RELIGIOUS PRACTICE – CONCEPT, ISSUES AND APPLICATION

by

JOHN TYLER STARKE

(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

The work of historians and sociologists in the last thirty years has spurred within the field of religious studies a vibrant interest in the notion of “practice.” While it has been increasingly used in discourse on various subjects, there has not been much concentrated attention on the notion itself. Contemporary Buddhist ethics and the “Christian practices” movement have both expanded upon its relevance and importance to religious life and study; however, my aim is to provide additional breadth and depth to this inquiry.

In addition to the historical development of the rise of “practice” discourse, issues of text, context and compartmentalization supply additional facets to enrich this area of study. I aim to offer a working definition of “religious practice,” to cite its appearance in religious texts and to illustrate its relevance to daily life.

INDEX WORDS: practice, Enlightenment, morality, virtue ethics, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, particularity, postmodern, Alasdair MacIntyre, Buddhist ethics, compartmentalization, Craig Dykstra, Dorothy Bass, holistic, doctrinalism, ritualism, Amos
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DEDICATION

To the only One who knows me fully and yet still pursues me relentlessly.

Soli deo gloria
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Rise of “Practice”

Within the last three decades, a growing attentiveness to “practice” has surfaced in a wide spectrum of disciplines in the West, ranging from the studies of the historical and social sciences to the ethics literature of the business world. While the breadth of this increasing interest in practice – whether any increase in “practicality” has actually occurred from it or merely that the inclusion of “practice” and “practices” has become yet another inert linguistic tool – is significant, for the sake of scope and simplicity, I will limit my inquiry to the area of religious practices. However, doing so requires some initial widening of perspective in order to trace this increased use of “practice” in religious discourse to its sources.

The Crumbling of Enlightenment Morality

Alasdair MacIntyre, in After Virtue, provides useful insight into the effects and the failure of what he calls the “Enlightenment project.” The assertion of the individual “as sovereign in his moral authority” and the unraveling of morality’s “teleological… character” sent not only tremors through the thinking of that time, but resulted also in powerful aftershocks still felt in the present.¹ Much of “Western thought” is still defined by – whether directly from or in opposition to – this individualized, compartmentalized

paradigm. In addition to the shift in the guiding *substance* of thought, there came the need to justify a new *source* for morality that had previously been “kept safe” largely within metaphysical (as proceeding chiefly from ecclesiastical) structures. The attempts to do so took two shapes: utilitarianism and Kant’s practical reason. Those theories – both utilitarian and Kantian – that were to serve as a moral step forward from the intellectual “misperceptions” and abuses of the past, though founded on the rationalistic tenets of the Enlightenment, would erode over time under critique. It appears that the credulity in religious authority as found in “the Middle Ages” had not been replaced by an irrefutable, comprehensive logic. Instead, a similar type of credulity persisted, but in a different form.

Both utilitarianism and practical reason aspired to a certain universality of application. Their proponents sought to set forth systems that would be pertinent and appropriate in situations of any scale and type. The Enlightenment-engendered insistence on the indisputable authority of Reason, humanity’s ability (even, duty) to work with it and the limitlessness of its scope – instead of safeguarding its legitimacy over time in the intellectual and moral arenas, proved to be the weak points under which Reason’s tenability would later crumble. In different ways, each moral perspective contained flaws that would completely prohibit the opportunity for such breadth of relevance.

Utilitarianism would hinge its viability on the notion of “pleasure” or “utility.” Though the concept of favoring actions which would generate the greatest “utility” in any situation seems simple enough, the problem arises when one examines what exactly is meant by this central term. MacIntyre cites the weakness of the theory on two levels. First, “utility” or “pleasure” might be one thing to one individual and something
completely different to another. Further, a person’s preference and perceptions of what is either most needed or most desirable change over time and in varying circumstances. In the end, “utility” is a highly subjective term, conforming not only to each individual, but changing dynamically even within each person. Thus, Henry Sidgwick, in his attempt to further strengthen the utilitarian perspective through critique admitted that “where he had looked for Cosmos, he had in fact found only Chaos.”

The second weakness of utilitarianism emerges on a broader, social level. MacIntyre suggests that, often, “[pleasure is] a pseudo-concept available for a variety of ideological uses…Hence when we encounter its use in practical life, it is always necessary to ask what actual project or purpose is being concealed by its use.” In other words, “utility” rarely exists without some usefulness towards a particular end. “Utility” can serve as a rhetorical or ideological tool for those in power in order to generate a given perspective and, hence, desired results. Further, as is increasingly apparent, the defining of “utility” by marketing and image-consciousness media also could sway definitions of utility. This ambiguity created by individual differences (and changing preferences) and subtle, yet socially directed ends deprives utilitarianism of any potential of being a universally agreeable and applicable basis for morality.

Kant’s concept of practical reason, on the other hand, fails because of the circumstantial impossibility of its exercise in any and all places. Drawing from the work of Alan Gewirth as a representative of the Kantian perspective, MacIntyre explains that there is “a certain measure of freedom and well-being as prerequisites for…[the] exercise

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2 Ibid., 63.
3 Ibid., 62.
of rational agency." Next, he proceeds to dissect and critique Gewirth’s designation of these criteria as “rights” which people naturally possess. Here, the critical crack in Gewirth’s reasoning appears in his assumption that these “rights” are actually or ever have been universally available. It is not that these prerequisites are disagreeable in themselves, but that in reality they are not universally obtainable. In that the “freedom” and “well-being” Gewirth describes are contingent upon very particular social and institutional situations, claims to their accessibility to all humanity are suspect.

The dissolution of these moral theories represented, at least in part, the failure of the Enlightenment project to provide a sustainable ground for morality for its cultural and intellectual descendents in the West. MacIntyre notes that, as the traditional structures of moral authority had been largely abandoned, the individual moral agent was left with no support for this new-found, “unbound” morality. And in the vacuum that was left, in swept “emotivism.” This is “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.” The universal application to which utilitarianism and Kantian rationalism aspired was all but forsaken by this new emotivism. As a result, the individual and society as a whole stands with no useful, defendable grounding for some sense of morality, much less, a coherent way of life (though MacIntyre’s invocation of tradition’s importance provides an “improvement” upon the isolated individualism that he condemns, his solution is no more an unconditional basis for morality as it offers a more parochial framework through which values and actions could be evaluated).

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4 Ibid., 64.
5 Ibid., 65-66.
6 Ibid., 11.
Though a comprehensive explanation of the Enlightenment’s failure to supply a viable universal morality cannot be undertaken, this brief sketch attempts to illustrate how the Enlightenment’s failure to offer a viable, universal morality resulted in what now seems like futile groping for some sense of meaning and morality that is not subject to the fancy of each individual person. Therefore, finding conceptual common ground for morality has proved to be a slippery slope.

Enlightenment Epistemology and Postmodernity

Along with the Enlightenment’s failure to provide a practical, universal, and meaningful ground for morality, a demand for the supremacy of rationality also created issues which impact the current importance of “practice.” As one of the principal facets of Enlightenment thought, Reason eventually became the strongest criterion for epistemological validity. Whereas in centuries previous, the Church had provided for the conveying and interpretation of information, rationality provided a new lens through which to look at the world. And it was the whole world that Reason aspired to grasp and rein in through understanding. Beginning largely with the natural sciences, this approach aimed chiefly to study through observation, to test through experimentation and to classify according to results. The development of the scientific method nurtured a perceived division between the investigator and the object of inquiry as well as building the foundation for a highly schematized, classifiable approach to knowledge and, in turn, the world.

Postmodern discourse has problematized this Enlightenment worldview as scholars have recognized the inadequacy of this perspective, due mostly to its underlying
assumptions and the vast complexity of reality which resists simplified categorization. However, merely deconstructing previous categories and schema has perhaps proven equally insufficient. Many postmodern theorists initially approached conceptual problems with conceptual solutions. This took the shape of deconstructing the idea of the metanarrative and the (in)ability to maintain objectivity, for instance. However, with time, it seems that those involved in the movement realized that, by providing only theoretical objections and alternatives, they were merely perpetuating that which they had criticized: the Enlightenment’s penchant for over-conceptualization. Though a sensitivity to practice had long been present in Western scholarship – in practical theology, Christian studies, or comparative religious studies – the work of Foucault and Derrida helped to bring about a heightened emphasis on practicality within academia. As a result, a greater awareness of practices and attention not only to “real life,” but also to “the average person” began, with the work of these theorists, to move increasingly into the foreground of various academic discourses. Here one finds Michel Foucault examining the specific practices in penitentiaries and Jacques Derrida speaking directly to the notion and playing-out of hospitality. It is out of these developments that the discussion of “practice” and “practices” grew.

“Practice” and Its Current Relevance

The notion of “practice” allows for the reexamination of the effects of categorically-based Enlightenment thinking and the practical reappraisal of Western postmodern critique, offering a springboard from which to move forward from these. “Practice,” instead of swinging the pendulum in the opposite direction from conceptual
thinking, aims at recognizing and achieving a balance between these deeply inherent patterns of perception and endeavors to pay attention to the particular practical implications “in reality.” Shared beliefs and perspectives on morality are not impossible to find; however, their diversity and complexity provides numerous and substantial inhibitors, not only to understanding, but to the ability to find common ground.

Examining what people do provides a greater opportunity for meaningful interaction and study. These “practices” are embodied; that is, they are manifest and visible. There is a particular latency to “belief” in its conceptual, but also its sometimes highly intricate nature. Hence, beliefs in themselves cannot be observed, while practices can. The visibility and empirical nature of practices opens the door for conversation. A closer attention to practices could help fill in the gaps where conceptual translation is difficult.

The increasing degree to which the world is confronted with its own diversity further necessitates such tools for understanding. As religion is often a defining and motivating influence for people, the ability to understand what people do and why is becoming increasingly crucial at a time when encounters with different cultures occurs more easily and more often. In that (post)modern discourse favors an awareness of the diversity of cultures and traditions (if not moving towards a wholly pluralistic outlook), practices provide crucial open doors for dialogue and understanding. Again, I am wary of speaking with excessive generalities, but the discussion of beliefs (especially within discussions of morality and its justification) can often present an impasse for finding common ground. While beliefs typically take a systematic shape thereby making the justification of morality a highly complicated affair when multiple perspectives are involved, practices offer a sort of “neutral ground” in which common goals (morality)
can take a common shape (practices) but with potential for a variety of reasons (beliefs, traditions, etc.). Within religion and philosophical discourse, this seems to be the major impetus for the recent rise in the usage of “practice” as a meaningful and applicable concept. Such an approach allows for the finding of commonality while maintaining and appreciating diversity among a vast variety of religious traditions.

*Pitfalls in Perspective*

Amidst the endeavor to provide opportunities for understanding between different religious traditions, caution and vigilance are indispensable. A concentration on practices can not only become unbalanced – as a kind of praxis-only approach – but can also distort the topic of discussion if the grounding assumptions and underlying agendas go unexamined. As a result, it is crucial to value and move towards an understanding and interpretation of other cultures that is both balanced and precise. Awareness of the implications of our perceptions must also be safeguarded. For example, in studying other religious traditions, there is a two-fold temptation either to minimize (pejoratively) or to appropriate that which is and those whom are under investigation. The former distances the “subject” from the “object” and often attempts to describe what is observed in a way that is diminutive and subsequently dangerous. The latter, however, though it *seems* less precarious, also tends to minimize the observed tradition by means of injecting the subject’s own agenda or sense of meaning into it while ignoring unwanted factual data. While this caveat may initially appear as conceptual or detached, it is crucial to remember that perceptions yield perspectives. These perspectives ultimately shape the ways individuals and communities view and understand the world as a whole. In turn,
these schemas, more pertinently, give form and direction to interactions between individuals, especially those different from themselves.

All along the Western front

These cautions in mind, though I intend this work to be useful for anyone involved with any religious tradition, it is rooted primarily in the Christian tradition and, subsequently, pertains predominantly to the West and its culture and, more precisely, to American society. There are a number of factors in Western and American culture that have contributed to the recent increase in considering “practices” within religious traditions. A group of scholars involved in practical theology have had much to say about the various catalysts that have increased the importance of a practice-orientation. A number of facets of late 20th- and early 21st-century American life have garnered their attention. Craig Dykstra, for example, points to “profound ambiguities intrinsic to contemporary…life.”

According to Dykstra and others involved in the “Christian practices” movement, Americans are besieged by a host of activities and beset with busyness, but amidst all the doing in daily life, there is little to no meaning. Further, Dykstra claims that, even if they were interested, “most people do not know where to go to find resources adequate for dealing with our personal and cultural moral ambiguity.”

Not only have the sources of community, meaning and purpose been uprooted from any practical grounding, it appears that recovering them has also become more difficult. In fact, a vigorous individualism has come to characterize “the ‘habits of the heart’ – that

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8 Ibid.
include consciousness, culture, and the daily practices of life” – of America.⁹ As life has become increasingly frenetic and decreasingly examined by those who live it, a reconnection with religious tradition and the practices within could provide a restoration of coherency and meaning to what has become scattered and chaotic.

My Approach to “Practice”

This work contains three sections, each meant to examine “religious practice” in various ways. In the first chapter, I will discuss “practice” more fully, giving specific attention to the processes by which the concept emerged in modern academic discourse – not only from its postmodern sources, but also to its rise to prominence in the “Christian practices literature” (Dykstra, Bass, et al.) and contemporary Buddhist ethics, both drawing significantly from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. I will formulate a working definition and relate it to its analogues – ritual and liturgy. Finally, I will provide a list of – what I would characterize as – the aspects of “religious practices.”

“Problems” deals with those areas I have observed that have contributed to and served as catalysts for the discourse on “practice.” Briefly, the trend of compartmentalization in various areas of life becomes central to understanding the dilemmas which I address. I first treat the emergence of this inclination in the area of belief, examining aspects and implications of its disproportionate occurrence (doctrinalism). To a large degree, I will draw from an inquiry into the Stoics and the historiography of Michel Foucault in order to illustrate its existence and effects. Second, I will examine the compartmentalization of belief from its counterpart, action. Drawing

from the book of Amos, I will provide an example of how mechanized, unreflective religious identification and action can yield harmful, even dangerous, results.

The final segment of this work (as located in the appendices) will consist of a series of interviews I conducted with various religious “professionals” around the state of Georgia. In each session, I posed a series of questions to each person, relating to “religious practice” itself and the gap between belief and practice. Being able to hear from the perspectives of those experienced in helping people in their religious endeavors should prove, I hope, interesting and illuminating.

**Goals**

Overall, my simple goals for this work are, first, to give some background to the recent discourse on “practice”; second, to delineate what “religious practice” is and what it includes; and third, to raise attention to the current issues and problems involved in the discussion. Further, I have no intent to add merely to the body of knowledge on religious practices, but, somehow to provide practical assistance in whatever way possible – perhaps in furnishing means for attaining greater inter-religious understanding. Michel Foucault, in an interview over his contribution to the field of philosophy, admits, “My books aren’t treatises in philosophy or studies of history: at most they are philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems.” With Foucault, I hope to see my work “put to work.”

Finally, my greatest hope for this paper is that some personal effect might come about for each reader – myself included! Michel deCerteau points to previous

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sociological inquiry that has focused largely on “the representations of a society, on one hand, and its modes of behavior, on the other. Building on our knowledge of these social phenomena, it seems both possible and necessary to determine the use to which they are put by groups or individuals.”¹¹ I will address beliefs and representations as well as the actions that proceed from them; however, it is the particular use to which they are put into practice that is of central concern here. The ability to differentiate between beliefs and practices is useful for understanding, but it also underscores the compartmentalizing potential in our society that has lead to the division of our lives into various, separate arenas of work, home, friends, leisure, religion, volunteering and many more. “If our high culture could begin to talk about nature and history, space and time, in ways that did not disaggregate them into fragments,” Bellah suggests, “it might be possible for us to find connections and analogies with the older ways in which human life was made meaningful.”¹² This kind of self-awareness and self-examination would assist anyone in assessing the coherency, intentionality and meaning in her or his life.

¹² Bellah, 283.
CHAPTER 2

PRACTICE

Approaching “Practice”

Instead of beginning with a delineation of “practice” and proceeding with a historical explanation of its development as a concept, a reversal of this order should prove more instructive for this notion. In examining religious practice, it is crucial to acknowledge that the recognizability and familiarity that “religion” enjoys within Western language and culture is not possessed to nearly the same degree by (religious) “practice” as a meaningful term in itself (as opposed to simply being a subcategory of other subjects). Though I have provided some background information concerning the emergence of the “practice” discourse as stemming from various historical and philosophical factors, I will attempt to more fully trace the evolving employments of the concept as it has been utilized in different arenas of discussion. Doing so will help to clarify both the general and specific uses of “practice” and, for the sake of this inquiry, to more precisely understand what has come to be called “religious practice.” I will begin, assuming a broader perspective, with two postmodern philosophers (Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau) and their attentiveness to discrepancies between theory and history, practice and reality. From here I will then briefly touch upon the impact of Alasdair MacIntyre and his work, After Virtue. In addition to this, I will briefly incorporate some of the Aristotelian sources from which he drew. Finally, the “Christian practices literature” and an Aristotelian approach to Buddhist ethics, both drawing upon the work
of MacIntyre, not only comprise the most recent developments in the attention to religious practice but also (especially from the “Christian practices”) form the foundations of my own understanding of the notion.

A Look at the Progression

To seek to define the boundaries within which “practice” is used in modern academic discourse would prove a tiresome endeavor. It is less a specific, solidified field of inquiry and more a perspectival shift within various disciplines. The humanities and social sciences alone have been highly saturated by its usage. Though there is certainly some common ground in reference to what is meant by “practice,” its appearance in a variety of areas yields numerous nuanced differences. In an attempt to understand this multiplicity of meanings, I will employ the same typology that Kathleen A. Cahalan derives from Paul Lakeland in her article “Three Approaches to Practical Theology, Theological Education, and the Church’s Ministry.” The following categorization by no means does justice to the complexity of the use of “practice” within various individual fields and, further, the interdisciplinary nature of these disciplines. Nonetheless, as an open-handed means for comprehension, it provides a fluid structure which helps to clarify some of the variant usages of “practice” in discourse.

Cahalan, drawing from Lakeland’s “description of three postmodern options in philosophy and theology,” points to the late modern, countermodern and radically postmodern approaches in examining the current types of practical theology. While the

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2 Ibid., 65.
present inquiry operates both within and outside of practical theology, Lakeland’s model will suffice.

The first, late modern, option is “modern” in its attempts to locate universals and an ongoing adherence to some form of a metanarrative. It is “late” in that its scholars more fully recognize the realities of context, particularity and subjectivity amidst this search for universal principles. Late modern thinkers include Jurgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and – Cahalan’s primary example – Don Browning. The late modern method retains the Enlightenment’s valuing of practical reasoning. In references to Browning’s work, Cahalan contends that “The capacity to engage in practical reasoning, both its universalizing and its consensus-building capacities, mark his project as particularly late modern.”

Cahalan also suggests that the social sciences, to a large degree, fall within this approach as well.

The countermoderns’ defining trait is that they “look backward in order to look forward.” That is, in their discussion of practice, countermoderns draw from sources of tradition – in particular, the Christian religious tradition – to define “practice” and explore its usage and manifestation. This approach to practices has evolved largely within Protestant Christian literature, particularly in reference to Christian education. Dorothy Bass, Craig Dykstra and Miroslav Volf are a few of the primary voices of this perspective.

Finally, the third group is what Cahalan calls the radical postmoderns. Suspicious of the lingering effects of the Enlightenment, postmodern theologians have tended to move towards “praxis-based theologies, in particular liberation, feminist, and contextual

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3 Ibid., 69.
4 Ibid., 66.
theologies.” However, a great deal of the interest in “practice” comes in postmodern thinking that is outside religion and theology. The fields of sociology, philosophy and history have all begun, especially in the last twenty years, to incorporate a vigilant attention to practices.

At this point, I will pay particular attention to the perspectives of Michel Foucault and Craig Dykstra within the current discourse on practices and their unique contributions to this discussion. I will begin with Foucault not only because of his chronological precedence but more in light of the broader nature of his attention to and use of “practice.”

**Foucault – Problematization, Practice and the Stoics**

Michel Foucault, though not involved directly in the religious use of “practice,” largely set the stage for this occurrence. He would fall most readily into Lakeland’s “radical postmodern” category. Primarily a sociologist and historian, Foucault centered upon the critique of power structures within society and, accordingly, a critique of the process of historiography. Both of these foci were, for Foucault, problematic products generated by the Enlightenment. As he examined the institutional and intellectual structures of his time, Foucault saw the issues of problematization (as present in the former) and the “ideal type” (a device of the latter) as signifiers of the importance of particularity and practice.

In his study of history, society and philosophy, Foucault centers upon the concept of “problematization.” At the end of his *Truth & Discourse* lectures, he explains:

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5 Ibid.
What I tried to do from the beginning was to analyze the process of ‘problematization’ – which means: how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) became a problem. Why, for example, certain forms of behavior were characterized and classified as ‘madness’ while other similar forms were completely neglected at a given historical moment; the same thing for crime and delinquency, the same question for problematization for sexuality.\(^6\)

While the focus here may initially appear to be a conceptual or categorical one, the underlying implications of these classifications in real life are what hold Foucault’s interest. In \textit{The Care of the Self}, the third volume in his \textit{History of Sexuality}, Foucault examines the problematization of sexuality in the first two centuries. He documents the change from previous centuries’ laxity and openness towards sexuality to a more austere perception of \textit{aphrodisia} in the first and second centuries. This conceptual shift of the sexual led to a corresponding popular response in reality. Among other social and philosophical factors, the regarding of the sexual act as potentially wasteful or dangerous contributed to the perceived need for “the care of the self.” With this shift also came a number of implications for daily life. This \textit{cura sui}, according to Foucault, “emphasizes the importance of developing all the practices and all the exercises by which one can maintain self-control and eventually arrive at a pure enjoyment of oneself.”\(^7\) Foucault goes on to specifically locate the practice of the “care of the self” among philosophers of the first two centuries, in particular, the Stoics. Drawing from Seneca, Epictetus and

\(^6\) Michel Foucault, \textit{Discourse and Truth – The Problematization of Parrhesia}, The University of California at Berkeley, October – November 1983, Eds. Joseph Pearson (1985) and Reed (1999, 2006) (http://foucault.info/ documents/parrhesia, 2006). 4. Referencing Foucault’s \textit{Truth & Discourse} lectures are difficult for two reasons: the source is internet-based and the lectures are divided into six sections. When I cite these lectures directly, I will cite specifically the section in which the thought or quotation occurs, thus making it more readily accessible to the reader.

Marcus Aurelius, Foucault catalogues the various practices, disciplines and techniques used by the Stoics in the *cura sui*. From self-reflection and meditation to communal dialogue and correspondence with letters, the Stoics employed a number of techniques – both individual and communal – aimed at bringing their *logos* (their unifying beliefs or schema) into complete conformity with their *bios* (their daily lives). As various conditions brought about the change in conceptualization of sexuality, the notion of the “care of the self” rose to importance, bringing with it a myriad of changes in the real, *everyday lives of people*. The Stoic philosophers had no interest in mere acquisition of new information; in fact, they were vocally opposed to it. Instead, Epictetus and his contemporaries stressed the importance of transformation through practice. Sweeping change certainly took place; however, Foucault points to the rise of the notion of the *cura sui* and its analogous practices as causing this effect, not institutional prescription.

**Foucault – “Ideal Types,” Practices and Historiography**

Moving forward, Foucault bases his critique of historiography on the same principles that he examines in the Stoic philosophers. His concern for practice in the broader historical field centers upon his examination of what he calls the “ideal type.” He explains:

Schematically one can say that the ‘ideal type’ is a category of historical interpretation; it’s a structure of understanding for the historian who seeks to integrate, after the fact, a certain set of data: it allows him to recapture an ‘essence’ (Calvinism, the State, the capitalist enterprise), working from general
principles that are not at all present in the thoughts of the individuals whose concrete behaviors is nevertheless to be understood on their basis.⁸

In short, the same discrepancies between concept and reality against which the Stoics had pitted themselves have emerged over time in the discipline of historiography. The same self-awareness that Epictetus required of his followers Foucault found lacking in the majority of historical inquiry of the past and during his own time. As a result, Foucault underscores the vital importance of practices – that is, what happens in reality. The Enlightenment had left the field of historiography with an unquestioned methodology of (oversimplified) categorization. According to Foucault, this “ivory-tower” approach to history betrays a host of hegemonic relations underneath the surface. The writing of history had become a tool of those in power, giving only nominal attention to “the real” and more focus on (re)writing the (meta)narratives of the nation-state or, more simply, those holding authority. Therefore, for Foucault, the primacy of practice became a necessary tool in the investigation of what actually goes on in the real world and the unveiling of the power-dynamics he saw as lying underneath all social phenomena. His concentration on practices represented his resistance to the hegemonic histories and the stated (though not manifested) intentions and motives of the sources of power.

De Certeau – A Shift towards the Quotidian

Michel de Certeau, a contemporary of Foucault, though he wrote much on a wide range of other topics, is perhaps most well known for his work The Practice of Everyday

Life. In it, he seeks to shift the focus away from the overt and institutional to the covert and personal. He asserts that

This goal will be achieved if everyday practices, ‘ways of operating’ or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity, and if a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories, and perspectives, by penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them.\(^9\)

While much of history and sociology have favored a kind of bird’s-eye view in which “movements,” institutions and major figures remain the foci, de Certeau is interested in the quotidian and individual responses to these larger forces. Importing terms like *la perruque* and *bricolage* – both signifying what he describes as an “artisan-like inventiveness”\(^10\) – de Certeau points to the ways in which

the worker’s own work [is] disguised as work for his employer…In the very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his *work* and to confirm his solidarity with other works or his family through *spending* his time in this way.\(^11\)

The individual, though surrounded by a web of power-complexes – whether at work, at home, or on the street – consciously and unconsciously reclaims the works and duties that are handed to her or him and, often times, reappropriates them in a more meaningful or productive way. This process becomes most clear in de Certeau’s distinction between “strategies” and “tactics.” Very simply, “strategies” represent, in a way similar to Foucault’s attentiveness to power dynamics, the prescription of propriety, usually coming

\(^10\) Ibid., xviii.
from institutional sources or the positionally powerful. In other words, “strategies” could be understood as “top-down” regulation, the defining of relations from a source that exists in relative isolation from the milieu which it seeks to normalize. On the other hand, de Certeau states, “I call a ‘tactic’…a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other.”12 “Tactics” operate “on the ground,” either paying little attention to the boundaries prescribed by “strategies” or appropriating an alternative sense of meaning or purpose within them. Instead of larger, hegemonic entities, “tactics” are a resource for individuals, for those not in power. De Certeau’s work, along with Foucault’s, has brought to the fore a greater attentiveness to reality, its particularity, the individuals that exist within it and the meaning they extract from it.

**Aristotle and MacIntyre – Building Bridges**

Alasdair MacIntyre, writing his major work *After Virtue* around the same time that Foucault was finishing his *History of Sexuality* and de Certeau his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, shared with these writers a deep dissatisfaction with the inherited societal structures and values of the Enlightenment. However, MacIntyre’s focus centered less upon historiography or hegemony and more on morality. The Reason-enamored tradition of the Enlightenment had offered highly Platonized moral options, as MacIntyre saw them, sweeping in scope but unrealistic and untenable. As a result, MacIntyre turned to Aristotle for the foundations of a newly constructed morality. Proposing that the Enlightenment project had failed to provide a sustainable universal morality, MacIntyre

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12 Ibid., xix.
turns to Thomas Aquinas' synthesis of a tradition-based value system (Christianity) and a philosophy that balances a broad perspective with an awareness of particularity and practicality (Aristotelianism). Emerging from this marriage comes the concept of “virtue ethics,” as distinguished from the deontological and consequentialist varieties. Instead of looking merely at the value or rightness of the action itself or its effects, virtue ethics attempts to broaden the scope. As a result, while particular actions and implications remain vitally important to the formulation of virtue ethics, these are set in the holistic context of a meaningful, purposed life. Aristotle states: “So virtue is a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent man would use to determine it.”

In the preceding section, Aristotle is careful to distinguish virtue from emotions and faculty. It is not, he maintains, a certain feeling of goodness or rightness, nor is it merely an ability to do or be good. Instead, a balanced emphasis rests on the discerning of a foundational logos (a concept later used by the Stoics) along with particular diligence in cultivating habits that proceed from and reinforce this guiding principle. These habits – practices amidst our bios, or “daily life” – possess a circular relationship with the logos. The two feed off of and into the other. Aristotle explains that

In a word, then, like activities produce like dispositions. Hence we must give our activities a certain quality, because it is their characteristics that determine the resulting dispositions. So it is a matter of no little importance what sort of habits we form from the earliest age – it makes a vast difference, or rather all the difference in the world.

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14 Ibid., 32.
From this, MacIntyre points to what he calls “internal goods” in practices. By this he means that certain activities and disciplines carry value within themselves. At first glance, this seems no different from deontological ethics; however, MacIntyre means more by this term. The value of the activity rests in its contribution to a holistic framework of meaning in someone’s life. It is not limited to the good of a particular action; rather, the action finds its good in itself and, even more so, in its fitting into a larger moral, teleological framework.

The beginnings of this attention to particularity that sprouted in the writings of Foucault and de Certeau further developed with MacIntyre. However, MacIntyre’s work differed from theirs in its shift towards the subject of morality. In this sense, he serves as a bridge between the historical-social beginnings of “practice” and the more recent ethico-religious discussion in this area. In the work of Aristotle, the source on which MacIntyre relied most heavily, relevance to both facets (historical/social and ethical/religious) of the “practice” discussion becomes evident. The philosopher asks a demanding question and answers it himself:

Or is the correct view that…in the case of conduct the end consists not in gaining theoretical knowledge of the several points at issue, but rather in putting our knowledge into practice? In that case it is not enough to know about goodness; we must endeavour to possess and use it, or adopt any other means to become good ourselves.\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^\text{15}\) Ibid., 277.
“Christian Practices”

The substantial impact of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* emerges in the growth of two areas of ethical discourse: the “Christian practices” and contemporary Buddhist ethics. I will treat the former here and address the latter next. In the “Foreword to the Second Edition” in Craig Dykstra’s *Growing in the Life of Faith*, Dorothy Bass writes that Craig Dykstra, the veritable spokesman for the “Christian practices” movement, “draws on the work of the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre while also integrating MacIntyre’s concepts with theological themes from the Reformed tradition.” Immediately following, Bass points to her own reliance upon the same source: “MacIntyre’s concepts also influenced the work I was doing during those same years…I appreciated MacIntyre’s notion of…the goods at the heart of a tradition.” It is chiefly MacIntyre’s valuing of tradition and virtue as based in character that serve as the connecting point for the work of these practical theologians. Similarly, it is in these two areas that I too center much of my own definition of “religious practice” and its implementation. As a result, in that I draw heavily from the “Christian practices approach,” I will give a somewhat more thorough explanation of this perspective’s claims on the needs for and definition of “practice.”

*Catalysts for “Christian practices”*

Those involved in practical theology and the “Christian practices” movement cite a number of cultural and existential problems that have necessitated an emphasis on

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17 Ibid.
18 Cahalan, 74.
religious practice. Though they cite a large number of probable causes, I have narrowed the list to a basic four-some: a void of meaning, an unexamined substitute, pace, and the subsequent focus that results from the previous three. It is also crucial to remember that these scholars are speaking largely to a Western and, more specifically, American audience. Though certain phenomena are evident elsewhere, the context from and to which these practical theologians speak is that of the United States.

Dorothy Bass, in *Practicing Our Faith*, points to a general lack of coherency to modern life. Though beset by a barrage of activities, commitments and priorities, there is no unifying structure that brings simplicity and meaning to it all. Pointing to this lack of “a life-giving way of life,” Bass points to how “we turn from one task to another, doing as well as we can but increasingly uncertain about what doing things well would look like.”

According to Bass, increasing numbers of people lack the resources for meaning and direction in their lives – for these practical theologians, religious traditions represent the lost source – and, as a result go about their daily schedule fraught with busyness but devoid of a ballast of purpose. The Enlightenment’s rejection of what it perceived to be religious credulity demanded that this way of life be replaced by one hinged upon universal reason. But, as MacIntyre asserts, this project failed, thus leaving modern, Western society not only without satisfactory direction on how to live based on rationality, but even more distanced from the (religious) traditions that had previously provided such value and structure for daily life. Bass asserts, “I also sense a feeling on the part of many that the language, assumptions, and convictions of a radically secular

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culture no longer are rich enough to sustain the sort of life people feel in their bones it is in them to live.”

Dykstra contends that the space that was once occupied by these reservoirs of meaning is now being flooded by a prevalent “pattern of mutual self-destruction.” In that this drive is so ingrained in the culture of the West – particularly America – it is difficult to discern, although with time it has become increasingly visible. “This particular pattern is called, by social psychologists,” Dykstra states, “the achievement-oriented lifestyle, a style of life that has as its center the compulsion to succeed or achieve in whatever social world one lives in.” Contributing to and proceeding from this widespread culture of self-promotion and self-protection is a frantic pace of life. “On the grand scale, change shows up in major technological advances or global shifts in population,” Bass and Dykstra assert. However, on a day-to-day, personal level, these changes emerge as the demand to “keep up” with all that is going on, whether it be advancing one’s career, becoming more involved in the community or even managing one’s family. Such claims can take the shape of sixty-hour work-weeks or a seemingly endless involvement in activities for adults and children alike.

In the end, this achievement-oriented culture has brought about a culture that is ultimately self-centered. It is at this point where the effects of the media and marketing have had significantly damaging effects on its audience. The availability and reliability of a product is one matter; however, the shift in market to an image-consciousness has played a major part in this problem. Further feeding this dilemma is the highly

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20 Ibid., 4.
21 Dykstra, 86.
22 Ibid.
23 Bass, 3.
individualistic culture of the West. The ideal of freedom has become distorted to an extent that it has birthed isolation. Robert Bellah, in *Habits of the Heart*, points to how “Tocqueville saw the isolation to which Americans are prone as ominous for the future of our freedom.”24 The insistence on success or happiness and the freedom to pursue it, coupled with the individualism upon which “the American ideal” is founded, has resulted in a deeply-rooted isolation in the lives of modern Americans (or Westerners). The popularity and availability of self-help literature and therapeutic groups and programs that urge the individual to “be the you that you want to be” are all indictments of a culture that is increasingly and self-destructively egocentric and isolated. Speaking to this problem, Bass and Dykstra write, “Dislocated and disconnected, we suppose that self-help offers our best hope. Lacking shared beliefs, we conclude that our private preferences are the closest we can come to the truth of matters. When this happens, the solo quest only mimics the disconnectedness that gave it birth.”25 In a sense, then, this self-focus is a cyclical, self-perpetuating process.

These problems are not relegated by these practical theologians to “the world” or “secular culture” but are located within the body of those who profess religious devotion as well. Additionally, Dykstra points to a “nasty suspicion” that has taken a hold within the Christian Church. This latent but lingering doubt undercuts the tenability of religious belief, relegating it to the realm of the highly subjective. As a result, “a kind of practical atheism infects church life, despite the fact that religious services continue to be conducted.”26 Dykstra maintains that religious affiliation remains an important facet of

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25 Bass, 4.
26 Dykstra, 9.
American life; however, it has increasingly become mere affiliation, devoid of ownership, investment and participation. The shape, force and pervasiveness of these problems, within and outside of the Church, necessitate and lend shape to the emphasis on and defining of “Christian practices.”

Defining “Christian Practices”

Dorothy Bass offers definitions both for “practices” and, specifically, “Christian practices.” The defining of the two is crucial in providing the first steps to a practical approach to this search for meaning and groundedness in life. Speaking generally, Bass states that “Practices are those shared activities that address fundamental human needs and that, woven together, form a way of life.”

Here, a distinctly social/communal aspect is central. In contrast to the individualistic trend that has become normal, practices seek to join people together in a community with each other through “shared activities.” The concern for “fundamental human needs” also helps to move individuals out of myopic self-concern and into a broader perspective where they are free to see others as valuable. Finally, these practices do not occur in random isolation from each other. Bass’ choice of words – “woven together” – vividly highlights not only their interconnectedness, but also the intentionality with which this is carried out. Practices thus help facilitate an awareness of the need for community, the inherent value of others and the formation of a coherent way of life.

In pinpointing a definition for Christian practices, Bass describes them as those “things Christian people do together over time in response to and in light of God’s active

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27 Bass, xi.
presence for the life of the world.”\textsuperscript{28} This description includes all aspects of the general “practices,” while adding particularly religious (Christian) specifications. For Bass, basing these practices in the tradition of Christianity means that practices performed now have their grounding in similar practices in the past. In other words, being done “over time” suggests that a certain continuity – and, in most cases, innovation – persists in Christian practices both between and within generations. The phrase “in response to and in light of…” underscores the causality, relationality and motivation of Christian practices. Gratitude and obedience are the intertwining motivators that pull Christians to live “in response to” God. This is only possible insofar as one has an encounter with God that he or she believes to be real and personal – the foundation for these practices is essentially hinged on relationship with God. Similarly, having had a meaningful encounter with God, Christians seek to join with what they perceive God to be doing in the world. In short, Christian practices are imitative. Bass’ inclusion of “God’s active presence” unveils a worldview that is theocentric as opposed to egocentric. In both means and ends, God assumes primacy. “For the life of the world” is similar to the addressing of “fundamental human needs,” but moves towards a greater coherency and broader scope. Meeting human needs can include anything from providing food and shelter to be willing to sit and listen to someone in conversation. However, an investment “for the life of the world” implies some type of initiative that will not only benefit both individuals and the world at large, but also that will not remain constricted within the present, reaching beyond a moment’s time and even an individual or group’s lifetime.

\textsuperscript{28} Bass, 5.
These Christian practices can and do take a variety of shapes. While this is true, Dykstra and Bass both assert that two principal Christian practices undergird and unite all the others. The relational basis of Christian practices brings to the forefront the practices of prayer and reading the Bible. In the former, “Christians doing things together attune themselves to take part, with trust, in the risky activities of God.” The authors describe the latter practice as “a living encounter with the bible…[the] Word, breaking through the ordinary to disclose what God’s activity consists of” and how to take an active part in it. Building off of these two foundational practices, Dykstra and Bass each come up with their own list of important Christian practices that, taken together, form a meaningful, cohesive way of life. Bass formed her list of practices in cooperation with a small group of other practical theologians from a variety of backgrounds. For her list, I drew simply from the chapter titles of her book:

1. Honoring the body
2. Hospitality
3. Household economics
4. Saying yes and saying no
5. Keeping Sabbath
6. Testimony
7. Discernment
8. Shaping communities
9. Forgiveness
10. Healing

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29 Bass, 202.
30 Ibid.
11. Dying well

12. Singing our lives

Dykstra offers a list within his text, choosing not to designate particular chapters for each practice. Drawing from these descriptions, his list of practices includes:

1. worshiping God together
2. telling the Christian story to one another
3. interpreting together the Scriptures and the history of the church’s experience, particularly in relation to their meaning for our own lives in the world
4. praying
5. confessing our sin to one another, and forgiving and becoming reconciled with one another
6. tolerating one another’s failures and encouraging
7. carrying out specific faithful acts of service and witness together
8. giving generously of one’s means and receiving gratefully
9. suffering with and for one another and all whom Jesus showed us to be our neighbors
10. providing hospitality and care
11. listening and talking attentively to one another about our particular experiences in life
12. struggling together to become conscious of and to understand the nature of the context in which we live

31 Ibid., vii-viii.
13. criticizing and resisting all those powers and patterns…that destroy human beings, corrode human community, and injure God’s creation

14. working together to maintain and create social structures and institutions that will sustain life in the world in ways that accord with God’s will

These lists provide a number of opportunities through which individuals and communities involved in “Christian practices” might move towards building a meaningful, holistic life together. However, it is not merely institutional structures that they are trying to circumvent, nor is it a moral philosophy that they are trying to construct. Moving from the historical and social contributions of Foucault and de Certeau and the moral-philosophical work of MacIntyre, Dykstra, Bass and other practical theologians have helped bring the discussion of “practice” into the study – and, more importantly to them, the cultivation – of religiousness.

“Practice” in Contemporary Buddhist Ethics

Recent discourse in contemporary Buddhist ethics has followed a route similar to MacIntyre and the “Christian practices literature.” Many facets of Aristotelian philosophy seem to hold a discernable similarity to moral, ethical tenets of the Buddhist tradition. This ability to draw from the philosopher who has contributed so much to Western philosophy and culture provides a common ground that has proven useful in making Buddhism more understandable and accessible to those in the West. Daniel Keown, in his *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, provides a somewhat helpful explanation of how, historically, Buddhist ethics have been conceived by those within the tradition and,

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32 Dykstra, 42-43.
additionally, how the current bridging with Aristotelian philosophy has taken shape. However, awareness of the historical contexts of ancient/traditional materials and the rhetorical agendas of those using them in the present is essential. For example, though Keown devotes a chapter to “Ethics in the Mahayana,” in the rest of the text, he uses “Buddhism” rather loosely, providing no indication to the reader whether he means early, Theravadan Buddhism (which he, still utilizing the diminutive terminology of the Mahayana, refers to as “Hinayana Buddhism,” or, “the Smaller Vehicle”) as it occurs in third century BCE India, Zen Buddhism in eighteenth century Japan, or any of the numerous Buddhist traditions that existed in the thousands of years and miles in between the two. Keown’s work aims at conveying to a modern, Western audience the ethical intricacies of a tradition that is not only foreign to its audience but also, in this case, is largely generalized for the sake of communicative simplicity.

For the sake of clarity, therefore, when I speak of “Buddhist ethics,” I am referring to the contemporary, largely Western movement within Buddhism (distinct from the historical, non-Westernized “version”). Despite this slippery slope, a brief examination of some of the facets of (Aristotelian) Buddhist ethics as conveyed by Keown should shed light on the breadth of impact of MacIntyre’s work and the common ground that contemporary Buddhist ethics now shares with “Christian practices.”

Keown parallels the goal of Aristotle’s philosophy – *eudaemonia* (“happiness”) – and that of Buddhist ethics, *nirvana*. Though careful not to claim exact congruency, Keown does assert that they are “functionally and conceptually related” to one another as being “the final goal” of their respective traditions.33 Similarly, both provide a moral framework in which the means and the end are inextricable. This teleological ethic is

reminiscent of MacIntyre’s “internal goods” which have value not only in and of themselves, but also as they participate in the *telos*. Keown delineates this thrust of Buddhist ethics from the utilitarian theories of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, wherein the emphasis centers on the utility of the act itself (Bentham) or the rule which ought to govern the act (Mill).

Similar categorical structures also emerge between Keown’s assessment of Buddhist ethics and Aristotelian philosophy. Most notably, both speak of the importance of virtue and divide it into intellectual and moral aspects. *Paññā* (from Pali, or *prajñā* from Sanskrit) parallels *dianoêtikos* while *sīla* mirrors Aristotle’s virtues described as *êthikos*. The former pair refers to a more conceptual or cognitive faculty while the latter denotes action. While this distinction (n.b. – *not* separation) between intellectual/conceptual and moral/practical does emerge in the work of Aristotle and Keown, both hold to a perspective of the human faculties that is somewhat foreign to post-Enlightenment categorization. Instead of relying on the common Western approach of isolating rational capacity from emotive tendencies, Keown suggests that an “alternative approach is to view the reason-emotion bifurcation as artificial and seek a ‘middle way’ between them: this is the position of the Aristotelian tradition and the view most congenial to Buddhism.”34

Though contributing much to the intellectual heritage of the West, Aristotle did not seem to “succeed” in cementing the importance of this synthesis between reason and emotion for his cultural successors. To a large extent, this perspective seems persist largely outside of the West, apart from Aristotelian influence. For example, in the

34 Ibid., 72.
Confucian tradition, the word *hsin* in Chinese most readily translates as “heart-mind,” revealing a similar stance on the unity of rational thinking and emotion within an individual. A reexamination of this perspective that allows for the distinction between reason and feeling but prohibits their separation could prove useful in a revised approach to understanding what, how and why people believe and, in turn, what is (not) done in light of it.

Much like the “Christian practices” movement, Buddhist ethics is foundationally concerned with action and transformation. Whereas the conceptualist perspective in the West would favor an approach in which practice proceeds from intellectual understanding, Keown asserts that, for Buddhist ethics, moral virtue must first be cultivated so that its intellectual counterpart might grow out of it. He writes: “*Sīla* is the starting point since human nature is so constituted that moral discipline (*sīla*) facilitates intellectual discipline (*paññā*). Until correct attitudes, habits and dispositions have been inculcated it is easy to fall prey to speculative views and opinions of all kinds.”

Focusing first on the solidification of practices helps guard against the formation of imbalanced and impractical views. While this might be likened to Aristotle’s assertion that “like habits produce like dispositions,” the Greek philosopher is still clear in his giving precedence to the intellectual virtues over the moral. Nonetheless, Buddhist ethics – sharing the Aristotelian heritage with “Christian practices” – is chiefly concerned with the gradual internalizing of this virtue in the individual. “It is a project,” Keown affirms, “which is progressively realized through time in the transformation of personality.”

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36 Keown, 111-112.
37 Keown, 194.
is not enough merely to understand or to perform actions. In the same way that food is ingested – taken in, consumed – and digested – in-corpore-ted, infused – so the individual, through disciplined practices pursues the virtues not merely to imitate them, but to own and embody them.

“Religious Practice” – My Definition

Having traced not only the historical backdrop which led to the greater attention to “practice” but also the varying uses of the concept amidst academic discourse, I will now provide my own definition and delineation of the term. In this section, I will more specifically attend to the notion of “religious practice” in itself, examining what it is, what it includes and its relation to similar terminology. After doing so, I will provide a list of facets of religious practice that I have drawn from studying various religious and philosophical traditions. It is at this point as I provide my own definition of the concept that my similarity to the “Christian practices” movement will become most evident. Nonetheless, though I draw heavily from this source, the following aspects of “religious practice” are not necessarily indicative of all Christian practices nor are they strictly limited to them.

Practices are concerned with the daily reality of real people (not theoretical models), elaborately interwoven with beliefs, essentially social in nature, and aim towards some end or goal. Further, this set of activity also seeks to form a whole way of life that unifies the practitioners’ actions, beliefs, worldview and identity (both personal and communal). What makes these practices specifically religious in nature is their focus upon the Ultimate. This Ultimate can take a number of different shapes – God, the
nation-state, nirvana, moksha, “progress’ – but primarily is other and greater than the self and the community. The Ultimate provides a reference point beyond the individual or community and, as such, affords that community with a central, organizing principle.

Moving forward, it will also prove helpful to define practice negatively by contrasting it with ritual. To be able to do so, however, will require specifying the scope of “practice” that will serve as the counterpart to ritual. For the sake of clarity, then, two notions of “practice” will suffice. The first, which I would refer to as performative practice, would encompass all aspects of doing and acting within religion. Hence, performative practice would encompass ritual as a subset. Rites of passage, yearly religious festivals, acts of devotion – whether individual or communal – would all fall under this category in that they are not merely conceptual notions, but distinct activities.

The second type, integrative practices, specifically seeks to coalesce the sacred and the commonplace. In this light, integrative practices would exist distinctly from rituals but with some overlap between the two. Ritual accentuates Mircea Eliade’s sacred-profane binary in the creation of sacred space, sacred time and sacred re-enactment. A type of performative practice occurs, but with the express intent of maintaining distinction between the this-worldly and the other-worldly. An integrative practice, however, aims at the decompartmentalization between the two. The sacred’s counterpart is no longer the profane (a qualitative difference), but the mundane (a locative difference). By a qualitative difference, I mean that ritual seems to create a polarity of value, cherishing the sacred and eschewing the profane. This ontological assessment compels the practicing community to attempt to isolate ritual in a particular setting or time, thereby securing a heightened “purity of experience” in the absence of the
corrupting presence of the non-sacred. Within the locative binary of sacred-mundane, some ontological differentiation is maintained; however, this distinction is concerned more with sites of occurrence and embodiment. Therefore, integrative practices hold the borders between sacred and mundane to be rather fluid. In fact, it is the blurring of the lines between and bridging of the two that are the purposes of such activity.

The fundamental dissimilarity between ritual and integrative practice arises in their teleological treatment of the sacred. While the methods may actually be the same, the former reinforces the separation of the sacred while the latter works towards its incorporation into the mundane. For example, Dykstra and Bass underscore how the sacramental Eucharistic meal, though typically set apart in some sort of sacred space or time, can also take place in another shape when a family invites a stranger over for a meal. In light of this multiplicity of forms, there is significant overlap between rituals and integrative practice (see diagram below).

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38 Bass, 9.
This intermingling is created by two factors: shared/similar activities and indeterminate intentions. First, there exists a space, as mentioned above the example of the Eucharistic meal, where ritual and integrative practices are methodologically congruent (or nearly so). The liturgical reading of scripture within a church mirrors an individual’s personal reading of the same text. For both performative practices, the Christian scriptures are the methodological means of activity. However, the former creates some sense of sacredness or purity of experience while the second brings the scriptures to an intersection with daily life. The practitioner’s intentions in regards to a teleology of the sacred determines whether the activity is more accurately described as a ritual or an integrative practice. However, as the second factor contributing to this overlap, the indeterminacy of individuals’ and communities’ intentions only serves to further complicate the matter. Somewhat in line with de Certeau’s notions of strategies and tactics, determining an entire group’s apprehension of a practice’s meaning is seriously undermined by the plurality of individual perceptions within that group. Therefore, for two individuals, similar practices can bear divergent intents while, at the same time, dissimilar actions can contain (essentially) congruent goals. This perspective would, in the diagram above, greatly expand the common area between ritual and integrative practice. In fact, this complexity is probably most reflective of reality. Nonetheless, despite methodological and teleological questions, some meaningful distinction between ritual and integrative practices does exist.

In addition, while I would locate liturgy and sacrament largely within the realm of ritual, there are definitely ways in which they could cross over into integrative practices. Liturgy, as the organizing structure for the procession of religious rituals, and sacrament,
certain rituals that hold an elevated status, whether they are distinguished from or overlap
with integrative practices, either way, both contribute significantly to the process of
integration that these practices seek to foster. Quoting a pastor, Bass comments that
“Worship is to daily life…as consommé is to broth. In liturgy at its best…the meaning of
all the practices appears in a form that is thick and tasty, darker and richer than what we
get in most everyday situations.”39 For a small Hispanic community in San Francisco,
the yearly practice of Las Posadas (the yearly reenactment of Mary and Joseph’s search
for lodging before Jesus’ birth) “is more than ritual. It crystallizes the community’s
experience of being nourished and challenged daily by the central Christian mystery –
namely, that the stranger at our door can be both gift and challenge, human and divine.”40
The performance of regular rituals in community can bring deeper meaning and
ownership to practices that can easily become mechanical for an individual.

Ritual and integrative practices also differ somewhat in terms of the company in
which they are primarily practiced. Though, again, there is significant overlap between
the two, ritual occurs largely in a communal setting. This is not to say that an individual
could not have her or his own set of religious rituals that are both maintained and
meaningful. However, integrative practices, as the embodiment of beliefs within the
daily routine of a person’s life, take place more often on an individual scale. But there is
even a limit to the individuality of these exercises. The greatest amount of
“independence” one might achieve in such activity is the implementation of them in
physical isolation from a religious community. In other words, the performance (how,

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 42.
where, when) of the practice can occur in *relative* isolation; however, the origin or derivation of these practices is highly social.

**Aspects of Religious Practice**

I have compiled a list of characteristics that seem to, for the most part, circumscribe religious practices. Again, I should note that my list draws much from the work of Dykstra and Bass, but also pulls from other various religious traditions. My inquiry into religious practice has also led me to examine the practices of the late Stoic philosophers (Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius), Confucian religiosity (as particularly found in *The Analects*), ancient Israel (at the time of Amos the prophet) and Ch’an/Zen Buddhism. Most of the facets I catalogue here are fairly straightforward and self-explanatory. Therefore, for brevity and simplicity, I will list them all together and afterwards provide brief explanations for each.

The major aspects of religious practice are:

1. a balance between theory/idea/belief and practice/embodiment/incarnation
2. the importance of tradition, including (meta)narratives and text
3. the formation of a holistic way of life – in short, a decompartmentalizing effect
4. an enduring way of life – not a *lifestyle* (temporary and subject to change)
5. the requirement of effort and investment
6. self-consciousness that is both reflective and reflexive
7. honesty and transparency with oneself and others
8. self-critique and self-examination
9. not merely self-awareness, but also attention to:
   a. underlying concepts/beliefs and their sources
   b. the degree to which they are (not) actually believed and applied
   c. psychological factors – individually, communally and socially
   d. the presence and interplay of “competing” desires/fears
   e. the implications of beliefs and practices on oneself, others and the world
   f. the context out of which and into which belief-practice are taking place

10. personal
   a. in the sense of being for and pertaining to oneself – ownership
   b. in the sense of pertaining to persons (not merely intellectual or organizational)

11. relational

12. communal

13. social

14. receptive

15. transformational

16. teleologically in-corporeal (embodied, natural)

The first facet simply emphasizes the need, in such a treatment of religious practices, that neither beliefs nor practices should be developed disproportionately. Each
not only informs and shapes the other in terms of content, but a healthy balance also brings a certain vigor in terms of quality.

As I will touch upon in the following chapter, religious practices often find their grounding in particular religious traditions, more particularly, in the defining narratives and authoritative texts which they uphold. This second aspect is crucial in that it locates a source for religious practices.

Facets three, four and five point to a life that is simple, enduring and demanding, respectively. By these descriptions I do not mean simplistic, inflexible and harrying. Conversely, decompartmentalization helps individuals and communities to move towards a purposeful life in which the various arenas can find coherency and meaning together. A stable way of life provides ballast amidst rapid, widespread change while still allowing for adaptation. And engagements that have high demands, as such, hold high potential and yield substantial reward.

Between the poles of self-absorption and complete unawareness of oneself lies the balance of the sixth, seventh and eighth aspects of religious practice. Self-consciousness – again, neither a fixation on oneself nor a hazy, passive “state of mind” – is an active pursuit. This activity is carried out in the practice of reflection. Further, reflexive thought provides a path for a kind of meta-consciousness, an awareness of what one is and is not aware. Though this may begin to seem needless, an attention to one’s consciousness can prove informative and constructive in shaping religious practices. An insistence on honesty and vulnerability also leads to the willingness to self-critique. Simply searching for one’s own strengths and victories will eventually prove crippling, leaving little space for learning and transformation.
The ninth facet simply expands upon the previous three. In addition to being aware of one’s self and one’s own thought patterns, the examination of practical implications, various influences (both internal and external) and the relational impact of one’s cognitive-emotional consciousness should prove illuminating for better understanding and shaping religious practice.

Religious practices are not truly integrative if an individual or community does not sincerely and practically subscribe to them, appropriating them as their own. In this sense, practices must be personalized. Similarly, while practices are not necessarily meant to be anti-institutional, integrative practices are akin to de Certeau’s “tactics” in that they are not fabricated and imposed by an outside source. They are – even for those that derive from religious traditions – meaningful and relevant to real people in real life.

The personal facet of religious practices does not mean they are purely individualistic. Conversely, these practices are relational in that they point practitioners to interact with other people and with the Ultimate. The communal nature of religious practice necessitates the joining with others in a similar rootedness and pursuit. In the broadest sense, this includes shared goals and accountability, or mutual training. Language alone points to the social nature of practices, not to mention cultural lenses through which individuals and communities view reality. Though each of these three facets – relational, communal, social – seem quite similar, their nuanced differences demand that all three be maintained and nourished in order to provide for a constructive, healthy development of practices.

The fourteenth facet, receptivity, draws largely from aspects six through thirteen. It is perhaps one of the most indispensable them all. Between the importance of an
awareness of self and context, along with a valuing of others, a willingness to learn and receive from others provides open doors for the fifteenth facet, transformation. In the same way a drought and bad roots can destroy a plant, ignorance and isolation can paralyze the potential of any community’s aims for growth and transformation.

The final facet – what I have termed as “teleologically in-corpore-tional” – both underscores and, paradoxically, undermines the importance of religious practice. In employing the Latin corpore, I aim to highlight that embodiment of habits and mores that eventually becomes natural, second nature to an individual or community. While communities benefit from attending to – that is, being aware of, developing and teaching – their religious practices, success also is met when members naturally enact them in daily life. To use another horticultural illustration, a feeble plant often requires a splint to enable it to stand upright. Over time, however, the plant, drawing its strength from the structure of its support, grows in its own ability to stand. Similarly, religious practices are meant, in the end, to be “forgotten.”

While these facets of integrative religious practices apply primarily to an individual or community personally invested and involved in practicing religiousness, these aspects are similarly crucial for the academic study of religiosity. In either case, the balance between concept and reality (or belief and practice) serves as the lynchpin which binds all the other aspects together into a cohesive whole. In the following chapter, I will demonstrate how, in various ways, this primary feature of balance is disturbed and, as a result, the other contingent aspects similarly disintegrate with time.
CHAPTER 3

PROBLEMS

The Growth of the Gap

During an introductory graduate religion course, my inability to reconcile William Young’s definition of religion\(^1\) with what I had observed in reality (in both myself and others) brought me to my current interest in religious practice. Though I admired the simplicity of Young’s definition – “human transformation in response to the Ultimate” – it was not just transformation that I had seen. There had been a handful of church-attendees who did seem genuinely involved in some sort of transformation; however, while most of the others I had observed (including myself) maintained a strong sense of identification with the Church or “Christianity,” there seemed to be an disproportionate lack of participation.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith points to this possibility where “within one’s own tradition one may know two persons who express faith identically in formal statements of belief, in formal patterns of ritual, in formal community membership and what not, yet in the case of one of them that faith finds embodiment in his character, while hardly in the other.”\(^2\) The problematic of this situation is two-sided. First, those involved in the tradition are not really participating in it by actively engaging with the community, being shaped by its collective beliefs and practices. I can understand how some might object to this objection; however, it is through the second facet of the problem that the implications

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of the first are more fully understood. In addition to not, in actuality, being a part of the living continuation of the tradition, individuals who strongly insist on identifying with the tradition while not participating therein perpetuate an unquestioning traditionalism. Even more dangerous are the walls – of differentiation from other individuals and communities – that are erected by such an unconscious and uncritical self-identification. The irony and tragedy emerge in that this divisiveness takes place without any personal investment or critical reflection in and of that which creates the ability to differentiate from others.

At this point, grammatical dynamics become increasingly visible. A substantive emphasis, involving little to no obligation to action (a verbal or adverbial association), contributes significantly to this situation. In other words, a fixation on a static “Confucianism” as an independent conceptual entity – or whatever religious tradition which serves as the object of unreflective, uncritical attachment – only fosters a rigid insistence on identification (largely without personal understanding or application) and open doors for differentiation from others.

As to my own definition of religion, I appreciate the simplicity of Young, but would rework it slightly. I would define religion as “humanity’s relation to the Other.” I omit transformation because of the prevalence of purely conceptual and ritualized religious practice that hardly is transformative for people. In the same sense I have chosen Other over Ultimate. This word choice helps in two ways. First, “the Other” can refer to anything outside of oneself (or a community) that is a source of meaning. This aspect would include an allegiance to one’s nation as being potentially “religious” as well as other, various isms that have many similarities to “traditional religions.” Secondly, the use of “Other” instead of “Ultimate” leaves room for the trend that I attend to in this
work and, more specifically, this chapter. Ultimacy, in itself, would demand not partial, but full devotion, leaving little room for the compartmentalization that is so common in the West today.

This distinction between “Other” and “Ultimate” leads to another helpful differentiation. For the sake of simplicity and consistency with my foundations in Christian religiosity, I will use the term “theology” to denote what an individual or community believes. I am aware that this term has, obviously, very theistic leanings; however, I use it to mean “what one believes to be true,” “belief system,” “creed,” or, most generally, “one’s understanding of reality.” I intentionally do not use “worldview” in order to retain an emphasis on a distinctly religious perspective. I propose that there is a need to distinguish between a “normative theology” and a “practical” or “enacted theology.” The former is more Platonic in nature while the latter is more Aristotelian. Though not necessarily mutually exclusive, an individual may “hold” beliefs that he or she does not really act upon. In short, these beliefs remain just that: beliefs. An “enacted theology” is that which, by observing one’s actions, unveils the functional, actual beliefs of the individual. For many in the West, the Christian tradition’s notion of a “sinful nature” would provide the basis for the need for such a distinction between what one believes in theory and how one actually lives. However, this concept of disparity between thought and action is not limited to Christian thought. The Analects point as well to this gap:

Zai Wo was in bed during the daytime. The Master said: ‘Rotten wood cannot be carved and a dirt wall cannot be trowelled. In Yu what is to be punished?’ The Master went on: ‘First of all when I dealt with people, having listened to their
words, I took their deeds on trust; but now, when I deal with people, having
listened to their words, I observe their deeds. It is because of Yu that I have made
this change.³

The reality of this distinction between what one believes (or says he/she believes) and
what one does is not limited to ancient China or present-day America but appears in
every culture at every point in time. Though this is true, for the sake of precision and
simplicity, I will limit my focus to late-20th- and 21st-century America for the following
examination.

**Compartmentalization and Its Effects**

At the bottom of all this lies a subconscious tendency to view the world and life
through a number of distinct, separable compartments. Though vastly complex and
drawing from a number of sources, this penchant for the division of a broad worldview
into independent arenas is also visible in the philosophical foundations of Western
society provided by the Greeks, such as Aristotle. The schematic device by which
Aristotle draws lines between, for example, intellectual and moral virtue has perpetuated
in depth and breadth to eventually result in the severing of the two (intellectual and
moral, in this case, but applicable to most binaries) from each other. This categorical
way of thinking has spread to the cultural descendents of ancient Greece. Instead of
attempting to understand and interact with reality in its entirety, daily existence is made
more feasible by approaching life in smaller, more manageable parts. The classifying,
schematizing thrust of the Enlightenment only invigorated this trend. Robert Bellah
comments, “One of the reasons it is hard to envision a way out of the impasse of

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modernity is the degree to which modernity conditions our consciousness…When the world comes to us in pieces, in fragments, lacking any overall pattern, it is hard to see how it might be transformed.”

The subdivision of life into various compartments or fields may provide a kind of practical simplicity that allows an individual to approach each area separately, not forcing a need to reconcile the vast variety of details and manners of each different situation under a coherent framework. This multiplicity of environments and the change within each seems to necessitate such compartmentalization. “This is a process,” Smith maintains, “whereby the complexity and proliferating novelty of life have advanced relentlessly and spectacularly…so that the religious seems to be one facet of a person’s life alongside man others.”

Though commonly taken as one of many compartments, religiosity offers a unifying perspective to the whole of daily life. It is at this point that religious practices serve as a bridge between concepts and reality, and from this, a connecting point between all the various aspects of life. Dykstra points to the problematic separation of ‘faith’ and ‘the life of faith’ that has beset much of modern religion, in particular, Christianity.

Conversely, he suggests, “Growth in the life of faith involves the penetration or infiltration of faith into ever-increasing dimensions of our existence.”

This integration and wholeness of life is central for the “Christian practices” and those involved in the movement’s development. However, at this point, I will examine the ways in which this integrity breaks down. Certainly a number of different manifestations of this fragmentation exist, but for the sake of simplicity, I will focus upon

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5 Smith, 124.
7 Ibid., 38.
two similar yet distinct phenomena: doctrinalism and ritualism. Both of these involve a high degree of identification with a religious tradition and, in many cases, a substantial degree of participation. However, in each instance an imbalance occurs between application and understanding. In doctrinalism, an individual or community will favor a highly conceptual, abstract approach to religiousness, taking the shape of a strong adherence to a set of beliefs or dogmas. This perspective, in its over-emphasis on belief and concepts, will often experience atrophy in praxis. On the other hand, ritualistic religiosity dutifully and diligently performs and participates in religious activities. However, this enactment is limited to a “cultural transmission” wherein it is performed not only uncritically and unreflectively by a community, but without substantial knowledge of its meaning or importance by the individual. It is important here to reemphasize that I am attempting to not communicate an elitist religious perspective but instead to point to the implications of such a disparity between belief and practice. Not only are there damaging effects for the individual, but also for the community and the world at large. It is with this in mind that I first turn to the phenomenon of doctrinalism.

_Doctrinalism – The Stoics and Foucault_

In order to illustrate this widespread disconnect, I will focus on two main sources: the Stoic philosophers and Michel Foucault. Though not overtly religious, both the Stoics and Foucault share an interest in this rift between what is said and what is done. In fact, Foucault himself writes extensively about the Stoics on this topic. Hence, I will examine the Stoics and their teaching as well as Foucault’s larger historiographical-philosophical agenda as two illustrations of this disconnect. Because the Stoics and
Foucault center their attention on the tendency towards a conceptual or informational overemphasis, the religious trend of doctrinalism is more relevant to this inquiry than ritualism. Further, though these examples are not religious, the focus of their attention bears squarely upon the issue of doctrinalism that effects communities which are. The philosophical communities of the Stoics and the historiographical critique of Foucault both are highly relevant and applicable to this religious situation of imbalance.

The Stoics

Before beginning to look at the philosophy of the Stoics, it is important to take note of the conceptual difference between classical and contemporary philosophy. Merriam-Webster’s *Collegiate Dictionary* first defines philosophy as “all learning exclusive of technical precepts and practical arts.” While other definitions exist that do include ethical and practical facets of philosophy, the popular notion – as evidenced by this primary and popular source for definition – favors a conceptual, abstract discipline. Conversely, the classical philosophers viewed philosophy as not merely informative but transformative. For them, philosophy was a pursuit, a life-engagement of drawing into greater balance one’s principles with their daily lives. Thus, unless noted otherwise, I speak of philosophy in this context as pertaining to its classical meaning.

Stoicism was born out of the teaching of Zeno in 4th century BCE Greece. After him, major devotees of this philosophy were Cleanthes, Chrysippus and eventually Cicero in Rome. While these constitute the early existence of Stoicism, I will focus chiefly on three later – and perhaps the most prominent – Stoic thinkers: Seneca the Younger, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Not only did their thoughts and teachings

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come to typify later Stoic philosophy, but also their propagation of a particular practicality. For each one, I will underscore his view of philosophy and life, his awareness of the dichotomy between informational and transformational philosophy and his practical prescriptions for living. Though I will address them in chronological order, Epictetus represents the epitome of this practicality and thus, in much of Foucault’s historical inquiry, is one of his favored subjects.

Seneca

Seneca the Younger lived around the turn of the millennium (4 BCE – 65 CE), primarily in Rome. Eventually he would become the tutor of the young Emperor Nero, though his effectiveness and rapport with the ruler would rapidly deteriorate before the eventual lunacy of Nero took shape. Nonetheless, Seneca wrote voluminously, spreading the Stoic ethos abroad. His *Letters from a Stoic* is a compilation of much of his personal correspondence with friends and students. His writing consists of a distinguishably personal air and practicality that largely characterized the Stoics.

For Seneca, life and philosophy were inseparable. Philosophy, so much more than a mere system of conjectures and treatises, offered its followers the prospect of living life as one ought. Seneca asks, “Who can doubt, my dear Lucilius, that life is the gift of the immortal gods, but that living well is the gift of philosophy?”9 In fact, Seneca viewed philosophy as an all-encompassing life-pursuit. He explains that “Philosophy, likewise, tells all other occupations: ‘It’s not my intention to accept whatever time is left over from you; you shall have, instead, what I reject.’”10 Hence, it becomes clear that

10 Ibid., 103.
philosophy carries with it a faculty – even a demand – for providing coherency and consistency to all the various activities of life.

The correspondence of guiding principles with the particulars of daily life became the driving force behind the Stoic approach to life. There exists a need for balance between the abstract and the concrete – not merely a thorough conceptual understanding of philosophical ideas or a busy lifestyle. The philosopher’s role was to cement this balance in his own life and the lives of others. Seneca, elaborating on this role of the philosopher, illustrates that it is his responsibility to teach “In the first place, truth and nature…and secondly, a rule of life, in which he has brought life into line with things universal.”¹¹ These broad “universal” first principles are not sufficient in themselves but must be brought to their practical bearing in the manifold particulars of daily existence. If not, then the guiding philosophical concepts remain as such – merely ideas.

The issue at base, then, is the transformation wrought by this ongoing application of principles to particular situations. For this to occur, the point of departure then becomes a thorough assimilation of guiding principles. Important questions arise hence: What exactly does this mean? To what degree must this assimilation occur? What shape does it take? Though Seneca answers some of these questions directly in his letters, a fuller explanation emerges along the via negativa as he speaks of (what he views as) deteriorated philosophy. Writing again to Lucilius, Seneca laments what he has observed:

Things tend, in fact, to go wrong; part of the blame lies on the teachers of philosophy, who today teach us how to argue instead of how to live, part on their students, who come to the teachers in the first place with a view to developing not

¹¹ Ibid., 172-173.
their character but their intellect. The result has been the transformation of philosophy, the study of wisdom, into philology, the study of words.\textsuperscript{12}

There was present a type of transformation within philosophy, but precisely the opposite of what the Stoics had envisioned. Both the teachers of philosophy and their students grew increasingly drawn to intellectualism while their own character and their own lives were left neglected. Seneca must have witnessed droves of people who would come to sit at the feet of so-called philosophers, content to have their ears and their minds tickled. Because of their satisfaction with such an informational binge with a complete lack of personal transformation, he questioned the degree to which any real practice of philosophy actually occurred there. Thus, Seneca often referred to these sycophantic crowds as “philosopher’s squatters, not students.”\textsuperscript{13}

In contrast, Seneca urged his friends and students to strive to assimilate those teachings they deemed valuable to the extent that their lives would noticeably correspond with them. He warned against “farfetched or archaic expressions or extravagant metaphors and figures of speech” while simply exhorting those with whom he corresponded to have their “words become works.”\textsuperscript{14} Being so bent on such application, Seneca did not hesitate to offer specific examples of practice that his students could undertake. These prescriptions were deeply important in that they unlocked the human potential for virtue, for, according to Seneca, the raw materials for virtue exist in every human but it is such regimented exercise that brings them to fruition.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 207.  
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 201.  
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 211.  
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 176-177.
Seneca adheres to three main practices. The first and primary exercise is one of daily personal reflection. This personal, somewhat individual aspect constitutes a major portion of Stoic philosophical practice, carrying with it variations according to the philosopher by whom it is prescribed. Essentially, the individual assesses the coming or finished day, an external situation, or his internal perceptions and thence examines the opportunity for coincidence between his guiding principles and his life. As I will illustrate more fully later, both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius hinge much of their own and their students’ development on this internalized inquiry.

However, this is not to say that these practices are largely individualistic. These reflections are tempered and guided through interaction with other students or philosophers. Additional practices of a more social character include personal conversations – or, in the case of Seneca, correspondence by letters – or the observation of the life of another. The former serves as an interview not too dissimilar from the internalized daily reflection. The latter demands that the student adopt a worthy candidate – one whose life and principles are largely congruous – as a rubric against which the student might discern his own degree of correspondence between his belief and his actions.

For Seneca, this practical philosophy was an indispensable means by which to live life in its fullest and most natural sense. Rather than constricting and limiting an individual, the rigorous pursuit of philosophy would lead to a kind of liberation. The informational, intellectualist pursuit, in his eyes, though not requiring the strict demands of personal transformation, would prove to be more constraining than its balanced,
practical counterpart. Instead of settling for a philosophical “doctrinalism,” Seneca asserts, “Let us expand our life: action is its theme and duty.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Epictetus}

Living mostly in Rome from the mid-1\textsuperscript{st} to the mid-2\textsuperscript{nd} century CE, Epictetus would eventually emerge as one of Stoicism’s chief figures. Born in Greece, he would spend much of his life in the Empire’s capital until he was exiled to Nicopolis in Asia Minor.

It is Epictetus that most clearly verbalizes the Stoic ethos – not only in its practical bent towards transformation and practice, but also in the very substance of the philosophy. He is most well known for two of his descriptions that come to encompass much of the teaching of the early and later Stoics. At issue for Epictetus was self-sovereignty (as a conceptual mindset) and self-mastery (as a practical process). Approaching these took two principal, conceptual shapes. The primary question which one ought to ask himself was whether something was beyond his control. He explains that much of life is simply beyond an individual’s ability to influence, much less, control it. At the same time, however, Epictetus reminds himself and his students that “within our power are opinion, aim, desire, [and] aversion.”\textsuperscript{17} While external events seemed to be at the mercy of Fate and Fortune, Epictetus’ approach sought to safeguard human freedom and independence amidst the unpredictability of life. Secondly, he likens life to

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 221.

\textsuperscript{17} Epictetus, The Works of Epictetus: Consisting of His Discourses in Four Books, the Enchiridion, and Fragments, Trans. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, New & revised ed. Vol. 1(Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1891), 215 (Enchiridion). Though all of the sources for Epictetus – the Discourses, the Enchiridion, and the Fragments – are in one book, I will specify in which of these a reference occurs since each section contains its own independent pagination.
a play in which individuals are the actors. Of great importance here is the recognition of one’s given lot in life and the resolution to fulfill it as well as possible. Epictetus elucidates: “For this is your business, to act well the given part; but to choose it, belongs to another.” 18  The battle to be fought was not over one’s circumstances or context. Instead, worthwhile effort would be expended in shaping a consistent, personal perspective of and approach towards these variables.

These crucial tenets comprised the conceptual framework for Epictetus’ philosophy. As it did for Seneca, philosophy for Epictetus encompassed the whole of life and held prescriptive sway over the individual. In his Discourses, Epictetus also refers to it as “the art of living.” 19  This art was not a leisurely one but an exacting procedure. Not only did it demand the intellectual, moral and active capacities of the student, philosophy demanded a thorough acquaintance with one’s weakness and shortcomings. However, this is not to be confused with the Christian notion of sinfulness or moral blemishes, although Stoic thought had a noticeable affect on this type of thinking. 20  Epictetus describes the implications of this deep self-awareness: “The school of a philosopher is a surgery. You are not to go out of it with pleasure, but with pain; for you do not come there in health; but one of you has a dislocated shoulder; another, an abscess; a third, a fistula; a fourth, the headache.” 21  Epictetus is not a lover of punishment or pain for himself or his students; however, he is acutely aware of the disparity between principles and way of life and the dissonance it causes in the life of an individual. In a sense, this

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18 Ibid., 223 (Enchiridion).
19 Ibid., 55 (Discourses).
21 Epictetus, 87 (Discourses).
conceptual over-emphasis, while it is common and deeply rooted, is unnatural and unhealthy. Thence, such pain is necessary for a thorough “self-reformation” that will lead the student back to a more natural way of life.22

Epictetus utilizes an illustration to further clarify the distance between the ravenous consumption of information and the nourishing process of transformation. He describes how “sheep do not hastily throw up the grass to show the shepherds how much they have eaten; but, inwardly digesting their food, they produce it outwardly in wool and milk.”23 In the manner that Seneca deplored the intellectualism of his day, Epictetus undercuts the same penchant for overemphasizing rote memorization and empty rhetoric. The natural order, as he sees it, is that humanity would be independent and free. This only occurs as balance is achieved between what one knows and what one does.

Epictetus asserted that guiding principles hardly have room to guide an individual when more energy is devoted to keeping the compendium of maxims memorized rather than assimilating them into the daily realities of one’s life. The tendency of the “philosophers” and “students of philosophy” in his day was to inverse the natural order – to gorge themselves on displayable, yet non-effective knowledge. “As if I should say to a wrestler,” Epictetus chides, “‘Show me your muscle,’ and he should answer me, ‘See my dumb-bells.’”24

A balance between what is believed and what is acted upon is the goal to which Epictetus seeks to help his students aspire and strive. For all his practicality, Epictetus affirms that theoretical principles are not only necessary, but must come before any attempt at application. There is a need for philosophers to “first exercise us in theory” so

22 Ibid., 242 (Enchiridion).
23 Ibid., 239 (Enchiridion).
24 Ibid., 16-17 (Discourses).
that some foundation might provide a footing from which to take practical steps, thereby allowing the students to move on to the crucial step of application, which is “the most difficult.” In fact, Epictetus also offers a practical intermediary between teaching and living: meditation. Through meditating on what is learned, the student disciplines her- or himself to not only gain a deeper intellectual grasp of guiding principles, but also to obtain a more personal ownership of these objectives. Another crucial practice – or, perhaps, a preliminary to practice – is the self-evaluation of one’s capacity. The student must discern “what state the ruling faculty of mind is; for on knowing it to be weak, no person will immediately employ it in great attempts.”

While Epictetus’ goal for himself and his students is comprehensive and transformative, his approach is gradual and patient. This determination of capacity allows the student to assess what the immediate, practical next step is as opposed to being overwhelmed at the whole of his endeavor. Perhaps aware of his students’ tendency to aim too high, he pleads, “Practice yourself, for Heaven’s sake, in little things, and thence proceed to greater.” As the student makes such manageable, small alterations to his behavior, there gradually occurs a transformation. The student more fully assumes the guiding principles and applies them to particular situations as opposed to unconsciously hoarding information. And not only this, their application comes with decreasing resistance as both belief and action harmonize to a greater degree.

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25 Ibid., 86 (Discourses).
26 Ibid., 87 (Discourses).
27 Ibid., 65 (Discourses).
Marcus Aurelius

The Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE) was one of the latest great Stoic thinkers. Though one of the paradigmatic figures of Stoicism, his philosophy was somewhat unique in comparison with that of Seneca and Epictetus. Even more than his two predecessors, Marcus Aurelius underscored the importance of living “as nature requires.”

The Emperor specifically referred to the guiding principle(s) of life as the **logos**. This **logos** produced the boundaries of the natural way of life not only for man, but for all creatures – each being endowed with its own **logos**. “To a being with a **logos**, “Marcus Aurelius states, “an unnatural action is one that conflicts with the **logos**.”

Therefore this **logos** is ontologically inextricable with the creature and necessarily ought to guide and shape its behavior. Philosophy then, for the Emperor, is the methodical, yet still “organic,” endeavor to re-center this nature or **logos**. In other words, philosophy provides a remedy for unnatural, destructive pursuits. Marcus Aurelius explains that “philosophy requires only what your nature already demands. What you have been after is something else again – something unnatural.”

With these ideas in mind, Marcus Aurelius gives a fuller explanation of the qualitative difference between informational and transformational philosophy. Whereas Seneca and Epictetus deplored it as useless and harmful, the Emperor explains that the hoarding of inert information is actually against human **nature**. He points to the tendency to wander towards self-indulgence instead of self-reformation and cites this intellectualism, among other things, as a form of it. In his *Meditations*, a dialogue –

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29 Ibid., 87.
30 Ibid., 57.
whether it is internal or with another person is indiscernible – occurs which exemplifies the Emperor’s views:

You’ve wandered all over and finally realized that you never found what you were after: how to live. Not in syllogisms, not in money, or fame, or self-indulgence. Nowhere.

-Then where is it to be found?

In doing what human nature requires.

-How?

Through first principles. Which should govern your intentions and your actions.

-What principles?

Those to do with good and evil. That nothing is good except what leads to fairness, and self-control, and courage, and free will.31

To be sure, the Emperor underscores the importance of principles and concepts here. However, they exist inseparably from enactment and embodiment. This body of principles which he endorses “leads to” the practical fruits of “fairness, and self-control, and courage.” Marcus Aurelius shares a suspicion with the other Stoics of an inflated importance given to the other, “false” philosophy, which is wrapped up in what he calls “logic-chopping.”32

Marcus Aurelius gives a very similar practical shape to his philosophy as Seneca and Epictetus. Like them both, he relies on a perpetual state of examination – not only of his own actions, but those of everyone he observes around him. In maintaining the balance between act and abstract, the Emperor would first observe himself or another in

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31 Ibid., 101.
32 Ibid., 13.
some undertaking and then would reflect on the question “Why?” in an attempt to extract the conceptual, motivating force behind concrete behavior.\footnote{Ibid., 143.} Second, much like Epictetus, the Emperor advocates a gradual approach to transformation. “And don’t go expecting Plato’s Republic; be satisfied with even the smallest progress,” he reminds himself and his listeners.\footnote{Ibid., 124.} More specifically, he suggests the setting of small, attainable goals for progress. Instead of striving to change oneself all at once, “Your actions and perceptions need to aim…at accomplishing practical ends.”\footnote{Ibid., 135.} And lastly, these practices are to take place in the company of others. While he never explicitly describes this aspect of practice, his Dialogues serve as a working example.

**Summary**

The Stoic emphasis on self-mastery rested in its implicit practicality. Stoicism was not a mere theoretical endeavor or an attempt to intellectually cope with the world, but a way of life. For the Stoics, philosophy really was the “love of wisdom” as opposed to the love of knowledge. While concerned with fundamental principles, they labored to apply these concepts within the particulars of daily life, underscoring and strengthening the nexus between belief and action. Michel Foucault, a 20\(^{th}\) century figure in philosophy and historical studies, also took particular interest in the classical concept of philosophy – namely, its transformative nature as championed by the Stoics. However, it is his critique of modern historiography that points to a similar imbalanced emphasis on schematic, conceptual understanding. Foucault’s approach to the past (and, for that matter, the
present) seeks to substitute this lens with one that is more attuned to the practical and particular.

Foucault, The Care of the Self and Theory of History

In *The Care of the Self*, Foucault devotes his attention to the culture of classical Greece and Rome. Though in itself a significant piece, *The Care of the Self* is but part of a three-volume (originally intended to be six volumes, but was never finished) work entitled *The History of Sexuality*. The subject of transformative philosophy as found in *The Care of the Self* is but one stage in a long, complicated process he calls the “problematization of the *aphrodisia,*” denoting a widespread change in popular perception of sexual practices in classical society around the first century CE. For Foucault, it is this concept of problematization – especially as it took shape (and found some resolution) among the Stoic philosophers – that permeates much of his thinking and writing.

Upon further examination, it becomes increasingly apparent that Foucault’s substance (philosophy, Stoicism) coincides with his underlying method (problematization, genealogy of history) to a greater degree than is first apparent. In the same way he highlights the Stoic attentiveness to the application of broad, normative principles in the daily particulars of life, so Foucault highlights the need to move towards greater congruity between historical theories and historical realities. His suggestion for the modification of historical method would be the same as that of the Stoic regimen: an increasing alignment of the *logos* (reason, principles) with the *bios* (daily life, reality) and

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a steady, vigilant self-awareness. The study of history, according to Foucault, should hence seek to employ a more balanced (theoretical-practical) approach and a generally self-critical method. This balance would necessitate a greater wariness of attempts to construct broad, sweeping theories of history while simultaneously giving increased acknowledgement to the complexity and thorough interconnectedness of events that would likely undermine attempts to offer oversimplified explanations of causation. The self-critical procedure would simply entail not only a greater awareness of the subjectivity and limitation of historical perspective but would also seek informative, constructive discourse with perspectives and disciplines outside itself.

Returning to *The Care of the Self*, an examination of the text will cast light upon the intertwining of his substance and his method. His inquiry into the Stoic philosophers now serves not merely as an example *within* the historical process of interest (the problematization of *aphrodisia*), but as a kind of narrative that exemplifies his broader approach to historical study. Though a host of parallels arise in the text, I will point out three here.

In the opening section, Foucault brings attention to the method of inquiry that Artemidorus uses in his *Oneirocritica*. Artemidorus explains his method:

I…have not only taken special pains to procure every book on the interpretation of dreams, but have consorted for many years with the much-despised diviners of the marketplace…I have patiently listened to old dreams and their consequences. For there was no other possible way in which to get practice in these matters.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{37}\) Cited in Foucault, 8.
Artemidorus here employs a kind of qualitative research. This approach provides Foucault with a practically oriented alternative to the typical “ivory-tower” historian who would otherwise be content to formulate sweeping theories based on numerical data or the writings of others. In one way, Artemidorus thus exemplifies and provides practical tools for Foucault’s approach to history. Collection of data and analysis thereof will not suffice for Foucault. Instead, he points to the need for a history that happens “on the ground” and not merely in the minds and manuscripts of academic professionals.

Further, in speaking of the concept of “the care of the self,” Foucault states, “one of the most important aspects of this activity…[is that] it constituted, not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice.” Incumbent to the study of history is an awareness of its own perspective. Just as the Stoic cannot isolate himself from the essentially communal life within the pursuit of transformative philosophy (and, for that matter, humanity in general), so the historian – or the historical endeavor – cannot be a purely isolated subject, but is both subject and object, enmeshed in a highly interconnected, complex web of relations and influences. Like Stoicism, the approach to historical studies is also an unavoidably social practice. Whereas a conceptual over-emphasis in historiography can potentially – though not necessarily – foster an individualized approach, Foucault’s proposed methodology would move towards consistent interaction not only with the object(s) of study but also with others who would be involved in different facets of such an investigation (for instance, the importance of a Renaissance historian working alongside philosophers, sociologists and “religionists” also concerned with this period). Hence, it is crucial that those involved in the discipline of historical studies recognize, acknowledge and work forward from this essential aspect of their field.

38 Ibid., 51.
Epictetus’ practice of continual vigilance in assessing one’s own perceptions provides another example of congruence between Foucault’s substance and method. Epictetus would urge his students to act as a night watchman or an assayer of coinage when examining their thoughts throughout the day. Taking each encounter and its ensuing thoughts, Epictetus would seek to, drawing from his own awareness of his perceptions, align his logos (the Stoic self-mastery) with his bios (his particular situation). Similarly, Foucault would insist on the importance of including an essential discipline of “meta-history” (for Foucault, genealogy) within the field of historical studies and historiography as well. Though referring to the constant self-vigilance in Epictetus’ prescription for the “care of the self,” Foucault would apply to historiography the “necessity of a labor of thought with itself as object” in order to avoid an overly “doctrinal” approach.39

In the end, the Stoic philosophers, the substance of Foucault’s inquiry (classical Greece and Rome) and Foucault’s method (a philosophy of history) are all concerned with the same situation: the trend of overemphasis on the conceptual-informational and the resultant need for a greater balance with practicality and particularity. While centering on philosophy and historical approaches, this inquiry holds much relevance for religiousness (in itself and the study thereof). On one hand, the regimenting of doctrine can also potentially become a tool for control and exclusion. On the other, an attention to doctrines and systems of belief, while providing an important conceptual foundation for a religious tradition, can easily turn into a dogmatic fixation which not only paralyzes the practical application of these beliefs but also draws heedless boundaries within and beyond the tradition.

39 Ibid., 62.
Ritualism – Religious Diligence and the Ethical Void in Amos

Paul Gilroy, in his *Postcolonial Melancholia*, dissects the vast impact of colonial history on much of the modern world and its implication for life today. The object of Foucault’s concern in his historiographical critique – the oversimplification of historical accounts, largely emerging out of dynamics of power and authority – flourished to a large degree in the narrative-genesis by colonial powers. These one-sided stories have contributed to deeply embedded racial tensions in many of these former colonies and, as well, in those nations that had previously done the colonizing. Amidst fluctuating attention to the reality or resolvability of this dilemma, a balanced approach has proved thus far elusive. Gilroy admits:

> If it survives at all, critical reflection on racism is likely to be diverted toward two equally unsatisfactory destinations. The first can be identified through its affirmation of practical action. This is commendable in many ways but becomes suspect where enthusiasm for praxis combines with hostility toward reflection. The evasive unity of theory and practice is then replaced by the unconditional exaltation of practice, unencumbered by thought…The principal alternative can be represented through highly abstract considerations of tolerance, relativism, and humanism that have recently become fashionable in scholastic circles. These have seldom been registered in critical theory as anything other then the detritus of impotent or disinterested bourgeois reflection.⁴⁰

The latter alternative corresponds to the foregoing discussion of doctrinalism. The former I will now investigate through the example of the biblical book of Amos. In each case, however, this imbalance between theory and practice brings with it significant

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effects on the (disproportionately) “believing” or “practicing” group and, often to a great extent, the larger community of which they are a part.

In the case of Amos, while the prophet brings a flurry of indictments against the surrounding nations, the majority of the his protests are leveled against Yahweh’s covenant people. As belief and practice grew increasingly compartmentalized, diligence in religious matters had devolved into grounds for the taking advantage of the underprivileged and poor. Amos was not indicting the people of Israel and Judah for abandoning participation in religious rites; conversely, he decried that these customs persisted – instead of being invested with religious meaning – as devices of oppression.

Amos, serving as God’s spokesman and spotlight, calls out against and illuminates the crimes of the people among whom he lives. Amidst his indictments, two main charges emerge: the “contempt of God’s law” and a general “religious complacency.”\footnote{Gerhard von Rad, \textit{The Message of the Prophets} (Great Britain: Northumberland Press Limited, 1968), 106.} The investigation of these two primary allegations will yield an underlying cause that, in turn, unites them. Though much can be taken from the indictments of the foreign nations and Judah, I will turn, as did Amos, to the northern kingdom of Israel as the focal point and primary locus of these transgressions. The disconnect between what is professed and what is done results in these outcroppings of social injustice and religious manipulation.

\textit{The Inhumanity of Israel}

At the end of his list of indictments against the various surrounding nations, Amos arrives at Israel. Shalom Paul notes here that these accusations against the northern
kingdom, “unlike the oracles against the foreign nations that enumerate only past transgressions, are in the present and reflect the social situation current at the time of the prophet himself.”42 For the sake of simplicity, I will approach the totality of Amos’ reproaches against the northern kingdom by the type of offense committed, instead of systematically dissecting each polemical passage.

Von Rad provides a helpful overview of the context and primary causes of the ongoing oppression that was taking place in Israel at the time. He points to “a society whose social life is cleft in two – a property-owning and therefore self-sufficient upper class lived at the expense of the ‘little people.’”43 The luxurious living of the wealthy came at the cost of the continual crushing of the lower classes. Von Rad offers further description of the participants in the oppression: “the whole of Israel – or at least her leading men – were sharply accused of flagrant breaches of the law.”44 In some places, the entire population is guilty and in others, Amos seems to speak, as von Rad suggests, to these upper-class Israelites. The situation had become so deplorable that in 3:9, it seems that God calls to the neighboring palaces of Ashdod and Egypt as witnesses to confirm the allegations. Paul cites the mandate in Deuteronomy 19:15 that requires two or more witnesses for the just conviction of the accused. The atrocities of Yahweh’s own people had grown so horrendous that it was necessary to employ the surrounding nations to account for their transgression.

From 2:4 up until 8:7, Amos injects much of his speech with invective against the Northern Kingdom. The array of his accusations falls into six categories. This typology

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43 Von Rad, 106.
44 Ibid., 107.
is not intended to be comprehensive or final, but merely to provide a recognizable structure to the multiplicity of charges leveled by Amos.

The first type of transgression draws a connection between the offenses of the surrounding nations and those of Israel. Just as the Philistines and Phoenicians were guilty of human trafficking, so the Israelites participated in this heinous crime. Although somewhat similar, two distinct instances of this occur in 2:6. Amos reports that “they sell honest folk for silver”, meaning, according to Paul, that those who have contracted debts and are unable to pay them are hence sold into slavery.45 Second, Amos describes how the wealthy “sell…the poor for a pair of sandals.”46 Whereas those involved in the former instance had some source of financial means, these latter victims were completely defenseless. A number of different translations have emerged in attempt to divulge the intended meaning of “a pair of sandals,” but regardless of the intricacies, it is clear that the intended meaning centers upon the handing over of a human for a paltry price.

The second order of oppression lies in the Israelites’ abuse of the legal system. Two verses in particular – 5:7 and 6:12 – most accurately and vividly depict the thorough abuse of the law in Israel. God addresses the people: “You that turn justice to poison and thrust righteousness to the ground.”47 The leaders of the Israelites had bent justice and righteousness – that which is intended to protect and benefit all people – to serve their own interests, thereby poisoning and debasing the entire legal process. Perhaps even more illustrative is the picture painted in 6:12. When Amos asks his audience, “Can horses gallop over rocks? Can the sea be ploughed with oxen?” He underscores the complete inversion of the intended purpose of the law. In the same way that using a

45 Paul, 77.
46 Amos 2:6.
47 Amos 5:7.
horse to travel over rocky terrain would be both foolish and dangerous, the notion of oxen ploughing the sea is completely ridiculous. Amos intends to unveil to his hearers the utter foolishness that drives their perversion of the law. Apparently, this degradation has become so severe that not only is “the process of the law” ruined, but the notion of “justice itself…[is] turned into poison.”\(^{48}\) The principal place at which these perversions would take place was at the city gate, the place where legal decisions and hearings were carried out. For those who would value honesty, the gate seems to have become a hostile place: “you that hate a man who brings the wrongdoer to court and abominate him who speaks nothing less than truth.”\(^{49}\) Paul explains that these two accusations point to the endangering of the arbiters and witnesses who attempt to proceed justly. The last phrase of 5:12 – “you…in court push the destitute out of the way” – provides another example of the wealthy steamrolling over the lower class Israelites.

Related somewhat to the indictment in 5:12, the third type of sin involves simply the daily taking advantage of the weak through abuse. Both instances of this transgression occur in 2:7. Again, it seems that the criticisms apply to the leaders of Israel in this context. They reportedly “push the humble out of their way,” showing complete disdain for them. In a sense, the wealthy Israelites bully the poor even in their daily encounters with them. The second offense emerges in the King James translation: “a man and his father will go in unto the same maid.”\(^{50}\) Paul asserts that, while this act was not specifically irreligious or illegal, it represented “just one more member of the defenseless and exploited human beings in northern Israel.”\(^{51}\) The oppression of the poor

\(^{48}\) Amos 6:12.  
\(^{49}\) Amos 5:10.  
\(^{50}\) Amos 2:7.  
\(^{51}\) Paul, 82-83.
and powerless in Israel remained not only within the bounds of necessary interactions, but seemed to take on a widespread bullying of the powerless.

Fourth, the financial arena provided a highly profitable environment where the rich could further exploit the poor. Though a gaping breach already existed between the wealthy and the destitute, through holding possessions as security for debts, excessive fines and dishonest dealing, the distance only increased. The “garments held in pledge”\(^{52}\) were held as collateral for unpaid debts; however, Israelite law specifically forbade the holding of necessary items as cited in Exodus 22:25-26.

Also in 2:8, the rich seem to enjoy “the proceeds of fines” they have levied from the poor. The collection of the straw tax and grain tax provided additional avenues by which the wealthy could profit off the livelihood of their less fortunate neighbors. Finally, dishonest business seems to have been a common practice. Though the previous two financial abuses relate more closely to the elite of Israel, this deceptive commerce could include almost any and everyone. Amos asks in 3:10, “what do they care for straight dealing?” Perhaps the most despicable aspect of this commercial brigandage emerges in 8:4-7. Amos uncovers the underlying motives and thoughts of the dishonest dealers. They ask eagerly,

> When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain? When will the Sabbath be past so that we may expose our wheat for sale, giving short measure in the bushel and taking overweight in the silver, tilting the scales fraudulently, and selling the refuse of the wheat; that we may buy the weak for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals?\(^{53}\)

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\(^{52}\) Amos 2:8.  
\(^{53}\) Amos 8:4-7.
As monetary gain – through dishonest trade – has taken precedence at this point, the religious ceremonies and festivals become more of a nuisance. Fairness has given way to deception and any thought towards the collective good has drowned in the swelling sea of self-promotion.

Excessive luxury and indulgent living marks the fifth example of Israel’s enduring oppression of the weak. Amos specifically points to the palaces, houses and excessive living as indicators that the elite are apathetically feeding themselves and starving the rest of their country. Amos’ invective against the women of Samaria in 4:1, however, reveals how widespread and serious this lavish extravagance really was. In referring to the upper-class women as “Bashan cows,” Amos means to imply they are extremely “well-fed, healthy and pleasantly plump.” These wealthy women’s “main purpose in life [was] to tend to their own self-indulgence, irrespective of the cost – to others.”

The sixth and final offense is somewhat unclear and perhaps would coincide with the third transgression (daily abuse of the helpless). In 3:10, Amos refers to the Israelites’ “gains of violence and plundering”. Whether this refers to attacks against their own people or even atrocities against non-Israelites, it is not clear. Nonetheless, the people of the northern kingdom were not below even resorting to physical violence to further their own self-indulgence.

Through the eyes of Amos, Israel was a hotbed for inhumanity. Yahweh’s commandments had become official Israelite law (or, perhaps, custom) which provided a

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54 Amos 3:10, 12 and 6:8.
55 Amos 3:12 and 5:11.
56 Amos 6:4-6.
57 Paul, 129.
58 Ibid.
source of refuge for all people, even the destitute and needy in Israelite society. These conventions evolved into, at best, legal niceties that even came to provide the very means by which the rich exploited the poor with increasing intensity. At worst, these divine commandments came to mean nothing and were ignored – as with the abuse of distraint for debts.\(^5^9\) The driving force behind this callousness seemed to be a rabid sense of self-promotion, mostly on the part of Israel’s elite. However, the general corruption of commerce reveals that this destructive self-concern had trickled down to all strata of Israel’s citizens. In the end, the very commandments of Yahweh lost their potency among the Israelites. His law, both in letter and essence, became negligible and irrelevant, leaving the lower class citizens open to exposure and oppression.

I will now turn to the complimentary facet of Amos’ accusation against Israel – the ritualization of religion. It is crucial to understand that the meaning and importance of these accusations are inextricably intertwined with the foregoing indictments of inhumanity. The Israelites’ exploitation of religiosity had \textit{everything} to do with their penchant for cruelty to their fellow humans.

\textit{The “Irreligious” Life of Israel}

In using the term “irreligious” to describe Amos’ secondary accusation against Israel, I mean not to imply a complete lack of religion, but instead the existence of a mere façade thereof. It is evident that the Israelites bound much of their self-identity to their relationship with Yahweh. In Amos’ perspective, however, it is less the actual relationship with Yahweh that was central to Israel at this time and more the ritual and traditional observances that emanated from this relationship. In fact, in some cases, these

\(^{5^9}\) Amos 2:8.
religious practices even assumed an increasing role in abetting the inhumane and corrupt practices of the Israelites (chiefly, the wealthy) in daily life.\(^\text{60}\) This persistence of mechanical observance of religious rituals in the face of ongoing immorality (or, perhaps, amorality) severely troubled Amos. As will become evident, his contention is not with the rituals themselves, but the manner and environment in which they are performed. Joseph Blenkinsopp declares, “One of the most remarkable aspects of the book is the presentation of worship as the expression of a radically sinful way of life.”\(^\text{61}\) In the same way I explained the accusations of cruelty and callousness, I will explain the instances of irreligiosity categorically, not by textual passage.

The intensity of Amos’ critique of the religious practice of the Israelites, when coupled with his unmistakable emphasis on ethical behavior, might seem to favor the denial (or, at least, a drastic minimization) of the importance of these rituals. But Walter Brueggemann suggests that such a dichotomization of “ethics” and “cult” would be hasty and unnecessary.\(^\text{62}\) He explains that in the ancient world “a regularized, stylized practice of symbolization is indispensable for the sustenance of intentional ethical practice.”\(^\text{63}\) That is to say, the religious cult would serve as the portrayer of the principles and myths that would not only personalize but also give practical shape to the emanating ethical behavior. Hence, a careful examination of Amos’ indictments will reveal that the prophet’s aim is by no means the abolition of the institutionalized religion. Instead of

\(^{60}\) Amos 8:4-6.
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
seeking to ban religiousness and ritual, he means to illuminate their Machiavellian counterparts: religion-ism and ritualization.

In a similar vein, though Amos aims much of his polemic at Bethel (and additionally, Gilgal, Dan and Beersheba), it is important to note that his dispute is not with these other shrines as contenders with the state shrine at Jerusalem. This concept of centralization did not take hold until closer to the reign of Josiah, approximately 150 years later. Nor were Amos’ accusations chiefly concerned with idolatry. Rather, it seems that Bethel and several other cities simply came to embody, in the eyes of the prophet, the anemic religiosity against which he was so firmly set.

The most frequently mentioned act of religious indifference in Amos is that of mechanical ritualization. The problem rested not in the fact that there was any kind of neglect of religious ritual. In fact, the Israelites dutifully attended to them. Amos lists a number of observances that the Israelites maintained: “festivals” and “solemn assemblies,”64 “whole offerings”, “grain offerings” and “shared offerings,”65 and the “pilgrim feasts” and “songs” of worship.66 The daily and other regular offerings maintained their centrality, at least in the performative sense. Additionally, even the yearly calendar festivals persisted with their normal regularity. Underneath all this, the Israelites assumed that this ritualized “recitation” of their religious rites would be enough to appease Yahweh. This mistaken conjecture, along with God’s assessment of the situation, emerges in 5:25-26: “Did you, people of Israel, bring me sacrifices and offerings those forty years in the wilderness? No!” Even outside of the horrendous way of living that had come to mark and mar Israel’s daily life, the supposition that sacrificial

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64 Amos 5:21.
65 Amos 5:22.
66 Amos 8:10.
fidelity was Yahweh’s principal mandate was mistaken from the outset. It was never Yahweh’s intention to institute a mechanical system of appeasement. Nearly three hundred years earlier, the prophet Samuel had to remind Saul: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”67 As such, the sacrificial system had turned for the Israelites into their own fabricated form of religiosity. Paul notes that in a number of places,68 God refers to the religious performances in a way that acknowledges this new “ownership” of the religious customs. Instead of claiming the rites as “My sacrifices,” Yahweh speaks of “your pilgrim-feasts…your sacred ceremonies…your…offerings.”69

Even beyond these regular required practices, the Israelites also participated in what appears to be extra or supererogatory rituals. In 2:8, the prophet mentions men lying down “beside every altar.” Elizabeth Larocca-Pitts refers to a practice known as incubation in which individuals would go to a holy place and sleep there in order to receive visions and dreams from God.70 Though it might appear impressive that certain Israelite men would extend so much effort; however, the next line in the verse reveals that the garments on which they lie down are wrongfully withheld distrain. The second major religious “extra-credit” practice was that of pilgrimage. Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba were all major sites for this ritual. In fact, the prophet even points out that Israelites had taken up the custom of swearing by “the sacred way to Beersheba.”71

67 1 Samuel 15:22.
68 Amos 2:8, 4:4-5 and 5:21-23.
69 Amos 5:21-22.
71 Amos 8:14.
Amidst the perennial inhumanity, the Israelites would still literally go out of their way to observe the required (and not required) religious rites.

A curious disdain for religious space also existed. Whereas the former offenses more likely involved the majority of the population, these transgressions – at least as is evident in the text itself – remained limited to the elite. Specifically, this indifference towards the sacredness of religious settings took the shape of self-indulgence on wine. The prophet describes their crimes: “and in the house of their God they drink wine on the proceeds of fines…[and] you drink wine by the bowlful.” The word for bowl in 6:6, as Paul suggests, could have ties to the ceremonial bowls placed in the temple. Further, in 2:8 the collection of excessive fines facilitated the purchasing of the wine itself.

On the whole, the situation on the surface in Israel had become dismal. In addition to the rampant immorality (or amorality), the religious establishment had become a mockery of the intent for which it was originally created. The combination of this cruelty and religious apathy was the catalyst for Amos’ bitter censure and condemnation of the inhabitants of the northern kingdom. However, these were but the outer manifestation of an inner sentiment.

*The Arrogance of Jacob*

Three times in the book of Amos, Yahweh swears or makes an oath. Typically, an oath incorporates an object by which it is authenticated. This object represents the surety of the promise and the certainty of its lasting quality. In 4:2, God swears “by his holiness.” Two chapters later, Yahweh swears “by himself.” But in the final instance

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72 Amos 2:8, 6:6.
73 Amos 6:8.
of oath-making by God, Amos asserts that “The LORD has sworn by the arrogance of Jacob.”\footnote{Amos 8:7.} It is no small thing that Yahweh would swear first by His holiness and Himself and then make a promise by swearing on the pride of Israel.

By pride, I mean that egocentricity that comes to eclipse all other concerns under itself. Self becomes the ultimate priority, even to the exclusion and injury of others – whether it be fellow human beings or even God. For Yahweh to swear upon this facet of Israel’s character implies the degree to which it had become both widespread and deeply ingrained in the culture. Thus, the harsh treatment of the poor and needy as well as the ritualization of religious practice both derive from this inward exaltation of oneself over other people, other causes and Yahweh. Brueggemann comments: “In that context of self-assured pride, which could be expressed in every aspect of policy and practice, the reality of Yahweh tended to be distorted away from Yahweh’s own purposes in the world.”\footnote{Brueggemann, 640.} The result of the arrogance of Israel was the abstraction of Yahweh into an inert religious concept. Though the Israelites would hurriedly assent intellectually to Yahweh’s existence and His relation to Israel, their “practical theology” revealed a different belief underneath the surface.

\textit{The Difficulty of Restoring Balance}

The fact that these examples – the Stoics and ancient Israel – are set in contexts thousands of years from the present day by no means belittles their importance and relevance. The same conceptualizing trends that the Stoics defamed and the substitution of religious ritualism for ethical living that Amos saw occur in a vast variety of forms in
the world today. However, even an attempt to balance the two by means of religious practices is not without potential danger. Bellah questions “whether these practices lead to the self-realization or self-fulfillment at which they aim or only to an obsessive self-manipulation that defeats the proclaimed purpose.”\textsuperscript{76} It is crucial to remember that though both the end and means are important, confusing the two often occurs subtly and not without damaging effect.

Alasdair MacIntyre affirms the intrinsic good of certain practices; however, this benefit exists only insofar as these activities are woven into a larger fabric of a way of life. Keown, discussing the common misperceptions concerning the Buddhist perspective on means, states that

the theme of the \textit{Discourse of the Parable of the Water Snake} and of the \textit{Raft Parable} is not transcendence but a warning that even good things can be misused. The teachings are good but Ariṭṭha distorts them. The scriptures are good but some people twist them to their own ends. The raft is good but becomes a handicap if misused by being carried around. Calming and insight meditation are good but can be a hindrance if an attachment for them is allowed to develop.\textsuperscript{77}

Information, theory, beliefs and doctrines can all swell to a disproportionate size. In the same way, practice, ritual and action can eventually overtake a healthy balance between what one believes and what one does. Just as it is easier to fall off a beam than to stay on it for a long period of time, it seems as though the direction for maintaining this balance is uphill and the effort required is strenuous. There is no single answer is locating and maintaining a balance between beliefs and practice. The challenge rests, however, in

\textsuperscript{76} Bellah, 290.

\textsuperscript{77} Daniel Keown, \textit{The Nature of Buddhist Ethics} (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 105.
locating the nexus where concept becomes concrete. Foucault explains: “It is a question of analyzing a ‘regime of practices’ – practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect.”

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

Cleaning Our Windows

For most academic disciplines in the West, a reexamination of our lenses is crucial. Though not discarding our most basic perspectives, we need but to keep, examine and “clean” them accordingly. Wilfred Cantwell Smith explains, “Usually we see the world through a pattern of concepts that we have inherited. Sometimes these windows need cleaning: so much so that almost we may be seeing the windows that we have constructed rather than the world outside.”¹ The inherited categorical schema through which we view the world hold within a dangerous penchant for obscuring those things which they intend to make understandable and accessible. Thus, especially in scholastic circles, there is a need for a greater attention to practices, particularity and personality, taking note of what happens in reality, not just within sweeping conceptual constructs.

The way in which we study the world affects the way in which we view it, and how we, in turn, interact with the world around us. Especially in the field of religious studies, where so much vested identity and culture is at stake for people, we must be increasingly aware of the practical implications of our perspectives. Similarly, as with studying religiousness, the personal and communal pursuit of religiosity requires a similar balance between concept and reality if meaningful ownership and transformation are to take place. Both of these areas – the academic study and the personal-communal

pursuit of religiousness – vastly affect the way life is lived on a scale that spans from the individual to the entire globe. In turn, the lenses through which we look in both learning and living religiously have a powerful impact on the world around us. Attention to performative and integrative practices provides a springboard from which we can move towards more accurate, personal and practical understandings of those with whom we share this world

**Intersubjectivity and Integration**

Understanding the windows through which we see is complicated by our own embeddedness. The demand of modernity and the Enlightenment to “be objective” only seems to have lost ground. The last fifty years have seen an increased willingness to admit our own historical situatedness and the resulting perspectival limitations. As a result, the lens through which we view the objects of our study (and, additionally, our very selves) no longer presumes such transcendent clairvoyance, on the one hand, and such ready differentiation between subject and object, on the other. Further, language’s inescapably social nature and its inextricable linkage to the formation and maintenance of our conceptual framework further cements the claim that objectivity, whether specifically in rigorous academic study or simply in general, is elusive.

Nonetheless, though Husserl’s phenomenological epoche appears decreasingly realistic, there still remains a demand to draw lines between the academic and the personal. Admittedly, there is an obvious difference between someone writing out their personal thoughts and reflections on any given subject and an intentional, methodical inquiry into the same. But within this distinction, lurking underneath the language that
separates the personal and professional, lies the still authoritative, though subtler charge
to “be objective.” I have struggled with the distinction between the two as to where the
line is really drawn. Bellah contests that:

Perhaps nature as perceived by the poet, the theologian, and the scientist may be
the same thing after all. At least there is now room to talk about that possibility.

And there are parallel developments in the social sciences. There, too, it appears
that studying history and acting in it are not as different as we had thought.²

It is such a blurring of lines between disciplines (and categories as well) that has
categorized this work. It is academic in nature; however, its foundations are
unmistakably personal. In reading the works of various contributors to the fields of
religion, philosophy, history and the social sciences, I have found that, for the most part,
little or no attention is paid to the actual life of these thinkers. Their contributions to their
respective fields are presented by scholars in virtual isolation, as things in themselves.

For example, Freud’s foundational psychoanalytical theories are readily reified in the
classroom and in textbooks while his own inner struggles and yearnings that surely
contributed much to his later study receive little, if any, attention. On multiple levels,
this is the concern and impetus for this work. Something significant happens – in a
harmful way – when concepts and theories are separated from their practical and personal
groundings. The foregoing sentence is but an example of such a process. Even the use of
the passive voice without identifying an agent of the action in order to explain a given
process illustrates subtly the tendency we have adopted to separate concepts and theories
from reality, practicality and personality. To be sure, theories often times can be safely

*separated* from their practical grounding; however, this occurs through the perspectives and production of persons, not other abstract entities.

**Looking Ahead**

Simply examining and comprehending the lenses through which our worldviews are constructed is difficult enough. Deciding how to take real, practical steps forward is even more troublesome. From the embeddedness and the pitfalls of categorical thinking (not to mention its benefit and usefulness for understanding) to the intricacy of issues and problems surrounding practice (from power dynamics to variant individual intentionality behind various practices), numerous factors necessitate caution and carefulness on our part. Nonetheless, for the sake of the advancement of the study of religiousness *and* the personal-communal involvement therein, a couple of key steps should prove helpful.

Perhaps even more valuable than the knowledge of certain facts is a kind of meta-awareness or meta-consciousness – a “detached” perspective that allows for examining the scope of what one does and does not know. Not only this, but it is critical to grasp *how* and *in what ways* we know as well. This should not be confused with the Cartesian process of doubt and rational reformulation. Conversely, recognizing the context – the means, goals, values and history, for example – of our epistemology is by no means an attempt to construct an all-encompassing framework into which the world (or whatever object of inquiry) conveniently fits. Instead, it is, in a way, an admittance of “defeat” – owning our historical embeddedness and its unavoidable influence on our perspectives.

Don E. Saliers, in *Practicing Our Faith*, points indirectly to this transition in thinking:

How do people learn to sing such hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs? The vast majority of Christians have learned the way the vast majority of any human
community learns: by rote…But with the advent of musical notation, and eventually of hymn books for the congregation, people also learned by note. With musical literacy has come an enormously expanded range of what can be sung, especially in those traditions that place the hymnal or songbook alongside the Bible as central to devotion and corporate worship.³

The “advent of musical notation” was not, nor was it meant to be, an indictment against the previous common way of learning songs – through memorization. However, the development of a “language” which would make accessible the intricacies and inner-workings of music served to equip people in much greater breadth and with increased depth to not only more accurately understand the songs they were singing, but to more skillfully participate in and, perhaps, compose music. This premise is similar to Foucault’s meta-historiography, which he calls genealogy. Further, it is not unlike the Stoic self-examination, both in its attention to one’s capacity (or lack thereof) and the examination of the congruence (or lack thereof) between one’s logos and bios. Adopting or working towards such a new “language” within religious practices would prove significantly resourceful both for those studying them and those participating in them.

While moving forward in examining and participating in human religiousness does involve this reflexive reflection, “progress” is not merely limited to learning and understanding – it takes the shape of interacting and participating as well. In academia, this would probably take the shape of a greater balance between quantitative and qualitative research – being willing, like Artemidorus, to simply sit and listen to people’s perspectives. In terms of personal-communal religiousness, it might look like seeking

simple, practical steps – whether through one’s own creativity or through connecting with others – by which one’s beliefs are more deeply integrated into the particulars of daily life. Nor can there be any improvement by merely speaking to broad, inert concepts external to oneself. Phrases such as “society needs to…” or “I would love to see such-and-such happen…” relegate responsibility to the other and away from oneself. Taking steps forward starts with each person – not as isolated individuals, but as those who are vitally integrated into academic and/or practicing religious communities – meaning your-and myself.
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APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEWS

As this work began to take shape, it occurred to me that a different perspective was necessary. A wider angle of vision would be critical for not only its completion but its relevance to reality. Perhaps restating Artemidorus’ methods of research will more adequately illustrate my motivation:

I...have not only taken special pains to procure every book on the interpretation of dreams, but have consorted for many years with the much-despised diviners of the marketplace...I have patiently listened to old dreams and their consequences.

For there was no other possible way in which to get practice in these matters.\(^1\)

In his inquiry, Artemidorus did rely on published studies of dream interpretation. However, it seems that the significant substance of his work came as he simply sat down with people and listened to their stories. My aim was to emulate Artemidorus and act in line with that which I had been writing – particularity, people and practicality. As a result, I conducted five brief interviews with professionals from various religious traditions. Because of the nature of some of the questions (pertaining to issues I address in the “Problems” chapter), I selected those whose full-time occupation was in religious leadership. I would be very interested in hearing feedback to the same questions from those who are not in such a vocation.

Further, I must clarify that I by no means relate my interviewees to Artemidorus’ “much-despised diviners of the marketplace;” on the contrary, it was a delight to simply sit with and learn from each one of them. Nor did it require any measure of patience and endurance, as Artemidorus intimates. Their stories and thoughts were fascinating.

Before each transcribed interview, I will give brief background information for each individual in an attempt to underscore the perspective from which they are coming (except for the Catholic priest who has asked that his personal information not be disclosed). I am thankful for each one of these contributors and hope, on one hand, that their discussion will put flesh on the conceptual skeleton I have built in this work and, on the other, that you will learn from them as much as I did.

For each interview, I drew from the same list of questions. The first set focuses on various aspects “religious practice” – its definition, its place in each participant’s traditions, and its relation to analogous forms. The second group centers upon the divide between stated belief and enacted practice. I will italicize these questions in each appendix. At some points, I asked supplementary questions in order to get fuller answers from the participants. Most notably, due to somewhat of a language barrier, I had to reword some of the questions for Arhat Boonmee (despite this challenge, our discussion was very interesting and informative).
INTERVIEW WITH A REFORM JEWISH RABBI

Rabbi Justin Kerber serves as the Director for the University of Georgia’s Hillel. Having worked previously in law and with various congregations throughout the Southeast, Rabbi Kerber brings a distinct perspective to the discussion. His depth of knowledge of his religious tradition was mirrored by his personable, friendly demeanor.

What do you think of religious practice?

I think…ritual, but I think of ritual regularly conducted in my daily life to be my religious practice. My daily, regularized meditations, actions, my regularized weekly ones and those that I conduct in the course of an annual festival cycle…

On a daily basis, when I get up – and this has evolved and changed – when I get up in the morning…there have been times in my life, especially when I was in rabbinical school, it was relatively easy [to make time] for a…Jewish morning service where I would lay tefillin…on an almost daily basis. Since graduating from rabbinical school…I find it harder to make the time to do that. However, lately I have been combining a religious practice with an artistic practice. I’ve been getting up in the morning and writing what I call “morning pages” in a journal. It connects me to the…broader universe and it also gets this sort of nagging “I have to go fill up the car, I have to pay the bills, I have to mow the lawn, I have to rake the leaves”…it gets it out there on the page. And I feel like by doing that I am getting in touch with what the Universe is
really trying to tell me. It’s a way of getting rid of the background noise so that I can listen to what God’s trying to tell me. I start off everyday – there are certain prayers in Jewish liturgy that are meant to be said upon arising – so rather than saying them, just lately I’ve been writing them down on the page. Almost every single one of my “morning pages” begins either with “Modeh ani lifanekha melekh hai v’kayam shehehezarta bi nishmahti b’hemla, raba emunatekha modeh” (rabbinic language – “I thankfully acknowledge You for returning my soul to me in lovingkindness”)…or I’ll say – there’s a whole set of blessings that begin the morning service – the first of them is Barukh atah Adonai… “Blessed are you eternal God, eternal sovereign.”…Rather than saying them, I’ve been starting my morning pages by writing those down, and then I go on to “I have to balance the checkbook, I have to do the laundry,…I have to do whatever it was that I forgot to do.”

What does this time do for you in terms of integrating religiousness into your day?

I’m still learning what it’s doing for me…I think it is helping reduce some of the anxiety and I think it is helping me organize myself. And by doing that, I think it is helping me become more effective on the job. I cannot prove that yet. I’ve been at this for four or five weeks now. Get back to me in a year and I’ll be able to tell you more.

How would you differentiate between integrative practices and ritual/liturgy?

I would distinguish [integrative practices] from traditional liturgy. Traditional liturgy – I get up, I’d go through the motions that are prescribed by Jewish law, right down to starting my day with washing my hands with a blessing…the actions of getting
dressed…I might even put on a special ritual garment…I might put on *tephillin* and then I might read through the entire…prayer service which can take a long time even if you’re speeding through it. Or I might start the day by going to a daily *minyan*. I think that’s both practical and liturgical. And I define liturgy broadly. One might say that liturgy is the words on the page. I just recently heard a definition of liturgy as the “stuff that comes between the songs.” I think of liturgy as everything from the words on the printed page to the music…to ritual garb.

**What, and to what degree, does religion have to do with the mundane?**

Everything. Jewish mystics really take the idea of God’s oneness to this really extreme, really radical notion that “it’s all God.” There are instances at the beginning of Hasidism…of people running down the streets screaming “*alles ist Gott, alles ist Gott!*” [“It’s all God!”]…from this table, to the garbage can, to the toilets to the telephone wires. We…can’t go through life with that realization and still function. Which is why mysticism can be so dangerous…it can lead to insanity. But when I’m aware of that [relevance of the sacred to the mundane] I can find it really, really profound and really, really powerful.

I found that especially powerful when I was working with patients in a hospital. Because a lot of the times, people when they’re sick, especially when they’re really sick, when it’s cancer or something life-threatening, people try to figure out what it all means. They ask themselves, “Why me?” I find the idea that God is not just in the sunshine and the bluebirds, but God is in the illness and God is with us in the illness and in the struggles and in the pain and in the end of life as well. And in the boring stuff, in the
writing the check to pay the bills or in mowing the lawn. I think religion is at its best when its not put into its little box and tied shut and shoved off in the corner like most people – and myself included – try to do to it. And I think we in the West…not that the separation of Church and State is wrong – I’m all for it – but it does lead us to try to put it aside to think of it as something dangerous, to compartmentalize, which is challenging.

What does it look like to take religiosity into daily life?

I am in the habit of making a bracha every time I take a bite of food, every time I sit down to eat. And I don’t make a big deal of it either. I just say it to myself. Most of the time other people aren’t even aware that I’m doing it…It’s very internal, it’s very quiet, but it’s there…There’s a line in the Talmud that says that there’s one line that’s good enough in certain circumstances. And what the Talmud says is that if you’re being chased by bandits – “Berik rahamana, mara dehai pitta” – it’s Aramaic, it means “Blessed are you, Merciful One, Master of this bread.” To me, that’s good enough at all times. I figure in this age when our money is in cyberspace and our very identities can be stolen at any moment without our knowledge, we’re always in danger of being attacked by brigands that we don’t even know. So I figure it’s good enough. So I say that to myself after eating.

So…there’s the answer in a nutshell…I try to find those little moments that are not big deals, that I try to make them sacred. I try to make the mundane sacred whenever I can…I’m very conscious…of when it’s Shabbat and when it’s supposed to be sacred time. And I sometimes find myself feeling that I’m not doing more than I really might.
And I know I’m not the only one to feel that way…I feel that tension a lot. I try to keep Shabbat special…I do not always succeed.

*What purpose does Shabbat serve as preserving sacred space but also as a launching pad for integrating religious practices into daily life?*

I see Shabbat, at its best, it’s very communitarian – and that’s a time when a community does actually gather to read Torah and pray together and to talk to God as a community and to learn together. I see the laws about using electricity as actually having some values…it’s a way to get you to turn off the email, the cell phones and the beepers and all the rest of it and just be. It’s very difficult to do, especially if you’re living in a liberal community that doesn’t accept all of the strictures…it’s very challenging.

*How would you help someone develop their own religious practices?*

Steps toward it would be – it doesn’t matter what you do as doing it regularly – I would highly recommend joining a *minyan* service that you feel comfortable in and visiting it regularly. I highly recommend reading…finding a general book about Judaism…or even a book of Jewish history and learning. From a Jewish perspective, I would highly recommend learning Hebrew because that really was a huge way in for me…I realized that knowing Hebrew made Judaism a lot more accessible than it ever had been.
What does connecting with a community do for someone interested in religious practice?

It makes it real. Judaism just does not happen – ever – at an individual level. It is all about the community; it is all about the tribe. There are things you do at an individual level and there’s definitely a whole internal piece of it. We have no monastic tradition. It is entirely about the family, it is entirely about the tribe. I would actually go so far as to say that one is not serious about Judaism unless one is doing something Jewish with other Jews.

What kind of emphasis does Judaism put on practice itself?

I think for Judaism, the balance is very much more on the practical side of things. I think the practice drives the faith much more, the practice defines the faith much more than the faith defines the practice. It is about the doing. People often ask me, “Why keep kosher? Why put on the tefillin?” And I say the answer to that – it’s like swimming. You just can’t get – I can tell you what it feels like to be in water, but you’ll never get it until you just jump right in and start swimming. You don’t know what it feels like holding your breath underwater until you’re actually doing it. There is Jewish theology but it…happens after the fact and from within the system. The word “theology” itself is not a Hebrew word. There is Jewish theology, but it gets written in response to Christian theology…By the way, it’s very possible to be an avowed atheist and still be a member of the Jewish community…you get that all the time.
Isn’t the textual elaboration of the Talmud more practical and practice-related?

It’s very hard to explain what the Talmud is. It’s a compendium of law. It’s a teaching tool. It’s an encyclopedia. It’s also a treasure trove of stories and wisdom. Most of it is about practical details. [Picks up a 200 year-old copy of part of the Talmud]

There’s a particular discussion that I’m looking for that’s both practical and [theological].

This is a…rabbinical discussion about saying blessings. [Pointing to and translating the Hebrew text] “How should one recite blessings over fruit?” “One should say, ‘borei p’ri ha’etz” before taking a bite of fruit. Do you see how practical that is? That’s not really about who made the fruit or why…those are sort of givens…

What do you see as a cause or contributing factor for the breach between what is believed and what is actually practiced?

Outside pressure, inside pressure. Sometimes it’s socially difficult, so there are a lot of other demands on your time and on your energy. And sometimes, a person doesn’t feel capable of taking on absolutely everything the religion might say [is necessary]. Judaism makes a lot of demands. And people don’t always feel capable of living up to it. And when that’s the case a lot of times people say, “Well, if I can’t do the whole thing then I’m not going to do anything.” Which I don’t think is what Judaism says and I don’t think any knowledgeable, decent-hearted practicing Jew would say. I think most would say it’s better to take on what you can…and keep learning.
What does the tradition of Judaism say about this divide?

At the base, it’s about practice. It isn’t about belief. The big idea is definitely the belief in one God. That’s not such a complex idea. So, I think Judaism is really about its action. And I guess what Judaism has to say when you boil it down is that learning is important, action is important, action might be more important. Only in the modern era have we really gotten concerned with “belief structure.” It’s not brand-spanking new, but it’s because of influences from greater outside society, from the Greeks until now.

What are the sources of authority (text, custom, etc.) from which people draw practices?

A lot of it is just practical learning. We lit chanukah candles this way at my house in this way so that’s how I know how to do it. We sang these songs at the Passover Seder so that’s how I know to do it. The Passover Haggadah is certainly the rabbinic document that most Jews are familiar with…The Torah certainly would be a well-spring, although it’s interesting because the Judaism that is described in the Bible is utterly obsolete. It assumes a sacrificial cult that hasn’t been able to be practiced for over 2000 years. The Talmud knows very well that there’s no more Temple and it is about how to do Judaism without a Temple, without a sacrificial cult.

Although…an opposite process is happening. As the rest of the Jewish world becomes more lenient, the Orthodox world becomes ever more stringent…and I’ve heard it argued that…all this stringency is that people are getting their knowledge more from books now than from their grandmother. There’s definitely a movement – it’s called the Teshuvah movement, it’s the Jewish equivalent of “born-again Christians.”
[There is] a specific series of books. [Pointing to another book] This is a traditional [text]. This is a company called Art Scroll that produces a whole series of Judaic literature. You’ll notice about it – they’ve got the traditional text. They’ve also got instructions in English interspersed all the way through it. Everything is translated. Everything has commentary…You’ll notice that the Hebrew here…is an Eastern European, Yeshivah-world way of pronouncing it. This whole thing is coming out of the Yeshivah world. They are conscious of preserving and extending it, giving it new life of its own. This whole series has had an enormous impact on Orthodoxy. The Orthodox minyan here uses an Art Scroll [book]. And they make everything. I’ve got an Art Scroll edition of the Tanakh. Commentaries everywhere. They make an edition of the Talmud, which is actually really interesting because that’s being used for Talmud study – Talmud study has always been the defining activity of an Orthodox man – but they make a Talmud that’s actually really user-friendly for people who don’t have the textual skills to really sit down and learn a page of traditional Talmud. But their stuff is very stringent…it’s full of these stringencies on how to do things properly. It’s very attractive, it’s very user-friendly. So it has taken on a lot of popularity. But it’s very strict. It’s going to push people to the right. It has done so. Now I’d say Art Scroll is kind of like Budweiser. At the end of the day you can say what you want about it, but, technically speaking, it’s excellent. It’s very user-friendly…just down to incredible detail. Ordinary sedorim do not have a whole section in English on laws on how to pray. There are minor public fast days when a particular Torah reading is read. Now it’s not widely known, but there are certain verses on a public fast day when the whole congregation is supposed to join in. They’ve got the level of detail – they’ve got those parts in bold-face. They really
lay it out for you. That’s what I mean by technically excellent. The intent is to preserve, protect and defend this one expression of really traditional Judaism. Preserve, protect, defend, and expand – bring this Judaism out from where it’s being kept alive in a few pockets in Israel and here in the United States to the broader public. They want to get Jews involved in Orthodox Judaism…and they’re succeeding.

How would you differentiate between a compartmentalized and a holistic way of life?

Sometimes my Judaism helps me feel holistic and other times it makes me feel compartmentalized. And that is a product of my role as a modern Jew – I’ve got one foot in the tradition and one foot in modernity. I think that too much compartmentalization can make you feel neurotic. It can make you feel pulled in different directions. And I definitely think that Judaism when it’s done well can help one transcend some of the daily pressures and some of the pushes and pulls one feels in different directions.
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH A METHODIST PASTOR

I met with Pastor Lisa Caine in a quaint white house that sits beside Oconee Street United Methodist Church and doubles as the office for the Athens Urban Ministry (AUM), which is part of the church’s outreach to the community. In addition to serving as the head pastor for the church, Pastor Caine is the Director of AUM, a program that meets the needs of Athens’ many homeless citizens.

What do you think of when you hear “religious practice”?

I think of religious practice as anything you do on a regular basis to draw you closer to God. Brother Lawrence talked about practicing the presence of God – so it can be a very loose kind of thing or a very defined and systematic and organized kind of thing…but whatever you do to practice the presence of God in your life. And he said you can practice that peeling potatoes in the kitchen just as well as you can practice it on your knees in the sanctuary. [The purpose of religious practice is] to draw you closer to God and [to be] more aware of God in your life, and [that God is] with you in your life.

How would you relate religious practice to ritual and liturgy?

Ritual and liturgy are both stylized, symbolic, have a long tradition of history usually associated with it, so you’re not just doing it for yourself. You’re doing it with others. Liturgy means “work of the people,” so it’s a communal activity, it has a history
behind it, a heavy symbolism to go along with it. Whereas a personal practice is idiosyncratic – it’s what you do to bring God into your presence and that might be totally different from what somebody else does. But in community, with ritual and with liturgy, you conform yourself to that practice and so it’s kind of a different feel. I think a ritual is any kind of practice that you do over and over again in a certain way, a certain manner, a prescribed manner which, in itself, gives meaning to it. If you don’t do it in that way, then it doesn’t have the same meaning as if you did follow the steps and did it exactly so. Liturgy is…by definition a communal activity. Ritual doesn’t have to be communal, it can be individualistic. Liturgy is always communal.

*What does religiousness have to do with the mundane?*

It depends, I guess, on how you define religion and if you’re thinking about organized religion, as in, “I am a Methodist, I am a Baptist, or whatever, and this is what we do in our religion.” Or is religion more…or spirituality, I guess you’d say, how do I bring God into my life and into the everyday activities? I think there’s a big divide for a lot of folks between their religion – as we said before, what they do on Sundays as a family practice, or as a habit, or as a custom, or as a way to network with people…you know there’s lots of reasons people go to church besides to worship God – and then what we do, in a sense, when nobody’s watching in the mundane activities of our lives. Like peeling the potatoes in the kitchen. Religion can or can not have a lot to do [with daily life] and depending on how the individual person makes the connection, crosses the bridge from Sunday morning into the mundane.
Somehow you’ve got to take what’s being presented to you from the outside and take it inside so that your identity changes. Your way of being in the world changes. And so, it’s not just a head thing…I don’t want to just say it’s a heart thing, it’s a whole person thing. And I think it’s a gradual process. And sometimes I think it has to be a conscious process for a while. And then after a while you just see things differently – you behave differently, act differently. Paul says, “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me.” And I think that’s what he’s aiming for…he internalized the practice so that it is you. It’s not just something you do, it’s something you are.

It’s kind of like when I remember learning how to drive a car and how excited I was at first and how aware I was at first of just sitting behind the steering wheel and how that felt different from sitting in the passenger seat. And the thrill of putting the key in the ignition and turning it and hearing the sound. I could have sat in the driveway and done that over and over again and been thrilled. And now, do I even think twice about sticking the key in the ignition and going? No. It’s just what I do, I don’t even think about it. And in a way, it’s kind of like that [with religious practices]. You do something at first very consciously and you’re very aware of it. It’s very new. And it’s exciting perhaps and then, as you move on into whatever it is, it becomes second-nature to you…just what you do.

*How does someone grow or move forward into a whole life of religious practice?*

It’s a whole life. It’s something that’s a continual process. And I tell people all the time, “You’re not through until you take your last breath.” And you maybe aren’t through then. We don’t know. So we’re constantly growing and changing and becoming
more aware and moving in different directions and going down a path and we don’t necessarily know what lies ahead on that path, we can just see the next step. So it’s just constantly revealing itself. I don’t think you can set out, let’s say, when you’re sixteen or whatever age…to say, “Ok, this is my path and this is what I’m going to do,” because life has a way of laughing at you when you do that. So you just do what you are doing now and then, hang loose and see what comes next. I don’t think you can block out and say, “This will be my spiritual path. This will be my spiritual life.” But for me, today, in this context, where I am, and with what I’m interested in and where I feel the leading of God, this is what I want to do to connect. And it may be different. To me, that’s part of the fun, part of the excitement of living that kind of life. You never know what will be around the corner.

I think for some people, they feel a very strong connection in service, in doing something, hands-on. I have a lot of folks in my church for whom God is never more present than when they’re working in the soup kitchen. That’s the Kingdom right there, when you’re handing a plate of food to someone. And you see people laughing and talking together who, maybe, are homeless. But for that moment, there’s peace, there’s joy. That’s a spiritual practice, but it’s a very physical practice. And then there are others for whom that doesn’t do it for them. They need to have a quiet time. They need to have a worship center in their home. They need to light candles…have incense…whatever. So it’s very individualistic, I think. You have to say, “Where do you connect?” For some, it’s in music.
What kind of emphasis does Methodism put on practice itself?

I think, in the Methodist tradition, John Wesley was big on practice. We’re called Methodists for a reason. He was very methodical. And he thought – and I’m not a very good follower of Wesley in this – you need to get up at 4 o’clock in the morning and you need to spend an hour on your knees and you need to spend an hour reading your Bible…and he believed that, if you could, you should take communion every day. There was an opportunity for you and God to draw close. I think religious practice is hugely important. The hard thing for anybody is to set up a practice and be, at first, aware. “Today, I’m going to set aside ten minutes to meditate.” “Today, I’m going to set aside ten minutes to read my Bible.” To make it a habit, it’s hard for us to make anything a habit. Try to make exercise a habit or eating your vegetables or brushing your teeth or flossing – you’ve got to put some effort into it at first. Otherwise, it is just that thing you do on Sunday and a thing that is external to you. Unless you incorporate it into your life in some kind of very personal way then it doesn’t live within you. I find it really interesting for so many people that I talk to, that [religious practice] always is something they’re going to do when they have time. They’re going to start coming to church regularly once the kids finish soccer practice. They’re going to start doing this regularly once they finish their MBA. But you keep putting stuff off, and yet if you think this is the most important thing in your life and if every day is a day that God has given you, then how odd it is to say, “I’ll do that later because these other things are more important.” There’s a part of us – you know when you were a little kid, you thought you were immortal – there’s still that little sense [in thinking], “I’ve got all the time in the world.” Maybe yes, maybe no. But how do you get folks to reprioritize so that, yes, you
can still get the MBA and you can still get the kids to soccer practice – all those things – but you do that under the umbrella that says, “God is here”? We manage to carve out time for so many things. That kind of behavior reflects, then, the priority, where it stands in your life.

**What sources of authority speak to practice?**

Of course, if you look at Scripture, Jesus spent a lot of time going aside to pray. So if you’re looking for a model, there’s a model. That’s a starting place. The Scripture says that we should raise up our children, to teach them. So there are Scriptural mandates. And I think traditionally, through the history of the church, there have been mandates for certain practices and activities to help reinforce belief. I think experience can show you too that a practice built up over time, something that you do regularly, can make a difference. [Laughing] As a Methodist, that’s hard, do I choose the Bible or do I choose Wesley? I guess I should take Scripture first. And there are plenty of mandates there in Scripture. In our Methodist tradition as well, [there are things that] Wesley suggested that we do – the accountability groups, the almsgiving and the praying. Go back and look at Matthew 6 and you pray in secret, you fast – all of those are there in Scripture too, and Wesley picked up on that. Well, I think that is what he was trying to do was what we’re saying to do – this is a mandate that comes, how do we internalize it and make it a part of our lives? We can’t just read about it [and say], “Oh, isn’t that nice? Jesus says to pray…Oh, I guess I have to pray.” I think that’s what he was trying to do, was to help people develop religious practices and he used Scriptural mandates for that.
Have you encountered a divide between what is believed and what is practiced?

Of course! I would be surprised if I didn’t. That’s what being human is. I don’t think any of us is perfect. We have high ideals and there are things we want to do and yet we fail every day. And yet it doesn’t mean we give up, we just keep on keeping on. I’m sure that’s the same for me as with anybody else. I think that sometimes, as a younger person, I became – I’m a church dropout. I was out of church for 15 years from the time I was 20 to 35. And part of it was because I thought people were real hypocrites, because they did say they believed one thing and obviously were not living it in their lives. And I think when you’re young and idealistic, you can really become judgmental about the failings of others and you can really go picking at that splinter in someone else’s eye and not be aware at all of the log in your own. But the longer I live, the more I realize, “Sure, we’re all flawed.” What I like about [Wesley] is this energy about things being unfinished, you’re always working out your salvation. It’s not a “get out of jail free” card, so you’re moving on to perfection. We’re all moving along, we’re all on this journey. We’re in different places in our journey. I think if we can recognize that, it gives us a certain compassion for others instead of a judgmental attitude. I don’t believe in cookie-cutter Christians. We’re all individuals.

What causes this breach?

Life. Life happens. It’s a failure to reprioritize, difficulty in establishing new habits. The really hard thing…they say the longest journey you ever take is the journey from the head to the heart. And making that journey, having those moments when the light bulb comes on, and all of a sudden you see things from a different perspective, it
takes a long time. Sometimes you can do the same thing over and over again with no
effect whatsoever and, all of a sudden, one day, it’s, “Oh yeah, I get it now.” I think it’s
Thomas Merton who says that if everyone was aware, we’d see burning bushes
everywhere, but most of the time we don’t see the burning bush. We don’t step aside and
look. You have to turn your eyes to see the burning bush. Also, I think that there’s – I
believe it’s a Buddhist practice – being in the present moment. That’s where God is, in
the present moment. We don’t spend a lot of time in this moment right now, but it’s all
we have. If we don’t find God in this moment…. [Laughing] Is there a burning bush
around here somewhere? I think we can live very superficially.

We’ve just got so much on our plate and so much we want to do that we’re trying
to be so many different things to so many different people that, if you’re not careful, you
forget who you are. It just gets lost. Maybe that’s true for everyone. I think that’s
especially true for women as they are mothers and there are all these things – the needs of
people.

*How do you help people become aware of this divide?*

I try to offer opportunities within our church arena for different spiritual practices.
Lent’s always a good time for that. We had a session on contemplative prayer. So we
did a three hour workshop on contemplative prayer for those who wanted to stay for that.
And then, I decided to introduce a moment or two of silence into our worship service so
that people could experience silence. And that’s been three or four years now and we’re
still doing that. We’re going to have a moment of silence to prepare our hearts and then
we just sit. It’s total silence anywhere from one minute to two minutes. And for some
people, that is the longest two minutes of their life. They hate it. And then I’ve had other people come and say, “I love the silence. It’s the only time in my whole week that it’s quiet.” And yet, to come into the presence of God, I think we have to have some silence to prepare our hearts. One year we had Bible study, we read books on devotional life. So we try to give them a variety of ways to connect. My church is very socially active and so the folks who connect to God through hands-on…I’m really trying to work with my really active people on slowing down, being quiet, and really giving God a chance to speak.

What does the Methodist tradition say about this divide?

Well, I don’t think that’s just a Methodist issue, that’s a human issue. And so, I think Wesley would have said – and it’s not just Methodist – the only way you can breach that gap is beginning practices on your own in your own life to make it yours. So that it’s not just the church’s, but it’s yours. You don’t just hear Scripture read in church, but you’re curious enough to read it yourself, which can be a daunting activity. So that’s why, I think, Bible study is so important to do it with someone and to it in a methodical way. And maybe develop a practice out of that. And the same with prayer and meditation. I think all churches are trying to help folks find ways to take it home. I know that there are a lot of folks who say that they don’t need God: “I can commune with God great just sitting under a tree somewhere.” And you really can, but I think you miss a certain aspect of spirituality when it’s just you and God. You miss that experience of God in other people. Jesus said, “Where two or more are gathered,” and so, why? Why not just, “Whenever you think about me, I’m there”? But, “Where two or more are
gathered,” there’s something about “I see God in you, you see God in me” – we have a broader and greater understanding. And there’s something about sitting in a sanctuary or kneeling at an altar…you don’t know [the people around you] perhaps and yet you feel a connection. That’s the Spirit working. God became incarnate for a reason. Came among us, walked among us. And if that was not to be in community and not for us to sense the presence of God in human flesh, then what was that all about? So I think the incarnation happens over and over again when we’re in church together.

Are people aware of the disparity?

Oh yeah, they’ll say that all time. And they’ll beat themselves up about it and I don’t think people should beat themselves up, I don’t think that ever works. I’m not into shame and guilt. That’s counterproductive. You’ve already started on the journey if you’re aware of the disparity. And that’s huge, that’s huge. Because once you realize that there’s a problem, you can work on it. It’s ok if you recognize it – that means God is working in your life.

Could you differentiate between compartmentalized and holistic life?

I relate that to my own life. When I was in seminary I took a class in spiritual practices and we had to write a spiritual biography. I finally called it “The Three Faces of Lisa” and I felt as though I was a split personality for a long part of my life. I was a certain way at work. I had a certain personality there. I was very driven and very focused and very ambitious and very cutthroat, I did what I had to do. And at home, I had an identity as the mother, as the wife, as the nurturer, as the buffer, as the go-between
— all the things mothers do. And then at church, I had another person and it was that one that I liked the best. It was there that I felt the closest to who I really was. And it wasn’t until working it out through my life that I let that one take over the others. Life is so much easier when you can just be the same person all the time – what you see is what you get. Compartmentalizing things is just fragmenting. You’re never your whole self. It just makes sense from a psychological standpoint as well as a spiritual standpoint – be authentically you. A friend told me at one point in that process, “You are a unique and unrepeatable miracle.”

*If a holistic lifestyle is better, then why does it seem that so many people live a life of compartmentalization?*

I think that, on the surface, [a compartmentalized life] looks easier. But I think on a deeper level, it’s a trust issue. It’s a trust in yourself, it’s trusting God, it’s trusting other people. Will they accept me if I reveal this side of myself? Will I get the promotion if I show love and compassion and kindness or do I really have to be cutthroat in this environment? So, I think trust has a lot to do with it. But when those issues are paramount, then it’s very hard to let the real self come out except in a very trusting, safe place.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW WITH A BUDDHIST ARHAT

Driving to the Wat Santidham Buddhist retreat center in Augusta, I had no idea what to expect. I was very excited, once I arrived, as I was asked to wait in a quiet room filled with various Buddhist statues sitting about and teachings posted on the walls. Arhat Boonmee, wearing the traditional Theravadan robe, sat himself down quietly and readied himself for the interview. As the head monk at the center, he is responsible for the training that goes on there. Not only did I thoroughly enjoy his insightful answers, but even more, I took great pleasure in the times when he would laugh out loud.

How would you describe religious practice?

In Buddhism we have two parts...like a lay-person and a monk who follows, studies what the Buddha taught...We have time to study and practice. Usually when you are a monk you have more time to learn more Buddhism and to practice. You don’t worry about anything because you live dependent on the people. But when for the layperson you have to work, you have a kid, a wife...When you practice Buddhism...Buddhism has a foundation for the layperson, called the 5 Precepts – not to kill or harm a living thing, not steal, not tell a lie...For monks, you have 227 precepts...but all precepts can control your body and speech, but cannot control your mind. If you want to control your mind, you have to practice at a higher level – meditation. First, we have precepts. After that, meditation. When you control your
mind, your mind will clear – you call that wisdom, you can think what the Buddha taught…then you will understand.

*What do you meditate on?*

Usually meditation will focus will focus on our mind. Usually in Buddhism, you have forty ways to do that. Sometimes, we do the breathing and everybody can do that.

*So the goal of meditation would be…*

For the people, you can do it for normal life. If you can control your mind, when you go to the world a lot of things can happen. You can calm down, you can think very clearly before you do anything, before you act. You think first and then you can control yourself. Everybody…can use [meditation].

*Can you relate practice and ritual?*

Usually…when you do a ritual like a ceremony and they are different from [country to] country. Buddhism down from the South…Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand is Thereavada. Up to the north – Tibet, Nepal, China – they’re Mahayana. To the south, we do ceremonies in different countries in different ways. [Ritual] is kind of like a skin…not important. But when we have a lot of people come together…we have to do something. Sometimes, we do a longer ceremony, a chant…depending on time.
Is there a difference in the purpose between ritual and practice?

Before we do meditation, we do chanting…The chanting prepares our minds and our bodies to practice meditation. When you chant you can think anything that will calm yourself down. In meditation, you can sit, you can walk, standing, you can lay down.

What does Buddhist practice have to do with everyday life?¹

Usually you just live a normal life…be a good person. If you’re happy with your life, that’s good for you. You get up…you go to work, do good things, help people out. Do the normal things…not against the law, not hurt[ing] people. You can make your life happy.

How does meditation help a practitioner approach daily life in a different way?

If [with] our body, we exercise…we make our body strong. The same thing. Your meditation makes you exercise your mind. If your mind is strong, or your body is strong, you can do anything with your body. You can go to work, you can do anything. When people do something and we see two people…maybe they’re not different…and one person has a very strong mind because they practice more, they’re really strong in their mind.

¹ It is at this point that I realized the unique case of Theravada Buddhism. According to its tradition, there is a sharp distinction drawn between monks and laypeople. Most importantly, enlightenment or awakening is able to be achieved only by monks. This division, at first glance, does seem problematic for my work; however, numerous aspects of Arhat Boonmee’s thoughts are still instructive and applicable to the arena of integrative religious practices.
Is there a different perspective that comes from meditating?

In meditation, we try to control ourselves. We try not to attach with the world. …you have to know that a common thing that happens all the time to…people and to the world – but how can you control yourself?…not to worry too much…not to get upset about anything. Just to be normal, to be happy with yourself.

How does someone grow in practicing Buddhism?

Usually they come with a custom or a tradition…in my country ninety to ninety-five percent, there’s Buddhism in their family. When they have time, they become a novice and take…10 precepts. When they are 20 years old, they become a monk. When you’re a monk, you study and you know more. Before you get married, you have to be a monk for a month or three months…you complete yourself. People there believe in all kinds of customs.

What is the goal of being required to be a monk?

To learn more about yourself…to learn the Buddha’s way. To make yourself a perfect person. You live in the monk’s [house], you practice meditation…you get up early in the morning…everything you learn for your life for the good person. Develop your mind…sometime, when you’re a layperson, you can do whatever you want, but when you’re a monk you [have to follow all the rules]. You have to take the 227 precepts all the time. Sometimes for the new monks, that’s very hard for them. Before you can eat something, you cannot eat by yourself.
What kind of emphasis does Buddhism put on practice as opposed to knowledge?

Usually in Buddhism, they have belief and wisdom. Not just believe…you have to understand what the Buddha taught…what that means…it has to make sense so you can follow.

Is there an emphasis on understanding and then practice?

Usually we have a precept and we follow the rule…we study to understand what we believe. Usually the Buddha will show you the way. You can believe him or not. If you believe in him…you can follow him.

What is the source from which you draw your practice?

From the text. From the Buddha. We call them the *Tripitaka* – we separate it into 45 books. Rules for the monks, for the lady monks. They talk about what the Buddha taught in stories for rules for the people. How the Buddha taught we recorded in the Pali language…we have to study Pali and then explain it into our language.

Do you ever encounter a divide between what is believed and what is practiced?

Usually when you are young, you make mistakes all the time. You know to smoke, to drink is not good, but you still do that. Even the people who follow their practice very seriously [still] make mistakes and then they try to develop their mind – if their mind is strong enough they can cut out all kinds of things like that…sometimes it takes many years…and then they can [be] rid of all kinds of bad things.
What do you think causes this divide? What makes me mess up?

You say something…you have to do the same thing, what you said…if you do like that, you have more credit, people believe you. Layperson and monk – monks practice, study and read…we have to do that…we follow that, what we said, what we tell to the people. But if you’re a layperson, you hear what the monk said…you didn’t do everything the monk said…you try to do what is good for you, what’s best for you. That’s why people respect monks more. Monks follow all the rules. And then people offer everything to the temple. Monks live by the people, because they believe that monks can do what they said. Some people can do really good, but some people can’t. So many things the Buddha taught…they can do something. At least you didn’t harm anybody, you didn’t bother people.

What does the Buddha say about compartmentalization and a holistic life?

Like with one person, you can be a father, you can be a husband, you can have a coworker, you have a son or daughter. One person has many statuses. Buddha has a duty for every person – a father, mother, son, for a teacher…for everything. Buddha taught everything about…every situation that you have. Do the right thing for you.

Is there any set of rules for every role?

The 5 precepts are basic for everybody. Not to kill all living things – that’s a normal rule for every religion. Not to steal others’ property – the same, every religion has this one. Not cheating on your wife, sexual misconduct. And not lying, be honest.
Not to drink…because Buddha said if you drink too much your brain is dead. Everybody must have these 5 rules…they are basic for all the Buddhist people.

Then there are specific rules for everybody?

No, not rules. Buddha taught you…it’s a duty for you. “You should do it this way.” The good way…for your son, for your daughter, for your student, for your teacher, for your mom, for your dad – what you should do for them – what will make them really happy.

Have you seen in Buddhism the extremes of ritualism and doctrinalism?

When you practice meditation you know by yourself…but some people, they just read the book, they know everything but they do nothing…this is not good for them because nothing happens. If you didn’t know anything but you did the good thing, you did good. It’s not bad…nothing happens. You didn’t earn anything from the knowledge you have. If you know something really well but you didn’t help people, you didn’t help yourself, you didn’t earn anything from it.

What about the group meditation and chanting…why is it important?

Chanting, a lot of chants you have memorized. One monk sometimes gets lost. But sitting meditation, if you sit alone, you get kind of lazy. You don’t want to do that. Even [lay]people – they can sit at home, but they come to the temple. Why? When they come here they cut off all worries. And then they can practice. They practice together to make them go, [looking to the side, as if at another person] “Ugh, they do it. Everybody
does the same [thing]. I have to do that.” If you’re alone, you’re kind of lazy. Every 
day] at 7:30am we do meditation. Some temples…do it at 4 or 5 in the morning. When 
the time comes, we have a bell…the monks come together [for] chanting and for 
meditation.

*How do the laypeople take practices in the temple into daily life?*

When they practice, they have to calm down…they have to exercise their mind. 
They have a strong mind and go back to fight with the problem in the house. Some 
people, before they come to the temple, they get upset really easily, get angry really easy. 
And when they come to temple, they practice meditation…they have more patience, they 
can control their mind. They didn’t do that any more. They can control inside. They can 
think first.

*What is each person trying to change?*

To develop their mind, develop themselves.

*In wanting to develop themselves, what is the goal?*

For the layperson, you develop your mind to be a happy person. That’s all they 
want. But for the monk, we practice meditation…when you practice really deeply, you 
can see the thing that the normal eye, the normal brain cannot see.
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW WITH A CATHOLIC PRIEST

When you hear “religious practice,” what do you think?

When I hear “religious practice,” as a Catholic, I just think about all the rules and regulations that the Church has for the members to follow throughout the year and throughout one’s life. For example, they have to go to Mass every Sunday…the practice of the rosary…during Lent, not to eat meat on Friday…to go to confession…to visit communion. That is the core of our religious practice. Also, the Church has…the rules [and] the rites, but it takes those into the religious practice which is “to love your neighbor as yourself.” There is also almsgiving, which is helping the poor…and to help the needy, to visit the sick [and] those in prison.

How would you connect the rules and rites to the commitment to love?

People have the tendency to choose between the two, because it’s hard to combine the two. The religious, the Christian idea, the Jesus idea is that these two will be so perfect that you don’t even see the difference because you’ll be religious. One of Jesus’ criticisms…was looking at the “religious” practice…it was not put into practice into daily lives. So our practice would be, for example, as a Catholic, that you would go and break the bread on Sunday, which is the Eucharist, then it asks you to extend and go in peace. The last word says to “go in peace to love and serve the Lord,” and to love and serve the Lord you do it by serving others because we don’t see God. But people have a tendency,
[once] the Mass is over, and they understand that everything is over so [they think], “I will go and live my normal life now.”…We see that people who are very religious, they spend a lot of time practicing in the Church…their lives, sometimes, are very lacking – because there is no balance. And when you have people serving fully on the social aspect or the “neighbor aspect,” they lack on their daily prayers because they say, “I’m praying while I’m serving my brother.” Practice, both in my preaching and my serving, I make sure that there’s always a connection. For example, for Palm Sunday, I ask people to take a palm and put it in their house…and reread the passion of Christ and compare it, how people are going through the same thing that Jesus went through…so we do it in everyday living…among ourselves.

*How would you relate integrative religious practices to ritual and liturgy?*

I find it very difficult to separate them. As a matter of fact, I think people are supposed to see God in everyone and in everything. First of all, Scripture says it. The basic of our faith, the first chapter. We’re created in God’s image. For example, when I prepare a marriage and I ask, “[Why get married in the church,] you could get married civilly?” But you see, Mary [as an example of an individual, not the Virgin Mary] is God’s creation and you have to see in Mary the image of God…so when we think about that, what do we think about? We think about love, respect…God is creator. You have to see God is creator and we are co-creators…Everything that we do is not an accident…they are a creation of God. But also God asks us to dominate creation and not allow creation to dominate us. So, therefore, if I have to wash my car…but if I remember that I’m a Christian, I use water for baptism. And water is life and if I waste it, then I’m
going against God’s creation…[then] I’m abusing God’s creation. The same way with people. If God is in the other person, like if I say a bad word to you…not only am I hurting you, I’m [hurting] the creation. If I’m disliking you for any reason, for the sake of it, I’m disliking God in you. If I’m working…I have to ask myself, “The work that I’m doing, is it helping in God’s creation?” If it is, then what is it doing? For example, if I am an accountant, I’m trying to make someone else’s life easier by managing his or her [money]. If I’m a policeman, I’m going to catch the next guy speeding. But if I said, “I’m giving you a ticket so I can save life, because you [won’t] kill yourself or others,” you transcend your work into the religious realm. So then it’s not just an activity. A Christian does not just do activities, but as a Christian our activities are supposed to be a human activity, but because we’re both spirit and body,…we always have to find the spiritual part of it.

Then, it’s hard to draw lines between ritual and integrative practice?

In the Christian religion, it is God that makes himself human…so our ritual is to bring all our human activities and offer them to God. And we receive from God so we can go back to our human activities, so there’s no separation. Although physically, for example, with time, [we can] separate human activity from a spiritual activity. To sit for an hour [in Mass]…I’m a bus driver, but I’m not driving the bus at that moment and I’m with other people who have other activities and we come together to think about that God and then receive the same grace, the same power and go back to the different activities which is good for humanity. So when we come together, the Spirit needs time to express itself because it doesn’t express itself only in activities – that’s where the ritual comes. I
think that’s where we can separate the ritual and the other aspect of practice. But in the practice itself, the ritual is a completely spiritual activity and the other is both human and spiritual activity.

How, and to what extent, does religiosity have to do with the mundane activities of life?

I would use a word “religion” with a small “r” and a capital “R.” The small “r” is the thing that we do in an hour, two hours, a specific moment…whatever time religion would take. A person can go through the ritual and you are “religious” in that sense, because religion, that’s what it does, it gives you rituals. But “religious” with a capital “R,” it’s more that whatever you do becomes “Religious” activities. Even washing the dishes. How does washing dishes become a “Religious” activity? It’s because I ate, those plates were used [by people]. The plates and the glasses that we used – because they have served human beings – they should be sacred. And when I’m washing them, I’m using, first of all, water, which is God’s creation and the human creation, which is the plates…and I’m going to use them again to give people life. Then when I’m doing it, it’s not just an activity, it becomes a “Religious” activity, because I see the Higher Being in my activity. Now, I can thank God for the strength and pray for those who do not have hands to wash dishes and think about those who did not eat. And even after the meal, it’s a time for me to think about my activities. What we do, I think ninety percent of our activities, we just do it without even thinking about it…and they’re not religious. Or I can be fighting with my brothers and sisters. Or I can let the other one do more than I do. [Or] I can become just in what I do and understand…then it becomes “religious” with a capital “R.”
How would someone take steps forward in growing towards “Religious” practice in their week outside of Mass?

Definitely, if we look at, let’s say the rosary. What used to be done in the past, when people were not so caught up in the individual, you would have a woman who would take six or seven children…and say the rosary with them. By saying the rosary, they are talking about the mother of God. However, that practice teaches children to respect an adult which is not their mother or father. That’s the first thing. The second is that the children [participate] in an activity which is not violent and teaches them to be together and share time together. That would be one way to practice it.

The second, for example, we break the bread which is the Eucharist. As a matter of fact, this Sunday’s reading talks about the five aspects of a community [that are necessary] to be truly Christian. First to listen to the teaching of the apostles. Second, to break the bread – and at that time, it wasn’t the host. People would bring the bread and break it…The significance of it is to share community, the common bond they had. And after, they would bring…the surplus of what they had and share it with those who did not have, according to the needs of each one. And they would go out and serve others. So our liturgy is not only coming with empty hands. Whatever you’ve done – either psychologically or physically – for another…and you cannot come to the Eucharist if you have an enemy, for example, you have to reconcile. If a poor person is in need and you deny it, you need to respond to the need. Not only because we respond to the liturgy, but because we’re thinking of the afterlife. I will be judged if I don’t do it here. Therefore, I think that’s where we have to go out.
That’s “religious” practice, but the religion itself is supposed to have structures. This is why we have different pastors, we have people who go and visit the sick. We have those who go and visit the prison. For example, yesterday there was a girl, we had a liturgy meeting [and] she didn’t come because she was going to visit the prison. We have people who come here Wednesdays and they’re not Catholic. They come to receive financial [help] – and that’s the collection, the collection that’s taken is supposed to be for the widows, for the poor and for the orphans. And we have the school…that’s another way of saying that education is important. Other places have soup kitchens. So, therefore, that’s the practice as a church. It doesn’t mean that every individual is doing, but we’re doing it as a religion.

What kind of emphasis does Catholicism put on practice (in proportion to belief, understanding)?

I think we have, as a church, a Judeo-Christian church, we lack in the practice and that’s what’s killing us. We say one thing and we do another. We have a good balance between the practice and the faith, I mean, in theory. But in the practice of the practice, that’s where we fall short. But we tend to be more social than religious. And I think that’s why a lot of people are searching…they go to other religions to search for spiritual help because our rituals become empty. And people are looking for deeper [meaning], especially whenever they have problems, and this is why I spend a lot of time with people. I do a lot of retreats. But we try to get people involved so that we can have the “spirituality” – that area that people need that I know that, when I have it, I can be secure in my activities. I would say that we lack in spirituality although we have a lot of rituals.
Sometimes people don’t understand the Mass because the Mass itself, it’s a very spiritual [thing] – for an hour, you can be filled for a whole week, but people don’t understand sometimes. [They learn] the motions and, after a while, they just go through it so many times – I could imagine a person who is fifty [years old] going to Mass every Sunday, doing the same thing. Or even myself as a priest, saying the Mass over and over again, so I have to make it unique every time.

What sources of authority (text, custom, etc.) speak to or necessitate the practices of the Catholic Church?

[Laughing] For the Catholic [Church] or for the Catholics? For the Catholic Church, it’s what we call the Magisterium, which is the teaching, the high teaching of the Church that no one can disagree with. You can disagree on moral issues, but you cannot disagree on the dogma. For example, although the Church will chastise a priest if I say that there isn’t anything wrong with birth control, but I can’t be excommunicated for it. But if I said, “There are not three persons in the Holy Spirit, there are only two,” I would be excommunicated automatically. So on moral and political issues, we can have our opinions, [but] we cannot teach it. But when it comes to dogma, you cannot disagree. The dogma, the tradition of the Church, we call it, with a capital “T,” “Tradition.” The teaching that comes from Jesus to now. Although they say it’s the Pope, but it’s not the Pope [himself], it’s the whole Church in harmony…In consensus with the whole church. The Magisterium is not an invention of certain medieval [thinkers]. The “tradition” changed according to cultures. But the “Tradition”, which is the core teaching, it stemmed from the Old Testament and the New Testament…from the disciples and the
apostles. So every Magisterium has to find its foundation in Scripture and the Tradition of the Church. For example, Luke said that there are many things that are not written...therefore there is an oral tradition that has come to pass. For example, Mary had an importance in Christian tradition, therefore she was well respected. For example, we find [baptism] directly. Confirmation you don’t find directly [in the Bible]. Marriage – there is not a ritual for marriage – so therefore we find it in Tradition. Our authority is from the Magisterium in the person of the Pope. He’s the one that’s supposed to make the bridge. A lot of people don’t know that. The Catholic church is universal. However, the diocese of Atlanta is a church in its own right. The bishop is the head of the church here. The Pope is the bishop of Rome. Therefore, the authority in the local church is the bishop. The Pope is the head of the universal [Church] in order to make bridges. The authority comes from the bishop theologically. People do not know the Magisterium many times. Many times people are more interested in the ritual than the Magisterium.

So, the local bishop is the local embodiment of the Magisterium?

Exactly.

Do you encounter this disparity between what people talk about believing and how they actually live?

Oh, one hundred percent! I think one of the things that really strikes me is the “Our Father.” When we say, “Our Father,” what are we saying? [That] we are all brothers and sisters. But in the practice of our faith we don’t live as brothers and sisters. We say that we are in communion – in common-union – but we live a fragmented life. I
think that’s where we’re failing and young people see that. Even in the family, people go to church on Sunday and they receive communion and we just get at the front of the door and they just begin to insult one another. I think the practice doesn’t follow what we say. We say we’re brothers in Christ, Christ was patient, Christ will go an extra mile to love another person, to forgive, to respect. So, different aspects of Christ are not incorporated into our lives. And I think that’s where the disparity is.

*What causes or contributes to that disparity?*

Sin. And Satan…the author of evil, which is expressed in power, trying to control others. And one of the things with religion, one of the weaknesses of any religion is power control. Because with religion, they “powered” people, and that power dominates. Instead of power, it is to serve. So therefore, religion [can] be power, control, egotism, selfishness…we don’t see others as the image of God. Another person…there’s another human being that God loves and [God] asks me to love.

*How do you help people become aware of and confront this disparity?*

Sometimes I change the words [in the Mass], that the words do not become routine. For example, the “Our Father,” [I ask,] “Do you realize what we are saying?” If I say, “Our Father,” therefore we have to understand that we have to treat [other people] as brothers. Not “My Father,” but “Our Father.” Our faith says it’s a body.
What does the Catholic Church say about this disparity? Is it in the “Catholic consciousness”?

As a Church we do. What we used to call modal sins, a few have been added to it. Pollution is one, drug use is another. There’s an effort to say, “If you do this, it’s against the teaching of God.” That’s how the Church reminds us. For example, doctrines on abortion or euthanasia. Or any issue that whenever the Vatican writes, it’s a way to remind us what we should be doing. They make sure that we are aware of it.

Do you think that most people are aware of this disparity?

I think we are aware of it, but when it comes to our personal [perspective]. What do I mean by that? For example, people sometimes tend to take an issue… I think that we are aware of it, but in a sense that [only] when it hurts us or others…but I think that people are aware of the dichotomy of the two. But I don’t think that we are looking at it from a very profound [stance]. But there’s something in us that tells us that there’s not a harmony. But also people will react…you see the truth but you’re not ready to embrace the truth. And someone is telling you, “Look at the truth,” and we don’t always appreciate it.

[After I mentioned Francois Fenelon and his thoughts on the “severity of God’s love”]

You think we have to be careful with those 17\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} century [figures]… I think they are excellent because we can go and find the same problems they were thinking about then…but the way of expressing it, the mentality, “God does everything.” I was trying to explain to someone…the person worries about if [he or she] is going to hell…that person said, “If I get divorced, I’m afraid God is going to send me to hell.” I said, “Before you
worry about hell, why does God say that you should not get a divorce?” It’s because the pain of divorce…you are hurting…you’re husband or your wife is hurting, your children are hurting. So therefore the pain…God is not so much [there] to judge you, but he says, “Don’t do it because you are going to get hurt.” So the pain that we inflict on ourselves…sometimes we think that God is involved in it but it’s not so much that God is giving you the pain, but the pain is in society because of sin, not because of God. But by accepting it and if I could allow that pain…it’s to see God. Let’s say if I’m in Iraq right now and I see the suffering of the people…I’m sure that a lot of people question, “Where’s God?” But should we go to God first? We should go to ourselves. What happened since thirty, forty years ago – or even centuries ago – that [contribute] to this suffering? But can we do anything to avoid that, either for this place or for the other place? So sometimes we go directly to God, but not to look at how we are living.

How would you discuss the differences between a compartmentalized and a holistic way of life?

I think we are lazy. We like to be comfortable. It’s comfortable to say, “Well, I live as a priest now, and tonight I will be something else because I want to enjoy everything.” Or to say, “I want to be a policeman now, then I will be something else on Sunday and something else on Monday.” So we tend to do that because we are complex beings…because we say that we have three aspects to our being – intellectual, physical, and what we call the spiritual. So therefore, if it’s a complex being, and we, for example, have the computer we call the intellect, we cannot even understand how it functions, we have to understand so much…the body is probably the next [most] complex – we cannot
understand. When we divide our lives like a factory, we don’t know what the pieces [are]…a product will come out, but you cannot enjoy the product because it’s been through different hands. But when we have a holistic life, we tend to merge our intellect, our body and our soul. As a matter of fact, when they become a perfect – not a perfect, but at least [suitable unity] – there is peace.
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW WITH A REFORMED \(^1\) PASTOR

Pastor Paul Cooke had never expected to take up vocational ministry. However, as the head pastor of Crossway Church in Watkinsville, he feels like he is exactly where he should be. Very apparent – even more so than the numerous shelves filled with books and commentaries – was his love for his family and his excitement to talk with me about religious practices.

*What do you think of when you hear “religious practice”?

Two things. First of all, when I hear “religious practice,” I think of something that we would generally do to earn something from God – to either earn a place with God, to earn “brownie-points,” as it were, with God. That would be part of my first inclination when I hear that particular phrase. It would be part of something that we would strive to do to earn God’s favor. Whereas, on the flip side of that, I think where God’s brought me is that, as a Christian, I don’t do anything to earn his favor. What can I do to earn forgiveness for offending a holy God who’s never done anything wrong, who’s never thought anything wrong? And his requirements are perfection – “Be perfect as I am perfect,” He would say. “Go and sin no more.” These sorts of statements all throughout the Bible that would put a measure on man that no man can achieve. And then, for him to say, “Ok, I know the problem and I’m going to make a way. I’m going

\(^1\) It is important here to differentiate between Reform Judaism and the Reformed Tradition of Protestant Christianity. Briefly, whereas the former tends to be more progressive in comparison to other branches of Judaism, the latter tends to be regarded as highly conservative within its tradition.
to send Jesus, my son, who lived without sin.” From that standpoint that Jesus would go
to the cross to bear my sins that I would be made right with God…that totally changes
religious practice. So when you say that, the flip side of it is – on this side, “Why do I do
that?” Because he has prescribed certain ways that I can be close to him. He’s saying,
“Look, so, Paul, if you really love me, if you see the love I have for you and its
transformed your life, if the gospel is in your heart – it’s not just a theory or something
we think – if it’s really in your heart, then this practice is going to be something you do
because you want to walk with [me].” It’s like the Garden again, you’ve been restored to
a place with him that we haven’t earned, we haven’t deserved, so that – why do I do
religious practices, because I want to earn something from him? No. – I want to be with
him, I want to know what I was made for, I want to know what he has for me today, I
want to walk in that.

So, religious practice would be things like worshiping him with all my life. It’s
not just a Sunday morning…but worship is all of life. Either I’m going to worship him or
I’m going to be worshiping something else – and it’s usually going to be me. I’m my
favorite idol. From that standpoint, religious practice takes the focus off of me and puts it
onto him and says, “You direct my life. I want to hear from you today.” So, I read his
Word. I pray. I seek counsel and accountability. So I would want to fast – why do I
want to fast? What I’m saying, I’m making a declaration that “I want you more than I
want food,” which is a basic necessity of life – “I want you more than I want food.” And
I’m not trying to earn something from God. I’m trying to make a statement to him that is
“You’re more important than food to me. You are food to me, you are my life.”
How would you relate religious practice to ritual and liturgy?

Again, I’d say ritual, in my mind, would be the first [definition I gave of] religious practice. We do it because we’re trying to earn something from God. We do it because [it’s] something maybe we feel comfortable with. It wouldn’t necessarily be in the context of, “I do this because God’s prescribed as a means by which we receive his blessings”…“yes, but we bless him.” And to think that you or I could bless God? He is holy, he has everything that there is to have. Everything that there is…he did it with the words of his mouth. He’s the star-breather, he just breathed and the stars are there.

I understand liturgy as being common practice that might take place, especially when you come together as believers. There needs to be [order], and I personally would plan everything when we get together for a meeting as if everything depends on that plan – there’d be prayer involved, there’d be the planning out of how I think it’s supposed to look and what I sense God is wanting to accomplish in that time. But when I come to that meeting, I need to hold it with an open hand so that if God wants to direct in some other way, I’ve got to be willing to go there, to say, “Well, maybe I missed God in this.”

And yet, at the same time, liturgies are defined by his Word. So it’s not like I’m just coming up with whatever I want. That kind of stuff that we would do – it’s got purpose behind it, it’s more than just a feel-good. And it is comforting to know that there are those things that are there like the Lord’s Supper, like baptism and things like that. But if it is just a ritual and if it’s not a moment for teaching for us to grow in the reality that God is filling this moment, this is about him, this ritual is not about us, so the Lord’s Supper is about Christ, him crucified, him reigning on high and him returning for his children…So it’s about the past, the present and the future. And he’s here right now with
us. We need a savior right now, right now and in this place, in our lives. Even when you talk about ritual which, many of us in Christian circles might use “quiet time”\(^2\) as a ritual, it’s got to be more than just something you’re checking off your list of things to do. You’re going to meet with God. You’re going to meet with God. I mean, God’s got enough to do on his hands and yet God would want to meet with us, the self-revealing God. Again, it’s a thing that he’s the center of it, not us.

*To what degree does religiosity have to do with the “mundane” activities of life?*

It’s everything. As a believer, we do everything as unto the Lord. So we pay our bills; that is an act of worship. We walk out our lives a representative of his, as an ambassador of his. So, no matter where we go – we go to work, we do the diapers, we change the diapers of our kids, clean the house, mow the lawn, care for the home, love our neighbors…all that…there’s nothing that’s mundane in his sight. Whatever he gives to us we’re to do with all our might as if unto him. So it’s an act of worship. That’s hard to remember in a moment, though.

Sunday is, for us, the greatest day of the week, but it’s simply an outworking of the rest of your week. So, you worship God in the mundane and in the daily and when you come on a Sunday morning it’s really no different, in a sense, from the rest of the week, except you’re getting to do it with the people who would love the Lord. So, it serves two purposes in a sense. [First], it serves as an outworking of the rest of our work, this culmination of the rest of our week, in a sense. But [second], it’s also a springboard

\(^2\) A “quiet time” is something that is commonly referred to in Christian devotion in which an individual (or small group of people) regularly spends time alone reading the Bible and praying as a means for interacting with God. In fact, relentlessly emphasizing this spiritual discipline was one of John Wesley’s greatest impacts on modern Protestant Christianity, as Pastor Cain suggests.
for the week to come. So what it does is it takes us back, right back to where we started: that this is about Christ, this is what he’s doing, he orders our life, he is sovereign over all things and so, therefore, even in the mundane stuff, it’s an act of worship.

So you need to discipline your children, you need to brush your teeth – there’s different things you put out there. It’s all an act of worship. You’re taking care of what God’s given you. And for his glory. You see more of who a person is in private than in public because we can all put on our acts for eight hours a day and we learn to do that. You know that the person who knows you best is your wife. She knows you best, she’s seen the sin, she’s seen the irrational behavior, like, “Where did that come from?” And they still love you and they’re still committed to you. See, that, for her, that might be the mundane stuff but that’s where, I think, the greatest glory is given unto the Lord, because it’s not an act. It’s God’s favor on you.

[The Sabbath] is pivotal. It’s the axel that everything else is driven on. And without it, Hebrews talks about, “Don’t forsake meeting together, as some of you are in the habit of doing” and then it talks about all the different ramifications that come from that. And I would say…that you start to see, “I’m not worthy of this, I have nothing to bring to the table except my sin.” Then, it’s pivotal because it adjusts your eyesight again. It’s like every week going in and getting new glasses or getting your eyes adjusted. It focuses you on, “Ok, so that’s what happened this past week. God did that. I didn’t see that before.” And then, at the same time, it prepares us to see him throughout the week.
How would someone grow or move forward in a life of religious practice?

First of all, it’s not done independently. Christ didn’t save a person. Christ came to redeem a church, he came for a people. And so it’s done in the context of the local church. And so, oversight of leadership, godly leadership, but at the same time, one of the things that God exalts the most in any man is humility. So, how do you walk out humility? To think that we can make it on our own is pride, arrogance. And you’d see that in any number of religions as well. So, to isolate ourselves from each other in the local church, to isolate ourselves from the world…that’s not what God is after. And so it’s giving yourself to that body [of the local church] and then, at the same time, giving yourself to other people who will help to walk with you in faith, who will help to bring to you observations of life. “You know, how you responded to your wife there, let’s go talk about that,” or, “You seemed a little harsh with your kid,” or “So, how are you spending your time, are you redeeming your days? Is every day, for you, an adventure with the Lord or is it just drudgery?” And I’m not talking about the health, wealth and prosperity stuff,…it’s an adventure because you get to walk with God. Not because he’s going to give you some magic fortune.

That would be the second thing – [one] living in the context of the local church, [two] intimately with people – and then there are any number of things that it gives: reading Scripture, prayer, fasting, biblical fellowship, worship of him, Sunday mornings. Also, just living our lives out together day in and day out. Not just that we get together once a week and say, “Oh hi, Jim!” and “What’s your name? [as if trying to remember a name he’s forgotten] Nancy, Nancy. Yes. Good to see you again!” And you call these people your friends. [That is] one of the things that’s happened in this society – and
probably more so with your generation than with mine – because you can just stay at home and you can live in your house. You can work in your house, you can live in your house, you can have everything delivered to your house. You never have to leave your house.

**What kind of emphasis does Christianity put on religious practice?**

It’s all of life, so it’s non-negotiable. God prescribes how we can walk with him and that’s what religious practices are. The Holy Spirit [was] left with us so that we would dwell with Christ. Therefore that whole aspect of the Spirit is vitally important. So, it would transform how we live – our whole life is changed. When Christ draws us to himself, he changes our life, we’re a different person. Then every aspect of life is about following the Lord.

**What are the sources of authority for religious practice?**

The Bible, the Scriptures are our rule of faith and practice. If it’s not drawn from Scripture, based upon Scripture…is it the “letter of the law”? No, that’s not it. It’s that God sets forth these things for us to walk in and they are a joy. We’re no longer – since the cross, since Christ – bound by the law. It shows us our sin,…how we all fall short of God’s glory. But that law now is a guardrail for us. It’s to keep us safe. It’s not a limiting thing of, “Ok, don’t commit adultery.” Why? Because that woman’s not your wife. Because it only causes strife.
Have you encountered a divide between what people believe and how they live?

Christ addresses that. Because we are fallen, because we are those who sin, because that is our nature coming into this world since Adam and Eve, our default mechanism is going to be to walk in that. And we all would have some different nuances – to walk in selfishness, to walk in self-righteousness, to walk in judgmentalism. And all those would affect social aspects [of life] because we just become self-consumed and we think we’re right about this. I see that even in my own heart, my propensity to not want to change. There is this divide, but because of God’s great love for his people, he just doesn’t let us stay there. So he continues to pursue us.

There are those divides, there are those things we want. James 4 talks about wanting to pursue our passions and our desires and that’s what starts fights and quarrels among us. So, what do we do? We fight, we kill, we steal. There would be that divide between what people believe [and how they live] but if we truly believe it then our life will be transformed. It’s going to eventually change. If there’s been a true encounter with the living God, there’s going to be a change. It might take a while, it take some real hard circumstances, but change is going to start to take place.

There are going to be these temptations that are going to take you off the path, or that can. Yet Christ brings us back, the Spirit of God brings us back. He uses people. He directly talks to us. He uses Scripture. And so there is this divide, but ultimately, because of Christ, because of the goodness of God, he will bring us back, there will be a perseverance to the end?
What causes this breach?

The three causes that I see that are defined in the Bible: the main one is our own nature, our own sinful hearts, our own propensity to want to pursue sin. In other words, the opposing of God, an anti-God, that’s what sin is. But then there’s the world, which is largely anti-God. They would be pursuing their own desires, their own religions, whatever they want. And third, it’d be Satan. All you have to do is talk to a drug addict. They know, they have been with demons. They have seen, they have experienced that in many ways maybe you and I haven’t.

Those would be the three that would draw us away. You pursue the American Dream and does God want that for us? Maybe. Maybe not. I think it depends on the person and whether they can really handle that kind of temptation and there are very few. I mean, “It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” And so you look at those sorts of things and it’s pretty sobering stuff.

How do you help people become aware of and address this divide?

First thing is, just as a Christian, realizing that, but for the grace of God, there go I. So if I’m sitting with a drug addict and I’ve never had struggles with drugs, I’m not sitting there throwing rocks at his glass house. Because I have my own temptations and issues of sin and so I come…first of all, Christ talks about taking the log out of your own eye before taking the speck out of your brother’s, so I’ve got to realize, “I’m a sinner just like they are.” In fact, I’m the worst sinner that I know. I don’t know them like I know me. And my own heart is darkened to me, so I don’t see all that’s going on with me. So,
if I’m coming at it from that perspective and I’m dealing with them from that perspective of saying, “Look, I understand the power of sin, I understand my own sinful nature, I understand your sinful nature.” But whether they’re in the church or a non-believer, if we come with that perspective, it first of all sets our hearts right and, secondly, we don’t have any place to go to condemn. So that’d be part of it – our own hearts have to be adjusted first.

And secondly, if you look at the patience of Christ, the patience of Paul, and Peter…they were very, very patient and yet they brought the truth. They called sin sin. They didn’t call it a mental illness – not that there aren’t mental illnesses. We try to define things biblically rather than letting the world define what it’s supposed to be taken as. You help people become aware of [the divide] by taking the truth, Scripture, and applying that to the culture. We have everything we need to know for life and godliness in the Scriptures. So, it’s taking the truth and imposing the truth on the data that we receive from outside and letting this be what filters and what determines how we respond, how we live, how we interpret our faith. It’s always in the context of the local church, in the context of fellowship and our lives being lived out with other believers and then, the other spiritual disciplines as well. God puts them there so that we can hear him more clearly, it kind of filters out all those other things.

*How does Christianity address this disparity between belief and practice?*

The ultimate – Christ is not only savior, but he is also example. In the Scriptures you see that…John the Baptizer at first he said, “This is the Son of God.” He heard the voice of God speak. And later on he’s in prison and starts to wonder, “Really, ok, did I
hear what I heard?” Typical stuff that any believer will struggle with at times. And he sent two of his disciples to [Jesus] and said, “Hey, are you really the Christ?” And he said, “Hey, tell him: the blind are regaining their sight, the deaf are hearing, the dumb are speaking.” And so what he’s saying is that the reverse of the curse, the reverse of the Fall of man is taking place.

It does address this difference between religious practice and religious belief and it’s always drawing us to where there’s a commonality between the two. We say that we love God and we don’t love our brother. He said, “How can you say that you love someone that you can’t see and yet the one you can see you don’t love?” He’s incessantly calling us to lay our life down – that’s what love is. “There is no greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.” And Jesus said that “I call you friend.” So you’ve got all these different references that constantly call us back to examining our own hearts in the light of who God is and in the light of the gospel, receiving grace from God, by his Spirit, that we would walk in a way that our lives are transformed. And constantly we need to be reminded of that.

There’s a guy, Mark Maury, who uses this illustration. His dad, when he was little, used to play this game with him. And he’d say, “Now I expect you to obey your mom while I’m gone, so let’s practice.” This is when he was like four or five years old. And [his dad] would take him and pick him up and put him on the wall and he goes, “Now I’m going to tell you something and I want you to do it. Stay there. When I turn around, you stay there.” And he’d let go and turn around and, of course, the kid would go right to the ground. And they’d start laughing. He’d turn around and look at the wall and his son’s on the floor and he’d say, “I told you to stay there!” And he’d take him and
put him back up and they’d laugh again. And he said that this is the same way that it is with us with the gospel. We forget every day and throughout the day. We’re constantly forgetting that we need a savior now, we need a savior today, we need to walk with the savior. So we have to be reminded of the gospel, we have to be purposeful as believers to preach the gospel to ourselves every day and numerous times during the day. It would bridge that gap between practice and belief. It would say, “Do you really believe this? Do you functionally believe this? A lot of times we don’t functionally believe it. We say we believe something, but we can sit around here and have a theological conversation and how are you supposed to treat your neighbor who just drove his car over your lawn and left tire tracks in your lawn? How are you supposed to treat your coworker who’s ticked-off at you because of something they thought was said, or was said?

Do you think people in general are aware of this disparity?

I don’t think most people are aware of it. But when you live out your life, they become aware of the disparity. Apart from what Christ has done, I’d do that too – I still do that [not live with beliefs and practice in harmony]. I think in the deep South especially, we have a lot of people who would know about Christ – this would be my estimation – but they don’t know Christ. So they’ve never met the savior – they have a theoretical knowledge in their heads, a theoretical assent. But that’s the same thing the demons have in their heads. James talks about that – the demons believe and they tremble, so what’s the difference between them and someone who “believes” and yet doesn’t tremble? Well, the difference is that when the reality of Christ becomes real, when you have met the savior, your life’s never the same again. Your life’s shipwrecked.
You can’t go back. And so, you’re not going to live the same life you did before. It’s just not going to be satisfying. Your appetites change. And so I’d say, for the most part, I would still see that most of the people who would claim to be believers would be unaware of that.

And part of that is we have, in many churches, stopped preaching the gospel which radically displays the disparity. You see Christ, you see it in the apostle Paul, you see some of these guys who’ve laid down their life, and that is very convicting. And that is supposed to be normal for a Christian. That’s not for the “professionals,” that’s for everybody. If we have this disparity between clergy and laity, then what we’re saying is that my wife, she can’t have the high calling. So therefore, she’s less of a believer and therefore she, in God’s eyes, will receive less of a reward – that’s stupid, that’s just stupid. If you know my wife, you realize she’s going to receive a much greater reward than I will. She serves in obscurity most of the time and she does most of the dirty work. She’s done most of the changing of the diapers, the stuff that only God knows. That’s incredible.

*How would you differentiate between a compartmentalized and a holistic way of life?*

One would say that there’s a religious life over here and there’s my life over here. That’s not how Christ ever proclaimed it, that’s not how God ever proclaimed it. “You are my people, now, live out your life like this.” There’s no dichotomy between the secular and the religious. It’s all, in a sense, religious. It’s all sacred. It’s all by his grace and for his glory. That’s what we’re here for. My life’s not my own any more.
That’s probably the best way to say it: my life’s not my own any more, I’ve been bought with a price. I’m a grateful servant who’s called “friend.” That’s mind-boggling.
Beginning in the 1930s, however, the Bureau of Indian Affairs began to remove restraints on Indian religious practice. These examples may contain rude words based on your search. These examples may contain colloquial words based on your search. Translation of "religious practice" in Russian. Search religious practice in: Web. Images.