## Practicing imagination: Reinvesting in religious tradition amidst popular culture

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Mary Hess Boston College (<u>hessma@bc.edu</u>) This paper is in some ways more of an exploration than it is a paper, because I am most interested in sharing some of my questions with you, rather than stating a definitive thesis. I hope that you will have new resources to suggest to me, new ideas of how to pursue these questions fruitfully. I want to begin by introducing myself a bit, and telling you something of how my research has progressed so far.

From whence I come...

I am an adjunct faculty member at Boston College's Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry. I am responsible there for on line distance education, and for efforts to think about media education in the context of religious education. I also direct a small research project, the "Religious Education and Challenge of Media Culture" project (more information available at: <a href="http://www.bc.edu/bc\_org/avp/acavp/irepm/challenge/mrcsource.html">http://www.bc.edu/bc\_org/avp/acavp/irepm/challenge/mrcsource.html</a>), that is a collaboration with a large ethnographic study taking place at the University of Colorado, Boulder. The UC-Boulder study is observing how people use the various kinds of media present in their lives to help them make sense of their lives, to "make meaning", sometimes – many times – in ways that religious institutions used to help people to do so.

In these contexts I have spent a lot of time exploring how mass mediated popular culture shapes religious experiencing, and thinking about how, if at all, it ought to be a part of religious education. Since Boston College is a Jesuit institution, and since my own faith community is that of the Roman Catholic church, most of my observations in this essay will speak from that location. I hope that what I have to offer might be evocative beyond that location, but I

certainly don't assume that it is. I also write from a consciously feminist perspective, and from an urban perspective lived out in a diverse city neighborhood. I share these "markers" with you as a way to suggest that I am situated in a very particular place, and trying to speak to and from that place.

Media literacy in religious education...

That said, let me turn to a brief summary of the work I've done so far. My dissertation research project was a participatory action study that engaged a group of religious educators in the study and implementation of a specific media literacy curriculum developed for Catholic educators by the Center for Media. What we learned in that project began with the recognition that we live in a commercial and mass-mediated world that we encounter daily. If there was a surprising finding from this study, it was that people have encounters with transcendence even in the midst of highly commodified, mass-media permeated texts — through television shows, for instance, or in film and video. Turning those encounters into something more than simple emotional "sense" of transcendence, however, required that people move beyond an isolated enjoyment of mass mediated popular culture into a collaborative, critical dialogue with it. In our research, the most fruitful such dialogues occurred when people from very different perspectives were engaging the same "text," when there was, quite clearly, some element of "difference" or "otherness" present in the conversation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This is a finding that is supported by the more extensive work of the "Common Fire" project, a description of which can be found in *Common fire*: Lives of commitment in a complex world, by Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks. Boston: Beacon Press. 1996

Transformative religious education which utilized popular culture texts also involved bringing that newly awakened consciousness into conversation with a specific religious tradition, and even more importantly, into embeddedness in specific religious practices. It is this final step of the process, the connection to religious practice, that is where my questions well up. My dissertation suggests that using media literacy tools in religious education is one element that can be very helpful.<sup>2</sup> Yet one of the more important questions the dissertation left unanswered is how religious *liturgical* practice could or should engage popular culture. Yet it is liturgical practice, or at least ritual practice, that emerges from communication studies as a critical element. My hunch is that we should be more concerned with the way we practice liturgy, than with how to include pop culture within it. More on that in a moment.

Moving from trucks delivering messages to ritual...

The research I've done in collaboration with the University of Colorado team has supported the conclusions we came to in the dissertation project. The Colorado team has begun to describe in ethnographic terms the profound meaning-making that is going on in people's lives in relation to mass mediated popular culture. Yet problematic aspects of some of that meaning-making are also clear, particularly the ways in which popular culture flattens

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> I don't have the space here to explain this finding, but you can read my dissertation at www2.bc.edu/~hessma/diss.html. I concluded that religious educators ought to be using media literacy tools to engage popular culture within religious education in at least three ways: 1) as a way into "conscientization" about contemporary contexts, 2) as elements within a process of discerning transcendence in everyday venues, and 3) as a way to uncover/discover shared themes and questions that provide evocative access into traditional religious practices.

religious symbols, provides distorted representations of human-being, and constricts the ways in which people see themselves and each other.

Among other findings, their research suggests that religious communities are no longer the primary context in which people are making sense of their lives, and that religious symbols are no longer solely "owned" by the communities in which they arose. My piece of that project, working with practitioners, suggests that the stance religious educators in particular need to take is a much more open and improvisational one than before. We can no longer rely on people being socialized within religious institutional cultures. Instead people are coming to their sense of themselves – as selves, in relation to other selves, in relation to God – in contexts that are often very distant from religious institutions.

Some religious educators have responded to that shift primarily by focussing ever more desperately on "content." Many people have tried, within the Roman Catholic community, for instance, to articulate doctrine ever more clearly and simplistically (a concern that complicates the use of our new universal catechism). Many people have tried to get people to ignore various kinds of popular culture content, to boycott specific films, or to "buy into" self-consciously "Christian" media (the Chatham Hill foundation, for example, has widely distributed a video entitled "Hollywood vs. Catholicism" that directly advocates film boycotts).

What the University of Colorado team is learning, however, in findings that are supported by an emerging consensus of communications scholars focussing on cultural issues, is that our previous understandings of how mass media work are clearly outdated and no longer very descriptive. Whereas older models of communication relied on what could be termed the "message delivery" model, newer research is suggesting that a ritual model makes

more sense. Rather than seeing mass media as a vast system of trucks for delivering pre-packaged messages that are simply received as cargo by passive recipients, these scholars are suggesting that people engage mass media in a variety of often very complex ways.

Mass media are perhaps better understood as elements of our cultural surround, places, if you will, from which we draw out various kinds of meanings and engage them in various ways. In this description, one way in which the mass media support our meaning-making is by providing elements of "social currency" — providing conversational raw material, for instance, and in that way building at least the perception of a common culture. The OJ Simpson case, or more recently, the Starr investigations, are examples of ways in which the media offer us images and narratives with which to project our own fears/concerns/desires into a public conversation. It is within the process of dealing with and interpreting such projections that religious educators can constructively enter into collaborative meaningmaking.

The physical contexts of mass media also have an impact on our behaviors and meaning-making. We can now bring information about a multitude of subjects into the privacy of our homes. The concern over children accessing pornography on the Internet is just one element of this process, which essentially shifts control over information from established institutions to individuals. Yet it is not simply a question of access or authority, but also of sheer physicality. More and more of our media use demands that we be drawn into an electronically mediated context in which we remain physically still for long periods of time, most often in indoor settings, thus cutting ourselves off from the full range of sensory information to be experienced in more diverse contexts. Here again, religious educators have an important

resource to offer, in our experience with alternative ways of knowing and being that have richly symbolic and sensual elements to them.

For all of these reasons, entering into and influencing meaning-making processes in our contemporary contexts, as educators have always tried to do, becomes much more a question of entering into *practices*, and less one of controlling *content*. If communication is about culture, about engaging in ritual, rather than about producing messages that are delivered, than religious educators need to learn about creating context, about supporting ritual. This is not to argue that content is not important, but rather to recognize, along with much of contemporary philosophy and humanities research, that context matters, and that meaning is heavily dependent on the context in which it is engaged.

On some level this "postmodern" description actually suggests that there are new opportunities emerging for religious communities. We know that in the past religious communities have been very adept at providing context, particularly through the embedding of specific practices within a tradition. Our deepest and most powerful resource in this postmodern context may in fact be precisely our ability to construct context, to <code>embed</code> our beliefs in ways of knowing and being that support them. Yet the wisdom of our traditions demands that we recognize that our beliefs are embedded not simply in doctrines, or other "content-oriented" frames, but rather within body postures, ritual practices, sensory experiences as well. Indeed, religious educators are learning that it is neither the experience, nor the interpretation, nor the ritual, that, by itself, are capable of awakening us to God's presence. Rather, all three are critical components.

Teaching amidst ritual...

Within the Catholic community it is painfully clear to religious educators that the central educational event in our community is the Sunday morning liturgy. I use the adjective "painfully," because in far too many instances our liturgical leadership is aware of its teaching role primarily in terms of the "word," still conceiving of education as one of delivering the proper content; and woefully unaware of the ways in which its practice of liturgy teaches, in some cases, the opposite of the content it is trying to deliver.

In the rest of this essay I'd like to think out loud about some ways of approaching liturgical practice that might provide a bridge for people who have been largely socialized within mass media environments into more historical grounded, institutionally rich religious traditions.

In order to do so, I first need to make some points about imagination, popular culture, and religious education. Imagination is the realm within which most people believe the mass media have their greatest impact. By the same token, it is also the realm most open to improvisation. On the level of common sense it is clear that mass mediated forms of entertainment provide diversion and escape. What I think is less clear, particularly within religious discourse about "the media" is any sense that there is value (let alone "values") to be had in such a space. Michael Garanzini suggests that "media presentations... contribute two things to the cauldron of children's [I would add: anyone's] moral development: narrative materials and attitudinal stance" (1994, 97). A negative characterization of the function of "escape" provided by mass mediated entertainment must in part be based on a critique of the "narrative materials," the elements of situation, character, time line, that the mass media offer; as well as any "attitudinal stance" they appear to

foster. Still, a ritual analogy for media suggests that these elements are precisely that — "raw" and "elemental" — that there is no guarantee that they have the same meaning for different people engaging them.

Indeed, how one engages a media "event" may have the same external appearance, but a radically different internal appropriation. Recent experience alone suggests that how one appropriates the information the media has provided about the Starr investigations has as much to do with one's immediate contexts and concerns, as it does with whatever the information was "on the face of it."

I think this point is important enough to my argument that I should state it again: meaning-making practice may "look" the same externally — we may all watch the same newscasts, for instance — but the conclusions we derive, the actions in which we engage as a consequence of our news consumption, may differ radically. This same point can be made in relation to liturgical practice. Certainly the reasons I would offer, as a white feminist Catholic, for my continued presence in our local parish liturgy have little in common with the reasons my elderly Dominican neighbor would offer; yet the practice, attending liturgy weekly, is the same. The ability to provide a common activity that serves widely divergent needs is part of the appeal of mass mediated communications. It can also be part of the appeal of liturgy.

If we live in a world where we believe that meaning can be controlled by the author of a message, where communications tools are simply instruments for the transmission of static messages, this kind of flexibility in internal appropriation is dangerous, subversive, impermissible for those who would control the messages — including religious institutional authorities. Yet if communications media are repositories of images, stories and other elements of meaning-making, "symbolic inventories" to use Hoover's term,

this flexibility of meaning can be an asset in a pluralistic culture. It can even be empowering to educators, for we then must grant to persons the ability to make sense of their own lives in the world and in doing so create a role for teachers: that of nurturing in people the skills and self-perceptions necessary to actively engage their contexts. This is a goal that I think liturgical practice can also facilitate. But note: here the emphasis is on *process* more than on content.<sup>3</sup>

symbol flattening and agenda setting

On the other hand, media scholars such as Hoover are also pointing to some of the media "effects" that a culturalist stance can identify. Rather than perceiving various mass media as large trucks delivering messages unchanged by the trucks, we can recognize that there are some ways in which the process of delivery does change the messages, in which the mass media have effects on religious meaning and religious communities; and in which religious communities, can, to follow the metaphor, refuse to "off-load" intended meanings. From this perspective, content *does* matter.

One such effect is what Hoover calls a "flattening" of symbols, which is to say that "symbols [are] becoming submerged in the general universe of

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Which is not to say that content is irrelevant! Scholars from a variety of disciplines within religious studies and theology have begun to point to the rich resources for meaning-making that reside within mass mediated popular culture contexts. Beaudoin gives numerous examples from within a GenX framework. Anne Patrick (1998) and Patricia Lamoureux (1998) speak of imaginative literature and moral formation. Pamela Legg (1997) writes of using film in religious exploration. Indeed, in 1994 Sheed & Ward produced an edited collection of essays around precisely the theme of "mass media and the moral imagination" (Rossi & Soukup, 1994), in which many authors argued in defense of the meaning-making resources resident within mass mediated contexts.

symbols of the media sphere..... Religious symbols, traditionally legitimated by religious doctrine, history and practice, today struggle to find any particular or special place" (Hoover, 1998, 5). Religious institutions are becoming aware of the extent to which popular culture appropriates explicitly traditional religious symbols, particularly in the more obvious instances such as that of the singer Madonna, who has used Christian symbols such as the cross and the stigmata as elements in her pop music videos. Such institutions are less aware however, or at least less vocal, about the ways in which images of transcendence — particularly those of endless ocean horizon or suffusing golden light — permeate television commercials; or of the ways in which assumptions about religious communities structure newscasts.

A common response on the part of religious communities has been to claim "outsider" use as of their symbols as "blasphemy." This claim is deeply problematic, however, particularly when there are many people, members of the GenX cohort and beyond, for example, for whom such use of the symbols actually re-energized them and made them once again powerful. When people experience a symbol as re-energized and then are told that that very re-energization is blasphemous, there is little room for remaining within the community that has named it blasphemous. Here again it is the way in which we approach the content that is significant.

Perhaps a more practical stance for a community of faith is the educational one. From this stance the goal would be to delve into the ways in which a particular religious symbol has been picked up within pop culture, in an effort to discern what hunger or yearning the author of the pop culture text was responding to or attempting to evoke. Trying to discern meaning in this way requires a profound imaginative sense. Exploring the use of the symbol can be a way into a discussion that can broaden and reclaim the symbol's

original, or at least religiously produced, meanings. Such a stance would be educational in the root sense of that term, because it would "draw out" from people the meanings they might invest in a specific symbol, rather than attempting to proclaim and control such meanings.

A second way in which Hoover suggests that the mass media have an effect on religious practice is through what media scholars have called "canalization" or "agenda setting" (1998). That is, mass media tend to focus energetically on a constrained set of questions, issues, symbols and practices, thus shifting our focus away from others.

The most recent and glaring example of such agenda setting is clear in media response to the Starr investigations. As I write this essay the U.S. is still deeply immersed in media coverage of the question of impeachment, and most other pressing questions have either been limited to brief newscast side bars, or ignored altogether. At a time when issues of profound religious significance such as human rights, the effort to eradicate poverty, religious differences that lead to armed conflict, and so on, are being contested and shaped by public policy-makers, not simply in the U.S. but throughout the global context, such questions are rarely if ever given sustained consideration within mass media contexts.

In narrowing the elements directed to our attention, the process of consuming mass mediated texts can tend to dull our religious imagination, and even render other forms of religiosity marginal or "outside the bounds." Yet it may be precisely the marginal forms of religious practice, those that fall outside the bounds of what the mass media represent as acceptable, that call us to justice and enliven our spirits. It was surely not a rational calculation of the likelihood of success that brought religious activists to oppose the deployment of nuclear weapons, for instance. Religious imagination, in turn,

may well be one of the most powerful resources our communities have to offer in the wider context (see for example, Harris (1987) and Fischer (1983)). More on this in a moment.

Gregor Goethals suggests that: "through our games and our arts, we momentarily transcend social structures to play with ideas, fantasies, words... and social relationships" (1997, 124). This kind of "play" can be enormously powerful, creative, and liberating. As Beaudoin has pointed out, members of the GenX cohort are perhaps that much more fluent than others in using elements from the mass media in this kind of play. But given the flattening and canalization Hoover discusses, it is clear that communities of faith need to find ways to reenergize and broaden engagement with our traditional symbols and practices. We dare not simply assume that we can continue to "proclaim" within this context, or even simply "play" with mass mediated elements. Instead we must steadily work to re-imagine and re-invest in our own, uniquely constitutive practices (liturgy being central among them, at least for Catholics), making them accessible and meaningful in a mass-mediated context.

What does this kind of imaginative "play" look like? What kind of imagination is required in this context? In thinking about how imagination contributes to this process, I have been persuaded by the ways in which the Dalozes and the Keens have talked about a "responsible" imagination, in their ground-breaking study of people who have maintained a long term commitment to the public good.

In that study, which I will refer to as the "Common Fire" project (after the book by that name which discusses their findings), the authors describe a specific form of imagination practiced by these people that the authors claim was essential to their ability to maintain their lives of commitment:

The people we studied appear to compose reality in a manner that can take into account calls to help, catalyze, dream, work hard, think hard, and love well. They practice an imagination that resists prejudice and its distancing tendencies on the one hand, and avoids messianic aspirations and their engulfing tendencies on the other.... Their practice of imagination is responsible in two particular ways. First, they try to respect the *process* of imagination in themselves and in others. They pay attention to dissonance and contradiction, particularly those that reveal injustice and unrealized potential. They learn to pause, reflect, wonder, ask why, consider, wait.... Second, they seek out sources of worthy images. Most have discovered that finding and being found by fitting images is not only a matter of having access to them but requires discretion and responsible hospitality — not only to what is attractive but also to what may be unfamiliar and initially unsettling (Daloz, et. al., p. 152).

It is this kind of imagination that was required of the religious educators who participated in my dissertation research project, and it is this kind of imagination that is being used by the practitioners who are looking at the Colorado team's study and seeking ways to respond from within communities of faith. What does engaging this imagination look like in liturgical practice? This question is at the heart of my search, and it is the question that has brought me to this seminar. Thus far I have only been able to identify two ways of engaging religious practice that seem to me to be capable of nurturing a responsible imagination in religious settings, amidst popular culture. Neither of them speaks directly to liturgical practice, although I will mention both as a way of alerting you to the kinds of practices for which I'm searching.

The first such effort is a description of "practice" that is both specific enough to identify a set of historically grounded practices that are constitutive of Christian identity, but also broad enough to be suggestive across creedal and liturgical boundaries. This description grows out of a major study supported by the Lilly Endowment and based at Valparaiso University, the

"Education and Formation of People in Faith" project. The practices identified by that team are also those that can be practiced on a daily basis, not simply within liturgical celebration. The second effort that I have found evocative is an attempt on the part of Walter Brueggemann to articulate a basis on which to preach within a postmodern context that embraces the metaphor of "exile," and is richly suggestive when turned upon media culture.

First: the Lilly project definition suggests that practices "address fundamental human needs and conditions through concrete human acts," "are done together and over time," "possess standards of excellence," and help us to perceive how entangled our lives are "with the things God is doing in the world" (Bass, 1997, 6-8). Part of that team's effort to identify these practices included their attempts to reclaim some practices that have been engaged in oppressively, in ways that do not deny past injustice but also do not suggest that such injustice is constitutive of the practice itself.

The practices they name in the book that lays out this project, *Practicing our faith:* A way of life for a searching people (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), include honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and saying no, keeping sabbath, testimony, discernment, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, and singing our lives. Each of these practices has various representations within the mass media, and each can itself apply to how someone engages the mass media. What counts as "saying yes and no," for instance, particularly in terms of prayer and examination of conscience, within the world of the television drama is fairly narrowly described. This is an example of how a specific practice is "represented" to us by the mass media.

What might we learn, however, by asking in what ways our practice of "saying yes and saying no" is permeated by the agenda-setting effect of the

mass media? What might we learn by discerning in what ways it might be appropriate to "say yes and say no" to how we consume media representations, to how we engage various kinds of mass media? In what ways might our practices in relation to media — escaping into the dream creating space of entertainment, for example — support and/or interfere with finding the internal silence necessary for clear examination of conscience? In asking these kinds of questions, the resources of the media education movement and a responsible imagination can be brought to bear within religious education — and, I believe, within liturgical practice.

reimagining and prophetic voices

The second example I noted was Walter Brueggemann's use of the metaphor of "exile" in the midst of postmodern culture. In seeking to articulate how one might preach in a radically altered, even postmodern cultural climate such as the late 20th century U.S., Brueggemann suggests that with the loss of cultural hegemony once owned by Christianity — a loss that in itself is liberating for many people — Christians ought perhaps to understand our pastoral situation as one of being in exile:

On the one hand.... serious reflective Christians find themselves increasingly at odds with the dominant values of consumer capitalism and its supportive military patriotism; there is no easy or obvious way to hold together core faith claims and the social realities around us.... On the other hand..... the "homeland" in which all of us have grown up has been defined and dominated by white, male, Western assumptions which were, at the same time, imposed and also willingly embraced. Exile comes as those values and modes of authority are being effectively and progressively diminished. That diminishment is a source of deep displacement for many, even though for others who are not male and white, it is a moment of emancipation..... I suggest that "exile" (as metaphor) is a rich resource for fresh discernment, even though a *Christian exile* in a secular culture, and a *cultural exile* with the loss of conventional hegemony are very different (1997, 2).

There is something very powerful about this metaphor, at least Brueggemann's explication of it, because it allows at one and the same time an ability to name the experience of disintegrating structures of religious community as we know them even as it suggests there is a vision for religious community that can endure beyond that disintegration and perhaps even be reinvigorated.

Searching the Hebrew scriptures for insight and resources that might speak to our current context, Brueggemann lifts up for discussion elements of the experience of exile including "the danger of despair" and the necessity of holding on to one's "mother tongue" (1997, 10). Brueggemann writes that imagining ourselves as exiles amidst this culture suggests that we must claim the freedom and power to re-imagine a resilient identity that "is rather intended for full participation in the life of the dominant culture, albeit with a sense of subversiveness that gives unnerving freedom" (1997, 13). Here again, a responsible imagination is at play.

By the same process, but within the context of religious institution itself, the metaphor of "being in exile" provides for people who have identified the hypocritical and often oppressive structures of religious communities, a deeply resonant, biblical role model by which to be present within the community while resisting its hegemonic claims. This is yet another element of "responsible imagination": a way of being open to that which is unsettling and even perhaps dissonant.

This kind of subversiveness resides in the Hebrew scriptures in part, Brueggemann argues, in the use of language characterized by such rhetorical stances as hyperbole, irony, contradiction, and deliberate ambiguity (1997, 43-44). These are also many of the elements of "irreverent spirituality" that Beaudoin (1998) argues are characteristic of a GenX experience. Beaudoin

points out the extent to which people who see themselves as "GenX" fully utilize the spaces of popular culture to imagine themselves into a spiritual space and to build a religious community, while maintaining deep suspicion towards institutional religion.

Is it possible to reach out to people experiencing exile from religious community, and at the same time to recognize our own (that is, religious communities') exile within a hegemonic popular culture? Again, it is Brueggemann to which I turn, although I am not entirely sure he would accept my interpretation. He suggests that in considering the experience of exile as written about in the Hebrew scriptures, three kinds of responses are seen: "assimilation," "despair," and "fresh, imaginative theological work, recovering the old theological traditions and recasting them in terms appropriate to the new situation of faith in an alien culture" (1997, 116). In this case the "alien culture" is media culture for religious "insiders," and religious institutional culture for religious "outsiders." His practice of interpretation requires a responsible imagination.

Religious educators need to walk this third, imaginative path, in at least two contexts. We need not despair at the "flattening" of our religious symbols, or the agenda-setting of the mass media; nor should we simply assimilate into media culture, accepting without argument the use of pop culture texts within liturgical spaces, or accepting as accurate the representation of religious practices within the media sphere. Nor do we need to accept institutional religious distaste for popular culture as a meaning-making sphere, or institutional supports for oppressive cultural stances.

Rather, we need to become translators and bridge-builders, helping to identify the spaces within media culture that allow us to dream large dreams, to connect beyond ourselves, to be drawn into transcendence, at the same

time as we pull forward into lived consciousness prophetic religious practices that have shaped our communities and called them to justice over time, and that can have deep resonance today. One way to do that is to take seriously the imaginative, ritualized, participatory ways in which people already engage media culture and build on them, build through them, to the imaginative, sacramental resources of our own religious communities. Such building would take as a given the need to inhabit tension, conflict, dissonance as part of liturgical practice, since such "inhabiting" is a habitual part of living within media culture.

As Brueggemann notes, the need for re-envisioned religious practice counters the

... technological emptiness that is filled by the liturgies of consumerism and commoditization. The issue in our own context is whether holy presence can be received, imagined and practiced in ways that counteract that powerful, debilitating ideology (1997, 9).

GenX'ers and others embracing elements of media culture to resist and subvert it, and in the process claiming religious identity that in itself resists and subverts the oppressive tendencies of religious institutions, have begun to find these ways of being in the world. Three in particular stand out: 1) refusing the stark dichotomy of "sacred/profane" in relation to media culture, 2) re-imagining religious practice as a way of directly confronting oppressive dynamics (whether in the culture at large, or within religious institutions), and 3) becoming adept translators — through practice and speech — embodying the resisting, resilient and resourceful stances that bring us into holy presence.

It is the latter two of these practices, re-imagining religious practice as a way to confront oppressive dynamics, and embodying resilient stances that

bring us into holy presence, that I sense could be most engaged within liturgical practice. But I am not a liturgist, or a liturgical scholar, and so I come to you seeking such resources and asking for ideas. May we have a good conversation!

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