MERCY AND THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION SYMPOSIUM

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Mercy and Business: A Partnership for Catholic University Business Students

Dr. Arlene J. Nicholas

Can a respected university mission that reflects mercy and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition be integrated into business courses? This author's wholehearted answer is yes. Critical to this integration is the willingness of students to embrace concepts such as fairness and mercy, as part of their lives beyond academia; that caring for others is inclusive in business and private life. Espousing the merits and obligations of service to the poor and marginalized to business students is exemplified in many forms. For management courses – the protection from harassment or disenfranchisement of any ethnic, economic or lifestyle differences of employees and co-workers. In human resources – outreach for diversity, fairness of applications, interviews and testing, and opportunities for training and promotions. In business communication courses – the tenets of Aristotle's logos, ethos and pathos are accentuated as methods of logical organization; ethical writings with credible research; and empathy and passion toward others and confidence in your service or product. In all business courses, the understanding of cultural dimensions and respect for the backgrounds and beliefs of others are emphasized.

Introduction

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition gives students and faculty the "opportunity to reflect on how faith traditions might provide a robust and profound intellectual and cultural resource which can inform commitments to justice while working in any career" (Uelmen, 2004, p. 923) and their personal lives. Salve Regina University and its faculty model this tradition through supportive social events, community service, and commitment to improving the lives of people on and off campus. This paper will explore the connections to the mission of mercy based concepts and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as it relates to students preparing to enter the world of business.

Onset of Catholic Intellectual Tradition

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is steeped in history from monasteries and medieval European universities with the teachings of theology, philosophy, medicine and law (King, 2000). Business teaching also became part of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as early as the industrial age as a social teaching effort regarding political, cultural and economic problems. The papal encyclicals from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (*On Capitol and Labor*) 1891 addressing the right to property to Pope John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* (*Hundredth Year*) 1991 denoting that organizations are communities of people who must also be at the service of

society (Costa & Ramos, 2011) have re-enforced the social teaching in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Guidance for business decisions have been reflected in many of the papal encyclicals

In her recent research on Catholic education, Tracey Rowland (2014) refers to the encyclicals[1] of the former pontiff Benedict XVI that indicate transformative love along with professional competence should differentiate the work in Catholic institutions from others (p. 8). Amelia Uelemen's (2004) article on Catholic law schools noted the "rich heritage of social justice and service to the marginalized" (p. 923) of these institutions and their encouragement of students to help the public.

Business Theories and Catholic Social Tradition

Business students are encouraged to be of service to the public in courses including management, finance, economics, marketing, accounting, law and ethics that all support the Stakeholder theory of the importance to consider any effect on workers, owners, customers/clients, community (Brower & Mahajan, 2013). This is part of Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, (Russo, & Perrini, 2010) another expounded theory of justice that is part of the lessons for Salve Regina business majors. CSR is explained as the "voluntary initiatives taken by companies over and above their legal and social obligations that integrate societal and environmental concerns into their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders" (Brower & Mahajan, 2013, p. 313).

Another similar theory and concept is the Triple Bottom Line that gives a hierarchy to people and environment, followed by profit (Schroeder & DeNoble, 2014). This is not to say that capitalism is no longer a viable business model. But it redefines any organization that opposes profit-making from sweat shop labor or at the cost of harming others with unsafe working conditions, or polluting or destroying the environment; practices that are, unfortunately, still in existence. The Salve Regina mission is apparent in business courses in which students learn about respect for people, places and the possibility of capitalism with a heart.

A Caring Business; Not an Oxymoron

The entire curriculum at Salve Regina University upholds the dignity of humans and the preservation of the environment. In the business department there is even a course in the undergraduate and graduate programs, *Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprises*, that exposes students to a variety of working organizational models, for-profit, non-profit and hybrids, that care for people, society and the environment. For example in the for profit sector, Better Shred (www.bettershredri.com) is a secure document disposal company that was created from a non-profit CranstonArc, that supports Rhode Islanders with developmental

[1] *Deus caritas est* (*God Is Love*) February 25, 2006, *Spe Salvi* (*Christian Hope*) November 30, 2007 and *Caritas In Veritate* (*On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth*) June 29, 2009.

disabilities and gives them jobs. And there is Glee Gum (www.gleegum.com) that produces a natural based gum with chicle that enables the employment of people in developing countries and sustainable practices for the rainforest.

So business students learn that you can 'do good' in many forms of businesses where rather than maximization of profit, social outcomes are maximized. In fact, even if costs seem higher to create such a conscientious organization, in time it can become more successful because of its outlook (Schroeder & DeNoble, 2014). Whether locally or globally, students are encouraged to think with their hearts as well as their minds to create or work in business ventures that respect the dignity of humans and the beauty of the earth. This is in keeping with Catholic social tradition and teaching that transcends the spiritual by addressing, as in the Old Testament, the need for people and society to be committed to charity and justice – the common good (Garvey, 2003).

Mercy Mission

Salve Regina University's mission inspires others for the common good and guides faculty, staff and students with an awareness of the "Catholic institution, founded by the Sisters of Mercy that seeks wisdom and promotes universal justice . . . for a world that is harmonious just and merciful" (Mission Statement, 2014). The Mercy core values of justice, respect, integrity, service, and compassion (Georgian Court, 2014) are integral to teaching business courses at Salve Regina.

Students are asked to analyze business cases, such as in Human Resources Management, Managerial Accounting, Investment Planning, Management and Organizational Behavior, Business Law and other business based courses, with evidenced based research to support their thoughts and reflections on lessons from classes, readings, experiences or simply how they would want to be treated in a situation. Long before the scandals of Enron, Tyco, and mortgage frauds, Business Ethics has been a required course for undergraduate and graduate business students. The scholarship in all these courses is enriched by the reflection which "helps to inform and guide the human quest for knowledge and truth" and that "students understand their moral responsibilities to humankind and are prepared to search for Truth throughout their lives" (Misto, 2014, p. 1). Finding relevant research, reflecting on experience from profession/personal experiences, connecting classroom or online discussions to business scenarios can inform future practices of effective leadership (Callahan, 2013).

The establishment of Salve Regina University by the Sisters of Mercy is itself an example of benevolence and leadership. A mansion built by a corporate tycoon given to an order of nuns for a school. An order of nuns that was founded by a keen businesswoman, Catherine McAuley, who transformed the lives of poor women in Dublin, Ireland by providing shelter and education with an inheritance she had received from her childless employers. After the house for

homeless girls was established Catherine founded the Mercy order and inspired others into lives of service and education ("Foundress," 2014). Students are oriented in this back story and faculty are reminded of this altruistic heritage through workshops and collegiums.

Business and Meaningful Life

Another way students gain a better understanding of mercy and business is from examples in school life. For instance, the school has charity and blood drives, a VIA (Volunteers in Action) program, community service requirements and trips, and speakers from all faiths for presentations on global social issues. Faculty demonstrate the mission through caring for students, volunteering in community work, and enlisting students to join them. Faculty also create student based outreach programs through clubs or academic enhancement of lessons. Additionally, many university staff along with faculty work in campus or personal community-based social enrichment projects including environmental initiatives. It is a spirit of compassion genuinely felt by campus colleagues.

Inspiring Students to Do Good

There are many connections for business to enrich the lives of workers and improve the community and society. "Teachers need to inspire their students to discover the good which is within them and to follow the call they have to use their professional skills and judgment as a force for good in the world" ("Vocation of ...", 2011, p. 25).

In 2013, the graduate program is required *Business Ethics* course name was changed to *Social Justice and Business Ethics* to encompass, even in the title, the objectives and concerns for others in the business world. Ethical principles for business can be based on two principles: Human dignity - as every person is of value; and the common good - acting purposely together for a shared goal ("Vocation of …", 2011). Salve Regina's mission resounds in the shared goal for a just, harmonious and merciful world. Faculty, Catholic and non-Catholic, are or should be committed to the mission of Salve Regina to manage the connected knowing of the Catholic intellectual tradition to "manage the formal educational process so that it nurtures the kind of learning that is needed" (Cernera & Morgan, 2002, p. 211).

Closing

As a former student, staff member and as a current faculty member of Salve Regina University, I personally have witnessed this mercy-missioned university's sincerity and encouragement as it "embraces all who are dedicated to learning from one another, and remains open to contributions that may come in a range of ways" (Catholic Intellectual Tradition, 2010, p.6). All backgrounds of students, faculty and staff are respected and supported. My mission as a business faculty is to continue in this tradition and embed this love of learning, of people, and of the earth to students who will take seriously their social responsibility to care for, cherish and encourage others.

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Building Bridges of Mercy:

An exploration of the role which mercy in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition can have in building interreligious dialogue with Islam.

Dr. Sean O'Callaghan
Mr. Sinan Zeino

Introduction

In any exercise involving bridge-building, the venture must be an enterprise involving at least two sides and both sides must be willing to cooperate, so the first question which needs to be asked about interreligious dialogue between the Catholic intellectual tradition and Islam involves the extent to which both sides can listen to each other. The rich history of fruitful debate and mutual enrichment between Islam and Christianity is one which would fill many papers, books and libraries, and I will be able to touch on only a fraction of it here by way of illustration, but any scholar speaking to an American-based audience in 2015 cannot avoid the 14 year old elephant in the room, the world-changing events of September 2001, which more than any events in recent world history have drawn a veil of mutual confusion and incomprehensibility over the relationship between the Muslim and the non-Muslim. Neither can anyone forget the barely four-month old trauma of the murder of the young American aid worker, Peter Kassig, also known as Abdul Rahman Kassig, by the group ISIS, the brutal killings of James Foley and Steven Sotloff just before that, and the very recent killing of Kayla Mueller, apparently the last of the Western hostages held by ISIS, who was killed in still disputed circumstances just a few weeks ago. As Americans, in particular, awaken to news of the murder of young, idealistic and altruistic fellow-countrymen and women, it is hard for them to imagine Islam as a merciful faith. The Islam of Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, of Shi'a Iran and of fascist and nihilist ISIS often speaks of an intolerance which could not possibly learn from bridge-building and dialogue. The much discussed merciful face of Islam, particularly of early Islam, is lost among the faces of the international brigades of murderous fanatics we see in the cinematic and high-quality videos posted in cyberspace by ISIS. The openness of ISIS to any kind of interaction with the world outside of its own ideological boundaries seems to be limited to proving the international appeal of its attempts to create a new, world-wide Caliphate, an appeal which it advertises to the world by recruiting and displaying militants from various nationalities. This is not a nationalistic, Arab Islam, but one which evidences catholicity,

universality, as long as, of course, you are the right kind of Muslim. In the Islam espoused by ISIS, mercy is, of all human and divine qualities, most noticeable by its absence. Where, then, are the faces of mercy within Islam and what dialogue can occur between those in Islam and Christianity who embrace mercy as a quality born of the very heart of God, one which can enable mutual respect, mutual learning and even mutual love?

There is considerable dispute amongst scholars of Islam, Islamic scholars themselves, ordinary Muslims and ordinary non-Muslims regarding the pluralist credentials of Islam as a whole. To enter this debate today would necessitate a whole conference just on this topic alone, but it is important to address it at some level, because, after all, without a pluralist perspective, Islam could not appreciate the truth or value of the discourse about mercy in another religious tradition. For the purposes of this paper, then, I will interact with the approach which maintains that Islam has a strongly pluralist history, which has been obscured or even at times almost obliterated. My intention is to demonstrate that *even if* Islam may not be considered *unmistakably* pluralist, there is within the religion enough evidence of engagement with pluralist perspectives on Islam's relationships with those of other faiths and none, to merit dialogue on areas of commonality. Those who champion Islam's pluralist beginnings, point mainly to the person of Muhammad himself and the Qur'an, claiming that Muhammad and his revelation were remarkably tolerant in tone and practice- intolerance and forced conversion coming only later when religious and pluralist elements were superseded by the demands of politics and empire. My discussion of Islam and pluralism will form a backdrop to my discussion of Islam, mercy and the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Boston College's document on the Catholic intellectual tradition, published in 2010 by its 'The Church in the 21st Century Center' frames the CIT firmly within the realm of dialogue, and, in particular, interreligious dialogue. In its opening remarks, under the sub-title of 'A 2,000-Year-Long Conversation,' this dialogue between faith and culture is also concerned with "questions of ultimacy that invite faith responses."

(http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/top/church21/pdf/cit.pdf p.6). The document then goes on to give examples of ways in which the CIT has engaged with non-Christian religions, which also, of course, are concerned with issues of ultimacy. Referencing Aquinas and his engagement with Aristotle, at a time when such engagement might be viewed with suspicion, the authors write that he chose "also to enter into dialogue with Muslim and Jewish thinkers, such as Averroes and Maimonides. Aquinas' passionate engagement with the intellectual pluralism of his times enriched and strengthened the Catholic intellectual tradition" (ibid, p.7). Interestingly, the document also refers to the Logos, the term which John, in his Gospel, chooses to refer to Jesus, the Word, and carrying with it the Greek notion of 'reason.' Throughout its history, Logos theology has been strongly linked to a survey of the ways in which the divine has implanted itself in the world, through the 'Logos Spermatikos,' so the Catholic intellectual tradition is intimately concerned with understanding and dialoguing with revelation in all of its manifestations, with the results of the search for ultimacy, for the truth, a truth

which has been planted in the very world in which we live and which shows itself, sometimes fleetingly and often partially, in human cultural endeavor, including religion. In the era of interreligious dialogue, Logos theology has begun to emerge as a model of interpretation, largely re-discovered from the early church and readily suited to building a new paradigm within which a fresh approach to non-Christian faiths could be developed. The model appeals strongly to both Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, with the former's view of paganism as "a mixture of gloom and vice" but also containing within it "discernible streaks of light" as a basis for a policy of engagement and dialogue rather than exclusivist rejection. The latter spoke of "gleams of truth which the Christian Church ought to be ready to accept as evidence of the diffused energy of the divine Logos" (Yates, 1994: 95, 96). Boston College's view of the CIT reflects the approach of Logos theologians that the Christian faith needs to always be in dialogue since it is always seeking the divine presence in the world: "The Catholic intellectual tradition is neither static nor complete. It is a dynamic conversation over time with a highly diverse range of dialectical partners: a conversation made of variant strands and a range of positions." (ibid, p.10). Logos theology is of particular use in discerning points of commonality between Christianity and the non-Christian faiths. Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* (1965), reflecting some of the language of Logos theology and particularly drawing on the 'light' imagery of Clement Alexandria and Justin Martyr states:

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965: 2).

In his excellent book, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (2011), John Renard, a Jesuit scholar of Medieval Islam at St Louis University, identifies four main "historical models of Christian theological engagement with Islam…The four are the polemical, the Scholastic, the Christian inclusivist, and the dialogical " (Renard, 2011: xvii). The polemical approach is explored through the thought of John of Damascus (c. 655-750), whose highly skeptical approach to Islam as a system of beliefs is tempered by his more pragmatic approach towards a phenomenon he, nevertheless, knows he must engage with in order to understand it and counter its claims. In his discussion of John, Renard makes reference to a number of surprisingly sympathetic profiles of Muhammad and Islam by a range of Christian sources writing in the seventh and eighth centuries, including the Armenian bishop, Sebeos, whose *History of Heraclius*, written around 661 "is remarkably generous, attributing to Muhammad a thorough knowledge of Mosaic law and acknowledging a general uprightness in his teaching "(ibid: xviii). Mona Siddiqui in her *Christians, Muslims and Jesus* (2013) provides a more sober assessment of Sebeos' view of Muhammad, noting that he calls Muhammad "the great ally of Antichrist" (Siddiqui, 2013: 61) in the same breath in which he praises him for

teaching “people to know God and to turn to the Living God” (ibid). Siddiqui notes that such an attitude reflects the conflict felt by Christian scholars of the period, in that they lauded the monotheistic nature of Islam, but had, understandably, severe problems with its view of the divinity of Jesus (ibid: 62). Renard cites other positive assessments, while also acknowledging many negative assessments of Islam from the same period, but argues “…it will come as a surprise that as late as the twelfth-century generally positive assessments of Islam by Middle Eastern Christian theologians seem to outnumber the blanket condemnations” (Renard, 2011: xviii). In spite of John of Damascus’ antipathy towards Islam, his familial connections with the Ummayad caliph in Damascus (his family served in government administration) provided him with an unrivalled knowledge of Islam for a Christian of the period (ibid). One work, which may be John’s, presents a dialogue between a Muslim and a Christian around so many topics of mutual interest to both faiths that Renard notes “These themes prompt further intriguing questions about the degree to which Muslim and Christian thought had already begun to interpenetrate in shaping divergent views of parties within both communities” (ibid: xix-xx). For Renard, John of Damascus’ chief merit is that he both understands, and presents an accurate picture of, Islam. There is no attempt to distort Islam, in spite of his doctrinal differences.

Aquinas’ Scholastic approach subjected the intellectual credibility of Islamic thought to some criticism and his view of Muhammad is overtly hostile, however he engaged Muslim thinkers in rational debate, taking seriously their intellectual contributions to human knowledge. For Renard, Thomas’ contribution to Muslim-Christian interaction lies “in the seriousness with which he views his adversaries’ positions” (ibid: xxii-xxiii).

The Christian-inclusivist model, as espoused by Hans Kung, “begins with Christian doctrine as the standard of truth, but debate over who is right must be replaced by the conviction that understanding is preferable to dominance” (ibid: xxiii). The fourth model identified by Renard is that exemplified in the work of the Anglican bishop Kenneth Cragg, which looks for “theological cross-references” between Christianity and Islam (ibid: xxv) which are conceptual in nature.

Engagement with Islam, then, has been continuous and multifaceted since the seventh century in both the Catholic intellectual tradition and the wider Christian faith community. Paul VI’s *Nostra Aetate*, his Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965) states:

> “The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the Day of Judgment when God will render their reward to all those who have been raised up

from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom" (*Nostra Aetate*¸1965: 3).

There is a remarkable similarity between Paul VI's statement above and that of Gregory VII (r. 1073-1085), who, writing to a Muslim ruler in Algeria, and thanking him for releasing some Christian prisoners, writes: "In truth, such charity we and you owe more particularly to our own than to the remaining peoples, for we believe and confess, albeit in a different way, the one God and each day we praise and honor him as the creator of the ages and the ruler of this world…For God knows that we love you sincerely to the honor of God and that we desire your own welfare and honor both in the present life and that which is to come; and with heart and lips we beseech that God himself will bring you, after the long continuance of this life, into the blessedness of the bosom of the most holy patriarch, Abraham " (Lyons, 2012:43,48). Gregory's letter was written in 1076 and within twenty years of that date, the First and Second Crusades would begin, and a very different chapter in Muslim-Christian relations would begin.

It is always difficult to speak of one Islam; it takes many forms and it is impossible to portray Islam in a monolithic fashion. Perspectives on Islam as a religion of peace are strongly polarized, but those Muslims who make a strong case for its peaceful, tolerant and pluralist nature, appeal, as I said earlier, to Muhammad and the Qur'an, rather to later Islamic history where they believe political ambitions muddied the pure waters of early Islam. Mahmoud Ayoub (1935-), a Lebanese-born scholar who converted from Islam to Christianity and then back to Islam again, outlines an interesting argument for Muslim toleration, which encompasses the more typical elements of the wider discourse on pluralism, but also introduces some emphases of his own. Sura 21: 107, Ayoub says, shows God telling Muhammad "We have not sent you except as a mercy for all human beings." Paralleling this, the Qur'an has God order Muhammad "Say, 'O humankind, I am the messenger of God to you all'" (Sura 7: 158). Muhammad, then, is a universal prophet (Ayoub, 2000)[1]. Central to Ayoub's argument on Islamic pluralism is the Qur'an's teaching on human diversity:

"Humankind was all one community. Then God sent prophets as bearers of good tidings and warners. He sent down with them the Book with the truth in order that it may judge among

[1] http://www.worlddialogue.org/content.php?id=58
Global Dialogue, Volume 2, Number 1, Winter 2000
'Islam and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism' by Mahmoud Ayoub

men concerning that in which they differ. But none differ concerning it, save those who were given the scriptures after manifest signs had come to them, being envious of one another. God guides aright by his permission those who have faith to the truth, concerning which they differed. God guides whom he wills to the straight way" (Sura 2: 213).

Islam is not strictly a religion, Ayoub argues, and the Qur'an does not claim that it is, but it is an attitude of submissiveness towards God. As an attitude towards God, it is open to all:

"*Islam* is not, according to the Qur'an and early Prophetic tradition, the name of a religion. Rather, it signifies the attitude of the entire creation before God. The term *Islam* in this sense applies to the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, to humankind and to everything that God created. This is the first and universal plane of the meaning of the term *Islam*. On another plane, *Islam* applies to any human beings or human communities which profess faith in the one God and seek to obey God in all that they do and say. It is in this sense that the Qur'an speaks of Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus and his disciples as Muslims" (Ayoub, 2000).

"The Quranic assertion 'Anyone who desires a faith other than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he shall be among the losers' expresses an exclusivist view of religion, but only if the term *Islam* is taken narrowly to refer to Islam as an institutionalized religion. If, however, it is taken to signify a human attitude of total submission (*Islam*) to God, then we are talking not about religious institutions, but about an ideal relationship between God and human beings that transcends all religions, including Islam" (Ayoub, 2007).[2]

Sura 2: 256 teaches that there should be no compulsion in religion and Sura 4: 94 teaches Muslims that they should not deny that another Muslim is not of their faith- "Do not say to one who offers a salutation of peace you are not a believer." Sura 2: 62 states "Surely the believers and the Jews, Christians and Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and whoever does right, shall have his reward with his Lord and will neither have fear nor regret."

Christians and Jews are known as Ahl al-Kitab, the People of the Book, however the final covenant made by God is that between God, Muhammad and the Muslim community. The soteriological details of the fate of Christians, Jews and others in Islamic salvific history are complex and lengthy and subject to intense disagreement, but there is certainly much evidence of a strong, pluralist strain of thought within Islam which is not considered to be a recent innovation, but which appeals back through Muhammad to Abraham. Many Qur'anic verses speak of diversity in revelation, of the diversity of creation itself and it being God's will that such

[2] http://iiit.org/Research/ScholarsSummerInstitute/TableofContents/ReligiousPluralismAndTheQuran/tabid/244/Default.aspx
'Religious Pluralism and the Qur'an' by Mahmoud Ayoub (2007).

diversity exists, even between peoples and their religions. Abdullah Saeed summarizes Islam's sometimes ambivalent attitude to other religions thus:

> At times, it appears harshly critical of the failure of older religious communities (such as Jews and Christians) to accept the prophethood of Muhammad and the new guidance given by God. At other times, it affirms the righteous among other faiths…The Qur'an sanctions religious exclusion, but also acknowledges a purpose in the diversity of religions (Saeed, 2007: 23).

Speaking to humankind in one quite extraordinary verse, the Qur'an says:

> If Allah wanted He could have made all of you a single nation. But He willed otherwise in order to test you in what He has given you; therefore try to excel one another in good deeds. Ultimately you all shall return to Allah; then He will show you the truth of those matters in which you dispute (Sura 5: 48).

The strong implication here is that different religions exist to spur on their adherents to outdo each other in doing good.

Having therefore established some groundwork for the history and the possibility of dialogue between Islam and Christianity, we now move on to the role of mercy itself as a bridge-building concept and shared quality between the two largest faiths in the world. I have often wondered why mercy is so central to Islam and it has always been difficult to get a definitive answer; however, since its inception, the charism of mercy is at its very core. Pre-Islamic Arabian society was certainly one in which mercy was not a central concern; numerous studies of the society describe a city in which the dominant tribe of Mecca, the Quraysh, grew richer and richer as a result of the trade in goods and in religion. The disparity between rich and poor grew wider and it was the widows and orphans, who were dear to Muhammad's heart because he himself was an orphan by the age of six years old, who bore the brunt of financial injustice. In such a merciless society, mercy must have taken on a particularly potent value. When I listen to the rhetoric flowing from the unspeakably cruel North Korean regime today, the word 'merciless' is actually used extensively in its own internal political and military discourse. It constantly threatens 'merciless' responses to what it perceives to be provocations from outside forces. Mercy is in very short supply in the society itself and in the penal system, in particular. In a world where mercy is scarce, it must take on a precious value. Another observation which I would make is that the word mercy is actually used little in our own society. One does not hear it very often even within religious circles, never mind outside. The very first section of Cardinal Walter Kasper's *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* is entitled 'Mercy- A Crucially Relevant, but Forgotten Topic.' On the profile which mercy has in Christian theology itself, Kasper writes:

> "…we make the astounding, in fact shocking, realization that this topic, which is so central for the Bible and so relevant for the present experience of reality, appears at best in the margins of the lexica and handbooks of dogmatic theology. In the traditional as well as in the more recent dogmatic handbooks, God's mercy is treated as one of God's attributes among others. Most often it is treated only briefly and then only after the attributes that derive from God's metaphysical essence…In the more recent handbooks, mercy is often completely absent and, if it appears at all, then more likely incidentally. Exceptions prove the rule; they cannot, however, fundamentally change the general finding. One cannot characterize these findings in any way other than as disappointing, even catastrophic" (Kasper, 2014: 9, 10).

Within Islam, however, the word is to be found throughout not only the Qur'an itself, but throughout the daily discourse of prayer. The mercy of God is referenced several times a day during the five daily prayers. The first chapter of the Qur'an is recited:

> "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds. Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee (alone) we worship and Thee (alone) we ask for help. Show us the straight path. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray" (Sura 1:1-1:7).

Almost every chapter of the Qur'an begins with the formula "In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful." The distinction between 'All-Merciful' and 'Ever-Merciful' is not cosmetic or superficial. This is not mere repetition, but has been the subject of intense debate by Islamic scholars over many centuries. God, the Ar-Rahman, the All-Merciful is the God who bestows his mercy on the whole universe. God, who is Ar-Rahman, is the God who seats himself on the throne over the entire universe, according to Sura 20:5. Mercy, then, flows from the Sovereign God, it is intimately associated with his sovereignty and majesty. The following two verses state "To him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth and what is between them and under the soil. And if you speak aloud, then indeed he knows the secret and what is even more hidden." (Sura 20: 6, 7). Existence depends on mercy, on the universal mercy of Ar-Rahman, but, Ar-Rahim, the Ever-Merciful, is the God who bestows his mercy into particular situations in the lives of human beings. Sura 17 says "Call upon Allah or call upon the All-Merciful." All-Merciful, then, is associated with the very name of God. This is the same God who says in Sura 7 "My mercy embraces all things." The Sufi mystic, Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (1207-74) "identified mercy (*rahma*) with *wujud* , which in this sense of the term denotes both Being, or the absolute Reality of God" (Murata, 1992: 206). Rahma and wujud interact in that without

Rahma, wujud would simply be 'existence,' however, when mercy is added to the mix, then existence is able to enjoy a relationship with the Creator. Being and mercy are inseparable. Existence comes into being because of mercy (ibid). The bounty of the mercy of God is inexhaustible. The hadith, the traditions of Muhammad, which are separate texts from the Qur'an state:

> "God created a hundred mercies on the day He created the heavens and the earth, each mercy of which would fill what is between the heaven and the earth. Of these, he placed one mercy in the earth. Through it, the mother inclines towards her child, and the birds and animals incline towards each other. When the Day of Resurrection comes, He will complete those mercies with His mercy" (ibid: 207)

Sura 6 tells Muhammad "Say 'Limitless is your Lord in His mercy…"

Now, to return for a moment to Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi's identification of *Rahma*, mercy, with *wujud*, Being; Cardinal Kasper argues with regard to the Church and its theology that a concept of the mercy of God traditionally has been derived from contemplating the historical self-revelation of God and not the metaphysical essence of God. Because of the problem of a suffering God, dogmatic theology 'has difficulty speaking of a compassionate God" (Kasper, 2014: 11). However, Kasper argues, outside of the realms of academic theology, "God's mercy, however, is the attribute, in God's self-revelation in the history of salvation that assumes first place" (ibid: 88). Kasper asserts that mercy 'cannot be subordinated to the attributes that derive from the metaphysical essence of God…" (ibid). Mercy, he says "expresses God's essence" (ibid). Therefore, "it stands in an indissoluble inner connection with God's other attributes" (ibid). Drawing on Pius XII's encyclical of 1956, *Haurietis Acqua*, Kasper argues for 'The God who Mercifully Suffers with Us,' a suffering based not on God's imperfection but on God's omnipotence (ibid: 118,119). In both Islamic and Catholic theology, we have then a God who intimately immerses himself in the world of suffering and whose very essence is mercy. As Ar-Rahman, God is that metaphysical being whose very nature is mercy, curiously both transcendent and immanent, but it is primarily with God as Ar-Rahim, the Ever-Merciful, the God who is active in daily lives, that both Christians and Muslims can connect in a practical display of mutual co-operation. For Christians, God as mercy has most fully been expressed in the person of Christ and, in spite of the prominent role of the figure of Jesus in Islam, the differences in how he is viewed as a divine and salvific figure present, of course, major stumbling blocks. Having said that, however, it is around the shared notions of God as All-Merciful and Ever-Merciful, in whatever way they are theologically and soteriologically expressed, that Christians and Muslims can unite, agreeing that mercy is not just an attribute of God, but an imperative from God as to how human beings should live with each other. There may be disagreement around how God functions as Ar-Rahim, but as Ar-Rahman, he is the universal dispenser of mercy to the whole world- to Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus –all faiths and none.

John Paul II's encyclical of 1980, very early on in his pontificate, entitled *Dives in Misericordia* or *Rich in Mercy* may seem to be far removed in time and space from the writings of the Sufi mystic, Abu Bakr Ibn al-Arabi, who was born in 1165 and died in 1240. Ibn-Arabi wrote much on mercy and developed a hermeneutic by which mercy could be understood. In a world in which extremists in Islam are looking back to more militant times and attempting to recreate them for a new kind of Islam, it is vitally important that pluralist and gentle voices, such as that of Ibn-Arabi are brought to the fore and that Christians also discover these voices and interact with them, so that a different version of Islam than that promulgated by ISIS and others becomes the basis for interreligious understanding. He was born in Andalusian Spain at a time of extraordinary cross-fertilization between Christian, Muslim and Jewish thought and the flowering of science and literature. A consideration of John Paul's very insightful encyclical and the writings of Ibn-Arabi enable us to tease out some common themes which can provide for very fruitful cooperation between the Catholic intellectual tradition and contemporary Islam. John Paul notes "The present day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact seems to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy" (John Paul II, 1980). The Pope attributes this partly to a dominionist perspective over the world, based on confidence in science and technology, which often excludes mercy. Interestingly, several times in the document, the Pope uses the words 'unease' or 'uneasiness' to describe the condition felt by human beings in a world in which they feel overwhelmed by fears and existential doubts. The amount of times the word is used is actually quite startling and I think that the Pope describes well the conflicts felt by modern humanity in a world in which absolutely nothing is certain. Even the Church, he says, shares the uneasiness. It is only an awareness and experience of mercy that can quiet this unease, mercy which flows from God and offers assurance of forgiveness and reconciliation and peace. Mercy, is "an indispensable element for shaping mutual relations between people, in a spirit of deepest respect for what is human, and in a spirit of mutual brotherhood" (ibid). Both John Paul II and later, Cardinal Kasper, make strong efforts in their writing to free mercy from any abstract theological straitjacket in which it may have become bound and emphasize its immanent and practical rather than transcendent and abstract qualities.

Ibn al-Arabi too, according to William Chittick, sought to free the notion of God's mercy from the jurists, the Kalam experts, the dogmatic theologians who were concerned with more rational interpretation of the Qur'an and as a Sufi "claimed to know firsthand that God's fundamental reality is mercy and compassion" (Chittick, 2000: 153). What is striking about the work of Ibn-Arabi is his reliance on the Qur'an itself as a source for his theology of mercy, his insight being based on inspiration of spirit rather than rational investigation (ibid: 154). In a revolutionary and controversial passage in his *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, his *Meccan Illuminations* , a book written over a twenty year period and focusing on cosmology and metaphysics, Al-Arabi identifies his own calling to mediate mercy with that of Muhammad, who the Qur'an claims God sent as a mercy. Al-Arabi writes of himself "God created me as a mercy, and He made me an heir to the mercy of

him to whom He said 'We sent thee only as a mercy to the worlds'" (ibid: 156). As in the thought of Qunawi, the cosmos is created by mercy and depends on mercy for its being.

Al-Arabi's interpretation of one verse of the Qur'an gives illuminating insight into his thinking and could even be said to ascribe to mercy that salvific role which Christians ascribe to Christ. Sura 29:4 states "Those that do ugly deeds, do they reckon that they will precede Us?" The term 'precede' means, in general Qur'anic interpretation, "to outstrip or surpass, to come first in a race" (Chittick, 2000: 159). Basically, the meaning seems to be that no one can outrun God and escape his justice. Al-Arabi re-interprets it as follows:

> When people disobey, they expose themselves to vengeance and affliction. They are running in a race to vengeance for what has occurred from them. But God races against them in this racetrack in respect of the fact that he is ever forgiving, pardoning, overlooking, compassionate and clement. Through acts of disobedience and ugly deeds, the servants race the Real to vengeance and the Real precedes them. So, He will have preceded them when they arrive at vengeance through ugly deeds…When the servants reach the end of the race, they find vengeance, but the ever-forgiving has preceded them and has come between them and their acts of disobedience. They had been judging that they would reach it before this. This is indicated by God's words, "Do they reckon, those that do ugly deeds, that they will precede Us?" [29:4], that is, that they will precede my forgiveness and the envelopment of my mercy through their ugly deeds? On the contrary, precedence belongs to God through mercy towards them. This is the ultimate limit of generosity" (ibid).

Like Al-Arabi, Pope John Paul II too roots mercy in the scriptures, but also in the incarnation, in the Old and New Testaments and, particularly, in the story of the prodigal, whose God also was there, as Al-Arabi's God of mercy, when he expected wrath but met forgiveness.

On the field of mercy, then, Islam and Christianity can meet, with a shared vision of the need for mercy in a world which is so often blind to, even ignorant of, the love and compassion of God. Two faiths, which lie so far apart on matters of salvation and doctrine can, nevertheless, build bridges of mercy, where hearts can be joined in compassion for each other as human beings created by a merciful God whose intent was for us to mirror that mercy to each other. That Pope Francis has published *The Church of Mercy*, is, I would argue, providential in our time, strengthening, alongside Cardinal Kasper's book, the emergence of a charism which has remained dormant for too long in the church's discourse and practice. What better theme could possibly provide the foundation for dialogue between the Catholic intellectual tradition and Islam than that which focuses on God, Al-Rahman, Al-Rahim, the All-merciful and Ever-merciful.

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The Mercy Vector:
Contagious Transformation in Higher Education

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In the U.S. today, higher education is in many ways searching for direction; hardly a day goes by without a news article illustrating how another facet of higher education is fraught with uncertainty, in need of radical revisioning, or perhaps even destined to disappear. While many of the challenges facing higher education are technical in nature, others are related to values in the sense of providing criteria by which to prioritize and choose between competing goals and goods. It is in relation to such goals that established traditions of ethical reflection, including the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, have something of value to offer higher education today. As a result, for the topic of this paper I would like to triangulate mercy, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (or CIT), and Catholic higher education. Reflecting on this fecund intersection responds both to the stated question orienting this year's Mission Integration grants (i.e., how Mercy and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition are interrelated), as well as some of the sub-topics suggested in the original call for papers (including "Mercy and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in Higher Education," and "Mercy, Faith and Reason"). Moreover, placing mercy at the heart of the CIT naturally has implications not only for this intellectual tradition on an abstract level, but also on a practical level for the Catholic colleges and universities that are a major site of development of the CIT in our time. And if one important aspect of the CIT is the engagement with current issues starting from Christian symbols and convictions, then by thinking about what form Catholic higher education should take, this paper should itself be viewed as an exercise of the CIT. In that sense this essay is a performative exploration of the role of mercy and the CIT, in the relation to Catholic higher education. As such, the overarching point of this paper will be that mercy has the capacity to function as a "vector" for Catholic higher education today in at least three ways, related to both the physical and biological definitions of the word. First, in relation to the physical definition of the word, mercy functions as a vector by providing an orienting direction for the functioning of post-secondary education. Second, in so doing, it also functions as a vector in the biological sense by transmitting values that can have potentially destabilizing effects on its host institutions; mercy provokes radical questions in relation to the institutional organization of our universities, and even some of the disciplinary assumptions informing the subjects taught in them. Third, in light of the thoroughgoing implications of orienting higher education around the merciful solicitude for other's suffering we are left to grapple with the final aspect of mercy as a vector (i.e., magnitude), in the form of a question: how much faith do we actually have in mercy, what are we willing to wager on it, how willing are we to entrust ourselves to it?

To begin, it is important to describe briefly what I mean when I refer to "the Catholic Intellectual Tradition" (or, CIT). Framing the issue in this way causes us right away to run into difficulties, because in a very real sense there is no such thing as *the* CIT, but rather a variety of traditions all too different degrees claiming the title "Catholic." So for the purposes of this essay I simply want to highlight the notion that those who self-identify as participants in the ongoing development of a CIT thereby indicate something about the starting point of their intellectual reflections. And if it is true (as I tend to think) that reason itself merely operates upon one's fundamental presuppositions, which reason cannot provide for itself, then one's choice of a starting point is very significant indeed.[1] From this perspective participants in the CIT can be identified by the fact that (in some manner the parameters of which themselves are the subject of controversy) they find in the resources of the Catholic tradition something worth thinking about, something that provokes their thought and in its core presuppositions gives it a particular trajectory.

What, then, is the impact of starting one's reflections on the CIT with mercy? A first step toward responding to this question can begin by more clearly identifying what we mean by "mercy" and Walter Kasper's recent book on this topic is helpful in this regard. When we first reflect upon the meaning of "mercy" we are likely initially to consider its connection to forgiveness. Indeed, this is the sense of the definition for mercy provided in the dictionary ("compassion or forgiveness shown towards an enemy or offender in one's power"),[2] and is the meaning we evoke when we use such phrases as a person being "at the mercy of" someone else. In his book on mercy, however, Walter Kasper draws our attention to some important additional layers of the meaning, by way of an etymological analysis of the word in Latin. In Latin the word for mercy is *misericors*, which "according to its original literal sense, means to have one's heart (*cor*) with the poor (*miseri*) or to have a heart for the poor."[3] In this sense mercy "names an attitude that transcends one's own egoism and…has its heart not with itself, but rather with others, especially the poor and the needy of every kind."[4] It is ultimately "existence on behalf of others,"[5] "a matter of attentiveness and sensitivity to the concrete needs we encounter…of overcoming the focus on ourselves that makes us deaf and blind to the physical and spiritual needs of others."[6] In the sense that God's existence is always *ex-istence*, a being with and for others, mercy is "the fundamental attribute of God,"[7] "the organizing center

[1] Isaac Asimov explored this theme in his aptly titled short story "Reason," which sums up the central point as follows: "You can prove anything you want by coldly logical reason – if you pick the proper postulates." A more developed academic exploration that includes attention to this same point may be found in Alasdair McIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*.
[2] Judy Pearsall, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Tenth Ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 891.
[3] Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, trans. William Madges (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 21.
[4] Ibid., 22.
[5] Ibid., 150.
[6] Ibid., 143.
[7] Ibid., 88.

of God's attributes."[8] Moreover, inasmuch as the spiritual life consists of reflecting the reality of God in one's own life (or being "imitators of God" in the language of Ephesians 5:1), existence as a disciple of a God fundamentally characterized by mercy means that one's own life must likewise be understood to mean "being for others, or being pro-existence."[9]

Thus defined "mercy" naturally has a practical orientation, and this can have the effect of correcting the unhelpfully speculative tendencies of the CIT fostered by how the dialogue between "faith and reason" has often been understood. In traditional Christian form, the encounter between faith and reason is often construed in terms of showing the reasonableness of faith (e.g., proofs for the existence of God), or the difference between what can be understood of God by reason or "general revelation" (the God of the philosophers), versus what must apprehended via "special revelation" (the God of Jesus Christ). This approach, however, has at least two unfortunate effects. First, it places the emphasis on the speculative level, which has the tendency to depict faith as assent to certain propositions, whereas faith is rather first and foremost a way of being, a way of living in the world.[10] Second, the conflict between the different objects of faith in the traditional framing of "faith and reason" leads to a further confrontation on the level of method, namely between propositions that can be proved using generally accepted evidential procedures, versus propositions that must simply be believed. This places "faith" at a double disadvantage, linked both to its apparent irrelevancy to life (as an abstract speculative discourse) and its lack of a reliable epistemic foundation: what difference does it make to the conduct of one's own life or the amelioration of others' whether or not one affirms certain speculative religious propositions (e.g., the Triune nature of God), and how could a reasonable person reasonably assent to them in the absence of reliable evidence?

In contrast, placing the mercy at the center of the CIT appropriately indicates that in our contemporary intellectual context it is certain *values* (rather than speculative dogmatic propositions) that reason needs, cannot provide for itself, and that constitute the locus of a leap of faith that in fact most people make all the time without realizing it. Some of the key points from the recent book *The Atheist's Guide to Reality* by Dr. Alex Rosenberg (chair of the philosophy department at Duke University) can help us to appreciate how the "faith and reason" dialogue of today first and foremost takes place on the front between knowledge and values. In this book Rosenberg gives powerful expression to the dominant intellectual trajectory

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[8] Ibid., 89.

[9] Ibid., 151.

[10] The biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan has engaged this issue in relation to the meaning of the phrase "the Kingdom of God" that forms the center of Jesus' preaching in the New Testament. Although this is commonly and popularly considered to refer to "heaven" as an afterlife destination, Crossan takes pains to instead indicate how, in Jesus' use of this term, it rather refers to "a process much more than a place, a way of life much more than a location," "a life-style under God's direct dominion." John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1994), 62, 65. Writing about Catholic Social Teaching, J. Milburn Thompson has summarized this point as follows: "Christianity is intended to be a philosophy of life, a way of living." J. Milburn Thompson, *Introducing Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 38.

since the Enlightenment of reducing "reason" to instrumental/empirical reason,[11] for example when he writes that:

> the methods of science are the only reliable ways to secure knowledge of anything; that science's description of the world is correct in its fundamentals; and that when "complete," what science tells us will not be surprisingly different from what it tells us today.[12]

Such a thoroughgoing commitment to the empirical method has a profound impact upon the realm of values. Purely as a matter of empirical observation, in Rosenberg's view it is certainly true that the vast majority of human beings (within the range of 2 standard deviations) tend to exhibit behaviors that one could describe as belonging to the same core morality. Rosenberg identifies this core morality to include such principles as "Don't cause gratuitous pain to a newborn baby, especially your own," and "It's wrong to punish the innocent."[13] However, from the outset an empirical approach precludes arguing from the objective *fact* of a widely-shared core morality, to the *moral claim* that this core morality is somehow "right." No, the reason why the majority of human beings endorse the same core morality can be determined using the same method that is used to generate anything that counts as knowledge, namely the scientific method. From this perspective the appearance of a shared core morality is the result of evolutionary adaptation:

> As with selection for everything else, the environment was filtering our variations in core morality that did not enhance hominin reproductive success well enough to survive as parts of core morality…Among competing core moralities, it was the one that somehow came closest to maximizing the fitness of our ancestors over a long enough period that it became almost universal.[14]

Consequently, a perspective resolutely based on reason alone (which today is substantially equivalent to empiricism) requires one to let go of any notion that our moral core is right, true, or correct: there is instead only "the core morality that evolution has inflicted on us."[15] Viewing the situation otherwise is simply an example of a category mistake: from an empirical perspective there is no "should" or "ought," there is only what "is." Rosenberg is firm and consistent on this point: "*We have to give up correctness*. We have to accept that core morality was selected for, but we have to give up the idea that core morality is true in any sense."[16] "Scientism can't avoid nihilism," and "Nihilism denies that there is anything at all that is good in

[11] This transformation has been noted by a variety of authors including Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Bernard Lonergan in his *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*.
[12] Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life Without Illusions* (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 6.
[13] Ibid., 104.
[14] Ibid., 108.
[15] Ibid., 144.
[16] Ibid., 113.

itself or, for that matter, bad in itself."[17] As a result, "Real moral disputes can be ended in lots of ways: by voting, by decree, by fatigue of the disputants, by the force of example that changes social mores. But they can never really be resolved by finding the correct answers. There are none."[18]

Although we may view Rosenberg's proposal to give up any sense of correctness as extreme, his analysis of the problem of the origin of values is widely shared. As Thomas Nagel (University Professor at New York University) has commented, "among the scientists and philosophers who do express views about the natural order as a whole, reductive materialism is widely assumed to be the only serious possibility."[19] One unfortunate consequence of making the scientific method coterminous with one's worldview is that there remains no space for viewing moral judgments as being true or false in any strong sense.[20] As the analysis of Rosenberg and others have convincingly argued, we cannot "objectively prove" any moral value to be good or true: in relation to the domain of knowledge, the most we can do is prove that behaviors associated with this value are the result of natural selection that, for the present time at least, has given human beings a certain pro-social orientation.

Thus, faith inheres in the step from such an objective description of "what is," to any value judgment of how one "ought" to live. [21] When faced with this realization one option is to eschew any faith whatsoever and accept Rosenberg's proposal of a thoroughly empirical approach to reality, embracing the nihilism that is its necessary concomitant. However, to live a human life entirely devoid of values, meaning, or purpose surrenders too much of what most people consider valuable and worthwhile in leading a full human life. If these experiences cannot be objectively validated using scientific procedures and so must fall into some other category than that of "knowledge," then perhaps we live more of our lives than we ever imagined based upon and in the domain of "faith." In fact, by affirming such things as love, goodness, consciousness, and free will the vast majority of people already base a great deal of their lives on faith, *believing* that such subjective experiences are not merely hallucinations or misleading epiphenomena but rather that they actually disclose some aspect of reality, a proposition that likely in principle exceeds what an empirical approach can demonstrate.[22] If

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[17] Ibid., 98.
[18] Ibid., 96.
[19] Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 4. See likewise his comment that "The conflict between scientific naturalism and various forms of antireductionism is a staple of recent philosophy" (13).
[20] Ibid., 28.
[21] This is an observation many people have arrived at, through various means, e.g., Paul Ricoeur in analyzing the thought of Karl Mannheim, including "Mannheim's paradox," in his work *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Colombia University Press, 1986), 159-180. Or one can think of Immanuel Kant distinguishing the question "What can I know?" from those of "What must I do?," and "What may I hope for?"
[22] For a recent review of the empirical impossibility of directly studying something as central to human experience as emotion, see the popular but well-researched article by Julie Beck, "Hard Feelings: Science's Struggle to Define Emotions," accessed March 12, 2015 from http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/hard-feelings-sciences-struggle-to-define-emotions/385711/. For a similar review of empiricism's similar failings vis-à-vis consciousness, see Oliver Burkeman's "Why Can't the World's Greatest Minds Solve the Mystery of Consciousness?,"

the dialogue between faith and reason has always been a core activating impulse of the CIT, then centering the CIT today on the value of mercy represents: (1) an apt recognition that a salient and pressing front of engagement between faith and reason in our contemporary context exists on the border between empirical knowledge and ethical values; and (2) the beginnings of a helpful response (if not a solution) to it.

If the foregoing has dealt in some depth with the question of the impact upon the CIT of placing mercy at its center, what of the third term to be triangulated in this essay: what impact might the foregoing have upon Catholic higher education? In short, just as mercy provides the CIT with a certain direction and set of priorities, so too mercy can operate as a vector in Catholic higher education by orienting it toward the end of reducing undesirable suffering. This orientation opposes the temptation for academic study (similar to historic temptations of the CIT!) to move in the direction suggested by several common understandings of the very term "academic," e.g., as a near synonym for abstract, non-useful knowledge; or as an adjective denoting a fruitless (i.e., "academic") distinction; or the privileged retreat away from real-world difficulties and problems to "the ivory tower" of academia. In contrast, mercy provides academic study with another vector. In mathematical language a vector is a quantity having direction as well as magnitude: an example would be the velocity of a car, consisting of its travel at a certain speed in a certain direction. In relation to the directional aspect of this definition, placing mercy at the center of post-secondary education creates a practical and even activist agenda for academic study by orienting it toward the compassionate engagement with others' suffering. I personally was inspired to encounter an approach to higher education inflected by mercy in the campus interviews for my current position in the Religious and Theological Studies Department at Salve Regina University, an institution founded by the Sisters of Mercy. In those interviews the pedagogical impact of the focus on mercy was described to me in the following manner: mercy is understood to be the goal orienting courses in every discipline at the university. I was told that whether one is studying psychology, or biology, or finance, or religious studies, each of these academic programs are ultimately informed by and oriented toward mercy. This might be evident in how service learning is incorporated into a class (e.g., marketing students helping a local NGO promote its services), or a service trip to Nicaragua, or it might be reflected in the particular perspectives introduced into the teaching itself (e.g., relating biological concepts to important contemporary environmental issues). In whatever form it might take, therefore, I clearly received the message that the university's Mercy mission introduced an applied, practical, and even activist orientation to post-secondary education: not simply knowledge for knowledge's sake, but rather knowledge mobilized in the service of "seek[ing] wisdom and promot[ing] universal justice."[23] From this perspective inviting students to embrace the value of mercy is the most significant "faith commitment" a Catholic

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accessed March 12, 2015 from http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/jan/21/-sp-why-cant-worlds-greatest-minds-solve-mystery-consciousness?CMP=share_btn_link.

[23] This is part of the wording of Salve Regina University's mission statement. Accessed November 14, 2014 from: https://www.salve.edu/about/mission-statement.

university can encourage its students to make. In relation to mercy as a vector, it is precisely because technical domains cannot offer orienting moral values for themselves that joining faith-based values such as mercy with technical knowledge, in whatever sphere, is absolutely essential for anyone who does not wish to embrace a thoroughgoing nihilism. If on a theoretical level we do not yet have a fully coherent account of how to integrate faith in the realm of value with the demands of purely empirical methodologies, we are not alone: no one has. On the practical level, however, it is enough to recognize that, as a Catholic institution fundamentally rooted in the value of mercy; supplementing empirical knowledge with a commitment to this value is the most radical sense in which mercy can function as a vector for Catholic higher education. Moreover, and although there is not the space in this paper to explore this in greater depth, with respect to the question of faith in God the experience of living out the value of mercy can itself be a powerful sacramental experience of Godself. If "mercy is the externally visible and effectively active aspect of the essence of God,"[24] then acting mercifully in this life is not merely a dutiful response to a deontological necessity. It is rather already a participation in the life of God, which in a Catholic understanding is the ultimate nature of grace itself.

Up to this point I have focused on the ways that mercy can function as a vector in Catholic higher education in relation to the meaning of this term in physics (i.e., by giving academic study a particular orientation or trajectory). However, mercy can also function as a vector in a second way, related to the biological definition of this word. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in biological usage a vector is "an organism that transmits a disease or parasite from one animal or plant to another."[25] Mercy functions as a vector in this sense both with respect to the transmission of its particular content (what the vector smuggles in), and also the process of smuggling itself (i.e., the subversive and potentially destabilizing effects of the vector's action).

The way in which Jesus spoke of the Reign of God in the New Testament consistently illustrates this second way in which mercy functions as a vector, one apt example of which is the well-known parable of the mustard seed:

> The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. (Mt 13:31-32)

When we think of this parable we are mostly likely to be struck by the juxtaposition of very small beginnings with improbably big endings; this impression is reinforced if we do a bit of biological research, and discover that the mustard seeds Jesus was likely referring to are of the variety *brassica negra*, which are approximately 1 mm in diameter, and yet can grow into

[24] Kasper, *Mercy*, 88.
[25] Judy Pearsall, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Tenth Ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1588.

shrubs that are up to 6.5-10 feet tall.[26] However, considering historical information adds a further layer of meaning, one more in line with the vector analogy I am seeking to draw here. The Roman author Pliny the Elder, for example, who was born in 23 C.E., wrote of mustard that "when it has once been sown it is scarcely possible to get the place free of it, as the seed when it falls germinates at once."[27] In his exegesis of the mustard seed parable, the historical biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan expands upon this basic insight by commenting that even when one plants domesticated versions of the mustard plant "there is an ever-present danger that it will destroy the garden." Moreover, he observes that the birds sheltered in the mustard shrubs trees would hardly have been charming to ancient farmers, since they represented a "permanent danger" to the farmers' seed and grain. Thus, Crossan argues that the point of the mustard seed parable is not only, or perhaps even primarily, that the mustard plant starts as a very small seed and grows into a rather large shrub. Rather, the point is that mustard seed

> tends to take over where it is not wanted, that it tends to get out of control, and that it tends to attract birds within cultivated areas, where they are not particularly desired. And that, said Jesus, was what the Kingdom was like. Like a pungent shrub with dangerous takeover properties. Something you would want only in small and carefully controlled doses – if you could control it.[28]

In the quality of mustard as "a pungent shrub with dangerous takeover properties" lies the element of similarity to the subversive and potentially destabilizing effects of a vector's action, and given the subject of this parable, therefore also of the Reign of God, characterized by mercy.

How could this be so? In what sense could mercy, that most kind and gentle of virtues, ever be aggressive, subversive, or threatening? Simply, if we make mercy the center of our post-secondary educational missions in the sense suggested by the Latin word *misericors* (as having one's heart with the poor), this will not only have the effect of directing our institutions, but also subverting certain of their established practices; mercy will not merely orient disciplinary research and teaching, but challenge some of their fundamental assumptions. This is so simply as a result of the radical disparities in quality of life that exist between rich and poor in our world, the contrasts between which can hardly be overdrawn. On the one hand, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that about "805 million people of the 7.3 billion people in the world, or one in nine, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in

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[26] Support for the statement that most biblical scholars have identified the mustard seed Jesus referred to as the "black mustard" variety (*brassica nigra*) can be found in Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 220. This plant variety originated in the Middle East, and in Jesus' time was cultivated for its oil as well as for culinary purposes. For biological information see Snodgrass, and also http://eol.org/pages/583895/overview (accessed November 18, 2014).
[27] Quoted in John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 72.
[28] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 72.

2012-2014."[29] The British medical journal *The Lancet* has estimated this means that more than 3 million children died of undernutrition in 2011.[30] Such experiences of deprivation force impossible decisions: "You are short of food for all or part of the year, often eating only one meal per day, sometimes having to choose between stilling your child's hunger or your own, and sometimes being able to do neither."[31] Consequently, to be poor often also means to experience "a degrading state of powerlessness": "You have a pervading sense of shame and failure because you cannot provide for your children. Your poverty traps you, and you lose hope of ever escaping from a life of hard work for which, at the end, you will have nothing to show beyond bare survival."[32] In contrast, on the "have" side of the great divide, today there are about a billion people living at a standard of living previously unknown except in the courts of kings and nobles from centuries ago. As a result, it is well within the financial resources of the world's "haves" to save the lives of many of the "have nots": reviewing a range of programs and interventions, the Princeton ethicist Peter Singer has estimated that the cost of saving a life through international development aid ranges from $200-$2000 dollars.[33]

Working from within a utilitarian ethical framework Singer has argued that if we take seriously the principle of the equality of human rights, and therefore also the equality of human suffering, these radical disparities demand of the wealthy that they cut back on unnecessary spending and donate the savings to relieve others' suffering until they would be sacrificing something nearly as important as a child's life.[34] A Catholic ethic framework – by appealing to such principles of Catholic Social Teaching as the dignity of the human person, the preferential option for the poor, the common good, and the universal destination of goods – comes to similar conclusions. As the Johannine communities in the early church poignantly expressed it: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (1 Jn 3:16-17).

What, concretely, does it mean for Catholic higher education to take seriously others' death and sickness due to easily preventable factors, vis-à-vis the allocation of our material resources to ease their suffering and death up to the point that we are not sacrificing anything "nearly as important"? The implications are so radical and numerous as to be profoundly disturbing. For example, a focus on mercy would cast spending on the physical facilities of universities in an entirely different light: can spending on beautifying a building, or adding better recreational facilities, really be justified as something "nearly as important" as the lives of the dozens (and

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[29] From the page titled "2015 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics," from the World Hunger Education Service. Accessed March 13, 2015 from: http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm.
[30] Ruth Alexander, "Does a child die of hunger every 10 seconds?," *BBC News*, 17 June 2013. Accessed March 13, 2015 from: http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22935692.
[31] Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* (NY: Random House, 2009), 5.
[32] Ibid., 6.
[33] Ibid., 103.
[34] Ibid., 18.

even hundreds) of people who could be saved if that money were otherwise allocated? This question is worth posing since the United States is reported to have the world's wealthiest postsecondary education system, "with average spending of around $19,000 per student compared with $8,400 across other developed countries."[35] Moreover, since 1998 there has been marked change in the spending of American higher education, whether public or private and from community colleges to the elite Ivies, in that a declining share of their budgets is spent on instruction and relatively more is spent on administration and recreational facilities for students. This "country-clubization of the American university"[36] contributes to increases in student tuitions at these institutions, and thus represents a challenge to mercy both within the global context, as well as in relation to the best interests of the student populations universities claim to put first. The large and rising levels of debt with which students graduate from college present them with a serious financial burden,[37] so increasing tuition costs cannot have students' best interests at heart. It is not within the purpose of this essay to provide detailed alternative models for our higher educational institutions, though I believe such models do exist.[38] It is, rather, enough simply to indicate how, as a subversive and subverting vector, mercy radically challenges the institutional integrity (in both senses of the word) of our universities in their current configuration.

A commitment to mercy will also challenge the assumptions of individual academic disciplines, and suggest fruitful directions for re-orientation. Areas of study related to economics and business face particular challenges in this regard, committed as they generally are to the assumption that the invisible hand of the market "beautifully harnesses the energy of selfish individuals thinking only of themselves."[39] On a factual level the principle of rational self-interest and the other anthropological assumptions concentrated in the figure *homo economicus* are being empirically tested in the relatively young field of behavioral economics, and are often found to be unsupported by the evidence.[40] However, from the perspective of a

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[35] Sam Dillon, "Share of College Spending for Recreation Is Rising," *New York Times*, July 9, 2010. Accessed November 10, 2014 from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/10/education/10education.html?_r=0.

[36] Ibid.

[37] "About seven in 10 (69%) college seniors who graduated from public and private nonprofit colleges in 2013 had student loan debt. These borrowers owed an average of $28,400, up two percent compared to $27,850 for public and nonprofit graduates in 2012." Matthew Reed and Debbie Cochrane, *Student Debt and the Class of 2013* (The Institute for College Access and Success, 2014), 1. Accessed November 18, 2014 from: http://projectonstudentdebt.org/files/pub/classof2013.pdf.

[38] Berea College in Kentucky offers one such example, which through a combination of comparatively small budgets and requiring students to work 10 hours per week in campus-related jobs has over time enabled it to grant every student a full tuition scholarship worth $20,900 per year. Berea's website (www.berea.edu) has more information, as does Tamar Lewin's article "With No Frills or Tuition, a College Draws Notice," *New York Times*, July 21, 2008. Accessed November 10, 2014 from: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/21/education/21endowments.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

[39] Ha-Joon Chang, *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism* (NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), 41.

[40] The work of Dan Ariely is particularly prominent to the general public in this field, due to the publication of his best-selling books *Predictably Irrational* (Harper Perennial, 2010), and *The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty* (HarperCollins, 2012). However, these unexpected results have begun trickling up even to prominent financial institutions themselves: for example, in 2010 the Deutsche Bank published a report listing 9 different ways that the assumptions of *homo economicus* are debunked by the research evidence. Stefan Schneider, "Homo economicus – or more like Homer Simpson?," *Deutsche Bank Research*, (June 29, 2010), 7-15. Accessed November 12, 2014 from: http://www.dbresearch.com/PROD/DBR_INTERNET_EN-PROD/PROD0000000000259291.PDF

mission focused on mercy the most important contemporary research findings relate to the effects upon students of emphasizing a worldview that places selfishness at the center. As Frank, Gilovich, and Regan reported in their study, "Economists tend to behave less cooperatively than noneconomists along a variety of dimensions."[41] Moreover, by studying student responses to Prisoner Dilemma games and ethical surveys across the four years of their education and between different majors, it became clear that at least part of this effect was due to the economics training students received that repeatedly and intensively emphasized the necessity and rationality of acting purely in one's own self-interest.[42] Students were even found to self-report a reduced likelihood of acting honestly in response to ethical dilemmas posed to them, and to expect less honest responses from others around them, after just one semester of receiving instruction in microeconomics.

For an educational mission focused on mercy, none of the anti-social behavioral impacts listed above is a desirable outcome. Recognizing the complicity of one's discipline in fostering negative behavioral outcomes will for most people not be a pleasant experience, and will on the contrary likely elicit resistance. This is the unsettling effect of mercy as a vector, smuggling in values and commitments that can fundamentally challenge disciplinary assumptions. In my own fields of theological and religious studies, for example, the emphasis on mercy radically calls into the question the importance of any doctrinal formulations, Christian or otherwise. If values such as mercy, and actions infused by them, are what matter most for a contemporary engagement of faith and reason, then although from a religious perspective these values arise out of religious narratives, symbols and dogmas, these are not in themselves foundationally important. They are the means (or mediation), but not the end. Likewise, with respect to the lifestyle of a professor in theological and religious studies, if one truly in mercy (*misericors*), has one's heart (*cors*) with the poor (*miseri*), it will not existentially be possible to rest easy in academic reflection for reflection's sake on the arcane aspects of religions as cultural phenomena in a world of extreme suffering. The upshot of the preceding examples is simply that while the specific mode of mercy's impact will vary by discipline and profession, no field will remain uninfected by its unsettling effects: in this sense the solicitude of mercy is uncontainable and does not respect disciplinary boundaries. To play again with Jesus' mustard seed image, perhaps this is why even today the U.S. Department of Agriculture lists *brassica negra* as a noxious weed in 10 different states![43]

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[41] R. H. Frank, T. Gilovich, and D. T. Regan, (1993). "Does Studying Economics Inhibit Cooperation?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 7(2), 1993, 167.

[42] That is, the authors eliminated the possibility that economics students are on average less cooperative than other students simply due to an initial self-selection bias (i.e., more selfish students going into a field that emphasizes self-interest). Part of the impact of majoring in economics may simply arise due to the cognitive impact of constantly focusing on money. For example, people unconsciously "primed" with experiences or references to money were less helpful to people in need, less charitable in donating money, put more physical distance between themselves and a new acquaintance than participants not primed with money, and chose more individually focused leisure experiences rather than group leisure experiences. K. D. Vohs, N. L. Mead, and M. R. Goode, M. R., "The Psychological Consequences of Money," *Science* 314 (2006), 1154-56.

[43] Accessed November 12, 2014 from: http://www.ars-grin.gov/cgi-bin/npgs/html/taxon.pl?7666

Of course, recognizing the radical import of mercy in any given area is not automatic or a given, but instead rests upon the depth of our commitment to mercy itself. The extent of our commitment to this value calls to mind the last aspect of mercy as a vector: having discussed the kinds of direction a focus on mercy proposes for our consideration, the question of the magnitude of our commitment to it remains. It is perhaps often the case that mercy regularly appears, at first blush, to be "unrealistic." But what assumptions lie beneath this impression? Simply, as this term is often deployed, "realism" seems to mean focusing on the most selfish and fear-based aspects of reality, and then asserting that these worst aspects represent what is most real. I would argue that the persuasiveness of this approach to "realism" is likely rooted in evolutionary developments that made it advantageous to privilege aggressive responses to threats perceived to pose an immediate danger. However, what is actually advantageous in the long term is not always the same as what appears to be advantageous in the short term; there is significant evidence, for example, that our evolutionary success as humans rests on the fact that we have cooperated with each other more completely than any other animal species.[44] Moreover, and in relation to the focus of this essay, if we really wager our lives on the value of mercy, then it is precisely in the midst of ambiguity and uncertainty that the depth of our commitment to the value of mercy, the extent of our "faith" in it, becomes clear. When we abandon the value of mercy at the first sign of ambiguity (the lack of an immediately identifiable "successful" outcome), significant difficulty, or challenge, we thereby indicate that our faith in mercy is not very deep, that we in fact are not particularly willing to trust in and entrust ourselves to paths committed to mercy. For when else does one require faith than in the midst of uncertainty, when there appears to be no guarantee of obtaining one's desired future outcomes? The challenge and invitation in relation to the "magnitude" aspect of mercy as a vector is the question: how much are you willing to wager that mercy truly does run "with the grain of the cosmos"?[45] This is the true wager of faith that a focus on mercy proposes to us.

Throughout this essay I have sought to indicate some of the transformative implications of placing "mercy" at the center of the CIT, and reverberations such a decision would have within the realm of Catholic higher education. As the philosopher Alex Rosenberg has strongly argued, questions of moral value lie beyond the parameters of the scientific method, which in our Western societies has largely been accepted as the only reasonable method of generating "knowledge." If Rosenberg takes this as an indication that there is no such thing as "good" or "bad" in moral terms, a person wagering on mercy instead finds in this analysis an indication of just how much of what is most valuable to us as people rests on "faith" in one form or another. Beyond any medieval associations of theology with faith and philosophy with reason, this indicates that the most profound leap of faith Catholic institutions of higher education can invite their students to make is that of joining faith-based values such as mercy with technical

[44] For a summary of some of the evidence in relation to this point see Alex Rosenberg, "Chapter 6 – The Good News: Nice Nihilism," in *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, 115-145.
[45] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 246.

knowledge, in whatever sphere they are working. If one dares to make this leap in a significant way, one is quickly introduced to another way in which mercy functions as a vector in higher education, namely in the biological sense of "an organism that transmits a disease or parasite from one animal or plant to another." Like the uncontainable mustard seed *brassica negra* Jesus described in his parable, mercy smuggles subversive and disruptive implications into higher education both on the institutional level, and in relation to the purposes and assumptions of the various academic disciplines. Recognizing the radicality of the challenge posed by mercy to our working assumptions and ordinary ways of doing things, we find questions posed to us regarding the final aspect of mercy as a vector: how much faith do we actually have in mercy, what are we willing to wager on it, how willing are we to entrust ourselves to it?

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