

Reflexive Evangelicalism

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Forthcoming in *Political Power & Social Theory*

ABSTRACT

Intellectual humility and religious conviction are often posed as antagonistic binaries; the former associated with science, reason, inclusive universality, and liberal secularism, the latter with superstition, dogma, exclusive particularity, and rigid traditionalism. Despite popular images of white American evangelicals as the embodied antithesis of intellectual humility, responsiveness to facts, and openness to the other, this article demonstrates how evangelicals can and do practice intellectual humility in public life whilst simultaneously holding fast to particularistic religious convictions. Drawing on textual analysis and multi-site ethnographic data, it demonstrates how observed evangelical practices of transposable and segmented reflexivity map onto pluralist, domain specific conceptualizations of intellectual humility in the philosophical and psychological literature. It further argues that the effective practice of intellectual humility in the interests of ethical democracy does not require religious actors to abandon particularistic religious reasons for universal secular ones. Rather, particularistic religious convictions can motivate effective practices of intellectual humility and thereby support democratic pluralism, inclusivity, and solidarity across difference. More broadly, it aims to challenge, or at least complicate, the widespread notion that increasing strength of religious conviction always moves in lockstep with increasing dogmatism, tribalism, and intellectual unreasonableness.

KEYWORDS: DEMOCRACY, HUMILITY, REFLEXIVITY, EVANGELICALISM, PUBLIC, SECULARISM

INTRODUCTION

When thinking about the practice of intellectual humility in public life, one typically does not think first of American evangelicalism. After all, white evangelicals in 2016 played a significant role in electing as president of the United States an individual who arguably represents the embodied antithesis of intellectual humility, responsiveness to facts, and openness to the other. In the wake of Trump's election, scholars and pundits wasted no time noting the "evangelical roots of our post-truth society" (Worthen 2017), tracing topics such as evolution- and climate-change denial, tribal partisanship and moral hypocrisy, and the eager embrace of conspiratorial narratives and "fake news" to longstanding evangelical distrust of science and secular reason (Hunter 2017). Others have noted longstanding evangelical complicity with varying forms of white supremacy and ethnoreligious nationalism—not least during the long 20th century (Balmer et al. 2017, Emerson and Smith 2000, Gorski 2016, Lichtman 2008). Such perspectives have been propped up by various pseudo-scientific and conspiratorial-apocalyptic accounts of xenophobic threat to white Christian America: whether from "pagan academics," "liberal media whores," and "Communist-atheist-nigger-loving-bearded-Jew-sonofabitch" supporters of the black civil rights movement (Marsh 2008:5,70), or Catholic American presidents under popish influence (Hunter 1987), or the "neo-pagan" feminist and "homosexual agenda" undermining Western civilization (Markofski 2015a), or, most recently, Muslim immigrants imposing shari'a across the United States (Morehead n.d.). Of course, belief and rhetoric of this type has not been limited to white Americans of an evangelical persuasion. Nor do all—or even most—evangelicals espouse such views (Emerson and Smith 2000, Greeley and Hout 2006, Markofski 2015b, Steensland and Goff 2013). Nevertheless, this litany of woes provides ample fodder to those inclined to doubt the possibility of strong evangelical religious

conviction coexisting peaceably alongside democratic pluralism and intellectual humility across difference in the American public arena.

When thinking about the practice of intellectual humility in public life, therefore, we might also think of a tension between the type of strong, particularistic forms of religious conviction often equated with evangelical Christianity and other varieties of traditional or orthodox religiosity (Davis and Robinson 1996, 1999, 2006, 2012, Hunter 1987, 1991)—whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, or other—and the sort of dispassionate, rationalist discourse conjured by depictions of ideal public communication and democratic deliberation in the tradition of Habermas or Rawls (Habermas 1991, 1995, Rawls 1971, 1995, Schneiderhan and Khan 2008). In rational secularism's ideal public sphere, there is no higher authority than the authority of the better argument, no legitimating reasons apart from those which are equally accessible to all, and thus no place for the polluting particularism of sectarian religion, with its frequent appeals to emotional and mystical (rather than rational) sensibilities and dogmatic-exclusivist (rather than rational-universalist) grounds of truth, authority, and belonging (Alexander 2006, Dillon 2010, Habermas 1991, 2006, Rawls 1971, Salomon 2016). When thinking about the practice of intellectual humility in public life, in other words, we tend to think of something secular and liberal.

In this paper, however, I argue American evangelicals can and do practice intellectual humility in public life, and that they can do so whilst simultaneously holding fast to their own particularistic religious convictions. As such, I will argue that the effective practice of intellectual humility in the interests of ethical democracy (Wood 2002, Wood and Fulton 2015, Markofski 2015b) does not require religious actors to abandon particularistic religious reasons for universal secular ones. Rather, particularistic religious convictions can motivate effective

practices of intellectual humility and thereby support democratic pluralism, inclusivity, and solidarity across difference. More broadly, this paper aims to challenge, or at least complicate, the widespread notion that increasing strength of religious conviction always moves in lockstep with increasing dogmatism, tribalism, and intellectual unreasonableness.

The paper is organized into four parts. First, I will discuss the concept of social reflexivity (Lichterman 2005) as an example of pluralist, domain-specific intellectual humility (Lynch, Johnson, Sheff, and Gunn n.d.) across categories of social difference, drawing on examples from my own original ethnographic research on new evangelical strategies of public engagement across the United States. Second, I will examine the endogenous cultural resources available to evangelicals for the practice of intellectual humility across difference in public life, and provide examples from my fieldwork of evangelical actors drawing on these resources to motivate new strategies of public engagement. Third, I will develop a case study involving conservative evangelical and left-liberal Buddhist religious communities pursuing understanding and solidarity across difference for religious reasons and the public good. This case study highlights religious actors with strong particularistic religious convictions finding resources for intellectual humility and solidarity across difference from within their own religious traditions, thereby facilitating culture war de-escalation, civil discourse amidst disagreement, and democratic-universalist solidarity precisely and paradoxically on the basis of each communities' particularistic religious convictions. Finally, I will discuss the implications of my argument for both social scientific and democratic discourse and practice, arguing for an empirically-based, bottom-up approach to democratic praxis and theory-building too often dominated by top-down, logico-deductive models of theory construction. This paper thus aims to advance both empirical

knowledge of evangelical practices of social reflexivity and intellectual humility in American public life and normative democratic theory.

SOCIAL REFLEXIVITY AND INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

The contemporary “science of intellectual humility” (Samuelson, Church, Jarvinen, and Paulus n.d.) is grounded in virtue epistemology and individualist psychology. The virtuous knower is one who possesses intellectual humility as a trait (Roberts and Wood 2003), recognizes (and resists where possible) tendencies toward various types of in-group and self-centered bias (Hamilton and Trolier 1986, Hogg 1992, Hogg and Abrams 1988, Narvaez 2008, Samuelson et al. n.d.), and develops appropriate emotional capacities and controls conducive to the practice of intellectual humility across difference (Dunning, Krueger, and Alicke 2005, Garcia 2006, Guenther and Alicke 2010). The virtue-theoretic epistemological approach leads to a particular way of conceptualizing intellectual humility—*IH realism*—as a “distinct and unified kind of psychological trait” or disposition possessed by an individual (Lynch et al n.d.:2). While researchers in this tradition disagree on the content and substance of intellectual humility as a virtue (Garcia 2006, Hazlett 2015), they converge in viewing intellectual humility as a context-independent psychological trait or disposition durably possessed by individuals. *IH pluralists*, on the other hand, conceptualize intellectual humility as domain-specific clusters of mental states or dispositions whereby individuals might display particular aspects or elements of intellectual humility (but not others), or display them in some contexts (but not others), or with respect to certain topics or activities (but not others) (Lynch et al. n.d., Raimi and Leary 2014, Tangney 2000, 2009). Rather than a context-independent psychological trait durably possessed by

individuals, IH pluralists conceptualize intellectual humility as varying across context and with respect to substantive content.

As a polythetic and context-dependent “open concept” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:95-96), IH pluralism is more well-suited than its realist counterpart to traverse across the disciplinary terrain from analytic philosophy and psychology to the social sciences. Within the discipline of sociology, IH pluralism bears considerable resemblance in particular to the concept of social reflexivity. Building on the classical American pragmatist tradition of Jane Addams and John Dewey, Lichterman (2005) first developed the concept of social reflexivity to explain why some religious groups are able to build two-way bridges across social divisions in the public arena while others struggle to do so (Lichterman 2005:15, 45, Lichterman and Reed 2015). According to both the pragmatist and neo-Tocquevillian traditions, people’s capacity to build bridges of empathy, trust, solidarity, and reciprocity across difference in public life is a necessary component of democratic flourishing (Addams 2002 [1902], Dewey 1980 [1916], 1988 [1939], 1997 [1938], Paxton 2002, Putnam 1993, 2000, Tocqueville 1966 [1835/40]). Whereas Lichterman’s (2005) original conceptualization focuses the communicative practices of groups, I define social reflexivity more broadly as people’s capacity to think and interact flexibly and self-critically in relation to diverse social others and situations.

This concept of social reflexivity maps onto pluralist conceptualizations of intellectual humility (Lynch et al. n.d.) in several ways. First, it involves an individual or group’s demonstrated capacity to practice critical self-evaluation and adjustment in response to shifting social situations, challenges from non-group members, and the observed consequences of different lines of action for diverse social others. Second, it involves people’s capacities to think and interact flexibly across categories of difference and disagreement. This is just the sort of

allocentric or “other-centered” (Narvaez 2008, Samuelson et al. n.d.) thinking the psychological literature suggests can attenuate System 1 cognitive processing biases that hinder the practice of varying types of intellectual humility across categories of social difference (Dunning et al. 2005, Guenther and Alicke 2010, Hamilton and Troler 1986, Tajfel 1969). Finally, this expanded definition of social reflexivity resonates with pluralist notions of intellectual humility in that it “captures the intuition that there are different ways to be intellectually humble,” and that “a person [or group] can be intellectually humble in one context, or with regard to some subject, and not be in another context, or with regard to another subject” (Lynch et al. n.d.:5). I will now turn to some findings from my own research to demonstrate how this is this case.

In 2011-2012 I conducted a multi-site ethnographic study involving twelve months of full-time ethnographic fieldwork alongside faith-based community organizing, community development, progressive advocacy, and service-volunteer groups in Portland, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Boston—including over 90 in-depth interviews with community activists, civic and religious leaders, political lobbyists, neighborhood residents and others. Deploying an “exceptional case method” (Markofski 2015b), I sampled cases in which I was able directly to observe and interview evangelicals interacting with diverse social others across multiple group settings and institutional contexts (Lichterman 2012). Along with participant observation, I also conducted 92 in-depth interviews ranging from 1-3 hours with key informants; intentionally sampling for diversity across race, gender, religion, and “strategic relocation” (Markofski 2015b) to allow for comparisons across these theoretically significant categories.

While conducting this research, I observed two distinct modes of social reflexivity being practiced by evangelical actors across difference that are particularly relevant to pluralist

conceptualizations of intellectual humility: namely, *segmented reflexivity* and *transposable reflexivity*.

Individuals and groups practice segmented reflexivity when they think and interact flexibly and self-critically with respect to one type of social difference but not others.

Segmented reflexivity is reflexivity restricted to one domain.

Neighborhood Partners and its director Kent are an illustrative case of the practice of segmented reflexivity.¹ Neighborhood Partners is a community development organization—founded and staffed by white evangelical Christians—that describes itself as a “faith-based nonprofit organization working for the spiritual and social transformation of Portland’s impoverished neighborhoods. We do this by equipping and resourcing churches to engage in community partnerships ... with people of goodwill, agencies, nonprofits, and schools, to create sustained, positive change, socially and spiritually, in their neighborhoods” (11/02/11 FR letter, ABCD training material p. 31). The organization practices and trains individuals and organizations in asset-based community development (ABCD), an indigenous grassroots approach to neighborhood transformation made famous by John McKnight (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993, McKnight and Block 2012) and colleagues at Northwestern University.

Kent and his fellow Neighborhood Partners staff combined remarkable flexibility and self-critical awareness of the dynamics of economic inequality in their work with unhoused and economically disadvantaged persons in the “other Portland” (Pein 2011)—the one not seen on *Portlandia*—with an equally vivid incapacity to reflexively engage issues of racial difference and inequality. Kent and his fellow Neighborhood Partners staff were highly sensitive to the linguistic, religious, political, and institutional mechanisms whereby evangelical Christians and

¹ All personal and organizational names are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated

other Americans kept the poor at arm's-length: whether through dehumanizing "othering" language, distant and condescending charity programs, blame-the-victim religious and political ideologies, or by closing themselves off to learning and receiving things of value from economically disadvantaged persons.

Whereas Kent and Neighborhood Partners routinely demonstrated the capacity to think and interact flexibly and self-critically with respect to class and economically disadvantaged others, this was generally not true of their engagement with race and racial others. In one particularly potent example, Kent processed his frustration one day after attending a meeting with a group of black pastors and community leaders focused on problems of police brutality and gentrification pushing poor black residents out of North Portland. "I just don't get it," Kent reported thinking about the black pastors' group, "Why are you all still so angry?" He went on to question why the group insisted on "rehashing the past" and focusing on particularistic racial experience instead of "just getting on with it," by which he meant working together across racial difference to build capacity for everyone in disadvantaged neighborhoods without focusing on their racial history and makeup.

In this case, rather than interacting flexibly or reflecting self-critically on his experience, Kent shut down reflection and opted out of further experience. "I didn't go back," Kent told me, without regret. Nor did race ever enter into Neighborhood Partners' discussions of poverty, economic inequality, grassroots democracy, or religion. Kent and Neighborhood Partners practiced a segmented social reflexivity capable of attending to issues of class, but not racial, inequity and difference. Other evangelical individuals and groups practiced segmented reflexivity in different ways, interacting and flexibly and self-critically with respect to race but

not gender or sexuality, politics and religion but not class, gender and sexuality but not race, race but not class or gender, and so on.

In contrast to segmented reflexivity, individuals and groups practice *transposable reflexivity* when they think and interact flexibly and self-critically across multiple types of social difference. Transposable reflexivity is reflexivity across domains.

Kim—former director of Christians for the Common Good, a Christian progressive political advocacy non-profit organization in Portland—represents an illustrative case of the practice of transposable reflexivity at the individual level. In both talk and action, Kim combined tour-de-force awareness of race, class, gender, and global inequality and difference with deep critical insight into the majority white evangelical religious culture of which she was a part. Peachtree Community Development Association [PCDA], a venerable Christian community development non-profit organization in Atlanta, on the other hand, practiced transposable reflexivity at the collective level. Whether interacting with race/class/religion diverse neighborhood residents and community leaders, gay and lesbian neighbors and former organizational members, or disadvantaged African American neighborhood youth and their parents, PCDA staff and volunteers habitually demonstrated capacity to think and interact flexibly and self-critically in relation to diverse social others and situations across a wide spectrum of race, class, gender, religious, political, and moral-cultural divides. Other individuals and groups did the same, practicing transposable reflexivity and intellectual humility across diverse social situations and categories of difference.

We may draw several conclusions from these findings. First, they provide empirical support for a pluralist, domain specific conception of intellectual humility. Social actors may indeed practice intellectual humility with respect to one social domain or category of

difference—what I call segmented reflexivity—while failing to do so in others. They may also practice one element or aspect of intellectual humility—self-critique, for example, or iterative fallibilism—while failing to practice others. This suggests the generative utility of pluralist and domain-specific conceptualizations of intellectual humility (IH pluralism) for future research.

Second, and consistent with prior research, these findings suggest that evangelicals can, in fact, be both “Christ-centered and socially reflexive”—to borrow a phrase from Paul Lichterman and coauthors on the subject (Lichterman, Carter, and Lamont 2009). That is, contrary to common secularist assumptions, evangelicals don’t have to stop being evangelical or abandon core religious convictions in order to practice intellectual humility across categories of difference and disagreement in the public arena.

There are several reasons for this. First, a large body of research suggests that evangelical practices in general—and those related to social reflexivity in particular—are often conditioned more by social and contextual factors than by explicitly “religious” ones. For example, while racially isolated white evangelicals demonstrate narrowly individualist and anti-structural interpretations of racial inequality in the U.S., non-isolated evangelicals change their views, bending toward more critical, egalitarian, and systemic understandings of America’s “original sin” (e.g., Emerson and Smith 2000, Markofski 2015b). Living in diverse neighborhoods, working in diverse organizations, being embedded in diverse social networks, attending diverse churches, have all been shown to independently influence evangelical beliefs and practices relevant to the practice of intellectual humility across difference in public and political life. Other work demonstrates evangelicals’ high propensity for cultural adaption, flexibility, and innovation in response to changing socio-historical circumstances and environments (Bielo 2011, Emerson and Smith 2000, Gordon 1984, Hunter and Wolfe 2006,

Markofski 2015a, Smith 1998). In many cases, religious conviction matters less than social context, or flows from it. American evangelicals have been historically more likely to reproduce than to resist or challenge extant social arrangements, regularly adapting their theology and religious practices to prevailing social currents and conditions (Emerson and Smith 2000, Hunter and Wolfe 2006, Markofski 2015a). While this propensity has often dulled the edge of potential evangelical contributions to progressive social activism (Markofski 2015a, Steensland and Goff 2013), it also speaks to American evangelicalism's structural and cultural openness to change and adaptation (Smith 1998) in response to exogenous forces and perspectives—one significant element in a pluralist conception intellectual humility.

Second, evangelicalism is not a monolith, a single point on the map of American religion; rather, it is an internally diverse and hotly contested field of agreement and struggle over a wide range of religious and political standpoints and strategies of action (Markofski 2015a). While much of what passes for evangelical Christianity in the U.S. demonstrates a clear lack of intellectual humility, responsiveness to facts, and openness to the other (Balmer et al. 2017), such positions are frequently contested on both secular and religious grounds, not least by other evangelicals holding alternative religious convictions more conducive to the practice of transposable reflexivity in public life.

RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS SUPPORTING INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Intellectual humility and religious conviction are often posed as antagonistic binaries; the former associated with science, reason, inclusive universality, and liberal secularism, the latter with superstition, dogma, exclusive particularity, and rigid traditionalism. Such framings reproduce long-standing assumptions about the incompatibility of science and religion, reason

and faith, progress and tradition, or secular and religious authority. On the one hand, these framings are not arbitrary or capricious. They reflect real historical struggles over knowledge and power in the post-Enlightenment West (e.g., Casanova 1994, Hunter 1991, Smith 2003). On the other hand, such framings too often take their premises for granted, fail to stand up to empirical scrutiny, and produce polarizing symbolic and social categories that are neither scientifically nor politically useful (Gorski 2017, Habermas 2006, 2008).

Problematic historical and philosophical assumptions, non-religious contextual influences, and internal cultural diversity and contestation are all reasons to problematize reified assumptions about the supposed antinomy between strong evangelical religious convictions and the practice of intellectual humility in public life. But there is another reason to think it is possible for evangelicals to practice intellectual humility while holding fast to particularistic religious convictions. Namely, their sacred scriptures demand it. The highest source of intellectual and moral authority in the evangelical faith tradition—the Christian Bible read through an evangelical lens—provides a rich and authoritative resource for the evangelical practice of intellectual humility and social reflexivity.

This is important, because, as a post-secular Habermas has come to recognize, making *a priori* demands that religious believers ground the substance and style of their engagement in public life in strictly secular or universally accessible terms is unnecessary, unproductive, and unethical from the standpoint of normative democratic theory (2006, 2008). It is unnecessary because traditional or orthodox religious individuals and communities of all persuasions have demonstrated historical capacity for practicing intellectual humility across difference in the public arena—to “consider one’s own faith reflexively from the outside and relate it to secular views” (Habermas 2006:9-10)—whilst remaining rooted in their own particularistic religious

tradition and convictions. It is unproductive because it unnecessarily alienates large swaths of citizens who find it difficult or impossible to articulate reasons for their public-political standpoints in non-religious terms for a variety of reasons (Habermas 2006, 2008); it eliminates “key resources” of “normative truth,” “moral intuition,” and the “creation of meaning and identity” that may otherwise elude secular society and secularist reason (Habermas 2006:10, Nemoianu 2006, Habermas and Ratzinger 2006); and it generates hostility and distrust between religious and secular citizens (or between religious citizens and the secular state) that threaten baseline requirements of solidarity, trust, and civility necessary for healthy democratic functioning (Gorski 2017, Hunter 1991, Mahmood 2015, Neuhaus 1984, Putnam 1993, 2000, Wood and Fulton 2015). Finally, it is unethical because it undermines normative democratic commitments to self-determination and inclusive participation in democratic public sphere for all citizens, including religious ones, which “empowers them to be the authors of laws to which as its addressees they are subject” (Habermas 2006:10).²

As such, it is imperative for proponents of ethical democracy (Wood 2002, Wood and Fulton 2015, Markofski 2015b)—of both secular and religious persuasions—to welcome particularistic religious reasons and motivations for the practice of intellectual humility in public life. The Christian Bible interpreted through an evangelical hermeneutic offers many such resources. This is a vast terrain; it is sufficient for present purposes to highlight just a few of the potent symbolic resources that authoritatively warrant evangelical practices of intellectual humility and social reflexivity on their own particularistic religious terms.

² Of course, Habermas maintains an “institutional translation proviso” requiring religious citizens and groups to translate their concerns and reasons into universally accessible secular language in formal political environments and while conducting official state business (2006).

The first is the evangelical doctrine of sin and human weakness (Jacobs 2008, Plantinga 1995). “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” writes Paul in the book of Romans (3:23, NIV). Lest his readers think their identity as Christ-followers exempts them the universal scope of this claim, the writer of 1 Timothy (v.15, NIV) elaborates, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” According to traditional evangelical readings of scripture, who is the person requiring the highest levels of critical scrutiny, moral circumspection, and reflexive self-examination? Oneself. Who is most subject to critical evaluation, scrutiny, and correction after oneself? The community of believers or the church, as described in 1 Corinthians 5. While dealing with a case of church discipline in Corinth, Paul draws a distinction between the community of believers and the general public: “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside” (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). Paul’s discussion here echoes the teachings of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 7:1-5. It is not others, but oneself; not outsiders, but insiders; not the stranger, but the friend; not “the world,” but “the church”; that must be subject to the most rigorous moral and intellectual criticism and self-scrutiny according to classic evangelical readings of scripture (Murray 2001 [1895]).

This evangelical understanding of sin and self-scrutiny is closely tied to the theological doctrine of the fall and resulting partial corruption of human faculties of reason and will (Luther 2012 [1525]). We must be slow to trust ourselves, our motivations, and our understandings, the prophets say, for, “the heart is deceitful above all things ... Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, NIV). We are all inveterate self-idolaters, prone to exaggerate our own person or groups’ merits while casting shade on others. Faith in Christ brings forgiveness and the possibility of

renewal, but “the flesh” is beyond redemption—only death and resurrection can cure it, as Paul argues in chapters seven and eight of the book of Romans. Until then, all our knowledge—not least religious knowledge—is “partial and incomplete,” for “now we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12, KJV). As such, Christ-followers are called to a vigilant intellectual and moral humility, acknowledging the fallible and partial nature of all human knowledge and moral striving—including first and foremost their own.

This intellectual and moral humility in the face of sin and human weakness is most directly expressed in the practice of repentance. In evangelical parlance, repentance, or *metanoia*, means to change one’s mind, to concede mistakes, to admit one’s fault, to turn around, to take a new direction (Sproul 2014)—as anyone with passing familiarity with popular evangelical homiletics could tell you. By necessity in light of the fall, repentance is a routine expectation and commitment of everyday life, a mundane—if exceedingly difficult—practice of daily spiritual discipline, a pillar of evangelical piety. Repentance marks the beginning of every evangelical’s spiritual journey and is their constant companion thereafter (Smith 2001), for it is the call of every believer to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” and thus “not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather to think of yourself with sober judgment” (Romans 12: 2-3, NIV). It grows more, rather than less, prominent in the lives of apostles, prophets, and saints—who come to recognize themselves as “foremost of all” sinners (I Timothy 1:15, NASB) and “very least of all the saints” (Ephesians 3:8) the nearer they approach God (Isaiah 6:1-7) (Watson 1988 [1668]).

Another central pillar of evangelical theology—the doctrine of incarnation, that God became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth—further amplifies the evangelical religious warrant for intellectual humility. As described in the second chapter of Philippians, the doctrine of

kenosis—the self-emptying incarnation of God in the person of Jesus—calls Christ-followers to renounce privilege, practice humility, prioritize others’ interests and perspectives, and reach across difference with love in the manner of their incarnate and crucified God (Philippians 2:3-8). Evangelical research participants invariably cited the incarnation as their primary religious motivation for strategic relocation—the intentional practice of moving into disadvantaged urban contexts in order to participate with residents in projects of social empowerment and transformation (Markofski 2015a, 2015b).

Research participants also frequently invoked Jeremiah 29:7 (NASB): “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.” Beyond presaging Tocqueville’s doctrine of enlightened self-interest, this passage and others like it have shaped urban evangelical community activists’ pursuit of collaborative solutions to public problems for decades (Bakke 1997, Lupton 2005, Markofski 2015b, Perkins 2007, Sider, Perkins, Gordon, and Tizon 2008). “What does the Lord require,” ask the prophets (Micah 6:8)? “To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” For urban evangelical community activists, this involves working alongside “people of good will” across the social, political, and religious spectrum for the common good of one’s city, neighborhood, or nation. For God causes the “sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust alike” (Matthew 5:45, NLT). In this view, the goodness of God, God’s creation, and God’s kingdom extend beyond the boundaries of the individual believer or church to include all people, all nations, the entire cosmos. As such, to quote one evangelical community leader in Portland—“all truth is God’s truth”—regardless of whether it is spoken by a Hindu, a Muslim, an atheist, or a liberal Episcopalian. Finally, seeking the welfare of one’s city

or nation involves loving one's enemies (Matthew 5:44), and, "if it is possible, as far as it depends on you," to "live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18).

These evangelical doctrines of sin, the fall, repentance, incarnation, *kenosis*, creation, the common good, and the nature of God's kingdom and character constitute a set of powerful and authoritative religious resources supporting evangelical practices of social reflexivity and intellectual humility across difference and disagreement in the public arena. Moreover, these doctrines and traditions of biblical interpretation are not foreign or peripheral to the beliefs and practices of mainstream American evangelicalism; rather, they are central pillars of traditional evangelical belief and self-understanding.

We see these endogenous cultural resources being put into practice in Neighborhood Partners' appropriation and framing of asset-based community development strategies of public engagement in theological terms, practices that routinely exemplified pluralist understandings of intellectual humility in public life. For example, prior to their weekly "community listening" ventures in the "other Portland," Neighborhood Partners staff subversively led outreach groups through a Bible study based on Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:26-40) to encourage them to engage people by "listening before speaking" and looking to "hear the voice of God" through the people and settings they encountered. Neighborhood Partners staff also discouraged groups from proselytizing during these outings, both verbally during the Bible study discussion and textually on the study guide given to each participant: "We're asking you to practice listening tonight. Because we believe our natural tendency is to speak before we've really listened well, we're asking that for tonight, you really resist the urge to TELL." Neighborhood Partners staff and volunteers frequently admonished their fellow evangelicals to "*discover* the gospel *in* their

neighborhoods,” rather thinking of themselves as “*bringing the gospel to their neighborhoods*” (emphases original).

These activities were supported by a robust theological framing that creatively rooted asset-based community development principles in core evangelical doctrines. In addition to day-long ABCD workshops for secular and religious non-profits, neighborhood residents, and city officials, Neighborhood Partners offered 12-18-month hands-on education and coaching experiences for churches as part of its School of Neighborhood Transformation. Each phase of these Neighborhood Transformation Courses began with teaching on the theological underpinnings of core asset-based community development practices.³

In the first phase participants learned that Christian public engagement ought to be marked by a spirit and practice “relational reciprocity” which reflects how “true relationship affirms the value and contribution of the other.” This principle was justified theologically based on an orthodox evangelical understanding of Trinitarian theology, which establishes “relational precedence and harmony” as constitutive of the very nature of God and thus also a regulative principle for legitimate evangelical public engagement. Not just a matter of cognition or belief, course participants learned that Trinitarian theology also called evangelicals to “affective heart change,” from fearful isolation and triumphalism to “togetherness and humility” with diverse social others.

Phase two focused on the core ABCD principle of “searching for assets,” which involves “finding the latent assets in every neighborhood and person.” Rather than describing people or communities first in terms of their problems or deficits as defined by external actors and authorities, asset-based community development begins with a search for the positive “gifts of

³ The following quotes come from a 1-page brochure describing each phase of the school.

head, hands, and heart” that are assumed to exist within every person, community, neighborhood, or situation—Christian or not. Neighborhood Partners evangelicals rooted this principle theologically in an evangelical understanding of the “*missio Dei*,” or mission of God, interpreted as a “love motivated search for people” initiated by God and imitated (*imitatio Christi*) by his followers. Proper understanding of the *missio Dei* required an “affective heart change” from judgmental moral and religious superiority to that of “loving search.”

In phase three, course participants learn about “collaborated solutions” enabled by “facilitating a culture of mutually discovered” problem-solving and collective action. Neighborhood Partners staff rooted this principle in the “*imago Dei*,” the evangelical doctrine that all people are sacred and made in the image of God, which carries the implication that “God [is] in everyone inside and outside the church.” The affective heart change motivated by the *imago Dei* and facilitated by the search for collaborative solutions to social problems is the unconditional “hope and dignity” of all people, no matter their religious, moral, economic, racial, or social status.

The principle of “relocation,” the focus of phase four of the Neighborhood Transformation Course, encourages evangelicals toward “moving out of our comfort zone to become *of* the other.” As discussed above, the evangelical doctrine of “incarnation,” God’s own “sacrificial identification with the Other” in Jesus Christ, provides the theological warrant for the practice of relocation. Beyond mere physical or cognitive relocation, incarnation calls for an affective heart change toward “sacrifice and being OF the Other (sic)” in a spirit of radical solidarity and self-abdication.

Finally, in the fifth phase, course participants explore “social justice,” which requires “advocating for equity” in the public and political arenas. Evangelical commitment to social

justice is predicated on God's desire for "shalom"—Hebrew for peace or flourishing—as exemplified in the "prophetic kingdom culture" described in the gospels and Hebrew prophetic tradition found in the major and minor prophets of the Hebrew Bible or Christian Old Testament (Gorski 2017). For the evangelical follower of Christ, pursuing shalom through social justice activism requires an affective heart change that seeks justice and social "righteousness for ALL (sic)," not just one's own family, tribe, self, community, or nation.

Neighborhood Partners' School of Neighborhood Transformation demonstrates how evangelical religious convictions can provide powerful and authoritative endogenous cultural resources for grounding evangelical practices of intellectual humility in public life. This is true regardless of which particular aspect of IH pluralism one might choose to focus on: whether not being overly impressed with oneself and one's beliefs (Garcia 2006, Roberts and Woods 2003, 2007), or seeking opportunities to challenge one's presuppositions and learn from other perspectives (Hazlett 2015, King and Kitchner 2004), or disrupting in-group and self-centered thinking and bias for more other-centered thinking and learning (Dunning et al. 2005; Guenther and Alicke, 2010, Samuelsen et al. n.d., Sedikides and Gregg, 2008), or the practice of transposable reflexivity across different types of difference. Each of these practices finds warrant in core particularistic religious convictions of American evangelicals; my research suggests these convictions are sometimes put into effective practice when evangelicals enter the public arena.

None of these religious convictions are grounded in secular reason or universally accessible language, but they are no less effective for that. In fact, if the role of motivation in debiasing thought is as important as the psychological literature suggests (Chaiken, Wood, and Eagly 1996, Dunning, Leuenberger, and Sherman 1995, Kunda 1990, Samuelson et al. 2002,

Wilson, Centerbar, and Brekke 2002), we might expect particularistic religious convictions to be more effective at persuading religious individuals and communities to practice intellectual humility across difference in public life than secular reasons, given the powerful emotional, social, and cognitive functions religion plays in the lives of many religious believers and communities. For them at least, insisting that the practice of intellectual humility be grounded in secular reason or universally accessible language may undercut the very motivations for debiasing thought and practicing transposable reflexivity across difference that proponents of ethical democracy must look to encourage in order to achieve their aims of a more egalitarian, participatory, pluralist, reasonable, and inclusive political and civic order in the United States.

A CASE STUDY IN INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY AND RELIGIOUS CONVICTION: BUDDHIST-EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE ACROSS CULTURE WAR LINES

In 2003, an African American woman named Kendra James was shot and killed by a white police officer in Portland, OR, sparking outrage and protests across the city's African American community. Black pastors and churchgoers were heavily involved in the protests and public meetings held in the aftermath of the shooting, demanding to know, "When will a black woman's blood be viewed as being the same value as a white man's?" (Metzger 2006). In response to the unrest, the Portland Police Department partnered with the National Conference for Community and Justice to create a series of dialogue circles involving law enforcement officials and religious leaders representing different faith traditions. One of the religious leaders invited to these dialogues was Dr. Paul Metzger, a white evangelical theologian and seminary professor of influence in greater Portland's surprisingly robust white evangelical community. Another was Kyogen Carlson, a Buddhist priest and guide of a prominent Zen Buddhist center in

Portland.⁴ Paul found the discussions “enlightening” and “provoking,” as they addressed “a long history of racial tensions in Portland, even though I think many in the white Christian community are seemingly unaware of this.” It was in this context that Paul first met Kyogen, along with other Jewish, Buddhist, black Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Catholic faith leaders from the greater Portland area.

These discussions unfolded over the course of 2003 and 2004, coinciding with the contentious 2004 presidential election campaign which saw George W. Bush re-elected in part due to his support for the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). At the same time, Oregon voters were debating Ballot Measure 36, which amended the state constitution to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman before it was ruled unconstitutional in 2014. Kyogen’s left-liberal Zen Buddhist center included many LGBTQ+ persons disturbed by Bush’s re-election, the passage of DOMA and Ballot Measure 36, and the apparent “Religious Right takeover of America” (Metzger 2006). Paul’s conservative evangelical community largely supported Bush, DOMA, and Ballot Measure 36. In this context of “intensifying culture war tensions in Oregon and Portland” (Paul, interview), Kyogen reached out to Paul “since we’d already known one another from this other conflict” and “asked me if we could come try and build greater understanding” between their respective religious communities:

My friend was deeply troubled by the anger and fear in his own community concerning the religious and political divisions locally and nationally. ... He hoped that we could work together—beginning in our own religious communities—to build mutual understanding and to foster civil discourse. I was struck by my friend’s insight into the

⁴ Paul Metzger and the late Kyogen Carlson are not pseudonyms but rather published authors and public figures. In interviews Paul requested for his real name to be used; Kyogen passed away in 2014.

anger, fear, and pain, not only of his own community, but also of mine, which the warring sides incite and inflict on one another through their overcharged and oversimplified rhetoric (Metzger 2006:57).

After several months of one-on-one conversations, Kyogen and Paul initiated a series of “town-hall-like meetings” aimed at providing a “safe haven ... to encounter one another” across deep political, religious, and racial divides, “beyond what [we] stereotypically see read and see and hear of one another from the headline news” (Metzger 2006:58-59). Over the course of nine months, evangelical and Buddhist lay persons met for a series of “dinnertime discussions” and a weekend retreat to—in the words of one participant—“chip away at the wall of separation and better understand the ‘other’” (Sater and Farlow 2006:71). The communities continued to meet periodically for over a decade, including a weekend retreat held a few days before I interviewed Paul and several other current evangelical participants in the Buddhist-Evangelical dialogue.

It is not particularly surprising or noteworthy for secular and interfaith religious leaders to pursue “mutual understanding and to foster civil discourse” through interfaith dialogue. It is somewhat more surprising and noteworthy for white conservative evangelicals to be involved in such dialogue. However, the real interest of this case lies in the way Kyogen, Paul, and their respective communities practiced intellectual humility across difference on the basis of particularistic and often incommensurate religious convictions. As Paul put it, the discussions pursued mutual understanding and civil discourse by “going through our convictions, not around them. Not stopping short, but going through them.” Paul found the discussions “much more enriching and meaningful” because of Kyogen and the Zen Buddhist community’s willingness to “engage *through* our distinctives (sic)” rather than pursuing “this kind of namelessness approach,

you know, some kind of vacuous middle space” that avoided the existence of real and deeply contentious difference and disagreement.

For Paul and his evangelical coreligionists, the discussions raised a crucial question about evangelical engagement across difference in America’s pluralist, democratic public sphere, namely, “How can the [evangelical] Christian community engage in authentic dialogue in search of the mutuality so necessary for civil society and yet remain true to the particular truth claims of Christian faith?” (Metzger 2006:51). Why seek mutual understanding and solidarity across difference in the public arena? Why treat diverse or antagonistic “others” with compassion? Paul found his own answer in a “Trinitarian model of authentic dialogue” according to which “the Christian community is called and enabled to pursue mutuality *because of* the particularity of Trinitarian faith” (Metzger 2006:51, emphasis original). In this view, authentic Trinitarian faith compels evangelicals to exemplify the “compassionate suffering of Christ” in their interactions with the “other,” which can “create[s] space for dialogue, fostering and nurturing the beloved community” (Metzger 2006:56). Metzger finds in black civil rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr. and John M. Perkins models of Trinitarian faith in public practice:

In contrast to secularist historiography, which sees the beloved community program as a “secular movement that used religion to its advantage” (Marsh 2005), King’s vision of beloved community in which all people are one “was theologically specific: beloved community as the realization of [Trinitarian] divine love lived in social relation” (Metzger 2006:54).

Trinitarian faith points evangelicals toward “non-coercive” modes of public engagement that “does not compel worship or acceptance of its vision; rather, it embodies it” (Metzger 2006:53). The cruciform pattern of Trinitarian faith compels faithful evangelicals to recognize that, “Like

Jesus before them, they gain political influence by losing it (John 12:24)” (Metzger 2006:55). At the same time, however, as King and Perkins demonstrate, Trinitarian faith also “supplies a fitting arsenal for resisting the enemies of justice [in this case Christian white supremacists] through Christ’s compelling sacrificial love” (Metzger 2006:54).

In his Trinitarian model of authentic dialogue and public engagement, Metzger grounds the evangelical practice of intellectual humility across difference in particularistic religious convictions rather than secular reason and political philosophy. The antidote to pathological expressions of public religion represented by the extreme religious right and other varieties of ethnoreligious nationalism is not secularism but rather better, more faithful religion:

The Religious Right could benefit greatly from reflecting upon Trinitarian orthodoxy and its accompanying practices, such as the compassionate suffering of Christ, King, and Perkins. Jesus did not marginalize liberals and lesbians, but instead identified with those that the dominant culture marginalized. ... King and Perkins would not limit the beloved community to Christians. Nor would they say Christians alone aspire to compassionate forms of existence. For example, the Zen Buddhist tradition resonates with Perkin’s particular brand of Evangelical Christian faith illustrated above. Both forms of faith affirm compassionate existence, patient acceptance, and identification with the other. Such communities should come together in solidarity in the present hour (Metzger 2006:56).

Benefiting from experiences of sustained reciprocal contact with black and Buddhist Americans under conditions of relative equality (Allport 1954, Anderson 2010, Pettigrew and Tropp 2006), Metzger discovered a rich trove of resources supporting the practice of transposable reflexivity and intellectual humility across difference in the public arena from within his own religious

tradition and particularistic religious convictions, while also finding points of convergence between his own tradition and others.

Other participants gave different answers to the question of “why a Buddhist would desire to sit and eat with a Christian, and why a Christian would desire to sit across the table from a Buddhist?” (Sater and Farlow 2006:71). On the evangelical side, participants saw sharing meals and conversation with left-liberal Buddhists as an opportunity to “live the love of Christ” by “becoming involved with them in a loving relationship” (Sater and Farlow 2006:73). They contrasted such an approach with one motivated by “purely apologetic reasons, as an opportunity to prove that Buddhism is wrong and Christianity is right, hoping all the while to notch another mark upon their belt of winning souls” (Sater and Farlow 2006:73). Though the dinner discussions revealed “many areas of disagreement,” evangelical participants resisted urges to focus on “winning arguments” or “proving others right or wrong,” focusing instead on building “beautiful friendships,” “irenic communion,” and in the spirit of St. Francis, “seek[ing] not so much to be understood, as to understand” (Sater and Farlow 2006:74).

Zen Buddhist participants welcomed the opportunity to dine and dialogue with those “standing on opposite side of the battle line in a war for our country and culture” for different reasons, “even though, as a concept, it seemed counter-intuitive and intellectually and morally distasteful,” under the assumption that “someone who believes [what evangelicals believe] can’t possibly be loving, intelligent, kind, spiritual, flexible, interesting, moral, etc.” (Sater and Farlow 2006:71):

Within our dialogue group, we had very real, very charged differences. Members of our group truly believe homosexuality is a sin, and one of the members our group is a proud homosexual in a long-term, committed relationship. Members of our group believe

abortion is murder, and one of our members had gone through two abortions with his wife. ... At one point a Christian I had grown fond of and considered my friend looked me straight in the eye and said with a smile, “Yes, according to our belief you are going to hell. Sorry about that.” We both laughed as I said, “Well, that’s OK; according to our thinking you may be lucky enough to get it right in the next life (Sater and Farlow 2006:72).

“Finding the Buddha-nature in such ‘others’” turned out to be a “powerful affirmation of my faith” for some participants:

Buddhism (as opposed to secular, social liberalism) teaches the following. People are, by nature, good. All beings are seeking happiness and trying to avoid suffering. If they do harmful things, it is because of ignorance. Ultimately, everything and everyone is interdependent—no separation. Ultimately, there is no “other.” ... Deepening my wisdom and challenging my ignorance is also part of my vow as a Buddhist; so it is natural I should seek an even deeper, personal conviction of this worldview (Sater and Farlow 2006:71).

Others spoke of how the discussions “deepened their own appreciation for how profoundly the *Dharma* operates in the world” (Sater 2005:7).

Zen Buddhist priest Kyogen Carlson invoked Buddhist understandings of *sangha*, karma, and mandala as warrants for the practice of intellectual humility and solidarity across difference. *Sangha*, or community, “one of the three jewels of refuge in Buddhism,” compels Buddhists to recognize that “all wounds are our own”—including those inflicted by the “outrageous,” “unreasonable,” “rhetorical extremes” taken up by culture warriors on both left and right (Carlson 2006:64-66). “For Buddhists, community is sacred,” and Carlson found in *sangha*

motivation to “keep working to enlarge the way I think of *sangha* and community to include everyone” (Carlson 2006:66). Sharing his dialogue experience at a conference whose audience consisted mostly of white conservative evangelicals, Carlson affirmed, “I do feel that all of you are part of my larger community, and I hope we can heal the wounds we share” (Carlson 2006:66). This perspective, that “we are all of one community, one body,” is represented by the symbol of the mandala:

In our tradition we speak of aggregates, things that form a whole, as a mandala. . . . For Buddhists, the universe is a mandala; the earth is a mandala; countries, cities, and communities such as church congregations, even families, can all be seen as mandalas. Through this perspective, we realize that what is done to one part of a mandala is done to the whole (Carlson 2006:62).

Rather than oscillating angrily between a “left-right divide” pitting “standards” or “accountability” on one (right) side of the balance and “compassion” or “tolerance” on the other (left) side, the mandala encourages us to seek balance between these positions while recognizing both are necessary parts of a larger whole (Carlson 2006:62-63). Rather than asking of culture war pathologies and wounds, “who started it, and whose fault is it?”, the Buddhist view that “karma is beginningless” shifts our focus from past blame to present action, for “although we do not know how it started, we can vow stop it” (Carlson 2006:65).

In addition to ongoing Buddhist-Evangelical dinner discussions, Kyogen and Paul’s collaboration spilled over into other initiatives, including a conference in the aftermath of the bruising 2004 election season titled “Building Beloved Community: Calling for an End to the Culture Wars” hosted at the evangelical Multnomah Biblical Seminary in Portland. Along with keynote talks by Paul and Kyogen, the conference featured a self-described secular humanist

author and former director of the Oregon Council for the Humanities, a journalist from a leading secular left-liberal periodical who wrote a viral hit piece on Portland's evangelical community, two white male evangelical professors from Wheaton and Multnomah Bible College, a female Unitarian Universalist pastor, a female black conservative Protestant radio host, a best-selling white male evangelical author, and several other participants in the Buddhist-Evangelical dinner discussion series. Each of these speakers discussed the importance of seeking mutual understanding and civil discourse across difference and disagreement in public arena for the health of American democracy and society, but did so on different grounds.

For white and black conservative Protestant speakers, the question, "how do we work together, not going around our worldviews, but through them?" was paramount (Harper 2006:16). One solution, the move to a "secular public square" which demands that "religion should not enter public discourse" and "we leave all our worldviews behind when we enter the public square," was deemed at turns "naïve," "ludicrous," and "not helpful" (Harper 2006:16). Instead, we must "reject stereotypes and straw man arguments" while searching for "common ground options" that allow diverse individuals and communities to "work together for the good of our city ... without either one demanding that the other give up his basic worldview in the process (sic)" (Harper 2006:15-16).

But why and how does one actually do this? How can we learn to "get along" across deep religious, racial, and cultural divides, "not just in the sense of getting through life and putting up with each other, but rather in accepting one another's differences, agreeing to disagree, and respecting each other's right to be wrong?" (Rice 2006:41). Gospel singer and radio talk show host Georgene Rice leveraged her "outsider within" (Collins 1986) perspective

to address the challenges of pursuing intellectual humility and solidarity across difference in the American public arena:

As an African American, I have the advantage of observing the cultural divide from a unique vantage point—as both an outsider and an insider. ... As a 21st century African American, I find that I have been given an assigned place. ... I believe this is a microcosm of what we are seeing on a much larger scale across the cultural milieu. We overlook the complexity of the individual in favor of a more monolithic group approach. This tendency to oversimplify our neighbor and what he or she might believe makes “getting along” a much greater challenge. ... The truth is, I know very little about you until I abandon my presumptions and we sit down and have a real conversation (Rice 2006:41-42).

Rice’s discussion of how the shape of her religious convictions informed practices of intellectual humility and civil discourse across difference and disagreement is particularly instructive and worth quoting at length:

As a Christian, my faith informs my worldview. And while I am no authority on the subject of “getting along,” there are several things from my faith tradition that I have found helpful as I navigate the cultural divide.

The first is not to think more highly of myself than I ought. As a serious follower of Christ, I have been made aware of my natural tendency—my *sinful* natural tendency—to think far too much of myself and far too little of others. If I am to be true to my faith, I must purposefully abandon that tendency and deliberately consider the value of others as equal to my own. ...

Secondly, I have learned from my faith tradition to esteem others more highly than myself. I have to admit this is a very difficult thing to do. In a culture that emphasizes self-esteem over virtually everything else, esteeming others more highly than oneself requires sacrifice. Sacrifice is not a popular idea in the 21st century. But it is not an option for the follower of Christ. So, what does it mean to esteem others? It means demonstrating a genuine concern for the interests of others and recognizing another's value, regardless of their worldview. It means not always having to have the last word. It means personal sacrifice.

Thirdly, for those of us who are committed to navigating the cultural divide I believe it is vital that we decide not to be easily offended. We can choose to be patient to our opponent, to listen before we speak, and to temper our response. We will very likely disagree on a number of things—both profound and small things—but we can choose not to be easily offended. And when we are offended, we can learn to manage that offense in a way that allows us to live together civilly. That kind of civility requires listening with the intent to understand particularly those with whom we disagree. ... In fact, the Gospel urges the Christian to be slow to speak and quick to listen. ...

Fourthly, we need to practice humility, which is a major feature of the Christian faith. We need to be humble when we're right and humble when we're wrong. Humility means that you admit your fault and purpose not to repeat your mistake. ... Is it possible to disagree and yet have respect for your opponent? I think the answer is yes. In fact, I

know the answer is yes. But it requires humility, a willingness to admit mistakes, and the intent to resolve conflicts quickly. We need to acknowledge our tendencies to want to be right all the time, to stick with the familiar, and to be defensive. We need to be flexible, willing to adjust our presuppositions. And we need to respect our opponent's right to disagree and be heard.

If we are to “get along” in the 21st century we must not assume that we are superior to our opponent, but recognize that we are of equal value and each has a right to be heard. We must recognize that winning isn't everything, and certainly not winning at any cost. Be prepared to live civilly and with the consequence of that loss. We're called to be countercultural in the Christian tradition, not hostile (Rice 2006:43-45).

Here we have many of the core theological doctrines of evangelical faith discussed in the previous section—sin, the fall, forgiveness, loving sacrifice, the gospel, self-critique, *imago Dei*, *imitatio Christi*, and more—mobilized to motivate and justify the practice of intellectual humility, solidarity, and civility across deep difference and disagreement (Brubaker 2015, Inazu 2016) in the public arena.

Conference participants noted that “getting along” in this sense does not mean that there is no place for “justified anger” (Gee 2013) or emotionally heated conflict in public discourse, for sometimes “anger helps preserve our integrity and self-regard” (Nichols quoted in Baxter 2006:31) while also providing necessary fuel for the difficult work of political activism and social change (Wood 2018). Rather, the important distinction to be made regarding justified anger, intellectual humility, and civility—as many wise community organizers and activists know—is “not between emotion and reason but between uncontrolled action and deliberate

action” (Nichols quoted in Baxter 2006:31), or between the “hot anger” of spontaneous reactivity and the “cold anger” of strategic social action (Rogers 1990).

The evangelicals and Buddhists who participated in the dinners, dialogues, and retreats organized by a popular evangelical theologian and Zen Buddhist priest did so for different reasons, reasons rooted in their particular faith traditions and religious convictions. They understood themselves to be creating a different sort of public space than that dominated by culture war politics and media technologies designed to exaggerate and amplify distrust and animosity towards religious, political, cultural, and racial “others”:

We need to partner with others to recreate and cultivate again civic practices such as town-hall meeting places where everyone’s voice can be heard. This historic enterprise has been missing from the current political and cultural landscape, driven away by the mass-market, mass media, individualism, and non-local virtual spaces of many internet chat rooms and competing blogs. We cannot afford to write one another off, nor allow the mass media to oversimplify respective movements and over-dramatize the differences ... Beginning with these town-hall-like meetings involving our respective faith communities, we have begun to move toward the creation of more complex public spaces than simply the state or market to inhabit (Metzger 2006:56, 58).

Building such “complex public spaces” requires more than ongoing commitment to dialogue and mutual understanding across difference—important as these practices are. It also requires a willingness to respectfully and reflexively *challenge* and *critique* one another’s perspectives, traditions, and commitments while allowing others to do the same to our own (Dillon 2010, Habermas 2006, Metzger 2006, Wood and Fulton 2015).

This is no easy task. Such a commitment involves moving beyond “mutual understanding” to “mutual persuasion,” the only way to combine “mutuality and particularity” in “authentic dialogue” (Metzger 2006). Kyogen and Paul found motivation and justification (Vaisey 2009) to pursue this task in their particularistic religious convictions, while also finding points of overlap and convergence in their respective traditions that could positively anchor communication and solidarity in the midst of deep difference:

For true mutuality to exist, we must seek after mutual persuasion. Neither Christians nor those from other persuasions have all that it takes. All of us are broken. And so, we should seek to persuade one another to go beyond where we currently are. We should also invite the society at large, secularist and non-secularist alike, to go there with us. While the Zen priest and I view the transcendent differently, our respective views on compassion help us affirm one another’s dignity and show one another respect. ... We may not persuade one another to become Buddhists or Christians. But we are persuading one another to go more deeply into our respective traditions in view of what we learn from one another in search of sources that will advance further a compassionate form of shared existence (Metzger 2006:57-58).

For Paul and Kyogen, Buddhist and Christian convictions about compassion provided shared grounds for mutual respect and solidarity in the midst of deep difference and mutual attempts at persuasion while acknowledging that persuasion has limits even as it is necessary for learning and growth (Dewey 1997 [1938], Habermas 2006). Paul’s encounter with Kyogen and the Zen Buddhist community pushed him “more deeply into his respective tradition,” in which he found new language and motivation for “compassion to come out of the corner and into the center” of

evangelical public and political engagement, “impacting our rhetoric and particular engagement of the other for the sake of building a civil society and world for all” (Metzger 2006:57).

CONCLUSION

This case study in Buddhist-Evangelical dialogue—along with Neighborhood Partners’ community development strategies and the transposable or segmented reflexivity practiced by individual and collective evangelical actors the country—demonstrate empirically how the particularistic religious convictions of evangelical Christians and others can sustain practices of intellectual humility across difference in the public arena. Religious conviction and intellectual humility are not mutually exclusive dispositions, nor do they always point to antagonistic or incommensurate practices. This combination of religious conviction and intellectual humility may take different forms. Religious actors may practice transposable reflexivity with respect religious and other forms of knowledge, or they may practice segmented reflexivity that shields religious knowledge from critique while encouraging self-criticism, flexibility, and adaption with respect to racial, economic, or political difference and disagreement. I have focused on cases involving evangelical Christians and highlighted core theological resources that authoritatively warrant evangelical practices of intellectual humility on particularistic religious grounds. However, as demonstrated by the Zen Buddhist community engaged in interfaith dialogue with conservative evangelicals, other religious traditions have their own endogenous resources capable of grounding the practice of intellectual humility in its various forms.

This is true even in the most seemingly unlikely cases. It is no secret that white conservative evangelicals in the United States have a history of opposing science and secular reason while dealing in racial, religious, cultural, gender, and sexuality-based discrimination and

paranoia that has often undermined the practice of intellectual humility and civility across difference in the public arena (Balmer et al. 2017, Emerson and Smith 2000, Hunter 1987, 1991, Lichtman 2008, Marsden 2006, Tranby and Hartmann 2008). While much of this history has perhaps less to do with the substantive content of evangelical faith than with material self-interest and cultural self-preservation (Gorski 2016, Wald, Owen, and Hill 1989), it remains that the evangelical faith tradition—and the biblical and theological sources on which it rests—is multivocal. Just as there are resources supporting the practice of social reflexivity and intellectual humility across difference in the evangelical tradition, so there are resources with potential to undermine such practices.

For example, it is widely noted that dominant expressions of the white American evangelical tradition have an anti-intellectual activist bent, often resulting in evangelical social movements and collective action strategies that fail to account for nuance, complexity, lack of expertise, and unintended consequences or harms to others (Noll 1995, Perry 2017). This ‘shoot first and ask questions later’ approach facilitates fast and flexible mass mobilization of passionate religious individuals around a wide variety of religious, social, and political causes; however, it also results in recurring waves of ill-conceived, short-lived, and inflexible collective action strategies that fail to attain movement goals (Emerson and Smith 2000, Markofski 2018, Perry 2017).

In these ways, white American evangelical populism often blocks, rather than supports, the practice of social reflexivity and intellectual humility across difference in public life. Pietistic “evangelical vocabularies of motive” (Perry 2017) are brandished as shields, blocking collaboration and learning from “the world” and across difference. Doctrines of biblical literalism and infallibility are brandished as swords, cutting down alternative religious and

secular sources of knowledge. Moreover, evangelical groups and organizations are often more concerned with policing subcultural identity boundaries than solving collective problems or building bridges across difference (Perry 2017, Smith 1998). This combative, self-righteous style of public engagement also mitigates the practice of intellectual humility and social reflexivity across difference. At their worst, conservative white evangelical readings of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures have been used to justify slavery and segregation (Emerson and Smith 2000, Marsh 2008), gender- and sexuality-based violence and discrimination (Griffith 1997, 2017), and militant strains of “blood and soil” religious nationalism throughout U.S. history (Gorski 2017).

However, because the pathologies of non-reflexive religion and ethnoreligious nationalism are so well-documented, this paper explores a different side of evangelical public engagement, the side in which particularistic religious convictions provide support for social reflexivity, solidarity, and civility amidst deep difference. Such practices are desperately needed in an age of rising inequality, distrust, polarization, and political dysfunction (Gorski 2017, Hunter 1994, Stout 2010, Wood and Fulton 2015). They are also widely supported by authoritative evangelical theological doctrines and interpretations of scripture. In addition to advancing empirical knowledge of oft-overlooked expressions of American evangelical public engagement, this choice is motivated by considerations raised in normative democratic theory. Rather than defining intellectual humility and democratic discourse in purely secularist terms and placing unnecessary, unproductive, and unethical expectations on religious citizens to leave their faith at the door of the public square, ethical democracy is better served by recognizing the contributions particularistic religious convictions can make toward improving the state of the art of democratic discourse and public deliberation the U.S. and around the world (Gorski 2017,

Gorski, Kim, Torpey, and VanAntwerpen 2012, Habermas 2006, 2008, Neuhaus 1984, Wood and Fulton 2015).

In this paper, I have laid out the contours of a reflexive evangelicalism capable of meeting the challenges of ethical democracy in a post-secular age. Drawing on original ethnographic data and textual analysis, I have described core particularistic religious convictions capable of grounding evangelical practices of intellectual humility, and chronicled how they are being put into practice by evangelical actors in the public arena. More generally, this paper argues that strong, particularistic religious convictions do not always or necessarily equate to narrow-minded dogmatism and unreasonableness in public life; rather, they can also be sources of social reflexivity and intellectual humility across deep difference and disagreement. If the argument is sound, this paper joins other recent work challenging scholars and citizens alike to move beyond anachronistic assumptions of secular-religious antagonism and incommensurability and toward increased efforts at intellectual humility and civility as we encounter one another in democratic deliberation, discourse, and struggle in public life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Carleton College Humanities Center, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, and the Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellowship funded by the Religion Division of Lilly Endowment. Thanks to Ruth Braunstein, Michael Lynch, and participants in the “Religious Conviction and Intellectual Humility in Public Life” workshop at the University of Connecticut Humanities Institute, and to Annette Nierobisz, Ross Elflin, Palmar Álvarez-Blanco, Anna Moltchanova, Juliane Schicker, Kathryn Wegner, and *PPST* reviewers for many helpful comments on earlier versions.

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