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Dialogue and Community: Teaching the Bible and Christian Classics in Relation to Western Tradition

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Abstract

In higher education in the United States, the "Western tradition" has traditionally defined the core curriculum of the liberal arts. The Bible and classic Christian texts (and to a lesser degree Jewish texts) have figured as an integral part of this tradition. They have been presented not only as part of the knowledge that constitutes an educated person in this culture but also as part of a tradition which can and should orient individuals in their private and social lives. These Christian texts, along with those of classical antiquity, have been taught not just as genetic history explaining where "we" culturally have come from but also as part of a prescriptive "ought" within which "we" should orient our decisions, employ our education. They have been part of a core curriculum, presumed to have an integrative value for all other specific and technical education.

In the U.S. this assumption has now been contested and in many arms of higher education it has been explicitly or functionally abandoned. The place of these texts and of the western "canon" generally, is a matter of great dispute. The dispute is sharpened because these are religious texts, which in the political/social context of the U.S. are subject to special scrutiny for their appropriateness in any general education program.

What then is the purpose of teaching such texts and how should they be taught? This is a burning question in U.S. education. Few people contest the idea that students should be made aware that there are multiple "world views" and cultural traditions, and that there is value in studying various such traditions. The question is whether in the midst of such study there is any justification for privileging one or some, as particular to our culture (the U.S. in this case).

This paper reflects on some of the implications of these developments for teaching the Bible and Christian in general education

in the U.S. It focuses particularly on the question of what relation, if any, can be maintained between the role of such texts in general education and wider questions of cultural identity and vision.

This paper reflects on some issues surrounding the teaching of the Bible and classic Christian texts in general education in the U.S. in a time of cultural globalization. It focuses particularly on the relation between the role of such texts within living religious communities, their role in cultural history, and their role in contemporary, integrative education. To that end, I will review some of the ways that Scripture has figured in education in the past, then comment upon some of the paradoxes of the current situation, and finally attempt to draw some tentative conclusions. I offer these reflections explicitly from the perspective of a Christian who is committed to the use of these classics within the distinct religious life of his church and whose primary educational work is carried out in a Christian seminary. This shared ownership of the texts by a diverse set of living religious communities and a general education establishment is one of the peculiar features of the context for their interpretation in the contemporary U.S. I trust that consideration of these dynamics may have some relevance for those in quite different circumstances.

I

First I want to note some of the possible relations between a classic and a constituency that might study it. There are six of these. The first is the relation of a classic with a living community attached to it by commitment. This is the case with the Bible and the Christian church, or the Qur'an and the Islamic community. These texts are taught and appropriated as authoritative sources for the fullest framework for human life and ends. In the case of Christian classics (as with many, but not all religious classics) this relation is intended to transcend participation in a specific nation or culture. Education in the religious community's classics is intended to provide a framework which at least at certain points supersedes formation in a single culture.

The second instance is the case of classic texts whose "constituency" is primarily an institutional and cultural legacy. They have shaped the history of a society and are sources for interpretation of its contemporary life, quite apart from any authority they may be granted currently. So for instance the classics of Greek philosophy or of early modern European philosophy may be taught in relation to

law and politics and literature. But they may have few conscious, "devotees" outside academic departments. From this perspective, education in such classics is identical with formation in a particular culture.

The third situation is one where a classic is adopted with the commitment noted in the first case, by a community living as a sub-group within a larger society. This larger society is itself shaped by other texts and traditions in its institutions and life. Such would be the case for Hindu or Muslim adherents within U.S. society or for Christians or Hindus or thorough secularists in Saudi Arabia.

The fourth situation is one characterized by an "interrupted" relationship with the classics of a tradition. That is, there may be people for whom the classics once functioned in the manner we described in either of our first two cases, but for some reason that connection has been broken: oppression, immigration, cultural assimilation. There is now an attempt to reconnect with those sources. Examples might be second or third generation immigrants seeking to reconnect with classics of their culture of origin, African-Americans searching for African sources, or even Christians in secularized Western countries attempting to reconnect with their nominal Christian tradition.

The fifth situation is the straightforward external study of classics that stem from other communities or cultures. This can take a highly academic form (as in the relatively new disciplines of world history or comparative religion) or a more engaged, even conversion-oriented form (as in North Americans taking up Buddhist classics in pursuit of spiritual practice).

The sixth situation is the external study of classics which once may have functioned as the focus of a living religious community or as the shaping texts of a living culture, but now do so no longer. These are the classics of "dead" cultures, like the Sumerian or Babylonian. They may be studied primarily in an attempt to reconstruct ancient history or with an eye toward their influence on other traditions that are of more direct contemporary cultural significance.

Historically, Western education has been characterized by the near-consolidation of the first two relations. Christian classics were the "core" both of

a living religious community and of cultural and social institutions. Even subgroups within the society, while they might have their own distinctive additional classics, almost universally affirmed the Bible as their core text as well. Religious minorities like Quakers, Roman Catholics or Mormons fit this pattern. Jews were a unique case, and yet even here there were shared classic texts. So education presumed a near unity of the first three types of relation I have described, and tended to ignore or downplay the last three types. In the modern period, all six types of relation with classical texts (and variations on them) have come into play in the educational arena.

One might say that Christianity as a religion itself arose as interpretation of a classic, the classic being the Hebrew Scriptures. This is true both in the sense that Jesus was a Jew whose life and teachings were based on the tradition expressed in those Scriptures and in the sense that in the formulation of what became the New Testament, the early Christians made nearly constant use of implicit and explicit commentary on Hebrew Scripture as the means of expressing the distinctive faith of their community. Hebrew Scripture is the first "Christian classic," and only later is supplemented with the New Testament, the two together becoming one Scripture.

Christianity came to largely share an assumption common to most religious traditions: that the classic is comprehensive and encyclopedic.[1] The classic defines education and education can be contained within the classic. There are several reservations to be noted however. While Christians were from the beginning "people of the book," in one sense, the actual book whose people they were was some time in the making. Therefore the true "classic" for Christians was the risen and living Christ, a person, not a book. At least for a certain period (and for some Christians on an ongoing basis) a charismatic and spiritual authority operated alongside the texts.

The logical expression of the assumption that the classic is encyclopedic is the commentary as the primary educational modality. Christianity shared in this tradition of commentary, with the Holy Spirit and the Risen Christ authorizing significant freedom in that tradition's development. Education consists then primarily in learning and interpreting the content of the Scriptures, and in learning

the languages and skills that are necessary to that end. The primary "research" task is developing the skill of knowing where in Scripture to address any legitimate question, and how to extract the answer. The text is the whole matter of education, including the source of learning the very methods by which to interpret Scripture. This is the first form of Christian education, a dynamic that not only interpreted Scripture but, in the sense that we can see New Testament texts as having a "midrashic" character, created additional Scripture.

In later centuries, this would be rationalized in a more explicit way. Education is integrated, so that all its branches come together in one study. The Bible is the curriculum and disciplines radiate from it as adjuncts: language study of Greek and Hebrew, philological studies, literary study, history, natural philosophy, rhetoric, morality. All of these can be dealt with exhaustively within the boundaries of the text itself. What needs to be known is within the classics, and learning to interpret and understand the classics is the sum total of education. This obviously puts great emphasis on sophistication of interpretive technique, and on the role of commentators. The development of a multi-layered reading of the text, the classic four-fold reading, was an expression of this.

Of course one of the distinctive things about the Western tradition is that from its birth Christianity was aware of another encyclopedic set of classics: those of Greek philosophy and the Homeric tradition. In the early centuries many gentile converts to Christianity brought with them this education already in place. The eventual decision was to subsume these texts rather than reject them outright, a decision reflected and implemented in Augustine's CITY OF GOD, for instance. The result was a situation in which the primary classic, the Bible, which included the Hebrew Scriptures, was in essence supplemented with some secondary classics. Viewed as an ensemble, this grouping retained the encyclopedic character just mentioned. But though the Greek philosophical and literary texts were taken as subordinate "pre-commentaries" on Scripture, as it were, their use implicitly endorsed the principle that there were things to be learned outside the primary classic.

Even more important, these particular Greek classics happen to contain within them a critical stance toward classics <u>perse</u>. This is exemplified in Plato's Socratic

dialogue ION.[2] In this case, the classic in view is Homer's epic poetry as the encyclopedic summary of education. Ion, the rhapsode or reciter of Homer, is interrogated by Socrates regarding those portions of Homer's poems where he writes of chariot-driving, or ship-building or leading armies. Who knows best whether Homer is telling the truth in these passages, asks Socrates: Ion or a chariot driver, a ship-builder, a general? In each specific case, Ion is compelled to admit that these people would know better. But still, he insists, in knowing what Homer says, he is knowing the real nature of things. How can this be so, Socrates asks, if Ion has no basis of his own for knowing if anything he repeats from Homer is true? In the face of Ion's confusion, Socrates suggests a way out: Ion may simply be possessed by a god when he repeats Homer, literally "out of his mind." This would explain why he can give no account of the knowledge he imparts. Socrates' criticism, though humorously discharged on the hapless Ion, plainly is directed at Homer, the classic, itself. There are specific realms of knowledge that deal more expertly with the individual matters covered in the classic. This suggests an "inductive" approach, and an implicit denial of any apriori encyclopedic status for a classic.

What is important for our later discussion is the way in which shared classics, the Hebrew Scriptures and Greek texts, became embedded as Christian classics: the first canonically and the second implicitly. Such hybrid features of a tradition will prove significant in later reflection on how these texts can function in pluralistic environments.

In the middle ages the educational situation changes dramatically in two ways. The first comes with the recovery of additional material from the Greek philosophers, principally Aristotle, and the renewed question of whether philosophy could have independent knowledge of matters which contradicted Scripture. The second change had to do with the commentary tradition itself. The church fathers, who had unfolded the encyclopedic meaning of Scripture in their writings, were accorded authority similar to that of the text they (presumably) correctly interpreted. The fact that their own texts were numerous and not gathered in any one place made it difficult to have a synoptic view of their conclusions. This was increasingly accomplished in the middle ages, and the result was clear evidence that they did not

agree with each other on many matters. So in the universities a new form of education arose which dealt with commentary on commentary, attempting to resolve apparent conflicts in existing interpretations. This is the appearance of "theology" in the form of an academic discipline.[3] So the education centered on Christian classics undergoes a transformation. It now deals with Scripture itself, with the limited but real autonomy of philosophy and philosophy's classics, and also with the variation among Christian commentators in their classic works. This picture would soon be supplemented (with the rise of modern science) with data from the "book of nature" as yet another source for theology.

The Protestant Reformation was an attempt to return to focus on Scripture alone, stressing study of the biblical languages and direct interpretation of the text. But the Reformation also put primary emphasis on the classic as a religious source and less on its encyclopedic character as a reference for all knowledge or on the harmonization of traditional commentators. While highly suspicious of philosophy as an independent source in education, the Reformation tended not to be so in regard to emerging science and "practical" education.

Education in the United States inherited this history. The story of the way in which basic education and religious education have diverged in U.S. history is not our primary concern.[4] In general terms we can say that Christian classics have figured in basic education in three phases: encyclopedic, integrative and illustrative. In its earlier and more encyclopedic phase, the various studies in basic education radiated from the Bible and classical antiquity. The curriculum was thus organized around the language instruction necessary to later study of these texts themselves and the skills required for application and interpretation of the texts. Education as offered at the founding of Harvard College, for instance, was organized in terms of what was needed to train ministers. That meant it was organized around the disciplines required to interpret and communicate Scripture. Though not everything helpful for this task was to be found within Scripture itself, this principle organized the curriculum. This was essentially a Protestant model, and the primary "common core education" that developed in the U.S. eventually sought to be pan-Protestant at the same time that it remained clearly distinct from Roman Catholic or Jewish education.

The evolution of American higher education involved the shift from this paradigm --- education for ministers that others could share --- to a broader pattern of education divided into distinct fields with their own autonomy. Rather than dictating the need or number of such fields, the Christian classics served as the integrative capstone of the process. Theology was the "queen of the sciences" in this sense not because Scripture had all the answers (as an encyclopedic approach might have assumed) but because it provided the structure within which other knowledge was ordered and completed. But this raises a new kind of question: just what is this integrative function and how is it fulfilled? What does it mean to say, for instance, that "The Bible stands at the center of a liberal arts education?"

In predominantly Protestant higher education it came to mean that two things were taught as the integrative framework for basic education. The first of these was a philosophical defense of a Protestant theism. The second was a general ethical scheme. Both drew on the Bible and on Greek philosophy. They were often represented in a capstone course on "Moral Philosophy" for college seniors, taught by a college's president. Christian classics were believed to provide a framework that dictated how a person's education should be put to use and what the standards for personal life should be. Though increasingly the bulk of instruction had to do with more specialized study, those studies could be viewed, at least in principle, as optional departments within the same scheme of knowledge, faith and service.

This phase sometimes harbored a tension between the assumption that Christian classics would have something to contribute to the integration of specific academic fields in their own work, and the expectation that their place came in coordinating the results of such work on a higher, more comprehensive plane. Though in principle both were possible, the tendency was to emphasize the lafter at the expense of the former. The actual practice in education was not so neat as talk of "phases" would indicate. In the late nineteenth century, for instance, it would still be common for the Bible to figure in education in both encyclopedic and integrative modes. That is, teachers in geology or biology might still straightforwardly refer to the biblical text as evidence about ancient and pre-history. It was "data" for science, if now only some data alongside other data. And the

Bible figured again at the integrative level, as the source for the more comprehensive understanding of the plan within which natural processes had their place.

The third phase involves yet another transition. Now specifically Christian classics serve an integrative function only as part of a larger program or as illustrative instances. A characteristic expression of this phase can be found in the "Western Civilization" courses, which appear in U.S. universities in this century. The deep background to this development is the critical-historical study of Christian Scripture. In the two earlier phases, Christian classics played either an encyclopedic or integrative role based on their ostensible content. Their place now shifts because they are made the objects of a different mode of interpretation. As critical-historical study becomes the methodological unity of the humanities and social sciences, treatment of Scripture becomes another instance of the application of that method. In fact, in many respects the method is pioneered in application to Scripture before it is used in other areas. Since later Christian classics tend to characterize themselves as commentaries on Scripture, they are in significant measure devalued because they lack this particular type of hermeneutic[5]. The "facts" that Scripture will now contribute to education will be those produced by such a method (i.e. the "historical Jesus") or the examples provided in the application of the method to Scripture.

The integrative function provided by the classics is now a genealogical one. Scripture and Greek philosophy belong to a series of "Great Books" that collectively reflect the development of Western culture. In an interesting way, post-Scriptural Christian classics now may take on a greater significance than the Scriptural texts they expound, because their formulations in areas of law or literature or theology have been concrete determinants of cultural institutions. Several different rationales were given for this approach to education. In the twentieth century, when the U.S. was twice involved in world wars, such courses tried to articulate a cultural orientation for the society, to describe the sources and values that constituted the "civilization" that one might be called upon to defend.[6] In this way study of the classics was linked to citizenship. Their role in general education was to fit a person for active participation in society by making clear the

culture's foundation and by teaching its ideals. But focus on these classics was defended also on the grounds that the best way to strengthen the intellect and to foster critical thinking was to have students wrestle with the most subtle and difficult minds in the tradition.

Another factor bears on the place of the Bible and Greek philosophy in such a core curriculum. In Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the "quarrel of the ancients and moderns" had raged precisely over the notion of classics. The ancient texts that had been the standards of education were pitted against the work of modern thinkers. The question was whether contemporary or near-contemporary works could become the supreme classics. If the result of this struggle in Europe was at first rather inconclusive, the verdict increasingly went in favor of modern classics. It might be said that another recommendation of the "Western civilization" courses was that in their reading lists they recapitulated this argument without in principle taking sides.

It was easy and common to read the sequence of great texts in a progressive way, in which new and more adequate thought replaced the old. On such a tack, the ancient classics played an integral role, but as reference points civilization evolved beyond. On the other hand, the same syllabus could be read in a quite different way, stressing the continuity of the tradition as working out seeds and tensions already present in the founding classics. It could even be read as a failing off into modernity, a degeneration from the insights of the classics. In this sense, the "Western civilization" and great books approach had a certain narrative character, telling the intellectual story and leaving it open for specific teachers and students to draw their own morals from the story. In fact, this approach to general education was often advocated specifically on these grounds: instead of indoctrinating the student in which world view to hold, such a program of study initiated the student into the characteristic argument among world views that typified (modern) Western culture. To be a Christian or a Jew, or an adherent of classical Greek philosophy or a convinced follower of Hume or Spinoza or Voltaire would of course mean that one would take up a specific commitment and relation to some of these texts rather than others. But all would be equally a part of one's education, for they set the geography of options and were tied to each other by their

arguments and counter-arguments.

Of course the impetus for the "quarrel of the ancients and moderns" came from the new methods of enlightenment thought, in philosophy, history, literature and science. The argument in fact tended to produce a distinction between progressive disciplines and cumulative ones. This was the crux of the distinction between the natural sciences and the humanities. New scientific theories or practices subsume and replace earlier ones. But in art, ethics and philosophy such displacement was by no means so obvious. Plato's definition of virtue or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, or for that matter Shakespeare's drawing of Hamlet's character are not replaced. They do what they do in a unique and incommensurable manner, and remain primary points of reference in a way that superseded theories of motion do not. The progressive, changing character of some disciplines may be held to mark their superiority: there is improvement over time. From such a view, older classics have limited value. But the relatively unchanging nature of cumulative disciplines can also be held as a strength, providing a foundation and orientation in an otherwise changing landscape. In particular, one may hope that they can provide some stable structure for an educational process whose subject matter now is in flux.

The place of Christian classics in general education in the recent phase has been defined by this search for a framework of values, principles, ideals that could help to integrate an array of progressive and largely independent research and the politics of the academic establishment, has prompted regular efforts to engineer some educational unity. These concerns take on heightened urgency whenever there is a felt national crisis. The high water mark of the "gret books" and western civilization curricula came in the period between the two world wars and in the early cold war. Christian texts are set within a broad sequence of "cultural classics," on the premise that somewhere among these voices, or arising out of the conversation among them, individuals are expected to find their own personal ideals and orienting principles. Christian texts are "illustrative" of one kind of commitment that might be taken up, and are also presumed to contribute something even to those who opt for another commitment. Indeed, another feature of this treatment of classics is the fact that the texts are self-referential: consciously and

explicitly extending or contesting earlier views. Therefore rather than providing a unified perspective for emulation, the ensemble of classics provides a conversation to join.

II

In order to summarize the current situation for Christian classics in general education, we will first consider some of the concrete roles they have filled. The first and most general role is that of a communication medium. Anyone familiar with documents from elite or popular history in Western culture is familiar with this point. Even among the illiterate, biblical stories, characters, images and vocabulary served as a common store of references. In the nineteenth century, whether in Lincoln's second inaugural address or in a letter from a barely literate farmer to a family member, references to relatively minor features of the Bible would be readily understood by the hearer or reader. What is true at a popular and basic level (people know what it means to be a "Judas") is also true in "high" culture (one cannot understand Dante or Shakespeare without knowing the Bible). In this sense, the classic provides a cultural language.

For this reason, knowledge of the classics can serve another role as a virtual surrogate standard for education itself. One can judge who is educated and who is not, and rate their general ability, based on their familiarity with this subject matter. For much of Western history, education was organized with knowledge of Christian classics as a primary aim. "Classical" languages were then the necessary first stages of such an education, and a demonstrated ability to interpret the classic texts at first hand was proof that one was in fact educated. Other, associated intellectual virtues were attributed to a person with such capacities. Knowledge of the classic itself, or possession of the skills necessary to interpret the classic, or the two together, can be taken to provide the basic model for education itself.

In a closely related third role, the classic can also serve as a literary standard, the norm from which style, expression and literary models are taken. The King James translation of the Bible has been such a source in the English speaking world.[7] This is a role which has actually become much more significant in

education relatively recently, since English literature itself has been a latecomer in the general education curriculum. Shakespeare only begins to appear as a curricular subject of study in the U.S. following the civil war. With the rise of attention to such literature, Scripture's cultural role is also enhanced.

The classic can play a role as a source of historical identity, either describing narratively the background of a people or tradition or expressing the fundamental beliefs that organized an historical tradition. It can fill this place by providing authoritative accounts of decisive historical events and/or by providing the patterns for rituals and practices which a community incorporates as a sign of continuity with its past.

The classic can serve as a manual for personal formation. In that case it offers instruction and models for individual morality, virtue, heroism and duty. It can also be a guide for individual spiritual development, for prayer and mystical practice.

Yet another role the classic can hold is that of a source for standards in social life. In this respect, it serves as a blueprint for the structure of institutions (like the family, political structures, economic organizations) and for the proper function of social relationships.

Finally, the classic can play a religious or metaphysical role, in providing the most comprehensive description of the ultimate nature of reality and in giving an account of ultimate human ends.

In an "encyclopedic" use of the classic, it plays all of these roles in basic education. Certainly until relatively recently the Christian classics functioned in some respect in all these areas. However, as we pointed out, from a very early period Christians in general did not have a pure "encyclopedic" approach to their own classics. Greek and Roman classics had a role in at least some of these areas (for instance, in setting a literary standard for Latin language usage, even for translation of the Bible into Latin). This set the stage for recurring tensions in Christian history, occasioned by those who wished to attempt a more encyclopedic use of the Christian classics.

What is the situation of Christian classics in education today? Interestingly, the functions we have described have largely been divided between two distinct kinds of education. In specific Christian education (seminaries, churches, church colleges) these classics can be taught as sources for personal formation, for normative visions of social life, for large scale description of the nature of the world and of human ends. These are explicitly excluded in general education. In general education, the Christian classics can be studied descriptively with regard to their past role in constituting a medium of communication, providing a literary standard and shaping historical identity.

This brief sketch begins to point up some of the paradoxes in the current situation. Within the broad range of the humanities, religious classics are treated as part of the more cumulative aspect of education. And yet by and large they are not treated in terms of the "cumulative methodology" that was characteristic of, say, traditions of Scriptural commentary or theology, or even philosophy, but rather in terms of progressive, "scientific" methodologies. This of course sets up a certain tension. What humanities were traditionally thought to provide in distinction from progressive discipline---an enduring framework of human self-knowledge, oriented to the peculiarly human needs for judgement, self-cultivation and discipline---they are at another level precluded from offering by virtue of the methodology used.

The discipline of "religious studies" is the embodiment of this development. It attempted to provide an answer to the question of how these classic religious texts could be studied in the context of an academic discipline in the humanities and still have an integrative place in education. The fact that such study would itself be interdisciplinary---drawing on history, archaeology, languages, philosophy, psychology, sociology---was all to the good for this integrative function. "Religion" was a subject peculiarly fitted to be an integrative focus, because it drew together various subsidiary studies in an encyclopedic way. The religious classic itself might be viewed no longer as encyclopedic, but the phenomenon of human religion was. At least for a time, some people saw religious studies as capable of serving as an integrative capstone to liberal education as a generic Protestantism once did. Such notions were never realized and the evolution of religious studies departments moved in the opposite direction, searching for distinctive, separate

academic "turf" rather than emphasizing an integrative role.

Jon Levenson has pointed out the resulting difficulty that arises in giving a rationale for the special place that biblical study has in our academic institutions.[8] Historical, critical study of the Bible insists that these texts are simply sources for knowledge of early Jewish and Christian history. And historical study of the Bible as a formative influence in Western culture (in the "great books" tradition) simply makes it a source for later Jewish and Christian history. The Bible retains a certain normative place in education because it is a foundational document of our cultural tradition.

However, in the current pluralistic environment, this rationale runs into difficulty on two counts. First, does the assumption of one unified tradition imply more cultural homogeneity than is in fact the case? Second, can the special attention for one culture be justified? An appeal may be made to the empirical fact that Western culture has taken on a special global significance. But the more basic issue, as Levenson indicates, is that continued educational focus on these texts makes sense because of the vitality of the religious communities that continue to make them formative of culture. And yet the assumptions of those communities are themselves rather systematically excluded from the educational focus. At the same time, the distinctive critical-historic methods that characterize the treatment of these classics in general education are themselves increasingly seen as part of one particular cultural tradition, subject to the same two questions we have just posed to religious classics.

In other words, if Christian classics (or others) are to continue to have any place as integrative elements in "core" education because they serve as integrative elements in the history of Western culture, they will do so because large numbers of people take them as directly integrative, providing truth and unity and meaning to other human endeavors. But it is such direct orientation that general education cannot address, except as a phenomena of the past.

III

As we have seen in the previous section, the place of Christian classics in basic education has gone through several phases. For at least two generations, it has been untenable in public education to assume that nearly all students relate to these texts as members of a living religious community. Another operative assumption followed: these texts defined a common cultural heritage and could be taught in that capacity. Ironically, the continued existence of dynamic Jewish and Christian religious communities has on the one hand validated this approach (illustrating that contemporary society is still shaped by these texts) and made it problematic (continually raising the tension over whether such instruction unfairly privileges these religious communities or purposely undercuts them). In this sense these classics are more problematic in general education than, say Greek philosophy, precisely because they have not become "mere" tradition but function in living communities.

The rationale for studying Christian and other classics as "the Western tradition" is in some crisis. Internally, this is posed as a critique of that tradition. As the sources of current culture, these texts are seen particularly as the sources of what is wrong with contemporary culture: racial, economic, gender, or political injustice. Therefore any normative use of these texts in general education stands complicit in perpetuating these wrongs. Externally, this is posed as a need to give equal attention to the classics of other cultures, where alternatives might presumably be found for the failings and limitations of Western classics. This concern can be phrased in a primarily substantive way, as I have just done. Or it can be phrased in a more "methodological" way, focusing on the fact that contemporary culture in the U.S. is in fact a pluralistic one, and therefore concluding that a review of Western classics is at best only a partial genetic explanation of "our" existing culture. This is the context for the debate over multiculturalism in education.[9] The division of labor which had existed (often uneasily) for some time no longer seems adequate. That division finds religious institutions using classic texts to form people as part of a specific living religious tradition while basic education uses the same texts to form people as participants in

a common cultural tradition.

There is no consensus as to the place of Christian classics in a common core curriculum. In the most common current practice these texts, like other classic Western texts, continue to figure in the curriculum under the heading of "cultural criticism." If not the formative sources of "our" common culture, they are taken to be the sources of a dominant culture, one which has been extraordinarily powerful in shaping economic, political, and cultural orders in the West and elsewhere. There is no automatic presumption that students should be formed in this tradition. But a minimal objective is that they should become explicitly conscious of the particular and contingent features of this heritage, of its role in building and legitimating social institutions, and of its many failings and distortions. In this process, knowledge of classics from quite different cultural traditions will be important. I think it is fair to say that so far such study is largely an adjunct to criticism of the Western tradition, instead of study of these traditions in their own right (with all the rigor and investment that would require).

In an earlier phase, study of the "Western tradition" allowed for a certain ambiguity as to whether this study presumed a unity to that tradition or on the contrary presumed a defining conflict between two or more fundamental options. Basic education was not designed to answer this question, but to pose it, on the assumption that engagement with that question was the primary hallmark of a liberally educated person, one prepared to participate in the culture's life. So the current, less explicit program of study of the classics of the Western tradition also allows for a certain ambiguity. There are those who maintain that these classics should be taught as "the best that has been thought" in a universal sense, as thoroughly culture-forming. And there are those who maintain that they should be taught more as "interests that have been imposed," in a thoroughly critical mode. The result in most cases is a somewhat haphazard teaching of this controversy itself. The classics are a text for the debate about their own status. This leaves room even for the affirmation by some that this practice is actually representative of the tradition, an extension rather than a repudiation of it.[10]

One moral that we can draw from this development is that in our current

educational situation it is a distinct advantage if traditional study of "core" classics already embodies a certain conflict between varying points of view. This can serve as a useful starting point for the inclusion of additional perspectives in basic education, giving that education the character of an ongoing dialogue rather than a simple process of cultural transmission.[12] It is also clear that tension continues to exist between using the classics to define "our" cultural context, as the setting in which contemporary issues arise, and using them to specify one option among many, in relation with the classics of other cultures. Even in a culture more homogenous than the U.S., this tension is likely to be significant.

In the U.S. context it will continue to make sense for the foreseeable future to focus descriptively on Christian classics in basic education as partly defining the heritage which shapes social structures. This descriptive dimension will likely continue to serve as the basis for cultural criticism. However, new changes are likely to flow from two other fronts. The U.S. continues to become culturally more diverse. Some of this diversity is reflected in persons and communities shaped by primary relations with "non-Western" classics. This will prompt increasing study of such traditions. This is likely to bring with it criticism of the universalistic Western assumptions embodied in the current internal critique of the Western canon. This will be especially so where (as with Muslims for instance) there are strong religious communities attached to the texts. On the other hand, many of the ethnic communities which are growing in the U.S. have a strongly Christian character, and their influence may reinvigorate a desire for a positive interpretation of Christian classics in basic education. These two forces are distinct, but they may overlap in interesting ways that will reshape the educational landscape yet again.

I believe that increasingly Christian classics will find a place in core curricula not as the emblem of a common tradition but as one distinctive option among others. The recent practice of treating the common Western tradition as a continuing debate about the validity of its varied classic texts will increasingly expand into a debate about those classics among others. Along with other effects, this will stimulate an interest in coherence and unity in the Christian tradition, for the purpose of meaningful comparison with others. This may partly balance the recent tendency

to treat that tradition in a fragmented way.

We saw in our brief historical review that Christian classics had functioned in three phases: encyclopedic, integrative and illustrative. In all three phases, including the last, these classics were given at least an implicit normative value. In the final phase, this normative value (now more cultural than religious) has been presumed largely for the purposes of criticism. Interestingly, in a new environment, even that kind of privilege will change. More focus will fall on these texts as part of a tradition which illustrates integration. Precisely because they represent only one way among several that the various elements of education can be unified, these texts may now be addressed with more concern to articulate that specific unity. They need no longer stand as surrogates for culture in its totality.

With no end in sight to the continued interaction of cultures, the classics of any single tradition cannot provide the basis for a core education if they are viewed simply as the sources of a basically inert cultural legacy. The claim that they allow us to understand "where we come from" and the nature of the culture we see around us, is unlikely to be adequate, as that culture itself undergoes accelerated change. Such classics must at least be engaged in a prospective dialogue concerning the future course of society; they must be seen to have possible formative value now. Therefore there is a need for contemporary authors and texts which try to articulate this, through reinterpretation and application of the classics.

Basic education will lead toward a dialogue of classics, from various cultures. But even in a diverse society this process benefits from having students gain common longitudinal knowledge of one or two traditions. This provides an important context for dialogue. Since the role of classics within any tradition is a complex one, it is valuable to have a relatively extensive familiarity with the full range of such complexity in at least one case. In many cases, as we have seen, this actually involves knowledge of several interacting sub-traditions. It is the combination of this historical knowledge and an awareness of contemporary attempts to reappropriate a given tradition that can foster understanding of analogous dynamics in other cultures. The teaching of religious classics in such

education will not aim at adherence to a religious tradition or presume a homogenous cultural context. It will be framed instead to prepare students to participate in the dialogue, judgement, and reconstruction of traditions that will increasingly mark our individual societies and the relations among them.

Notes

1. See (Henderson 1991 pp. 140ff.) Henderson outlines six "commentarial assumptions" which he sees across most religious traditions. The first is the one we have noted: the assumption that the classics are comprehensive and all-encompassing. The second is that the classic is well ordered and coherent. The third assumption is that the canon is self-consistent and internal contradictions are only apparent. Three subsidiary assumptions follow: that the classics are profound, that they are moral and that they contain nothing insignificant. Since these assumptions cannot all be maintained without a good deal of exegetical effort, there is a related argument about the relative clarity or obscurity of the true message of the classics. It is often suggested that the difficulty or indirection of the texts is itself an integral part of their value.
2. (Plato 1956)
3. Peter Lombard's SENTENCES and Abelard's SIC ET NON are two paradignatic texts of this development. See also (Hefling 1984) for a discussion of this development.
4. This story is told in Marsden 1994; Marsden and Longfield 1992.
5. For more on this see Stephen Fowl's introduction in (Fowl 1997).
6. It is interesting that one of the pioneering examples of such a course, at a school that was at the forefront of the development, was a "War Aims" course taught at Columbia University during. World War 1. See Carnochan 1993.
7. But perhaps no classic surpasses the Qur'an in this respect, as virtually the constituting event of a literary culture.
8. (Levenson 1993a) See also (Levenson 1993b)

9. See for instance Carnochan 1993; Casement 1996 and Gates 1992.

10. For instance, in the specific area of literary theory, Harold Bloom offers an argument that this criticism is in fact the common coin of the Western tradition, in what he calls the "anxiety of influence." The profound relation and continuity between an earlier and a later work in the "canon" may be expressed in the desire of the later to escape determination by the former. See (Bloom 1994)

11. It is not surprising, I think, that in this environment the academic study of the Bible puts its entire emphasis on the greatest possible variety of textual sources, scriptural authors, visions and communities. So long as the Bible is "canonical" in basic education, the emphasis must be on it as a meeting place of varying perspectives rather than on any unified vision of the whole, which might be the "property" of one group rather than another.

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對話與社群：聖經及基督教經典教學與西方傳統

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摘　要

在美國的高等教育中，「西方傳統」傳統以來即被定義爲人文領域的核心課程。聖經與其他基督教的經典（也包含一些猶太文本）被視爲是這個傳統不可或缺的部份。這些作品不僅被認爲是有識之士必備之知識，更被當作是可以且應該規範個人與社會的重要傳統。這些基督教文本以及其他經典不但向來被視爲真實的歷史教授，解釋人類的起源，同時也被當作「應當遵守」的觀點，成爲我們處事與受教的規範。它們一直都是核心課程的部份內容，被認定對於各種專業與技術教育都有重要的價值。

在美國這種假設已經被質疑，而且在高等教育的不同分支中甚至遭到公開或是在實際運作中被棄絕的命運。到底這些文本以及整

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個所謂西方的典律究竟應該扮演什麼角色，各家爭論不休。更由於此在美國的政治／社會環境裡宗教作品，在高等教育課程裡的適切性必須受到特別的檢驗，因此這方面的爭論愈形劇烈。

所以，究竟教授這些文本的目的為何，又該如何教授？這正是美國教育目前激烈討論中的問題。很少人會反對學生必須體認世界觀與文化傳統乃是多元的，以及學習這些傳統的必要性。但是問題在於在這個學習過程中如何解釋為何選定某些我們認為對我們的文化（這裡指的是美國）相關的傳統來研究，而不是其他的傳統？

這篇論文討論的是在美國一般教育中教授聖經與基督教經典時牽涉的相關問題。討論的重點是在一般教育中教授這些文本與更廣泛的文化認同與願景之間可能有的關連。