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# Religious Educator as Rabbinic Disciple: A Theology of Teaching

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR AS RABBINIC DISCIPLE:

A THEOLOGY OF TEACHING


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INSTITUTE OF PASTORAL STUDIES


BY

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The role of teacher was central to Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God. In the intervening 2000 years since the Teacher walked the earth, Christianity has become institutionalized forcing the educational process to the periphery of Church dialogue in favor of magisterial conformity. As a result, the role of the Christian teacher today is ambiguous. This ambiguity is particularly striking when viewed from the contemporary juxtaposition of American culture in constant change and the Roman Catholic magisterium anchored in an entrenched hierarchical tradition.

I propose to define the role of Christian teacher in this contemporary dialectic by exploring the office of Christian teacher from two perspectives. I will begin with the cultural, sociological, and political realities that provide the framework for this office. Then I will retrieve historical theology for the office of teacher that is reasonable, authentic and applicable within the constructs of scripture, Church tradition and contemporary experience. It is my contention that the role of the Christian teacher is to fill the office of rabbinic disciple, an office to which the teacher is called by the community of faith and the Spirit of Christ to radically witness immutable Gospel values realized in the present. Such a

teaching office calls culture and religious institutions alike to accountability by holding up a light of faith and truth that all might see and be transformed.

In the course of this thesis I will argue that there is a unique American experience of religion and religious education. It should be noted at the outset that I will use the term "American" and "America" to refer to those who live in the United States of America, to the republic itself, and not to any other "national" experience of religion and education. While I admit to and treasure the great diversity of voices within the American experience, it is my personal conviction that there exists, at least in the world of ideological truisms, a shared paideia[1] made up of commonly held religious ideals that fuels a national spiritual energy. That spiritual energy has not only drawn previous groups of immigrants to abandon hearth, home, friends and nation to come to this country, but it continues to draw the majority of modern immigrants to this country as well. It is my position that the diversity of voice in the current milieu of America is simply a public affirmation of American spiritual values now liberated, empowered, and owned by new and formerly disenfranchised groups. This re-empowered American paideia has important ramifications for religion and education in this country as we undertake to build new and rebuild old institutions that are more inclusive, tolerant, and relevant to the lived experience of Americans.

It shall become obvious that this new and diverse American experience has had and continues to have major impacts on the way Americans perceive institutional religion and religious education. I will argue that this same

experience has resulted in an Americanization of Catholicism and of catechesis, the Catholic metaphor for religious education.

This uniquely American vision of Catholicism is not in harmony with the centralized, paternalistic, and hierarchical practices of the Roman Catholic Church. This Roman perspective on religious education, unarguably rooted in one lived tradition and arguably traceable by an unbroken chain to the apostolic age, can be interpreted as significantly irrelevant if one considers that on any given Sunday fully 60% of those who profess to be adherents to the Catholic faith in this country choose not to attend mass.[2]

I think it is important to focus for a moment on my concern with the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church. I am not arguing against hierarchy per se, and it is not my intention to stand against non-American Church leadership of the Catholic Church in America or in the world. It is my intention to hold the Roman Catholic Church accountable for Catholic practice, particularly Catholic practice at a world level. Further, it is also my intention to recover a prophetic voice for the office of teacher. The prophetic voice is, by definition, never in harmony with institutional status quo. Since the focus of hierarchical structure is toward the top, it may appear that I am attacking the office of Bishop or Pope. Nothing could be further from my purpose. In fact, I would affirm that one of the greatest strengths of the current structure of the Roman Catholic Church is the prophetic voice with which the office of the Pope can speak. However, I will not hesitate to give examples of those actions by the hierarchy, usually by a Vatican

Congregation or the Curia, that limit the vision and effectiveness of the Church's teaching mission to the world and to America as a part of that world.

There are many ministries within the hierarchical Church that provide good and effective practice along with practical and inclusive leadership. They retrieve and confirm the relationship between our lived experience and the wisdom of tradition from our faith rooted in our Jewish legacy and expanded in the Good News of Christ Jesus. It is the same institutional strength of this hierarchical Roman Church that now allows the Church to transition into becoming a truly universal and world Church. A world church needs to allow the cultures of its peoples to inform the tradition just as they are in turn informed by the tradition. These healthy and growth-producing dialogical practices have sadly not yet become the norm in the Roman Catholic Church. I am American and Catholic. The reality of the Roman experience of the Catholic Church, for better or worse, is inescapable for me. As previously mentioned, that is not the case for 60% of my fellow American Catholics.

I am suggesting that the Roman perspective and practice, while irrelevant for many Americans may have actually become an obstacle to the faith of a large number of those same American members who seek to celebrate and realize their diversity and newly found societal liberation within their faith communities. Those who seek to bring this American experience of equity and freedom to their communal expression of faith often find doors loudly and painfully slammed in their face by magisterial authority under the guise of

magisterial teaching or magisterium. It would be helpful therefore, before continuing with my argument, to untangle two often confused ideas in the Roman Catholic Church, the teaching office of the Church and the teaching authority of Popes and Bishops.

The teaching office of the Church is held not by any one Bishop or Pope but rather in common by the Church universal. All members of the Church are morally bound to seek and proclaim the truth concerning God and the Church especially, as they pertain to the fundamental rights of the human person or to the salvation of souls.[3] The Church recognizes a special pastoral teaching office that is held by Bishops and Popes as a function of their office which is termed magisterium.[4] The terms "Magisterium" and "Magisterial Authority" have no fixed canonical or theological definition but are generally used to describe the teaching of dogmatic or doctrinal truth of faith that is essential to Christian belief. I will not use the terms "Magisterium" or "Magisterial Authority" in this context as they have a tendency to confuse what is taught with who is teaching. I will use the term "magisterium" only to refer to the teaching office that is a function of the office of Bishop or Pope.

Inevitably in any discussion of teaching the conversation will naturally turn to what is taught. In the Roman Catholic Church there are four levels of teachings each carrying with it a different character and responsibility for the faithful. The highest level is that of a doctrine of faith. It is a creedal teaching that is founded in scripture or tradition and definitively taught by the universal

magisterium as divinely revealed. Teachings at this level require an assent of divine and universal faith.[5] This level is also the level of an infallible teaching by the Pope or the college of Bishops when convened in an ecumenical council. Infallible teaching authority under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is rarely invoked and as such will not be a consideration of this thesis.

The next level of teaching is that of papal teaching or the teachings of the college of Bishops as part of a universal magisterium that is not definitively taught. The faithful are required to respond to this level of teaching with "a religious respect of intellect and will, even if not an assent of faith."[6] Under this level one finds the level of magisterium as exercised by local Bishops or conferences of Bishops whose teachings demand a response of religious respect from the faithful.[7] The final level of episcopal teaching authority or magisterium is that of constitution and decree issued by a legitimate authority within the Church such as the Curia. These constitutions and decrees, when issued, require the observance of the faithful.[8]

Given this understanding of the tenets of the Church's magisterium, one can begin to understand the personal pain and frustration experienced by many of the faithful when faced with a Roman insistence on continuing to develop a celibate male-only priesthood, their position in opposition to all forms of birth control and their failure to commit to economic justice and support a theology of liberation for the oppressed in third world countries. These and other Roman positions have seemingly caused the hierarchical Church to abandon the high

ground on morality and justice issues in favor of doctrinal obedience. The extent of the frustration can be seen in charges of bad collegial faith that are openly discussed by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.[9]

This use of the Church's magisterium has failed not only on an ethical level but more importantly on a dialogical level with current American society. The heavy handed approach to move ordinary teachings to the level of doctrine and the insistent call for assent and obedience to juridic authority confused with the magisterium are remarkably at odds with American culture and even more remarkably askew when compared to the teachings and parables of Jesus.

After exploring both the American experience of religion and religious education as well as the Roman perspective of catechesis, my discussion will turn toward the recovery of theological threads from within the Catholic tradition that allows for a teaching office that, although not magisterial, is scripturally defined and empowered by the best of the tradition of the Church. I will examine the earliest ideas about Church offices and structures of teaching as well as examine two charisms present in the early Church, teaching and prophesy. Those charisms present within and outside the Catholic tradition will be traced through the history of the Catholic Church up to and through the Second Vatican Council.

Having woven the fabric for this office of teacher as rabbinic disciple together, the mantle will be taken up and put in hermeneutical engagement with both the American and the Roman expressions of Catholicism. It will be argued

that an ethic of relationship, personal and corporate, provides a viable framework for American religious education that is grounded in human experience while it actively engages transcendent realities. This relational ethic will provide a basis for engagement with the Roman Church that allows for faithful assent as well as providing the basis for the recovery of a prophetic voice in the evangelization of the Church by the world.[10]

A prophetic office of teacher as rabbinic disciple will no doubt not find peace either in the relativism of the secular culture or the moral morbidity of a juridic authority disguised as magisterium. As a rabbinic disciple this teacher will be called to engage the present lived reality with the wisdom of tradition to which they are heir, especially the wisdom from the living tradition of a first century Jewish rabbi who had much to say about living our lives as the children of a God he called *Abba*.

# CHAPTER 2: AN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE OF RELIGION AND EDUCATION

Looking at the American experience at the end of the twentieth century is not a simple task and it is open to many interpretations. In this chapter I will view this American experience from cultural, sociological and political perspectives. I will highlight what I perceive to be the ramifications of these realities on the experiences of education, religion, and religious education in America. Finally, I will outline what I feel to be a practical framework for an effective teaching office in the American experience of Catholicism.

When we seek to discover the culture of an ancient people such as the Egyptians, the Greeks, or the Romans we generally start with the larger public or cultural symbols of their society that appeared to have some meaning by virtue of the regularity with which they are produced, reproduced, or mirrored in other artifacts of a similar genre. As we discover these symbols we are constantly trying to discover their meaning for the society that created them. We try to find out the place of these symbols in the public and private lives of the people who made up these cultures. We attempt to find the meaning of these larger symbols by finding specific references to them in other more or less incomplete public sources such as legal records, business records, and the occasional courtly

biography. In the cases of the Greeks and Romans where we still have limited access to the language, that written language has yielded examples of literature and dramatic form that give us some insight into the lives of the peoples who lived in those places and times. Unfortunately in the process of looking back we are usually left in the dark with respect to the thoughts and daily experience of the common person. We look at the symbols and the experiences of a dominate culture and are left blank as to the meaning assigned by the larger society to these icons.

In the story from Luke's gospel where Jesus is asked by the scribes and pharisees about whether they should pay taxes or not, Jesus asks for a coin and noting the head of Caesar imprinted on the coin pronounces that the people should render onto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's.[11] This story, interpreted on the level of whether to pay taxes or not, is an example of where some translators miss an entire cultural understanding that undoubtedly made this story part of the gospel's account of Jesus. The story tells us that Jesus didn't receive just a coin, he received a denarius. This is important for two reasons. First of all the denarius had the head of the Emperor Augustus imprinted on it and as such was a symbol of Rome. Secondly, Jesus did not receive a shekel, the coin of Israel used to pay the temple tax. There exists an entire subtext to this story based on the icon of the coin that says Rome should be given their just due and be driven from Israel because the rightful ruler of Israel is Yahweh located in the Temple at Jerusalem. There are

other interpretations of this story available via the symbol of the Roman coin as it might have been understood in the Judean culture. Any of them might be correct given that we are unable to definitively understand the symbol of the coin in this story. We fail to recognize, as the result of our limited understanding of cultural context of first century Judea, that the coin is an icon of a much larger cultural reality.

Turning our attention to a late twentieth century American cultural context is also a problem, not so much for lack of a cultural context but for the multiple contexts available to us for making meaning. In searching for a unique cultural feature of modernity, one is struck by our singularly modern notion of time. Our concern for time and our understanding of time permeate virtually all of our cultural understandings in the instantaneous world at the end of the twentieth century.

The development of the machine age first gave us a public time driven by water and weights. Later with the advent of production steel we, as individuals with clocks and watches, received a time that was personally measurable. No longer bound by seasonal or comparative structures of time, Western European cultures and America became owners of time and concerned ourselves with moveable and relative concepts of time such as speed, acceleration, efficiency, and eventually with the variable nature of time itself. America has become a culture obsessed with time. Time itself has become a commodity of life in the late twentieth century.

In a culture concerned with and driven by time it would seem that a common cultural context might be found in how we utilize our time. Not surprisingly we find that Americans spend most of their waking hours at one form of economic production or another. Also not surprisingly, we find that Americans spend a lot of time watching television. In fact, demographers and pollsters who evaluate such things like A.C. Nielsen and Business Week/Harris Polls are in virtual agreement that the average American spends a seasonally adjusted twenty-four hours a week watching television. This number has remained remarkably constant over the past thirty years, remaining between twenty and twenty-five hours per week. Current trends in understanding television as a part of a larger multimedia environment encompassing movie, radio, television, cable, internet, cellular, and satellite technologies are beginning to diffuse this picture, but for the present purpose I shall limit the discussion to television as the current vehicle of choice for a mass media experience of culture.

Given the amount of time Americans spend watching television and the nature of the medium it is safe to say that the American cultural experience is reflected by television, and although it has been suggested that mass media now shapes the culture rather than simply reflecting the culture,[12] it is doubtful that either extreme is actually true at any given time. The case is more likely that the media in a late twentieth century capitalistic society is symbiotic with a consumer based popular culture. No matter whether either extreme is true, the media

surely gives us a most accessible tool to see the culture and popular values no matter whether it reflects or projects them.

What do we see when we look at the cultural mirror of television? The self-made man, the liberated woman, the Marlboro man, "you've come a long way baby," Clint Eastwood, Ophra Windfrey, Tom Cruise, and Madonna; all these people and terms invoke immediate images and responses in the mind of the American reader. They are icons of a popular culture. They are reflective and expressive of the American values of individualism and personal freedom of choice. They are also reflective of success and power. It is not an accident that I chose media celebrities to make my point. One might argue about the "who" of who's chosen to make the point, but had I chosen Colin Powell, Hillary Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and Rosa Parks, my point would be substantially the same. To be sure, there is a world of difference between the "whatness" that is conjured up by the images of Madonna and Rosa Parks but there is also a good deal in common.

Many people, cognizant of the power of iconography, are distressed by the media's ability to make icons out of people and things that stand for questionable values. To some the inclusion of Madonna as a cultural icon is offensive. They long for a simpler time, prior to the explosion of mass media in the last half of the century, when cultural icons were also cultural heros who's values seemed immutably set. Such was the case for cultural hero icons like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Betsy Ross and Clara Barton. Many of

these same people also long for a time when contemporary heros, such as Babe Ruth and Franklin D. Roosevelt, were less intensely reported particularly from the standpoint of personal morality. A "don't ask, don't tell" policy of reporters and historiographers kept the relativism of private moral and ethical standards from explicit display in a public forum.

A close examination of the personal lives of many of America's historical icons undertaken only in recent history reveal that not much has really changed in the world of private values and ethics except that today we are more likely to examine, in the public sphere, those same things we have always known and gossiped about in the private sphere. Today, with the instantaneous and intensely competitive media industry, the contextualization of public and private values held by society as a whole can be clearly recognized by contrasting the public's reaction to the images of Clarence Thomas with Bill Clinton or Mark Fuhrman with O. J. Simpson. What was once a private recognition of a relative value or double standard has now been made public.

This move from the private to the public sphere of moral or ethical understandings is reflected by the changes in television that have occurred over time. Gone are Donna Reed and Robert Young replaced with *Ellen* and *Sienfeld*. Gone is the social conformity of network television family shows like *I Love Lucy*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Hazel*, and *Leave It to Beaver*. Today's "family" shows include *Home Improvement*, *Mad About You*, *Dharma and Greg*, and *Friends*, not to mention shows like *Beverly Hills 90210* or *Baywatch* that are heavy

favorites with adolescent viewers.[13] This media mirror begins to reflect a cultural ethnic and moral diversity of stunning proportions.

When one begins to examine moral questions, our culture has traditionally turned to the religious presence in our society. Religion, particularly Christian religion, is indeed one of the institutional foundations of our culture. In looking at the Christian dimension of national media programing alone we find everything from the *Bobby Jones Gospel Hour* to a Christmas Midnight Mass broadcast live from the Vatican, from *Mother Angelica Live* to *Touched By An Angel*, or from *Soul Man* to *Nothing Sacred*. We see a diversity of Christian expressions that arise from a similarly diverse cultural experience of religion.

From a media perspective, diversity is clearly a value mirrored both in content and context. Media accessability is currently available, given the shear number of media offerings spawned by the development of cable, for all sort of sects, subcultures, and common interest groups. This current diversity coupled with a medium soon to be expanded exponentially through satellite and internet technologies will allow both people who see themselves as socially unique, and media advertisers happy to affirm and acknowledge that uniqueness to instantly form and sustain non-traditional social groups. This media diversity reflects cultural diversity and a freedom of public expression that allows for and reinforces a group rather than a societal mind set among Americans. Media diversity certainly reinforces and reflects the traditional American ideal of individualism.

I have chosen to look only at the shared American phenomena of media to trace value and a move toward more individualized constructs of society and societal evaluations. I could have, just as well, examined the workplace and how we have changed from a group of generalists to groups of specialists. This movement is particularly noticeable in the professional fields of medicine and law where it is nearly impossible to find a doctor who labels themself a General Practitioner and where it is equal folly to talk to the IRS without a tax attorney as it is to appear in criminal court without a criminal lawyer.

Despite being culturally grounded in individualism and the inherent personal freedom that correlates to holding individualism as a cultural value, we need to remember that the human being is a social animal. As a social animal it is only natural that we form and join in communities. We seek group association in the American culture or any other culture for personal affirmation and also to reinforce our particular set of cultural and moral or behaviourial norms. America has become a nation of group associations.

Group associations are divided into involuntary and voluntary associations. Involuntary associations feature an ordinarily inescapable membership with associations based on physical characteristics such as gender, race, genetic, congenital, and other physical factors. Membership in other associations that form around these static groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), or National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is voluntary. Voluntary groups extend to the limits of

the human imagination encompassing everything from fan clubs dedicated to particular celebrities to support groups for people who grieve over the loss of their dog or cat. In America an individual belongs at once to many voluntary groups with greater and lesser degrees of affinity. These associations, whether involuntary or voluntary, are the wellspring of the individual spirit. In the words of Martin Marty, "Most of the citizens of this nation draw their main inspiration from their subcommunities, subcultures, religions, tribes, racial and ethnic groups, movements and causes."[14]

The American embrace of the ideals of diversity and individualism have lead to what many sociologists including Harold Isaacs calls a retribalization of American society.[15] This idea of tribalism and tribal loyalties are seen by some as being in conflict with the historical American value of personal freedom. A personal freedom that carries with it a responsibility to the common good as an American citizen. I believe it self evident from the foregoing discussion of individualism, as rooted in personal freedom, that any real undermining of the individual's fundamental responsibility to the society at large and to those outside of one's own limited tribal groups, is generally unlikely in our highly communicative and interdependent culture. Indeed it is the communicative nature of mass media and multimedia that is seen as a sort of communal cement not only for the American culture but for the developing global community as well.

So in fact the fracturing of Americans into interest groups and the phenomena of specialization have only been possible through the combined effects of personal freedom of choice and a highly evolved social economic structure. The degree of specialization at all levels of societal interaction, particularly evident in large urban settings, serves at one time or another to make each of us conscious of our personal incompleteness and dependence on others in our society for our individual personal freedom.

As I sit here and write this paper I have no idea how the electricity is funneled into my apartment, but I and my computer are wholly dependant on an army of unseen specialists at the local electric utility and far beyond to keep writing. I am in this case quite literally connected to them. I do not own a generator to use in the event of a power failure. I trust them. At some level the utility company trusts me to pay the bill they will send me for the electricity I have already consumed. Their employees trust the utility company to pay them the wages that are owed them. The banks, or at least their loan officers who have loaned money to the utility company employees to buy houses and cars, have trusted them to repay that money and interest. And on and on it goes in this economic example of trust. One could argue that these are legal or contractual relationships or that the relationships were economic or capitalistic and not relationships of trust at all. What I hoped to show with this example is not what sort of relationship necessarily exists in each case mentioned but simply that

there exists both an explicit and an implicit relationship between everyone involved with supplying power to my computer.

Socially speaking each of us represents a diverse set of tribal relationships that are both voluntary and involuntary in which we ground the identity of our individual selves. These values of diversity and individualism make us dependant on each other in the context of a larger American society, at the level of personal freedom and responsibility and at the political level for which explicit and implicit relationships are necessary. We are interdependent on each other by virtue of our own specialization for the maintenance of our technologically evolved social networks on which we have become dependant for our very existence.

While we have already begun to talk about the political necessities of the American experience we have not yet taken a look at the political fallout that comes from holding personal freedom, individualism, and diversity as cultural values that are socially reinforced. Part of the political reality of America is that America is also a religious nation and was in fact founded on an entire set of freedoms, not the least of which was the freedom of religion. All of the major religions in America speak directly to moral value and presume, by a higher order of authority than any government, to hold even the most diverse individuals and groups accountable for their behavior. Clearly then our various American freedoms are not always in harmony with one another. This is

particularly the case in the current relationship of religious freedom and personal freedom.

Beginning with the puritans under John Winthrop, who saw this new world as a new promised land and as the establishment of Matthew's city on the hill[16] and continuing in large extent to this day, America is a nation that has put its trust in the divine providence of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael. Looking at America as a political entity, we are concerned as individuals with our personal freedom and as social animals with our relational interdependence. Politically speaking we move to the issue of formalizing social norms and mores into laws and ordinances. Much like the earlier example of the coin in the Lucan Gospel story the real meaning and purpose of laws sometimes gets lost or changed over time.

Many people believe that today we have arrived at a point in the politics of our culture of diversity where personal freedom has become the tyrant of public demeanor resulting in a level of separation between Church and state unimagined by any previous generation. The wall between Church and state originally constructed to keep the state from interfering with religious practice has been remodeled to make sure that any vestige of organized religion is kept far away from influencing the laws of state.[17] Moral arguments surrounding issues like euthanasia, capital punishment and abortion are the most notable areas were religious input is interpreted not only as an intrusion into the affairs of state but where any espoused religious position is seen as an affront to public

sensibilities.[18] Increasingly, the role of religion is confined to the private sphere while moral and social justice issues are made captive of a public sphere devoid of religious input.[19]

This separation between the public and private spheres, the rise of individualism, and the diversity of voluntary associations may have already taken a toll politically that might give credence to those that predict a retribalization of American society will result in the end of our democratic-republic as we know it. The failure of over half of the eligible voters to participate in the last presidential election does seem a rather telling indictment of the American political system.[20] I prefer to see this failure to exercise one's constitutional rights as an outgrowth of a systemically stilted and an under recognized educational paradigm.

The history of the American educational system in the last half of the twentieth century is very much the history of a politically dominated public school system that although locally controlled, is increasingly dominated by state and national policies and mandates that have severely limited any real local autonomy. It is also a school system grounded in the educational philosophy of John Dewey. In his exhaustive work on American education, Lawrence Cremin says that Dewey believed that a school "should not only teach youngsters to think clearly and independently but also imbue them with an understanding of the essential character of the new industrial society and saturate them with a commitment to serve their fellow human beings."[21] Dewey wrote *Democracy and Education* in 1916 and never conceived of a secular school system operating in

isolation from a public experience of religion that, if nothing else, provided a positive moral underpinning to sociability and society. Dewey's view of education was transnational and he did foresee the state's role as becoming necessarily secondary in state education if we were to be able to mutually interact with other cultures. Cremin suggests in coming to grips with Dewey and the emergence of Marshall McLuhan's global village that an "American *paideia* would ultimately have to be made compatible with a world *paideia*."[22] I'm not sure that mixing talk about American religious ideals in 1988 and concerns about nationalism voiced at the beginning of the First World War isn't like mixing apples and oranges, but the concept that Dewey foresaw the necessity for change in what characterized education in America is helpful as America attempts to reconstruct its educational system. The American educational system that has become increasingly irrelevant and ineffective to scores of youth living in America's inner cities, to the point that the American educational system has in fact become the occasion of hopelessness and oppression.

In 1988, the same year as Cremin published the last installment of his three volume set on *American Education*, the City of Chicago passed the school reform act and established Local School Councils in an attempt to return control of the public school system to the neighborhood level. This was done because the traditional public school curriculum and methodology had failed to do Dewey's work of socialization and had left entire segments of Chicago's population, particularly black and Hispanic groups, effectively isolated from the

American experience. I would hasten to add that this was not a failure of educational thought but rather an example of what can happen when an educational movement becomes institutionalized and the institution fails to contain the necessary systemic structure for self-renewal.

The failure of public education in established urban settings is not unique to Chicago. It is indicative of a growing trend not only in urban America but also in third world countries where institutional failure has lead to a move toward liberation from this sort of stultified education institution. A move toward educational practices and systems that serve the disenfranchised and reintegrate them into the political process of their societies. This socio-political perspective is evident in the works of numerous educational theorists including Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Michael Apple. Flowing out of this same genre of liberation thought in education are the works of numerous feminist theorists such as Bell Hooks, Maxine Greene, and Kathleen Weiler. Feminist thought that call into question power and class structures, paradigms of freedom, and are supportive of the moving of moral conversations from the private to the public spheres. Education, like culture, society, and political structure is undergoing massive changes as we move through the information revolution at the end of this millennium. As we have seen in each of the other areas there is at least an implicit relationship of religion to education in the current educational reality of America. In the words of Bell Hooks speaking of teaching, "there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; [those] who believe

that our work is not merely the sharing of information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our student. To teach in a manner that respects the souls of our students is essential."[23]

Turning expressly to the religious dimension of America one is left to ask, what is the determining criteria for the sacred in a culture that seemingly idolizes gratuitous sex, youth, power and material possessions in a wish to simply live for instantaneous personal gratification? Despite this initial impression one only needs to question the average American to discover that both spirituality and a belief in God is at an all time high in twentieth century American history, yet Church attendance is at an all time low.[24] Clearly then, religious affiliation belongs in the category of a voluntary association.

If radical individualism and a separation between the private and public spheres of a person are realities of a pluralistic American society, then radical individualism also manifests itself religiously in what Robert Bellah terms internal and external religions.[25] Bellah defines the extreme of internal religion as a sort of new age "cosmic selfhood" and the phenomena of religious fundamentalism as the extreme of external religion. What is interesting about Bellah's presentation is not the construct of the polar opposites but that many people are driven to them. Lost is the religious center held historically by mainline Protestantism. It is arguably viewed as being lost to a media driven culture of consumerism. Bellah is quick to point out that the consumerism and affluence

portrayed by the media eventually leaves people hungry for something more fulfilling for themselves.[26]

There are various names for the roughly fifty percent of the American population who profess to be Christian but are disconnected from their faith traditions. Some call them the unchurched, others the non-converted baptized, and even baptized pagans. They are Americans who profess to believe in Christ as the son of God but fail to see the necessity for organized religion or to recognize the authority of such religious traditions to speak to with wisdom to their personal faith experience. I will use the term "seeker" to describe members of this group of people who are disconnected from their faith traditions, as opposed to the term "believer" which I will use to describe individuals who are actively practicing within a Christian faith tradition.

In the search for relevance in the current American milieu, organized religions in the United States seem to be going through much the same process as governmental and educational systems. In an age of seeming relativism how is the Christian experience or any religious experience that claims to stand for immutable values and truth to be able to touch the lives of those that seek to satisfy their individual hunger for meaning beyond themselves?

It is arguable from the forgoing discussion that we are currently living in the middle of a paradigm shift that is variously named the information age, the post-modern period, or the post-literate age. What is common among these various labels is the realization that microchip and computer enhanced

technology and research have given humankind the ability to accumulate knowledge at a rate faster than humankind's ability to integrate and synthesize that knowledge. Change has become the normative state of the human experience in America. The cultural, social, political, and religious symptoms that have been described above are the results of humanity's continual attempts to make meaning out of their current existence and to put their world in relationship with a larger cosmos.[27] The growth of the religiosity among the seekers seems in keeping with this human longing for meaning and relationship. Following from that basic human need, the drop of participation in organized religion among the seekers can be seen as a result of the failure on the part of many organized religions to engage in and find contextual meaning for their traditions in today's world. These religions have failed to establish a ground for relationship between their traditions and these seekers of transcendent meaning.

It is in precisely the areas of transcendent experience and meaning that Bellah has founded his internal and external extremes of religion and not surprisingly people have gravitated toward them. The "new age" movements without the experience of Christian community to provide a sort of grounding rod for the interpretation of the transcendent and human relationship seems highly disposed to narcissism. Fundamentalist forms of Christianity, having embraced modern technologies and marketing strategies, are growing disproportionately fast in comparison to other forms of Christianity, yet one is forced to ponder the reasons for these fundamentalist forms not being even more successful. I

believe that it is their over simplification of the human condition in relationship to the world in which we live and limited view of the transcendent that make them a non-viable option for an increasingly complex American mind set.

Today's religions in America are called to make meaning out of a culture of complexity. They are called to stand as an authentic witness to traditions of faithfulness that are continuous from our earliest recorded history. By virtue of Jesus' command to Peter: "feed my sheep,"[28] the community of John and subsequently later Christian communities, understood their role was to lead those who hunger and thirst for spiritual fulfillment to the bread of life and the wine of eternal salvation. It is equally apparent that the moral dimension of religion is critical. It is not sufficient to answer only to our own whim as the "new age" believers would do nor is it sufficient to live our lives in an unexamined manner that relegates our behavior to a set of externally imposed rules. History, culture, sociology, traditional understandings, interpretation, and meaning making are not strange concepts in the world of education and teaching. Morality and moral formation are the traditional realm of the religious educator or teacher.

Religious educators are unique Christians. They are called to make meaning out of an explosion of scientific and cultural knowledge, to authentically witness to and explain religious traditions rooted in the experience of a living God, and finally they are charged to call others to relationship that flows from a conversion that acknowledges the fundamental brokenness of the human condition in need of the salvific grace and the love of God.

The seeker at the end of the twentieth century, awash in the information revolution that results in a flood of knowledge in which many truths are true at once, is in need of wisdom. The Christian educator is the inheritor of a wisdom tradition that extends to the beginning of recorded human history. The seeker looks for an authentically founded truth that transcends the finite world in which they exist. The Christian educator is in possession of a truth so vast that its depth can never be understood and yet a truth so personal that its existence can be recognized within the quiet stillness at the center of the individual human heart. It is at this center that the relationship of the transcendent Jesus is experienced. It is at this center that the call to discipleship is heard and it is in the context of Christian community that the call to discipleship is lived out in the reality of Christian life.

To meet the demands of the modern age the Christian educator is called to be a rabbi disciple who bears an authentic witness to the ultimate revelation of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christian educator is called to evangelize, to call others to relationship with a transcendent and living God through that same Christ Jesus. The Christian educator is called to act as a rabbinic disciple. They are called to be relationally grounded to the experienced present and called to continue a dialogue with a transcendent experienced reality. At no point since the Apostolic Age, has the charge to be a rabbinic disciple been more relevant. Now is the time when the hunger for spirituality in all its truth and mystery calls faith and the religious tradition into dialogue with a

culture rooted in individualism, with democratic ideals that stress personal freedom, and finally with the created diversity of humanity.

As a Christian educator who also happens to be American and Catholic, I must now address those parts of the my faith's educational tradition that are not dialogical but dictatorial, not democratic but hierarchical, and finally not diverse but patriarchal.

# CHAPTER 3:  THE ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

In looking at the role of Religious Education and the office of teacher from the perspective of the Catholic Church in America it needs to be stated that the overwhelmingly dominate form of Catholic practice in the United States is the Roman Rite of Catholicism. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church in America is made up predominately of immigrant groups of Irish, French, German, and Polish heritage each holding their own national Catholic tradition, their national tradition was a tradition linked to the Roman Rite. The pattern of enculturation that brings each of these immigrant groups to the point that they no longer view themselves as Irish or German Catholics but rather view themselves as American Catholics or Americans who are also Catholic has historically taken three generations.[29] The current groups of Catholic immigrants that are predominately of Hispanic and Asian origin seem to be following very similar patterns of socio-religious enculturation. This process of, as innumerable scholars have more or less put it, the Americanization of Catholicism seems to have instilled an irrepressible spirit of democracy into the hearts of American Catholics. That said, American Catholics tied to ethnic and cultural loyalties

beyond their simply American experience have found themselves trapped between being a "true American" and a "good Catholic."[30]

Historically, to become truly American is to embrace a set of ideals and beliefs that are rooted in Protestant thought. Historically, to be a good Catholic has meant to be obedient to Catholic authority, an authority visible in the person of the Priest, Bishop and in particular to the Roman Pontiff. Protestant thought rooted in a Puritan dislike for these "papists"[31] has been, until the last half of the twentieth century, hostile to Catholicism and particularly to the Roman Pontiff. Whether the American experience was hostile to these Catholic immigrants and resulted in the denigration of Catholic bonds or not, the reality of the democratic experience and the ascendent rise of Congregationalism among Protestant denominations has had an affective experience on the American Catholic psyche.

In turning my attention to Rome I will begin with one of the most noticeable characteristic of Catholicism, the hierarchical Roman structure. Headed by the Pope, the Roman Catholic Church is made up of a bureaucracy so vast and so broad that even those who work within the Catholic Church often have a difficult time keeping it all sorted out. To say that this structure, complete with Bishops, Archbishops, and Cardinals who have their own coat of arms, smacks of a princely Church with the Pope as earthly king is not an exaggeration. To say that America was founded in opposition to this sort of system is also not an exaggeration. The fact there existed, and still exists to this

day, a separate Catholic school system in America bears witness not only to earlier Catholic persecution by a largely Protestant America but also to a particular distrust by both American Catholics and the Roman Catholic Church of the American government's Protestant roots as visible in the values of the public education system.

In the nineteenth century the Roman Catholic Church, used to being politically recognized and empowered in Europe, was seen as a threat to the American ideal of separation of Church and state. On one hand, the papacy was solidly opposed to the heresy of the scientific enlightenment as is evidenced by Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* while America on the other hand wholly embraced the enlightenment as a cultural ideal. In America, beginning around 1830, new waves of immigrants who were predominately poor, uneducated, and Catholic began to flow into the United States. The result was that the Catholic Church in America was not only perceived by Protestant America as a political and cultural threat but it was now also seen as an immigrant Church. The Catholic Church had become an icon for all these ethnically diverse immigrant groups and as such is was perceived by Protestant America as an economic threat that created social problems. The response to these or any other new alien groups was one of open hostility and discrimination. This led to the eventual establishment of parallel social structures among Catholics who largely remained in urban settings where they could maintain connections to this developing Catholic socio-economic network. These structures made available by Catholics *to*

Catholics were both formally and informally developed to provide for the American Catholic's needs culturally, socially, economically, and educationally.

For many but not all Catholics this practical sectarianism, that stressed a Church that was against culture and a unique Catholic identity within the larger American culture, served as an effective strategy for the enculturation of the multiple waves of Catholic immigrants to the United States that continued in earnest until about 1920. This siege mentality that viewed the Catholic Church in America as a fortress that was surrounded by a hostile world of heretics was not to end until the 1960 presidential election of John Kennedy, an event that would signify the end of Catholic institutional sectarianism and the beginning of the "Americanization" of Catholic institutions. In noting this fact as it pertains to the social and cultural history of Catholic educational institutions , Jack Seymour, Robert O'Gorman and Charles Foster say:

> The election in 1960 of the first Catholic to the highest office of the nation symbolized Catholic education's attainment of "Americanization." This, along with Vatican Council II's direct recognition of and engagement with modernity, suggests that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century aims of faith preservation and intellectual and cultural separation through ecclesiastically controlled schooling are no longer appropriate. Thus the Catholic Church in this country is free to reconstruct a new mythos (rationale and agencies) for Catholic Education...[32]

As Seymour, O'Gorman, and Foster note there was one other event of the sixties that was to have a profound effect on the Catholic identity and the Catholic culture, that event was the Second Vatican Council. Much could be said about the Second Vatican Council but I want only to stress three points that I

feel are germane to this discussion. First of all, the council was about the bringing of the Roman Catholic Church into dialogue with the cultural reality of the enlightenment or modernity. Secondly, the council itself was the Roman Catholic Church's first real action as a world or global Church in its two thousand year history.[33] Finally, Vatican II's exercise of its universal magisterium in its documents regarding the laity's role in the Church, particularly evident in *Gaudium et spes*, was widely interpreted by American Catholics as the opening of a dialogue of mutuality regarding local and national Church administration. A dialogue in which the laity now believed they would have a voice.

The hope and promise of the 1960's gave way to the realities of a bureaucratic and authoritarian Church hierarchy in the 1970's and 1980's. It was as though having now admitted to the invention of the printing press, the Vatican and the Roman Curia had to make up for lost time. Under the free reins and the personage of Pope John Paul II, the Curia would by the end of the decade of the 1980's attempt to publish defining works on almost every matter of dogma and doctrine. In shear number of major papal and ecclesial documents the current pontificate has eclipsed the work of the council and the conciliar commissions. The number in this case is not so important as the content of these documents. Increasingly the content of these documents has become more authoritarian such as in Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's *responsum* to the question on the ordination of women that marks an attempt by a Vatican congregation to move non-definitively taught universal and ordinary magisterium to the level of

infallible teaching.[34] A more confrontational attitude toward the American Catholic Church in particular is evidenced in the Curia's "Instruction Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest."[35]

In turning our attention to the field of religious education, the mere fact that to a great extent the practice of religious education or catechesis is defined and its boundaries set outside the confines of the United States, has historically been problematic for Americans at many points in our history, and at no point has that fact seemed more problematic than at the end of the twentieth century.

Speaking from the perspective of religious education or catechesis, the composition of the General Catechetical Directory (GCD) in 1971 followed by the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) in 1997 by a committee of the world's Bishops, shows an unbelievably sophisticated understanding of the major implications of the process of educating in faith. Although the point could be and is argued by many, it will be claimed here that the writing of the GCD and the GDC is a function of the Church universal as part of its legitimate magisterium with an accent given to the word "general" in the title of the document. The GDC shows a depth of universal perspective on religious education that would be almost prophetic at points if it had been done with the simple pastoral sensitivity of having been written using inclusive language.

Now that the universal document on catechesis has been finished, the National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) will take up the work of composing a new National Catechetical Directory (NCD). The NCD is a document that

specifies the catechetical norms and practices for the Catholic Church in America. The fact that this American document must stand for approval and be subject to revision ultimately by a small elitist committee of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) that is answerable only to the Roman Pontiff, not only strains the bonds of collegiality among even the episcopal brethren, but it is often as not interpreted as condescending and mean-spirited by a large number of Catholic laity in America. It is this sort of top-down authoritarian context in which the Roman Catholic Church finds itself when it approaches the American conversation of religious education. It is a conversation for which Rome apparently even fails to possess the correct language.

In looking at the reality of religious education or catechesis in America one is immediately struck by the persistence of a school model of elementary catechesis and a dearth of adult catechetical offerings putting American Catholicism clearly at odds with the Roman vision. The Catholic approach to religious education, heavily influenced by the ideal if not the realization of its image as the "church that was a school,"[36] has always been primarily a cognitive process albeit a cognitive process directed at children. The effects of building and maintaining a large privately financed educational system in the United States has taken its toll. A toll paid not only by the religious orders who built the schools but also as an endless taxing of the resources of local and parish communities. Communities that are ill prepared monetarily and intellectually to sustain these schools or to interpret their role in an integrated context.

Although the Catholic Church situates catechesis within the broader field of evangelization, neither the American nor the Roman Catholic Church have moved toward the embrace of the radical evangelization they espouse. The Roman Church's current approach is not much different from the past. There has been little written on evangelization since the Second Vatican Council by comparison to the volumes of apologetic writings and two editions of a noninclusively written catechism. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Paul VI and to a large extent *Evangelium Vitae*, by John Paul II stand out starkly in contrast to the remainder of the post-conciliar documents. Even when one includes the bulk of the catechetical documents, whose point of departure is the teaching of the faith rather than the experience of faith, the concerns of the majority of the remaining ecclesiastical documents largely deal with ethical and dogmatic issues that clarify the Church's doctrinal position concerning them.

The patriarchal tenor of the ecclesial exchange, the emphasis on doctrine and dogma, and lack of pastoral sensitivity overshadow any positive contribution that the Roman approach to religious education could have made to a wider dialogue within the American Catholic Church of the late 1990's. To say that this position strikes a dissonant chord with the lived experience of most American Catholics as previously explored is not an understatement.

Depending on the role one defines for the theologian, theology is a likely field in which to look for someone to bring synthesis and harmony to apparently competing experiences of faith and faith tradition. Here the dissonance rises in

an ever-increasing crescendo fueled by the mixture of magisterium with juridical authority that attempts to make the ordinary teachings of the Church fall under the umbrella of infallibility. The result is that conversation has turned into pitched battle. The game players are well known: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Tissa Balasuriya, Bishop Fabian Bruskiwitz, Charles Curran, Mother Angelica, John Cardinal Mahoney, Call to Action, Opus Dei, the National Catholic Reporter and The Wanderer to name but a few. The position of the hierarchical Church, as interpreted by the CDF, is equally clear, calling for conformity to certainly questionable teachings and above all obedience to authority. Any attempts to discuss other positions will be met by censure or worse. This position is wholly untenable from both a Catholic and an American perspective.

The state of theological discourse or lack thereof, brings into focus the Roman bias toward calling for obedience rather than to conversion. Recent trends in papal documents seem to insularly ground themselves in the works of the current pontiff rather than in the fertile soil of the conciliar documents of Vatican II. There was hope in the spirit of Vatican II by those who saw the prospect of expanded participation in the magisterium that would include theologians and by those who saw participation in a teaching office that would eventually include all of those called, especially laity called from among the "People of God," to the vocation of teacher. Any idea of reclaiming a vibrant office of teacher or an expanded magisterium was all but lost as post-conciliar focus turned to power and a politicized magisterium.

In any institutional religion a legitimate voice of doctrinal conformity is a structural imperative. Without an expressed belief system that determines the religious identity of the membership it is not possible to sustain an institutional structure. How an institutional religion goes about determining that belief system or doctrine becomes part of the culture of that particular religion. As a religion grows it tends to become more institutionally dependant and the culture that determines doctrinal conformity becomes politicized. In any institutional religion such as Roman Catholicism, a closely held and controlled voice of doctrinal authority such as the CDF is exceedingly subject to human error and abuse. From an American political perspective the CDF can be seen as synonymous with the "smoke filled room."

The result of the current situation is that the historical office of teacher appears to have been co-opted by political usurpation. Universal and ordinary teaching authority has been taken from the pastoral ministers and the People of God. In the next chapter I will recover the office of teacher that was left behind in the political wake of a changing Church and one that is imperative in a cultural reality where change is the only constant.

# CHAPTER 4: RECLAIMING A THEOLOGY OF TEACHER

Although I could start the process of reclaiming a teaching office at any

point in the Catholic Christian tradition, I think that it is imperative to start with

the lived experience of Jesus as recorded in the canonical Gospels and insofar

as modern biblical scholarship allows us to accomplish this task. Beginning then

with the Gospels, the adjective used most often in the Revised Standard Version

of the Bible to describe Jesus is teacher or rabbi.

Rabbi is an Aramaic word meaning master. In John's Gospel the author

explicitly refers to rabbi as meaning teacher or master. The first century Jews

would have understood and used the term rabbi to denote a learned man who

was an interpreter of Mosaic law. The Jews were and are today still a people of

the law. In Judea, at the time of Jesus, all Jews observed the law as given to

Moses. There were, however, factions within the Jewish tradition that disagreed

with the way in which the Mosaic law was interpreted and thus observed. Judea

was historically a theocracy. Even under Roman occupation, many local matters

in Judea were still governed to some extent by Mosaic law. So to some extent,

under the Romans and the Herodian kings, these various religious factions

remained political factions although they were vastly less powerful than they had been in the Hasmonean period, 135 - 39 B.C.E.

Two factions appear in the accounts of Jesus' life as they are preserved in the biblical texts, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The differences between these two groups are worth noting briefly. Pharisees believed in life after death, Sadducees did not; Pharisees believed in an interpretation of tradition in determining the observance of the law, Sadducees believed in observing a more literal interpretation of the law alone; the Pharisees' membership was large and made up primarily of laity, the Sadducees' membership was small made up from among the aristocratic priesthood that operated the Temple in Jerusalem.[37]

From the foregoing I think it is fairly clear that Jesus had one foot firmly planted on the pharisaic soil of the rabbinic tradition of Judea. Yet, even though Jesus was operating as a pharisaic rabbi he did not subject himself to the authority of the law. For a pharisee the law was the ultimate authority and a rabbi's authority was derived from studying and interpreting the law.[38] Jesus certainly studied and interpreted the law but his authority was clearly not founded in this world. Jesus taught with an authority that was recognized as not being subject to the normal secular religious reviews of the pharisaic party. As the author of the Gospel of Mark recalls:

> And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he
> entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at
> his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not
> as the scribes.[39]

If the locus for Jesus teaching authority was not to be found in the law it could be seen in the prophetic tradition of Israel. Judges, priests, kings, and prophets were called and raised up from among the least of the Israelites by Yahweh. The prophets were charismatic men and women who received their authority either directly from Yahweh or through one of Yahweh's angelic messengers. Jesus clearly understood his teaching mission to be in the prophetic tradition as can be seen in Luke's story of Jesus' preaching at the synagogue in Nazareth:

> And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself; what we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here also in your own country.'" And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them he went away.[40]

From this Lucan passage it is apparent that the author not only saw Jesus as a prophet but as being among the greatest of Israel's prophets. The illusion to his prophetic authority along with the reminder of the fact that Israel had ignored

the greatest of God's messengers sent to them in the past, were no doubt the causes of their great anger against Jesus.

We see Jesus the teacher as a rabbi who speaks with the authority of God in a prophetic voice. The message that Jesus proclaimed was that the Kingdom of God was at hand. It was not something for the future but it was something to be realized now in his lifetime. Jesus preached of repentance or conversion that was necessary in order to believe in the Good News. Here in Mark it can be seen as the core message of Jesus' ministry:

> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."[41]

As was the custom for many of the prophets and rabbis, Jesus collected a band of followers or disciples. Jesus' disciples were made up of those who wished to learn the ways of the master rabbi and those who thought they had found in Jesus a prophetic messiah whom Yahweh had sent them to deliver Judea from the hands of their Roman oppressor. From the stories preserved in the synoptic Gospels, it can be reasonably interpreted that the inner group of twenty or so disciples Jesus gathered about him did not initially understand their commitment to follow Jesus in the same way as did the later writers of the Gospels. Jesus disciples may have initially understood following Jesus as incurring a sort of vow of poverty or that they would be required to endure hardship in the process of realizing their earthly Kingdom, but it became obvious to the disciples after Jesus' crucifixion that the basic understanding of

discipleship had changed. By the time of the Gospels writing, to be a disciple of Jesus would require more than a willingness to give up wealth and family for the Kingdom. Being a disciple would include imitating the master in every way and especially it would include the carrying of a cross and a willingness to lay down one's life in a spirit of love for one's faith and one's faith community.

After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension the disciples, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit began to preach Jesus as redeemer and the resurrection as God's promise of victory over death realized in Jesus as the gateway for entry into eternal life. The Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection began to spread throughout the Mediterranean region. No doubt in response not only to the question of gentile converts but also in consideration of doctrinal unity the disciples gather at what is called the First Church Council at Jerusalem and the institution of Church comes into existence.

The fact that there is a Jerusalem Council and that it occurs so early in Church history is a testament to the diversity of Christianities already present in the Apostolic Age. This council has been interpreted on a political level as the attempt of the Church of Jerusalem to attain primacy over the other Church communities that had formed outside Jerusalem, most notably the Pauline and Johannine communities. No matter the reason, the Jerusalem Council's attempts at unity beyond Jewish doctrinal interpretation in light of the Christ experience and a primacy of a Jerusalem Church, later moved to Rome, failed.

Whether it is wholly or partially a question of political or doctrinal

consideration, a growing concern over the "authority" of traveling prophets or

disciples who's message sometimes seems contradictory to that of Jesus'

Apostles is evident. These concerns are voiced in a number of early writings. A

good example of this concern is evidenced in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called
> you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel– not that
> there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and
> want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel
> from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which
> we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before,
> so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel
> contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.[42]

Attempts to write down not only the Gospel accounts of Jesus but also the

teachings of the Apostles and what it means to be Christian continue and

advance to the point that by the beginning of the second century one finds the

earliest record of a dogmatic nature in the Didache.

The Didache is interesting in that it clearly acknowledges multiple forms of

Christian community organization. Some communities are headed by prophets

and/or teachers who have settled down within certain communities. The

prophets are in some cases even acknowledged as being a priestly class.[43]

Teachers seem to be a rabbinic type and are not specifically referred to as

priestly in office by themselves. Some communities are overseen by elected

Bishops and Deacons. Deacons, judging from the instruction for their

appointment, apparently still fulfill an office of economic dispersal similar to

those Deacons encountered in the Acts of the Apostles.[44] The exhortation to appoint Bishops and Deacons and the admission that some communities apparently have no prophet as Priest seem to allow for communal and collaborative community leadership in the priestly ministry as well. While the *Didache* is an excellent source of information on Christian community organization, the portion of the *Didache* with which I am concerned deals with the community's discernment of two spiritual charisms in light of the *Didache*'s presented belief structure or doctrine, the charisms of teaching and prophesy. These two charisms are of the utmost importance to those who would be disciples of Christ Jesus.

The charism of teaching is clearly recognizable in the *Didache* as a teaching authority or office apart from any explicit doctrinal consideration. The office of teacher appears to be in the model of wisdom teacher or rabbi. Indeed one would expect such a model of religious instruction to be common in the early Church communities that are coming out of a largely Jewish tradition.[45] Even the gentile communities were made up of gentiles who were initially the uncircumcised Jewish gentiles of the gate at synagogue.

While the question of doctrinal fidelity to the teachings of Jesus as interpreted by the "twelve Apostles" is implicitly assumed, it is never mentioned as a governing concern of this teaching office. The *Didache* does stress the necessity of moral formation as a response to the resurrection experience. From this perspective the tone of the teaching in the *Didache* can be interpreted as

wisdom teaching. It seems apparent that it is the moral formation grounded in a contemporary wisdom teaching that is to lead one along the road to eternal life. To be sure that road is full of twists and turns that might obscure the goal and so the *Didache* also admits to the authority of a prophetic charism and assumes that a prophetic charism is active within the wide range of communities that make up the Mediterranean Church.

The charism of prophesy is already clearly problematic by the time of Paul's correspondence with the Galatians arguably dated around 54 or 57 C.E. Prophesy is by its nature in opposition to prevailing conventional authority or secular wisdom and its truth is often beyond the listener's ability to accept. The *Didache* speaks of a prophetic charism that seems to appear in three voices. The first voice is that of the prophet proper. This prophet is a sort of itinerant preacher who moves from place to place preaching repentance and the Good News in much the same fashion as Jesus or John the Baptist. This prophet gains his sustenance from the goodwill donations of the faithful. There appear to be problems associated with abuses by this sort of prophet to the point that some of them are labeled as false prophets and accused of "trafficking on Christ."[46] The second discernable prophetic voice is that which seems to reside in a prophetic teacher. This form of prophet seems to be willing to settle and work within a particular community. This prophetic teacher can be seen as taking over some of the functions of Deacons in some communities where they have become charged with reminding the community of their obligations to the poor.[47] Beyond

just calling for the care of the poor this prophetic teacher would also seem to be about the forming the community's moral and social conscience.

The final voice of prophesy in the *Didache* is that voice that resides with the Bishop or Deacon as a part of their office. Here also can be seen the first instance of a developing magisterium as well. It is the recognizable and stated belief that the elected Bishops and Deacons, by virtue of their election, can perform the services of prophet and teacher.[48] There have become two different points of view for interpreting this belief throughout history.

One point of view will interpret these charisms in light of the form and function of the sacrament of ordination. This point of view generally states that the charisms of prophesy and teaching are affective charisms imparted by the act of ordering, therefore all who are so ordered are in possession of those and other charisms of the Holy Spirit. So the office of teacher and prophet are absorbed by the office of the Bishop.[49]

The other point of view, the one which I shall continue to explore, assumes that the charism of teaching and the prophetic voice are active gifts of the Holy Spirit poured out on those who are called to serve in these offices regardless of their ordering. The early Church certainly had an understanding of both teaching and prophetic offices that were viewed as a part of a spiritual gift from God's providence to meet the needs of the community. It was the communal discernment of these and other charisms present in a particular person that caused the community to elect a person Bishop.

It was precisely the process of communal discernment in election of Bishops that made it possible for the early generations of the Church to make the sorts of sacramental statements found in the *Didache*. The eventual divorce of the communal discernment from the election of Bishops results in a displacement of the prophetic and teaching offices from the magisterium of the Church. Nowhere does the tension between the divorce of the prophetic and teaching office and the institutional Church become more easily recognizable than in the monastic reaction to the formal institutionalization and politicalization of Christianity in the fourth century as the Church becomes Roman.

The fourth century opened with the end of persecution and the close of the Age of Martyrs as the emperor Constantine embraced Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Church councils beginning with Nicaea and ending with Chalcedon would openly and heatedly debate the theological nature of God, humankind, sin and salvation. They would lay down the doctrinal foundations for all future discussions about the Triune nature of God, Original Sin, and the human and divine natures of Christ. Politically motivated and culturally diverse, these councils would, for the first time, determine objective truths that would put a person or whole community either inside or outside the Christian Church. These doctrines resulted in persecutions of Gnostic communities and in the procurement and the management of the reignments of secular power that accompanied an institutionalized Church to which almost everyone would belonged.[50]

The spiritual reaction to this institutionalization of religion was fueled by a belief that the Gospel message, now tamed and secularized, had become insipid and led a number of individuals, the desert *abbas* and *ammas*, to retreat into the wastelands of North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and eventually into solitude in Europe, to find the voice of the Spirit present in a world that was separated from the secular world to which they now felt the Church belonged. Quickly however these desert *abbas* and *ammas* found that, far from being apart from the world, they were a valued and much sought out resource for it. They were constantly besieged by all sorts of pilgrims, including St. Athanaius, St. Jerome, and St. John Cassian, for a *word*. The word, in this case, is a piece of spiritual advise or wisdom given in the context of relationship that if received might give life to those who received it. The relationship of the *abbas* or *ammas* to their disciples and the pilgrims was of parents to their children begotten in Christ.[51] These desert experiments in monasticism founded on spiritual discipline and rooted in a simple wisdom teaching that was morally anchored in Christian relationship, stand in stark contrast to the masterful and authoritative catechetical works of St. John Chrysostom, the theological treatise of St. Augustine, and the grand liturgical spectacle of the catechumenate witnessed by Egeria in the diary of her pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

As the Roman Empire fell into disarray and Europe entered the Middle Ages the imperial Church collapsed into monastic outposts that were economically self-sufficient in operation. Any thought of universal theological

discourse or of doctrinal development was rendered mute by the political and economic realities of feudal Europe. These monasteries possessed a great storehouse of theological writings that would remain unused for centuries until the eventual rise of scholasticism. The economic and political circumstance that caused European monasticism to become a viable island of knowledge and hospitality in a hostile world would become an evangelizing witness to the barbaric invaders of the empire and lead them from tribal bonds into bonds of faith.[52] Left with an illiterate population the literate monastery was more symbolic of an inbreaking transcendent God than a human and accessible God. The wisdom of the monastery diluted into knowledge and knowledge into power. As brokers of God's grace to the peasants and of knowledge to the feudal princes, the monastery and the cathedral became fused to the political and social fabric that was Christendom. Education was limited to members of the elite classes and religious teaching was limited to homilies that often revolved around telling stories about local saints.[53]

The relationship of Church to political and economic power as the Middle Ages continued became symbiotic. It often became impossible to tell where the Church ended and where the political began. Practical implications included the not uncommon scenario where an oldest son of an aristocratic family became the titular heir to the family's feudal estate and the second oldest son became the local Bishop to gain control of the Church's feudal estate. The Church became the largest land holder in medieval Europe and the process of becoming

a Bishop became an economic function in which the Office of Bishop and more importantly the economic control of the Church estate were often sold to the highest bidder in a widespread practice of simony.[54]

With the end of the Viking invasions an era of economic reawakening began. A new merchant class began to develop along with an economy that allowed for more than simple agrarian economics. The Church developed its own merchant economy as it began the widespread practice of selling sacramental grace and indulgences, a practice that was to continue more or less unencumbered into the sixteenth century. There were those upon whom the economic injustice of these Church practices were not lost such as the Bogomills and the Albigenses. The Church's ability to effectively mount a crusade or holy war, backed by armed nobles true to their own self interests if not the faith, made quick work of any such dissension. With the advent of trade and the slowly improving lot of the peasant class in a diversifying labor market, it became impossible for the Church to physically control of the spread of any dissonant theological ideas. To deal with this new reality, the Church instituted the Inquisition. The reality of the Inquisition was that is was used as much to maintain political alliances as it was to combat heterodoxy and heresies that were largely a result of the Church's own failure to teach or model the tenets of Christian faith.[55]

In the midst of this morass, new waves of monastic reforms began to take shape. The Franciscan and the Beguine movements were both attempts to find a

God accessible to the human person whether in nature or in response to human suffering. Virtue, found in the ability to vow poverty, gave rise to new access to God. Similarly, the availability of time to reflect on God gives rise to scholasticism fueled mightily by the Dominican movement. Despite the interest in theological thought and the monastic calls for reform, the role of a prophetic teaching office remained lost and the prophetic voice mute. In summing up her review of the middle ages, Marianne Sawicki poignantly remarks, "Centuries of neglect of the Christian education of the masses meant that the flowers of scholastic theology bloomed beyond the reach of most Christians. Centuries of abuse of Church property meant that vested interests were now too strong for the reforming councils and Popes to overcome."[56]

At the beginning of the sixteenth century the political and economic situation between the Church and the German nobility was under stress but was not unusual given the history of their relationship. A young Priest and theologian was critiquing the Church's financial practices. There was also nothing unusual about that instance. What was to make this dispute between an Augustinian monk and the Church different from the countless similar disputes before was that the fundamental way in which society acquired and disseminated knowledge had begun to change. The invention of the printing press had changed both the speed and the distribution of the written word making Martin Luther's theological disagreements with the Roman papacy available to a wide audience and accessible to an even wider one by subsequent oral readings. No longer

isolated geographically or effectively suppressed theologically, Luther was able to impact the thoughts of other Priests and theologians such as Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin. They were able to form an extended community that would sustain and nurture new paradigms of their theological reflection. What made Luther so dangerous to the established Church was his position on justification by faith alone. This was not good news for those who depended on the income from indulgences and for a hierarchical clergy intent on mediating God's grace. God, as revealed in a Bible that had been translated into the language of the people, was made available to the common person and the Reformation was born.

The reaction of the formerly simply Christian but now Roman Catholic Church was the Counter Reformation. The Counter Reformation was official Rome's attempt to reform decadent Church structures and practices. Doctrinal issues that were to form the Roman Catholic identity for the next four hundred years had to be tightened up and articulated. Liturgical practices and the Mass in particular, had to conform to the unity of the body of Christ and be the same everywhere at all times. Even the language had to be the same. Gone were the few vernacular instances of the Mass as everywhere the Mass was now in Latin.[57] The heightened importance of doctrine and the necessity of defending the faith, from the Protestant heretics, resulted in an educational zeal unseen in the Church since the times of the Roman Empire. Reforming movements began to arise within the Church as new orders like the Jesuits in 1540 and the

Ursalines in 1544 are formed primarily for educational and missionary purposes. St. Charles Borromeo founded the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) in 1536 to teach the truths of the faith to both children and illiterate adults. The first Roman Catechism, issued in 1566, was a summary of the doctrines promulgated by the Council of Trent. Armed with tradition and education the Roman Catholic Church settled into a siege mentality that would last until the end of the modern period.

Although spiritual mysticism flourished and produced a number of prophetic voices, especially during the period of the Reformation, such as St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Teresa of Avila these voices are contained primarily within a religious order tradition that requires Roman approval for their existence. There remains in this period no room in the public Church, concerned with conformity and uniformity, for a prophetic teacher that might challenge the perspective of hierarchical order of the Church. There were now other culturally, socially, and politically accepted Christian Religions for those who wanted to do engage in that sort of public dialogue.[58]

A result of the political reordering that occurred during the Reformation, caused by the break up of the Church's feudal estates and agrarian economic base, was the development of national Churches. Religious persecution among various religious groups was not uncommon as tendencies toward nationalism developed. America, first as a collection of colonies and later as a country, in

stark contrast to the European experience, espoused a foundational value of religious tolerance and freedom.

America, founded on Puritan values and a Protestant ethos, becomes the place for Protestantism in its various forms to flourish. In American Protestantism one can begin to recognize the pluralities of Christianities and various political understandings of Church structure at work. Here one can also see the ancient charismatic forms of teacher and prophet. Religious education, at one end of the spectrum, begins to take on an eclectic dimension echoing rabbinic tradition as is evidenced by the work of people such as William Ellery Channing, Horace Bushnell, and George Albert Coe. The prophetic voice in America is found in a chain of revival preachers beginning with Jonathan Edwards and continuing, despite or because of preachers like Billy Sunday, to Billy Graham today. Both the voice of a teaching office and the prophetic call to conversion are rooted in the American Protestant tradition from its earliest manifestations.

Throughout this same period in America, Catholic teaching became isolated from the public sphere. Largely made up by massive immigrations of illiterate people in the last half of the nineteenth century, Catholics were treated as outsiders by Protestant America. The Catholic development of their own educational and economic systems that paralleled those of the public sector did little to influence integration into the American mainstream. The articulated goal, even though never realized, of required Catholic education for every Catholic child probably had a greater effect on the Catholic national psyche than any

other Catholic institution in America. The focus of Catholic education in America was that God is active in everything and that therefore every action had religious ramifications above and beyond the material or secular reality. This separatist model of American Catholicism and its educational philosophy was in near perfect harmony with the prevailing wisdom of an abortive First Vatican Council and the neo-Thomisic stance of Pope Leo XIII, that clearly stressed the a world in which the spiritual clearly transcends the material to the point of opposition and where all learning was meant to address the learners attainment of their ultimate heavenly goal.

At higher levels there was dissension among America's Catholic leadership as to the appropriate direction for Catholic Education to take in its relationship to the larger public world. Under the banner of "Americanism," championed by Bishop John Ireland, there was a significant attempt made at the end of the nineteenth century to engage Catholicism and Catholic Education with the secular world. With Rome's intervention condemning "Americanism" as heresy, Catholics would have to wait until 1960 to officially enter the American mainstream.[59] Catholic teaching would, with the notable exception of social teaching, be confined to indoctrination and obedient assent until the Second Vatican Council.

The Second Vatican Council opened the door to its vast if suppressed prophetic tradition in many ways during the course of the council. No document seemed more representative of that openness than did *Gaudium et spes*. In

*Gaudium et spes* the council called for the integration of Catholics with the world around them and in particular into relationship with those outside the Catholic Church. In words of unity and in a call for fully human reflection the council led by Spirit said:

> The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human.[60]

In defining an active role for the laity in the Church's mission of evangelization, the hierarchical Church explicitly recognized for the first time in over four hundred years that there is an active apostolic role for all the Christian faithful and especially the laity within the mission of the Church. In *Apostolicam Actuositatem* the council placed the ecclesial action of evangelization squarely within the role of the laity.

> They exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the salvation of men. Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ.[61]

By admitting the laity into the function of evangelization and by repeatedly placing catechesis or religious education wholly within the framework of evangelization it appears that there is an explicit recognition of a teaching role outside that of the magisterium. In fact a bit later in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* one finds that there is indeed a recognition of a special vocation and an "office"

for someone other than an ordained Priest who is responsible for Christian education.

> Teachers and educators on the other hand, who carry on a distinguished form of the apostolate of the laity by their vocation and office, should be equipped with that learning and pedagogical skill that are needed for imparting such education effectively.[62]

Finally, Pope John Paul II in *Catechesi tradendae* affirms and expands this teaching office to a ministry that includes responsibility for moral formation and social conscious. This is plainly an incorporation of moral formation into the office of teacher. Given the tradition of Catholic social teachings from *Rerum Novarum* to the present, I have arrived at a teaching office that is rooted in the prophetic voice of the early Church and Jesus himself. Quoting from *Catechesi tradendae*:

> Teachers, the various ministers of the Church, catechists, and also organizers of social communications, all have in various degrees very precise responsibilities in this education of the believing conscience, an education that is important for the life of the Church and affects the life of society as such.[63]

In light of these and other catechetical documents of the modern Church, all echoing this same vision of religious education and moral formation that harkens back to the roots of the Christian experience, I am able to claim an office of teacher as true rabbinic disciple in the prophetic tradition. It is now my task to bring that rabbinic disciple into conversation with the American experience.

# CHAPTER 5: A MODERN HERMENEUTIC

Empowered by the Christian faith as a rabbinic disciple of the Master and having gained the authorization of a prophetic teaching office from the Roman Catholic tradition I am left to relate the idea of discipleship and the exercise of this office to the late twentieth century world in which I live. How am I to live out the charge of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew[64], to go and make disciples of all nations, as a religious educator?

Perhaps the idea of a hermeneutic between this ancient teaching office and the modern reality is the best place to start. Because a hermeneutic is simply the act of interpreting one reality in relationship to another, I believe that relationship, if not the entire fabric of that cloak I began to weave together at the start of this thesis, is certainly the warp that runs through its length.

To be human is to be in relationship not merely with the experience of life but with the reality of the otherness outside oneself.[65] This experience of the other as person as in Martin Buber's *I-Thou* relationship carries with it a serious ethical dimension, an ethic founded in relationship.

How unsurprising it is to have turned a conversation about religious education into a conversation about ethics and moral formation. I am about to

form an ethic of moral behavior that will govern the rest of this discussion. It is unsurprising inasmuch as throughout this discussion I have alluded to various moral questions and observations. I believe I get whole hearted support from my Catholic catechetical tradition when I say that, all religious education is about moral formation and that all moral formation is about religious education. The last half of my statement that, "all moral formation is about religious education" is probably the most controversial so I will start there.

Staying firmly within my understanding of Buber's concept of relationship, human beings remain in an *I-It* relationship to the things and people that are experienced until they acknowledge the total otherness of the *It* that is experienced. Once a human has acknowledged that otherness they have named the *It* a *Thou* as the *It* has taken on a sacredness and a transcendence within the context of that immediate relationship. At that instance of the acknowledgment, the individual human stands in a similar sacredness with respect to the *Thou*. Without the reality of the *Thou* there is no human relationship, without relationship there cannot be a truly human being.

There is a sacredness that humans experience in relationship to the *Thou*. Without the experience of the *Thou* and the sacrality of relationship humans have no reason to prefer one course of action over another outside of ones personal desires and needs. It is the experience of the sacredness that makes one human and the conscious realization of that sacredness that makes a human being a moral being. The conscious realization of any event is an act of

education. Sacrality or sacredness is a way of naming an experienced transcendence outside of a religious belief structure. Put succinctly, the experience of the sacrality of relationship calls us to moral accountability. Religious education is a conscious realization of that morality that exists out of that relationship.

There are two levels of relationship that must be addressed by the religious educator in America facing the millennium or for that matter by the religious educator in any culture at any time, one is on the personal level and the other is on a corporate level.

On the personal level, entry into any learning situation is an act of relationship. Any relationship requires a certain level of trust to exist. An educational relationship requires not only a trust but also an openness to accept the possibility of real change by all partners to the relationship. Relationships can occur on many levels but the level of trust and acceptance is critical in the relationship of student to teacher if there is to be any affective sharing of information or value.

Returning to the American seeker, there must first be a relationship between the seeker and the ultimate Transcendent before any true reflective knowing is possible. That Transcendent experience is not rationally knowable by the seeker until it is reflected on through some religious lens of belief. Not until such a relationship is established can any form of religious instruction permeate beyond the cognitive to the affective domain of the person. This initial

relationship between the seeker and the Transcendent is, in a Christian religious term, evangelization. As a Catholic Christian, and more so as a religious educator, I am called by my relationship to the risen Jesus to evangelize. Evangelization can take many forms as Pope Paul VI tells us:

> The methods must be adapted to the age, culture and aptitude of the persons concerned; they must seek always to fix in the memory, intelligence and heart the essential truths that must impregnate all of life. It is necessary above all to prepare good instructors -- parochial catechists, teachers, parents -- who are desirous of perfecting themselves in this superior art, which is indispensable and requires religious instruction.[66]

Once a person has experienced the reality of relationship with the Transcendent on the personal level they are called to respond to a new set of ideals or to see things from a new or a different perspective. This is by definition conversion. Conversion calls a person to make meaning out of their experience and in so doing to be open to further conversion as they are drawn deeper into the mystical and personal relationship with the Transcendent. The action of discovery or journey is, in the Catholic tradition, called catechesis, In catechesis the role of the teacher is one of guide or director not of indoctrinator or police. The moral imperative of the rabbi on the personal level is not only to expose and challenge the seeker's understandings and perceptions, but also to trust in the sacrality of the seeker's relationship to the Transcendent.

Implicit in the description of religious educator as a rabbi is the notion that there also exists a corporate or communal knowledge of the Transcendent experience that has been formed into a belief structure. That community of

belief, in Christian terms referred to as the People of God or Church, comes with its own ethic of relationship very often explicitly stated in the belief structure of the community itself. These beliefs are often expressed in Christian terms by faith tenets such as the Great Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Decalogue, or the Creed. The corporate or communal nature of relationship in the Christian community or body is as much rooted in a human being's basic nature as a social animal as it is in any Pauline metaphor. In a sinful world, where all are more or less sinful at any given point in time, even communities of faith have a need to devise humanly constructed behavioral rules, commandments, and laws to allow for the social interaction of the community as a whole.

The ethic of the community, while communally held within the relationship of the community, is always experienced on the level of the individual's relationship to the community or to other individuals. This experience always occurs within the context of the individual's relationship to the community. The individual, by entering into a corporate relationship with the community, acquires or at least begins to acquire the relational ethics of that community. Those ethical relationships apply not only to others within the community but also to the greater society and the world at least insofar as the community holds or defines such relationships. An individual is always free to choose to join or to leave a community, religious or not, as their relational consciousness and hence experience allows.

Returning to the American experience, a person's religious association is a voluntary association. Catholic moral theology is supportive of the idea of choice insofar as an individual has free will or at least the ability to effectively exercise a fundamental option for or against any Transcendent relationship in the course of their lives. As a true rabbinic disciple one needs to keep in mind that there were those who heard the Good News but that did not believe, indeed there were and are those in this sinful world who are violently opposed to the Gospel message.

In an American reality whose values include individualism, personal freedom, and diversity it might be comforting to remember that a nearly unanimous majority of the population believes in God and eighty five percent of Americans freely proclaim themselves to be Christian despite the fact that only one-third of the population is actively involved in any form of religious practice on any given Sunday.[67] In this environment the rabbinic disciple must rely heavily on their prophetic voice.

The rabbinic disciple is called to bear witness to the immutable value of humanity's God-given self worth and to the joy of the Good News of salvation. They are called to make meaning of an experience of relationship that causes a shift in the identity of from an individual person to the identity of a person rooted in the faith of the salvific role of Christ Jesus. They are called to build a community of relationship among all disciples and with the Transcendent.

Together they are called to work for the Kingdom of God both here and not yet arrived.

Rabbinic discipleship is a call to witness one's faith in the face of a secular world that appears hostile to their message. The rabbinic disciple is called to raise the consciousness of their fellow Americans to cultural and social injustices that the society perpetrates on women and minorities. The rabbinic disciple is called to renounce systemic injustice of political systems that have become oppressive of the human condition by their shear existence. The rabbinic disciple is called to be a voice for the voiceless and socially disenfranchised who are unable to speak for themselves. The rabbinic disciple is called to live out the words of Isaiah that Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth just before the people tried to throw him off a cliff.[68]

These calls to action by the rabbinic disciple are not the calls or actions of a person hostile to a culture, a society, or to organized religion. These are the calls and actions of a person, a rabbinic disciple, rooted in relationship with their culture, their world, and their religious community. These are ethical acts of relationship that bear both the possibility of the tradition informing the culture and of the culture informing the tradition.

I believe that it is in stressing the ethic of relationship, allowing for open and honest dialogue rather than requiring doctrinal obedience, that the gulf between religious belief and the American culture can be bridged. First, the ethic of relationship is respectful of all of the inviolate sacredness of the individual and

accepts the fact that there must be a mutuality of personal freedom in order for any relationship to exist. Second, in that mutuality there is a respect of the absolute diversity or otherness of the transcendent other. That is to say that there is a sacrality in the transcendence of the other that validates their otherness and their experiences at least for that culture, that person, and at that time. Third there is in any relationship to a transcendent other the implicit relationship to the Transcendent other that is also valid. When I bring my relationship to the Transcendent into the cultural relationship it is not the relationship that is at stake but merely the honest possibility that in a created world all creation and hence all relationships have the ability to inform and deepen my knowledge of the Transcendent.

Communities that are built on these relational ethics have a moral dimension of accountability that is mutually binding on each individual community member, at least to the extent that they identify with the community. This relationship with the community simultaneously provides a cohesion of identity that reinforces and deepens the communal commitment and the identity of those individual members who belong to the community.[69]

In a religious community that has, by virtue of the community's relationships to each other, to the greater society or world, to the wisdom of tradition, and to the Transcendent; already formed an identity it becomes the religious educator's responsibility in the rabbinic tradition to both challenge and reaffirm to the community's identity from the engaged relationships of that

community. To do this is to acknowledge that the community or congregation, made up of unique individuals, has a faith life and journey of its own to make. The congregation needs to stand in relationship to a universally held set of truths that define less of who they are and are not, then they define the universal experience of God's saving grace as revealed throughout salvation history and especially in Christ Jesus.

# CHAPTER 6: THE WORLD CHURCH

So far, in my consideration of this Americanized model of rabbinic disciple I have not engaged the office of teacher as the rabbinic disciple with the reality of hierarchical Roman Catholic Church and so I now shall. I have very carefully developed a teaching office that is unquestionably founded in the Catholic tradition and in my opinion, it is an office that is explicitly authorized in the documents of Second Vatican Council as well as in the writings of Pope John Paul II. The operative words in the last sentence were "in my opinion."

Pope John Paul II has, with increasing frequency, called for something he terms a "new evangelization." What is signified by this term is really a sort of new proclamation of the Gospel message to those peoples and cultures who were previously considered Christian but whose faith has apparently failed to take root.

The "new evangelization" is the reaction of the official Church to what it sees as a loss of faith in the contemporary period. In recognizing much the same symptomatic cultural, social, and political evidence as I have cited, the "new evangelization" tends to interpret that evidence in a negative light. It sees people as psychologically immature and morally self-reliant and introspective. While it

calls for many of the same actions that I would propose to use as an evangelist, the "new evangelization" proposes those actions from a position of moral superiority and in a confrontational manner.[70] Finally, in one of the most innovative moves, the "new evangelization" does admit to the notion of a structural nature that applies to culture and allows culture to be named as a proper subject for evangelization.[71]

The first question I need to address in this "new evangelization" is the state of the human person. I have cited evidence that the typical seeker, as I have named the person to whom the "new evangelization" is directed, is not a person without faith. The seeker is a person who for any number of reasons has not chosen to express their faith within the confines of a traditional religion's belief system. While I have noted the shortcomings of that position given the spiritual wealth of the various Christian traditions, I do not doubt the authenticity of that evangelizing proclamation to have permanently changed the life of that person in favor of Christ Jesus. How could I claim such knowledge of another person's soul much less a culture as a whole? I do know that the human acts of hypocrisy evident in and ascribed to the Catholic faith tradition, as well as the faith traditions of virtually every Christian tradition that has been constructed by human beings, is enough to give pause to any initiate's minimal reflection on whether to enter into a relationship with those traditions. If salvation is available to individuals of good will within a Buddhist or Hindu tradition through the saving

grace of Christ,[72] then why not also for these seekers who have faith in Christ although not mediated by a humanly constructed Church?

The second question concerns the tenor of the "new evangelization" and its decided morally superior and confrontational position. This sort of a stance implicitly confirms that one source of moral knowledge is superior to another source even though they might potentially yield the same knowledge. In the context of religion this sort of superiority seems wholly out of place. To approach a relationship, from the perspective of relational ethics as I have discussed, with the precondition that one of the groups in the relationship assumes a moral superiority over and against the other means that the possibility of any ethical relationship is lost. In contrast the rabbinic disciple is rooted in an ethic of relationship that assumes a sacredness of the other. Any action that would impede the ability or restrict the possibility of ethical relationship to one's fellow humans or to the larger known and unknown cosmos would be an immoral action. That is not to say that any belief structure is acceptable, or that the Catholic tradition has no immutable truth. That does say that the Catholic tradition must approach evangelization with a relational ethic that allows for culture to shape the tradition's expression and to inform the tradition's understandings of those immutable truths.

My final question turns on the structural nature of a culture that makes it the proper subject of evangelization. I believe that one needs to evangelize the culture. I do not think that it is an easy task. I think that a culture is evangelized

by the people and communities within a society or societies that make up a culture. I believe that the Roman Catholic Church, as a world Church, can call culture into question and support those working within individual cultures in their work toward cultural evangelization. However, if the Roman Catholic Church is going to be successful in calling culture into question, it is going to have to be open to an honest dialogue.[73] To call a person or a culture to relationship in Christ requires that one is in relationship not just with Christ, but with the other person and their culture. Relationship requires a moral accountability on the part of each entity in the relationship. The Roman Catholic Church needs to remember that it is a also a cultural structure, that it is in need of constant and ever deeper conversion, and that it is called to continual conversion just as is the individual Christian.

From the perspective of relational ethics, recent attempts by the Curia of the Church to hold non-definitively taught, ordinary, and universal teachings of the Church as infallible do serious harm to the possibility of conversion and deny relationship. The application of the doctrine of infallibility in a context that would deny forever any person's right to priestly ordering or the liberating power of the Gospel message to the poor and oppressed denies relationship. Importantly, the application of infallibility itself in this manner would deny the human ability to have made a mistake. If a culture is a structure that can be evangelized the culture must also be a structure that can sin. The denial of relationship by an

infallible decree of this sort can from the perspective of relational ethics be termed structural sin.

A rabbinic disciple located in the best of the Roman Catholic tradition, grounded in an ethic of relationship and empowered by the prophetic voice of the Holy Spirit is an authentic heir to the prophetic office of teacher that is apparent in the early Church and confirmed by the ecclesial writings of the Second Vatican Council. This office of teacher as rabbinic disciple speaks prophetically to the lived experience of the person and is actively engaged in the challenging of culture, both as culture impacts and interprets the faith tradition and as culture is impacted and interpreted by the faith tradition. The rabbinic disciple provides an authentic grounding for the ongoing experience of Christ Jesus in our world and calls people, culture and Church to the accountability of relationship.

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