Multiple Religious Belonging

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The Religious Quest As Transformative Journey: Interspiritual Religious Belonging And The Problem Of Religious Depth

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Abstract: As scholars and the public grope towards understanding emergent forms of religiosity (multiple-religious belonging, spiritual but not religious, interspirituality), notions of discernment, religious depth, and spiritual practice figure prominently in defining and assessing these forms. Some form of commitment to a particular religious tradition is often considered the most important factor in the discernment of religious depth, while "spiritual but not religious" is often seen as the amorphous searching or the drifting whims of an immature ego. I will argue, however, that failing to take into account the most mature forms of emerging religiosity is bound to miss important developments, just as similar methodologies would for traditional religions. Further, I point out problems with correlating religious depth with belonging to a particular religious tradition, and offer an alternate way to conceive of religious depth. In doing so I develop the concept of the religious quest as transformative journey, allowing for a more capacious understanding of religious consciousness. I then introduce *interspiritual religious belonging*, contrasting it with certain understandings of "multiple-religious" belonging, and providing mature examples of its embodiment. Finally, utilizing new surveys from Pew and PPRI showing accelerating growth among the "spiritual but not religious" and "religiously unaffiliated"—as well as expanding religious and racial diversity within the United States—I briefly reference potential political ramifications the interspiritual movement might have, and address the importance of developing mature theological perspectives from within it. It is my hope that the Theology Without Walls project can provide academic space for the latter.

Keywords: John Thatamanil, multiple religious-belonging, spirituality, Jeanine Diller, emergent religiosity, spiritual but not religious, contemplative

1 A question of categorization

In the summer of 2016, I spent a week at a Roman Catholic monastery tucked away in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, co-facilitating an intimate dialogue among contemplative practitioners of diverse wisdom traditions. Most of the participants lived active lives in the world and played recognized leadership roles in their communities, which included academic life, religious institutions, and social work. The title of the gathering was "The Future of Religion and (Inter)Spirituality." Multiple religious belonging was a major foci of our discussions.[1]

1 These dialogues were convened by the *Foundation for New Monasticism and Interspirituality*, of which I am a co-founder, and facilitated by Netanel Miles-Yépez and myself. For more on the Foundation, see http://www.new-monastics.com/

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In the months leading up to the retreat, I had been reflecting on scholarly responses to emerging forms of religiosity: multiple-religious belonging, the spiritual but not religious, interspirituality. I found particularly helpful Jeanine Diller's wonderful essay on "Multiple Religious Orientation." In it, Diller outlines a range of possibilities for multiple religious belonging. Using the "continua" of depth and breadth to chart possibilities across a graph ("depth" being the vertical dimension, "breadth" the horizontal dimension), Diller locates different ways of being multiply religious, from fully belonging to more than one religious tradition, to being "spiritual but not religious," to engaging multiple religious traditions with various levels of commitment. In Diller's analysis, religious depth is defined as a measure of how intensely one participates in a religious tradition ("the farther one goes on this continuum the *deeper* one participates in religion"), while *breadth* represents how many religious traditions one participates in ("the more traditions one practices, the *broader* one participates in religion").[2] The depth continuum ranges from a simple openness towards a particular religious tradition to the deeper dimensions of "identifying" with and then "belonging" to a particular religious tradition. Identifying represents a personal choice to identify with a religious tradition, while belonging is a yet deeper dimension that requires acceptance into a religious tradition by the community of religious practitioners, who at this level accept one as a member into their religious community.[3] Religious depth as here explicated involves an actual commitment to the practices, rituals, beliefs, etc. of a *specific* religious tradition.

With this analysis Diller is able to locate a wealth of examples of varying configurations along these continua: from friends who identify with more than one religious tradition through marriage or other social circumstances (e.g., one of Diller's friends, "Nan," who was born into a family that was already multiply religious with a Hindu mother and Christian father and who eventually married a Jew); to groups gleaned from Pew's much quoted survey "'Nones' on the Rise"[4] (e.g., "spiritual but not religious"); to comparative theologian Francis Clooney and Roman Catholic Jesuit priest Robert Kennedy (Kennedy is also a Zen Roshi, or an acknowledged teacher in the Zen tradition); and finally even famous Sufi mystics Rumi and Ibn Arabi. For example, Diller categorizes Francis Clooney, who is also a Jesuit priest, as *identifying* with both Christianity and Hinduism, but *belonging* only to Christianity. Robert Kennedy, on the other hand, *belongs* to both Zen Buddhism and Christianity. Diller gives examples of "beyond belonging," a stage of religious depth characterized by a sense of belonging to all religions (Ibn Arabi), or conversely belonging to none (Rumi), but this stage of religious depth only occurs *after* belonging to a particular religious tradition.[5]

While reflecting on Diller's essay and other scholarly work during the aforementioned retreat, I was struck by an incongruence. As dialogue participants opened up to one another, surrounded by a pristine nature removed from the hustle and bustle of the world, describing our own religious journeys, steadfast commitments, spiritual experiences, and the encompassing nature of religiosity that permeated our lives, it dawned on me that numerous participants, myself included, did not fit into any of the categories so promisingly outlined by Diller. Nor were their lives being reflected in the vast majority of scholarship being done on emerging religious forms. Again this past summer, at the 2017 gathering of "The Future of Religion and (Inter)Spirituality" in upstate New York, this pattern was repeated and even amplified among a new round of dialogue participants.[6] Why, I wondered, do these mature expressions of spirituality and religiosity remain off the radar of much of even the most nuanced academic scholarship?

2 Diller, "Multiple Religious Orientation," 343, 344.

3 Ibid.

4 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "'Nones' on the Rise."

5 Diller quotes Ibn Arabi: "My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a covenant for Christian monks, a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba and that tables of the Torah and the book of the Qur'an. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith." And Rumi: "I am neither Muslim, nor Christian, Jew nor Zorastrian; I am neither of the earth nor of the heavens; I am neither body nor soul." Diller, "Multiple Religious Orientation," 351.

6 These dialogues were also convened by the *Foundation for New Monasticism and Interspirituality* (see note 1), and were held at the Abode of the Message in New Lebanon, NY, June 15-20, 2017.

2 Complicating the categories

Perhaps this incongruence was simply an example of the inability to categorize exhaustively the nuances of religious participation. After all, there is nearly an infinite array of possibilities. However, I sensed that a deeper philosophical issue was at hand. Is there a concept of religious depth, I wondered, that is not beholden to the idea of "belonging" to a *particular* religious tradition? Can one commit oneself to a religious quest without belonging to or identifying with a particular religious tradition? And how might we understand such a religiosity?

These questions prove to be somewhat rhetorical, as I must answer them in the affirmative from the start. For a committed religious life outside any particular religious tradition describes a large number of the dialogue participants mentioned above, as well as a growing cadre of friends and colleagues I have come to know over the years. I should note that I consciously use the term "religious life" as opposed to "spiritual life" here, in order to emphasize the committed nature of these lives, which most often include disciplined spiritual practices, theological and philosophical frameworks, and communities of dialogue and inquiry. I also wish to avoid the amorphousness that the term "spiritual" might convey (e.g., my "spiritual practice" is going dancing at the clubs on the weekend, which may be perfectly appropriate given the context, but is not what I mean to denote here). These are people who are living with a deeply felt sense of religiosity, where all aspects of their lived reality revolve around their religious-contemplative orientations and practices, and yet many would neither identify with, nor declare themselves as belonging to, a particular religious tradition, or to more than one tradition. This does not mean there is not significant interaction with and participation in religious traditions, often there is. However, the very categories of self-identifying as belonging to a particular tradition, or even a "multiple-belonger" to more than one tradition, turn out for such cases to be faulty categories. That is, these very categories misconstrue the concept of religious depth, correlating it with "identifying" or "belonging" to a particular religious tradition. Perhaps an example will help to clarify this point, one that may seem initially to confirm the validity of these categories, but in the end reveals their inadequacy.

Pir Netanel (Mu'in ad-Din) Miles-Yépez is the head of the Inayati-Maimuni Order, a hybrid Sufi-Hasidic lineage, fusing Sufi and Hasidic principles of spirituality and practice espoused by Rabbi Avraham Maimuni in 13th-century Egypt with the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov and Sufi spiritual teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan. The potential for such a lineage became possible when Pir Netanel's spiritual teacher, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (a "master" in the Hasidic tradition and founder of the Jewish Renewal movement), was initiated into the universalist Inayati Sufi lineage and made a sheikh by Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, the son and successor of Hazrat Inayat Khan.[7] An authority on Kabbalah and Hasidism, Reb Zalman, as he was generally known, was a student of Howard Thurman, worked with Abraham Joshua Heschel, and participated extensively in interreligious dialogues, particularly with such spiritual luminaries as the 14th Dalai Lama, Thomas Merton, Swami Satchidananda, Thomas Keating, and others. Though a pillar of liberal and mystical Judaism in the last century, Reb Zalman remained committed to "a creatively Orthoprax Hasidic Judaism" throughout his life.[8]

Reb Zalman initiated Miles-Yépez into both the Hasidic and Sufi lineages, thereby creating a new fused lineage that has also been recognized by Pir Zia Inayat-Khan, the successor of his father, Pir Vilayat. As might be expected, Pir Netanel does not identify exclusively with either the Hasidic or Sufi aspects of his "hyphenated lineage," but sees both as equal contributors of "spiritual DNA." He identifies as Jewish, but not in a way that excludes the Christianity of his complicated ancestry. However, though conversant

7 For the Inayati Order, see https://inayatiorder.org/. For the Jewish Renewal Movement, see https://aleph.org.

8 Much of the information about Reb Zalman stems from multiple personal interviews with Miles-Yépez in 2016 and 2017, who was one of Reb Zalman's closest students. As one example of Reb Zalman's interfaith dialogue work, he was part of a roundtable discussion at the Chan Center in Vancouver, Canada on April 20, 2004, with the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and others. Miles-Yépez showed me the video of their roundtable. A dialogue between Zalman and Thomas Keating can be found on YouTube as "The Kiss of God." For the relationship between Zalman and Heschel, see the introduction to Heschel, *Human*. For Zalman's relationship with Merton, see Kaplan, "An Interview." Miles-Yépez is also currently working on a book detailing Merton and Zalman's extensive correspondence through letters.

in Islam, he does not identify as a Muslim Sufi, as the Inayati lineage is universalist in orientation. For him, Hasidism and Sufism are "supranormative traditions," which might be accessed without normative religious commitments. His personal religious commitments tend toward Judaism and Christianity. And yet, in the end, he feels his greater religio-spiritual identity is not contained by any of these normative or supranormative traditions. It is broadly "interspiritual," though particularly and strongly informed by the aforementioned traditions. They are the "flavors which add taste and dimension" to his interspirituality. Likewise, the Inayati-Maimuni Order, according to Miles-Yépez, is neither Hasidic nor Sufi, but an emergent form of religiosity that has grown out of traditional religious-mystical lineages, and which can claim authentic connection to those traditional lineages.[9]

The point of relevance to our discussion here is that Pir Netanel would not *self-identify* simply as a multiple religious-belonger, which complicates the categories in Diller's analysis. While having some sense of belonging to both Sufi and Hasidic lineages, Pir Netanel more fully describes himself as being involved in the formation of an emergent religiosity that has been born through a fusion of the two (indeed, he would claim a third contribution from contemplative Christianity), without being reducible to either tradition, or merely an amalgam of both, for it cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts.[10] *Rather, within this emergent religiosity exists a worldview which challenges our notions of clearly defined religious traditions, and that contains within itself a perspective and religious embodiment that goes beyond the various fused elements.*

While Diller does make an effort to understand religiosity that is a fused hybrid of two or more religious lineages, her understanding would be difficult to apply to Pir Netanel. For instance, Diller analyzes her friend Nan mentioned above, with a Hindu mother, a Christian father, and a Jewish partner, who continues to hold religious commitments in all three traditions while describing herself as a "Jewish-Christian-Hindu." However, Diller attributes to this particular type of hybrid identity a lower level of religious depth than is manifest in identification with or belonging to a particular tradition.[11] Nan's hybrid religiosity is more the result of social circumstances and the needs of daily life than the outcome of a prolonged, reflective, and committed spiritual and religious practice. Diller sees her as "religiously busy," but without the need to resolve deeper issues in conflicting beliefs between traditions. Nan simply adopts "non-conflicting beliefs and practices," while remaining silent "about the conflicts even in the midst of activity."[12] However, the hybridity found in Pir Netanel's religious journey does not emerge through familial relationships or romantic partners, but rather is a consciously chosen synergistic fusion *that was embraced and strengthened by committed spiritual and religious practice, extensive learning, and the guidance of authentic teachers.* The *depth* of Pir Netanel's religious commitment, which permeates all areas of his life, is clearly on par with some of the more extensive expressions of religious commitment found among those who commit to one or more traditional forms of religiosity. Yet a system that only sees religious depth in commitment to particular religious traditions will fail to recognize this type of religious depth. And while Pir Netanel emerges out of a fusion of traditional religious-mystical lineages, a similar type of committed religiosity may emerge, as we will see below in the example of Beverly Lanzetta, that does not spring from any particular religious tradition, but which over time may still make extensive use of contemplative lineages within those traditions.

There are, of course, less mature ways of being "interspiritual" as well. And as we will explore ways of understanding religious depth below, as well as interspiritual religious belonging, it will perhaps be fruitful for us to contrast our example of Pir Netanel with what I consider to be a less mature form of "interspirituality." Let me introduce a spiritual seeker I will call "Fred." Fred decides to attend a Buddhist meditation retreat one weekend. At this retreat, he has a profound spiritual experience that opens him up to what he feels are expanded possibilities for meaning and religious orientation in his life. Fred promptly commits himself to this particular form of Buddhist practice. However, over the next year his initial experience fades and Fred finds himself growing bored with the practice. He begins to look for something else that can give meaning

9 Personal interviews with Miles-Yépez in 2016 and 2017.
10 Ibid.
11 Diller, "Multiple Religious Orientation," 347.
12 Ibid.

to his life, connecting him somehow to the initial experience he had. He eventually attends a Hindu *kirtan* ceremony, and once again has a powerful spiritual experience. *Kirtan* now becomes his main practice, and he attends ceremonies multiple times per week. However, over the next year a similar process repeats itself. The practice begins to become dry, the initial experience fades, and Fred once again finds himself in doubt and wondering how to "connect" to a deeper meaning in life. Fred moves on to the Christian contemplative practice of centering prayer, then to Sufi whirling dance, etc. Fred has fallen prey to what I describe as "cookie-jar spirituality," and become an experience junkie. One's spiritual and religious life becomes akin to continually sticking one's hand back in the cookie jar, trying to get another hit of spiritual experience. Though tasty, these cookies of spiritual experience ultimately lack nutritional value. And while they have their place in spiritual life, if depended upon for sustenance they lead only to malnutrition, not to spiritual maturity and religious depth as I conceptualize them below.

Fred's problem is that he lacks a fruitful framework for religious and spiritual life. He thinks that his spiritual life is ultimately about having blissful experiences rather than being willing to undergo the rigors of a more extensive transformative process. Fred's example is likely reflected in many spiritual journeys of younger people, who by standing outside of traditional forms of religion are forced to engage their spiritual lives without fully formed frameworks to help guide their journeys. What they need, I contend, is not to simply be told to join a religious tradition, but support in coming to a more mature understanding of the spiritual impulses they are experiencing, so that they might more easily live into a committed spiritual life that leads to religious depth (just what I mean by religious depth we will explore below). This essay, I hope, can serve as a small contribution towards just such support. It is also an invitation to academia, with its focus on mature, reflective thought, to play a role in the ongoing religious and spiritual lives of these pilgrims. However, to do so we must first begin to better understand these emergent forms of religiosity, and subsequently allow our conceptual categories to evolve accordingly.

3 The religious quest as transformative journey

Here we turn to recent work of John Thatamanil, which provides a working definition of religion that allows us to capture a broader conception of the religious, and so to hone in on what is of particular importance to the committed types of emergent religiosity we are considering. For Thatamanil, to be religious means "to seek comprehensive qualitative orientation. … [it is] a transhistorical claim that human beings seek orientation *to the whole of things or reality as such* rightly understood."[13] The religious quest, then, seeks to orient the whole person, "mind, heart, and body," to what is ultimately real.[14] How is this accomplished? According to Thatamanil, it necessitates both cognitive and affective transformation, using what he calls, respectively, "interpretive schemes" and "therapeutic regimes." Or to put it another way, to be religious simply means to embrace (or develop) a cognitive framework (interpretive scheme) that relates the world and one's life to a sacred / religious dimension of existence, and further to adopt actual practices (therapeutic regime) that help one to embody the positive qualities and potentialities that one's cognitive framework endorses; for example, qualities such as love, compassion, wisdom, and commitment to social justice.

Interpretive schemes offer normative comprehensive semiotic frameworks for understanding reality as a whole, while therapeutic regimes aim at "practical disciplines" which over time effect an inner and outer transformation. This transformation results in a "radical new comportment toward the world," changing the way we relate to the world and to others. Ideally, interpretive schemes combine with therapeutic regimes to form a nexus for comprehensive qualitative orientation, for our being-in-the-world, which encompasses more than mere conceptual assent to a particular series of beliefs or doctrines. The spiritual practices of a therapeutic regime, such as meditation, prayer, yoga, dance, ritual, etc., "install" as it were, religious frameworks in the body, mind, and heart of the religious practitioner.[15]

13 Thatamanil, "How Not", 65.
14 Thatamanil, "Transreligious", 357.
15 Ibid.

It will be fruitful to briefly draw out certain parallels between Thatamanil's "working theory of religions" with that articulated by William James, as we move towards a definition of the religious quest as transformative journey. Though James' theory remains problematic in certain areas, not least of which is an unconscious bias towards a personal, Protestant form of faith and religious experience, it does resonate in generalized ways with contemplative lineages within religious traditions.[16] In his conclusion to *Varieties of Religious Experience* James proposed, in his pragmatic way, that the theories and belief systems of religions were secondary to the feelings and conduct they generate.[17] That is to say, it is the comprehensive *qualitative* orientation to the world they produce which constitutes their worth—or lack thereof—for humanity. James deduced from his studies that by properly orienting human beings towards what he called "other dimensions of consciousness," an inflow of spiritual energies was initiated that served to bring about a transformation in the individual, both cognitively and affectively. James summarized "in the broadest possible way" his conclusions on the characteristics of the religious life as follows:

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance.
2. That union of harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end.
3. That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof—be that spirit 'God' or 'law'—is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.[18]

James' conclusions of course need updating in terms of his use of language. Also he lacked access to more sophisticated articulations of religious experience from non-Christian sources, Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, Daoist, etc. Nevertheless, James' overall conclusions are generally amenable with those of contemplative traditions throughout the world's religious traditions, though the mechanisms he proposes are often challenged.[19] This type of religiosity, that is, a religiosity that is interested in the spiritual transformation of the practitioner and of the larger world, is not one that necessarily must be carried out within a particular religious tradition, or whose only arcs of possibility lie within established traditions. Yet, *generalities* of religiously transformative processes, such as the adoption or development of cognitive frameworks (interpretive schemes) and commitment to spiritual practices (therapeutic regimes), in order to enact a transformation of our being-in-the-world, may be extrapolated to offer a more capacious understanding of religious possibilities. That is, by defining religion as a transformative quest that leads to expanded expressions of qualities such as love, compassion, wisdom, and fervor for social justice, we can begin to understand emergent forms of religiosity as similarly involved in such a quest. And we may then construe religious *depth* as a measure of commitment to such a transformative journey, and even more as a measure of some degree of attainment of enhanced expressions of love, compassion, wisdom, etc.

The religious quest as transformative journey might be described as *experiments in transformations of consciousness*, where consciousness is understood not merely as cognitive, but rather as denoting an entanglement of bodily affective sensations and cognition—that is, of ways of knowing, thinking, feeling, touching, and seeing interdependently (con/scious, or "knowing together").[20] This essay is not the place to go into detail on the possibilities of transformations of consciousness (though an important aspect of this theory of religion), as my main concern here is in pointing towards an alternative definition of religious depth, and correlating that definition with emergent forms of religiosity. Religious depth might then be described as the degrees to which such transformations of consciousness embody qualities such as love,

16 For a series of critical essays discussing James' *Varieties*, see Proudfoot, *William James*. In particular, see Hollinger, "'Damned for God's Glory'" for a critical essay on James' Protestant bias.

17 James, *Writings*, 451.

18 Ibid., 435.

19 For an appreciation of James notions of religion from a Buddhist perspective, see Wallace, "Three Dimesnions," 75. For a Buddhist perspective on religion as contemplative science, as well as challenges to James' underlying psychological theory, see Ricard, "On the Relevance."

20 I am indebted to Catherine Keller for pointing out this etymology of con/scious.

compassion, wisdom, and fervor for social justice, which requires discernment as opposed to categorization. These four qualities have often been used as criteria for discernment of religious authenticity, as we will see in the following section.

It is however worth briefly noting important differences between what is being proposed here and what has generally been known as "perennialism." Perennialism has different versions, but revolves around the idea that the various religious traditions share a common core, and are but different ways to accomplish the *same* process of human redemption/ enlightenment/ realization. Scholars of religion such as John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith have developed religious theories of a perennialist nature.[21] However, for myself, as well as for Thatamanil and James, there is no reason to presume that all journeys are going to the "same place," or that processes of transformation developed by religious traditions result in the *same* transformative process.[22] Other scholars, such as S. Mark Heim and David Ray Griffin have developed theories that posit multiple ultimate realities (a questionable thesis in my opinion), or at least different religious goals or "salvations." David Ray Griffin calls his theory, based on the work of John Cobb and A.N. Whitehead's process thought, "deep pluralism," as opposed to the "identist pluralism" of Hick and Smith, though I have reservations as to whether or not Griffin's "deep pluralism" actually accomplishes what it claims.[23] Again, I am unable to go further into these debates here. Suffice to say, while I am doubtful about their being multiple "ultimate realities," I am much more open to pluralistic ontologies of ultimate reality itself, such as those proposed by Raimon Panikkar, Beverly Lanzetta, Jorge Ferrer, or Catherine Keller.[24]

As I see it, each transformative journey may lead to the embodiment of various (and perhaps unique) divine attributes, and so to differing (but likely complementary) insights into the nature of reality. Different wisdom traditions can be seen to have discovered and implemented some type of transformative process—affected by cultural conditions, religious frameworks, linguistic, social, and political realities. In doing so they incarnate differing processes which result in nuanced possibilities for the manifestation of divine attributes, described in general as enhanced expressions of compassion, wisdom, love, prophetic fervor for social justice, etc. I use "divine" here, and throughout this essay, more as an adjective than an ontological imposition, e.g. denoting enhanced expressions of love, compassion, wisdom, etc. In other words, the embodiment in human form of qualities often associated with God, Buddha-nature, harmonious expressions of *qui*, etc. (without equating any of those). Therefore, my use of "divine" is not meant to exclude non-theist positions (e.g. Buddhist), or even religious naturalist or secular humanist viewpoints. Without going further into a more lengthy discussion of my own emerging theory of religion, I mention the above to point out that it is not much of a stretch to say that an understanding of the religious quest as transformative journey holds true for many with traditional religious identities, as well as for many with emerging forms of religiosity.

4 Reorienting religious *depth*

If religion is approached as techniques developed by humankind to transform us cognitively and affectively, adorning us in its maturation with various divine attributes, then one can ask whether belonging to, or identifying with, a particular religious tradition remains a necessary component of religious *depth*? Further, does belonging or identifying with a particular religious community *necessarily* entail religious depth in and of itself? For example, how might we compare the religious depth of, say, Thomas Keating, a Roman Catholic monk widely regarded as a spiritual adept and respected as a 'sage' both within and without the Christian tradition, who has spoken extensively and eloquently on the need for spiritual transformation

21 Hick, An Interpretation of Religion; Smith, *Meaning and End*.

22 Cf. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*.

23 Griffin, "Religious Pluralism"; Griffin, "John Cobb's"; Heim, *Salvations*.

24 Lanzetta, *Other Side*; Keller, *Face*; Ferrer, *Revisioning*; Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony* – in particular see "The Myth of Pluralism," 52-91, "The Pluralism of Truth," 92-101, and especially "The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?" 145-182.

and the injunction that we must learn to *love,* not just our own tradition, but all wisdom traditions—and a Jerry Falwell Jr., who during the recent 2016 U.S. presidential election held up then presidential candidate Donald J. Trump as an example of Jesus' teachings (despite Trump's numerous derogatory racial comments and misogynistic behavior) while also exhorting his students to carry concealed guns in order that they might "end those Muslims?"[25]

I grant that the example of Jerry Falwell, Jr. is an extreme one; nevertheless it is useful in making my point. If belonging and identifying to a particular religious tradition are the criteria of religious depth, then both Thomas Keating and Jerry Falwell, Jr. can be understood as coming from an equal place of religious depth. Yet in terms of comprehensive qualitative orientation, transformative depth, and divine adornment there would seem to be little doubt, in my mind at least, as to who has plumbed more surely the religious dimensions and potentialities of our humanity. Though an exaggerated comparison, it elucidates the problem of correlating religious depth with religious belonging, and highlights what exists as a spectrum throughout all religious traditions—that people engage the religious quest as transformative journey in wildly varying degrees.

I have argued for a concept of religious depth that would attempt to discern both the level of commitment to a transformative journey *and* the actual attainment of enhanced expressions of divine attributes. Both are necessary, as commitment to religious practice is not necessarily an indication of religious depth as understood here. For example, many fundamentalists in all religious traditions may actually be *more* committed to religious practices ("therapeutic regimes") and corresponding cognitive frameworks ("interpretive schemes"), while at the same time remaining manifestly deficient in the attainment of divine attributes. Too offer another lopsided example, though again one which exists along a spectrum throughout religious traditions, consider the committed religiosity of many members of ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), outlined in depth by Graeme Wood in an excellent article in *The Atlantic*.[26] Certainly, their religious life has been "transformative" for many of them, but not towards the embodiment of divine attributes as described here. One might compare their religious depth to, say, that of a Rumi or Ibn Arabi, paralleling our comparison above between Keating and Falwell.

As examples of these divine attributes, I have listed love, compassion, wisdom, and fervor for social justice. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, and I am unable to explore such attributes in depth here, but they point reasonably in the direction I intend. These criteria also overlap with the criteria often used in various theories of religious pluralism. For instance, Aloysius Pieris speaks of the two poles of wisdom and love, which move in a dialectical fashion to bring about transformation.[27] John Hick speaks of the transformation from "self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness," which "shows itself, in this world, in compassion (*karūna)* and love (*agape).*"[28] Paul Knitter and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki center their criteria along the lines of liberation theology, arguing for social justice as the central concern for interreligious dialogue.[29] John Thatamanil speaks of the transreligious theological project as the "quest for interreligious wisdom," where religions offer "transformative access to dimensions of ultimate reality by way of their scriptures, rituals, spiritual disciplines, religious experiences, and the like."[30] These divine attributes should all be present in varying degrees for religious depth to be embodied. Any one quality alone will not do. Buddhists speak of the need for both compassion and wisdom (or "skillful means"). St. Paul tells us that though I may have all knowledge and gain all wisdom, but have not love, I am nothing.[31] Fervor for social justice can easily fall into a toxic mix of anger, resentment and futility without compassion, love, and

25 For Thomas Keating's views on other religious traditions, see Olsson, "The Interspiritual." For Falwell, Jr.'s endorsement of Trump, see Costa, "Evangelical." In it, Falwell is reported as saying, "In my opinion, Mr. Trump lives a life of loving and helping others as Jesus taught in the Great Commandment." For Falwell's comments on "ending those Muslims," see Bailey, "Jerry." These comments were widely reported by newspapers and media outlets at the time.

26 Wood, "What ISIS."

27 Pieris, "The Buddha and the Christ," 163.

28 Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 164.

29 See Knitter, "Toward," especially 181; and Suchocki, "In Search."

30 Thatamanil, "Transreligious", 356.

31 1 Corinthians 13.

wisdom. Wayne Teasdale, who coined the term "interspiritual," offers an extensive list of "nine elements of spiritual maturity," each of which should be present and which he describes in detail: (1) actual moral capacity; (2) solidarity with all living beings; (3) deep nonviolence; (4) humility; (5) spiritual practice; (6) mature self-knowledge; (7) simplicity of life; (8) selfless service and compassionate action; and (9) the prophetic voice.[32]

The sometimes treacherous work of *discernment*—that is, of making value judgments as regards religious depth—is an inescapable aspect of the theological endeavor, perhaps even more so for those tentatively working as "transreligious" theologians. Discernment is often subtle, proceeding in shades of grey rather than black and white (though as the above examples of Falwell, Jr. and ISIS show, not always). This means that no simple correlation of religious depth with exterior categories will necessarily hold. Discernment is an unending process that plays out within the temporal, existential, embodied world—time being the great sifter of insights and intuitions—and matures in parallel with our own personal development of religious depth. This is one area where *spiritual practice*, I would argue, becomes an inherent part of the theological endeavor, for our hypotheses and reflections on the religious dimensions of humanity reflect our own capacity to plumb the transformative depths of religious life. To practice discernment is to be invited to participate in an ongoing dialogue with one another on the merits, limits, problems, and advantages of how we are conceiving of religious depth.

5 Interspiritual religious belonging

The above suggests unarticulated possibilities of religious participation (such as the example of Netanel Miles-Yépez) that are missing from, and perhaps unable to be captured by, analysis that equates religious depth with traditional religious belonging. In our contemporary era, where access to multiple and varying wisdom traditions and their "interpretive schemes" (cognitive frameworks) and "therapeutic regimes" (spiritual practices) is increasingly widely available, it seems only natural that over time religious approaches would emerge which syncretize various interpretive schemes and therapeutic regimes. In understanding the religious quest as transformative journey, "syncretism" need no longer represent the corruption of a purity of revealed truth. Rather, it can connote religious innovation that recognizes the always changing nature of our religious traditions, and which affirms and works with revelation (broadly understood) in more or less mature and fruitful ways. Particularly in the United States, where increasing diversity entangles with cosmopolitan ideals (at least in certain pockets of the country), and where the idea of an experiment in global culture has long held strong cultural resonance, a fecund milieu exists within which such syncretistic phenomena continue to percolate.

In fact, these trends appear to be accelerating. Social and political factors in the United States point towards a future of greater religious and cultural diversity, nontraditional religiosity, and a need for syncretistic political messaging. In a new Pew study just released at the time of this writing, the percentages of those identifying as "spiritual but not religious" in the U.S. has increased significantly just since 2012, when they exploded on the religious scene as comprising a much higher portion of the population than previously imagined. Among those 18-29 years of age, the percentage jumped from 20% in 2012, to 29% in 2017. Among those ages 30-49 the increase was even more significant, jumping from 20% to 30%. Overall, 27% of the U.S. population now identifies as "spiritual but not religious," a huge increase from the 19% who identified that way only five years ago. This increase cuts across racial and political boundaries, including whites, Hispanics, blacks, Democrats, Republicans, and differences in age and education.[33]

In a significantly larger parallel study (of over 100,000 Americans in all 50 states), also just released at the time of this writing, the Public Religion Research Institute finds a precipitous decline in white Christian America, while at the same time showing growth in nonwhite Christianity and the religiously unaffiliated. The "religiously unaffiliated" is now the largest category of identification, comprising 24% of the overall

32 Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*, 105-169.

33 Lipka, "More Americans."

population (the next largest category is white evangelical Protestants at 17%). Among those ages 18-29, a full 38% identify as religiously unaffiliated. Of all of those who identify as unaffiliated, only about one quarter identify as agnostic or atheist, which suggests spiritual inclinations among the "religiously unaffiliated" even as they identify as "secular." The PRRI study also found that the youngest religious groups in the U.S. are all non-Christian.[34] All of this points towards radical changes in the future make-up of the United States as it becomes increasingly diverse, both racially and religiously. In an article examining the political implications of these studies, Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux finds that the base of the Democratic party is becoming "increasingly religiously varied," and a major challenge for Democrats in the future will be to "craft a message that speaks to pretty much every faith tradition — as well as people who have no religion at all."[35] This leads me to speculate that an *interspiritual* message, as a spiritually literate message formed in part through interactions among diverse religious traditions along with those outside of these traditions, is likely to have growing political capital in the United States in the years and decades ahead, and hence substantial consequences across the globe.

The continually growing populations of the religiously unaffiliated and spiritual but not religious represent not only a challenge to traditional notions of religiosity, but one that also cries out for new and emergent *theological* underpinnings.[36] These phenomena are not just for sociologists and religious studies disciplines to investigate, but demand new forms of theological thinking and reflection. I suspect these growing inclinations of a younger generation reflect the beginnings of a new religious impulse, though still unformed and inchoate, towards a future dynamic where boundaries between traditional religious frameworks ("interpretive schemes") and their corresponding spiritual practices ("therapeutic regimes") are much more fluid—and syncretisms much more common. This fluidity of boundaries, combined with an actual commitment to a transformative religious quest, is what I call *interspiritual religious belonging*.[37] Interspiritual religious belonging is an organic process that arises from the fundamental intuition of the religious quest *as* transformative journey, combined with a creative religious impulse that impinges religious boundaries and may or may not lead to embeddedness within particular religious traditions.

I contend that in order to better understand such emergent forms of religiosity, we must reorient our ideas of religious depth. Consider the example given above of Pir Netanel (Mu'in ad-Din) Miles-Yépez. Contrary to understandings that equate an absence of commitment to religious *institutions* with immature expressions of spirituality and/or a lack of religious depth, Miles-Yépez exhibits an encompassing, steadfast commitment to a transformative journey that requires a constant shaping and molding through theological reflection *and* spiritual practice, and whose journey has been imbued with guidance from respected spiritual adepts in traditional wisdom lineages.[38] Far from being a free wheeling, haphazard, anything goes hodge-podge of ideas and practices, Miles-Yépez provides an existential example of a religious life blossoming into maturity, which sees itself as *unembedded* in traditional forms. "Unembedded" does not necessarily mean "disengaged from," but rather connotes the possibility of living a deeply religious life outside of commitment to any particular religious system as traditionally understood.

To offer another example of interspiritual religious belonging with religious depth I turn to Beverley Lanzetta. Lanzetta is an intriguing study for academic discourse since she developed many of her ideas as a religious studies professor and theologian within the academic world. However, Lanzetta entered academia only after having a culminating experience in her own religious journey and penning a mystical text based

34 Cox, *America's Changing*.

35 Thomson-DeVeaux, "America's Shifting."

36 It is important to recognize that the "religiously unaffiliated" and "spiritual but not religious" are distinct groups, but with significant overlap. For example, around 50% of the spiritual but not religious still identify as Christian, while around 40% remain unaffiliated (see Lipka, *More Americans*).

37 Elsewhere I have written more extensively about different kinds of interspiritual religious belonging, and given an overview of the history of the interspiritual movement and some of the people currently involved. Some of the points made in this section are summaries of this work. While not academic literature per se, it can be helpful in providing context for interspirituality. See McEntee and Bucko, *New Monasticism*. In particular, see "Interspirituality," 56-67.

38 For one example of equating spiritual depth with commitment to a religious institution, see Locklin, *Spiritual*.

on her own experience.[39] It was through her academic study that Lanzetta discovered the mystical teachings within the world's wisdom traditions.[40] Subsequently, she has engaged the mystical teachings, saints and sages of many different traditions to help develop her arguments, yet remains steadfastly outside any formal religious institution or need to claim belonging to any traditional religious form.[41]

Lanzetta has also served as a spiritual teacher outside of the academy for many decades, and continues to produce spiritual literature.[42] Despite often utilizing contemplative teachings from traditional religious traditions, Lanzetta has been insistent that her religious life is part of an emergent religious-spiritual impulse that is happening globally. In *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred,* Lanzetta writes that humanity is "in the birth pangs of a global spiritual experiment" that is "challenging us to forge new wisdom traditions."[43] For Lanzetta, the patriarchal excesses of our religious traditions, as well as traditional splits between spirit and matter or divinity and humanity, demand new forms of spiritual embodiment to arise. For some, this work may go on within traditional religious institutions, as spiritual pioneers work to change the inner structures, doctrinal understandings, and practices within these traditions. But for many, they feel called to embody a committed religiosity outside of traditional structures. Lanzetta sees these new spiritual embodiments proceeding not necessarily independently of our religious traditions, but rather in partnership with their most spiritually transformative technologies, incorporating "the wisdom of diverse worldviews" as they look to "the contemplative structures that give rise to religious consciousness."[44] In other words, it the religious quest as transformative journey that Lanzetta sees as broadly participative in an emergent multi-faith, interspiritual religious consciousness.

Lanzetta has described this new religiosity as characterized "by openness to multi-faith and interspiritual conversations; by a concern for suffering and the ravages of human violence; by a desire to prevent further destruction to the earth and to heal its eco-systems."[45] She emphasizes that it is emerging not out of religious doubt, rebelliousness towards institutions, or egotistical individualism, but rather as a "faith experience of the utmost seriousness that compels each person to give up whatever is oppressive, superior, exclusive, hurtful, or violent in his or her own religious worldview."[46] For Lanzetta, many of the "religiously unaffiliated" are actually "heeding the call of a *deeper* faith."[47] She describes three "common ground" characteristics among these interspiritual pilgrims: (1) they hold pluralistic viewpoints, or an adherence to "'the manyness of truth' and are uncomfortable with religious languages and liturgical forms that exclude, oppress, or patronize;" (2) they are committed to "an authentic spiritual path—often in the dark and without spiritual languages or community support—to what impassions them, to what calls them in the *depth* of their souls;" (3) in doing so they are "giving life to new lineages of religious truths, to the deep structure of religion itself."[48]

Lanzetta has developed many of her claims theologically. For instance, in *The Other Side of Nothingness,* Lanzetta attempts to articulate what she calls a "desert hermeneutic," an interpretive framework that proceeds from pure kenosis, the divine abyss, or nothingness.[49] In doing so, she develops an interpretation of mystical theology that for her discovers, on the other side of apophatic encounter, a divine nature that is inherently pluralistic, non-absolute, and which in its endless fecundity continues to birth new religious and contemplative traditions. That is, Lanzetta grounds her claim of an emergent interspiritual consciousness that is giving rise to new forms of religious and contemplative life within the depths of divine encounter, indeed as an aspect of the creative and pluralistic nature of divine reality itself.

39 For the mystical text I refer to, see Lanzetta, *Path*.
40 For an overview of Lanzetta's life see her recent autobiography, *Nine Jewels of Night*.
41 Cf. Lanzetta, *Emerging*. Also Lanzetta, *Radical*.
42 Cf. Lanzetta's website at http://beverlylanzetta.net/
43 Lanzetta, *Emerging,* 4.
44 Ibid., 7.
45 Lanzetta, "New Monastic."
46 Lanzetta, *Emerging*, 53.
47 Ibid., 61, italics mine.
48 Ibid., 56, italics mine.
49 Lanzetta, *Other,* 5.

In *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology,* Lanzetta introduces the concepts of the *"via feminina"* and the "dark night of the feminine" through a study on "the spiritual dimensions of violence against women," and "the implications of gender in the spiritual life."[50] These concepts represent for Lanzetta new constructions of the religious quest as transformative journey, which attempt to address the problem of spiritual violence inflicted upon women's inner life.[51] This violence is due to the patriarchal nature of traditional religious and spiritual concepts, linguistic forms, and practices, which have been almost exclusively constructed by men, and therefore exclude to a great degree women's experience of the world.[52] Lanzetta utilizes in particular the experiences of female medieval mystics to extrapolate resources for these newly constructed concepts. Here Lanzetta offers practical examples with theoretical sophistication of newly constructed theological concepts and spiritual practices that have emerged from an interspiritual form of religiosity—substantiating her claim of an emergent religious consciousness that directly addresses structures of oppression through a committed, transformative path, giving "life to new lineages of religious truths."

My interest here is not in analyzing Lanzetta's theological or metaphysical concepts, but rather to simply hold her up as an example of interspiritual religious belonging being done in a mature, committed, and reflective way. Lanzetta's writings, and her work as a spiritual teacher, all exhibit a strong degree of the qualities of religious depth outlined in this article. Lanzetta is consistent in her insistence that the religious quest is ultimately about spiritual transformation that allows us to hold the world and it's suffering in ever expanding degrees of love and compassion. She speaks often of humility, and offers a prophetic voice in particular on the suffering of women and the environment. Whether or not one agrees with all of her religious and theological constructions, it would be difficult to make the argument that she lacks religious depth as I have described it here.

Lanzetta also offers another noteworthy example of the difference I am trying to hone in on between religious belonging as traditionally understood—even including "multiple-religious belonging" as defined, say, by Diller—and what I am calling interspiritual religious belonging. For instance, according to Diller, multiple-religious belonging at deeper levels of engagement actually leads to questions of faithfulness over conflicting beliefs, which more shallow levels of religious depth need not attend to (think of the example of Nan above). That is, by committing at deeper levels in more than one tradition, a question arises, "Am I being unfaithful in my religious participation?"[53] Yet no such difficulty seems to arise among interspiritual religious belongers—however deep or shallow.

Note the similarities between Lanzetta and Miles-Yépez in terms of their sense of religious belonging, even though one religious journey has been more involved in what we might consider traditional religious-contemplative lineages (Miles-Yépez), while the other has occurred for the most part outside of any religious tradition (Lanzetta). For both Lanzetta and Miles-Yépez, their religious belonging falls into a broadly defined *interspiritual* self-identity, one that is not the same as belonging to a particular tradition or even multiple-belonging to more than one tradition. Rather, such traditions help inform their interspirituality. Recall Miles-Yépez's claim above that his religio-spiritual identity is not contained by any normative or supranormative tradition, rather these traditions have become the "flavors which add taste and dimension" to his *interspirituality*. This interspirituality is not a new religion as much as a new religious consciousness, one that breaks down boundaries between religious traditions, and complicates many of the very structures through which we think of "religion."[54] As Lanzetta describes it, "if it is a religion, it is unlike any we have known, for it is free of the universalist or exclusivist claim and without need of a determinate form or final name. Its underlying structure is dynamic and self-emptying,

50 Lanzetta, *Radical,* 2.

51 For another article on the dark night and issues of feminism and women's experience, see Fitzgerald, "Impasse and Dark Night."

52 Lanzetta, *Radical,* 16.

53 Diller, "Multiple Religious Orientation," 351.

54 For an excellent article that complicates the traditional category of religion from various angles, see Thatamanil, "Comparative Theology After 'Religion'."

radically democratic and absent of one all-inspiring prophet."[55] It is also important to note that there are many strands of religious consciousness *within* religious traditions that shun exclusivist claims, and which also strive for dynamic and self-emptying structures of understanding.

Elsewhere I have briefly recounted the history of interspirituality, current happenings within the movement, and offered other examples of its embodiment, such as Mirabai Starr.[56] It is perhaps important to note that interspiritual religious belonging does not lead to a single syncretistic framework, but rather a multiplicity of emergent interpretive schemes and fusions of spiritual practice. For instance, the majority of the participants in the aforementioned dialogues at the beginning of this article would not assent to a singular theological framework, nor necessarily share spiritual practices (therapeutic regimes), yet many might identify as "interspiritual." The same is true for the examples mentioned above (Lanzetta, Miles-Yépez, and Starr). The development of a cognitive framework or interpretive scheme becomes a process-oriented approach for the interspiritual religious belonger, where theological understanding is forged in the dynamism of one's life and spiritual practice. Hence, one's interpretive scheme is no longer handed down to one as an established framework, as is traditionally done in wisdom lineages and religious traditions (e.g. the doctrine of *anatman*, or no-self; or the Nicene Creed), but emerges in the praxis of one's own journey, most often (but not always) in *partnership* with multiple traditional wisdom lineages held within creative, syncretistic tensions—though perhaps "belonging," in Diller's sense, to none. Therefore, differences are to be expected as religious understanding is forged through processes of relational individualization in varying cultural, social, and linguistic milieus, as well as based upon one's choice of therapeutic regime (or spiritual practices).[57] However, in each case the interspiritual religious belonger, as I have defined them here, embraces the religious quest as transformative journey, and in this sense shares a worldview as to the meaning and function of "religion," as well as processes and even practices with traditional wisdom lineages.

One final example worth mentioning, in order to move beyond individual exemplars, is the interspiritual community Osage Forest of Peace, outside of Tulsa, OK. Osage describes itself as "an interspiritual contemplative retreat center," with a "resident community of people from a variety of spiritual and religious backgrounds."[58] Osage naturally finds itself on the edge of interspiritual exploration. In addition to offering public retreats and a school for spiritual direction, Osage's diverse religious community participates in dialogues, contemplative services three times a day, spends one day a week in silence, and is currently developing public "interspiritual services" to be offered throughout the year, paralleling religious services from diverse traditions.[59] Osage provides services and inspiration for those walking traditional religious paths as well as for those outside traditional religious forms. Recently, one of the Osage community members moved into a hermitage, and formally took the "nine vows of the new monastic," based on Wayne Teasdale's nine elements of spiritual maturity mentioned previously (see note for vows).[60] This ritual was meant to signal her deepening commitment to a religiously transformative journey within an interspiritual

55 Lanzetta, *Emerging*, 61.

56 McEntee and Bucko, *New Monasticism,* 56-67. For Mirabai Starr's self-identification as interspiritual, see "Introduction: The Interspiritual Quest," in Starr, *God of Love,* 1-11.

57 I have written of this process of creating individualized religious frameworks from a Christian sophiological perspective in McEntee and Bucko, "Dialogical Sophiology," in *New Monasticism,* 82-96.

58 Osage was originally founded as a monastic ashram by Pascaline Coff, a Roman Catholic Benedictine nun, and was "inspired by the wisdom and vision of Bede Griffiths" (Coff was a disciple of Griffiths). In 2010 it transformed into an openly interspiritual center, with a diverse religious community. Quotes are from: "About Us." Osage Forest of Peace. Accessed September 11, 2017. http://www.forestofpeace.org. For more on Bede Griffiths, see Du Boulay, *Beyond.*

59 Ibid. The development of "interspiritual services" comes from a conversation in September 2017 with the Executive Director of Osage, Don Chatfield.

60 These nine vows were developed by Diane Berke, and can be found in McEntee and Bucko, *New Monasticism,* xxxv-xxxvi. They are: (1) I vow to actualize and live according to my full moral and ethical capacity. (2) I vow to live in solidarity with the cosmos and all living beings. (3) I vow to live in deep nonviolence. (4) I vow to live in humility and to remember the many teachers and guides who assisted me on my spiritual path. (5) I vow to embrace a daily spiritual practice. (6) I vow to cultivate mature self-knowledge. (7) I vow to live a life of simplicity. (8) I vow to live a life of selfless service and compassionate action. (9) I vow to be a prophetic voice as I work for justice, compassion and world transformation.

framework. While interspiritual communities such as Osage differ from religious communities built around a unified theological framework, in many ways they are not so different from traditional religious communities. For in the end they are human communities, attempting to lead lives of spiritual depth, and discovering together the religiosity into which they are living.

6 The need for recognition, and a hope for Theology Without Walls

Unfortunately, though understandably, religiously unaffiliated groups often emerge in scholarly analysis as a somewhat amorphous group who do not embody deeper levels of religiosity.[61] For instance, one often hears, both within academic circles as well as among traditional spiritual teachers in the broader public milieu, that one must root oneself in an established tradition in order to attain religious depth, and only from there can one reach out responsibly to other traditions. Francis Clooney, for example, has been a champion of this position, and has developed comparative theology as necessitating belonging to a particular religious tradition.[62] While there is wisdom in this advice, one also sees the bias of an older generations' experience of inter-religiosity, one that maintains a preference for traditional religious forms and relies on how they themselves were formed religiously (that is, by becoming established in one tradition, and then from that anchoring exploring other traditions). Perry Schmidt-Leukel betrays a similar bias in a recent book of his Gifford lectures, when he states that "pluralism can only exist as Christian pluralism, Jewish pluralism, Muslim pluralism, and so on," and then goes on to define "interreligious theology" as existing only as tradition specific theologies.[63] Where, one might ask, does that leave interspiritual religious belongers, who may not identify with any particular religious tradition?

These types of well-ordered categorization lend themselves to a peculiar scholarly satisfaction (of which I myself am often guilty, as perhaps all theorists are), but here they inevitably risk turning a blind eye towards mutational ideas of religiosity that are being catalyzed within budding movements. Too often emergent religiosities are dismissed with a wave of the hand. For example, at a recent American Academy of Religion panel, I watched as a religious studies teacher in the audience asked the panel about increasingly frequent questions she received from her students. These students spoke of a desire to live a spiritual life of meaning yet were not drawn to any particular religious institution (my guess is that many who are teaching religious studies, comparative religion, or theology these days are finding similar questions and/or comments arise more frequently in their classrooms).[64] Francis Clooney immediately answered that she should encourage them to commit to a particular religious institution if they wanted to truly live a life of religious and spiritual depth. No one offered an alternative opinion. While I am sure Clooney's answer stemmed from a genuine concern for the students' spiritual lives, one must consider if such advice might actually be harmful to the inner religious-spiritual impulse felt by some of these students. If something akin to interspiritual religious belonging can be recognized as an authentic religiosity, which is lived out in mature and spiritually efficacious ways, then we might begin to hear these questions from our students in a more nuanced—and perhaps more challenging—way. As we become more familiar with mature expressions of interspiritual religious belonging, we might direct students to some of this literature in order to more fully explore the spiritual longings they are articulating.

From the perspective presented here, it would be wrong to interpret these phenomena as "nonreligious" impulses, as the moniker "spiritual but not religious" might imply, but rather as a nascent stage for emerging types of religiosity. If we are only able to see religious depth in terms of belonging to a traditional religious tradition, then we will also fail to see this emergence as a new type of religiosity. Further, just as

61 Cf. Locklin, *Spiritual.*

62 Clooney's views on this matter are well known. Cf. Clooney, *Comparative*, 9-12. For a comparison of the difference between comparative theology and the fledgling discipline of "transreligious theology," see Thatamanil, "Transreligious."

63 Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious,* 7-13.

64 American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX, November, 20, 2016. This was a Comparative Studies in Religion Section and Contemplative Studies Group panel, Theme: "Reflections on Louis Komjathy's (ed.) *Contemplative Literature* (SUNY Press, 2015)."

in any religious tradition there exist within it more and less mature forms of embodiment, understanding, and theological reflection, so too here. One wouldn't turn to shallow expressions of traditional religions to understand them, and neither should that occur here. In order to better understand these emergent forms of religiosity, we must turn to examples of more mature expressions, such as Beverly Lanzetta, Netanel Miles-Yépez, Mirabai Starr, and others.[65]

It is not that immature forms of emergent religiosities are difficult to find, but rather they might well be *expected* to be widespread, especially among younger people, who nevertheless may be genuinely responding to deeply felt religious and spiritual impulses that as yet have limited theoretical and institutional infrastructure to give form and coherence to (think of "Fred" above). These fledgling forms are in need of the intellectual freedom to form hypotheses of religious life, including of religious depth, and to then be in dialogue with mature theological critiques and reflections on the reasonableness of such hypotheses. In other words, they need to be *invited in* to the wider theological and philosophical communities within the academy. This is an area where I believe the nascent Theology Without Walls (TWW) project can play a role.

TWW has been described by Jerry Martin as a "cooperative, constructive, trans-religious theological project" that attempts to do theology in a non-restrictive way, beyond the boundaries of any single religious tradition, by taking into account revelation, enlightenment, and insight from all sources, without ("to the extent possible") privileging any one source.[66] John Thatamanil defines transreligious theology as constructive theology that learns from more than one tradition, but differs from comparative theology precisely in not requiring identification with any particular religious tradition or community.[67] These seem like natural invitations for an "interspiritual theologian."

The fleshing out and development of mature theological perspectives from within this emergent religious milieu will help support the religious lives and spiritual concerns of a younger generation. TWW can provide a container for the mature reflection that these movements need to deepen their own self-understanding, ground their religious and spiritual lives, and pass on lived knowledge to new generations of seekers. TWW does this by providing a welcoming space for these thinkers, and by facilitating access to academic discussions as well as dialogue partners, often from traditional religious perspectives, for interspiritual theologians to engage with.

Further, the interspiritual movement itself may grow in surprising directions. As I briefly alluded to earlier, there may be growing political ramifications in the U.S. for the development of a message that can speak with spiritual maturity across religious traditions, as well as to those from no tradition. As a spiritual-religious movement being born out of a heightened awareness of issues of justice and oppression, and explicitly in dialogue, experimentation and partnership with diverse religious traditions, interspirituality appears well positioned to play a leading role in the development of just such a message. This endeavor has no need or wish to replace or subsume traditional religious orientations, but on the contrary, emerges and orients itself in deep and substantive *partnership* with them. Indeed, it is in the wisdom of theological insights and spiritual practices that humanity has thus far developed, often over millennia, that knowledge, guidance, and spiritual energies are often found to support the maturation of these emerging forms of religiosity. Conversely, perhaps these emergent forms can in turn challenge traditional religious structures to more quickly wean themselves from patriarchal and oppressive structures, and to embrace the religious quest as transformative journey in ever deepening ways.

65 And while exploring the literature is helpful, coming to a better understanding may actually require substantive conversations and interactions with those who are living out these religious lives in mature ways. For instance, by inviting them to interreligious dialogues and conferences.

66 Martin, "What is TWW?" For more on TWW see http://theologywithoutwalls.com/. See also *Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Special Issue: Theology Without Walls*. Fall 2016, Volume 51, No. 4, and the collection of essays in "Topical Issue: Is Transreligious Theology Possible?" ed. by Jerry L. Martin. *Open Theology* 2 (2016).

67 Thatamanil, "Transreligious," 355.

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