Teaching and Christian Practices

Reshaping Faith and Learning

Edited by

David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith

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weight to the ways in which we are formed by the practices in which we participate, and not merely by the ideas we exchange. We suggest that Christian practices offer a kind of pedagogical wisdom that could reshape and redirect our classroom choices and strategies in surprising yet fruitful ways.

The ideas explored in this volume are at times countercultural, but they do not stand in eccentric isolation; that is, we don't think our intuitions are idiosyncratic. Rather, the project draws together the wisdom to be gleaned from three substantial and important scholarly discussions, three streams of contemporary thought that we will outline further in the remainder of this introduction:

- first, a body of literature in philosophy and sociology that has explored the formative nature of social practices;
- second, discussions among educators and philosophers of education regarding how concepts of practice developed in philosophy and sociology can be used to characterize what happens in teaching and learning;
- and third, a specifically theological literature that connects this recent concern with social practices back to the Christian church's more ancient commitment to formation through practices and disciplines that embody the Christian way of being in the world — practices such as prayer, hospitality, testimony, community, and Sabbath-keeping.

These scholarly conversations represent, among other things, a move away from the notion that rational deliberation on ideas is the primary shaper of the self, and toward a more contextual and embodied understanding of how what we do with and among others shapes who we become.[9] Our concern here is to take these existing discussions — concerning the nature of social practices, of education as a set of practices, and of the role of practices in Christian formation — and explore how they might offer a matrix for re-imagining Christian teaching and learning. We will therefore offer here a little more exposition of these background ideas to provide a

9. As Paul Griffiths puts it in his chapter in this volume, "Offering an account of what one does as a learned or would-be learned person is much less formative of and intimate with the modes of knowing one performs than are the practices into which one is catechized as a neophyte of a particular form of learning." See p. 111n.9 below.

frame for understanding the particular projects represented in the chapters that follow.

Learning as Formation: Virtues, Habits, and Practices

Much of the current discussion about the role of "practices" in formation owes a debt to Alasdair MacIntyre's now-classic work *After Virtue,* in which he introduces an oft-cited definition of "practice."[10] But before attending to his definition, we should first contextualize it in his larger project.[11] Diagnosing the demise of the Enlightenment project (and decrying its aims), MacIntyre notes that what doomed the Enlightenment project from the start was its loss of the concept of *telos* (the end of a goal-oriented process).[12] Emphasizing the autonomy of individuals to determine their own ends, and thus rejecting any specified *telos* as an imposition on libertarian freedom, the Enlightenment project underestimated the significance of moral *formation.* Instead, its picture of the moral agent assumed a kind of natural, untutored rationality that would simply "choose" what was right because it was rational. In short, by rejecting the notion of a shared human *telos* and extolling individual rationality, the Enlightenment project had to reject any notion of *virtue* — for virtue language makes sense only where one recognizes the formative role of communities of practice that *create* ethical agents.[13] Enlightenment models of ethical action are allegedly born; virtuous actors are always and only *made.*

So, as MacIntyre argues, there can be talk of virtue only where there is a teleology in place, for virtues are those habits and dispositions that incline one toward the *telos* specified as "the good." Thus MacIntyre also emphasizes that what counts as a virtue is always relative to the *specification* of

10. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

11. For helpful accounts, see Brad J. Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue,*" in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition,* ed. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 7-29; and Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's* After Virtue (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997).

12. MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* pp. 195, 203.

13. It should be noted that Charles Taylor offers a similar diagnosis and critique of the Enlightenment model on this point. See Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 79-80.

"the good," and such specifications of the good are communicated to us through the narratives of particular traditions.[14]

Such habits and dispositions are not "natural" in the sense of being inborn capacities or abilities; rather, they are "second nature": acquired dispositions and inclinations that are absorbed over time by participating in the routines and rituals of a tradition, as well as by imitating the models upheld as "exemplars" by the tradition. On this account, a moral "education" is not just a matter of getting the right information about my duties, obligations, and responsibilities; rather, moral education becomes a matter of *formation* — the inscription of good habits (virtue) as the construction of character. And such moral formation happens by means of practice. Thus it is that MacIntyre offers his (rather inelegant but influential) definition of a "practice":

> By a "practice" I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[15]

We should note several of features of this definition of a practice:

- First, a practice is social, communal, and inherited: it is a complex of routines and rituals that is handed down from others.
- Second, not all routines and rituals are "practices" in this sense. MacIntyre draws the distinction by emphasizing that a full-blooded "practice" has "internal goods." These are goals or aims that can be achieved *only* by engaging in the practice. "External" goods can be achieved in any number of ways. For example, chess is a practice with internal goods which are specific to the game (analytic skill, strategic imagination, competitive intensity). To really play chess — to be a *practitioner* of the practice — is to seek these internal goods. Now, I might also play chess to become rich and famous; but such goods are "external" to the practice — they could be achieved by any number of strategies.[16] If I merely "instrumentalize" a practice for some other, external end, then I'm not really a practitioner.
- Third, every practice has relevant standards of excellence, determined (but also debated) by the community and tradition that nourishes the practice. Thus "to enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards," for the good internal to the practice "can only be achieved by subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners."[17]

The upshot of MacIntyre's notion of practice is directly concerned with the nature of education. While his primary concern is the shape of *moral* education, he raises the broader point that any education worthy of the name has to be formative, and that formation happens only through practices which inscribe a *habitus* — an orientation and inclination toward the world, aimed at a specific *telos*.[18]

While MacIntyre's sense of practice has a deeply Aristotelian pedigree, one finds an overlapping sense of practice and formation in the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu, who also invokes the notion of *habitus* to make sense of the formative power of cultural practices. For Bourdieu, this is a matter of honoring the significance of our non- or pre-rational comportment to the world. Contesting both empiricism and intellectualism — that is, both materialist determinisms and overestimations of rational deliberation — Bourdieu is fighting on two fronts, insisting, "contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are

14. MacIntyre means to emphasize the storied character of moral traditions with his use of the term *narrative*. As he later puts it, "I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" (*After Virtue*, p. 216). MacIntyre emphasizes that virtue is, strictly speaking, "relative": that is, what counts as virtue is relative to what a tradition's narrative extols as the *telos* of human flourishing. This is why Homer, Aristotle, Paul, and Jane Austen can all be "virtue theorists" and yet have such significantly different catalogues of virtues. See *After Virtue*, pp. 181-87.

15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 187.

16. This is why MacIntyre will claim that "throwing a football" is *not* a practice, whereas the "the game of football is"; or "bricklaying is not a practice," whereas "architecture is" (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 187). The idea is that bricklaying could never be an end in itself; it would also be subordinate to some grander aim (e.g., building a cathedral). This distinction is germane to the discussion below regarding whether teaching can be a practice.

17. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 191.

18. Indeed, the claim is that any education is formative in this sense, even if it doesn't own up to the formative power of pedagogy. In short, the question isn't *whether* education forms virtue but rather *which* virtues are being inscribed (and to which *telos* such an education is oriented). For an excellent analysis, see Perry L. Glanzer and Todd C. Ream, *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions."[19] On this model, *habitus* is an orientation to and understanding of the world that is absorbed and shaped at the level of practice. Bourdieu is thus interested in "the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence" that "produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them."[20] Learned and acquired through practice, *habitus* is "embodied history, internalized as a second nature"; it functions as "accumulated capital," and "is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects 'without inertia' in rationalist theories."[21] What this generates is a "practical sense" — a kind of know-how that is either unconscious or preconscious but nonetheless intentional and oriented to some end or *telos*.[22]

Bourdieu wants us to recognize that practice has its own "logic"; to rephrase Pascal, practice has a logic of which logic knows nothing. Or as Bourdieu himself puts it, "Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician."[23] What we're interested in culling from Bourdieu is not only his emphasis on the formative role of practices and "rites," but also his sense that "practice" has its own logic. It seems to us that this is a fruitful, suggestive lens for considering the irreducible wisdom embedded in pedagogical

19. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 52.

20. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 53.

21. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 56.

22. "Practical sense is a quasi-bodily involvement in the world which presupposes no representation either of the body or of the world, still less of their relationship. It is an immanence in the world through which the world imposes its imminence, things to be done or said, which directly govern speech and action. It orients 'choices' which, though not deliberate, are no less systematic. . . ." An example is "a 'feel for the game.'" See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 66.

23. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 86.

practices — not, it should be noted, just because of the content that they transmit but also because of the "logic" that inheres in the practice.

Educational Reflections on Practices

Given the lasting influence of MacIntyre's careful discussion of the criteria that enable a human activity to be identified as a "practice," it is perhaps not surprising that one of the traces of his work in educational discussions is a debate concerning whether teaching is, in the MacIntyrean sense, a practice. MacIntyre himself, somewhat to the consternation of philosophers of education seeking to work with his ideas, offered the view that teaching is not a practice, on the grounds that teaching lacks its own internal good to serve as its *telos*, but instead serves a variety of goods derived from the particular ideas and practices being taught.[24] Others, notably Joseph Dunne, have disagreed, with philosophers of education tending to find MacIntyre's view of teaching somewhat reductive.[25]

Interesting as this debate is, for our present purposes in this volume it is somewhat beside the point, since our focus is not on the status of the act of teaching per se, but rather on what Christian practices can contribute to how teaching and learning are carried out and experienced (more on this below). Once the focus shifts from defining and demarcating practices to the various ways that patterns of Christian practice might inform the practices of the classroom, another influential line of educational discussion becomes relevant and helpful, one rising from the work of Etienne Wenger.[26]

24. Alasdair MacIntyre and Joseph Dunne, "Alasdair MacIntyre on Education: In Dialogue with Joseph Dunne," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36 (2002): 1-19.

25. See Joseph Dunne, "What's the Good of Education?" in *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Philosophy of Education*, ed. Wilfred Carr (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 145-60;"Arguing for Teaching as a Practice: A Reply to Alasdair MacIntyre," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37 (2003): 353-69. Apropos of this debate, see also David Carr, "Rival Conceptions of Practice in Education and Teaching," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37 (2003): 253-66; Pádraig Hogan, "Teaching and Learning as a Way of Life," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37 (2003): 207-23; and Nell Noddings, "Is Teaching a Practice?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37 (2003): 241-51.

26. Of course, Bourdieu's work has also been extensively drawn upon in educational research; for the present project, however, his influence was in most cases mediated through Wenger's work, and so we focus on Wenger's contribution to educational discussions of practices here. For a helpful comparison of MacIntyre and Wenger on practices in relation

Wenger is an educational theorist who has written extensively about how "communities of practice" function, an interest that grew out of earlier work on the nature of the learning that takes place in the context of apprenticeship.[27] He defines practice as action "in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do" — or, more catchily, as "a shared history of learning that requires some catching up for joining."[28] Groups of people who engage in shared patterns of practice in concrete settings (offices, classrooms, sports fields, etc.) become "communities of practice." People come together on a regular basis and do things together in certain ways in pursuit of certain shared goals, and in doing so, they become a community that is defined and held together by shared practices (rather than, for example, family ties or affectionate attachments).

Wenger sees several basic processes constantly interacting to shape communities of practice. Certain forms of *participation* are available to different members of the community. By this he means the kinds of actions, interactions, and relationships that are available for a given member of the group.[29] For example, in one kind of group I might be able to speak my mind spontaneously and freely, while in another group, speech might be more controlled or even ritualized. In one setting someone asks a question, and I shout out an answer; in another I raise a hand or decide not to speak at all. When I am in the first group, I get to hold the floor and speak as an expert; when I transition to the second group, I get to make the coffee. There may be various forms of participation that are plausible to me in a given group at a given moment. At the same time, there is an accompanying process of *reification,* as ideas at work in the group get turned into things (objects, gestures, sounds) that endure from one session to another.

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to education, see Terence McLaughlin, "Teaching as a Practice and a Community of Practice: The Limits of Commonality and the Demands of Diversity," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37 (2003): 339-52.

27. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context,* ed. Seth Chaiklin and Jean Lave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

28. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 47, 102.

29. Clearly, a wide range of actions is possible in the abstract in any setting (it is always in principle open to a student in class to, say, leap onto the teacher's desk and begin singing); various social constraints, however, including shared imagination (see below), keep a smaller range of behaviors actually available, with variation among participants as to what is available. The issue isn't compulsion, but rather social possibility.

You can't kick an idea — but you can (and might occasionally want to) kick a computer that was installed in the classroom because of someone's conviction that technology helps learning. Reifications in classrooms would include, for example, chairs, desks, textbooks, grades, syllabi, tests, gestures, and so on. Ideas, assumptions, and goals have become reified parts of the shared physical environment, and consequently constrain future actions.

Participation and reification constantly interact as members of the community negotiate the meaning of their actions with one another. If my classroom consists of a large number of chairs fixed in straight rows all facing in the same direction, then certain kinds of participation, such as listening to a lecture and writing notes, become easier. Other kinds, such as group discussion, become more difficult. If the classroom has chairs arranged in circles around larger tables, then the opposite is true. Similarly, some ways of awarding grades (judgments reified as letter-objects) will encourage individually competitive forms of participation; others will encourage cooperation. Some ways of grading will encourage conformity; others, originality. As these choices become reified into stable institutional structures, they may work for or against the intentions of individual instructors or learners the next time around, guiding their choices, whether with or against the grain of their prior preferences. Reification and participation are always at work together, in harmony or in tension.

As they work together and negotiate the meaning of their actions over time, members of a community become aligned to one another and develop a *repertoire* — a set of behaviors having particular meaning for this group. Certain words take on special shades of meaning that are opaque to outsiders. Certain gestures become immediately recognizable. Instructions given explicitly at the beginning of the semester may not need to be repeated later, for everyone in the group comes to know their expected moves. By the end of a semester in which Friday is homework day, if I forget to tell my students to turn in their homework on a Friday, most of them walk forward at the end of class and do it anyway — it has become part of the repertoire, the set of behaviors and meanings shared by this group. Repertoire (like *habitus*) is a way of naming the patterns inscribed in the way we do things together, and helps to define the boundaries that form between the different communities of practice of which any given individual is a part.

Wenger emphasizes that these patterns of practice are informed by a shared *imagination,* a sense of what the community of practice is about,

what goods it is pursuing and why. Here *imagination* does not mean "fantasy" or "creativity" (see further the final chapter of this volume); it refers to the ways in which we construe our shared tasks. Sharing this imagination is one way of belonging to the community. Not sharing it is one way of not fitting in. If a group of students imagines that they are fulfilling a boring but necessary task to complete a program requirement, while the professor imagines that the group is engaged in a passionate pursuit of truth, frustrations will emerge. Over time, imagination becomes embodied in repertoire, and repertoire at the same time shapes imagination. Shared imagination is manifest as much in what we do as in what we say.

There is considerably more detail in Wenger's account, but this brief summary will suffice to indicate its relevance. A community of practice, Wenger says, is shaped out of certain forms of participation, an ongoing process of reification that turns intentions into stable objects, the growth of a shared repertoire of meanings and behaviors, and the development of a shared imagination concerning what the group is really aiming for. An account such as Wenger's has value for discussions of Christian practices and Christian learning because it provides a systematic framework for exploring how vision becomes embodied in particular educational behaviors and how learning arises from those behaviors, opening space to examine the relationship of faith not just to ideas, but to pedagogical practices.

Theological Reflections on Practices

The constellation of the MacIntyrean themes of practice, virtue, and formation has also made a significant impact on a generation of discussions in theology, particularly in the area of practical theology concerned with Christian education. In the same way that we want to push back on reducing Christian education to the dissemination of Christian ideas, voices such as Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass have contested the reduction of Christian faith to intellectual assent to a set of propositions. This involves a shift from considering Christianity as an intellectual system to (re)emphasizing the church as a community of practice. Thus, as Dykstra summarizes it, "the life of Christian faith is the practice of many practices."[30] Or as Brad Kallenberg summarizes, "Christianity cannot be explained or understood without reference to a distinctive cluster of practices. In order to participate in the tradition called Christianity one must necessarily participate in these practices."[31]

30. Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices,* 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 67.

Dykstra's account appreciates MacIntyre's claims regarding the formative power of practices (and this is just returning MacIntyre's model to its originating soil). "The primary point about practices," he emphasizes, "is no longer that they are something we do. Instead, they become arenas in which something is done to us, in us, and through us that we could not of ourselves do, that is beyond what we do."[32] Practices, then, are not just "things we do"; they do something *to* us. Dykstra appropriates the MacIntyrean definition of practice in order to highlight this formative aspect of Christian practices. So, on the one hand, Christian practices are like other practices (like chess and football): they are social, complex, teleological, informed by tradition and narrative, and so on. They fit MacIntyre's definition of "a practice." On the other hand, they're also *more* than that. Thus, while Dykstra often "naturalizes" Christian practices, as it were, in order to help us appreciate their almost mundane formative power, he also emphasizes what is unique or peculiar about Christian practices: they are nothing less than "habitations of the Spirit."[33] One might say that the formative power of Christian practices is never less than natural, but it is also more than natural.

When viewed through this MacIntyrean lens, we begin to appreciate that Christian practices would have implications beyond the confines of "spirituality." If practices form our very comportment to the world and inscribe in us a *habitus* that primes and shapes our action, then Christian practices will do nothing less than configure how we see and act in the world.

But what do we mean by "Christian practices"? What would be included under such a rubric? On one level, the term might refer quite specifically to *worship* practices — the liturgical rites and routines that mark the church.[34] But on another level, the term can refer to a wider set of practices somewhat synonymous with "spiritual disciplines" (and this

31. Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue,*" p. 22.

32. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith,* p. 56.

33. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith,* p. 63. This is combined with an appreciation for their physicality (p. 71).

34. This seems to be the operative focus behind an important book along these lines: *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics,* ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). The "practices" considered are generally restricted to those practices that constitute aspects of Christian worship.

wider definition can obviously include the narrower set of Christian worship practices). In this book, our authors generally follow Dykstra and Bass in recognizing a wider set of Christian practices that includes not only baptism and the Eucharist but also hospitality, Sabbath-keeping, testimony, simplicity, and many more.[35] Thus we tend to function with Bass and Dykstra's more generous definition of Christian practices as "things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world."[36]

While this discussion of Christian practices has been appropriated for thinking about "Christian education" more narrowly (that is, faith formation in the church and in the context of theological education), it has been largely untapped as a resource for thinking about pedagogy in the context of Christian colleges and universities. While there is all sorts of room for discussion regarding how to conceive the relationship between Christian educational institutions and the church more specifically, we are convinced of two things that invite us to see the connection between the two more intimately: On the one hand, we are convinced that Christian education must be *formative* in just the sense that MacIntyre emphasizes. If Christian higher education is going to take seriously its responsibility for education in *virtue*, then it also needs to attend to matters of practice and formation.[37] On the other hand, we are convinced that implicit in the inherited practices of the Christian tradition is a kind of pedagogical wisdom on which we can draw for Christian teaching more broadly.

35. While there is a conversation to be had regarding the relation (and perhaps priority) between specifically liturgical practices and extra-liturgical Christian practices, we won't distract ourselves with that point here. This project is officially agnostic on the point and has room to absorb models that might prioritize liturgical practices as well as those that do not. Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass give a certain priority to liturgical practices as the "consommé" to the "broth" of wider Christian practices ("Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith," in *Practicing Our Faith*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997], p. 9), whereas Miroslav Volf seems ambivalent about according any priority to specifically liturgical practices (see Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002], pp. 245-63). This stems from Volf's attendant (though contestable) claim that, *de jure*, beliefs "ground" practices (pp. 258-61). For an alternative account of the relation between beliefs and practices, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), pp. 133-39.

36. Dykstra and Bass, "Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith," p. 5.

37. This is the central argument of Glanzer and Ream in *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education*. Christian colleges also broadcast claims about "virtue" formation. See, for example, the "Core Virtues" included as part of the Core Curriculum at Calvin College (discussed in an appendix to Cornelius Plantinga's *Engaging God's World: A Reformed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002], pp. 225-41).

Christian Practices and Christian Learning

Drawing from these philosophical, educational, and theological inquiries into the nature and importance of practices, our goal in the present volume is to extend their insights in ways that speak to the Christian classroom. We propose that various elements of these discussions can help to frame an account of what a Christian pedagogy could look like *in practice*, beyond a focus on whether Christian ideas are being conveyed or Christian character is being individually modeled.

We noted above that the essays in this book are not primarily concerned with the status of teaching per se as a practice, but rather with the various ways that the work on Christian practices just described might inform classrooms across the disciplines. This focus suggests somewhat differently framed questions. It invites exploration of the possible relationships between particular Christian practices and the learning setting. It soon becomes evident that there is more than one possible relationship between Christian practices and educational practices. Questions worth exploring include these:

- When can or should a particular Christian practice become a direct part of what is taught, a straightforward ingredient in the educational experience, whether in order to enhance the achievement of existing learning goals or in order to expand outcomes to include broader kinds of formation? For example, how would learning processes and outcomes be changed if learners were asked to try *lectio divina* as part of their learning how to engage with great literary works, or if they were asked to fast before a discussion on poverty in an ethics course?[38]
- Are there particular Christian practices that can sustain the enterprise of teaching and learning by forming dispositions that both

38. K. Jo-Ann Badley and Ken Badley, "Slow Reading: Reading along *Lectio* Lines," *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 15, no. 1 (2011): 29-42. Bradford S. Hadaway, "Preparing the Way for Justice: Strategic Dispositional Formation through the Spiritual Disciplines," in *Spirituality, Justice, and Pedagogy*, ed. David I. Smith, John Shortt, and John Sullivan (Nottingham: The Stapleford Centre, 2006), pp. 143-65.

contribute to successful learning and give it a particular cast? If, for example, a certain degree of humility is a precondition of genuine learning (as Mark Schwehn has argued),[39] inclining the learner to be willing to surrender his or her own quick judgments in favor of a presumption of wisdom in the authors of the material studied, then are there particular Christian practices that can help shape or sustain this form of humility?

- Since Christian practices are themselves, at least in part, pedagogical devices to help form the self in particular directions, then are there ways in which they can function as models for, analogies to, or guiding metaphors for educational practices — framing pedagogy by offering a kind of hermeneutical clue to a normative shape for daily educational life? How, for instance, would foreign and second-language learning look different if it were patterned on the practice of hospitality to strangers rather than on the practices more typically associated with tourism or international business?[40]
- Are there present patterns of educational practice that are in tension with the kinds of formation implicitly aimed at by Christian practices, such that we need to consider restructuring teaching and learning lest their rhythms be in competition with Christian formation? Could, for instance, our investment in individual ownership and rapid consumption of knowledge be at odds with the attentiveness and receptivity needed to read Scripture well, or might our focus on individual autonomy create tension with the goal of growth in humility?[41]

39. Mark R. Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

40. See David I. Smith and Barbara Carvill, *The Gift of the Stranger: Faith, Hospitality, and Foreign Language Learning* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000); David I. Smith, *Learning from the Stranger: Christian Faith and Cultural Diversity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009).

41. Paul Griffiths argues the former in *The Vice of Curiosity: An Essay on Intellectual Appetite* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2006); Susan Mendus argues the latter in her article "Tolerance and Recognition: Education in a Multicultural Society," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 29, no. 2 (2005): 191-202. The tension could, of course, run in either direction here — it may be that the practices of particular Christian communities undermine learning. For instance, socialization into certain proof-texting strategies as a part of the communal practice of biblical interpretation may make it more difficult for certain students to succeed in writing or speaking tasks framed by other norms of discourse. See, for example, Chris Anderson, "The Description of an Embarrassment: When Students Write about Religion," *ADE Bulletin* 94 (1989): 12-15; and Elizabeth Platt, "'Uh uh no hapana': Intersubjectivity, Meaning, and

- What difference might it make to Christian students' experience and construal of learning if their learning were framed by Christian practices? Can an overt focus on particular Christian practices reframe the imaginations of students and teachers in ways that undermine a utilitarian relationship to learning and enable the making of new connections between previously unconnected ideas? Can an involvement in learning experiences built around Christian practices provide some degree of counter-formation to the secular cultural liturgies that otherwise shape our lives and perceptions?[42]
- In what ways should Christian teaching and learning be "nested" within specific practices of Christian worship? Is there a way that worship in the church, chapel, and elsewhere constitutes a necessary context for Christian education in classrooms, laboratories, and libraries? In what way is the college, as an educational institution, dependent upon the church?[43]

The examples referenced in this brief sketch of possibilities indicate that some work has already been done in this vein. We hope that the essays presented here can provide a more concentrated, sustained, and cohesive indication of the potential of a focus on Christian practices for broadening our understanding of how faith and learning intersect in classrooms, and for remedying the comparative lack of focus on teaching and learning among Christian scholars to date.

The Outline of the Book

The chapters that follow were written in connection with a three-year project conducted by the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning at Calvin College, with funding from the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith at Valparaiso University. A team of Christian scholars from various disciplines was charged first with studying key work from the background literatures surveyed above, and then with choosing a course for which they would design a pedagogical intervention

the Self," in *Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning: New Perspectives*, ed. Joan Kelly Hall, Gergana Vitanova, and Ludmila Marchenkova (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), pp. 119-47.

42. See, further, Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

43. For initial discussion, see Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, chapter 6.

based on one or more Christian practices. Most of the chapters that follow describe these interventions, giving an account of how connections were made between Christian practices and teaching in the relevant subject area and reporting on the results. The emphasis is not upon empirical validation, but rather upon "thick" narratives and thoughtful connections between practices and pedagogy — our intentional aim from the outset was to illuminate and explore possibilities and potential rather than to produce generalizable data. Versions of these chapters were presented at a conference called "Teaching, Learning, and Christian Practices" held at Calvin College in October 2009; three further chapters — those by Paul Griffiths and Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung and the book's closing chapter — were commissioned for and presented as plenary addresses at the conference.

The opening essay by Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung weaves general reflections on the learning potential of practices together with an account of the particular learning that went on in a philosophy seminar on Aquinas's writings concerning virtues and vices. This leads to a helpful description of "a certain rhythm between practice and reflection on practice" that remains relevant to all of the following chapters. Students' learning included moments of insight resulting on the one hand from discovering new ways of naming their experience, and on the other from experiencing participation in practices from the Christian tradition designed to reorient the self. Learning the history of philosophical accounts of virtue and vice turns out in this instance to include encounters with the vices of vainglory and pusillanimity, experimentation with vows of silence, and an event involving Reddi-wip and extensive plastic sheeting. A careful discussion of the relationship of practice to reflection and tradition provides the frame that holds such disparate elements together, and sets the stage for much that follows.

David Smith recounts dissatisfactions with a literature class that were grounded not in content or perspectives, but rather in the reading practices that tend to be operative by default, and the way these are sustained by teachers and students. He draws from various Christian accounts of spiritually formative reading to sketch a contrast between charitable and consumerist reading practices, and questions the classroom moves that help sustain the latter. What if those who teach courses that involve engagement with significant texts were to set out intentionally to construct a repertoire that sustained charitable reading — what would that mean for pace, for rhythm, for posture, for assessment? Exploring these questions not only points to a new classroom repertoire, but also offers hints of how

the fruits of such endeavor might trickle through into other areas of students' lives.

Carolyne Call takes a cluster of practices — testimony, fellowship, and hospitality — and uses them to transform her approach to a course in adolescent psychology. With stark honesty and insightful attention to detail, she narrates how the specific changes in focus required by the intentional orientation to Christian practices made the course both profoundly demanding and deeply rewarding to teach. Expecting to be refining a teaching stance that was already Christian, she found her past experience of teaching more deeply challenged than she had anticipated. Her account of how particular challenges were met highlights the importance of the teacher's own grounding in Christian practices in order to sustain a Christian presence in the classroom.

Julie Walton, with Matthew Walters, sets out to investigate the relationship between the Christian practice of table fellowship and the specific stresses facing students in a nutrition course taught to pre-nursing students who are anxious about qualifying for a nursing program. Taking the flurry of recent writing offering hospitality as an educational metaphor a step further, Walton introduced a structured program of shared meals into the course, looking for signs that it might help students "become mindful and accepting of the dreams and needs of their neighbor-classmates sharing time and food with them."

These four examples of particular practices being used to reshape specific courses are followed by a chapter in which Paul Griffiths steps back to the bigger picture and offers reflections on how the appetite for learning needs to be catechized and what liturgy has to do with education. Exploring the reasons for Christian ambivalence about the value of learning, Griffiths argues that "to understand and to seek learning as Christians do is very different from understanding and seeking it as pagan academicians do," and suggests that we all too often settle for "a kind of education . . . that pressure-cooks the vices to a well-done turn." We need to attend to the different shapes that the appetite for learning can take, and to how these are formed; this is where Christian practices come in. Griffiths turns to the liturgy as the place where Christian life is most vividly lived and teases out ways in which the movements of Christian worship suggest parameters for the appetite for learning.

Griffiths underlines how liturgy is shot through with lament and stammering gestures in which we confess our incompleteness and falling short. There is some echo of this motif in Ashley Woodiwiss's essay narrat-

ing his efforts to re-orient the underlying narrative of a freshman seminar toward the practice of pilgrimage as an antidote to the superficial tourist gaze of instrumentalized learning. Woodiwiss reports limited success, underlining the point echoed in other chapters that applying Christian practices is no quick and easy fix. He explores some possible reasons for this particular project falling short of initial hopes, including a highly individualistic cultural context, a lack of prior encounter with key Christian practices, issues of time and space, and insufficient working through of the chosen practice into daily shared behaviors.

James K. A. Smith's experiment creatively joins a course on Philosophy of the Social Sciences with the practice of fixed-hour prayer and attentiveness to the liturgical calendar. While the connection here might at first seem rather extrinsic, Smith uncovers connections between Christian practices of time-keeping and the sustaining of moral order (a theme discussed in the authors studied in the course). His interest is not only in prayer as potentially opening up space for learning, but also in how bodily participation in Christian time-keeping practices might change and deepen students' learning about how the cultural liturgies to which we are subjected tether our rhythms and imaginations to secularized time. Testimony from students in the course points to insights gained and perspectives shifted.

Glenn Sanders offers a gradually unfolding narrative of how he set about seeding Christian practices into a Western Civilization course. The project was driven by a central concern with how to engage students with history learning in their capacity as moral and spiritual beings. At the same time, continued reflection on the nature of practices as the experiment unfolded led to the realization that it was easier to adopt the language of Christian practices than the practice of Christian practices. Sanders tracks the stages of realization that led to cumulative changes in the course, culminating in a central emphasis on community-building.

Matthew Walhout points out that pedagogical practices can serve various visions of human flourishing. He compares teaching practices with the physical constraints that underlie the designs of roller coasters and prayer labyrinths. Like those constraints, practices are deserving of careful forethought and studious attention. They can succeed in facilitating the desired kind of experience, or they can fail miserably. After considering three different visions that pedagogical practices might serve, Walhout focuses on his own use of the prayer labyrinth image as a guiding metaphor in his physics course. The labyrinth itself has always referred

metaphorically to pilgrimages and the Christian walk through life, and here these references take on their traditional resonance in the context of students working their way through a science curriculum.

Kurt Schaefer also addresses an area of the curriculum that might not seem to offer immediately obvious points of contact for Christian practice. He focuses on learning in technical courses, taking as his specific example a course in econometrics, a discipline commonly associated with mathematically driven technique. He makes the case for viewing such a course as involving an apprenticeship in interpreting well, and in this connection moves to a consideration of Christian practices of interpretation. He finds that particular Christian hermeneutical practices developed in relation to interpreting Scripture, together with the interpretive virtues that they imply, can be suggestive of ways in which students need to grow when interpreting economic data, and he offers an account of how this connection can change teaching and learning practices in technically oriented courses.

In the closing chapter, David Smith draws together some threads from various preceding chapters, in particular emphasizing the need to recruit students' imaginations if experiments with Christian practice in the classroom are to be successful. Christian practices, and their pedagogical analogues, are to be understood neither as theoretical principles to be clinically applied nor as efficient techniques practiced upon students; they depend upon the building of a shared imagination in which students acquire new ways of seeing and understanding their own learning as well as new rhythms commensurate with this renewed imagination.

This closing chapter reiterates a concern that frames the whole. We do not intend these exploratory studies to be received as rigid recipes, finished prescriptions, or guarantees of pedagogical bliss. We do, however, hope to help readers to imagine a practice of teaching and learning that is rooted in the long and rich history of Christian practice, and to do so through examples as much as through exhortations. Teaching and learning are both high callings, and both deserve the disciplined attention of those who call themselves Christian educators. We pray that these explorations will offer some glimpses of how we might pursue them more faithfully.

Pedagogical Rhythms: Practices and Reflections on Practice

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung

Some Reflections on Why Practices Are Needed

Imagine that you died today. In the days that follow, your friends and family gather together to mourn you and remember you. Imagine what they would say about you and about your life. There would be things to celebrate, things to regret, things they would miss about you, and no doubt a few things they wouldn't! If you were to listen in on those imaginary conversations and capture them on paper — in other words, to write an honest testimonial of the person you were and the life you lived — how would that speech read? For the sake of this exercise, an honest word is better than a good word, if you have to choose.

Now imagine a second version of the speech. This time, think of the speech you *wish* someone could honestly have given at your funeral — including all the good things you wish were true of you, the way the first speech you wrote *would* have read had you become all that you wanted to be.

Why this imaginative exercise? Funerals are one of the few places we still reflect on and talk about a person's character — not just one's achievements or quirks, but the person one was and the stories that best revealed this and the qualities that marked the character of one's life. It's also one of the few times we take the time to reflect on our lives as a whole — to set aside the tyranny of the daily and the urgent and to measure our life in terms of "big picture" concerns. A funeral is an occasion to try to view the whole package, to think about how the parts of your character and your

life fit together — what they added up to and what your life said about the kind of person you were.[1]

In short, this eulogy-writing exercise is a reflective moment of self-examination and a *memento mori* all wrapped up in one. To put it another way, it's one example of a practice of reflecting. It presses the questions that are at the heart of a liberal arts education and a Christian life of discipleship:[2] "Who am I? Is this who I want to be? What goods and virtues are expressed in the way I'm living? What is the human good, the best way to live? And how does my life measure up to that ideal?" The first speech tells us who we are now. The second speech articulates the calling, the mission, the task that still lies ahead: "What sort of person do I hope yet to become? What picture of a good human life should inform my future choices and commitments?"

I teach a philosophy seminar on the medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas at Calvin College. In it, we study Aquinas's writings on the virtues and vices.[3] When my students do this eulogy exercise in class, I have them add a second step. Based on the speeches they wrote, I have them write down three character traits that they would like to get rid of (from the first speech) and three character traits that they want to cultivate (from the second speech). My students tend to begin this assignment hesitantly and with furrowed brows. Their lists of virtues often include invented words such as "forgivingness" and "lovingness," descriptive phrases such as "being more positive about myself" and "laughing more" and "being a better friend," as well as items that they're not sure count as virtues, such as "leadership," "assertiveness," and "creativity." When they write "strength" on their list, I ask them what that means. Perseverance — remembering that you can also persevere in sin? Or the motivation to endure even when it's difficult? Or the guts to withstand physical pain or ex-

1. See the Epilogue of my *Glittering Vices* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009) for a more extended explanation of this exercise and its rationale.

2. It's true that many consider both types of educational project training for a certain kind of service in the world (for a Christian example, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action* [Grand Rapids: CSI/Eerdmans, 1980]). I don't disagree that service is the probable outcome, but in this essay I prefer to think about the ways such service is grounded in character and the practices that form it, and how to cultivate dispositions that enable us to serve most faithfully, remembering with John Milton that "they also serve who only stand and wait" (from "On His Blindness").

3. In particular, we read Aquinas's *Disputed Questions on Evil* and the second part of the second part (IIaIIae) of the *Summa theologiae*.

ertion? Or the ability to stand up boldly for their beliefs? Or is it some combination of these? When I ask them, quite often they're not exactly sure what they meant. Likewise, several students might list "being true to themselves" but then disagree about whether this means being sincere even if you are bad, whether there might be differences between merely telling the truth and being honest or sincere, and whether contemporary "authenticity" has anything to do with, say, a Christian idea of faithfulness or moral integrity. Stumbling through this listing exercise after writing their initial speeches thus helps them feel the need for an education about the concepts and vocabulary necessary to do the next step of articulation and analysis.

I had this experience myself in graduate school. Challenged by the demands of a competitive academic program, I struggled with the usual insecurities — finding and securing a place in a new pecking order, fearing the shame that came with offering a naïve or uninformed answer aloud in class, trying to impress erudite and imposing professors who would eventually be helping or hindering my job prospects. My inner emotional landscape was defensive and fearful; my strategy in public was to avoid detection, lest I be exposed for the incompetent fool that I felt I was. (I found out years later that this common experience had a name: "impostor syndrome.")

My epiphany came when I was reading Thomas Aquinas on the virtues and vices. He was describing a vice called pusillanimity. The word *pusillanimity* literally means "smallness of soul." What Aquinas meant was a habit of shrinking back from all that God was calling you to be out of fear of failure, a sense of inadequacy, a feeling of powerlessness or incompetence. His example: Moses at the burning bush. The man whom we know as one of the greatest leaders of Israel hears God's call and says, "Who — *me?* Surely you've got the wrong person! I'm not qualified!" Hearing God's call, Moses panics, finds excuses, tries to pass the buck to his brother Aaron, and cites all his weaknesses and lack of qualifications.

But read on. This is not the end of Moses' story. It is only the beginning. Follow God's call, Moses, relying on *God's* power this time. Stretch yourself to be what God has in mind for you. Forget measuring possibilities by your puny humanly measured talents and your own unaided efforts. Think like Mary at the Annunciation: "I'm just a lowly handmaiden, but overshadowed by the Almighty, God will become incarnate within me, and all nations will call me blessed."

Reading Aquinas on the vice of pusillanimity was my "aha" moment.

I saw myself and my struggles in a whole new light. With this new concept in mind, I could name my own weakness and diagnose its causes. With these pictures of vice and virtue embodied in real human lives, I had the resources to reframe how I was living and why. Later, when I taught this material to my students, I watched as they had the same experience of epiphany: "Now I have a name for it"; "Finally I see what this struggle was really about"; "I had no idea *that* was the problem."[4] I wonder how common it is to find that naming your vices is itself a moment of liberation?

For this diagnostic process of self-examination, the fourth-century Christian John Cassian offers a metaphor for moral malformation — the "tree of vices."[5] Pride is at the root of the tree, and the trunk extends upward from it. The main seven branches are the traditional seven deadly sins — vainglory, envy, sloth, avarice, wrath, lust, and gluttony. From each of the seven branches grows additional "poison fruit," drooping downward. What this image shows us is the obvious mistake of thinking we can pluck off a vice's surface symptoms (its "fruits") and not address its source motivations or "roots." It offers a picture of self-examination that invites us to dig down to deeper causes. The organic metaphor also shows how sin, left unattended, will not sit idly within us but will grow and branch out further. Moreover, the "tree" of vices shows us the twisted inner connections of sin. It leads us to investigate how each of the vices is connected to pride, and why certain "fruits" or offshoot vices spring from the main seven.[6]

4. The language of self-examination, diagnosis, and remedy are all from John Cassian, fourth-century founder of Western monasticism. In many of Cassian's works, Jesus is named the physician of souls, and the vices name variations of spiritual disease (see, for example, *The Institutes,* trans. B. Ramsey, O.P., Ancient Christian Writers 58 [New York: Newman Press, 2000]). We have to translate these concepts carefully in a culture accustomed to contemporary therapeutic metaphors from psychology and a medical model of treatment that may be inconsistent with this ancient tradition.

5. Note: In the tradition, this was guided by a spiritual director, not something one did all by oneself. The tree metaphor is from *The Conferences,* trans. B. Ramsey, O.P., Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York: Newman Press, 1997), V.x. Gregory the Great later named pride the ultimate root of the other seven, and artists depicted various fruits hanging from the tree, basing their lists of vices and their typical offshoots on Cassian, Gregory, and others. See for example, http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=6975.

6. There is also a tree of virtues, rooted in either humility (versus pride) or love (versus disordered love), although the parallels between the two lists of seven end there. See http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=6976.

Teaching the vices and virtues showed me the power of this process of acquiring new names, new pictures and paradigms. For with them comes the ability to recognize and spell out concepts and connections new inquirers intuitively grasp but cannot yet adequately identify. These new concepts and connections help us analyze and reflect on our character.

The main point in the opening exercises I've described is to see the *need* for naming and to experience *why* identifying the virtues and vices can be helpful and important. The eulogy exercise also locates our intellectual inquiry in a larger, personal, and practical project of character formation. The names we learn have meaning and significance in that frame, while that practical project motivates and makes sense of the detailed intellectual work that follows.[7] Through these practices of reflection, my students feel and identify for themselves the gap between what they are and all that they are called to become. From there, they can see how identifying the vices and cultivating the virtues is a natural next step.

The project of learning about the vices in my class is one example of a certain rhythm between practice and reflection on practice. In attending to the ways this rhythm played itself out in our classroom, I'd like first to highlight two things about the diagnostic practice of naming and the "whole life" reflections in which that diagnosis is embedded. The first is what Craig Dykstra calls the problem of "the too big and the too small."[8] The second is the relationship between concepts and concretely embodied experience.

First, Dykstra's point: the problem of the too big and the too small is roughly this. If we give students too big a picture of the moral project, they have difficulty translating that into action-steps, concrete practices, and a way of going forward. In my students' case, the project of "being virtuous" or "developing more Christ-like character" felt fairly vague as a starting point. Turning to lists of particular virtues and specific spiritual disciplines gave that big picture more traction for them in the actual patterns and practices of Christ-like living. The problem of the too small is the opposite one — losing sight of the forest in one's study of a particular tree: for example, trying to define courageous action without a developed sense of what goods need protecting and why, how courage fits into the network

7. Later in this essay I'll turn to the ways the intellectual project can motivate, sustain, and enrich practice.

8. See Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), pp. 66-67.

of other Christian virtues, or how its common cultural expressions might be transformed in a context of Christian sacrificial love. So the key is to keep these connections between the overarching goals and the daily steps, between the vision and motivation behind the larger project and the need to discern what to do now as a student sitting in the dining hall or in a dorm room. For my class, the tree of virtues and vices functioned as a fruitful link between the "big" and the "small."

Closely related to this concern is a second issue — the connection between intellectual inquiry and reflection on the one hand, and concretely embodied daily practices on the other. To put it in terms of my graduate school experience, acquiring a new conceptual category was not the same thing as knowing how to live it. I could understand pusillanimity at some level, but how could I *become* less pusillanimous? How could I live out the paradigm shift from relying on my own puny efforts to trusting God's grace to see me through the challenges of my calling?

One way I discovered (or better: rediscovered) was to practice observance of the Sabbath. I went from working seven days a week — feeling as though even that was never enough to keep up with the overwhelming workload — to stopping what I was doing one day a week in order to *live* God's liberating promises: "He who called you is faithful, and *he* will do it" (2 Thess. 5:24); "Learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29-30). Sabbath rest includes meditating on what *God* has done and is doing, being fully attentive and present in worship, being refreshed by God's presence undistracted by anxieties or future plans, sitting still and breathing deeply, sleeping enough.[9] These are patterns of action designed to help us break the bad habits of believing that success depends entirely on our own efforts, fueled by the anxiety that our efforts will never be good enough. Pusillanimous lack of trust in God was the root of my fear of failure. Sabbath-keeping helped me learn to let go of these fears and open myself up to God's call to engage in his work with confidence. Diagnosing pusillanimity as a vice helped me see that I was living as if my feeble efforts were the only resource I had. Sabbath-keeping, for me, showed me that learning to rest was learning to trust in God. Unfortunately, this trust came only through painful practice. Trusting is hard. Practicing Sabbath rest was a *discipline* for me, albeit a discipline in which I discovered grace

9. For a similar point regarding our practices of sleeping enough, see Lauren Winner, "Sleep Therapy," *Books and Culture/Christianity Today International* (1/1/2006), http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2006/janfeb/2.07.html.

and freedom and joy. So the virtue-vice tradition gave me the initial concepts and reframing insights, but I also found that the practices to which they also pointed gave me specific new ways to live out those concepts, while those ways of life in turn deepened my understanding of the meaning of trust and dependence.

A Tradition as a Natural Place for the Rhythm of Practices-and-Reflection-on-Practices (and a Classroom as a Natural Place for Reflective Practitioners)

My own discovery of the vices and their diagnostic power was just that — my recent discovery of something already in place. From that place of discovery, I had to move in two directions: first, backward into the past. Moral formation and the imitation of Christ are nothing new, even if their challenges must be taken up anew by each of us. The practices, disciplines, and virtues that shape good character have been part of the conversation in the Christian tradition for centuries. On this topic, therefore, we need not start from scratch or re-invent the wheel — most of our discoveries and epiphanies come from listening in on an ancient conversation and tracing the paths of past practitioners. The key is to recognize in this long-standing conversation something *we* still need to hear. We need to recognize a place for *ourselves* within the tradition.

Second, from my place of discovery, I had to move forward — from my personal experience and appropriation of the intellectual and practical resources of the Christian moral tradition to effective pedagogy for others. It's one thing to have the experience and insights yourself; it's quite another task to find ways to give others the opportunity to gain similar experiences and insights for themselves. My pedagogical goal was to afford my students the opportunity to participate in the same movement I had — moving back into the tradition and then bringing it forward.

In moving back into the tradition, my students learned to submit to what the Christian tradition had to teach them through practices, and in moving the tradition forward, they learned to translate the material into something they could call their own. For my students at least, trying certain practices brought home the need for submission, while the translation process disciplined them to take up a more reflective stance.

In both our practicing and our reflecting on practices, therefore, we were working with and within a tradition. And by "tradition," I don't mean

a merely intellectual tradition of inquiry about the good.[10] The Desert Fathers, Cassian's and Benedict's monastic communities, and Aquinas's fellow Dominicans — all those who pondered questions about vices and discipleship and offered us their answers — were themselves already living as members of a body of Christ-followers. All of these inquirers were also disciples actively and communally trying to imitate Christ's character even as they reflected on it; and they reflected on it and inquired further about it because they practiced it. They were immersed in these ethical and spiritual practices themselves, trying to articulate what they were doing and becoming from a place within the practice.

So we had a model for this project. Now it was our turn.

In my class on the vices, we inscribed various practices into our classroom work, and we reflected on those practices in ways that anticipated greater engagement in them. In the next two sections, I offer examples of how we did this.[11]

Practices *for* Reflection

One way we engaged the tradition of the vices pedagogically was to engage in practices *for* reflection. Analyzing a particular discipline or virtue described abstractly or theoretically was different than reading a thick, narrative account of how particular people lived it out, and that too was a different way of learning about it than practicing the discipline ourselves. At each level of immersion, there were things we could see from closer inside — things that made our reflections less vicarious and more experientially grounded.[12] In these assignments of practices I had the following (mod-

10. For a richer concept of a tradition which encompasses both practices and reflections on practice, I am indebted to Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), chapter 15, especially p. 222.

11. I am analyzing practicing and reflecting on practice as conceptually distinct here, but in our classroom experience the two were often not clearly distinguishable.

12. However, not all levels of "insider" experience and "immersion" would necessarily be required to count as genuine practice. Similarly, there might well be different levels and modes of reflection possible (some more spiritually attuned, some more philosophical, for example). I thank David Smith for pressing this point in discussions of an earlier draft of this essay. His example — that of American football — is instructive: what an NFL quarterback practices and knows is different from what an offensive coordinator practices and knows, and this again is different from what the team's lifelong fans practice and know. Nevertheless, each is a member of the practice called "American football," each is formed by

est) pedagogical goal: To provide students with an opportunity to read a text *through* a life experience. So we tried Christian formational practices — spiritual disciplines — for ourselves, albeit usually in modified form.

How did this work? What type of reflections did it yield?

The class was on the seven capital vices — more familiarly known as the seven deadly sins. The number seven is a bit artificial here, since the traditional list began with eight or nine vices and was shortened to seven over the course of several centuries. This shortening means that the list of seven we have today includes the vice of pride but omits the vice of vainglory. Most of us have never even heard the word *vainglory* before. Vainglory is an unfamiliar vice with an equally archaic name. My students certainly found this to be the case. Later I'll give examples of how these lost concepts and vocabulary we have recovered from the vices tradition lead us to inquire about how those concepts might translate (or how they don't). But here I'll show how partial immersion in the practice made this concept come alive for my students.

The definition of *vainglory* is "the disordered desire for attention and approval." The vainglorious person seeks to project an image of herself that will garner attention, approval, and applause from her desired audience. For the vainglorious person, image is everything, and reality quickly blurs into "spin." The Greek word for vainglory *(cenodoxia)* literally means "empty of glory." Vainglory is the sham side of trying to be appropriately acknowledged and honored by others. The vainglorious person just wants the limelight. You're indulging in vainglory if you're posting Facebook photos of yourself looking fabulous, or using just the right erudite vocabulary to impress your academic colleagues, or buying a luxury car to enhance your social status. Vainglory is perhaps America's favorite vice. The advertising industry would be lost without it.

But we are victims of vainglory, too. Before my students studied vainglory formally in class, I assigned them the practice of silence for a week. Or more precisely, a modified version of it, but one still rigorous enough to have the desired effect. The exercise: No talking about yourself. That's all.

Simple, right? But think about it — no talking about yourself means no commenting about your feelings, no offering your opinions or judgments, no wry witticisms or clever criticisms, no long-winded narratives

their immersion (at whatever level) in the practice, and each has reflective insights as a result.

about how your day went and what frustrated or elated you, no interrupting with "bigger and better" stories, no fishing for compliments, no calling or texting to share what you're doing, no blogging about your opinions or favorite movies or annoying neighbors or pet peeves, no complaining. And perhaps hardest of all, no defending what you did, no pre-emptive spin to prevent others from getting the wrong impression of what you're doing, no rationalizing, no excuse-making. No nothing. Instead, be still. Listen. Let other people talk. Let your actions speak for themselves.

We had no idea how hard this would be. I knew at the beginning that it would be a challenge, but until we lived with the discipline for a few days in a row (even in this modified form), we had absolutely no idea how much of our lives revolved around managing our reputations and focusing on how others perceived us. In this practicing of the discipline of silence, my students and I grasped something we couldn't grasp through descriptions or reading instructions or observations of others' practice. The new insights about ourselves came through immersion in the practice.

Although verbal silence doesn't get at the half of the vainglory problem in an image-based culture, we quickly got a robust experiential taste of how deeply rooted a vice can be, and how blissfully unaware we were that we even had it. It's important to notice, too, that our apprenticeship required submission: We had to begin by taking the tradition's word for it that there was something to be gained here that we couldn't see from outside the practice.

The sheer shock value of this exercise never ceases to amaze me. I had the students write a journal reflecting on their practice, and it was clear from reading their journals that they, too, had an "aha" moment of moral awakening, somewhat akin to the experience of someone pouring a bucket of ice water over their heads. They came away not only conscious but convicted.

It's not that we can't or shouldn't share ourselves with others, of course. Communication is essential for human community. And speech is a good way to share ourselves. What this engagement in the practice of silence taught us, however, is that more often than not, we were "sharing" in a manipulatively self-aggrandizing, attention-grabbing way. It also gave us a taste of what it might be like to free ourselves of the constant exercise of boosting our own approval ratings. In a culture that values "honest self-expression," we have a lot to learn from a tradition with "vainglory" still in its vocabulary and analytical toolbox. When speech is taken away, the resulting silence shows us how to rely on attentive listening and non-verbal

communication, especially good eye contact and touch. But my point is this: After our weeklong practice, I don't have to explain any of these conclusions. My students have already figured it out. Moreover, unlike most of my lectures about it, they also remember it later.

In my class, the practice of silence is only a starting point for reflection and further inquiry into one vice among many. Through this initial practice, students come away convinced that they have something to learn and something to gain from listening to and imitating those who have already practiced a way of life designed to resist vice and cultivate virtue. It bolsters the credibility of this tradition — convincing us that if we are willing to apprentice ourselves, there are masters here from whom we can learn.

There are other benefits, too: this short trial of spiritual disciplines makes real the possibility of a new life. It offers an experiential encounter with the freedom that can be found in new habits and practices. Understanding the vice of vainglory and practicing the discipline of silence are gateways to entering a new way of being more fully human (i.e., more Christ-like), and with it, a new way of envisioning ourselves and our world. Sometimes a taste is enough to lure us in (sometimes not).[13] Who knows whether it will become an ongoing discipline for any of them? Here we encounter the limits of pedagogy; here, too, we see the need for a church community beyond the classroom to provide a place for continuing apprenticeship in such practices.

To sum up, the first way my class engaged this tradition of character formation gave us an opportunity to be *apprentices*, even if only in an exploratory and experimental way. My experience is that the power of the practices speaks for itself and gives the tradition of which they are a part credibility, and that even temporary submission to the wisdom of the tradition invites one to take seriously the possibilities of engaging further in the Christian life and its practices.

13. I have often been asked whether one should teach the vices first or the virtues and spiritual disciplines. My answer is that both approaches can work. Some students practice a spiritual discipline and come away from the experience eager to learn more about the vices, because they now take the extent of the vices' distorting power seriously. Others come away from exercises in self-examination associated with the vices eager to learn about the spiritual disciplines because they now have an incentive to take up Christian practices that will help intentionally shape a new life in Christ.

Practices *of* Reflection

The second facet of our learning experience was a "translation" project — that is, student reflections designed to move them back into further practice. I've just talked about submitting ourselves to the tradition as apprentices — trying out various practices in modified form to experience in an engaged and invested way their diagnostic and formative power and to spur further investigation and reflection. Now I want to say something about becoming a *master* — that is, making the tradition your own (to some extent, at least) and coming into a position to teach it to others.[14] Let me say at the outset that just as our apprenticeship was only partial and truncated, so was our experience of trying to be masters.

By the last month of the semester, my students were at the point at which they had at least some grasp of what Cassian and Aquinas had to say about the vices, their remedial disciplines, and the virtues. The final assignment sent them in teams to give presentations on the vices in the campus residence halls — seven nights, seven dorms, seven vices.

One example of how this went comes from the presentation on vainglory. First, the students began with an exercise in which the audience had to list ten celebrities or well-known people in the United States. Then, when that list was compiled, the audience had to list ten people they would consider heroes. The lists looked very different, and there were no overlapping names. Then my students asked what those on the celebrity list were well-known for. Answers: wealth, good looks, athletic talent, and "being famous for being famous" (poor Paris Hilton always takes a hit here). Then came this question: What had the heroes done to earn their place on the list? The answers shifted. Few if any heroes were "famous" or well-known. Audience lists almost always included a grandparent unknown to anyone

14. Let me make a distinction between types of mastery here by way of an example. When I was young, my brother received a Rubik's Cube for his birthday. He solved its mystery in a matter of days, whereas I struggled to complete a first layer of the puzzle. While he quickly gained proficiency at solving the puzzle himself, however, he remained hard-pressed to articulate the way he solved it. By contrast, I was able to lay out the step-by-step process of solving the puzzle (or the part of it I eventually learned to solve), but was never as proficient at doing it as he was. So there are at least two types of mastery — one relevant for practicing proficiently, and one for teaching the practice; one for doing it well, and one for explaining what one is doing and why. In this section of the essay, I am referring to the latter; I assumed that proficiency in the practice comes with more time and experience than was available in a single semester's class.

else in the room. What emerged from the comparison was the distinction between being a person given glory and a place in the limelight, and being a person *worthy* of glory and admiration. Note that there is no discussion of celebrities or heroes in the tradition regarding this vice. But this reflective exercise shows that the unfamiliar vice of vainglory still "translates" today, making sense of distinctions between celebrities and heroes already familiar to us.

Take a second example of the work of translation: My students designed a vainglory quiz — that is, more or less, a contemporization of a confessional manual, listing possible manifestations of the vice (based on the traditional offspring vices) and measuring one's susceptibility to it. It included the question, for instance, about whether one had ever exaggerated the truth or lied about something to win a laugh or the approval of one's friends. Lastly, the presentation team showed "Gaston's song" from the film *Beauty and the Beast,* correctly identifying an exemplar of both vainglory — Gaston — and its opposite — the Beast, who learned that his outward appearance would never win him social approval but that greatness of heart made him honorable nonetheless.

I call these reflective exercises "translation projects" because in them students had to take technical concepts from a medieval text and extend them into contemporary life — into actions such as conforming to peer pressure, into exemplars such as Disney characters, into today's vocabulary of celebrities and heroes. To do the translation, my students had to figure out where the tradition made sense of their lives and where they thought it left gaps or missed the mark. Then, as beginner teachers, they had to make these insights come alive for others. In doing this, they also learned how every translation falls short in some ways, and how some of what they meant to teach was missed or misunderstood. Mastery is not an achieved state but an ongoing process.

Did the translations always go this easily? Certainly not. Let me also describe a particularly challenging area for our translation project: the vice of lust. The primary texts we read were from the Desert Fathers and from medieval thinkers who took a vow of celibacy. Especially in the early ascetic tradition, the counsels about lust focus on abolishing sexual desire altogether, renouncing all earthly things and associations with women or family life, and disciplining the body through stringent fasts and all-night vigils.[15] John Cassian's advice to the monk trying to avoid lust and vainglory? "Flee women and bishops."[16] This advice did not easily transfer into the lives of those students who considered marriage a viable option and who lived in a world where sexually explicit advertising is ubiquitous. There is no desert to flee to, nor would total flight enable legitimate family life. These texts provided the most difficult case of translating the tradition. The project of teaching demanded not only critical reflection[17] but also a challenging case of creative appropriation for a contemporary audience.

Let me highlight one area where this was possible, despite the dissonances. Common cultural portrayals of sex today tend to dissociate our embodied actions from our inner life. Sex is "just physical" — a pleasurable bodily experience from which we can walk away with no aftereffects on our hearts or minds. Even many abstinence programs focus on avoiding physical contact that will count against one's technical virginity, as if this were the whole story of "purity."

On first blush, the tradition seems to echo this superficial view, treating the body as the site of traitorous desires and temptations. On a closer reading, however, the earliest teachers in the tradition emphasize a more holistic understanding of both lust and chastity.[18] They note that while going into the desert to live a solitary life certainly removes many outward occasions for lustful temptation, this merely moves the struggle inward — into one's thought life and fantasies. When we can't physically indulge in lustful acts, we retreat into memory and imagination.[19] This, too, they

15. Moreover, the viewpoint of women's struggles with lust is typically not considered at all. The texts are predominantly by men and for men; to these "brothers," women are part of the world to be renounced, and even there, they are the property of their husbands and fathers.

16. Cassian, *Institutes,* XI.xviii.

17. Let me be clear: not all of it translated — the early authors' views about women, for example, sometimes just simply needed rejection or correction.

18. So while their anthropology remained dualistic, their holistic understanding of the dynamics of the vices did not lead them to neglect either element of the person when talking about diagnoses and remedies for the vices. In this sense, their moral psychology is more integrated than the implicit dualism of many contemporary evangelical teachings.

19. As Maximus the Confessor put it, "First the memory brings a mere thought to the mind; and when this remains for a while, passion is roused, and when this is not removed, it sways the mind to consent; and when consent is given, sinning in action finally comes about" (*Century* I.84, p. 149); and "The fight against memories is as much the more difficult than the fight against things as sinning in thought is easier than sinning in deed" (*Century* I.63, p. 145). These quotations can be found in St. Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life and The Four Centuries on Charity,* trans. P. Sherwood, O.S.B., Ancient Christian Writers 21 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1955).

warn, can be real lust — no less a barrier to love and pure prayer. This insight resonated with my students. The computer may be destroyed, the photo or person far gone from our presence, but the images in the mind remain. The vice of lust is not "merely physical" — it permeates the whole person. Lust is a battle in our hearts and minds as much as in our bodies.

In fact, in their presentation my students concluded that the pleasure of self-gratifying *fantasy* is at the heart of this generation's attraction to pornography. When Cassian speaks of renunciation not only of his former worldly life but also of the thought-life that went with it, this sounded like advice my students could both understand and endorse to others. To those who have experienced the power of pornography, Cassian's advice to "Flee women" became an injunction to flee not from real, human relationships but from virtual, inhuman ones. The translation gave them a way to take the tradition forward.

By way of summary, then, we can say that the students' partial immersion in modified spiritual disciplines gave them incentive to apprentice themselves to the teachers and texts of the tradition, but the opportunity to teach the vices made them reflective translators, critics, and advocates of the tradition themselves.

Some Reflections on the Need for the Rhythm of Practices and Reflection on Practices

While my class fruitfully included practices and reflection on those practices, we might still wonder why we need pedagogies that afford opportunities for *both* immersion in practices and reflective consideration of them.

First, why do we need practices? How do they prompt and feed reflection? The "apprenticeship" approach discussed earlier shows that sometimes character formation begins with being inculcated in practices the goods of which we do not and cannot fully understand from the outset or the outside — as illustrated by my students doing an experiment countering vainglory.[20] Who knows what their initial motives were? The point is to engage in the practice together as a community, and to do so long enough with the right sort of mentors and models that any initial skeptical or mercenary motives could be transformed and new insights forged.

Then why do we need reflection? For those who do become further

20. See note 12.

immersed, immersion in the practice can be insufficient. Aristotle emphasizes that we have to learn *that* certain practices are good by doing them, and we also have to develop a reflective understanding of *why* these practices make a human life good. According to Aristotle, the "why" arguments may not convince us if we are not already morally formed in certain ways.[21] Without characters formed by certain habits, we will be deaf to certain arguments explaining what makes that kind of character worth having. But fitting our initial habits into this larger perspective is *also* essential to maintain our commitment to the full formation and perfection of the virtues.

Let me offer a contemporary example. The high school seniors in my church education class spend a good deal of their time complaining about the lame, old-fashioned hymns we sing over and over in church. They would prefer to switch to a praise-and-worship genre and have that repertoire keep up with the latest hits being written in the Christian music industry. Putting genre considerations aside, what is the point of having a common hymnal and singing the same songs over and over for generations? It's a practice that forms our corporate worship. But while my students were well immersed in it, they didn't see why it was valuable; they didn't understand its significance. My answer to their questions about practice had to address the "why." Here it is.

When I was in college, I worked second shift on the dementia unit at a local nursing home as a nurse's aide. After we fed the residents dinner, we put them to bed. One particularly demanding patient had her call light on constantly, and it got to the point where the other aides were too frustrated to answer it anymore. As the rookie member of the staff, that meant it was my job. Mrs. B, I'll call her, really didn't need anything from me or anyone else — at least, she didn't need our medical assistance. She needed company; she didn't want to be alone in the dark. So I would sit on the edge of her bed, and she would hold my hand and stroke it while in a wobbly voice she sang hymns to me — hymns she knew by heart from years of singing them over and over, hymns she could recall more clearly than what she had for dinner two hours earlier. At first she did all the singing. But it turned out that all of my own training in singing "boring hymns" over and over in church meant that I too happened to know the verses of "Abide with Me" by heart. So I could join in on Mrs. B's favorite: "When other helpers fail, and

21. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), I.3, 1095a1-15, and X.9, 1179b1-1180b25.

comforts flee, help of the helpless, O abide with me." It got to be a thing with the two of us, part of our nighttime routine: I'd put her to bed, and we'd sing that song — all the verses. Like my students, I had the practice; Mrs. B taught me the "why." Why sing the same old boring hymns over and over? Because they give us the language for lament and loneliness that most praise songs don't, and someday we'll need those words. Because those songs bind generations together into a community. Because now Mrs. B and I share a favorite hymn, and through that hymn I learned to see her not merely as a nursing home resident, but as a saint and a sister in Christ.

So we need practices, *and* we need reflection on practices. Practices enhance and expand our reflection, and reflection enriches and sustains our practices. We need immersion in a practice and we need a context of meaning for the practice itself, something that can be gained through reflection.

Ideally our reflective questions should be asked not once, after an assignment or at the end of the semester; rather, they should be repeatedly asked in conversation with a community of practitioners, because what we see ten years into a practice will be different from what we see after a semester, and what we see when we have children that are grown will be different from what we see when those children are infants, and what we see after living through suffering, disappointment, betrayal, and conflict will be different than what we see at idealistic first blush. The point in the classroom is not merely to offer the students a particular insight or conclusion at that moment but to teach them the rhythm of trusting enough to keep practicing and then examining what they've practiced.[22] Perhaps this rhythm could be thought of as one articulation of what the same Christian tradition calls "faith seeking understanding." What the apprentice learns by trusting faith, the master creatively appropriates through fuller understanding.[23] Deepened understanding in turn can deepen practice, and the cycle continues.[24]

22. Reflection on practices also kept the process of formation transparent and enabled us to evaluate our formation with an honest, critical eye.

23. Of course, on broader readings of "practice," intellectual reflection itself could be a practice or part of a practice, but then we just get reflection on the practice of reflection (its goals, goods, and methods, etc.). Again, we can think of the process as reciprocal: the trustful imitation of initial apprenticeship yields greater understanding and creative appropriation, which then brings us back to more intentional and informed apprenticeship in practices.

24. Again, the theoretical distinction is appropriate, but the two are not as easy to distinguish in concrete instances. The "why" questions we asked in my philosophy classes on

I am arguing, therefore, for the fruitfulness and in many cases the necessity of pairing the two, the reciprocal rhythm of practice and reflection on practice. Sometimes reflection can be a retrospective evaluation of a practice. Immersing ourselves in practices first can lead us to acknowledge that there are *some* things we can recognize and appreciate only by submitting and doing faithfully even before we can see why. At other times, reflection on the "why" leads to prospective endorsement of a well-lived human life and incentive to begin (or continue) practices that form a part of it.

So the reflection with which we began this essay — namely, "Who do I wish to become? And why?" — may lead to practices that answer the question "How do I become that sort of person?" Within this lived rhythm, the point of reflecting is to be more intentional about how we live as Christians, what sort of character we are called to cultivate, and what practices best enable us to do so.

Conclusion

I'll conclude with one last story. For their final project, three of my students led a presentation on the vice of gluttony for an audience of their peers in the residence halls. In class, they studied the vice and its traditional remedy — the discipline of fasting. Their highly entertaining presentation included a blueberry pie-eating contest and enough Reddi-Wip to require extensive plastic sheeting over the floor. But the high point for me came when this group of three arrived back at my office a year and a half later at the beginning of Lent, wondering if they could come in and talk more about how to fast. What they had learned and taught made them want to come back to the tradition. They had learned to value and trust its

the virtues, vices, and spiritual disciplines were not so easily separated from the practices about which and from which we asked them. Practicing silence or fasting for a week introduced a Christian way of life — its insights and internal goods — and these practices also gave us material for reflection. Similarly, our exercise of modifying Aquinas's practice of fasting, even in modified form (we skipped all snacks and reduced our eating to two small meals a day), made for a richer conversation about the differences between dieting and fasting. Spending a week documenting our anger helped us constructively engage the controversy in the tradition about whether anger is a constructive moral response or whether all anger is wrathful and vicious. We may believe in theory that anger can be a right response, but when our personal records reveal that almost every angry response that week was disordered and destructive, we may be more willing to consider respectfully the early tradition's counsel to purge our lives of anger altogether.

resources, and the reflective work they did in class led them back to the practices, together, to claim them as their own. Not every student took this opportunity (in fact, most did not), nor could I force them to, but it seems to me that this particular moment showed me most clearly both the limits of pedagogy and its unlimited potential.

My class on the vices was an experiment in apprenticing ourselves to a tradition and its spiritual disciplines, with the hope that immersing and submitting ourselves to practices would work in tandem with a reflective understanding of them, a reflection that included both critical distance and creative endorsement.

Self-examination through the vices and spiritual formation through graced disciplines was the form my particular class took. No two classes will do this the same way. But the experience helped me grasp how formative practices and reflective theorizing are richly bound up with each other. It affirmed both their individual importance and their inseparability. The rhythm of practice and reflection on practice is thus something I aspire not only to live, but to teach, and not only to teach, but to live.

Reading Practices and Christian Pedagogy: Enacting Charity with Texts

David I. Smith

Questions about Reading

When Christians (or folk in general, for that matter) discuss reading, most of the energy tends to go into judging the acceptability of particular books. Publications on Christianity and literature tend to consist of faith-informed commentary on significant works, or debates about what books should be read by whom, or whether they should be read at all.[1] This is a fine and necessary enterprise. This essay, however, is more concerned with the kinds of readers that we have become or are becoming, and about how much responsibility teachers bear for that process. I will be examining how reading is nested within the practices of teaching and learning, and what this has to do with faith; but first allow me to set the stage with a few points of reference.

There is a long tradition of discussion of what we might call spiritually engaged reading. This includes the development of specific practices that seek to move the reader beyond mere decoding of information and to slow and enhance his or her ingestion of words with a view to personal transformation. Eugene Peterson, in a recent popular contribution to this tradition, has this to say about the "discipline of spiritual reading":

> [It is] the only kind of reading that is congruent with what is written in our Holy Scriptures, but also with all writing that is intended to

1. The majority of the scholarly articles published on Christianity and literature (for instance, in the journal of the same name) have focused on interpreting works or developing literary theory, while more public Christian debates about reading are often of the "should children be allowed to read Harry Potter" variety.

> change our lives and not just stuff some information into the cells of our brain. All serious and good writing anticipates precisely this kind of reading — ruminative and leisurely, a dalliance with words in contrast to wolfing down information.[2]

Such distinctions are common, contrasting kinds of reading in which a text is "used" (treated as a means to information or distraction), and reading in which the text is "received" (approached with vulnerability to being changed by it).[3] Paul Griffiths has explored at length the contours of "religious reading."[4] The kind of reading in which religious people become practiced is repeated and ongoing, revisiting texts multiple times. It seeks to be slow and attentive, drinking in the details of the text and approaching it reverentially. The reader comes to the text expecting it to make moral demands, and is willing to submit and be changed. Reading takes place in a communal context with a shared tradition of interpretation, and faithfulness counts for more than creativity. The act of reading seeks personal transformation through attentive encounter with significant texts. The contrasting term for Griffiths is "consumerist reading." This kind of reading values speed and efficiency. It seeks to master the text and control its meanings for purposes of practical application. Texts are often read only once and are disposable after information has been extracted. Individual motives and interpretations are valued, and originality is prized. The main

2. Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), p. 3.

3. These particular terms are drawn from C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961). There is a secularized echo of such distinctions in Louise Rosenblatt's account of "efferent" and "aesthetic" reading stances; see *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978). On some tensions between Rosenblatt's account and past Christian ways of making the distinction, see David I. Smith, "The Poet, the Child, and the Blackbird: Aesthetic Reading and Spiritual Development," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 9, no. 2 (2004): 143-54.

4. Paul Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and "Reading as a Spiritual Practice," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, ed. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 32-47. See also, for example, Roger Newell, "Teaching the Bible along the Devotional/Academic Faultline: An Incarnational Approach to the Quarrel between Love and Knowledge," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 6, no. 4 (2003): 190-97. While such binary distinctions are common, the issues at stake are not identical in each case, pointing to the need ultimately for a more carefully variegated account than a stark division into two kinds of reading.

goal is information or pleasure, and the text should inform rather than transform the reader. Both kinds of reading have their place — some texts and occasions properly demand consumerist reading — though Griffiths suggests a consumerist stance has colonized far more of our reading practices than is good for our spiritual health.

It seems at first as if "religious reading" implies reading a sacred text — in Christian settings, the Bible. However, the boundary lines are not so clear. Christians interact with a wider range of texts in ways that fit Griffiths' description — classic devotionals, commentaries, hymns, confessions, and so on. Recall also Peterson's comment that other "serious and good writing" beside Scripture is "intended to change our lives"; it may not receive the same a priori submission given to core confessional texts, but it calls for some variant on the kind of self-giving reading that Peterson, Griffiths, and others have in view.[5]

Alan Jacobs explores such a variant in his application of a "hermeneutics of love" to literary texts.[6] Here (and Jacobs is far from alone here) the language of virtue comes to the fore. Charity in reading involves avoiding quick dismissal and cheap disdain, resisting the ego satisfaction of allowing a text only to confirm one's prejudices, and seeking the good in a text, choosing its truths over its defects. Humility implies a working assumption that the text may offer wisdom that I lack, and that if the road to grasping it is stony, then the fault may lie at least as much with me as with the text itself. Justice involves reading fairly, working to weigh evidence before making evaluative judgments and seeking to represent the text without distortion, even when distortion would better fit my interests. The act of reading itself (whatever the specific text) becomes an act in which, as in all other acts, Christian virtues ought to be exercised.[7]

5. There is no space in this essay to pursue further how the boundaries should be drawn here so that literary texts receive their due but are not positioned as surrogate sacred texts with quasi-biblical authority; for present purposes, it will suffice to note that there are aspects of accounts of "receiving" texts with the goal of personal growth that seem to fit the ways in which a variety of texts may be read.

6. Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001); Alan Jacobs, "Bakhtin and the Hermeneutics of Love," in *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith*, ed. S. M. Felch and P. J. Contino (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001), pp. 25-45.

7. There is a clear intersection here with some common ways of articulating the curricular aspirations of Christian colleges. My own college, Calvin College, has a core curriculum explicitly framed in terms of (among other things) the pursuit of a list of virtues that includes several of those listed here. See Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Re-*

In sum, connections have long been made between Christian identity and how reading is practiced. Talk of reading as a practice, of course, invokes the particular questions framing this volume, questions arising from discussions of the nature of social practices — sustained, complex, cooperative human activities in which goods are pursued and virtues are formed and supported.[8] Alasdair MacIntyre famously argued that "it is always within some particular community with its own specific institutional forms that we learn or fail to learn to exercise the virtues."[9] Etienne Wenger has offered further exploration (described in the introduction to this volume) of how social groups engaged in shared practice develop norms, rhythms, and repertoires that are of consequence to the imaginations and identities of those who participate in them.[10] Others have extended these concepts in Christian terms: we do not grow in faith through ideas alone; we practice our faith by participating in the Eucharist, corporate worship, prayer, forgiveness, Sabbath-keeping, testimony, and, yes, particular practices of reading and attentiveness.[11]

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formed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 177-241.

8. See the introduction to this volume.

9. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 194-95. Christian accounts of moral formation of course need to find ways of coordinating this focus on community formation with a primary emphasis on grace and gift; on this, see, for example, Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 74-78; and Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Attending to the Gaps between Beliefs and Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 33-48.

10. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Of course, as soon as one cites more than one protagonist in recent discussions of social practice, the precise meaning of the term *practice* begins to shift. For comparison of Wenger and MacIntyre on practices, see Terence McLaughlin, "Teaching as a Practice and a Community of Practice: The Limits of Commonality and the Demands of Diversity," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37, no. 2 (2003): 339-52. For the purposes of this essay, I am using the term *practices* in a sense somewhat looser than MacIntyre's rather stringent definition, and more reminiscent of Wenger's definition.

11. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, pp. 42-43. Miroslav Volf suggests that "Practices . . . are Christian insofar as they are 'resonances' of God's engagement with the world" ("Theology for a Way of Life," in *Practicing Theology*, p. 260). I explore other aspects of Christian reading in relation to pedagogy in David I. Smith, "Misreading through the Eyes of Faith: Christian Students' Reading Strategies as Interlanguage," in *Teaching Spiritually Engaged Reading*, ed. David I. Smith, John Shortt, and John Sullivan (Nottingham: The Stapleford Center, 2007), pp. 53-66.

With these all too briefly sketched coordinates in hand, we can return to students, teachers, and how they read. What if we approached the Christian literature classroom not only in terms of what interpretations change hands, but also in terms of what kinds of practices are shared? Might this shed light not only on how reading can be Christian, but also on the nature of Christian teaching and learning?

Dissatisfactions with Teaching

I will focus here on a particular course, an undergraduate survey of the literature of German-speaking countries since 1945. The course is fourteen weeks long and is an advanced course taught at Calvin College, a Christian liberal arts college in Michigan. The account that follows draws mainly from the Spring 2006 semester, though the practices described have now been in place for several iterations of the course. With the literatures of four countries in play, several Nobel Prize winners to consider, and a backdrop ranging from postwar reconstruction through existentialism, feminism, ecological concern, and the cold war to terrorism, postmodernism, reunification, and multiculturalism, there is pressure to cover content in the limited time available. Since this is the only survey course in our catalog covering this most recent period of writing in German, some attempt at coverage has to be made, producing a temptation to over-ambition on the part of the instructor that will be familiar to anyone who has ever taught survey courses.

First attempts to teach this course left me with a number of frustrations, mainly in connection with the reading practices that it appeared to provoke and promote. How texts are handled, presented, and framed by pedagogical tasks helps determine the modes of reading and the relationship to the text that are adopted by students.[12] Put more bluntly, reading stances are not accidental: we are partly responsible for how our students read. My students, it seemed to me, often failed to display desirable reading practices. "Charitable" or "spiritual" reading is characterized by the authors mentioned above in terms of applying disciplined attentiveness, reading slowly, repeatedly, contextually, and with humble care. When I considered the practices generated and sustained by my course, I saw stu-

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12. See Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem;* and "What Facts Does This Poem Teach You?" *Language Arts* 57, no. 4 (1980): 386-94.

dents reading more like consumers. They read quickly in order to cover the ground in the midst of the demands of other classes. They read superficially and once only, gaining enough acquaintance with the text to avoid embarrassment in class. They then blithely offered evaluative opinions about complex texts barely mastered.

These observations are not intended to invite a response that involves blaming students. Many disciplines offer survey courses, and while these are an indication that there is a legitimate time and place for reading for broad coverage, they can also exacerbate existing temptations toward pedagogical practices that invite largely consumerist modes of reading. Common classroom practices tend to implicitly communicate that fly-by reading is a sufficient and acceptable basis for expressing judgments concerning complex texts. Western educational culture associates speed of verbal response with intelligence; we all know what it means if a child is "slow" or "quick-witted." Teachers tend to see those who respond the fastest in class as being the brightest (an odd idea, once one comes to think about it).[13] Add this to common ways of managing class discussion, and the tendency to air swift opinions and evaluative conclusions publicly on the basis of cursory acquaintance with the text can end up actively rewarded through positive regard and good participation grades. Put more bluntly, I began to wonder whether leaping to quick and partially informed judgments was a good success strategy for students in my classroom if pulled off with wit and verve. It seemed to me that our reading practices should be blamed at least as much on the professor (that would be me) and on the larger rhythms of the educational institution as on students; both, after all, help to shape the expectations that students bring to such a class. To a considerable degree, we get the reading practices we deserve.[14]

Although I am generalizing for the sake of brevity, I suspect that the caricature is fairly recognizable. My main point here is that my dissatisfaction was not with course content, but with our practices. This became my question: How much could change, given that the course had to be a survey, the class location, timetable, and format were fixed, and the institutional context would remain more or less constant? Can one make headway from within standard parameters?[15]

13. See Ron Ritchhart, *Intellectual Character: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

14. Compare Nicholas Wolterstorff's broader questioning of our recurring sense as a society that we are not getting the educational outcomes that we deserve in his essay "The Schools We Deserve," in *Schooling Christians: "Holy Experiments" in American Education*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 3-28.

Interventions in the Classroom

In turning to classroom interventions, my intention is not to make any big claims for individual strategies, but to characterize a community of practice. In Wenger's terms, this involves sketching how shared imagination and relations of accountability develop around a joint enterprise, and how particular forms of participation and reification (turning intentions into objects) grow into particular repertoires of discourse and behavior (see the introduction to this volume). I will describe the changes made to the class in the form of a continuous narrative, not wishing to set too much store by any single intervention taken out of the wider pattern of practice.

The opening class of the semester was the focus of much reflection. The agenda during this hour was to establish the immediate postwar situation and the harsh economic, social, and psychological conditions facing German writers. How was one to write, without paper or a buying public, in a language denatured by years of propaganda, about realities such as Stalingrad and Auschwitz? I was used to dealing with this material in lecture format. Students were engaged, could repeat the main points on a later test, and got good grades; the class was a success by common criteria. Two considerations moved me to attempt a rethink. One concerned the importance of first impressions: I wanted a way of starting the semester that might set the tone. The other had to do with charitable reading. I wanted to orient us in some way to an exploration of the hermeneutics of charity, and reasoned that regular information transfer methods were likely to be limited in addressing goals such as growth in humility and compassion. With these two concerns in mind, I arrived early and set up a looping PowerPoint presentation consisting entirely of black-and-white photographs of rubble and extermination camps against a black background. I also set a piece of dissonant ambient music looping on the computer, blacked out the classroom, and turned off the lights. Finally, I

15. Apposite is Alasdair MacIntyre's comment that "it is indeed from within practice that we disengage from its immediacies in order to correct practice." See MacIntyre, "Review of *Philosophical Arguments* by Charles Taylor," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 186 (1997): 94-96; the quotation is on page 96.

stacked the chairs in the corners and hung a sign at the door inviting students to enter in silence. Then I left and deliberately returned several minutes after the start of class. Fifteen students sat in silence on the floor; I sat down among them and said, "It's 1945, we are in Germany, and you are a writer: What is it like?" I immediately learned (as my students proceeded to give me most of what had been in my lecture the year before) that one has a different kind of discussion with students when seated with them on the floor in the dark than when standing over their desks under bright lights. In beginning this way, I intended to physically enact a posture of humility for our initial approach to the experience of the Germans whom we were about to read, and to create a more affectively compelling pedagogical context that called for empathy. In doing so, I hoped to take a first step toward reframing my students' approach to the texts assigned.

For the next class session we read Heinrich Böll's "Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa . . . ,"[16] a short story in which a teenage soldier returns wounded to his school, now converted into a field hospital. He is carried on a stretcher past statues and paintings representing classical, humanistic, and militaristic traditions as co-opted by Nazi German education. This story, itself a masterful critique of a twisted educational community of practice, has more than enough layers to occupy us for some considerable time. After a first reading, we spent a class period discussing the story and its cultural references. Then for homework I asked students to read the story again.

I had become uncomfortable with the fact that while it would seem unprofessional to me as a scholar to write a paper focused upon a work that I had skim-read once only, my students were effectively asked to do this on a regular basis. I made some modest sacrifices of previously assigned texts in order to create a little space in the schedule, and then assigned repeat readings of two texts, in the first and last weeks of the semester. I enforced a second reading by two strategies. First, I openly explained my goals and shamelessly pleaded with students to complete the second reading. Second, in case the daily grind should trump my efforts at persuasion, I assigned tasks for the second reading that required a level of analysis that was not achievable from memory. After the second reading of "Wanderer," we counted the works of art and explored how Böll is presenting the school and the imagination it fosters as a sick parody of the stations of the

16. In Heinrich Böll, *Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa . . . : Erzählungen* (Munich: DTV, 1967), pp. 45-56.

cross. Here again I was looking to reify some larger goals and begin to generate a repertoire consistent with charitable reading. I wanted students to read with humility. I reasoned that perhaps one of the ways that humility might be learned in a literature classroom is to experience reading a complex text, forming initial interpretations, discussing them for an hour in competent company, and then going back and discovering whole worlds of meaning that were missed the first time. As long as my students were asked to read texts only once, that particular experience was denied them in favor of an implied ethos of easy mastery. Again I sought to keep our bodies in play: the first time we read the story, we sat in a circle; the second time, I clustered the chairs tightly and concentrically in the center of the classroom, physically hunching us around the text to embody close, intimate attentiveness.

It was not possible to assign multiple readings of some of the larger novels taught in the succeeding weeks, so I sought another way of structuring repeated engagements with texts into our learning. I decided to assign a single poet for the semester. Every week, regardless of what else we were reading, students were assigned one poem by Hans Magnus Enzensberger. The poems were chosen and sequenced so that connections could be found, whether direct or oblique, with the concerns, themes, or imagery of the other texts assigned that week. Students were asked to read the poem before Monday's class, in which a few minutes were taken to elicit some first reactions and give at least some momentum to any who were nonplussed. Before Wednesday's class, students were required to submit a translation by e-mail — this allowed me to further check comprehension. By Friday, they were to write a journal entry about the poem, using a rubric for guidance. In this way I sought to maximize the likelihood of students experiencing repeated engagements with each poem separated by sufficient time for reflection to occur and new insights to emerge, moving away from an instant response mode of reading. Responding to the translations and journals weekly allowed a formative conversation to emerge between students and myself, with the result that the journal interpretations improved markedly over the semester — even though keeping up this regular rhythm of communication demanded a level of discipline from me that sometimes escaped me. By the fourth week I found comments in student journals to the effect that a line in the current poem looked as if it meant such and such, but that couldn't be right, because that's not the kind of thing that Enzensberger would normally say. Such interpretive moves are essential for handling Enzensberger's frequent irony,

and yet had not been possible for students to make during previous versions of the course, since they had no extended experience with a single author as a basis for such comparisons.

As will already be apparent, I was thinking during the semester about embodiment, about how learning and spiritual growth might in some way be connected with such mundane matters as posture, lighting, physical distance, and tone of voice. This made me more self-conscious than before about my own presence in class. One day found me thinking about how I entered the classroom. On the one hand, I might stride purposefully into the room, stand at the front of straight rows of chairs, and briskly utter something like this: "Right. Last time we reached page 37, and for today you were to read as far as page 58. Did everyone do that? Good. Now the main themes of this section are . . . Let's begin at the top of page 40. Would someone read aloud for us?" Or, I might start differently. Spurred on by John Cavadini's fascinating study of how humility before the text was reflected in the specific discursive moves that Augustine made when preaching,[17] I walked into class absorbed in an open copy of the assigned book. I wandered to a seat in the circle, sat down, and continued reading without looking up. Eventually, my opening words were something like this: "You know, I've read this novel four times, and this is the third time I've taught it, and I was still, before class, trying to figure out why on earth we get the sudden change of topic on page 40. Did that strike anyone else as strange? Can anyone help me out?" Either way of beginning could be valid; yet each speaks differently.[18]

Later in the semester, there came a day when, contrary to the norm that had developed, most students were not prepared for class. My attempts to open discussion produced unusually halting responses. After a few minutes, one of the students intervened. "I have to confess that I didn't do today's reading," she said, "and I'm guessing that quite a few of us didn't." There were sheepish nods of assent around the room. I thought for a few moments, and then said, calmly and without rancor, "Please go home; class is over. We can't charitably discuss a text that we haven't read.

17. See John C. Cavadini, "Simplifying Augustine," in *Educating People of Faith: Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities*, ed. John Van Engen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 63-84.

18. Each speaks differently, though admittedly not univocally; much depends also on context, tone of voice, student frames of reference, and so on. I am merely seeking to make concrete the attempt in this particular setting to reify a particular relationship to the text in a way that might contribute to a particular classroom repertoire.

We'll make up the extra hour next week." This took a few moments to sink in; then the students left in silence. It still seems to me that to proceed with class at this moment in this particular community of practice would have been to signal a willingness to cover for their lack of engagement with the text by lecturing, thus implicitly abandoning the project of learning to read charitably. I also take this exchange to be a sign of maturing engagement with the class's framing practices. As Wenger puts it:

> Negotiating a joint enterprise gives rise to relations of mutual accountability among those involved. . . . Responsibility with respect to what makes life harder for others, for instance, is something they enforce among themselves, sometimes quite vocally. . . . The regime of accountability becomes an integral part of the practice. . . . Being able to make distinctions between reified standards and competent engagement in practice is an important aspect of becoming an experienced member.[19]

The emergence of such a distinction seems at least incipient in the proactive response from the students to the signs of lack of preparation as the class got underway.

Thinking in terms of social practices need not imply that learners are sufficiently formed simply by engaging in a set of shared behavioral moves. A social practice involves a narrative, a reason why, a mental horizon within which action is experienced as meaningful.[20] Wenger suggests that a successful community of practice needs to be sustained by an "infrastructure of imagination" that gives particular meaning to moves that

19. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, pp. 81-82.

20. MacIntyre (*After Virtue*, p. 193) argues that "a practice, in the sense intended, is never just a set of technical skills, even when directed towards some unified purpose and even if the exercise of those skills can on occasion be valued or enjoyed for their own sake." He adds, "There is no such thing as 'behavior,' to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs, and settings" (p. 208). Similarly, Wenger asserts, "Practice is, first and foremost, a process by which we can experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful. . . . It does not address simply the mechanics of getting something done, individually or in groups; it is not a mechanical perspective. It includes not just bodies (or even coordinated bodies) and not just brains (even coordinated ones), but moreover that which gives *meaning* to the motions of bodies and the working of brains" (*Communities of Practice*, p. 51). This need not imply denial that there are formative effects of practice that are not consciously mediated, but merely affirms that a more holistic account of how we are formed within communities of practice needs to take account of the ways in which meaning and action become linked.

could otherwise be read differently.[21] For this reason, I worked at negotiating with students the meaning of our shifts in practice. I adopted two main strategies.

The first had to do with the themes of the works assigned. While variety remained both inevitable and desirable, several works engaged with themes concerning the shape of modern consciousness and the loss of a contemplative relationship with reality. This allowed explicit reflection on the consumer-oriented nature of our contemporary ways of relating to reality. Works such as Hartmut Lange's *Der Himmel über Golgatha (The Sky over Golgotha)* invited us to discuss what it is about our day-to-day formation as (post)modern selves that makes it difficult for us to sustain loving attentiveness toward significant texts. Why are we often the wrong kind of readers for spiritually significant texts, and how would we need to change to become receivers rather than consumers of what we read?[22]

Second, I wove a further longitudinal thread through the semester that surfaced every two weeks. MacIntyre argues that "to enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point."[23] Wenger notes more succinctly that "practice is a shared history of learning that requires some catching up for joining."[24] Every second week I assigned a short text in English, no more than a few paragraphs, that dealt in some way with the question of what reading might have to do with Christian charity. Using Mark Pike's typology of different kinds of readers of poetry, students were encouraged to consider what kind of reader they were and how this might help or hinder their access to certain texts or suggest areas in which they needed to grow or learn from others.[25] We read extracts from Alan Jacobs on the hermeneutics of charity and discussed what love might mean in the context of reading. Was loving a book the same as enjoying it? How does charity relate to eros?[26] We discussed

21. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, p. 238.

22. Hartmut Lange's novellas proved particularly fruitful in this regard. The particular volume that we used was Hartmut Lange, *Schnitzlers Würgeengel: Vier Novellen* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1995).

23. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 194.

24. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, pp. 47, 102.

25. Mark A. Pike, "From Personal to Social Transaction: A Model of Aesthetic Reading in the Classroom," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37, no. 2 (2003): 61-72.

26. Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*.

Mikhail Bakhtin's claim that only "loving attentiveness" is capable of slowing down long enough over a text to linger over it and sculpt every detail.[27] We considered Basil the Great's arguments for the spiritual value of Christian meditation on pagan literature.[28] We explored Kierkegaard's contrast between what he calls the "poet," who is lost in the experience of the text for experience's sake, and the "child," who listens to the text for that which should be obeyed.[29] After each reading, a brief time was set aside in class for discussion. Periodic journal entries reflecting directly on these readings were also assigned. The aim was to weave together imagination and repertoire — the reflective pauses focused on these texts were intended to provide what Wenger terms an "infrastructure of imagination."[30] The question of what it might mean to read with Christian love thus became an explicit and ongoing part of the class agenda, enabling an identification of our developing repertoire as a form of Christian practice. Toward the end of the semester, during one of these discussion times, several students began to talk about their other classes. Some expressed a newfound dissatisfaction with their experiences in other college courses, and with aspects of college life that kept them in hurried and harried mode. Having begun to feel their way into another mode of engagement, they wished for more of it across their educational experience. One student changed his plans for the summer. He had intended to read ahead for the following year; now he planned to select the most important books from the past year and reread them.[31]

I worried for most of the semester about how to assess the course. The inherited examination format, consisting of a few short essay questions covering major works and themes from the period, did not seem a fitting conclusion to what we had been doing. The journal entries, a midterm exam, and class discussions provided some material for evaluation, but I was looking for a way to close the semester that underlined, rather than undermined, the emphasis on charitable reading. In recent iterations

27. Cited in Jacobs, "Bakhtin and the Hermeneutics of Love," p. 27.

28. Cited in Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, pp. 141-42.

29. Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses and The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

30. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, p. 238.

31. This student also followed through further by requesting an independent study the following semester in order to pursue themes in the literature we had discussed.

of the course, I have used varying combinations of assessment tasks selected from the following in place of a final exam:[32]

- Choose any work studied, re-read at least 100 pages, and write a short reflection paper detailing what was learned from the re-reading.
- Find an undisturbed spot and, notebook in hand, meditate in silence for at least an hour on one of the texts studied. Then meet with two other students, discuss what insights were gained, and write up a summary of the conversation.
- Think of a thoughtful Christian friend and write him or her a five-page letter explaining how a close reading of one of the texts studied could positively impact his or her life.
- Write a short reflection paper showing awareness of existing models of what "Christian reading" might entail and explain how you understand and view the notion.
- Choose a poem by Enzensberger not studied during the semester and write a short interpretive essay with the aim of showing how you have matured as a reader of his poems.

The end result was that I still had student writing on which to base grades, but the mode of engagement became part of the focus of the assessment in a way that discouraged relying on a hurried review of course notes.

The Fruits of Our Labor

A community of practice emerges over time from interaction and gradual attunement. It is not a linear implementation of theory. Not all of the above interactions were planned in advance. In describing them retrospectively, I have inevitably lifted them out of a richer context of daily words, gestures, e-mails, ideas, and adjustments that made up the lived texture of the class. I make no strong causative claims for any single change in the course — the aim and, I think, the reality was a pattern of practice oriented toward the realization of charitable reading. The aim of reading with charitable attentiveness was reified in particular assignments, texts, arrangements of light and furniture, images, gestures, and forms of partici-

32. What follow are not the exact instructions given to students (these included some more extensive guidance), but only a brief summary of the tasks.

pation. Amid these, we began to forge a repertoire of language and behaviors that could count as engagement with reading Christianly. Signs of a "regime of mutual accountability" began to emerge in the class as this temporary community of readers struggled with how to relate the demands of the shared practice to the constraints and pressures provided by the larger college community and their everyday lives.[33]

Wenger notes that participation in a community of practice fosters an "identity of participation," a sense of self shaped by the forms of participation that define the group as members become attuned to their shared enterprise. This process also gives rise to new boundary configurations, for group members are also members of other groups and so face the task of brokering the tensions that arise from multi-membership in order to sustain a degree of personal coherence.[34] A clear instance of this is the tension set up by the course design between common college student reading practices and the particular conception of reading practices around which this course was built. A focus on practices invites the assumption that deficiencies in student reading behaviors (superficiality, haste, fragmentation) are not simply manifestations of individual vice but rather are related to existing patterns of practice.[35] They will therefore not be easily modifiable by mere exhortation, but may be put under pressure by the creation of a countervailing community of practice. This pressure became visible as students began to express how difficult the practice of charitable reading was proving to be, internalized a sense of accountability for the readings, and eventually began to express a newly dissatisfied perspective on their mode of study in other courses.

One set of student journal responses offers an intriguing glimpse of further negotiation of boundaries between memberships in overlapping communities of practice. Just over halfway through the semester, a student wrote the following in a journal entry:

> After discussing reading lovingly, with love, I've taken that and reflected on the way I read people. As with books, people need time, and

33. This summary recapitulates some key features of communities of practice as detailed by Wenger in *Communities of Practice;* see in particular pp. 67, 81, 83.

34. See Wenger, *Communities of Practice,* chapter 4.

35. Wenger (*Communities of Practice,* p. 98) notes, "Close scrutiny will usually reveal good reasons — functional or dysfunctional — for a practice to be the way it is. . . . It is a mistake to assume that practice is inherently a conservative force, and it is also a mistake to assume that practice is erratic or can be modified by decree."

cannot merely be skimmed over to be thoroughly understood. While at [a local coffee shop] earlier this week, I made the mistake of hastily casting a rather negative judgment on one of our customers. This young, attractive woman, thin as a twig, visited us on St. Patrick's Day to order a drink. I immediately smelled smoke on her person and noticed her seductively clingy attire. Prostitute? I wouldn't put it past her. She was definitely leading a shady life, maybe involved with drugs. But hey, why was I thinking these things? Had I exchanged two words with her yet? No. My fellow Barista, Chris, finished off her drink, made some small talk, and found out that she was on her way to a nursing home for the night to visit a friend. (Journal Entry 5)

A few weeks later, in the final journal entry of the semester, the same student took up this train of thought and pursued it further:

Not long ago, I took reading Christianly and applied it to the way I read people. I noticed myself casting rash judgments on people without understanding them, knowing their backgrounds, or even talking to them. I think especially because of the focus in this class to read Christianly, I tried to change this bad habit. I had an opportunity to practice reading people Christianly only this past weekend. A middle-aged man from out of town came in, in search of a computer. He claimed he had been wandering around Grand Rapids for the past two days in search of his sister, who he only knew lived somewhere near Kentwood. He didn't have her phone number and needed to look it up online (in an e-mail because she was unlisted). [The coffee shop] doesn't have computers, though, only Internet service. My co-worker wanted to get him out; she thought he was off his rocker. But I talked to him for a little while, and upon hearing he hadn't eaten in at least a day, gave him a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and told him he could ask one of our customers to use their computer. One gentleman was kind enough to let him. So he got on, and couldn't find her number, but left a message for her to come and pick him up; he would be waiting.

Having been in a similar situation once myself (lost in Germany), I was sensitive to his needs and feeling of exhaustion and helplessness. I took my own experience and related it to his, and because of my Christianity, I asked myself over and over what the right thing to do would be. Like skimming over a text leave[s] one unsatisfied, and does an injustice to text and author, I was not at peace having briefly met this man, to leave him out on Breton [Road] for the night. I had to go back

(with a male friend), if only to keep him company for a short while, but possibly to bring him somewhere to spend the night.

In this way, I believe, allowing time to get to know a work (or person), realizing from what sort of framework we're looking at it, and doing so lovingly, this is how we should read Christianly.[36]

Here the student responds explicitly to the focus on Christian reading, and indicates awareness of development in her own responses as the semester progressed. While it would be folly to assert that this class was the sole source of her spiritual growth (her own prior maturation and other experiences during the semester were surely in play), she clearly perceives the class as having directly provoked further growth in her ability to suspend judgment of others ("because of the focus in this class to read Christianly"). She also shows explicit awareness of the positive and negative roles of prior identity and interpretive frameworks when it comes to making evaluative judgments ("she thought he was off his rocker"; "having been in a similar situation once myself"; "realizing from what sort of framework we're looking at it"). Most strikingly, she offers an unprompted extension of the class theme to other life experiences ("reading people Christianly") and thus to broader Christian growth.

I suggest that it makes sense to view the negotiations described by this student as arising from the tensions of multi-membership. There are tensions between the classroom community of practice and the community of practice in which she participated as a barista. Participation in the latter typically involves polite but limited engagement with customers, a focus on efficiency, avoidance of possible embarrassments to other patrons, and non-engagement with non-customers. Participation in the former entailed slowing down, learning to avoid swift judgments, and suspecting human depths below the surface. Growth occurred as the practice of charity was allowed to trump the practice of customer service where discord arose between the two. These journal entries provide insufficient evidence to reach general conclusions, but they at least invite the question of whether a focus on ideas alone, without the creation of an alternative repertoire of practices that fostered an alternative identity of participation, would have been enough to force the renegotiation of identity that took place at the boundary between the two communities of practice. Wenger points out that

36. Student journal, German 308: Twentieth-Century German Literature II, Calvin College, May 2006; this material is quoted with permission.

in the process of sustaining a practice, we become invested in what we do as well as in each other and our shared history. Our identities become anchored in each other and what we do together. As a result, it is not easy to become a radically new person in the same community of practice. Conversely, it is not easy to transform oneself without the support of a community, as reflected by the countless support groups proposed by the self-help industry.[37]

This suggests that Christian learning ought to be approached not as the insertion of Christian ideas into the default social dynamics of the college classroom, but rather as the intentional fostering of communities of counter-practice rooted in the history of Christian practices.

In terms of matters such as ability to read and interpret literary German, and knowledge of literary movements, terminology, and the sociohistorical background to the works studied, the students in this course did at least as well as those in any previous version that I have taught. I am confident that the redesign to accommodate a focus on charitable reading did not result in a diminishment of learning with regard to conventional goals. This was still very much a class in the literature of German-speaking countries; in fact, it was still a survey course. I did, however, see encouraging signs of spiritual growth in the comments and assignments of many of the students. This was neither guaranteed nor uniform, and some students showed signs of business as usual; this was, however, balanced with striking evidence of growth such as that described above.[38] This of course remains a particular class, with its own peculiar parameters, location, and context. I offer it not as a blueprint, but as an example suggestive of the conclusion that the effort to think through Christian pedagogy in the light of the history of Christian practices is worthwhile, and might even fruitfully extend the repertoire of Christian higher education.

37. Wenger, *Communities of Practice,* p. 89.

38. That students should show different degrees of appropriation of the underlying Christian practice goals is not only not surprising, but also not necessarily an indication of lack of progress. As Joseph Dunne notes, "There are important practices which, even though they contain possibilities of great virtuosity, are nonetheless available with real integrity at quite modest, even rudimentary, levels of accomplishment." See Joseph Dunne, "What's the Good of Education?" in *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Philosophy of Education,* ed. Wilfred Carr (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 154.

The Rough Trail to Authentic Pedagogy: Incorporating Hospitality, Fellowship, and Testimony into the Classroom

Carolyne Call

What does it mean to be a Christian educator? This is a question I ask myself on a regular basis. Besides teaching in a faith-based institution and referring to myself as a religious professional, what would it mean to say that I am an educator who is a Christian? Would my own faith life make any difference in how I practice my craft in a classroom? Should it? I would like to say it would, and was tempted to assume this as a given. But such an assumption turned out to be pedagogical hubris. Considering the impact of Christian practices on pedagogy pushed me to become intentional about the role of faith in the actual practice of teaching. The idea of practicing hospitality in the classroom arose for me out of Parker Palmer's work[1] and seemed to mesh well with my own previous understanding of how I approach teaching. Wanting to be more deliberate about the integration between my faith life and my pedagogical approach, I started to reflect seriously on a question posed by Ellen Marmon: "What would be different about your teaching if you thought of yourself as a *host* and of your students as *guests*?"[2] This chapter explores how I answered this question.

In order to answer the question, I decided to change the format of an annual course I teach to pre-service teachers. The course is titled "Adolescent Psychology" and is a requirement for all students with a secondary education minor. There are typically from twenty to twenty-five students in the class, and majors vary widely. Students usually have had at least an introductory course in psychology or educational psychology, although this

1. Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

2. Ellen L. Marmon, "Teaching as Hospitality," *Asbury Theological Journal* 63, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 33-39.