Postmodern G*d-Talk, Liberation, and the Educational Context

By Kristin Poppo

Whether one calls it G*d-talk, religious discourse, or spiritual musings, conversations speaking to the divine, spirit, mystery, religion, and G*d are increasingly prevalent in educational studies. Whether it is the recurring discussions of church/state distinctions, exploration of the relationship between moral development and religion, or an appeal to appreciate spiritual ways of knowing, religious discourse is becoming more and more common among educators. Rather than argue the validity of religious discourse, which is in fact a contentious conversation that has little outcome on whether or not people actually choose to engage in G*d-talk, I would like to explore how critical social theorists can both examine and engage in religious discourse in ways that promote just and compassionate community. Such reflection begins with the recognition of both the danger inherent in and the possibilities emerging from discussions that examine the relationships between religion, culture, and education. History clearly illustrates the

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ways in which religion has served as both an oppressing and liberating force. This article introduces a critical hermeneutical framework for educators who seek to integrate religion and spirituality into the educational process. Engaging in this process ensures that the use of G*d-talk is liberating and not, as history has so often shown, oppressive.

Re-examining Religion and Culture

Many conversations about religion during the modern era begin with the claim that humanity has outgrown the usefulness of religion. In many ways, this perspective has dominated academic institutions and has resulted in some disdain for those intellectuals who continue to try to explore the elusive role of religion in the life of the mind. Marx's assertion the religion "was the opiate of the people" and Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead" have framed many contemporary conversations that attempt to explore questions of ethics, behavior, and culture with little or no reference to the role of faith. A recent New York Times bestseller, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* by Sam Harris (2005), continues the conversation that religion is in fact the cause of all ills, and therefore, should be eradicated from human society. For many intellectuals, religious discourse is viewed as somewhat soft-brained and the quest for knowledge has to be based on reason rather than the more enigmatic premises of faith.

Although this perspective remains prevalent in many contexts, there is an alternative perspective that recognizes that religion is such a pervasive force in the human condition, that a conversation of culture cannot ignore the role of religion, and vice versa, an examination of religion cannot ignore the role of culture. Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Culture* affirms this perspective when he says

> Religion is sociologically interesting not because, as a vulgar positivism would have it, it describes the social order (which, in so far as it does, it does not only very obliquely but very incompletely), but because, like environment, political power, wealth, jural obligation, personal affection and a sense of beauty, it shapes it. (1973, p. 119)

In many ways, since Geertz wrote this in the early 1970s, the increasing prevalence of religious discourse in the social, political, and educational arena has clearly illustrated that faith plays a significant role in the social order and the institutions that govern our lives.

Exploring the importance of religious discourse within cultural studies has been further aided by two factors. First, there appears to be less of a need to deny the role of religion in political, social, and economic events. No one can deny that many of the armed struggles of the Twentieth Century have been specifically connected to religious hostilities. At the same time, religion has also served as the force that has inspired many who work for social justice and human rights. Harvey Cox (1995) in *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* reflects on the continued importance

of the role of religion in culture. He speaks of the work he did in *The Secular City* 30 years ago and writes that in that book "I tried to work out a theology for the 'post religious' age that many sociologists had confidently assured us was coming" (Cox, 1995, p. xv). In his more recent book, Cox observes that instead of the death of religion and G*d, the end of the Twentieth Century has illustrated "a religious renaissance of sorts" (Cox, 1995, p. xvi). In this book he focuses on Pentecostalism but recognizes that the religious vitality inherent in Pentecostalism can also be observed in sects of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam, as well as other faith traditions. Instead of continuing its decline as a social and cultural force, religion is once again serving as an actor in the drama of culture, education, and society. Clearly, many commentators on culture have recognized the importance of religion in culture and its role in cultural studies.

The second factor that affirms the role of religious discourse is the affirmation of both multiple ways of knowing and multiple truths within postmodern inquiry. Epistemologically, reason has been dethroned as the only adequate means for ascertaining truth, and as a result, the idea that singular universal truths can be found has been debunked. Within contemporary conversations, theological inquiry can be affirmed, albeit with a humbler and more analytical voice than has been traditionally used. A postmodern approach to theological inquiry will challenge the universal truth claims that have traditionally emerged from theological discourse. However, postmodernism welcomes inquiry into the particular voices that share how religion shapes particular truths in distinct contexts. A further discussion exploring the ways in which those truths encourage or limit unnecessary suffering is particularly fitting in the postmodern conversation that often struggles with questions of justice.

Within the educational context, discussions surrounding moral development, school vouchers, and character education often include references to religion, faith, and spirituality. Clearly, for many who support school vouchers, religious education should in part shape the larger educational vision. A recent controversy in Dover, Pennsylvania, instigated by a local school board's decision to require biology classes to use a supplemental text to teach Intelligent Design, clearly points to the ways in which religion continues to inform decisions regarding public education (Humes, 2007). Conversations about posting the Ten Commandments in schools as part of character education further reflects the intersection of religious and educational discourse. Although the aforementioned examples point to the propensity of the religious right to try to shape educational policy, there has been a ground swelling among progressive forces to bring what is framed as spirituality back into the schools. Books such as *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education* (2007), *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education* (2005), and *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education* (1999) as well as an entire issue of *School Administrator* magazine (2002) dedicated to "Spirituality in Leadership: Nine Essays on Using Your Inner Connections for a Greater Good" all point to the prevalence of conversations about spirituality in education. Across the spectrum of personal conviction, G*d-talk is thriving in the educational context. The question needs to be posed: how can we

assure that the use of G*d-talk in education is in the best interest of all students and does not serve as a force for indoctrination or oppression?

Walking on Dangerous Ground

When the powerful force of religious discourse in society is acknowledged, one cannot avoid the fact that one is walking on dangerous ground. History clearly illustrates the ways in which religion has served as both an oppressive and a liberating force. For example, during the two millennia following the birth of Jesus Christ, religious and political authorities have used Christian doctrine to oppress and annihilate non-believers. The crusades, the genocide of indigenous peoples, and the Holocaust can all be blamed, in part, on Christianity. At the same time, like other faith traditions, there are streams within Christianity that have served as inspiration for liberation. For example, many revolutionary movements have claimed that a Christian G*d serves as the inspiration for their struggle for justice. Liberation Theology in Latin American countries founded Christian Base Communities that provided healthcare, education, and other services to the poor, and Black Liberation Theology has been grounded in James Cone's assertion that God is on the side of the oppressed. Recognizing the way in which religion has been used for both good and evil, those who choose to engage in religious discourse must carefully and critically reflect on the whether their use of religious discourse is liberating or oppressive. Unfortunately, there is no easy way make this distinction.

In ascertaining how a careful examination of religious discourse can proceed, it is important to recognize that when individuals become enamored with religious and spiritual language, they often loose their criticality and willingly embrace dogmatic beliefs. Oftentimes, these beliefs are oppressive. This tendency is evident in both those who claim to stand to the "Right" and those who claim to stand to the "Left." The stampede toward both new age spirituality and fundamentalist religions is deeply problematic because in many cases many individuals lose their critical nature in their bliss of having discovered what they understand as 'Ultimate Truth.' In some cases, what is considered hegemonic in one context becomes acceptable under the guise of a revealed truth. The pleasure of this discovery often results either in the same dogmatism and intolerance evident throughout the history of the church, or a self-absorbed quest for meaning that often ignores one's relationship to the larger community.

It is fairly easy to critique how "right wing" initiatives of school prayer can be oppressive to atheists or how the posting of the ten commandments can exclude the faith of people who are not from the Abrahamic Traditions. In many contexts, initiatives from what is perceived as the "right" clearly exude intolerance for diversity, and hence, are quite oppressive. At the same time, the "educators to the left" have embraced spirituality as their key word in embracing religious discourse as illustrated in some of the aforementioned contemporary books. Many of these books challenge individuals to "inner work" that informs their work in education. It is in these cases that some educators loose their criticality and/or become "focused

on their naval" in lieu of a continued focus on liberatory schooling. Finding and asserting one's faith or spirituality does not excuse one from critically examining the impact of one's beliefs and actions.

Oftentimes the quest for faith or spirituality is synonymous with individuals grasping for absolute, transcendent, and universal truths that can deny the perspective of others. Within the postmodern context, any engagement in religion must occur with recognition of plurality and the realization that all truth is relative. One cannot forget how effectively the postmodern context has critiqued the nature of knowledge and truth. Yet, as many individuals rediscover religion, the advances of postmodern inquiry are often forgotten, resulting in a return to myopic, dogmatic, and often dangerous belief systems that justify the destruction of others. The rebirth of religion has in some cases resulted in overzealous and uncritical discoveries of truths that serve to hinder the work of tolerance and justice. A postmodern approach to theological inquiry will challenge the universal truth claims that have traditionally emerged from theological discourse and will welcome the particular voices that share how religion shapes meaning in particular contexts. Serious dialogue about the importance of social justice as the fruit of a life of faith should explore the ways in which those truths encourage or limit unnecessary suffering. An examination of the role of religious discourse in education must proceed with critical reflection.

I see this work very much in keeping with Henry Giroux's description of a transformative intellectual. In *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning,* Giroux (1988) writes,

> Transformative intellectuals need to understand how subjectivities are produced and regulated through historically produced social forms and how these forms carry and embody particular interests. At the core of this position is the need to develop modes of inquiry that not only investigate how experience is shaped, lived, and endured within particular social forms such as schools, but also how certain apparatuses of power produce forms of knowledge that legitimate a particular kind of truth and way of life. Power in this sense has a broader meaning in its connection with knowledge than is generally recognized. Power in this instance, as Foucault points out, not only produces knowledge that distorts reality but also produces a particular version of the "truth." In other words, "power is not merely mystifying or distorting. Its most dangerous impact is its positive relation to truth, the effects of truth that it produces." (p. xxxv)

The work of a transformative intellectual engaged in the examination of religious discourse in education is to explore the ways in which religion serves as a power that generates truths. In order to engage in this work, the inquirer must be willing to recognize the subjective nature of religious truth claims and be willing to examine those truth claims within a particular context. A veil that provides a barrier between its self-proclaimed truths and the world no longer protects religion. Rather, religious traditions require the same investigation as other social forms and apparatuses of power. The process by which religion is examined requires a less dogmatic understanding of the role of revelation than many religions have traditionally enjoyed.

A claim that sees religious truth as subjective requires an examination of the role of human imagination in the construction of religion as well.

Postmodern G*d-Talk

In order to engage in the critique of religious discourse, and eventually the construction of liberating religious dialogue, a closer look at the evolution of the intersection of religion and culture is necessary. To do this, one recognizes that the relationship between religion and culture is complex and is neither uni-dimensional nor uni-directional. In fact, I would argue that religion is both a producer and product of culture. On one level, dominant myths and interpretations of those myths appear to shape and stabilize culture. On another level, when culture changes in ways such that the foundational myths and interpretations are no longer meaningful, both the myths and their interpretations can be recreated. For this reason, theological inquiry and reflection requires an understanding of both those myths and stories that are dominant in religion and of the ways in which cultures shift and change.

Gordon Kaufman's understanding of evolution of religion is particularly helpful in understanding this relationship. According to Kaufman (1993), G*d is a symbol that humans use to attempt to describe what they understand as the ultimate reality of life, and theological inquiry is the process through which humans engage in "imaginative construction" in order to describe and make sense of this mystery. When Kaufman describes the grand historical schema, through which religion is generated, he writes,

> In time the more imaginative or poetic women and men began to articulate stories and songs, pictures and ideas, of human life in its context. These drew together and organized in new ways various aspects of experience, and they helped sharpen perception of certain features of the environment. These early ("mythic") versions of what would later become religious and philosophical conceptions of "human existence" and "the world"—retold and expanded generation after generation—depicted human life in imaginative fashion, showing the major problems to be faced and the tasks to be performed; and they presented a view of the setting within which human life fell (the world) and of the powers and beings that must be dealt with if life were to go on. Telling and retelling these cycles of stories provided a symbolic context within which it was possible to reflect more deeply on human existence, elaborating details and articulating further the understanding of the human and the world. (1993, p. 35)

According to Kaufman, the genesis of religion and G*d-Talk is grounded in the fact that many individuals, who engaged in the creation and the recreation of myth, acknowledged the unknown and the primal mystery. Therefore, they struggled in various fashions to identify some notion of the divine. According to Kaufman, these individuals were engaged in theology, which he describes as "a human imaginative task." The myths that were created are foundational to culture because the myths speak to the ways in which the founders of that culture make meaning of the world and of the human condition.

With time, many of these stories were written down and what Kaufman calls "self conscious worldviews" appeared which articulated "the possibilities and problems of human life" (1993, p. 36). These worldviews could, and can, be theistic, polytheistic, or atheistic. They can range from belief in a G*d that controls all human experience to the belief that human lives are depicted by chaos. Regardless of the worldview generated, all cultures, according to Kaufman, hold one thing in common—they engage in this imaginative task to interpret their existence and orient their lives. In varying degrees of formality and sophistication, these worldviews and myths served as the foundation of religious traditions. Religion institutionalizes these myths to ensure that worldviews are passed on from generation to generation. Although the imaginative task of theology continues, certain rigidity is evident in those religions, which have created canons of scripture and theology and that dictate elements of faith. When religion has played a significant role in a variety of cultural institutions including government, education, and economies, the foundational myths created in an effort to make sense of the world become the "driving force[s] that animate, legitimate, and regulate" the policies and positions of specific institutions and economies (Wink, 1984, p. 5). Religious myths and worldviews explain the behaviors and practices of many peoples.

Although myths have in some instances shaped and controlled culture, there are also times throughout history when there is a significant dissonance between religion and the actual experiences of people. At these times, the culture often forces dominant theological constructs within various religions to change. In this way, culture shapes religion. Kaufman understands these theological shifts by recognizing that the symbol G*d is a "human imaginative construct." Therefore, the work of theology at times of dissonance is to both critique earlier constructs of G*d and continue the imaginative work of creating new ways of understanding the symbol which speak to the possibilities and problems of life today. He writes,

> We begin with an awareness that all talk of God belongs to and has its meaning within a particular symbolic frame of orientation for human life, which emerged, in a particular strand of human history. The symbol "God," like the rest of language and like other important religious symbols around the world, was created as the women and men in that historical movement gradually put together a world-picture which enabled them, with some measure of success, to come to terms with the exigencies of life. This symbol, then (like all others), must be understood as a product of the human imagination. This does not mean that God has no reality, it is "merely imaginary"; symbols such as "tree" and "I" and "world" and "light-year" have also been created by the human imagination, and that certainly does not imply either their falsity or emptiness. What it does mean is that this symbol (like all others) will need to be regularly subjected to criticism and testing, as we seek to see whether it can continue to function significantly in human life. When such examination reveals serious problems, it becomes necessary (as with all our symbols) to engage in reconception and reconstruction—or, if this is not possible, to drop the symbol altogether. (Kaufman, 1993, pp. 39-40)

The symbol G*d is the means through which many humans wrestle with making meaning in the world. Kaufman's expectation would be that, at times, the constructs, which describe the symbol, are no longer meaningful or helpful in a particular context. The mystery behind the symbol remains relevant, but the symbol no longer communicates meaning to the participants in the particular community of faith. Therefore, theologians must engage in imaginatively constructing a new symbol that describes that mystery. The essence of G*d-talk is the conversation that emerges from the deconstruction and reconstruction of such symbols.

Any social structures, including educational institutions, that engage in G*d-talk need to be cognizant of the transitory nature of religion as it both shapes and responds to the complexity of the human condition. When education, turns to religion or spirituality as a place to ground its process, the dominant will of a particular group can be de-ified in a way that would be entirely unacceptable in any other context. Hunan Alexander recognizes both the danger and possibility of integrating spirituality into education in the context of character education. He advocates for "intelligent spirituality" and writes,

> Intelligent spirituality refers to those visions of the good life that integrate subjective, collective and objective orientations to goodness while avoiding the dangerous extremes of each; they do so by embracing the conditions of ethical discourse, on the one hand, and the regulative principle of transcendence, on the other. This sort of spirituality responds to the moral failure that spawned the current quest without undermining the political success that makes such a quest possible. (Alexander 2003)

For this reason, this paper challenges educators to adopt a process that demands critical inquiry for the use of G*d-talk in educational endeavors, and puts forth one such process that works to liberate rather than oppress.

A Liberatory Theological Method

Educational theorists and practitioners are in need of a model for ascertaining whether their use of G*d-Talk is liberating or oppressive. The model of liberation theology is fitting for educational practitioners because it is work guided by the theologians advocating for groups that have been historically oppressed. The work of the theologian in this context is to reclaim religious and spiritual language that liberates the group rather than prolongs their oppression. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1998) describes the work of a feminist liberation theologian when she writes; "Religion, theology, and biblical interpretation are best understood as feminist places of struggle over the production of either oppressive or liberative meaning and authority" (p. 76). For liberation theologians, the re-imagining of G*d is structured around a human imaginative process that seeks to create a deity grounded in liberation, compassion and justice.

Engaging in the work of theology with the primary goal of promoting justice requires a radical departure from much traditional theology. In fact, it changes the

very ways in which theology is done. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Latin American libera-
tion theologian, claims,

> The theology of liberation offers us not so much a new theme for reflection as
> a new way to do theology. Theology as critical reflection on historical praxis is
> a liberating theology . . . This is a theology which does not stop with reflecting
> on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is
> transformed. (Gutierrez, 1973, p. 15)

The important work in liberation theology is not an abstract intellectual process
in which conversations can focus on such inane topics as how many angels can
dance on the head of a pin. Rather, it is the thoughtful work of critical theological
inquiry, which is grounded in the particular practical ramifications for a particular
group in a particular context.

Liberation Theology is grounded in particularity and place and includes, but
is not limited to, the experience of women, homosexuals, women of color, African
Americans, Native Americans, and the poor. Globally, the list can go on and on.
Liberation Theology is grounded in the work of a particular group that engages
both scripture and theology in an exploration of how it has either served in their
oppression or could serve as a source for their liberation. Liberation theology no
longer accepts that a group of white, middle class, European men can do theology
for all people. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes, "The canon and evaluative norm
cannot be 'universal,' but must be specific and derived from a particular experience
of oppression and liberation" (1984, p. 60).

The hermeneutical process put forth by Schüssler Fiorenza guides my work of
theological deconstruction and reconstruction. Her work differs from some libera-
tion theologians that claim that scripture consistently serves as a source of liberation.
Schüssler Fiorenza claims that there are texts that have been used to promote sexism,
to justify slavery, to encourage homophobia, and to support capitalism. Likewise,
there are texts that encourage equality, justice, and compassion. Schüssler Fiorenza
writes, "the insight that the Bible is not only a source of truth and revelation but also
a source of violence and domination is basic for liberation theologies" (1984, p. 61).
The work of liberation theology is to claim those scriptures that serve as a source of
truth and revelation and discard those texts that have been a source of violence and
domination. Once again, Schüssler Fiorenza writes, "the litmus test for invoking
Scripture as the Word of G*d must be whether or not biblical texts and traditions
seek to end relations of domination and exploitation" (1984, p. xiii). Likewise, edu-
cators engaged in liberatory schooling who choose to engage in G*d-talk must hold
themselves to an equally high standard of criticality and reflection.

To do this work of evaluation, Schüssler Fiorenza has created a four step
feminist hermeneutical model that serves as a methodology for any individual
who seeks to engage in theological inquiry from a particular place and time for the
welfare of a particular group that seeks liberation. This interpretive method can
be used as a tool to first critique and then embrace, discard, or recreate scripture.
This hermeneutical process includes a hermeneutics of suspicion, a hermeneutics

of proclamation, a hermeneutics of reconstruction, and a hermeneutics of creative actualization.

The interpretive process begins with a hermeneutics of suspicion that calls into question the traditional acceptance of scriptural and ecclesiastical authority. This hermeneutic recognizes that most scriptural texts in the canon serve particular interests of authority and power. Thus, they must be approached with suspicion to discern whether or not they serve to oppress or liberate the particular group that engages in the inquiry. By looking closely at historical context and issues of translation, the hermeneutics of suspicion allows one to unearth texts that support a liberatory perspective and condemn those texts that serve oppressive interests. It is the work of the suspicious inquirer to recognize that there are conflicting messages in scripture. If one's purpose is liberation and one believes this is G*d's purpose as well, then the liberation theologian claims only the liberatory scriptures as revelatory. Other scriptures are understood to be more representative of unjust and oppressive power relations on earth than the will of G*d. The hermeneutics of suspicion allows one to differentiate between oppressive and liberating texts.

The hermeneutics of suspicion is closely followed by the hermeneutics of proclamation. In this interpretive process the work of suspicious inquiry leads the critical theorist to claim and disclaim particular texts. This hermeneutic does not limit itself to the text and its historical context but looks to the role of a particular text in culture. Therefore one is called to recognize how some texts, which are not obviously oppressive, have been and continue to be used for domination. In the hermeneutical process of proclamation, one's work focuses on the ways in which scripture is used to support those theologies that maintain exploitative power relations between men and women, adults and children, the rich and poor, etc. Schüssler Fiorenza writes, "in short, a feminist critical translation of the Bible must be complemented by a careful theological evaluation of biblical texts and their oppressive or liberation impact in specific cultural situations" (1984, p. 19). In conclusion, the hermeneutics of proclamation helps one to identify those texts and theologies that are oppressive and extract them from the worshipping community of faith. During this process, those texts that have successfully withstood critique are claimed as liberatory and are emphasized within the faith community.

As a new cannon is created for the liberated community, the hermeneutics of remembrance ensures that the stories of one's people are not lost. Thus, one not only clings to the moments of justice, but one remembers the moments of suffering as well. Through this "dangerous memory," solidarity is promoted amongst those who have suffered across time. Part of the work of remembrance and solidarity is to recognize how long one's people have suffered. The rest of the work is to reclaim the ways in which one's people lived, loved, and rejoiced in spite of that suffering. Schüssler Fiorenza's work *In Memory of Her* chronicled the important role of women in the early church. The historical critical method allowed her to uncover much information regarding the leadership of women in New Testament times. Thus, the hermeneutics of remembrance allows us to claim solidarity with those

powerful women and also lament the patriarchal powers that later eliminated their leadership roles. In any community struggling for liberation, the hermeneutics of remembrance allows the community to remember the times when they were oppressed as well as their continual struggle against that oppression. This memory ensures that the community will always remain alert and careful to recognize those powers that may try to benefit from their oppression.

Finally, as the blossoming community finds those texts and theologies that affirm their liberation, the renewed community must be created. Here, the hermeneutic of creative actualization is useful. Through the hermeneutic of creative actualization, one can recognize how the history of the oppressed has been lost and retell the story of one's people from a different voice than the one that was canonized in the scripture. Based on the prior critical work of interpretation, new stories can be created. Imagining different pasts encourages the possibility of imagining different futures as well. Thus, as one claims those texts that are liberatory, one can imagine a future where their message is honored. Thus, theology is created that demands the liberation of the oppressed and the world is transformed.

Through Schussler Fiorenza's four-fold hermeneutical process, anyone who chooses to engage in G*d-talk in the context of work for liberation can examine whether the use of religious discourse in a particular context is liberatory. In the best cases, the experience of an oppressed group of people will be examined in the context of religious truth claims. Through this process, once can ascertain whether G*d-Talk is liberatory or oppressive. Beyond that initial discovery, this process provides an opportunity for an oppressed group to both share their story and discover G*d-talk that is in fact liberatory. Although this work is prevalent within many oppressed religious communities engaged in liberation theology, I have not seen this level of criticality used amongst educators engaged in religious discourse. Educators that engage in G*d-Talk must take responsibility for the underlying force being garnered behind their message. Their responsibility is to ensure that their work is not used to oppress the children and communities that they serve.

Choosing G*d-Talk

When educators choose to engage religious discourse, they take on an incredible responsibility to carefully examine both their motives and the repercussions of their decision because of the historical power of religion in culture. Recognizing religion as the human attempt to describe the divine, the propensity for both goodness and evil in religion is obvious. Schussler Fiorenza proposes a method for examining the role of religious discourse in engaging in this work. While engaging in this process, I encourage educators be mindful of Sharon Welch's advice to work in a place of "absolute commitment and infinite suspicion" (1985, p. 91). Educators claim a deep commitment to children and strive to better their lives and the larger communities in which they live. Yet, at the same time, there are institutions committed to serving children where decisions have been made may not necessarily be in the child's best interest. If educators are unable to critically self reflect in all

that they do, and especially in the interface between G*d-talk and the educational context, they can inadvertently support oppressive structures.

I work in an educational context that is grounded in providing liberatory schooling for children as a person whose faith serves as the motivation for providing progressive education for children. In this context, I find that Welch's description of both her fallibility and her commitment provides a healthy perspective for educators. She writes,

> As a postmodern theorist, I have two absolutes. First, I can be wrong, as can every system of thought every community, every movement, and every group of people that I trust. We can be wrong not just in the sense of being partial in our analyses and ineffective in our strategies, but also by being immoral, corrupt, short-sighted and self-serving…My second absolute, under conditions of justice, life is deeply rewarding, meaningful and joyous. Even taking risks for further justice is more an act of self and community affirmation than sacrifice. (Welch, 1999, p. 34)

Welch reminds of us of our humanity and the qualities of ourselves that mirror closely the qualities that emit both fear and hope in the context of religious discourse. She tells us to tread lightly as we move forward in our attempts embrace something as powerful as G*d-talk. At the same time, we are reminded of the importance of the pursuit of justice. Justice is an exceedingly worthy aim and it rarely works hand in hand with dogmatic adherence to any truth.

G*d-talk in both the political and educational context remains incendiary. For better or worse, it cannot be ignored or eradicated. For educators committed to liberatory educational practices, G*d-talk must be addressed with much care. Each time one wanders into this dangerous terrain, the difficult work of deconstruction and reconstruction is necessary because it may provide a greater opportunity for liberation. For this reason, educators are challenged to engage in critical theological inquiry with humility.

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