

Su Yon Pak and Gregory Snyder<sup>1</sup>

# Uncomfortable wholeness: Buddhist chaplaincy education at a Protestant seminary

**Abstract:** How can theological education respond to the shape-shifting and expanding nature of chaplaincy? What is the tension between maintaining professional standards while allowing space for new forms of chaplaincy to emerge, especially in increasingly interreligious contexts? What pedagogical innovations need to be developed to support training of chaplains? This chapter highlights the Master of Divinity program with the focus on training of Buddhist chaplains at Union Theological Seminary (NYC), a historically liberal Protestant seminary. It articulates the Buddhism and Interreligious Engagement program, structure, and rationale in the context of Buddhist chaplaincy in the U.S. The authors explore interreligious pedagogical interventions that allow meaningful religious difference to endure while cultivating the possibility for connections to be realized across that difference.

## Introduction: The many changing roles of chaplaincy

In the fall of 2011, I took my class to downtown Manhattan, to Occupy Wall Street where people had been gathering to protest social and economic inequalities. Seeing the need to care for those encamped in Zuccotti Park, some of our students had begun to organize as “protest chaplains.” They were not ordained, nor even fully trained. But they saw the need and felt compelled to fill that need. So, after a brief training with the Disaster Relief chaplains on trauma and interreligious spiritual care, they took turns providing “ministry of presence” for those who were occupying Wall Street. My students were learning theology in praxis, in real time.<sup>2</sup>

The above story illustrates the shape-shifting and expanding nature of chaplaincy and the need for us to pay close attention to it. So, we begin with some con-

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<sup>1</sup> While this is a co-written article, Gregory Snyder took the lead writing all the parts on Buddhist formation/self-inquiry and Su Yon Pak the parts that pertain to Christian formation, chaplaincy, and MDiv standards.

<sup>2</sup> While this story is from Su Yon Pak’s teaching experience, Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan have a fuller description of the role of chaplains in the Occupy Wall Street movement (2012, 68).

textual observations. As chaplains become more diverse in terms of religion and world views, so too do the contexts where they work. There are chaplains at the airport, colleges and universities, fire and police departments, prisons, hospitals, hospice, nursing homes, social service agencies, family services, military installations, unions, businesses, seaports, racetracks, truck stops, movement spaces like Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and Standing Rock, and online and on the mobile app, like Vennly (bevennly.com). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought chaplains to the frontlines of the battle in ways that demystified their roles and made them highly visible. In 2020–21, many news outlets covered stories about chaplains, their work, their commitments, and their life as the pandemic altered how people were cared for, died, processed grief and loss, and ritualized death. The chaplain's role, along with healthcare professionals, was at the center of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

The changing nature of chaplaincy is both a product of and the impetus for the changing religious landscape of the U.S. With the increasing number of Americans claiming “spiritual not religious” or “nones” or “dones” with organized, institutionalized religion (Pew Research Center 2015), chaplaincy is changing in response to the larger movements to reorganize religious life as we know it. More people are seeking spirituality outside of institutional faith communities, bringing religion into public and often secular spaces. However, within spaces that traditionally might have been regarded as secular, many are seeking deep spiritual heritage and training. The current embodiment of spiritual practice regularly defies the traditional categories of religious heritage.<sup>4</sup> Navigating this often-conflicted space, chaplains have become “priest(s) of the secular” (Sullivan 2014, 3) or “twenty-first century’s indispensable ministers without portfolio” (Sullivan 2014, 3).

Currently, chaplaincy in the U.S. is developing in two seemingly opposing directions: First, in efforts to move toward professionalization, standardization, and certification, chaplaincy is becoming more regulated by the state via degree and certificate granting bodies. Secular institutions in which chaplains work are likewise highly regulated. Religious traditions engaging chaplaincy in the U.S. are increasing, complicating the formal process of training and certification. What does the increasing interreligious complexity of chaplaincy education

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<sup>3</sup> For a collection of news about chaplains, see Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, “Chaplaincy in the News.” <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/chaplaincy-in-the-news>.

<sup>4</sup> The Chaplaincy Innovation Lab has taken up addressing chaplaincy as it is being transformed in recent years. Wendy Cadge and Michael Skaggs wrote a case statement for the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab with a helpful overview of the changing landscape of chaplaincy (2018).

mean when many of the assumptions in the professionalization, standardization, and certification process remain Protestant (Sullivan 2014, x)?

Second, chaplaincy is proliferating in new contexts previously unimagined, such as movements like Black Lives Matter or Standing Rock as mentioned above, where chaplains are organized on an ad hoc and temporary basis through organically and more loosely formed networks and social media. These movement spaces are also becoming deeply. Chaplains' varying training is democratizing chaplaincy. While all the competencies of a skillful trauma-informed chaplain are needed in these fast-changing and turbulent spaces, there is no certifying body that credentials such chaplains. That they are highly unregulated raises further questions about effective forms of education.

As regulators, how can we maintain the standards so critical to accountability while creating space for new forms of chaplaincy to emerge? As professional colleagues, how do we support the solid work of traditional chaplaincy and incubate experimentation, like chaplaincy through mobile apps? As educators, how do we create a pedagogy that allows so many meaningful religious differences to endure while cultivating the possibility for connections across those differences? In this emerging territory, how do we take seriously all these intersections and provide a formal education that lays a foundation for this work? Such questions inform Union Theological Seminary's Master of Divinity program that aims to train chaplains across religious traditions, in general, and Buddhist chaplains, in particular, with the interreligious perspectives, interpersonal, self-inquiry, spiritual care, justice commitments, and meaning-making competencies necessary to flourish in this quickly changing field. This chapter explores the opportunities and challenges of a Buddhist chaplaincy program in a historically liberal Protestant seminary.

## **The context of Buddhist chaplaincy in the U.S.**

The Master of Divinity (M.Div.) in Buddhism and Interreligious Engagement (BIE) at Union was born of the relationship between these fundamental questions and the need to educate ordained Buddhist clergy and lay leaders for the complex American religious context. What does sangha (community of spiritual friendship) look like in America, and how do the various expressions of ordained Buddhist clergy relate to it? How do Buddhist clergy function effectively in a society whose religious language, rules of engagement, and polity are so fundamentally Christian that its assumptions are largely invisible? Should Buddhists concern themselves with U.S. credentialing bodies or abide by traditional Buddhist/Asian means for recognizing authority?

Various traditions with an array of sangha relationships have arrived in the U.S. with immigrant Buddhist communities since the early 1800s, blending in complex and contested ways. During the twentieth century, Vinaya-bound<sup>5</sup> monastics supported by the *dana*<sup>6</sup> of a wider lay community, married Zen priests with family temples, and Tibetan gurus in exile –for example– have all landed on U.S. shores tasked with either supporting immigrant heritage<sup>7</sup> communities or navigating the transmission of the Buddhadharmā to Western converts. When supporting immigrant communities, ordained Buddhists often find themselves responsible not only for teaching the Buddhadharmā but in the role of purveyors and custodians of the entirety of a transplanted culture. Moreover, they are doing so as their communities adapt to often hostile social, economic, and political realities in the U.S. It is likely that most of them were not trained in all the aspects required for the immense breadth of work required here, ranging from cultural support to social services to responding to hate crimes against community members within a foreign context.

While sangha–laity<sup>8</sup> relationships are complicated by new pressures within heritage communities, the Asian expressions of these roles and relationships are often misunderstood, confused, or rejected entirely in so-called convert communities. In convert communities, the complexities of the traditional Buddhist roles of lay and monastic are even more complicated. While the primary relationship between laity and monastics in Asian communities is usually one of devotion, Western, mostly white, lay Buddhists have often either devalued or exoticized devotional practices, rationalized the dharma outside of the cosmologies supportive of devotion, and insisted on taking up the meditative and text-based practices of monastics as lay practitioners (Glieg 2019). Traditional roles of monastics and laity are further blurred because many Japanese and Korean clergy (called priests in the U.S.), are trained monastically while marrying and

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5 *Vinaya* refers to the code of conduct adhered to by those who have joined the formal Buddhist monastic community, or *sangha*, as *bhikku* and *bhikkhuni* (monks and nuns).

6 *Dana* refers to generosity, and here specifically, to the act of laity supporting the formal *sangha*.

7 Throughout this article, *heritage* is used to refer to Buddhist practitioners who were born into a Buddhist family of Asian countries where Buddhism is practiced. *Convert* refers to Buddhist practitioners who became Buddhist and are not of Asian heritage. While categories of heritage and convert are popular shorthand, the binary erases important groups like Asian-American practitioners who choose to become Buddhist when their family of origin is not, and European- or African-American practitioners born into families already practicing Buddhism.

8 *Sangha* here specifically refers to the orders of monks and nuns, which would be the traditional usage of the term.

inhabiting what early Buddhism would have regarded as a lay life.<sup>9</sup> These clergy care for temples and families rather than living in a monastic community under the authority of the full Vinaya. Even though the underlying assumptions and orientations are distinct, clergy arrangements of the priestly kind can potentially fit neatly into the Protestant expectations regarding clergy-congregation relationships. Further, many European-descended converts bring Protestant expectations to Buddhist temple leaders, expecting not only dharma talks and times for meditation, but family rites of passage, community engagement programs of social betterment that fit with Western expectations. While these aspects of religious life would be worked out in their traditional contexts, they are unclear in America. Consequently, any common path to understanding how ordained Buddhists are to relate to a lay community in the U.S. vanishes at the moment it is proposed.

Buddhism also spans the same aforementioned changing landscape of religion, both conditioning and conditioned by it. Buddhist practitioners include the deeply devout, insistently secular, multi-generational, newly converted, practice-oriented, study-oriented, ritual-oriented, individual, familial, upholders of the sangha jewel, bedroom-corner sitters, mantra reciters, mindfulness practitioners, the apolitical and the socially engaged. One may even find all of these practicing together in a single temple, seeking guidance from a single teacher. Each of them is in some way trying to understand human life and find relief from *dukkha*, often bringing personal as well as historic, societal *karma* into the work of transformation. Monastic training is often insufficient to address this complexity, especially considering that an increasing number of millennial Buddhist practitioners are requesting dharma teachers and clergy to bring the Buddhadharmā to our collective karma born of a legacy of colonialism, genocide, slavery, white supremacy, and misogyny that remains unaddressed in many of our bodies and lives. Regardless of the depth of training and insight, the highly diverse complexities of American society mean Buddhist training communities often struggle to prepare those who will effectively act as clergy for the American context. Leav-

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<sup>9</sup> Here we are drawing a different ordained/lay distinction than is typical in Christianity. The distinction of monastic/lay is the original distinction within Buddhism where monastics take up the renunciant path and the laity are involved in everyday life. However, the rise of ordained non-monastics, predominantly in East Asia, creates a new distinction between priest and lay that is somewhat in tension with the original distinction, resulting in what in the Buddhist context would be lay priests. The meaning of lay then floats between a dialectical relationship with both priest and monastic, recognizing this more recent distinction while honoring the formative and dominant one.

ing this complexity unaddressed risks ignoring the diverse needs of the American Buddhist community.

While we need chaplains trained broadly enough that they are able to adapt to the varying needs of our sanghas, requests for Buddhist teachings and guidance also come to us from beyond the Buddhist communities. Certainly, what we consider to be traditional venues for chaplaincy work – hospitals, prisons, and schools – are increasingly calling on Buddhists to support these spaces. However, Buddhists are also being requested to serve in many burgeoning contexts that are shifting how we think of chaplaincy itself. This shows up in both secular ways (such as giving mindfulness training), as well as religious (teaching formal meditation to Black Lives Matters activists). While more traditional expressions suffer from limited credentialing bodies in the U.S., more secular manifestations often lack appropriate training or at least have no common clarity regarding satisfactory education (Cadge and Skaggs 2018). In both cases, the field of chaplaincy may be uniquely positioned to navigate this multifaceted, emergent terrain.

Add to this a nation that is becoming increasingly syncretic religiously. Many sanghas have a considerable number of multiple believers (Rajkumar/Dayam 2016). At the Brooklyn Zen Center, where Greg is the senior priest, devoted Buddhist practitioners are also active in the religions of Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, African ancestral and animist traditions, Paganism, Humanism, and more broadly held Rational Materialist views. Not only do Buddhist clergy need to be trained to lead a sangha in a multi-religious society, they also require the skills to lead a multi-religious sangha.

## **Master of divinity in Buddhism and interreligious engagement—program structure and rationale**

The M.Div. is a professional degree most commonly required for ministers, chaplains, and religious leaders. At Union, the M.Div. program is the largest of all degree programs. Taken full-time, it is a three-year degree that requires 78 credit hours, including 40 to 44 credit requirement in Bible, Church History, Theology, Practical Theology, Interreligious Engagement, 6 credits of field education, and an option to complete a thesis or thesis project. Whereas the curriculum was composed of four classic fields in theological education—Bible, History, Theology, and Practical Theology— in 2013, the faculty adopted a fifth, namely the interreligious engagement field. Membership in this field is made up of faculty from other traditional fields to emphasize the multidisciplinary nature of this endeavor. This also ensures that the work of interreligious engagement occurs

across the broader seminary curriculum. The focus and goal of the interreligious engagement field demonstrate the particular methodology embodied at Union:

- The focus of this field is engagement with non-Christian religious traditions potentially spanning a range of disciplines in the seminary curriculum: scripture, theology, worship, ethics, spirituality, etc. The focus of the field on substantive engagement of Christian professionals with different aspects of religious practice and thought of other traditions distinguishes this field from more purely academic approaches to comparative religion, religious pluralism and the like in non-seminary contexts.
- The goal of this field of study is to prepare religious and sociocultural leaders for a multireligious world. Equipping students to draw connections between interreligious dialogue, spirituality, social justice, and other practices is a distinctive feature of this field (as opposed to an exclusive focus on comparative theology). Drawing upon the diverse expertise of a large number of Union's faculty, the interreligious engagement field of study offers courses that focus on specific religious traditions and practices, comparative and dialogical topics, theology of religions and comparative theology.<sup>10</sup>

Creating this new multi-disciplinary field signaled the seminary's commitment to educating religious leaders, including chaplains, who will be ministering in increasingly multi-religious contexts. Strengthening interreligious knowledge became an essential and urgent commitment in ministerial formation. In addition, the fifth field, and subsequent creation of two new tracks to the M.Div., namely, Buddhism and Interreligious Engagement (BIE) and Islam and Interreligious Engagement (IIE), responded to the expanding religious identity of our students and faculty. To further support chaplaincy training, in 2020, Union created a new chaplaincy concentration that overlays the BIE course of study with chaplaincy training. This new concentration combines Union's historic strengths of the psychology and religion discipline and the newer Interreligious Engagement field.

The newly designed flexible M.Div. is a culmination of several years of faculty grappling with the increasing diversity of students, both in terms of vocation and religious identities. Union needed an M.Div. program what would satisfy the learning needs of traditional students seeking ordination in Christian denominations as well as unaffiliated, humanist, Buddhist, and Muslim students seeking to work in various contexts including hospital, hospice, higher education, mili-

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<sup>10</sup> Excerpted from the full proposal to faculty brought for discussion and vote on November 20, 2013.

tary, prison, and care facilities. Currently, Union offers four tracks in the M.Div. program:<sup>11</sup>

- **Ministerial leadership** prepares students for ordination or other credentialed ministry. Those interested in preparing for non-credentialed ministry, non-profit leadership, or vocations in contexts outside of or beyond a church will find alternative courses that will prepare them for their own calling.
- **Islam and interreligious engagement** prepares students for diverse leadership roles with and in Muslim communities. These roles include religious and spiritual leadership; chaplaincy at universities, hospitals, or prisons; professional counseling (with further clinical training); teaching; and careers in interreligious/interfaith cooperation, policy-making, social justice advocacy, journalism, non-profits, and government.
- **Buddhism and interreligious engagement** prepares students for diverse leadership roles with and in Buddhist communities as well as bringing Buddhist practices and principles to communities that may not identify as Buddhist. These roles include religious and spiritual leadership; chaplaincy at universities, hospitals, or prisons; professional counseling (with further clinical training); teaching; and careers in interreligious/interfaith cooperation, policy-making, social justice advocacy, journalism, non-profits, and government.
- **Anglican studies** prepares individuals for diverse leadership roles within the Episcopal Church, including ordination, chaplaincy, or other ecclesiastical ministries.

Both the Buddhism and Interreligious Engagement concentration and Islam and Interreligious Engagement concentration are embedded in and expanded from the traditional M.Div. curriculum with the four-fold (now five-fold) discipline/field structure of Christian theological education. The historical identity, ethos, curriculum, and culture of Union where Buddhist chaplain formation occurs is still Christian and, more specifically, Protestant. The creation of two additional tracks required two dynamic accommodations in the curriculum. First, Union's M.Div. program goals and outcomes, which are grounded in Christian theological education, needed to be reinterpreted to provide room and rationale for two new tracks. Similarly, both the Buddhism and Islam concentrations needed to work creatively within the curriculum map framed by the M.Div. program goals and outcomes that are based on the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) educa-

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<sup>11</sup> See M.Div. program guide for complete M.Div. learning goals and outcomes on Union's website <https://myunion.utsnyc.edu/myunion/forms>.



tional standards for M.Div. programs<sup>12</sup> offered by an accredited theological school. Union's M.Div. program goals give a fuller picture of the curricular frame. They address competency in four learning areas: *religious heritage*, *cultural context*, *personal and spiritual formation*, and *capacity for ministerial and public leadership*. *Religious heritage* includes scriptural, historical, and theological perspectives of Christian traditions as well as interreligious awareness and substantive interreligious engagements. Competencies in *cultural context* include social and cultural understandings necessary for contemporary theologies, the life of the church, and promotion of justice in the world. *Personal and spiritual formation* develops one's own spiritual life and practices as well as guides the spiritual formation of others. *Capacity for ministerial and public leadership* includes developing one's own ministerial identity, interpersonal intelligence, various arts of ministry, and contextually nuanced interpretation of religious traditions informed by interreligious engagement.<sup>13</sup>

The reason for developing an M.Div. BIE program within this broader context is to support those who wish to become Buddhist-literate chaplains, who are entering into leadership as dharma teachers or sangha leaders, or who are already ordained monastics relocating to the U.S. and wanting to be educated for our cultural context. The challenge was to construct a curriculum that balances structure and flexibility to address these varying needs.

The Buddhist core coursework needed to be broad enough to work across many traditions, cultures, and contexts without losing depth and within the limitations of a burgeoning program. In addition, skills-based courses and practicum historically rooted in a Protestant context had to adapt to Buddhist student needs while Buddhist professors must be in dialogue with instructors and facilitators to support this broadening. Finally, the program is *Buddhism and Interreligious Engagement*, meaning that IE skills must be articulated and reinforced throughout the coursework.

Only the specifics of the BIE program vary considerably from its Christian counterpart. Thus, the Bible requirement has expanded to include Sacred Texts (courses like "Zen Buddhist Texts" and "Reading Early Buddhist Texts");

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12 For the complete list of M.Div. program standards, see Association for Theological Schools Commission on Accrediting Degree Standards. <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/degree-program-standards.pdf>. In June 2020, ATS revised the standards of accreditation which can be found here: <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/standards-of-accreditation.pdf#pagemode=bookmarks>.

13 For the complete M.Div. learning goals and outcomes, see <https://utsnyc.edu/wp-content/uploads/MDiv-Program-Guide-2022-23.pdf>, 3–5.

History now includes “Global Buddhist Histories,” and Theology, “Buddhist Religious Thought.”

Our BIE students study not only their own sacred texts but also those of other faiths, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism along with indigenous spiritual practice and thought. In the first year, BIE students take an “Introduction to Christian Theology”; in learning how Christianity has critically engaged its tradition, they gain skills in which many Buddhists are not trained. “Introduction to the Bible” and “Zen Buddhist Texts” provide basic exegetical skills and hermeneutical lenses for engaging sacred texts. Buddhist Religious Thought introduces the grounding dharmic concepts of Buddhism. The first-semester requirement of “Religions in the City” gives all M.Div. students the opportunity to visit and practice with other faith traditions in New York City while being instructed in the foundational theories and methodologies of Interreligious Engagement.

In the first year, our “Introduction to Buddhist Meditation Practices” addresses spiritual formation. It introduces BIE students to a wide array of Buddhist meditation practices through primary, mostly early Pali texts. Each week they take up a different practice, until they have basic knowledge of the interrelationship of these practices and how they can be used in their work. Learning basic language and concepts through such practice-based engagement orients their future Buddhist studies appropriately. “Introduction to Pastoral and Spiritual Care” serves as a foundational course in how to work in a pastoral context, critical to chaplaincy and lay sangha service.

Finally, through “Socially Engaged Buddhism,” a study of colonial and post-colonial Buddhist social movements in Asia and “Comparative Buddhist–Christian Liberation Theologies,” which compares Christian liberation theology and Socially Engaged Buddhist movements, students explore community organizing and an array of justice issues through Buddhist frames. The first year is designed to provide the necessary foundations for the many possible needs and directions a Buddhist student might choose to take through their time at Union. Our current recommended program path for M.Div. BIE students follows:

**FIRST YEAR:** The first year focuses on foundations in Buddhist thought and practice, Christian thought and practice, Interreligious Engagement and Spiritual/Pastoral Care, which collectively prepare BIE students for education pathways in the ensuing years. Specific capacities cultivated: meditation practices, self-inquiry, pastoral/spiritual care, IE methodologies and praxis, familiarity with texts and religious language across traditions, exegesis, hermeneutics, constructive theology, historical and social contextualization. The first semester provides the basic experiences and tools for a depth of learning within and across traditions.

**First-year Fall Semester:**

- Introduction to Buddhist Meditation Practices
- Religions in the City: Introduction to Interreligious Engagement
- Introduction to Pastoral & Spiritual Care
- Introduction to the Bible

**First-year Spring Semester:**

- Buddhist Religious Thought
- Foundations in Christian Theology
- Socially Engaged Buddhism
- Christianity in Historical Perspective

**SECOND YEAR:** With a focus on developing pastoral imagination and a capacity for theological reflection in field practice, the second year continues to deepen, broaden and integrate all of the capacities introduced in the first year. While there is a stronger focus on Buddhist texts and history in the second year, it is informed by IE frames developed in the first. Having basic skills in meditation and pastoral care in the first year are critical supports for the second.

**Second-year Fall Semester:**

- Buddhist Sacred Text Requirement, e.g. Zen Buddhist Texts, Reading Early Buddhist Texts: Ethics, Meditation, and Wisdom, etc.
- Buddhist Global Histories
- Field Education Seminar I
- Practical Theology or Additional IE Requirement

**Second-year Spring Semester:**

- Buddhist Concentration Requirement\*
- Field Education Seminar II
- Practical Theology or Additional IE Requirement
- Buddhist Concentration Requirement or General Elective

A unit of Clinical Pastoral Education is highly recommended during the summer after the first or second year.

**THIRD YEAR:** In the third year, students focus on the integration and articulation of practical and academic aspects of their education as they formulate an engaged Buddhist vision of chaplaincy and leadership.

**Third-year Fall Semester:**

- Buddhist Concentration Requirement or General Elective (4 courses)

**Third-year Spring Semester:**

- Thesis
- Buddhist Concentration Requirement or General Elective (2 courses)

For students in the BIE-Chaplaincy concentration, they are required to complete courses in Psychology and Religion in addition to the BIE course requirements. The following are examples of Psychology and Religion courses:

- Introduction to Pastoral and Spiritual Care
- Pastoral Listening Practicum
- Chaplaincy
- Professional Ethics for Spiritual Care
- Trauma Informed Pastoral and Spiritual Care
- Death, Dying, and Bereavement
- Buddhism and Psychoanalysis: A Healing Partnership

The following are examples of Buddhist concentration electives:<sup>14</sup>

- Buddhist Psychology: Healing Intergenerational Trauma, Difficult Emotions, and Colonial Mentality
- Reading Early Buddhist Texts: Ethics, Meditation, and Wisdom
- Indo-Tibetan Buddhism
- Community Engaged Buddhism: Organizing for an Alternate Housing Future
- Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Rereading of Parables and Stories in Buddhism and Christianity
- Comparative Buddhist-Christian Liberation Theologies
- Asian Theologies
- Double Belonging (focuses on Buddhist-Christian dialogue)
- Introduction to Self-Inquiry
- Integrative Path Personal & Social Healing: Buddhist Phenomenology
- Chaplaincy Through Theravada Lens
- Guided Readings in Buddhism

Throughout this program, Buddhist students are navigating the tensions of learning their own religious practice alongside those of others. Conflicting basic assumptions and analytical frames come into glaring relationship, highlighting areas where one's own unconscious assumptions require nuance and clarification to oneself, where foreign frames support, complicate, or confuse this clarification, where differences eventually resolve, and where the questions of one religion may simply not be the questions of another. While knowledge of other religions is cultivated, we suggest that wholeness of one's own faith is found through this process of interreligious learning. Wholeness as a process of deepening roots in a tradition is an alternative to purity of faith. While the process of becoming whole through engagement is uncomfortable, if not deeply painful and ungrounding, it is this path that cultivates the stable roots and flex-

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<sup>14</sup> Pali and Sanskrit courses are offered as summer intensives and also fulfill these requirements.

ibility in both the chaplain and religious tradition itself that is so desperately needed in our world. We tend to grasp our traditions as identities. In engaging other traditions, these identities are destabilized. In the best case, we open our grasp and connect to the other. Both of these processes are painful because they take us into the unknown. The typical egoic response to the unknown is resistance, and then we move through fear, grief, and loss before experiencing the joy of connection. One cannot truly commune with the other without first releasing and grieving one's grasped identities. Students come to realize that traditions and convictions are strengthened through this clarifying process of respectful interreligious engagement that often challenges our very core.

Successful implementation of the BIE program depends on this uncomfortable wholeness or “practical vulnerability” as our colleague John Thatamanil proposes, the posture of openness to the claims and aims of the other religious tradition(s) and a “commit[ment] to remain[...]in such intimate proximity” to those traditions (Thatamanil 2016, 356). It is an openness even to take on the practices of the other tradition “in order to see and to know as the other does” (Thatamanil 2016, 356). This “truth-seeking inquiry” respects the other persons and traditions toward mutual transformation (Thatamanil 2016, 358). It leads to interreligious wisdom.

Such interreligious wisdom is now essential for all chaplains. Educating for that interreligious wisdom is complex and contextual, and offers opportunities for creative pedagogical method. Thatamanil offers one such method for teaching Hindu-Christian Dialogue and courses on religious diversity. He frames his courses using “a medical model” of questions derived from Buddha's Four Noble Truths and invites students to put those questions to any text or thinker: “How does this text/thinker diagnose the human predicament? What is the etiology of that predicament? What is the prognosis? What is the therapy?” (Thatamanil 2016, 361). Bringing these questions to our own and others' traditions is an opportunity for sincere respect and deepened respect.

## **Educating toward wholeness: Interreligious engagement capacity-building for Chaplains**

We turn now to discuss the interreligious engagement of capacities that transpire when offering Buddhist education within a historically Protestant seminary. First, we explore a Christian practice of theological reflection as one method to cultivating pastoral-moral imagination. Second, we explore the notion of self-inquiry, a central practice and capacity within the Buddhist tradition.

What resonance and dissonance do theological reflection and self-inquiry have when they are employed across religious traditions?

One of the fundamental goals of a seminary education is cultivating “pastoral imagination” in students, the multi-dimensional capacity that integrates the head, heart, and the spirit in response to the pastoral situation itself. To cultivate this imaginative capacity, we exercise four formative practices. First, one practices sustained engagement with sacred texts and practices of one’s tradition(s). From this engagement, a pastor should be able to (re)interpret the sacred texts and traditions for this contemporary life and context. Second, one develops an understanding of human nature and a solid appreciation “of what makes human beings tick, of who people are and how they operate” (Dykstra 2008, 52). This practice also requires one to know oneself through a disciplined examination of one’s conditioning as well as one’s formation, discernment, spiritual practices, and theological reflections on those practices. Third, one hones skills for complex understanding of organizations and institutions—what they are, how they operate, both on a day-to-day level as well as on a longer-term strategic and structural level—to align the mission and values of the organization with organizational practices.<sup>15</sup> And the fourth practice offers a historical, contextual, and critical understanding of the world that the church/faith communities exist to serve. These four practices are woven together with a desire to know what it means to worship God and are context-specific.

Yet the term “pastoral” is limiting to our diverse student body for whom “pastoral” signifies “Christian” and “parish.” Instead, what is needed alongside pastoral imagination is its prophetic partner—“moral imagination”—which requires clear-eyed analyses of power of systems, structures, and relationships and how they create injustices and inequalities, which values sacred dignity and agency of all people, and which fuels our fight against injustices. Moral imagination believes in the power of life over death, freedom over captivity. It is fueled by our courage to ask and enact, “what if?”<sup>16</sup>

While the imaginative capacity is in the function and the realm of the mind, moral imagination relies on bodily knowing, memories, and stories that live in

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<sup>15</sup> See the four-frames approach to organization and leadership by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal. They advocate for identifying, understanding, and reframing four distinct frames (structural, human resource, political and symbolic) that operate in organizations and leaders. The skills of reframing these distinct frames give us a more comprehensive picture about a complex organization (2017).

<sup>16</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas advocates for the prophetic religious tradition of the African American communities—moral memory, moral identity, moral participation, and moral imagination—as a way to break the racist structures, patterns, and practices in the society (2015).

our bodies and also the spaces in and through which our bodies move.<sup>17</sup> It is an integrative, embodied capacity for practical wisdom, *phronesis*. It is also the most difficult knowledge to learn and teach, especially in an interreligious space where our bodies move and present themselves very differently from each other.

While connecting the imaginative capacity to the full embodiment of wisdom aligns nicely with the Buddhist tradition, in the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, the Buddha was clear that there are three kinds of knowing: intellectual understanding, the process of deepening with that understanding into the body through practice, and then finally a deeply embodied knowing that is the foundation of one's actions in the world. Imagination, or what Buddhists would call *upaya* (skillful means) emerges from the full embodiment of the *Buddhadharma*. Buddhism brings to moral imagination 2600 years of practices whose primary aim is the embodiment of a clarified wisdom – moral, epistemological and ontological – compassion, and skillful means necessary to alleviate *dukkha*, or suffering for self and others. This process is the foundation for any skillful Buddhist chaplain whose ongoing practice would unfold *upaya* and the moral imagination.

However, a question for Buddhists is always one of societal context when it comes to *upaya*. The Buddha challenged caste bias regarding access to religious authority allowing all castes into the sangha and changing the cosmological genesis story with the *Aggañña Sutta* (Sujato 2018). Yet he did not openly challenge slavery as far as we can tell. Chinese Zen monastics both defied and supported the violence of imperial governments. Japanese monastics were divided across World War II aggression, some openly preaching in its favor. Sri Lanka gave birth to A.T. Ariyaratne and the Sarvodaya movement as well as monks effectively calling for genocide of the Tamil. A reluctant Buddha admitted that women were equal to men and gave them access to the monastic order. Yet, it is arguable that women have never received equal treatment or institutional support throughout the history of Buddhist practice. So when we speak of devotion to no harm and the liberation of all beings, do we also mean economic, political, racial, and gender violence? Are we also speaking about issues of justice? If so, how do we train Buddhist clergy to cultivate the moral imagination necessary to address these issues?

To this point, the tradition of cultivating pastoral and moral imagination, at least as it is understood and taught at Union, offers rich opportunities to Bud-

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17 See Mai-Anh Le Tran (2017, 16–17) for a discussion on “testifying bodies” and “teaching bodies.”

dhist students. The first point mentioned above includes the ability to “(re)interpret the sacred texts and traditions for this contemporary life and context” (Dykstra 2008, 52). The work of theology, as a necessary component of the context-specific spiritual practice of ministry, is one of the primary gifts that Union has to offer Buddhist clergy, especially where liberation, womanist and other theologies engaging a socially critical lens are concerned. While Buddhist students would likely translate theology into the framework of *upaya*, the engagement of social liberationist thought and movements for the purposes of ending *dukkha* is relatively recent to Buddhism, at least as gauged by surviving texts. Moreover, the consideration of the social positions of those giving and receiving the teachings as a frame for critiquing and considering skillful adaptations to varying contexts is critical to a Buddhadharma that does not inadvertently cause harm. Over time, Buddhism has always adapted to its context. But it is something else to train Buddhists how to do so consciously, thoughtfully, and effectively.

On the second point of ensuring a “disciplined examination of one’s conditioning,” while the training of Buddhist chaplains requires psychological nuance and skills likely missing in monastic training, Buddhism brings a great deal to the examination of conditioning. As the latter will be dealt with in the discussion of self-inquiry, we do not mention it here. However, it cannot be overstated how important training in transference/counter-transference and other Western psychological insights is for Buddhist chaplains and leaders who so often require support with egoic confusion and moral clarity.

Regarding the third point that pastoral imagination must include a “complex understanding of organizations and institutions,” (Dysktra 2008, 52) those from traditions like Soto Zen who have worked their way up through the ranks and understand how monastic organizations function are the minority. Most incoming Buddhist students have few skills in administering institutions, nor are they aware of the tradition’s positions on institutions.

Finally, one of the most important areas of exchange for BIE students at Union is the fourth aspect of pastoral imagination—that of developing “a historical, contextual and critical understanding of the world.” This ties into the first point regarding the work of theology, but especially focuses on understanding the complexity of this moment and place in history so that we can respond skillfully. As an example, one cannot effectively teach the dharma without harm in the U.S. if one is not familiar with our history of racial violence. One cannot be an effective Buddhist chaplain without this knowledge. Any expression of the Buddhadharma must be both located and universal.

Moreover, karmic liberation requires the understanding of karmic conditions. Without a knowledge of the karmic effects of one’s society and collective



history, those effects will be internalized, unconsciously framing our expression of the Buddhadharma and thereby potentially causing unintentional harm when such views give rise to unconscious intentions and consequent actions. A Buddhist education that does not take into account histories of social violence reduces karma to a theory of individualized seeds and fruits that are divorced from the broader social reality that is the context from which a particular person's karma unfolds. The social, historical, and critical training emphasized in this aspect of pastoral imagination promotes a real-life reflection of *pratityasamutpada*,<sup>18</sup> allowing for *upaya* and *karuna* (compassionate action) to manifest in ways that meaningfully address the suffering of the world. For the Buddhist leader and chaplain in the U.S., this education must be central so that further harm is reduced.

A seminary education brings this wide array of knowledge to Buddhist students. That knowledge is spread across far too many courses to explicate here. To illuminate how this training might unfold for a BIE student, we turn to one aspect of training around pastoral imagination: theological reflection.

## Theological reflection and moral imagination across traditions

How do we cultivate pastoral-moral imagination in students? Theological reflection is one practice that is at the heart of pastoral formation. In Su's work as a theological field educator, she witnesses the transformative capacity of reflecting and thinking theologically and of creatively bringing to bear the full resources of one's religious tradition(s) in shaping students' practice of spiritual care, their understanding of the other, and their cultivation of pastoral imagination. Theological reflection has a wide range of goals including personal and communal transformation, community building, accompaniment, and making sense of suffering (Foley 2014, 34:72). It is a life-long work that improves with practice. Whether it is called "reflective believing" (Foley 2015), "making faith sense" (Kinast 1999), "knowing-in-action" (Bounds 2008), or "pastoral cycle" (Holland and Henriot 1983), theological reflection is an exploration of individual and communal experiences in conversation with the wisdom of our religious traditions. It surfaces our beliefs, theology, perspectives, and actions as well as those of the

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<sup>18</sup> Often translated as dependent origination, *pratityasamutpada* in its simplest form is the Buddhist teaching that all *dharmas* – here best translated as phenomena – arise in causal relationship with all other dharmas. No dharma is ever ultimately independent.

traditions. Another way of thinking about it is to ask the questions: Where is God in this situation? Where is God present? Absent? What is God calling us to do? This action-reflection-action method confirms and challenges, orients and disorients for the sake of expanding our understanding both of our experiences and of our tradition. The result is a new understanding and meaning for our lives.

This process critically engages the whole self in context, employing traditions/disciplines of inquiry. While there are many different ways to do theological reflection, Patricia O'Connell Killen and John De Beer's method is particularly effective: a) one narrates an experience; b) in contemplation and engaging feelings that arise, one lets the heart of the matter emerge; c) one explores and reflects on the heart of the matter with traditions and disciplines of inquiry; d) one allows new insights to emerge; e) one structures action that arises out of this reflection (Killen and De Beer 1994).

Because theological reflection begins with experience, contemplation on that experience necessarily involves embodied knowledge. Feelings, emotions, bodily sensations, and images assist in exploring the heart of the matter. Theological reflection then engages our intellect as we put critical theological frameworks as well as our traditions in conversation with the heart of the matter. This rigorous exchange can create a disorienting, liminal space, yet one from which new insights emerge from which we return to practice (Cameron, Reader, Slater, and Rowland 2012). And when theological reflection is done together across religious traditions, the assumptive world framed by this Christian method may collide with others' world views and cosmologies and challenge or affirm them.

Edward Foley has taken up the task of exploring theological reflection across religious traditions by moving away from tradition/religion-specific terminologies. He calls this "reflective believing" by which he means, "a meaning-making practice, exercised in light of one's individual or shared wisdom-heritage, that honors the experiences and stories of its participants" (Foley 2015, 92). Engaging the head, the heart, and the hands, Foley asserts that reflective believing is an "invitation to intimacy as spiritual community" (Foley 2015, 42).

In Su's field education seminar class, she introduces this method of theological reflection as an essential tool of engagement for ongoing pastoral reflection and formation. When she teaches this method to Buddhist students in her class, she is acutely aware that even though she has broadened this process for non-Christians, it still bears the imprint of Christian practice. At the same time, this practice is at the heart of building capacity for practical wisdom for chaplaincy and any ministry vocation. This circular movement of practice, reflection, and return to practice is a life-long reflective art form which becomes a habitus (Pak 2020).

How might a Buddhist student utilize theological reflection for their own pastoral formation? Ian Case, a Buddhist student in the M.Div. BIE program was a field education intern at the Manhattan Detention Complex, a New York City jail that detains people awaiting trial. For one of his verbatims, Ian wrote a theological reflection on an encounter with the detainee in jail. We wanted to understand more fully, how he experienced doing theological reflection as a Buddhist. We asked Ian to write a second-order reflection on theological reflection process for this chapter.

### **Some reflections on Buddhist theological reflection**

*Ian Case (M.Div. '20 Buddhism and Interreligious Engagement Concentration)*

As an American convert Buddhist, there is already a certain kind of “translation” or “cultural rearticulation” that necessarily functions as an aspect of my spiritual path. While I wasn’t brought up in a specific faith tradition or in an especially religious household, I was certainly raised in an overall Christian cultural context. Taking up a Buddhist practice meant learning a different vocabulary, embodying new ritual forms, and relating to others within a new ethical framework—and approaching all of this from a position and a mind/body that had been enculturated by Christian assumptions (not to mention the other dimensions of my social conditioning). For the most part—especially during the first few years of my practice—this rearticulation happened implicitly and automatically.

That being said, the reality of studying Buddhism at a largely Protestant seminary did not come as that much of a shock to the system. I was already used to navigating across this difference. The main effect of being at Union has been to make me more sensitive and deliberate about the process. I was lucky to be able to take a course on Buddhist-Christian liberation theology during my first semester, and this class served as a primer for doing this kind of interreligious rearticulation in an academic setting. It also became very clear that “translation” is not always possible or preferred. Traditions also need to be understood and appreciated on their own terms. My rearticulation became more nuanced, more careful.

Another effect of studying at Union was that I began to think about Buddhism “theologically,” as an integrated system of philosophical/psychological/ethical teachings and practices that is always dynamically situated in history and social contexts. I understood Buddhist soteriology not as salvation but as liberation from suffering (which may be variously defined depending on context).

When I was first introduced to the practice of theological reflection, I understood “theology” within this Buddhist context and I saw the reflection as a process of meaning-making within that frame. My first attempts at the practice—during my first year—were a bit intellectual and forced. I felt as if I was searching my own archives of the Buddhist tradition for a teaching that would fit the situation. And then I would try to extract some insight from the teaching to apply to the situation in question.

Once I started doing these reflections in the context of chaplaincy, however, the process became much more organic and natural. As I reflected on the pastoral situation, I would make an effort to completely let go of all of my preconceived ideas of how the situation *should* develop or what I *should* do. At the same time, I would bring my awareness to my body and allow sensations and energies to arise. In this sense, this part of the process

was very much about not knowing and renunciation—giving up any notion of control and just being open to what emerges in the moment.

Eventually, something *does* emerge. Sometimes I will see the situation with more clarity, or I'll see some aspect of my own conditioning that is functioning in the situation (and which I missed before). These feel like gifts that arise from the reflective process and the beginning of a kind of meaning-making. As more of the heart of the matter is revealed in this process then a conversation with my tradition (and with my own experience of practice) can start to happen. Again, this is not necessarily willful. Connections and resonances become evident. In the best case, there is a resonance not just with the teaching but also with my embodied understanding of the teaching. As the conversation develops, this will often generate deeper insights into the situation and the overall pastoral plan. Sometimes a response is clarified.

This stage of the process can be understood as confessional in a certain sense. In the Zen tradition, I understand confession to have two aspects: first I must acknowledge the action in question (see it clearly) and then I must take responsibility for it. As I let the situation or interaction speak to me, I begin to see emerging themes (and my own karmic tendencies) more clearly. I may see where the suffering is. Once this happens, I can begin to take responsibility for my part or I might see areas where agency is possible for those I am serving. I can also take responsibility for whatever aspect of the teaching is illuminated in the process; I can own that as one possible interpretation of the living encounter.

The process of theological reflection is iterative and ongoing, supporting more skillful responses from a position of humility and not knowing.

Here, Ian clearly articulates many of the themes so far expressed in this paper as he respectfully engages traditional chaplaincy training around pastoral-moral imagination and theological reflection from his own Buddhist positionality. In fact, his insight about theological reflection that leads to the Buddhist notion of confession is a powerful enhancement of the reflective process that could have only come about through interreligious encounter.

## Practicing self-inquiry across traditions

What of the skills and capacities that Buddhism brings to a seminary and chaplaincy training program? For starters, it brings a long history of systematic inquiry into the nature of self and being; the threefold training of *sila* (ethical discipline), *samadhi* (mental discipline) and *prajna* (embodied, phenomenological realization) provide a path for taking full responsibility for who we are in the world. *Ethical discipline* is not only aimed at transforming behavior from unwholesome to wholesome, but morality as a practice is itself a mirror to the self-clinging mind, meaning that *sila* is a support for the mind's unbinding, greater stability, deeper realization, and final liberation. In turn, the gathering and

stabilizing of mental factors in *samadhi* cultivate a fertile garden for moral clarity and dharmic insight. To lie, steal, or otherwise act in unwholesome ways destabilizes the mind, causing us to falter on our path to freedom. Third and finally, the deepening realization of *pratyasamutpada* delivers the mind from its obsession with, and grasping of conventional and ultimate truths, and points human life right back to relational morality and the immediacy of our interconnected life. To do this transformative work with integrity requires each of us to do as the thirteenth-century Zen Buddhist monk, Eihei Dogen, instructed and “learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate the self” (Waddell and Abe 2002). For the sake of shorthand, we will refer to Dogen’s “backward step” as self-inquiry.

While there is certainly a strong encouragement of moral commitment at Union, of theological reflection and voice, of critical engagement with the text, analysis of power, interreligious engagement, and social justice work on all fronts, from a Buddhist perspective Union lacked the cultivation of self-inquiry that matures the self-knowledge and capacities necessary to engage the painful, demanding, spiritually transformative work of constructive theology and social change. In some cases, it seemed clear this was a barrier to deepening theological and moral commitments as well as cultivating key capacities for chaplaincy. Many non-Buddhist students have felt comfortable taking Buddhist courses to develop these capacities. Many have very skillfully integrated them into their own spiritual formation. Usually at least one third of participants in the course, “Introduction to Buddhist Meditation Practices” are non-Buddhist. However, courses in Buddhist practice do not necessarily support non-Buddhist students in developing self-inquiry language and skills within their own tradition.

After much discussion with colleagues about this matter, this perceived need led Greg to create the course, “The Practice of Self-Inquiry,” which draws from multiple religious traditions as well as European and African phenomenology, existentialism, and post-structuralism for guidance on how to think about self-inquiry within one’s own tradition. Beginning with Husserl, we worked our way through Butler, Dostoyevsky, Ellison, Foucault, Plato, the Buddha, Descartes, Fanon, de Beauvoir, hooks, Ignatius, Al-Ghazzali, Sankaracarya, Suzuki, Dogen, and others, exploring the various potential objects of inquiry, methods of suspension of investment in those objects, the reliability of the observer/narrator, normative versus liberative teleologies, rational, imaginative and phenomenological methodologies, skepticism, theories of body, decolonization, gendered experience, and examples of Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian inquiry models. Then we asked students to address the following issues in the formation of a personal methodology of self-inquiry:

- *What is the self*: How does the student understand the self ontologically? Where is it experienced and what is the nature of what is being located?
- *A theory of body is a theory of perception*: Taking the suggestion from Merleau-Ponty, how does the student understand and experience the body as it relates to the self and experience of a world (Merleau-Ponty 2002)?
- *Suspension*: Informed by writings of Eihei Dogen, Edmund Husserl, and others, student's look at what it is to cultivate a stable witness for their experience as a phenomenological foundation for the process of self-inquiry (Husserl 2012).
- *Teleology*: What is the purpose of the inquiry? Is it soteriological, aimed at pure knowledge, moral betterment, etc.? How does the aim affect the means by which it is obtained?
- *Confession and renunciation as process of inquiry*: All self-inquiry requires a form of confession and renunciation to maintain a reliable inquiry. This is especially the case when morality is centered. For the student, is confession and renunciation normalizing, cultivating, liberatory, or otherwise?
- *Scene of address*: Who is being addressed in the inquiry? Is it to yourself? God? An imagined moral other? A communal other? Ancestors? The Earth? Non-human sentient beings?
- *Epistemological method*: Is the inquiry phenomenological with regard to direct observations? Is it rational with regard to metaphysical conclusions? Is it imaginative, or does it claim some other method? How do you discern and articulate the difference as you shift from one to another? —
- *Reliability of Inquirer*: How does one discern and account for reliability of the inquirer, whether it be a manifestation of resistance, deception, forgetfulness, ignorance, the mere fact of our conditioned nature, or, as Butler suggests, when the subject is not the authority of their own account due to lack of memory in early life (Butler 2009)?
- *Responding to Resistance*: What are the methods and practices the student will use to address resistance to more difficult threads of inquiry?
- *Social Critique*: If the "I" is a function of norms and conditions, then self-inquiry includes engaging social conditioning and therefore becomes a form of social critique. How is this navigated with clarity? Where does moral responsibility lie when the self is a site of social reproduction?
- *Exposure/being* (intimate and anonymous) vs. *narrated self* (published & substitutable). The former, which is basic experiential presence, cannot be narrated even though it structures all narrated accounts of self.

These areas of thought were treated methodologically, not simply theoretically. Students were asked to uncover how they understood *suspension* of mundane

mental processes within their practices, critically engaging Husserl (2015) as only one example to frame the problem. Were students engaging in rational, imaginative, phenomenological, another, or multiple methods of inquiry? How did they deal with resistance to process? What is the teleological trajectory that guides the process – salvation, clarity, liberation, moral normativity? What was their method for confessing errors (however they define them) and renouncing them in order to reconnect with the path? What or who is the “scene of address” as Butler (2009) describes it? In other words, who are they unconsciously addressing in their inquiry? How do they ensure the reliability of their self-inquiry process? These, among many other questions, resulted in one of the most exciting, productive, and rewarding classes Greg has ever facilitated. He was privileged to watch a very religiously diverse group of students work diligently together to create personal methodologies of self-inquiry that seemed very much to clarify and deepen their spiritual paths. We asked two students in the class to write a reflection about the process of self-inquiry for this chapter. Hear what students said about the process:

**Reflection on interreligious engagement and spiritual formation: A Christian student’s perspective**

*Kristine Chong (M.Div. '19, Ethics concentration)*

Given my family’s history of migration (triggered by U.S. militarism and neocolonialism in the Korean peninsula) and embeddedness in the Christian church (my father is an ordained pastor), my seminary journey can be characterized as a constant negotiation of my Christian tradition/identity with the multiplicities of my historical-racial schema. Having begun the work of examining and integrating my ancestral and historical spiritual roots in other courses and engagements at Union, taking Professor Snyder’s course on “The Practice of Self- Inquiry” during my last semester of the M.Div. program at Union was a pivotal experience. I consider the course to be a capstone of my seminary education, as it offered a site of assessment, articulation, and affirmation of my formation as a Korean American diasporic womxn of Christian upbringing training to be a chaplain in an interreligious and post-modern context.

Engaging in the self-inquiry process enabled me to systematically assess my own practices and assumptions as a Christian-raised, multiply-formed practitioner. As the class introduced self-inquiry practices from various religious traditions as well as non-religious phenomenological thinkers, the focus on metapraxis as the locus of engagement was generative for students to articulate our understanding and the aim of our self-inquiry. Learning the methods of self-inquiry gave vocabulary to my existing practice – such as suspension, subjectivity of self, bodily presence, discernment, confession, and scene(s) of address – and the assumptions, worldviews, and habits that both underlie and orient self-inquiry practices. Since self-inquiry is a crucial component to how I as a chaplain ground and prepare myself when engaging with people, having diverse frameworks and sources to understand my prac-

tices (such as that of the Examen), prepares me to be a more self-aware and spacious spiritual caregiver.

Moreover, articulating my self-inquiry process facilitated new insights about my formation, discernment, and theological reflections as a developing chaplain. Examining my self-inquiry practices reflected my spiritual development at an institution like Union, a historically Protestant seminary oriented towards interreligious theological education. My practices encompass Christian ones, such as the Examen<sup>19</sup> (as taught by Professor Roger Haight, S.J.), centering prayer<sup>20</sup> (as introduced by my peers) – as well as other traditions, including mindfulness meditations (as facilitated by Professor Tara Chung) and rituals that incorporate indigenous Korean traditions such as *Tonghak* (“Eastern Learning”)<sup>21</sup> and shamanism. Dialoguing with multiple sources and traditions has helped me to trace lineages and identify new linkages between my existing self-inquiry practices and my ongoing formation as a chaplain who will interact with people of diverse and multiple religious identities. As I cultivate a deeper connection and sense of my multitudinous identity and history, I have a richer reservoir of resources to utilize for spiritual care.

A key realization I had through the self-inquiry class was how significant the Zen Buddhist practice of living by vow is for my self-inquiry process and chaplaincy work. Living so that “life is itself a vow,” a practice that is endless, helps me to dismantle a capitalist and neoliberal worldview prominent in Christian theologies that focus on a linear, progressive trajectory and teleology (Okumura, 2012, 30). In fact, my struggles of feeling like chaplaincy is “not productive or effective enough” are grounded in an output-oriented economy. Thus, living by vow – which for me is comprised of *imago dei* (the view that every person/being is created in the image of God/mystery) and *jeong* (a Korean concept of right-relation that encompasses compassion, affection, solidarity, and vulnerability) – enacts a relational, ethical, and care-oriented metapraxis that undergirds my chaplaincy ethos. I would not have come to this realization and integration without a co-learning interreligious space, nor without a Buddhist instructor and colleagues.

Amidst the various values of interreligious engagement, challenges also existed in the self-inquiry class. The sets of “conditioning moral norms” entangled in the “prevailing ma-

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**19** The Examen is an ancient Christian practice of daily prayerful reflection and discernment of God’s presence, as conceived and taught by Ignatius of Loyola (who founded the Society of Jesus order, or the Jesuits) in the sixteenth century.

**20** Centering prayer is a form of contemplative prayer and meditation that developed from mystical traditions within western Christianity, such as the Desert Mothers and Fathers and the fourteenth-century treatise, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Centering prayer focuses on interior silence and letting go of words, images, and emotions, with the exception of using a sacred word to symbolize one’s intention of inward receptiveness to divine presence and action (Thompson, 2014, 47–48).

**21** *Tonghak* was an indigenous political, social, economic, and religious movement in Korea in the late 1800s. An amalgamation of various religious and philosophical ideologies – including shamanism, Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and western learning (Christianity) – *Tonghak* preached a message of equality for all people and a heaven on earth. The movement led to the *Tonghak Rebellion* of 1894, a massive peasant uprising against a corrupt and exploitative government during a time of growing Japanese and western interventions and economic polarizations between wealthy farmers and peasants.



trix of ethical norms and conflicting moral frameworks” that we read in Judith Butler’s work were very real in the classroom; they showed up across various standpoints regarding race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship (Butler, 7). Particularly resonant for me was the intersection of race and religion, as reflected by the majority white representation of non-Christian (typically Buddhist) students in the room. This composition raised questions of how to be together and acknowledge differences across multiple markers, without overlaying or misattributing differences solely to one category. The notion of *uncomfortable wholeness* manifested in manifold ways: the discomfort of being together among differences; the discomfort of acknowledging who were absent in the room; the discomfort of disrupting the concept of what “wholeness” means or looks like; the discomfort of the dangers and realities of appropriating other traditions. These discomforts point to the hard work that is required for interreligious engagement, and the need for new sets of norms, intentions, and practices that account for diversity, division, and kinship.

And yet, amidst the challenges, the self-inquiry process ultimately affirmed my formation as a Christian chaplain. The power and value of presence – of showing up – is the core of my chaplaincy work, and this was embodied in the class. Self-inquiry is about presence for one’s present being in the world. It offers a space of rest, awareness, care, and healing for deeper self-knowledge and toward “moments of unconditioned love and spacious awareness” (King 2018, 126). Such a state is what frees, motivates, and sustains my self-inquiry practice and my work of spiritual accompaniment with people who are in transition, crisis, or trauma.

### **Uncomfortable wholeness**

*Reamogetje Ngoepe (M.Div. '19 Psychology and Religion Concentration)*

The self-inquiry class helped me realize that prayer, and specifically praying in tongues, is to what I turn to suspend, to inquire about myself. I find myself praying in tongues, under my breath or somewhere on bended knees when I’m in distress, seeking clarity, questioning, wrestling. This knowing has had a profound impact for me, enabling me to understand the pivotal role of prayer in my personal knowing; I now pray more frequently, more intentionally.

In reflecting on our self-inquiry processes, we were encouraged to reflect across an array of variables to understand the different ways in which our processes are impacted. Starting off with the aim of our self-inquiry processes – mine being to foster relationship through intimacy and accountability with God, myself and others. Societal conditionings also play a pivotal role in inquiry, and for me, race embodied culturally through language was the most impactful; navigating and negotiating feelings of inferiority, traumatization, [and] imposed and appropriated language. So it is necessarily at this social location [that] my self-inquiry process meets me. Further pressing on me was what it means to speak in another language (tongues) that subverts and disrupts when my own language and culture has been colonized.

To interrogate my process further, I will reflect on the following variables: my scene of address, accountability, reliability, confession, and body.

To draw from Judith Butler in *An Account of Oneself*, my scene of address takes two forms: the person being addressed as well as the location of address. My scene of address is God, and the location within which it takes place is wherever I am praying. Throughout

this process there is a narration from God, the person exposed to that narration, and a new narration of self I beget from this encounter. It is in this process of narration from God as well as my own thoughts (and those of others if communal prayer) that various forms of reflection and revelation take place. This reflection could be expressed through a poem, fleshing out an idea, receiving an affirming word for someone.

Butler distinguishes between exposure and narrated self – helping us connect more authentically with that which is true about ourselves vs. merely taking in what is said about it. Butler says in terms of language, “the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making” (Butler, 21). In naming this, she challenges us to find our true voice in a sea of clutter. Resmaa Manekam expands on this to relay how it’s even more critical to engage with our narrations of self in relation to trauma that has been passed down; in how we lose the location of trauma, thereby losing ourselves and finding false comfort in telling and believing stories about us that are not (no longer) true about us.

In reflecting on my reliability as an inquirer and what I’m most resistant to, it is letting go of the narrations about generational racial trauma that provide a false sense of comfort vs. a truly healing narrative. I feel like I would be giving up and losing a big part of myself if I lost the narrative that has lost its location.

I reflect on my confession process as one that should enable me to sufficiently explore vulnerable parts of me. I borrow Foucault’s notion of gnostic self as a hermeneutic of self – a notion of self that is more curious, open and seeking. A sense of self that is more likely to recover a sense of self after trauma and internalized inferiority. Phillis Sheppard, a black psychoanalyst, mentions how culture is a medium within which our sense of self grows, [and that] if this is compromised it can result in a “compromised developmental trajectory and a failure to develop a healthy and firm sense of self, with an ambivalence, or hostility towards one’s own culture, gender, race and sexuality” (Sheppard 2011, 120). For healing to occur within this reality, it would be helpful to have a self able “to discover the truth inside oneself, to decipher the real nature and the authentic origin of soul....” (Foucault 2016, 2–16, 55).

My confession process is also intertwined with the people to whom I am accountable. It is my hope that it also illuminates those things that get in the way, the things that cause me to resist and cloud my reliability as an inquirer. The people who I confess to are God, my analyst, and close friends, community. I have recently started praying with a group of black women on campus and it has been one of the most enriching experiences I have had in Seminary. As we share what’s heavy on our hearts, our prayer items, praying for each other, I feel the spirit moving and my sense of knowing and connectedness deepening.

My theory of body remains an area of growth and interrogation for me. I perceive body as experience, having a history. I also perceive the body as having knowledge to navigate its historical conditioning, to know how to move to survive.

Otto Rank, an Austrian psychoanalyst, suggests that the oldest form of speech is akin to prayer, and of speaking in tongues that it is “an actual creation through words of the soul” (Rank 1989, 267). Teli Anderson asserts that “if black women’s howling or moaning is a prediscursive linguistic disruption, awaiting entry into proper language, speaking in tongues is one of the most powerful forms of post discursive speech... to disrupt the continuity of known speech and to travel beyond the boundaries that restrict black women’s agency” (Anderson 2001, 124). This emergence of subversive and disruptive language evokes healing, and therefore, a new kind of knowing.

While it certainly has its limitations in terms of inclusivity and scope, we consider this course a very practical example of how Buddhist competencies can become both core and transformative within the current seminary context. This was not an easy class. Class meetings were uncomfortable, at times contentious, but overall surprisingly and profoundly healing for many participants as they understood their traditions more deeply and engaged them through emergent methodologies. They were able to come forward in the confusing, profound, and sometimes terrifying complexity of a process that unfolds who we are right in front of us. Students engaged inquiry both personally and collectively with great courage and grace. It was an honor to be a part of this process with them.

## Conclusion

In closing, we return to an earlier question: How to create a pedagogy that allows meaningful religious difference to endure while cultivating the possibility for connections to be realized across that difference? The above methods of formation provide guidance here. Both theological reflection and self-inquiry are processes not only of formation but of pedagogy. They are normative as structures, but not overly determinant in terms of content and tradition. Any interreligious pedagogy must allow for deep engagement in the particularity of one's tradition while being vulnerable to the same depth and particularity of the other's traditions. It requires a normative structure that holds differences and allows for multiple religious convictions and expressions to flourish. However broadly conceived and applied it is, we realize that no normative structure can be fully divorced from a tradition. Recognizing this, those engaging interreligiously must enter this formational space with the "practical vulnerability" mentioned above. Counterintuitively, it is precisely the normative structure that allows for the creativity of interreligious wisdom to emerge in its religious specificity.

While the above frame of self-inquiry could be argued to be Buddhist, or dharmic, the space held by the normative structure is open enough to allow for practitioners of other traditions to both recognize themselves and find voice within this structure. Similarly, the frame of theological reflection is primarily Christian, but broad enough for practitioners in other traditions to fully engage the particularities of their own traditions for meaning-making.

Navigating the initial foreignness of these formational processes, one endures the discomfort of a stranger until one's integrity and wisdom emerge. This pedagogical method requires the faculty to engage "practical vulnerability." In fact, this co-authored paper arises out of our interreligious relationship where we live out this vulnerability. This has given birth to an incredibly creative friendship that models this process for our students. Such relationships are the beating heart of interreligious engagement, the reason Buddhism is able to flourish in a historically Protes-

tant seminary and the path leading to a religious life that values wholeness borne of respectful relationship over harmful, exclusionary notions of purity.

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