# EDUCATING FOR FAITH APPROPRIATION IN A PLURALISTIC CONTEXT: THE THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY OF SHARED CHRISTIAN PRAXIS AND CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

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## *Abstract*

In the twentieth century, religious educators have emphasized the necessity of appropriating faith. Two contemporary approaches to faith appropriation include Thomas Groome's shared Christian praxis and Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra's Christian practices. This essay examines the theological presuppositions of these two approaches to faith appropriation through a comparison of two contemporary methods of theology, critical-correlation and cultural-linguistics. Finally, I propose an adaptation of these forms of faith appropriation vis-à-vis a more recent theological method, a theology of interruption.

In the late twentieth century, Christian theologians have turned toward questions of theological methodology. This concern with theological methodology is part of a wider concern with the role of interpretation in both contemporary philosophy and theology. As David Tracy writes, "If the Christian theological must articulate the meanings of the phenomenon variously called the 'Christian fact,' 'witness,' 'message,' or 'tradition,' then he [sic] is obliged to enter into the discussion of the nature of the disciplines of history and hermeneutics" (Tracy 1975, 49). Method and hermeneutics are marks of contemporary theology and have had an influence in religious education especially related to faith appropriation.

Thomas Groome's shared Christian praxis and Dorothy Bass and Craig Dystra's Christian practices are two approaches to Christian religious education, both emphasizing the appropriation of faith. Despite a common interest in appropriation, shared Christian praxis and Christian practices are grounded in distinctive theological hermeneutics, ways of interpreting and appropriating faith, represented by the critical-correlation school

(David Tracy) and the cultural-linguistic school (George Lindbeck), respectively. Engaging in a dialogue between the two theological hermeneutics allows for a critical analysis of the hermeneutical assumptions and methodological approaches in both shared Christian praxis and Christian practices in light of pluralism.

This essay proceeds in three parts. First, I outline the hermeneutical approaches characteristic of the critical-correlation method and the cultural-linguistic school. Second, I analyze how these hermeneutical assumptions are treated in the pedagogies of shared Christian praxis and Christian practices. Finally, I propose an adaptation of these two forms of faith appropriation vis-à-vis a more recent theological hermeneutics that treats pluralism as central to the Christian event.

## THE HERMENEUTICS OF CRITICAL-CORRELATION AND CULTURAL-LINGUISTICS

Before turning to the educational approaches of shared Christian praxis and Christian practices, it is important to outline the hermeneutical approaches of critical-correlation and cultural-linguistic theology. Critical-correlation theology engages in a hermeneutics of conversation that emphasizes the need to relate human experience and the Christian tradition. Cultural-linguistic theology relies upon a hermeneutics of performance views Christian practice and narrative as essential to shaping human experience as Christian.

Critical-correlation, as a revisionist theological method, presumes the possibility of a conversation between contemporary, secular thought and the larger Christian tradition (Tracy 1975, 32-33). This conversation becomes the central way of engaging in the theological project in a postmodern era. The sources for this conversation are Christian texts, what Tracy will later call Christian classics (1981, 248-249) and common

human experience (1975, 43-45).  The correlation of these sources occurs through a critical act of discerning the relationship between the questions and answers of human experience and the theological event or text (Tracy 1975, 46).  The common human experience is interpreted for its religious meaning through the disciplines of phenomenology or the social sciences (Tracy 1975, 47-48; Tracy 1981, 60-61).  This religious meaning of human experience is understood as the encounter with questions of ultimate meaning in human experience (Tracy 1981, 61).  In addition to the emphasis on the limit-questions of human experience, the Christian texts are examined through both history and hermeneutics, allowing the infinite potential for meaning in the Christian classic to become meaningful in *this* present moment (Tracy 1987, 111).  Here, the symbolic quality of these texts as disclosing an aspect of God's manifestation in Christ becomes important (Tracy 1981, 281).  Finally, the theologian employs a metaphysical or transcendental mode of reflection to determine the adequacy of the correlation.  The theologian asks if the correlation is internally coherent, existentially meaningful, and hermeneutically true, expressing most adequately the Christian event to which it has directed its attention (Tracy 1975, 182-187).  Fundamentally, critical-correlation emphasizes a hermeneutics of conversation, recognizing the possibility of truth in each text, person, event, discourse, and symbol system that is encountered (Tracy 1987, 20).  One appropriates the results of this conversation, when one is prepared to argue, to defend that claim in further conversation (Tracy 1987, 25).

The cultural-linguistic method is partially a response to Tracy's method of critical-correlation, what Lindbeck calls experiential-expressive models of religious interpretation (1984, 31).  The experiential-express models approach religious faiths as

distinctive symbol systems emerging from an experience or event in the past (Lindbeck 1984, 16-17). At their most extreme, these models of religion treat the truth claims of doctrines as nondiscursive symbols, not dealing with claims of truth (Lindbeck 1984, 17). The particular doctrines and practices that are an important part of a specific religion are expressions of a common faith that all human beings may express in culturally relevant ways. Many Catholic theologians, who adopt experiential-expressive models of religion, treat revealed doctrine as the most adequate way of expressing the human experience, refusing to give up claims of truth (Lindbeck 1984, 18).

In a cultural-linguistic approach to religion, Lindbeck offers a model of religion and culture as a language through which one gains the capacity to name reality. He writes:

> A religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of human life and thought….It is not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and the good (though it may involve these), or a symbolism expressive of basic attitudes, feelings, or sentiments (though these will be generated). Rather, it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments….Its doctrines, cosmic stories or myths, and ethical directives are integrally related to the rituals it practices, the sentiments or experiences it evokes, the actions it recommends, and the institutional forms it develops. All this is involved in comparing a religion to a cultural-linguistic system (Lindbeck 1984, 33).

In this model, human experience becomes Christian as the practices and narratives transform this experience through acquaintance with the cultural-linguistic system of Christianity (Lindbeck 1984, 40). The truth of the particular doctrine or narrative is related to the correlative forms of life that it generates (Lindbeck 1984, 64). In order to judge the adequacy of the religious doctrines or narrative, one must develop "some skill in how to use its language and practice its way of life before the propositional meaning of

its affirmations become determinate enough to be rejected" (Lindbeck 1984, 69).

Theological texts and human experience are not correlated with one another, as much as human experience becomes transformed through learning the grammar of the tradition and contributing to its development. As one practices Christianity, or any other religious tradition, one's unique cultural condition and affections are molded to the tradition, providing an endless variation of Christian experiences (Lindbeck 1984, 84). If Tracy's approach to theology is characterized by a hermeneutics of conversation, Lindbeck's is a hermeneutics of performance whereby the appropriation of any religious faith happens through the gradual process of gaining capacity in practicing the faith.

## CONVERSATION AND PERFORMANCE IN SHARED CHRISTIAN PRAXIS AND CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

Thomas Groome's shared Christian praxis and Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra's Christian practices operate out of two different hermeneutics. David Tracy's hermeneutics of conversation influences Groome's shared praxis, "*a group of Christians sharing in dialogue their critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith*" (Groome 1980, 184). On the other hand, George Lindbeck's performative hermeneutics shapes Bass and Dykstras' Christian practices as "*things people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world* (Bass and Dykstra 2002, 18). While Groome and Bass/Dykstra may not place these theological methodologies at the heart of their own work, the hermeneutics of these equally distinctive theological methodologies influence the pedagogical approaches of these theorists of religious education.

**Shared Christian Praxis**

Thomas Groome's shared Christian praxis (SCP) is an approach or style to religious education in which the Christian community "reflect[s] critically on their own historical agency in time and place and on their socio-cultural reality, having access together to Christian Story/Vision, and personally appropriate[s] it in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith toward God's reign for all creation" (Groome 1991, 142). SCP consists of five movements, including a focusing activity, engaging present praxis as raised by the focusing activity (movement 1), reflecting critically on this praxis (movement 2), turning toward an interpretation of the Christian Story/Vision (movement 3), performing a dialectical hermeneutics between the Christian Story/Vision and the present praxis in movements 1 and 2 (movement 4), and finally a decision/response for lived Christian faith (movement 5) (Groome 1980, 207-232; Groome 1991, 146-148). Because of its concerns with human experience, interpreting the Christian Story/Vision, and appropriating this interpretation into renewed praxis, SCP shares much in common with Tracy's critical-correlation method of theological inquiry. By examining these three common areas of interest, I show how Groome's own use of a hermeneutics of conversation shapes his approach to appropriating faith.

For Tracy, an examination of the religious qualities of human experience, using either phenomenology or social science, is an essential aspect of any theological method in the current era. Groome's shared Christian praxis approach agrees with Tracy that human experience has a religious dimension to it. Religious education, for Groome, "focuses specific attention on empowering people in their quest for a transcendent and ultimate ground of being" (1980, 22). Shared *Christian* praxis is only one form that

religious education might take, since any number of religious traditions might also attend to the qualities of religious experience, understanding the meaning of this experience through the particulars of its own symbol system (Groome 1980, 24). Within the Catholic tradition, Groome also grounds the religious nature of human experience in a theology of revelation whereby human experience reveals the divine, displaying an incarnational quality (1991, 160-161).

Still, Groome enriches this quest for the religious quality of human experience by his use of the term praxis and the pedagogy of conversation that he adopts. When Groome speaks of praxis, he means the full way of being human in the world including the active, reflective, and creative aspects of human knowing and living (1980, 169-175; 1991, 137). By turning people toward present praxis, the educator is beginning to engage people in reflection upon how their experience as human beings in the world is already shaped by religious symbols and the interpretation of these symbols (Groome 1991, 178). While Tracy's understanding of human experience was primarily related to thinking, Groome contextualizes this thinking into a whole way of life, a critical conversation about what it means to be fully human, to live wisely.

In SCP, the hermeneutics of conversation is enfleshed in a pedagogy that is itself part of the religious dimension of human experience. For Groome, no experience is revelatory, unless one first begins to reflect upon this experience in conversation with self and with others (1991, 144). The conversation with self is enriched by the questions and narratives offered by others in a trusting community. The very act of sharing faith, one's desires and hopes in a community of inquiry, leads to a deepening identity and maturity in this faith for the self and the community as a whole (Groome 1991, 179). As Groome

writes, "The deeper our levels of reasoning, remembering, and imagining, the more likely we are to uncover the transcendent that is imminent in our lives" (1991, 197). Tracy's concern with the conversation between human experience and the Christian tradition becomes in Groome not merely a theological method but a pedagogical style.

In addition to the religious dimensions of human experience, Groome also employs a hermeneutics of conversation within the Christian tradition itself. Like Tracy, Groome views the Christian tradition as a collection of narratives and symbols that need interpreted in order to appropriate the Christian Story/Vision. By Christian Story, Groome means all forms of Christian media: the Scriptures, traditions, liturgies, creeds, theologies, symbols, myths, spiritualities, ethics, even the structures and forms of ecclesial governance (1991, 216). The Christian Vision is the consequence of this Christian Story, shaping both the present and eschatological vision of people's lives (Groome 1991, 217). Employing Dulles' model of revelation as symbol, Groome encounters the Christian Story/Vision as a way of harnessing "the potential of life-giving symbols to change people in life-giving ways, to invite commitment, and to draw people into experiences of mystery and worship rather than only into 'discursive thought'" (1991, 221). This Story/Vision expresses, symbolically, the faith history of a person's relationship with God, already inviting people to lived faith (Groome 1991, 220).

Here too a conversation takes place. Groome offers nine hermeneutical guidelines for the educator to use in movement 3 for conversing with this Christian Story/Vision, which he reduces to a single hermeneutical *modus operandi*: *"Remembering the life-giving purpose of God's reign, and aware of my own perspective and the lives of these participants, what old and new 'truths' can I draw from this 'text'*

*that encourages people in the praxis of Christian faith?*” (1991, 240). The educator,

before entering the classroom, needs to engage in a conversation with the text, to carry

out the historical and hermeneutical work that Tracy spoke about in critical-correlation

theology. Simultaneously, the educator presents this material in a disclosure style, one

that “gives people access in ways that open up the tradition so that they are drawn to

intuit, to think, to question, to imagine, to discern, to come to see for themselves, to

decide about what this Story/Vision means for their lives now” (Groome 1991, 244). In

effect, the explicit articulation of the Christian Story/Vision is a new member of the

conversation (nascent in the previous movements), joining a dialogue has already been

taking place in the examination of present praxis. What elicits a faith response is not the

text itself but the conversation with the Christian Story/Vision.

Finally, the fruit of this conversation in Groome, just as in Tracy, is an

appropriation of Christian faith. In describing this act of appropriation in movement 4,

Groome writes:

> By ‘appropriation’ I mean that participants integrate Christian Story/Vision by
> personal agency into their own identity and understanding, they make it their own,
> judge, and come to see for themselves how their lives are to be shaped by it and
> how they are to be reshapers of its historical realization in their place and time”
> (1991, 250).

Groome trusts that such appropriation is possible, because human beings have both a

natural and graced ability to recognize and appropriate the truth of the Christian

Story/Vision in their lives in a community of dialogue (1991, 256). Yet, genuine

appropriation for Groome is more than seeing the truth; it is living it. In movement 5,

Groome emphasizes that the community of inquirers will need to make a decision, either

cognitively, affectively, or behaviorally on how one might live the fruit of this

conversation, a renewal of present praxis (Groome 1991, 267).  When properly

performed SCP never ends, because each new appropriation reshapes present praxis,

requiring further inquiry and conversation.

Therefore, SCP adopts and transforms Tracy's hermeneutics of conversation into

a pastoral and pedagogical approach.  SCP assumes that each human being has a natural

capacity to allow God's revelation in history to become another revelatory moment

through a critical conversation with human thought and life and the Christian

Story/Vision, all the while in dialogue with the community of faith (present, past, and

future).  All people, no matter their particular stage in life or religious tradition can

participate in this appropriation of faith through SCP.  A Christian or Buddhist may use

this approach to see something life-giving in each other's faiths.  The human capacities

utilized for appropriation include everything needed for a good conversation: critical

thinking, interpretation, judgment, imagination, and concern for the conversation partner.

As one engages in SCP, these habits of conversation are acquired.

**Christian Practices**

While Groome's SCP has received considerable scholarly attention and

development through the years, Christian practice offers a newer and thus less developed

approach to religious education and pastoral ministry.  In comparing SCP to Christian

practices, it is helpful to employ the distinction between the hermeneutics of conversation

and performance.  If SCP employs a hermeneutics of conversation for the appropriation

of lived Christian faith, Christian practices uses a hermeneutics of performance to

gradually gain capacity in specific forms of life that are Christian.  Because of the relative

immaturity of the theory of Christian practices, I offer comparisons between SCP and this

approach in order to indicate how the hermeneutics of performance leads to distinctive emphases.

Craig Dykstra, one of two leading voices in the emergence of Christian practices, adopts Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to religion. Because religions adopt faith stances as distinctive ways of living, they involve "the fashioning of distinctive emotions; of distinctive habits, practices, and virtues; of distinctive purposes, desires, passions, and commitments; and of distinctive beliefs and ways of thinking" (Dykstra 1999, 115). Whereas Lindbeck was more interested in determining how certain religious practices and worldviews helped shape the formulation, development, and interpretation of doctrine, Dykstra focuses upon how Christian practices might transform how one views reality. He writes, "This means that religious language is not just language about 'religious things' (i.e., the religious community, its institutions, and traditions) but about the whole of reality made evident and available through the community's faith" (1999, 119).

This religious worldview is mediated through the performance of Christian practices. What are these Christian practices? First, Christian practices are responses to fundamental human needs, ways of responding to the desire for human flourishing (Bass and Dykstra 2002, 22). To discern what these human needs are, a Christian practice approach engages in theological reflection, in order to better understand the particular human needs in a society, as well as how God continues to respond to the needs of creation in the present (Bass and Dykstra 2002, 24). Christian practices, as found within the heart of the Christian tradition, include honoring the body, keeping Sabbath, forgiving, forming communities, discernment, dying, singing, healing, living justly,

telling the Christian story, and worshiping (Dykstra 1999, 42-43). By engaging in the practice, one begins to see these fundamental human needs in a new light. Like SCP, Christian practices correlate a Christian understanding of the world and human experience. Yet, the correlation is carried out, not first through a critical examination of *praxis*, but an apprenticeship in the particular grammar of the practice itself.

Second, through engaging in Christian practice, the human person grows in knowledge about self and God. Related to the knowledge of self, Bass and Dykstra write, "Entering the Christian practice of healing, for example, develops in practitioners certain skills, habits, virtues, and capacities of mind and spirit" (2002, 25). Christian practice fosters a distinctive way of viewing the world through the very art of practicing Christianity. Yet, these practices also increase one's knowledge of God. As one engages in the practice of keeping Sabbath or hospitality, one learns the biblical stories that ground the practice, the liturgical words and gestures that quicken the desire for deeper knowledge of God, and to see God acting in the leisurely rest of creation or in welcoming the stranger into one's midst. By engaging in practices in an excellent manner, the human person is opened to beliefs about God and the world that were once considered improbable (Volf 2002, 257). Whereas, SCP addressed the Christian tradition as a symbol system, Christian practices engage this same tradition as a collection of habits and virtues, which lead one to beliefs about God. To understand the belief, one needs the practice.

Third, Christian practice are social and historical. This is important, because an essential aspect of receiving an education in faith regarding Christian practice is coming to see how other communities, across time and space, have carried out this practice (Bass

and Dykstra 2002, 26-27). This historical inquiry into the nature of practices throughout time and space is essential to education in faith for Bass and Dykstra, because they adopt an understanding of practice as articulated by Alasdair MacIntyre. He writes:

> By a practice, I mean 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 definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved as systematically extended (MacIntyre 1984, 187).

By reflecting on how other Christians practice Christianity, a fuller understanding of the various ends of those practices comes about by examining how other persons have constructed the standards of excellence that are part and parcel of the practice in question. This does not mean that Christians can forego critical thought in regard to these practices, since Christian practices are never isolated from the fall and redemption of human beings (Bass and Dykstra 2002, 27). Instead, as one discerns how practices have led to less abundant forms of life, one recognizes that the dynamic of sin and grace operating in the world. The response is not so much an avoidance of the practice in question but a renewed commitment to engage in this practice in a redemptive manner, as a way of life abundant (Bass and Dykstra 2002, 29). If SCP converses with the Christian Story/Vision in order to discern life-giving memories to dialogue with present praxis, Christian practices does so in order to learn the standards of excellence and consequent beliefs that have emerged from the practice throughout time and space so that a specific Christian community might enrich and renew a contemporary practice.

From these three points, one can see that appropriation of faith in Christian practice is subtle. Human activities are undertaken and gradually given meaning through the practice itself, shaping one's identity. This appropriation of faith takes place through

a redirection of human desire and intention, one that helps to form and transform belief (Plantinga Pauw 2002, 47). Elaborating on the Jonah story, Amy Plantinga Pauw writes, "The problem is not that Jonah fails to believe the right things; he fails to *desire* the right things. As the Augustinian tradition insists, the link between belief and practice is forged by human desire and attitude. Both our cognitive and practice efforts arise out of our loves" (45). Christian practice appropriates the Christian faith through an education of human desire that can take a life time of commitment to the practices, whereby gradually one can begin to see new facets of God's action and being in the world (Coakley 2002, 83-93).

Thus, while the pedagogy of Christian practices asserts that each human being has the capacity to appropriate God's revelation, it also insists that such appropriation takes place through a deeper engagement and understanding of specific Christian practices (Jones 2002, 60). Everyone can understand God's revelation in Christ, though such understanding reaches new depths as one practices Christianity, picking up the grammar of the tradition. Christianity is appropriated through the performance itself.

## FAITH APPROPRIATION AND PLURALISM

The hermeneutics of conversation and performance, as utilized in SCP and Christian practices, arose partly out of an academy and a wider world in which pluralism was becoming a necessary aspect of human thinking and living. Yet, in the intervening years since Tracy and Lindbeck proposed the critical-correlation and cultural-linguistic methods as ways of interpreting religion, the challenges and fruits of pluralism have become even more central to the theological endeavor. In the final section of this essay, I outline a recent theological hermeneutic as offered by the Dutch, contextual theologian,

Lieven Boeve.  The purpose of this examination is to offer an approach to religious education inspired by SCP and Christian practices that utilizes this hermeneutics of interruption.

Lieven Boeve, a contextual theologian researching and writing in a European context, places questions of pluralism at the center of his own theological method.  For Boeve, a person, who professes the particulars of a religious tradition, does so in a world in which there are always other options for believing or not believing.  This is especially true for Christianity in the West, which once occupied a privileged position.  As Boeve writes, "Since the necessity to be Christian no longer exists on the cultural level, contemporary Christians—structurally speaking—must more than before 'choose' to be a Christian, whether or not they live out their faith…as a vocation or 'being chosen'" (2007, 29).  The result of secularization is not the disappearance of religion from the public square but an increasing plurality of religious options, all which interact with one another (Boeve 2007, 27).  The person, who chooses to live as a Christian or a Buddhist is doing more than responding to the transcendent in one's life, as articulated by a specific symbol system.  Instead, faith appropriation in a genuinely pluralistic context becomes a vocation to the very particularities of this faith community, an obligation for the person of faith to choose *this way of life* (Boeve 2003, 62-63).

Because of this new context of radical pluralism, Boeve is highly doubtful of the effectiveness of modern critical-correlation.  First, Boeve contends that it is no longer tenable to see theology's primary project as a conversation between secular human experience and Christian faith.  This is because secular culture is as pluralistic and perspectival as various religious faiths (Boeve 2007, 34).  Second, even if one could

bring together the entire diversity of human experiences and religious faiths, postmodernity has challenged the possibility of developing a consensus among these conversation partners (Boeve 2007, 35). That is, when a Christian says God, he or she simply means something quite distinct from the transcendent ground of being of the existential humanist. Third, the critical-correlation approach to theology has ignored the particularities of the tradition at the expense of the universal. The Christian tradition, for Boeve, does not communicate any universal human truth, but one particular perspective of being human in the world, and the uniqueness of the narrative is what makes it so valuable (Boeve 2007, 33-35).

Yet, precisely because the human person recognizes this radical pluralism, he or she cannot embrace a pre-modern naivety or a radical fundamentalism. Christianity "is located in the midst of an internally pluralized arena in which it is obliged to determine its own position in relation to the other fundamental life options surrounding it" (Boeve 2007, 41). The person of faith lives Christianity as an open narrative, ready to engage the strangeness and unexpected aspects of being a person of faith expressed in other fundamental life options, as well as the strangeness and otherness of God as expressed in the Christian narrative (Boeve 2003, 96-97). This context of the open narrative leads to a hermeneutics of interruption. Every time the Christian narrative is too secure in its own identity, the truth claims of other ways of life interrupt the Christian narrative (Boeve 2007, 44). This interruption is a halting of the narrative sequence, one that demands a return to the particularity of one's own narrative (Boeve 2007, 44-45).

This hermeneutics of interruption is not simply contextual but also theological. The Christian God, as revealed by Jesus Christ, is one, who continues to break open

previously closed narratives, forgiving sins, liberating captives, and healing the sick. The

biblical motifs and images are related to the interrupting God: the exodus, the

resurrection, and the pilgrim. The paschal mystery, the ultimate closure of all narratives

is also the breaking open of this narrative: God too has interrupted death. The Christian

is called to be open to this interruption, as well as becoming an interrupter, one who

challenges closed narratives (Boeve 2007, 46-48). The person, initiated into the grammar

or speech of Christianity, learns about God's interruption through the very practices and

narratives that make up Christianity (Boeve 2007, 52). And by contributing to these

practices and narratives, the Christian becomes an interrupter, who remakes, renews, and

revises the narrative through the grace of God's interruption (Boeve 2007, 48).

Boeve's hermeneutics of interruption shares common concerns with the

hermeneutics of conversation and performance. His theological methodology treats

experience, theological content, and the act of appropriation, now understood as the

interruption of God's presence. From a hermeneutics of conversation, he emphasizes the

need to recognize the local context, as well as to attend to non-theological data in the

theological enterprise. From a hermeneutics of performance, he sees the need to engage

with the particularity of the narrative and practices of Christianity as an initiation into a

way of life.

Yet, Boeve's proposal is distinct from both a hermeneutics of conversation and

performance. While a hermeneutics of conversation believes harmony is possible

between secular human experience and the Christian narrative, a hermeneutics of

interruption is wary of such harmony, because it ignores the particularity of the two

narratives and their respective forms of life. Religious experience, as spoken about by

Christians, means a particular form of life in a specific faith community (Boeve 2007, 83). Secular experience is informed by entire ways of life that are not equivalent to Christian experience. Faith experience in a tradition makes specific experiences of the transcendent possible, just as much as secular practices may lead to an incapacity for the transcendent. Normal human experience, even when examined, is not necessarily revelatory. As Boeve writes, "In a life of faith, which has its theological explanation in the relationship between God and humankind, there remain dimensions that cannot be communicated to those who do not share this faith, dimension that have their roots in the said relationship" (2003, 181). Here, Boeve finds more common ground with a hermeneutics of performance than one of conversation.

Nonetheless, Boeve's theology of interruption is also not equivalent to a hermeneutics of performance. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic method and Christian practices tend to ignore the fact that Christian narratives and practices do not mediate a unitary vision of the good life. As the Christian practices the reading of texts, reflecting on events, and welcoming the stranger, they are also interrupting the tradition and context in new ways, changing this vision of the good life in the process. In addition, the practices, as they reveal God also disclose this God, since the practices cannot capture God and may in fact be in need of interruption (Boeve 2007, 87). A major fault of a hermeneutics of performance is that it can easily lead to a closed narrative, whereby new contexts (including the context of the one practicing) and other narratives do not interrupt the practices.

Boeve's hermeneutics of interruption offers possibilities for religious educators, carrying out faith education in specific traditions in a pluralistic context. In order to

discover some of these possibilities, I now recontextualize SCP and Christian practices in light of this hermeneutics of interruption. Through this recontextualization of SCP and Christian practices, religious educators may see areas for development in approaches to faith appropriation.

SCP, as an approach or style of religious education that encourages adaptation to situation or context, offers great possibilities for the religious educator using a hermeneutics of interruption. First, the focusing activity, rather than establishing a generative theme, becomes a pedagogical act of interruption. Certainly, this act of interruption may include gathering a community around an event that is engaging to people's interests (Groome 1991, 157). Yet, this moment of gathering should elicit wonder, awe, even moments of confusion. Rather than recognize their own lives in the focusing activity, they may see something so strange or unique that its very particularity calls out to the person. The strangeness of the focusing activity is precisely what may attract someone to engage in it. Part of this strangeness, in a pluralistic context, will involve using explicit imagery, symbols, words, and practices from the tradition to which one is introducing the student. In a pluralistic setting, one can no longer assume that the Christian narrative already forms the foundation of any experience.

Second, in movements 1 and 2, SCP already participates in a hermeneutics of interruption. By turning one's attention to present praxis through the voice of the other in dialogue, one is interrupting the assumptions and ideologies, the closed narratives that are a part of being a fallen human being. Yet, one will also need to include the Christian narrative(s) in these movements, not in a nascent form but as an explicit interrupter. For example, a focusing activity may include sharing the Easter *Exsultet*, the liturgical hymn

that speaks of the *felix culpa* of humanity, the happy fault and necessary sin of Adam. Adolescent students may say that in this happy fault, they see that sometimes sin can bring forth good things and so engaging in this sin is sometimes necessary, because one can learn from it. This is *not* necessarily the Christian narrative, but may express certain American narratives of happiness and what Christian Smith calls moralistic therapeutic deism (2006). This narrative needs interrupting by the Christian narrative, one in which it is possible and desirable for a redeemed person to not sin.

Third, movements 3, 4, and 5 in SCP are in need of some revision in a hermeneutics of interruption. First, in a hermeneutics of interruption, one will not speak of a single Christian Story/Vision. Rather, there are a plurality of Christian stories and visions. The narrating of these stories and visions interrupt the Christian in their absolute strangeness, in their stunning particularities, whether this includes the reign of God instituted by Jesus Christ or the monastic practices engaged in the medieval era. Second, if human experience in general is not faith experience, then it is problematic to ask students to correlate present praxis and the Christian Story/Vision. Before correlating, one will need to begin an apprenticeship in the Christian life, a gradual socialization into the language and narrative of Christianity. Here, SCP may incorporate some of the insights of Christian practices. Then, as human experience becomes faith experience, one is better able to recognize the more problematic elements of the narrative. Third, SCP's fifth movement seems particularly suited to a hermeneutics of interruption. By asking for a decision of faith, of behavior, of cognition, the educator is recognizing that there are other options available to the believer. The person, who says a narrative is true, worthy of being a whole way of life, is choosing a vocation and a calling. Movement 5, in a

hermeneutics of interruption, is a process of the students and the teacher working together to discern this vocation of faith, however tentative it might be at the time.

Christian practices also may benefit from a hermeneutics of interruption. First, rather than see Christian practices as responses to human fulfillment, one may interpret them as interruptions. Christian hospitality is not simply a transformation of hospitality but an interruption of it. If the presence of Christ is coming in the stranger, in the text that one reads, or in the homeless and hungry, then this will include an interruption of the mores and the assumptions that the American narrative of hospitality, of study, and of charity. Christian hospitality can be painful, difficult, a matter of incredible ascetic discipline, because one is never simply transforming a universal human desire but a human desire already shaped by a cultural context. Second, the act of interpreting a Christian practice not only leads to a better understanding of the practice but an interruption of it. Christian practices would benefit from an appropriation of SCP, using theological reflection in precisely the way that Groome does. One needs to reveal the narratives that make Christian practice less than excellent, allowing these narratives to interrupt the Christian practice. Third, as those who practice Christianity search for the standards of excellence in the history of practice, it also needs to recognize the strangeness and otherness of the practice under examination. Monastic practices in the eleventh and twelfth centuries offer a bizarre narrative of what constitutes human fulfillment. This is because, in past practice, monks engaged in these practices with entirely different cognitive patterns and patterns of desire (Asad 1993, 155). In fact, these monks may have more in common with non-Christian practitioners than contemporary Western Christians.

# CONCLUSION

Religious educators have benefited from the theological insights brought about by the turn to hermeneutics in contemporary theology. Groome's SCP operates out of a hermeneutics of conversation, one that is open to the truth in human experience and the Christian narrative. Bass and Dykstra's Christian practices is informed by a hermeneutics of performance, recognizing that to learn Christianity requires engaging in the particularities of the Christian narrative. In light of the increasing influence of pluralism in the world, religious educators need to adopt a hermeneutics that allows for the appropriation of faith in this new context. A hermeneutics of interruption, though only one theological example, offers new possibilities for appropriation in an era of pluralism.

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