things” and *dia touto* “for this reason” reappear in the final, culminating question and answer of 13:51-52.

“Have you understood *tauta panta* all this?” They answered, “Yes.” And he said to them, “*Dia touto* therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”
(13:51-52)

Once again *tauta panta* “all these things” summarizes Jesus’ parable teachings;⁴⁸⁷ once again *dia touto* “on account of this, for this reason, therefore” presents Jesus’ overall reason for conveying these teachings.⁴⁸⁸ But here Jesus’ explanation concerns “every *grammateus* who is *mathēteutheis* for the kingdom of heaven,” that is, “every scribe” who is “discipled” / “trained” / “schooled” for the kingdom. As Ulrich Luz remarks,

After the disciples have understood Jesus’ parables, one expects a concluding sentence of Jesus that speaks of *their* task. Instead, he speaks of the Christian *grammateus* [scribe], that is, exclusively of the ‘theologian’ and the theologian’s special task.⁴⁸⁹

But this is exactly the point that Jesus is making: the ideal Jesus-believer is a *scribal* disciple.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ In 13:24, *panta tauta* refers to Jesus’ parable teachings to the crowds (13:3-9, 24-33); here *panta tauta* indicates Jesus’ whole presentation: “everything spoken by Jesus beginning with 13:3” Davies and Allison, 2:444.

⁴⁸⁸ *dia touto* sums up “all these things” and “takes the idea further,” Luz, 2:286. “In the nine occasions when Matthew has *dia touto* on the lips of Jesus, ... there is always some more or less evident connection with what has gone before.”

⁴⁸⁹ Emphasis added. Luz writes, “It is clear that the expression does not simply mean all of the disciples instructed by Jesus as *one might expect from the context*, but only those among them who were scripture experts.” Luz, 2:287, emphasis added. He sees this focus on the *grammateus* as “the greatest difficulty of our brief text” which is difficult, if not impossible to “get around” idem, 2:288.

⁴⁹⁰ This is the closely and well argued conclusion of “The Disciples as Scribes” in Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism, and the Matthean Community* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994), 238-245. In summary, Byrskog argues that Mt 8:19; 13:52, 23:34, and 28:19-20 all “impl[y] that a *scribal teaching activity is to be carried out by Jesus’ disciples*” 245, original emphasis.

A scribe is an expert in Scripture (cf. Mt 2:4, 17:10, 23:2-36). The Book of Sirach, composed in the early second century B.C.E.,⁴⁹¹ describes in detail the training and practices of a rising scribe (Sir 38:32-39:11). They include intensive study of Jewish traditions, working with texts, ascetic practice, and rigorous prayer (Sir 38:24, 34, 39:5).

The apprentice scribe

seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients, and is concerned with prophecies;
he preserves the sayings of the famous and penetrates the subtleties of parables;
he seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs and is at home with the obscurities
of parables. (Sir 39:1-3)

Once the trainee scribe has come to maturity, God may in response choose to fill him with a “spirit of understanding” that “directs his counsel and knowledge” as he explores scriptural texts (Sir 39:6-7). Now the new scribe, too, can formulate and “pour forth words of wisdom of his own” in response to the “hidden things” of the Lord (Sir 39:6-7).⁴⁹² Jesus’ *grammateus mathēteutheis*, like the scribe described by Sirach, will also have learned how to marshal traditional materials and pour forth new wisdom while conserving old forms.

Such a disciple will be like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.⁴⁹³ The “householder” in this comparison appears to be Jesus himself. A few lines earlier, Jesus has explained that “the householder ... who sowed good seed” in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Mt 13:27, 24) is in fact “the Son of Man” (Mt

⁴⁹¹ It is likely that Sirach’s model for scribal training continued to be relevant for many generations. Collins notes that Sirach is quoted – often by name – in early rabbinic literature, and that fragments have been discovered at Qumran and Masada, suggesting that it was widely used in the 1st century C.E. John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1997), 42.

⁴⁹² Sir 39:7 cf. NETS.

⁴⁹³ The unusual order of “new things and old things” has occasioned much comment but little certainty. See Davies and Allison, 2:351-2; Luz, 2:288.

13:37).⁴⁹⁴ In the previous Discourse, concerning Discipleship, Jesus both identifies himself as the householder, and urges his disciples to emulate his own practice:

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the householder Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! (Mt 10:24-25)⁴⁹⁵

The scribal disciple will resemble Jesus, his teacher.⁴⁹⁶ He will know “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 13:11); he will “understand” the true referents of ancient prophecy (13:13);⁴⁹⁷ he will “explain,” or “provide plain instruction” about parables (13:36),⁴⁹⁸ clarifying point by point their connection to faith life, ethics, and final judgment (13:18-23, 37-43, 49-50). He will *ekballein* “bring out” or “throw out” both “new things and old things ... from his *thēsauros*,” his “store house” / “treasure chest” / “treasure.”

The “treasure,” which comprises “the mysteries of the kingdom” (Mt 13:11), includes knowledge of Scripture and the capacity to handle it deftly; this is evident from Jesus’ use of Isaiah 6:9-10 and his allusions to Scripture in the parables. Yet it is always expressed in “new” ways, as parables, admonitions, and interpretations designed for new, “kingdom” situations. The phrase “*ekballei* to throw out of one’s treasure things new and

⁴⁹⁴ The *oikodespotēs* “householder” appears four other times in Mt. In 20:1, 11 Jesus also equates the *anthrōpos oikodespotēs* who hires and overpays his day laborers with himself (cf. Luz 2:533); Jesus presents this parable to explain how *he* will deal with *his* followers “when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory” (19:28). The chiasmic inclusion formed by 19:30 / 20:16 (“But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first. ... / ... So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”) firmly connects the Parable of the Workers with the introductory setting about the disciple’s future compensation. In 21:33 the *anthrōpos oikodespotēs* is a landowner who plants a vineyard; here Jesus equates himself to the “heir” of the householder (21:38). Only in 24:43 is there no apparent alignment between the *oikodespotēs* and Jesus.

⁴⁹⁵ NRSV, adapted.

⁴⁹⁶ On the use of the masculine pronoun here, see below.

⁴⁹⁷ That is, she will understand how prophetic texts apply to “this generation,” cf. 15:7-9; 24:15-35.

⁴⁹⁸ The disciples ask Jesus to *diasapheō* to them the parable of the weeds (13:36). The root sense of this word is “to make thoroughly (*dia*) clear (*saphanēs*).”

old” recalls a saying about the power of spoken words that Jesus delivers in the previous chapter:

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings [ekballei] good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings [ekballei] evil things out of an evil treasure. (12:34-35)

The task of believing scribes is not to rummage through books, looking for choice snippets of text to display. It is to proclaim powerful words and to produce powerful new compositions from the materials that study and spiritual insight have laid up in their “hearts.” It is for the disciples to imitate Jesus’ own scribe-like activity and finally to become “like [their] teacher” (Mt 10:24).

That scribal discipleship is an integral part of Jesus’ vision for his disciples is further reinforced when the unusual verb *mathēteuein* “to disciple, to make [someone] a disciple”⁴⁹⁹ shows up in his final (“Great”) commission at the end of the Gospel:

Jesus came and said to ... the eleven disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Mt 28:16, 18-20)

The imperative *mathēteusate* (“make [them] disciples!”) is the main verb of the sentence, with “go[ing],” “baptizing,” and “teaching” as its supporting participles. Now, at the end of the Gospel, the disciples have finally graduated; one of their key tasks is teaching new believers to *tērein* “obey, keep, guard, observe” everything that Jesus has *enteilasthai* “commanded.” The classic phrase *tērein entolas* “to keep [the] commandments” entails actions, not simply words. Here Jesus commands his disciples one final time to emulate

⁴⁹⁹ The verb *mathēteuein* does not occur in LXX, Philo, or Josephus. In the New Testament, it occurs only once more in Mt (at 27:57, describing Joseph of Arimathea as a person who had been “discipled” by / to Jesus) and once in Acts 14:21. Rengstorf, “*mathētēs*[, etc.],” 461.

the example that he has set: to wield miraculous power (cf. 10:1, 12:19-22),⁵⁰⁰ to teach Torah as he as taught Torah (cf. 5:19),⁵⁰¹ to rework and repurpose Scripture as he has done.

But a reading that remains true to the text also discovers evidence that complicates a mandate for believers to improvise responsibly with Scripture. A close reading of Matthew's Gospel suggests that the "disciples" are presented as a *subset* of those who follow Jesus. In the narrative world of this Gospel, the disciples are a group of believers set apart. For example, Janice Anderson argues convincingly that "the disciples" in Mt do not include women. The women who stayed with Jesus as he was dying and looked to his body even after his death (Mt 27:55-56) are distinguished from "*all the disciples* [who] deserted him and fled" at Gethsemane (26:56).⁵⁰² The angel instructs some of these same women, who have come to see Jesus' tomb, "Go quickly *and tell his disciples*, 'He has been raised from the dead, ... you will see him ... [in] Galilee'." (Mt 28:7).⁵⁰³ Anderson argues that Matthew uses figures like female followers (Mt 27:55-56, 61; 28:1-10) and male and female supplicants (9:18-31; 15:22-28; 26:6-13; 20:29-34) as "foils" for the key group – the disciples. Anderson's analysis complements the arguments of other researchers that Matthew's Gospel was addressed to Jesus-

⁵⁰⁰ For example, at the beginning of his "Discipleship Discourse," Jesus sends out his twelve disciples to "cure every disease and every sickness" (Mt 10:1); this is exactly how Mt describes Jesus' own healing ministry a few verses earlier in 9:35. In 21:19-22, Jesus curses a fruitless fig tree which suddenly withers. Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive."

⁵⁰¹ Mt 5:19: "Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and *teaches others to do the same*, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and *teaches them* will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (emphasis added).

⁵⁰² Emphasis added.

⁵⁰³ Emphasis added.

believers of literate, scribal, or teacherly status.⁵⁰⁴ What are the implications for the capstone project of this unit if *the entire Gospel* is an elite scholar's affair, aimed not at believers in general, but at a small, scholarly fraction of believers?⁵⁰⁵

A Teaching Project That Is True to the Spirit

I propose that Christians indeed remain true to this Gospel when they use one part of its text to clarify and relativize another. The warrant for this practice lies not only with Jesus' example of Scriptural argument and his mandate that "disciples" should do likewise, but also in the particular characteristics of scribal discipleship that Matthew and Jesus describe. If disciples in Matthew are called to bring out the new and the old, they are also called to be schooled by non-scribal believers. They are called to identify new spiritual insights in study and prayer. And they are called to be guided in their discernment by Jesus' ongoing spiritual presence – what Trinitarian theology would call God's Holy Spirit.

Matthew's narrative suggests that non-"disciples" can display exemplary faith, and that they too receive fresh spiritual insights. If the women in Matthew are foils for the disciples, this is because they are powerful symbols that ideal faithfulness often lies

⁵⁰⁴ The point has been argued cogently by the following: Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*; Aaron M. Gale, *Redefining Ancient Borders: The Jewish Scribal Framework of Matthew's Gospel* (New York; London: T&T Clark / Continuum, 2005); David E. Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); Anders Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 1 (2008): 95-132. For scholars who have interpreted Mt as a text-book for Jesus-believing Greek-Jewish scribes, see A. T. Lincoln, "Matthew – A Story for Teachers?" in David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press / JSOT Press, 1990), 125 and note 2; Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*, 2nd Edition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968, original 1954), 34, n. 4; Jack Freeborn, "The Presence of Christ in Matthew," *The Expository Times* 115 (2004): 156-161.

⁵⁰⁵ On the small number of people who could read texts in Greco-Roman antiquity, cf. H. Gregory Snyder, *Teachers and Texts in the Ancient World: Philosophers, Jews, and Christians* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-3.

outside the expert scribal group. As soon as these women see the risen Jesus, they rush up to him, “[take] hold of his feet, and worship[] him” (28:9); in contrast, the disciples – even as they are graduating – are still not the “perfect” followers whom one might expect (cf. Mt 5:48):

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. (28:16-17)

Anderson argues that the female followers (Mt 27:55-56, 61; 28:1-10) and the faithful supplicants – that is, women, blind men, and Gentiles (9:18-31; 15:22-28; 26:6-13; 20:29-34) – function in Matthew’s narrative to spur disciples towards greater, more faithful practice.⁵⁰⁶ If the faith of these outsiders is “great,” that of the disciples can often be “small.”⁵⁰⁷ These supplicants also receive spiritual insights into Jesus’ true identity. When they “cry out” to Jesus with the Messianic titles “Son of David” and “Lord” (9:27-28; 15:22; 20:30-31),⁵⁰⁸ “eyes are opened” (9:30; 20:33), outcasts become “followers” (20:37), and onlookers – perhaps even Gentiles – learn to “praise the God of Israel” on Jesus’ account (15:31).⁵⁰⁹ Other outsiders also receive insights about Jesus in this Gospel (e.g., foreign Magi, Mt 2:1-12; toddlers, 21:15-16).

⁵⁰⁶ Anderson, “Matthew: Gender and Reading,” 10-17.

⁵⁰⁷ Jesus criticizes “the disciples” for their “little faith” (8:26, 14:31; 16:8; 17:20); but he praises the Canaanite woman who asks him to heal her daughter: “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done to you as you wish” (Mt 15:28). Anderson, “Matthew: Gender and Reading,” 11, 14.

⁵⁰⁸ In Mt, the verb associated with these supplications is always *krazein* “to cry out.” The ritual of “crying out” titles would not be unique to Mt’s worship practice. Crying out “Lord!” “Messiah / Christ!” “Abba, Father!” or “Jesus is Lord!” is a distinctive element in Pauline churches as well (1 Cor 16:22; 12:3; Phil 2:11; Rom 8:15; “*krazon* crying ‘Abba! Father!’” in Gal 4:6). For discussion, see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 113-114, 142-143, 198-199.

⁵⁰⁹ That Matthew records Jesus healing Gentiles is not in question: see Mt 15:21-28 and possibly 8:5-13. That Matthew records a long episode of miracle-working among the Gentiles (from Jesus’ visit to the territory of the Canaanite woman [15:21], through the healing of a crowd on a mountaintop who “saw the mute speaking, etc. ... And they praised the God of Israel” [15: 31]) is the opinion of many scholars. See Luz 2:344-445 and n. 12, Davies and Allison 2:569.

What is more, when the disciples receive spiritual insights, Jesus calls them to sort out the meaning through a process of egalitarian, communal discernment. Consider this conversation between Jesus and Peter when Jesus asks what people say about his true identity:

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mt 16:16-19)⁵¹⁰

The context suggests that “binding and loosing” is connected with questions of doctrine.⁵¹¹ Immediately before Mt 16:16-19, the disciples have come to “understand” that Jesus has warned them against “the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (16:5-12). Immediately following, Jesus reveals that his Messiahship entails not only glory but suffering and death (16:21). This process of “binding and loosing” is also linked with group decision-making and communal prayer:

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (Mt 18:18-20)

⁵¹⁰ Mark Goodwin has recently argued that Peter’s confession (“You are ... the Son of the Living God”) may be a conscious reworking of Hos 2:1 LXX, in which Peter applies a well-known epithet for Messianic Israel personally to Jesus. If this is correct, then “binding and loosing” is not simply about establishing sound doctrine, but about establishing the meaning of new *Scriptural* insights. Mark J. Goodwin, “Hosea and ‘the Son of the Living God’ in Matthew 16:16b,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2005): 265-283.

⁵¹¹ Davies and Allison point out that mainly on the strength of literary parallels, a halakhic connection is “the major opinion of modern exegetes” with respect to the meaning of “binding and loosing” (Davies and Allison, 2:637-639, quote from 638). However, they add that halakhah is not particularly in view in Mt 16:13-20 or its context; they frame “binding and loosing” in terms of the broader category of “teaching” (2:634-641). So too Luz, for whom Mt 16:19 empowers disciples like Peter “in a binding way to teach everything that Jesus has commanded,” while 18:18 mixes “the thought ... of judging” and teaching, “without the two meanings being mutually exclusive” Luz, 2:368, 365. With respect to Peter’s “power of the keys” (Mt 16:19) Luz notes further, “In an isolated Jewish reference ... ‘to open’ and ‘to close’ are ... used for doctrinal decisions” Luz, 2:365, n. 94.

This passage, part of the Community Discourse (18:1-35), puts “binding and loosing” in the context of cultivating humility (18:1-5), forgiving community members (18:15-35), and maintaining unity by preventing apostasy (18:6-14).⁵¹² Jesus underlines the egalitarian nature of the spiritual study-group by insisting that none of the disciples should be called “rabbi,” “father,” or “instructor,” because he, Jesus, is their only teacher (23:8-10).⁵¹³ Considered together, the passages on “binding and loosing” suggest that Matthew’s model of scribal discipleship includes egalitarian, communal discernment about doctrine under the guidance of Jesus’ immanent spirit.

Matthew’s picture of ideal discipleship is not static, but aspirational; his vision of what is “new” includes an egalitarian openness which he attributes to his great teacher, Jesus. Matthew’s picture of ongoing interpretation fits well with the semiotic theology that I have proposed in this paper. The process of interpretation does not fix meanings once and for all. Interpretation is an ongoing process of re-presenting complex symbols for new situations. The Trinitarian theology for which I have argued insists that this process lies at the heart of all experience, that it arises from within God’s very self. To engage in semiosis responsibly is to open oneself to the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God. To set young people on the path of this process is to open them up to God’s Mind. I

⁵¹² The key word in Mt 18:6-9 is *skandalon* “stumbling block” / *skandalizein* “cause to stumble.” “For Matthew, ‘cause to fall’ (*skandalizō*) is connected with rejecting Jesus (11:6; 13:57; 15:12; 26:31, 33) and apostasy (13:21; 24:10) That he is thinking here also of leading people into apostasy is obvious, since the little ones [v. 6].” Luz underlines that in Mt, apostasy is both “a matter of false doctrine” and a matter of “concrete deeds that do not correspond to the will of God.” Luz 2:432-433. The key word in Mt 18:10-14 is *planasthai* “wandering, going astray” which eventually leads to *apollunai* “perishing, being lost.” Here too there is a connection not only with mutual charity but also with apostasy. Davies and Allison, 2:773.

⁵¹³ This is unlike the picture of scribal life at Qumran, for example. The Dead Sea Scrolls appears to portray a cadre of spiritual and scriptural leaders, who with “complete knowledge of sectarian doctrine,” judged the scriptural interpretations of lower ranked members of the group. See Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, *Civic Ideology, Organization, and Law in The Rule Scrolls: A Comparative Study of the Covenanters’ Sect and Contemporary Voluntary Associations in Political Context* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 327-329, 417.

contend that this vision of responsible, Spirit-led semiosis is reflected in the Gospel of Matthew. Teaching students to rework and reuse Scripture is true to this text, and to the Spirit of Jesus.

A Teaching Project That Is True to the Community and Its Needs

In a framework of semiotic realism, our projects must always be tested against the practical needs of real life. As I have noted, Catholic high school students tackle issues of security, identity, and growing self-direction. The capstone project is designed to address some real-life issue; in the modern parable that I use as an exemplar, the issue is that of security – specifically, the question of mutual respect in the high school community. What is more, a unit that helps Christian students achieve a certain level of mastery in their use of Scripture strengthens their sense of identity as rising young people of faith because Scripture shapes the textures, expressivities, and identities of those students who use it as normative. Finally, the content of this Biblical unit offers some classic Christian markers of faithful maturity. It gives students the opportunity to take these insights to heart. The call to grow up and be fruitful, to “shelter the birds of the air” under one’s leaves, to make a complete commitment of one’s life to God’s kingdom – all of these become grist for the mill of student reflection in this curricular unit.

A Project of Responsible, Improvisational Teaching

Some Biblical genres, like narrative or poetry, might seem to lend themselves easily to a pedagogical model informed by the values and practice of TO. The work of Victoria Rue and Peter Pitzele easily suggests how embodiment, performance, and

improvisation can help such Biblical passages come alive.⁵¹⁴ But Mt 13 revolves around Scriptural interpretation, writing and composition, proof texting, Biblical erudition and studied allusion. For this reason, it is an excellent test case for evaluating a Biblical pedagogy which is inspired by embodied analysis and rooted in improvisation. If the model of pedagogy that I have proposed can help instructors teach Mt 13 in ways that are rich and compelling, then that model will have proven effective even in what appears to be the more difficult case.

The process of training for responsible improvisation is central to the work of this unit. The unit as a whole and its individual lessons are designed to help students fabricate real life responses in a way that is true to key points of departure – to the text, to the classroom community of practice (and its wider school setting), and to the inner interpretive promptings that students experience as they learn. In the first place, the unit addresses many of the insights on good training that I have highlighted from SL theory. The focus is not on the transmission of expert Scriptural knowledge from teacher, textbook, or scholars, but rather on the development of students' capacities to read Scripture and to read about Scripture; to respond in writing, movement, and artwork; to riff creatively on stories, passages, and Biblical genres. Students take the knowledge that they gain *about* Scripture and use it to work out how to compose a new parable that will hit home for fellow students and teachers. At the same time, they get to consider whether their assignment makes good Christians sense; whether they decided in the affirmative or

⁵¹⁴ Victoria Rue, *Acting Religious: Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies* (New York: Wipf and Stock, 2010 [original 2005]); Peter A. Pitzele, *Scripture Windows: Toward a Practice of Bibliodrama* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura / Alef Design Group, 1998).

the negative, they have learned to negotiate and cope with a new level of Christian responsibility.

In the second place, the unit addresses many of the values and practices that I have identified at the heart of TO. By “saturating” students with repeated access and close readings of the text of Mt 13 (not to mention the intertexts of the Parables Discourse that Days 3, 4, and 6 identify in Is, Pss, 2 Esd, Dn, Ez, and Mk) the unit makes Scripture available at a fine, granular level; in this way, students can get a feel for the text, and a sense of its affordances, resonances, and possible uses. The unit also invites students through multiple exercises to appraise their surroundings with an eye towards challenges and potentials; it invites them to appraise their own social / spiritual situation, and to appraise the capacity of the Parables Discourse to shed light on their lives and their choices. The open-ended nature of the capstone invites students to brainstorm a number of options for their final Parable Project, and to hash out together which images and arguments are most true to their different points of departure (e.g., to the style of Jesus’ parables and the content of his message; to the personal insights they have garnered throughout the unit; to the realities of Cristo Rey student life). Students are invited throughout the unit to ask their own questions and to follow their own minds concerning the text and its various uses, and concerning the pedagogical process itself. In short, this unit demonstrates that a pedagogy of training for responsible improvisation as I have described it can indeed generate coherent, perhaps even compelling forms of high school Bible instruction.

If the pedagogical model that I have proposed is coherent, is it also illuminating? It describes at least some forms of teaching; does it offer some epistemic gain?

One result of framing the teaching of Bible as a process of training for responsible improvisation is to focus attention on the tensive role of the trainer in a liberation-oriented pedagogical setting. I have touched on this topic in Chapter II, where I discussed the tensions involved in navigating between one's home culture and the classroom culture of interpretive practice. Here I underline how my pedagogical model locates the teacher at the crux of this tension – not as a departure from everyday teaching practice, but as an admission that this is where teachers always work in their capacity as cultural brokers. To frame this brokering function as “training for improvisation” expresses in a new and perhaps clearer way how teachers can exercise authority without being authoritarian, how they can guide both learning and liberation with one and the same teaching act.

In this unit, the Bible teacher does not rely on experts to provide all the answers, but makes an unsettled question the center of pedagogical focus, taking at face value the unresolved tension among scholars as a “teachable moment.” The moment is teachable not because it allows a set point to be made, but because it allows for a genuine inquiry that results in real-life projects that impact student life. My model suggests that this kind of bona fide inquiry is the goal of religious education in general, and in particular of teaching the Bible.

In the pedagogical model that I have described, the role of the teacher in designing and managing the learning process is clearly central. Many published curricula for high school Bible courses provide visually and intellectually stimulating textbooks filled with background information about Biblical texts;⁵¹⁵ publishers also offer excellent

⁵¹⁵ E.g., Daniel Smith-Christopher, *The Old Testament: Our Call to Faith and Justice* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2005); Michael Pennock, *Encountering Jesus in the New Testament* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009).

manuals filled with enrichment activities to deepen students' engagement with Scripture.⁵¹⁶ I commend these as helpful resources that teachers can use in constructing a unit. But I argue that whenever possible, teachers should design their own units, tailored to the needs and challenges that their students face. My pedagogical model insists that teachers – like students – are neither transmitters nor high-fidelity performance machines, but improvisers with Scripture who called to interpret the Bible in fresh, new, responsible ways. While constraints of time and politics may limit teachers' opportunities to do so, I contend that this should be the educational ideal. The *planning* process that I have described lies within the capacity of most high school religion teachers; what is more difficult is the rigorous process of *testing* whether one has been true to the text. Does Mt 13:52 license widespread improvisation among Christian believers, or does it restrict this kind of work to “apostles” and “teachers”? It is clear that scholars can disagree with the conclusions that my test has reached. The fear of “getting it wrong” need not stop high school Bible teachers from approaching their calling as responsible *artists*. It is only as they master such artistry that they can hope to free students for similar tasks.

V. Conclusion

Matthew underlines how radical new insights may come from “the least” (cf. Mt 11:11) and the marginalized. Matthew emphasizes egalitarian fellowship in his scribal movement, not rigid hierarchy. Matthew challenges his listening audience to strive for deeper faith and more perfect discipleship. These tensions are an integral part of the

⁵¹⁶ Navarro, Christine Schmertz, and contributing authors. *Teaching Activities Manual for The Catholic Youth Bible*. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000.

message in Matthew's text, and they take on new meaning, more immediate relevance, as soon as we pick up and interpret his text for ourselves.

If Jesus tweaks and repurposes ancient Scripture, if Matthew does the same with the Septuagint, with Mark, and with other sources, then high school teachers can feel confident inviting their students to reuse and repurpose Christian Scripture as well. The case for this practice is strengthened even further when we consider how present-day North American literacy and text culture is so different than literacy in ancient times. Would Matthew recognize in Cristo Rey students the unlettered members of early Christian communities, or would he glimpse in them scribes-in-training? As a Scripture teacher committed to integral liberation, I have call on my students to rise to Matthew's challenge. As a scholar of religious education, I suggest that high school teachers also are called to this kind of practice. I invite them to test whether the Spirit is calling them to a deeper, scribal type of discipleship.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have argued that teaching the Bible to Christian adolescents is best understood as training them to improvise responsibly with Scripture, and I have parsed each of the elements in that argument to show that my claim is cogent and well warranted in Christian tradition.

In parsing the words “teaching” and “training,” I have argued that teaching students to interpret the Bible is best understood as a process of training. That is, teaching is best seen as a coached process of apprenticeship in the practice of a local classroom community. To teach is not just to convey information; it is much more basic, and much more complex. To teach is to train students in the ins and outs of a practice. It is to show them how to practice, and how to practice well. It is also to explore why and how a practice might actually matter. Good teaching, like good training, moves students towards mastery. It develops their native capacities; it helps them put words into practice; it helps them respond nimbly and flexibly to situations both familiar and novel; it helps them to cope when they notice that accustomed norms and standards are beginning to change.

In parsing the words “responsible improvisation,” I have argued that “improvisation” emphasizes both the creative and the bounded dimensions of interpreting Scripture; while “responsibility” underlines the self-conscious and rigorous testing of the interpretations that we create. To improvise responsibly is to render creatively within a context of established community practice. To interpret is to take a text (for example) and to render it in other terms. Thus, a good improvisation is a good interpretation; and a good interpretation is a good improvisation. I have underlined how interpretation is the right – and the duty – of all who strive to live by a religious tradition. Interpreting

Scripture means improvising responsibly with it; I have argued that this is what good teachers train Christian students to do.

I introduced this model of training by grounding it in my experience of teaching inner city Catholic high school students. My examples came from Cristo Rey New York High School, and the Cristo Rey model for educating disenfranchised and poor teenagers in North America. From my teaching experience, I identified some of the challenges that Cristo Rey students – and all teens – can face: challenges of security, of cultural identity, and of adolescent development in a more and more complex world. I unpacked the concept of “integral liberation” as a cogent educational response to those challenges. To be integrally liberated is to have both the resources and the freedom to grow and develop: physically, materially, culturally, psychosocially, and spiritually. I then presented my initial attempts to teach Bible for integral liberation at Cristo Rey High School, and I laid out the approach that I have followed in this dissertation: a reflective practitioner’s philosophical inquiry. In this essay, I have tried to determine whether it does indeed make sense to frame an integrally liberating Biblical pedagogy, in terms of “training students for responsible improvisation.” I have explored the ways in which this kind of framing makes intellectual and practical sense.

The Theory of Situated Learning

By using the theory of Situated Learning, I framed my pedagogy in terms of community and practice. A “situated,” social science perspective on the classroom sees that setting as a complex “situation” comprised of intersecting identities, institutions, and agendas. This complex situation is the setting within which teachers can foster integral liberation; it is also the place where they can hobble it. While the classroom’s variables

are too numerous to control, some of its key features can be shaped, nudged, and influenced. For example, as teacher I have the power to model improvisation; the power to shape student assignments so that they elicit students' voices rather than shut them down; the bully pulpit that can shape our classroom agenda by holding up certain values and questioning others. I structure the classroom situation so that students' realities and Biblical passages become key raw materials in the works we produce.

One challenge of relying so closely on the real life situations of classroom students is the danger that realities and struggles that are not represented in the classroom constituency will be difficult to bring up and explore. Where students and teacher can broach sensitive topics, this challenge is lessened by the possibility of empathy. That is, where classroom participants can explore and express their emotions more freely, the experience of being moved by the struggles of others can become the foundation of a real-life motivation to learn and to act.

On the other hand, this challenge becomes more acute in classrooms or discussions where mistrust, denial, and pretense play a prominent role. For example, before teaching at Cristo Rey, I taught several years at an all boys Catholic high school in Central Harlem where – for numerous reasons – my rapport with my students was sometimes strained. This was never more true than when teaching a unit on human sexuality. My anxieties about coming out / being outed and their anxieties around gender and vulnerability resulted in a toxic classroom environment, in which none of us were able to speak from the heart. Our inquiry went nowhere fast. The effect of denial and pretense denial may be particularly salient among middle-, professional-, and owning-class teenagers. Unlike poor and working class teens, they may not readily recognize the

ways that social and economic forces target them for oppression; unlike their poorer peers, they may lack a sense of shared struggle that can underwrite the sharing of stories and the quest for mutual support. In such settings, a pedagogy for integral liberation that is based heavily on student experience has considerable spadework to undertake: spending time building strong trust in the classroom and providing access to different types of experiences (for example through film, literature, or community service).

The Practice of Theatre of the Oppressed

By using popular theater as a model to give clearer shape to this training curriculum, I picked up key themes from Situated Learning theory and reworked them into an arts-based model of training for integral liberation. The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) of Augusto Boal – an art form in the spirit of Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy – deploys numerous exercises, games, and performance formats to coach participants to find their own voices. Its goal is to help them tackle exigent situations by means of creative solutions. It is a program of training that puts words, images, gut feelings, and ideas into dramatic and practical form, in order to increase the self-conscious and rigorous testing of participants’ behaviors and norms. It is an integral practice; that is, it rehearses and strengthens native capacities on multiple levels. It encourages creative and spontaneous expression; and it follows up with rigorous analysis – conducted not only through words, but through feeling, image, rhythm, and movement as well.

In all of these ways, TO offers a rich model of training for integral liberation. My chapter on teaching as Jokering identified several key TO principles that can guide Bible teachers. A pedagogy designed to promote integral liberation through responsible improvisation with Scripture will make Scriptural materials available to students in ways

they can use. It will train students to hone their perception of situations, emotions, and Scripture (to hone their perceptions of whatever material has fallen before them). In other words, it will give them the opportunity to work closely and attentively with text and experience. As students pay close attention they will notice their own internal reactions: the promptings of Spirit, whether joyful or frustrated. They will also notice the texts and their textures: the data of Scripture, its feel, and its possible uses. A pedagogy modeled on TO practice will also encourage students to brainstorm possibilities – possible meanings that the text may convey, possible implications and applications for current life. It will train students to negotiate those options through rigorous yet flexible choice. In other words, it will train them to act more like artists than appliers of algorithms, as they hold multiple “points of departure” in tension.

More generally, a pedagogy modeled on TO will rehearse students in two basic dimensions of responsibility – it will give them the chance to take charge of their learning, and the chance to reflect on their ongoing practice. The value of TO as a performance-based model for integral liberation becomes evident, for example, if we consider these last two dimensions more closely. TO underlines the physical, performative dimension of human learning. Imagine a teacher inspired by TO, who tries to raise these two dimensions to levels of mastery. She may invite students to interpret Scripture by occupying the classroom with their body-formed images, thus disturbing power hierarchies on a visceral level. She may schedule student performances that invite learners to step out of their skin. Using bodies in this way, and stretching student skills through performance, makes sense when integral liberation is the goal.

One difficulty in adopting a pedagogy that is modeled on artistry is that it requires extensive rehearsal, especially for those of us who have witnessed – or practiced – teaching in less flexible ways. Teachers tend to teach others in the ways that they themselves have been taught. TO requires, as Boal has insisted, a “demechanization” of our mechanized habits. In addition, teachers who are attracted to this kind of embodied and power-sharing pedagogy may fear that they might lose control of their classrooms by employing these kinds of techniques. This fear is hardly unfounded. Since most teachers and students lack the experience to communicate and make meaning in such full-bodied ways, there is always the possibility that the communicative process will unexpectedly break down, overheat, or go awry. Like all teaching methods, embodied pedagogy is a skill that must be mastered, and initial trials will not always succeed. This is, of course, a good reason for interested teachers to practice the craft even more. Participating in learning circles of interested teachers is a good way to practice these kinds of methods and to develop a level of comfort before attempting them in class.

How can we make embodied learning more common in university and seminary education? One way is to sidestep the classroom – to pursue embodied and critical pedagogies as extra-curricular, or co-curricular forms of knowledge. Another way is to insert this kind of pedagogy into the professional lives of academics through trainings and conferences. It is challenging to devote higher educational classroom resources to this kind of practice when (paying) students, colleagues, and administrators may not consider it legitimate or scholarly. But the effect can be rich and rewarding, and will propagate further as time goes on.

A Pragmaticist Pneumatology

The final theoretical lens that I have applied to my pedagogical model is the philosophical and theological framework of Christian semiotic realism. This framework is built on the pioneering work of Donald Gelpi. Gelpi sought to inculturate Catholic thought and experience in a “Yankee” idiom, and he used American Pragmatism as his intellectual ground. The framework relies on a metaphysics of experience, and is normed by reflection on Christian conversion. Its strength is its developmental, evolutionary outlook, and its hypothesis-testing approach to intellectual inquiry. It is a “Pragmaticist” framework which looks to Peirce’s realism as its guiding light. It integrates biology and social science (concepts of habit, embodiment, and practice) with philosophy and moral reflection (concepts of inquiry and semiosis; of accuracy, truth, and norms). It undermines dogmatism without succumbing to relativism by sorting out and collating its basic premises, yet holding no premise as true without warranting evidence. It admits that our understandings of reality are always constructed, but it insists on constructing them on the basis of evidence that has been tested and (in some reasonable sense) found to be true.

Gelpi integrates all of these concepts with Trinitarian theological reflection: specifically, the concept of Spirit, which for Peirce and for Gelpi is integrally linked with interpretation. By using this framework, I unpacked the connections between interpretation, creativity, Scripture, and Holy Spirit. I argued that responsible improvisation puts us in twofold alignment: (1) with our own deepest tendencies for healthy creativity, and (2) with the life-giving Spirit who created the cosmos, and who interprets the deep things of God.

In what way can we articulate the boundaries of responsible interpretation in light of this philosophical and theological model? Can they be stated *a priori*, or only after the fact – only after someone has ventured an interpretation, and the community responds, “Oh, no! That will not do!” Is Bruce Ellis Benson correct when he remarks, “A pastor [is not] allowed to ‘improvise’ on 1 Corinthians for a sermon in the same way that Paul was ‘allowed’ to improvise Old Testament and early Christian texts in composing 1 Corinthians”?⁵¹⁷ How should we determine whether an improvisation can be “deemed ‘faithful’ .. or ‘unfaithful’ ... to a text”?⁵¹⁸

Benson is right, but his point deserves nuance. The Christian canon of Scripture, its texts, and its text-forms are all much more fixed and controlled in the 21st Century than they were in the 1st Century C.E. The norms of citation today are less flexible – not least because standardized and identical printed copies of texts are now commonly available. (Before printing, such standardization simply did not exist). Today, writing or discovering “new” Scripture clearly moves one to the boundaries of Christian identity – perhaps even beyond it. (Here the Mormon Church is an evolving case in point.)

At the same time, the reworking of Scripture is a common and well embraced practice. No one would be surprised if Benson’s pastor used Scriptural images, tropes, or turns of phrase in her sermons, or even her published work – provided she did not pass those words off as “real” Bible verses. This proviso is as much a function of literary and scholarly standards as it is a point of theology. A particular use of Scripture may be deemed faithful or it may be deemed treacherous, but it must be judged from several

⁵¹⁷ Bruce Ellis Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics: Jazz Lessons for Interpreters,” in *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads*, Kevin J. Vanhooser, James K. A. Smith and Bruce Ellis Benson, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 205.

⁵¹⁸ Benson, “The Improvisation of Hermeneutics,” 205.

points of departure. Does it attempt to deceive the audience according to common sense standards, or scholarly norms? Does it cut across the grain of morality? When considering the warrant for applying it, does that warrant read thick or thin? The standards of Christian conversion that Gelpi enumerates, and that I adopt, help to thicken this kind of analysis. In light of these norms, we can ask: Is this use of the text affectively, intellectually, interpersonally, politically, and religiously *responsible*? If it is a creative interpretation, is it also critical and true?

Teaching the Bible: Improvisation and Expertise

In my last chapter, I used my pedagogical model to create and assess a unit of high school Bible teaching, specifically a set of lessons and a capstone project focused on the Parables Discourse in Mt 13. I suggested a number of ways that teachers could prepare themselves to teach such a unit: by cultivating practices of affective, moral, intellectual, and religious conversion (as defined in my previous chapter on Pneumatology), by attending to their students' interpretive presuppositions, and by attending closely to the Biblical text. I then sketched an example of a teaching unit on the Parables Discourse. Finally, I explored in close detail how that unit exemplified training for responsible improvisation.

For high school teachers who are attracted to the model of teaching that I propose, this chapter may present the greatest challenge. In it, I encourage high school Bible teachers to become responsible improvisers of their own Bible curriculum. The difficulty here, I contend, is not in the license of teachers to improvise – that license is amply attested in Situated Learning theory, in TO's vision and practice, and in the semiotic philosophy of Gelpi and Peirce. All these approaches firmly agree that improvisation lies

at the heart of human behavior. The difficulty lies in the teachers' ability to *test* their improvisations, and to test them as responsibly as they can. The challenge of "responsibility" is to *increase* the *ability* of high school teachers to *respond*. I focus here on curriculum writers, because high school teachers rely on them to shape much of what is "covered" in class.

Putting aside questions of how ecclesial politics affect Catholic high school curricula, I ask some questions about pedagogical vision: What kind of curricular material would be required for high school teachers to become more responsible improvisers in their own classrooms? What kinds of curricular materials can develop the native capacities of teachers: to negotiate situations and values, to plan more transparent activities, to make the Bible more available to their students, to remain true to the Biblical text? Should they resemble textbooks, workbooks, "toolkits," web-based data bases, social networks, or something different again? Developing those kinds of materials is one key next step for my pedagogical project.

Prospects for Further Work and Research

If teaching Bible for integral liberation is best understood as training students to improvise responsibly with Scripture – if my argument here has been correct – then the suggestions that I have already made about teacher training and higher education provide a fulsome agenda for future strategizing and future work.

The "if's" in that sentence are crucial. The process of empirical grounding and testing is an integral part of the model I have put forth; thus one key avenue for further investigation is to test both the premises and the results of my reflections. I have based my proposal on my own experience and on my students' in-class responses. What would

be revealed by a systematic, qualitative study of inner city student beliefs and practices concerning the Bible? My teaching was informed by TO sensibilities in a partial and patchy way; how would students react to a year-long Bible curriculum that was thoroughly informed by an artistic approach? My training in TO, and my theological education, have offered me many years to develop and reflect on this pedagogy. How would high school teachers respond to it? What pieces (if any) would they take, run with, or seek to expand? One exciting prospect in this respect is combining the pedagogy that I have expounded with the work of Participatory Action Research (PAR) with youth.⁵¹⁹ The action-oriented ethos of PAR gives a measure of real-life usefulness to the empirical research that I would conduct.

Finally, further theological work connecting Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Roman Catholics would be helpful. Scholars who are thinking and writing about Holy Spirit and Scripture can support teachers who are working in ecumenical settings. We can help teachers articulate their reasons and their Christian warrants for teaching the Bible. We can help them to explain and to sharpen their teaching so that it is more creative, more critical, more true.

⁵¹⁹ See for example, Jeffrey M. Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell, *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008)

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