

**Mini-Plenary Discussion with Gabriel Moran (“GM”), REA:APPRRE Annual meeting
11/22/09 Facilitated by: Leona English (“LE”)**

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Participant: How does the practice of religion and practice of theology as separate parts play out?

GM: People generally do practice religion, but theologians practice theology. I theorize that religion emerges out of reflection and practice, while theology reflects rather than putting into practice.

Participant: You opened with the statement that there is a relation of practice of religion and education. Do you believe there is a practice of religious education?

GM: The fundamental dance is between religion and education and there are different practices of each. To me it seems to be a need for a dialogue between education and religion, led by professional educators and those of the practice of religion, which may not necessarily be by professionals. We are operating in somewhat parallel worlds and they come together.

Participant: How do you clarify practice, is it without reflection? What are practices based upon, what is relation between “knowistic” and reflective?

GM: It begins with the “small person” beginning to practice something called religion; these small people do what their parents are doing. There is no awareness of the content, at an early age. At some point when they begin to question, then growing people need answers to the questions that emerge. That is practice.

Participant: How does it get passed on? Through large groups or by individual people?

GM: There has to be enough people to merit a tradition, and to maintain those traditions. There needs to be someone that asks questions reflectively of why we do these things. We need to create a parallel word to Islamism such as Christianity. And there is a lack of reflection on the part of some Christians practicing Christianity.

Participant: Have we lost the theology that informs our piety?

GM: The practices and rituals of our daily life need to have that type of reflection infused into them to inform piety. Sometimes people say there is no answer when the reality is there are many answers, but we can still offer them guidance in how to think about those answers.

Participant: What is the existing ambiguity of theology and religious education?

GM: Most religious educators know a good bit about theology, but theologians may not be as aware of religious education. Theology tends to dismiss religious education. But there is a worldwide urgent problem; How do you deal with religion in non violent educational ways? There has not been a real need for a dialogue between religious educators and theologians. People in church offices and authority protect tradition, to pass it on, rather than allowing it to adapt and change to what tradition may become. I see this relationship as being similar to the

relationship between physicians and nurses, one is considered the expert and the other considered the more relational person.

Participant: Religious education is largely done in the basement by women with children, while theology is left to professionals or the sisters in the order. Theology is not particularly taught, but passed along. The divide exists and is complicated by church authority removed from both, the seminary and the basement.

GM: People in theology and religious education positions need to be more vocal about these issues, for educators that are raising legitimate questions. It has changed somewhat, but there is much further to go. Theological education is largely confined to the seminarians. Maybe we have to rethink some of the terms that are reinforcing these positions.

Participant: As a young adult theologian, I see no divide, perhaps these concerns are being bypassed by the current generation, because they don't have the stereotypes that exist.

GM: If there is that much change that is taking place, that is excellent. But I am not seeing that reflected in the published literature, not in church educational settings and not in public educational settings. We are making progress, but there remains some divide.

Participant: For those of us in public education what happens when we present this data and combine it with our responsibility? How do we teach faith as understanding as information and living out our faith with the students? Do you see any way in which those can be joined in a public setting?

GM: Big topic on its own. Experience is that in secular university there is much religious interest but no religious department. Teaching religion can be politically volatile and it can attract people who are either proselytizing or those who are so antiseptic in their teaching that nothing is conveyed. How can it be presented so that the learner can make up their own mind? It can create an emotional kind of relationship with the learner, and develop a better understanding of the religion of another. We are still at the stage of the human race where we need to have at least the exposure to the other. To maybe STOP killing each other.