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Boyung Lee

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TOWARD LIBERATING INTERDEPENDENCE: EXPLORING AN INTERCULTURAL PEDAGOGY

Boyoung Lee

*Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union,
Berkeley, California, USA*

Abstract

This article proposes a postcolonial intercultural pedagogy, one that can create Liberating Interdependence among communities and across boundaries. First, the author examines conflicting ways that the Exodus is told in different communities: as a story of the God of the oppressed and as a story about an unjust God. Second, after analyzing the conflicting explanations of the same story, she critically reviews the ethnocentrism latent in many liberation pedagogies, ones based on multiculturalism. Then she proposes an intercultural pedagogy to bring communities at odds with traditional interpretations of the God of the Exodus to a same forum that creates Liberating Interdependence.

A couple of years ago, my colleagues and I experienced serious, intense, painful, and yet important conversations about cultural misappropriation and race issues on campus. A group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students, whose self-understanding was that they were dedicated to the promotion of radical inclusiveness, led a chapel service. The words of the hymns sung at the service were dramatically changed to gender-inclusive language.

The inclusive-language hymn singing provoked heated debates about racism and cultural insensitivity. An association of African-American students raised serious concerns about inclusive language hymns, namely, that they are an outright misappropriation of African-American cultures by the dominant White society. Many hymns sung at the service were spirituals. According to the African-American students, the objections are as follows: first, African-Americans are keenly aware of problematic language in some spirituals, but the reason why they sing the hymns as written is because the age-old words are a reminder of the past and its legacy of oppression, so whether spirituals should be changed to inclusive language hymns arguably is a matter

that African-American communities should decide. Second, the worship organizers should have discussed the language of the spirituals with African-American communities before editing the hymns. By not doing this, worship organizers treated African Americans as though they are cultural misfits, and thus the organizers ironically breathed new life into the cultural chauvinism of yesteryear's masters.

Spirited discussion about racism and cross-cultural sensitivity followed. The entire campus community was invited to acknowledge the reality of racism. This observance included a wall of mourning on which people could write their reflections about recent events. Although most comments were thoughtful, a few took me aback. For example, someone wrote, "Whenever there is a conversation on racism on this campus, only African-American voices are heard. Asians are invisible here."

In this article, I submit that this is a problematic way of engagement, for it is a pattern based on multiculturalism rather than interculturalism, so it may quiet the waters while unwittingly harming already marginalized cultures.¹ In short, each community is mainly in conversation with the dominant cultural group; however, they are not necessarily in communication with one another, except as mediated by the dominant group. If one community is focused primarily on the achievement of its own ends, it can set these interests at odds with those of other communities, in which case groups would appear to compete with each other for approval by the dominant culture.

How can different communities, especially ones at the margin, engage myriad perspectives so that they think comprehensively about inclusion? This article proposes a postcolonial intercultural pedagogy, one that has the promise of reaching across cultures in novel ways.

MOVING FROM MULTICULTURALITY TO INTERCULTURALITY

Taking culture seriously is nothing new to educators. Jerome Burner says that school curricula and classroom settings always reflect explicit plans and inarticulate cultural values (Bruner 1996, 27–28).

¹According to Hyondok Choe (2006, 16), a Korean-German philosopher, the concept of multiculturalism only describes the factual existence of various cultures; it does not say anything about the relationship between or among these cultures.

The school can never be considered as culturally “free standing.” What it teaches, what modes of thought and what “speech registers,” cannot be isolated from how the school is situated in the lives and culture of its participants. Through education—whether it be formal or informal—a society cultivates and reinforces attitudes that encourage its people to regard their beliefs, values, and ways of thinking as right and worthy of respect. By internalizing those social and cultural values, people shape their personhood. Interacting with other members of society, they learn how to develop culturally acceptable human relationships.

The aforementioned incident on my campus shows that each group deeply cared about its own culture. Each group reflected on theology from its sociocultural perspective, and spoke out on behalf of its experience. However, because there seemed to be no conversation across the communities, the unintended result was misunderstanding. The irony here is that each community has historically been marginalized and oppressed, and yet they would appear to be competing with each other rather than working together. Regarding this phenomenon, a prominent Asian-American theologian, Rita Nakashima Brock, in a private conversation with me, said that the current mode of cultural discourse in theological and religious education assumes that there is one big circle with its center. Once the one main circle of the dominant culture is posited, each of the other groups form small circles around the dominant culture’s circle. Most of the time, small groups are only talking with the center, so they are not in conversation with any other small groups in its neighborhood. The result is that small circles compete with each other to be the privileged dialogue partner of the dominant culture’s center.

This is what Hyondok Choe describes as *multiculturality* (2006, 5–23). The concept of the “multicultural” was introduced to recognize and explain problems of contemporary society where several different cultures exist as a result of migration and colonization. Compared to the monocultural model in which the dominant group of a society does not recognize the rights of minority cultures or the dominant culture discriminates against those who do not belong to the mainstream, multiculturalism would appear to be a step forward. However, Choe (2006) argues that if we are really serious about the existence and rights of all, we need to explore ways to live together in peace and solidarity that accentuate the unique contributions of one and all, for “the concept of ‘multicultural’ society is helpless facing the situation of living in parallel (in ghettos, for example) and cannot develop a model for living together” (16).

The concept of multiculturalism is also the dominant mode in current Christian Religious Education. With increased interest in contextual pedagogy, many Christian religious educators pay attention to the issues raised by the marginalized communities, and try to be attentive to different voices in their research and teaching; however, it would appear that we religious educators are busy listening to and lifting up the silenced voices, but are not paying much attention to creating new modes of communication among all these different voices. Brock ventures that communication seems to happen mainly between the dominant culture and a marginalized community, rather than among all of the communities.

This mode of communication based on multiculturalism is also dominant in liberation pedagogy, which regards the context of people as the most important foundation of education. Problematizing the apolitical and ahistorical claims of Western universalism and the hegemonic notion that Eurocentric culture is superior to other cultures, liberation pedagogies are attentive to the long-silenced voices of the marginalized (Giroux 1991, 22–28). In Christian contexts, liberation pedagogies reinterpret the Bible and church traditions through the prism of the social, political, economic, cultural, and religious contexts of people, especially that of the marginalized. Hereto they challenge the ethnocentricity of Western theological views, and highlight the option for the marginalized as the central focus of the scriptures. For example, Latin American, Korean Minjung, and Black African communities applaud the Exodus as the story of the God who favors and delivers the oppressed from injustice.² As the readers of these communities face oppression, they find hope and justice in the Exodus story, with its transition from slavery to liberation, themes with which these communities identify.

From Latin-American contexts where the majority of the people had been colonized by Christians and continue to be oppressed by rich and powerful Christian leaders, liberation theologians George V. Pixley and Clodovis Boff huzzah the God of the Exodus who led Israel out of Egypt, as a model for deliverance and liberation (1991, 215–227). Although God’s love is universal, which love would include even the Pharaoh, Pixley and Boff emphasize that in the Exodus, God’s love is expressed as support for the slaves in Egypt: God heard the cries

²I summarize these three perspectives using Part III of “The Exodus: One Narrative, Many Readings,” in Sugirtharajah (1991).

from the slaves, and came down to set them free. In other words, the theological principle expressed in the Exodus is that God's impartiality makes God's love for the oppressed significant (218). Therefore, if the Latin-American church wants to incarnate the Good News, it must stand in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.

The Exodus is also important to Korean Minjung theology. Like Latin-American interpretations, Minjung theology starts from the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts of the Minjung, the suffering people of Korea. They share the same view that God is the God of the oppressed. However, if Latin-American interpretation highlights God's preferential option for the poor, Minjung interpretation puts its weight on people's agency for change.

Cyris H. S. Moon, a Minjung theologian, first finds a parallel between Korean Minjung's suffering history and the social history of the Hebrews in the Exodus (1991, 228–243). The Koreans, like the Hebrews, suffered for years under the domination of ruthless governments and foreign oppressors. Moon points out that the oppressed of the Old Testament did not participate in its authorship, but, rather, the Old Testament was written from the perspectives of men and royalty, and from the vantage point of rulers. Although the Old Testament is filled with stories of liberation, particularly the Exodus, the Hebrew slaves are described as the despised, the powerless, the outcasts, and those who had no rights at all (228). Moon observes that because of long-lived and cruel oppression by the Egyptians, the Hebrews had developed the mentality of slaves, internalizing the master's castigations (230). Although the Hebrews had suffered an oppressed life, they did not realize that the only way to freedom was to trust God and Moses, the latter of whom identified himself with the oppressed people in order to liberate them. Therefore, it is critical for contemporary readers to note that, in the Exodus narrative, God invites and trains God's oppressed people to act as God's partners and agents. God is not the sole actor for people must play a role in attaining freedom (230). This concept of agency and partnership differ fundamentally from the prevailing idea in the mainline Korean church; namely, that the fulfillment of all human history is carried out under God's sovereignty, and that human political decision making is not a serious consideration. According to Moon, the Exodus narrative shows us that if oppressed people are to obtain liberation, they must confront their oppressors and participate in the struggle for their human rights; it is then that God works with them (237).

A similar emphasis is also made by Jean-Marc Ela in Black African contexts (1991, 244–254). Locating the Exodus in Black African contexts where colonialism and neocolonialism heavily influenced Christian theology, Ela notes that the Exodus is a puzzlement for Black Africans. The God they learned about from European missionaries was “a God who is a stranger to the times, indifferent to political, social, economic, and cultural occurrences, having no prospect of involvement such as would necessarily be implied in the Promise” (246). This God commended adaptation and submission to the system of colonial hegemony, and, as a result, many African Christians, Ela notes, do not cry out to God for change. Instead the hope for a better life in heaven is paramount. Ela continues, the Exodus narrative invites Black Africans to reconsider God as a God of deliverance in *this* world. The Exodus invites them to enter into solidarity with people who are refused the dignity of being human; to denounce the abuses of established systems, and to intervene to protect the weak as did Moses (244).

These interpretations of the Exodus from three different communities clearly show that liberation theology and pedagogy start from the contexts of the community. In terms of educational approaches, it is a student-centered approach, in contrast to text-centered or teacher-centered ones. In the context of biblical teaching, R. S. Sugirtharajah, a prominent scholar of biblical hermeneutics from India, calls this approach a “reader-centered” approach that presupposes:

That the meaning of the text is produced by mutual interaction between the reader and the text; that the reader engages the text and the text in turn engages the reader, and the meaning is the invention of the reader; that a specific meaning is perceived in the text by certain readers because of their particular social, cultural and religious location. (3)

Because of these characteristics, liberation biblical pedagogy always expects there to be multiple meanings from the same text, as indicated by the three different views above. In a classroom context, a liberation biblical pedagogue, therefore, pays attention to the sociocultural contexts, especially to the unjust situations of the people s/he is working with. S/he invites students to critically analyze their contexts, asking why things are the way they are? Who benefits from them? Who is sacrificed and what needs to be challenged? S/he encourages students to reread the scripture from the perspective of the analyzed

contexts, thus to find new meanings from the text.³ This leads me to ask what these interpretations and liberation pedagogy shed on the incident on my campus? Do they promote harmony and peace among the groups in conflict on my campus? If one addresses this question from the perspective one of the aforementioned interpretations, the answer probably will be affirmative. However, if one comes from an alternative context, one that perceives the God of the oppressed as a collaborator with colonialism, the answer will be *No*. For instance, some Native Americans view the Exodus as a land grab.

Robert Allen Warrior, a Native-American theologian, reads the Exodus as a Canaanite. Warrior says that the promised land of the former slaves of Egypt was the land of Canaan, and YHWH used the same power against the enslaving Egyptians to defeat the indigenous inhabitants of Canaan (1991, 279). The ancient-to-modern nexus? The God who came with the colonialists wiped out the Native Americans, the people who already lived in the Promised Land. However, across the sweep of theology, including liberation theology, the Canaanite side of the story typically has been overlooked. Albeit liberation theology empowers communities to read scriptural narratives for themselves and make their reading central to theology and political action, Warrior argues that liberation theology does so by ignoring the history behind the Exodus, and therefore it fails to differentiate between the liberating god and the god of conquest (282). If Christians are really serious about liberation and God's cosmic justice, the Canaanites should be placed at the center of Christian theological reflection and political action (283). More importantly, Warrior questions whether or not one should accept the Exodus as a model of leadership and social change:

As long as people believe in the Yahweh of deliverance, the world will not be safe from Yahweh the conqueror. But perhaps, if they are true to their struggle, people will be able to achieve what Yahweh's chosen people in the past have not: a society of people delivered from oppression who are not so afraid of becoming victims again that they become oppressors themselves, a society where the original inhabitants can become something other than subjects to be converted to a better way of life or adversaries who provide cannon fodder for a nation's militaristic pride. (284)

³For a good example by a liberation educator, note Paulo Freire's approach to literacy; namely his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) and *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation* (1989).

The Native-American perspective on the Exodus is a noteworthy challenge to current contextual theology and liberation pedagogy, especially for those of us who have worked hard to speak from the margin or to lift up the silenced voices. Warrior challenges us to remember that the Exodus has at least two parts: deliverance and conquest. Each community's unique location affects how it reads the story and what it hears. Inattentiveness to all of the complexities of the past and present can easily lead to unintended consequences (e.g., the subjugation of other people). Failure to hear all of the voices can lead to acceptance of an interpretation that is lackluster, and other important critiques go unspoken. As a result, liberation pedagogy can unwittingly fall prey to its own uncritical ethnocentrism, over and against the Western universalism that it criticizes. In short, who God is depends on how one has experienced life, and can be affected by how stories are told and taught in a given context. Therefore the above perspectives require us to consider as many voices as possible relative to the text.

TOWARD INTERCULTURAL PEDAGOGY FOR LIBERATING INTERDEPENDENCE

Interculturality urges Christian Religious Education to depart from multiculturalism; that is, if it is really serious about the fulfillment of the reign of God on earth as a pursuit. Otherwise, as shown in the incident on my campus and in the aforementioned conflicting interpretations of the Exodus, one community's justice sometimes is gained at the cost of others. As long as one community's justice results in injustice to others, it is not true justice; rather it perpetuates a dog-eats-dog worldview. Therefore, I suggest pedagogical strategies for Christian religious educators to create a more just world.

First, interculturality challenges Christian religious educators to rethink and expand the purpose of our pedagogy. Unlike the current discourse of culture based on multiculturalism, our pedagogy should utilize *Liberating Interdependence* (Dube 2000, 185–186). Musa Dube, an African postcolonial feminist New Testament scholar from whom I borrow the term, says that the term *interdependence* is “to describe and to underline the interconnectedness of different histories, economic structures, and political structures as well as the relatedness of cultural texts, races, classes, and genders within specific and global contexts” (185). Dube continues:

The postindependence experience of many Two-Thirds World countries has also rudely shown that “independence” from other nations and cultures, even from those that oppressed them, is neither practical nor the best means for survival.

.....

The interdependence of nations, continents, genders, races, cultures, and political and economic systems, therefore, has always been a given and remains one of the most important aspects of survival. Nonetheless, most interconnections are built on foundations that are both oppressive and exploitative. The term *liberating interdependence* is therefore used here to define the interconnectedness of relationships that recognize and affirm the dignity of all things and people involved. (185–186)

As Rita Nakashima Brock also rightly points out, and as we have seen in the aforementioned analysis of liberation pedagogy, many liberation theologians and pedagogues from the formerly colonized Two-Thirds World and the marginalized First World tend to focus on the fulfillment of justice and peace in their own communities through challenging the dominant paradigm and speaking up from their different contexts. Notwithstanding that, an unintended result of such a pedagogy is to create a dialogue with the dominant group alone, instead of engaging all groups. This dynamic often results in unhealthy relationships between the marginalized as they compete with each other to be a more important partner of the dominant group. This mode of engagement thus helps the dominant group to keep the status quo, while putting other groups at odds with one another.

To have *Liberating Interdependence* be the purpose of our pedagogy, religious educators need to ask whether our pedagogy brings the liberation of those who are the most marginalized among and beyond our community. When someone is suffering due to exclusion and oppression, while we are pursuing justice for our own community alone, no one will take our work for world transformation seriously. Therefore, while each community must work out its own critical norm of pedagogy, it is important that we as Christian religious educators hold ourselves accountable to one another and test our community’s norm in public discourse, in constant dialogue with those of other communities (Kwok 1995, 19). To test whether our pedagogy is creating *Liberating Interdependence*, we should ask an important question posed by Nami Kim, a Korean-American feminist theologian who teaches at Spellman College in Atlanta; that is, whether my/our comfort is gained at the cost of somebody else’s (Kim 2005, 75–94).

Second, Christian religious educators would do well to remember that knowledge is produced by multiple interactions among different cultures and people, and thus we need to develop dynamic methodologies to frame such complexity (Kwok 1995, 36–40). In other words, to have *Liberating Interdependence* happen at all levels of our teaching, Christian religious educators should promote interaction between participants of different backgrounds, and remain cognizant of the merits of interculturality. In the context of biblical hermeneutics, Kwok Pui Lan, a postcolonial theologian, gives helpful commentary:

We hear a plurality of voices speaking different social dialects from all sorts of backgrounds. We do not hear them directly, but through reported speech, which as Bakhtin says is “of speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also speech about speech, utterance about utterance. We have to understand the dynamic interrelationship between the speech being reported and the speech doing the reporting. This requires us to pay attention to the relation between oral transmission and the written document of the Bible, the framing of discourse by the author, the multilevels of the dialogue, and the possibilities of reframing the retelling in the present situation. (43)

It is just not readers who bring their various contexts to the text, but the text itself. The contents of our teaching and learning are also products of multiple interactions among different cultures and people. Therefore it is critical for us not to focus simply on the author’s voice in the classroom or on the purported orthodoxy of church leaders. Instead we should investigate the ways different groups of people in Christian communities across history create meaning out of the text, using their different cultural backgrounds. We need to examine how these different interpretations create a multiplicity of meanings that interact with and condition one another (Kwok 1995, 37).

For such investigations and analysis of the contents, I find postcolonial theological hermeneutics extremely important and helpful. For example, in the context of biblical pedagogy Fernando Segovia emphasizes the importance of investigating the interaction between Israel and its surrounding empires; to look at different groups of ancient Hebrews and early church Christians (Segovia 2000, 119–132).⁴ Given the reality that the Bible was written in the context of the Near Eastern or of the Mediterranean Basin colonial empires such as Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, Segovia argues that it is

⁴I have discussed Segovia’s hermeneutical methods in detail in somewhere else. See Lee (2007, 44–61).

crucial to analyze the power relationship between Israel and those empires, and this reality's influence on the production of the Bible. During the writing, editing, redacting, canonizing, and translating periods of the Bible, such interactions conditioned and reconditioned the text. Moreover, since the expansion of Western imperialism has been one of the key attendant spirits of Christianity, biblical pedagogues and readers should analyze how the text traveled and participated in the history of Western imperialism, and how it continues to write its story far beyond its original context and readership (Dube 2000, 17). From the early mercantile phase of European imperialism of the 15th century to the Western empire-building era of the 19th century, to the contemporary capitalist stage of high imperialism, Western imperialistic traditions and Christian missionary movements traveled hand-in-hand. Missionaries, who were protected by the empire, justified foreign domination as God's will. Relying on texts like the Exodus, many Christian missionaries entered and took the lands of non-Christian Asians, Africans, and Native Americans, either to convert them, or to promote self-serving claims of superiority and election (Dube 2000, 17). So in biblical pedagogy, it is essential to analyze how the West reads and interprets the Bible, and to study the Bible's modern day interpreters' socio-political-economic assumptions, and their implications. Hereto Dube, in commenting on Bible study, suggests the following questions for analysis and discussion:

1. Does this text have a clear stance against the political imperialism of its time?
2. Does this text encourage travel to distant and inhabited lands, and if so, how does it justify itself?
3. How does this text construct difference: is there dialogue and mutual interdependence, or condemnation and replacement of all that is foreign?
4. Does this text employ gender representations to construct relationships of subordination and domination? (57)

By asking these questions, educators should examine whether we are integrating marginalized cultural traditions into mainstream views while accepting implicitly the existing paradigm. Alternatively, can we create *Liberating Interdependence* "in favor of living together (*convivencia*) with differences" (Aquino and Rosado-Nunes 2007, 14–15)?

Third, for *Liberating Interdependence* to happen, the teaching process of Christian Religious Education should be that of dialogue based on equality. Reapplying the phraseology of Elliott Eisner and Maria Harris, unless our teaching and learning process embody the

said purpose of our pedagogy (Eisner 1985, 57; Harris 1989, 63), *Liberating Interdependence* will be less effective, and may amount to pedagogical rhetoric.

The prefix “inter” in both interculturality and interdependence denotes relationship and dialogue between two or more different communities. Although they bring different perspectives and experiences to the dialogue, their relationship and rights should be equal in principle (Choe 2006, 16). In reality, however, these communities in dialogue are situated in various kinds of power constellations, depending on their race, ethnicity, gender, age, social positions, and so on. In other words, not all communities are on equal footing. Therefore, challenging and analyzing the presently unequal interactions among different communities is an important part of pedagogy for *Liberating Interdependence*: what interests are represented worldwide? What types of values underlie the cultural interaction promoted by globalization? Who is obtaining the benefits of such interaction (Aquino and Rosado-Nunes 2007, 14–15)? By asking these questions, pedagogy for *Liberating Interdependence* can help participants recognize the difference and diversity between and among one another, thus to examine critically their own privileges and ethnocentrism, and to create a basis for developing new modes of dialogue and solidarity (Choe 2006, 17). The goal of interaction and dialogue is not to explain perceived reality, but to transform it. Herewith and in my own classroom teaching, I encourage and highlight the following.⁵

To my White middle- and upper middle-class students, who are the majority in my class, I challenge them to critically examine and study their own assumptions and worldviews as given form by White conventional cultures. With genuinely good intention, many of those with liberal and progressive theological views tend to think that they are sensitive to non-White communities, and are doing justice work for other communities. However as their Asian-American teacher, I find that many students fail to see that their culture and ethnicity confer special privileges on them. Therefore, I emphasize that they should try to understand what it means to be White *before* they try to understand non-White communities. Admittedly, there are sub-centers and margins (e.g., Appalachia) to the center (White culture in North America); however, in pedagogical discourse we typically “whitewash”

⁵I have discussed similar points in detail in “Realities, visions and promises of a multicultural future,” *Religious Education* 99(3) (Summer 2004): 287–315. Co-authored with Mary Elizabeth Moore, Katherine Turpin, Ralph Casas, Lynn Bridgers, and Veronice Miles.

the center as though it is not really there. White people need to raise questions about their identities and the privileges that they enjoy as White people. Often in intercultural conversations, those of us who are coming from non-White communities find it extremely difficult and frustrating to have serious conversations with our White colleagues because they do not seem to know much about their own cultures. To reflect on contributions that White persons can make to a community of *Liberating Interdependence* would be a good starting point. In a nutshell, talking about others without knowing oneself is nonsense.

To my students from the marginalized communities, I urge them to stop imagining nonexistent centers. There are many sub-centers, in addition to an imagined center; however, when we assert one norm, then we effectively limit our contributions to interdependence, as though our own thoughts are afterthoughts. Then, rather than inviting diverse groups of Whites to the roundtable, we turn to our neighbors sitting around the edge and grumble about the “center,” thus allowing it to control our actions and to define us. We need to reflect critically on who our conversation partners are, and why we tend to talk to one imagined center rather than to talk with one another and the plurality of “centers.” Furthermore, we need to keep revisiting our goals—our hopes and our dreams—lest they be lost to hand-wringing about an imagined center.

What would intercultural dialogue look like in the classroom? Let me give an example. In my Introduction to Christian Education course, a course that about forty theological students take every spring, I try to help students create a community of *Liberating Interdependence*. Thus to move beyond a multicultural pedagogy, emphases include critical analysis of students’ own social locations and assumptions, and the development of skills for social analysis. Through the semester, students work in small groups on shared projects, ones that focus on learning and teaching a religious tradition other than their own. Foci have included Greek Orthodox, African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic, and Queer approaches to Christian Religious Education. In other words, through small group work students are expected to learn Religious Education of the *other* whose rich and long-lived wisdom is not widely available in printed forms in the North American Religious Education field. After studying the traditions and practices of Religious Education of a different cultural group for a semester through participatory observation (including conversations with community members, and reviewing available literature), each group presents what they have learned to the class.

About ninety percent of the students come from White middle-class Protestant backgrounds. Almost all of them identify their worldviews as liberal or radical, and claim a commitment to social justice. However, from my Asian-American point of view, their approaches to social justice, especially race issues, are White-American centered (e.g., they have a willingness to invite others to their privileged center, a multicultural approach). However, since the class challenges students to be intercultural, it is unsurprising that there is struggle with or resistance to this methodology. Genuinely learning about and from the *other* requires my students to become aware of their own biases and assumptions, which can be a humbling experience. Notwithstanding this, every year I witness group presentations that include “coming out” stories, including students’ realization of their own privileges and racism, intentional and unintentional ignorance of other traditions, and students’ awareness of their resistance to genuine conversations with their neighbors. Frequently, students list the small group work as the best learning experience of the class in their course evaluation. I do not intend to say that my students are completely transformed by my class and their small group work within a semester. However, at least they learn that there are great traditions with which they need to be in conversation, and from which they can learn. More importantly, I hope that they learn the critical necessity of interculturality for their ministry, and how to pursue it.

Another important benefit of this small group work is that students learn how knowledge can be generated through a communal process. As they study their topic together, create a teaching program on the topic, and present their finding to their classmates, they have a firsthand experience of the importance of community in teaching and learning. They also learn ways to implement it in their own pastoral contexts. In other words, instead of having students solely learn theories and praxis in a classroom setting, or having them learn theories in class and practice what they learn in their own context later, what I teach them in the class is immediately applied to their own presentation to their classmates. Below is my instruction for the group work in the course syllabus (3):

1. *Learning how to develop group dynamics/community building skills as a part of your educational ministries*—Community-less education is not a true education! As I will highlight in the class over and over again, and as you as a group will experience throughout the semester, knowing your participants (needs assessment) and building a sense of community

are fundamental for good education. *Before you jump into the work mode for presentation, please spend time to get to know each other in a safe place that you create together.* As you get to know each other, your different interests, learning styles, and strengths will emerge, and then each member can contribute to the group's work in a unique and harmonious way.

2. *Reflecting on today's lesson and learning to be a teacher*—Each group member is expected to take turns to facilitate discussion: “What did you learn at school today?” “Why is it important for you?” “Why is it not important for you?”—It is also the role of the facilitator to make sure that everybody participates; that no one monopolizes the conversation.
3. *Preparing for the group presentation that will be given at the end of the semester.* The group members are expected to share in the research and writing of group presentation on a selected topic. Further guidelines for group presentation will be provided by the instructor.

The goal of dialogue for *Liberating Interdependence* is not to persuade others through our opinions and thoughts, but, rather, to transform reality through listening and being influenced by others, and changing ourselves. Both my African-American students and LGBTQ students can be agents of transformation for each other through genuinely listening to each other and being checkmates for each other. For this the pedagogical process itself must be mindful of what it means to be liberating *and* interdependent. Otherwise, we repeat the same old patterns and look to be theological hamsters.

Boyung Lee is associate professor of Educational Ministries at Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. E-mail: blee@psr.edu

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