

The Self in Contemporary Liberal Religion: A Constructive Critique

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One of the most enduring legacies of the Enlightenment is its highly individualistic view of the human self. This view of the self became a central characteristic of the liberal-modern worldview, and it quickly found its way into the religious liberalism that emerged in the wake of the Enlightenment. Yet today, this individualistic understanding of the self is increasingly untenable. Philosophers, social scientists, psychologists, linguists, and theologians now generally agree that our liberal understanding of ourselves as autonomous individuals is an illusion. We don't first exist as individuals who then form social groups. Instead, the group always comes first, and the individual is formed by and always exists in relation to a larger social context. We are social beings through and through. Yet despite widespread contemporary agreement that the human self is fundamentally intersubjective or social in nature, a strong and potentially destructive emphasis on individualism continues to dominate the self-understanding of many religious liberals, including those within the Unitarian Universalist tradition.

I believe we religious liberals need to get over ourselves. We need a more suitable understanding of the self as social, and in this article, I want to suggest an approach toward constructing such a conception. I begin by tracing the philosophy of subjectivity that emerged in the Enlightenment and that became the basis for the liberal-modern understanding of the self. I also sketch the more recent developments that began to undermine this view (part I). I then describe the individualistic self-understanding I believe to be prominent and problematic among religious liberals today (part II). I next identify and analyze two specific crises I see in current liberal religious practice in light of this self-understanding (part III). Finally, I move toward constructing a conception of the self that is more suitable for the contemporary situation (part IV), showing how this new self-understanding can help address the problems I have identified.

I. THE PHILOSOPHY OF SUBJECTIVITY

It is a truism that modern Western philosophy, beginning with Descartes in the seventeenth century, signaled a "turn to the subject" that enthroned individual reason and consciousness at the center of human existence. This view received its highest expression in the Enlightenment, especially in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The turn to subjectivity represents in part a rejection of external authority. Kant's motto, "have the courage to use your own reason,"¹ is one expression of this perspective. While this process began with the Reformation's challenge to the authority of the church, it led during the Enlightenment to new conceptions of law and civil government. Individual rights and human will, for example, were seen as restraints on state power and authority. Subjectivity thus carried with it an important dimension of individualism and autonomy of action, including the right of criticism. One consequence of this view was that the

individual subject now oriented itself toward carrying out purposive activity by means of cognitive or instrumental mastery over the external world.² When this posture is combined with a perceived need for autonomy, the result is that the self is artificially separated from its own lifeworld context.

This elevated view of individual rationality largely determined the modern conception of the self. Several characteristics are worth noting here. First, the self is conceived as abstract and disembodied consciousness. This attitude has led to the artificial separation of mind and matter, mind (or spirit) and body, human and nature, and other dualisms that have plagued modern thought ever since. Second, the subject becomes self-legislating. Human reason is the sole judge of truth. Since all external authority is rejected, the subject need look only to itself for justification of its beliefs and moral norms. Third, separation from the objective world, combined with the principle of autonomy (self-law), means that one's sense of purpose or meaning must come from within oneself, and not from the community. The self, in effect, defines itself. Thus, in the modern view, the individual subject becomes a mature self, an autonomous ego, by throwing off the constraints of the social group and breaking free. ³

From the perspective of our contemporary understanding of the self as socially embedded and relationally situated, this earlier individualism seems absurd. Yet echoes of it still ring in our late twentieth century ears. The liberal Protestant theological tradition grew up in the wake of the Enlightenment, and subjectivity was perhaps its most prominent trait. The emphasis occasionally shifted from experience to reason and back again to experience, but at least until the early twentieth century the focus remained on the individual subject. Indeed, despite the general move toward intersubjectivity, these subjectivist tendencies linger in our own understandings of the self, and a strong individualism is still present in much contemporary self-understanding among religious liberals.

Of course there is no sharp line here. Just as modernist subjectivity continues to affect our contemporary self-understanding in the West, so too a certain counter-discourse, in which the "decentering" of the subject began to take place, emerged hot on the heels of the Enlightenment.⁴ These perspectives did not replace subjectivity with intersubjectivity; instead, they challenged the subject's claim to autonomy and disinterested rationality. Thus, Hegel subordinated the subject to the inexorable movement of an unfolding historical process, and at the same time reduced the subject to a particular manifestation of the Absolute. Marx embedded the subject in ideology and the material effects of social class, and so challenged both the autonomy and the privileged status of the individual subject. Nietzsche unearthed our long-repressed non-rational Dionysian side, including the urge to creative expression and will to power, and thus subverted our Apollonian pretense of reasoned morality. Finally, Freud turned the subject inside out by claiming that our rational conscious mind was largely dominated by the mysterious operations of the unconscious mind. But as important as these developments were, they did not completely dethrone the individual subject.

Instead, they were warnings against an uncritical faith in objective rationality and over-confidence in the powers of the autonomous subject. Meanwhile, the spirit of Enlightenment modernity continued its own discourse, the discourse that informed the tradition of liberal theology. A true break with the philosophy of subjectivity, one which saw the individual subject not only as decentered but also as derivative, had to await two important philosophical developments in the twentieth century.

The Philosophy of Intersubjectivity

Contemporary philosopher Jürgen Habermas notes that "early in the twentieth century, the subject-object model of the philosophy of consciousness was attacked on two fronts."⁵ One was the linguistic turn taken by developments in the philosophy of language; the other was what Habermas calls the "psychological theory of behavior," referring to the social psychology of American pragmatists G. H. Mead and John Dewey. Both of these developments are important for understanding the construction of the self I undertake below. Accordingly, I want to sketch their basic outlines at this point.

The linguistic turn: The linguistic turn developed along two independent lines. One moved through the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein; the other through philosophical hermeneutics. Both of these lines of thought deny that humans have any sort of direct access to the phenomena of consciousness, whether in the form of self-reflection or direct subjective experience of external objects. In other words, the subject's relation to itself and to the world is now understood as mediated by language.

Wittgenstein emphasized that the meaning and truth-value of words are determined by their actual use in linguistic practice. These practices follow certain conventions or "rules," but the rules have no meaning or application apart from the specific practices or "language games" in which they are used. If users understand a word to refer to a particular object, they can do so only because past usages have established this particular meaning. The context of language that permits these sorts of references is always presupposed. This means that there can be no private language, that is, no language whose use is limited to the subject's own experiences. Language always has public meaning. In other words, the criteria for correct use are always public criteria constituted by the established practices of the particular language group. In effect, as Seyla Benhabib notes, the subject has been enlarged from an individual to a collective subject, a "social community of actual language users."⁶

Habermas has argued that Wittgenstein's concepts of rules and language games do not go far enough to explain the way language works in actual communicative practice. If we limit our understanding to the "grammar" of linguistic conventions, we miss the other "performative" functions of language. According to Habermas, when speakers make understandable linguistic utterances, they not only employ

rules of grammar and the meaning conventions of the community, they also enter into a threefold relationship with the world: They make a claim about the objective world that forms the subject matter of the utterance; they establish an interpersonal relationship with the hearer; and they express their own intentions or purposes. I cannot undertake a thorough treatment of Habermas's theory of speech acts here. For the moment, it is enough to see that we have come a long way from the modern philosophy of the subject in which subjective introspection and autonomous reason were thought to ground the self. Instead, we now see the self, including the self's knowledge and experiences, as entirely mediated by language. And we see language itself as a social product that performs a variety of functions. This new understanding of the deep interrelation of language and experience has had a profound impact on all forms of constructive theology, including liberal theology. I will return to this question in part III, below.

The hermeneutic line of the linguistic turn reinforces these tendencies. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the field of hermeneutics was concerned primarily with interpretation of texts and proper methodology in the social sciences. In the mid-twentieth century, however, it underwent an important shift in direction. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger turned hermeneutics away from its concern with methodology, and instead inquired into the ontological conditions, or the basic structures of Being, that underlie all activities of understanding. Heidegger held that understanding is itself a way of being in the world. An act of interpretation is simply a form of understanding that "involves seeing something as something." More than this, our interpretations can never be independent of the "preunderstandings" we always carry with us. In other words, interpretation always takes place within our life context. These preunderstandings also affect the way we see the world, and leave little room for any sort of pre-conscious or pre-interpretive awareness. The result is that "all perception is always already interpretation." 7

Philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer narrows the subject's playing field even more. For Gadamer, understanding always takes place within the horizons of "a historically situated, intersubjective lifeworld."⁸ And this lifeworld context is not purely objective; we are constantly interpreting it and adjusting our understanding. Moreover, understanding always occurs through the medium of language, which is itself a product of a particular historical and cultural context. The result is that our activity of understanding is not something we undertake as autonomous subjects. Instead, it is an intersubjective activity, or a kind of medium, within which the subject exists. In other words, the subject is always situated both "horizontally in the dimension of language and understanding" and "vertically in the dimension of history and tradition."⁹ The result is that the Enlightenment conception of the autonomous rational subject is completely undermined. Both the self and its activity of understanding are intersubjective and contextual.

The intersubjectivist turn: The second major blow to the modern philosophy of

the subject was delivered by the social psychology of American pragmatism during the early decades of the twentieth century. As Cornel West notes, "American pragmatists promoted an intersubjectivist turn which highlighted the communal and social character of acquiring knowledge."¹⁰ This approach undermined the earlier philosophy of the subject by reconceiving the self as an inherently social being. The principal figures in this development were John Dewey and G. H. Mead. For my purposes here, a summary of Mead's thought will be sufficient.

For Mead, the task of social psychology was to study "the activity or behavior of the individual as it lies within the social process."¹¹ Neither human behavior nor human mental processes can be adequately understood simply by looking at the individual. The individual is important in Mead's thought; both individual experiences and their underlying physiological mechanisms are relevant inquiries. But these phenomena cannot be separated from their social contexts. As a result, in his study of individual experience, Mead emphasizes the role of conduct, and especially "conduct as it is observable by others."¹² Mental phenomena, too, while not reducible to behavior, are best studied and explained in terms of observable or social behavior. Moreover, individual acts always involve what Mead calls "larger, social acts" that extend beyond the individual to include or affect other individuals within the group. Thus, individual behavior "can be understood only in terms of the behavior of the whole social group."¹³ There are no isolated individual acts. This view of human activity leads to a social understanding of the self. That is, the human self has no independent or original existence. Instead, it emerges out of the individual's relations to other individuals within the larger social context. The self "is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience." ¹⁴

Mead thus reverses the philosophy of subjectivity that sees the autonomous self as primary and the society as a derivative collection of individuals. Instead, individual selves are derivative of the social process in which they exist. The social order is both a logical and a biological precondition of the existence of individual selves, which always belong to and emerge out of that social order. Selves never exist in isolation; they "can only exist in definite relationships to other selves." ¹⁵ At both the social and biological levels, then, the individual is formed through a social and communicative process.

Mead's thought signals a fundamental shift to a philosophy of intersubjectivity. Contemporary philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas and Cornel West, and theologians such as Gordon Kaufman, have continued these developments, integrating the principles of intersubjectivity with those of linguistics in their understandings of the human self. Kaufman, for example, sees the human as a "biohistorical" being. The human self, in other words, emerges out of both a biological-evolutionary context and a cultural-historical context.¹⁶ This approach expands on Mead, but, like other contemporary thinkers, continues to see the self as fundamentally social in nature. Yet these developments seem to have

escaped the gaze of many religious liberals, who continue to see themselves as autonomous individuals. I turn now to an analysis of current self-understanding among religious liberals.

II. LIBERAL RELIGIOUS SELF-UNDERSTANDING

The modern philosophical paradigm of subjectivity, which sees the individual as an autonomous and self-regulating subject, has long dominated the liberal religious understanding of the self. Earl Morse Wilbur, whose two-volume study of the origins of Unitarianism has become a standard reference, identifies three defining principles that characterize the early liberal religious movement: freedom, reason, and tolerance. Freedom implied no bondage to creeds or confessions; reason meant no blind reliance on authority or tradition; and tolerance implied no insistence on uniformity in doctrine, worship, or polity.¹⁷ This highly individualized understanding of religion was reinforced by the philosophy of the subject that emerged in the Enlightenment, and it has characterized the liberal religious tradition, especially Unitarianism and Universalism, ever since.

A strong emphasis on individual reason and the "right of private judgment" was evident in the eighteenth century rational religion that eventually led to Unitarianism,¹⁸ and a radical individualism, including an almost pathological resistance to institutional authority, accompanied the rise of Universalism as a radical sect in pre-Revolutionary New England.¹⁹ In the nineteenth century, liberal religious movements from Transcendentalism to Free Religion resisted institutional structures and upheld the primacy of direct, unmediated access to the divine. These forms of individualism have persisted into the twentieth century and, I argue, continue to dominate much liberal religious self-understanding.

Of course, there have been periodic challenges to this tradition of individualism. Early in the present century, Unitarian minister and pacifist John Haynes Holmes, for example, argued that the individual is not "an isolated personal entity," but rather "in reality a social creature."²⁰ By the same token, Universalist leader Clarence Russell Skinner insisted that the philosophy of individualism was simply "unworkable" in the contemporary context.²¹ Unitarian Universalist theologian and ethicist James Luther Adams affirmed the relational nature of the self in his concept of "social incarnation." As he liked to put it, "there is no such thing as a good person as such. There is the good husband, the good wife, the good worker, the good employer, the good layperson, the good citizen."²² And liberal theologian Henry Nelson Wieman also held a fundamentally social conception of the self, expressed most fully in his doctrine of creative interchange.²³ Yet despite these theological developments, the individualistic understanding of the self that emerged with the Enlightenment has proved remarkably persistent within the liberal religious tradition.

I now want to sketch some of the ways this issue affects our present self-

understanding and religious practice. I am helped significantly in this effort by a recent survey of Unitarian Universalists, the results of which were published in 1998, and by an address given by sociologist Robert Bellah to the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association at its annual meeting in June 1998, interpreting the survey results in light of our denominational history. This survey was the largest such undertaking in over thirty years, and more than ten thousand people responded. Its central message, as Bellah interprets it, supports my view that individualism is still the dominant force in our movement.

Bellah locates the roots of this problem not simply in the tradition of liberal religion, but also in the individualistic understanding of the self that has dominated our culture from the beginning. As Bellah sees it, one of the central characteristics of American culture "is the sacredness of the individual conscience, the individual person."²⁴ This cultural reality has always been closely connected to the tradition of dissent with which liberal religion has been identified. The result, as Bellah puts it, is that

what religious liberalism and American culture generally lack is a social understanding of human beings. We start from an ontological individualism, the idea that individuals are real, society is secondary.²⁵

In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, this individualism is reflected in many ways. The first affirmation of the present statement of Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes, the document that defines the basic terms of our shared covenant, is "the inherent worth and dignity of every person." This is followed by other basically individualistic affirmations, including "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning" and "the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." The final principles are less individualistic, affirming "the goal of world community" and "the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." While these seem to soften the individual focus of the others, Bellah is correct in noting that they do not substantially affect the fundamentally individualistic orientation of the overall covenant.²⁶

Survey responses reinforce this emphasis on the individual. One question asked, "what role has your congregation played most importantly in your life?" By far the largest single response was "it supports my views and upholds my values," the most individualistic of the possible choices. This pattern is repeated in other responses. When asked what factors most influenced your decision to join a Unitarian Universalist congregation, for example, more than sixty percent said "searching for a belief system and faith community that made sense to me." When asked what values the congregation should instill in children, seventy percent selected "a sense of their inherent worth, self-respect" as their first choice. And to the question "what do you expect to happen for you when you attend a Unitarian Universalist worship service," the largest number chose "to remember with gratitude and celebrate what is most important in my life." An

almost equal number chose "intellectual stimulation," not exactly a community-oriented choice either. These and other examples reflect the strong individualism, even self-centeredness, that seems to dominate our congregations today. One of the more interesting results of the survey was that these sorts of responses were remarkably consistent across all demographic and theological lines.

Alternative views were also expressed, of course. In the question about the role of the congregation in your life, the second largest choice, at twenty five percent, was "it is a beloved community of forgiveness, love and spiritual growth." And two-thirds named "shared values and principles" as the "glue" that binds individuals and congregations. Further, community is apparently important in times of crisis. When asked "how does being a UU sustain you in times of crisis, tragedy, or pain," nearly half the respondents chose "it provides a community of love, support, and renewal." But while these and other responses indicate "an undercurrent of desire" for a deeper sense of community, Bellah points out that "though values and principles are shared all right, what is shared is still fundamentally individualistic." 27 Indeed, over forty percent chose "acceptance, respect and support for each other as individuals" as the congregational "glue." This indicates the long reach of the philosophy of subjectivity, and suggests that the road to a truly social or intersubjective understanding of the self is long and difficult. In my view, it also explains a good deal of the identity crisis I describe below. A strong sense of religious community cannot be built on a shared belief in individual autonomy, especially when that belief echoes the dominant value of the larger culture.

III. TWO CRISES IN LIBERAL THEOLOGY

In this part, I want to identify two specific crises within liberal religion today. Both of these are bound up in our understanding of the self. The first is what I will call an "identity" crisis; the second I will call a "prophetic" or "justice" crisis. These crises emerge out of an ongoing tension in liberal theology involving its relationship to society and the larger culture. On the one hand, liberalism has always been accommodating and accepting of culture. Liberal religious thinkers have always operated from the assumption that theology should connect the symbols and norms of one's religious tradition to the spirit and conditions of one's own time. Only by taking into account the learning of the social and natural sciences, the insights of the arts, and other cultural perspectives, liberals have argued, could theology continue to be credible and relevant in contemporary society. This accommodating stance is sometimes said to be the central characteristic of what it means to be a religious liberal.²⁸

On the other hand, liberal theology has always understood itself in prophetic terms, as offering a critique of culture. Liberal theologians have been quick to call society to account in the face of injustice, to challenge the cultural status quo, and to call for reform. James Luther Adams has called this the "progressive element" in religious liberalism,²⁹ and the survey I discussed above reflects this

emphasis. When asked about their dreams for the movement, nearly two-thirds chose "become a visible and influential force for good in the world." And when asked to identify "the deepest yearnings of your heart," more than a third, the largest group, chose "to make a difference, help build a more just world." These two liberal tendencies, the accommodating and the prophetic, are not necessarily contradictory, but they do exist in a certain tension with each other.

In order to clarify the two crises I want to address, I will engage two current critiques of liberal theology, one from the right and one from the left. The identity challenge usually comes from our critics on the right. At the simplest level, the identity crisis has to do with the problem of being able to say just who we are, religiously and theologically. This is a familiar problem for Unitarian Universalists. In some sense, it is part of the price we pay for our historic commitment to religious pluralism and our emphasis on a "free and responsible search for truth and meaning." But at a deeper level, this identity issue is related to the liberal accommodation of religion and culture. By adapting ourselves to the larger culture, our critics say, we constantly run the risk of losing our distinctly "religious" identity.

The justice challenge normally comes from the left, and it charges that the liberal response to social issues is often inadequate or ineffective. This challenge is also related to liberal theology's connection to culture. As H. Richard Niebuhr recognized long ago, the easy accommodation of religion and culture tends to produce a certain level of intellectual and social comfort. The result, as Niebuhr put it, is that religious liberals tend to be "non-revolutionaries who find no need for positing 'cracks in time.'"³⁰

Both the identity crisis and the justice crisis therefore seem to be inherent in the liberal religious tradition. I argue that both of these crises have been created in part by the lingering effects of the individualistic understanding of the self that emerged with the philosophy of subjectivity during the Enlightenment, and that a genuine reconception of the self as intersubjective can significantly address them. In short, I argue that an explicit adoption of the intersubjective and linguistic philosophical paradigms, including explicit acceptance of the reality that we are fully social selves, can help the liberal religious tradition achieve a stronger sense of identity, and at the same time provide a stronger critical grounding for a truly prophetic and justice-oriented praxis.

The critique from the right: postliberal theology

The critique of liberal theology from the right is perhaps best represented by so-called "postliberal" theology. The central figure in this movement is Yale professor George Lindbeck, and its manifesto is his book *The Nature of Doctrine*.³¹ Lindbeck begins by laying out his understanding of the nature of religion. Religion, he says, is a "cultural-linguistic" phenomenon. By this, he means that religion provides us with a kind of large-scale structure or framework

that enables us to organize our experience by giving us a set of interpretive reference points. This framework always exists within particular historical communities and traditions. From this perspective, to be religious does not mean to hold certain kinds of beliefs, or to have particular kinds of experiences. To be religious is to internalize a specific tradition and live by reference to its particular framework of meaning.

Now at one level, there is nothing new here. Lindbeck is simply restating the functional approach to the study of religion that first emerged a century ago, and that is represented today by figures such as anthropologist Clifford Geertz and sociologist Peter Berger. Lindbeck's significant move, it seems to me, is to extend this cultural view of religion to theology. The central task of theology, according to Lindbeck, is to "give a normative explication of the meaning a religion has for its adherents."³² This is basically a descriptive task, and theology is to be evaluated by how faithfully it adheres to its own narrative tradition. As Lindbeck himself notes, this approach tends to "result in conservative stances,"³³ although it need not necessarily do so.

In order to see how this perspective becomes a critique of liberal theology, we need to examine what Lindbeck calls the "experiential-expressive" view of religion. This represents the liberal view, and it has been the dominant view of modernity. According to this view, religion is grounded in certain pre-conscious or unmediated forms of human experience. Schleiermacher's notion of a "feeling of absolute dependence" is perhaps the earliest expression of this view,³⁴ although it has antecedents in 18th century natural theology and in 17th century pietism. Twentieth century examples include William James' famous definition of religion as the feeling of apprehending oneself as being in relation to the divine,³⁵ and John Dewey's understanding of "the religious" as a particular quality of experience.³⁶ Wieman's theological empiricism also belongs to this tradition. Our Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes reflect this basic perspective when they name "direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder" as the first among the sources of our faith. In this view, religion is seen as internalized, or located primarily within the individual human subject. This experiential understanding of religion, in other words, is based on the philosophy of subjectivity and its individualistic view of the self.

Lindbeck rejects this experience-based view of religion, along with the liberal theology it produces, in part, because it fails to recognize its own cultural and historical location. It is not universal, as liberals have traditionally liked to claim; instead it simply reflects a particular view of the human subject that has come to dominate Western thinking during the past two or three centuries. At a deeper level, Lindbeck challenges the primacy of religious experience itself. Instead, his "cultural-linguistic" view of religion, as he calls it, reverses the priority and holds that all experience, including religious experience, has meaning only in terms of the cultural and linguistic framework in which it is embedded. Here, we see the influence of the linguistic turn in philosophy discussed above. Finally, Lindbeck's

view challenges the traditional liberal understanding of the self as an autonomous, rational being who can develop most fully only if freed from the bondage of external authority. Lindbeck's approach again reverses the liberal priority by making the community primary and seeing the self not as autonomous, but only in relation to the communal context.

Now, what are the implications of this postliberal view of religion for liberal theology? From one perspective, Lindbeck is simply fighting old battles. As I noted earlier, nearly all theologians today, including most liberals, would agree with Lindbeck that theology is always limited by its cultural context and its historical circumstances. In fact, the earliest clear expression of this principle came not from a conservative postmodern theologian, but from one of the great liberal-modern theologians, Ernst Troeltsch, a century ago.³⁷ Contemporary liberal theologian Gordon Kaufman has continued this historicist emphasis, adopting what might have been called a "cultural-linguistic" understanding of religion even in his earliest work, long before Lindbeck's model appeared.³⁸ More recently, Thandeka has written of the deeply intersubjective nature of what she calls the "embodied self," a self that emerges through encounters with other selves in particular social contexts.³⁹ I could offer many other examples. Thus, contemporary liberal theology has long since moved beyond an individualistic view of the self.

The part of Lindbeck's program that interests me, rather, is its emphasis on tradition. The Enlightenment's rejection of all external authority, especially the church, has led to a tendency among liberals today to downplay the value of tradition as a resource for theology. Kaufman, for example, has argued that "theologians dare not simply take over traditional ideas" uncritically, and he has rejected what he calls "two-dimensional" or correlational methodologies partly because of their explicit anchoring in tradition.⁴⁰ Wieman has always emphasized the importance of tradition in religion, noting that transmission of the "new order" established by creative good takes place through "continuing community."⁴¹ At the same time, like Kaufman, he has warned against the uncritical acceptance of tradition.⁴² Of course freedom from the strictures of the past is liberating, and no religious liberal would likely advocate a return to old authoritarian frameworks. I also think it would be a mistake for liberal theology to follow Lindbeck's inward orientation that tends to insulate the tradition from critique and isolate it from engagement with the larger society. I am concerned, however, with a particular tendency I see among religious liberals today: Many resist seeing themselves as part of an ongoing, living tradition for fear of losing their sense of independence. This fear is based on a false understanding of the self, and it significantly contributes to the identity crisis I identified above.

The critique from the left: liberation theology

The critique of liberal theology from the left is represented by liberation theology. In this discussion, I cannot address the many different perspectives that now fall

under the "liberation" umbrella, nor can I treat the important details of its methodology. Instead, I want to focus on two related dimensions shared by all liberation perspectives. The first is its emphasis on exposing and overcoming the causes of oppression; the second is its emphasis on praxis.

Liberation theology has always understood oppression in structural and systemic terms. For example, poverty is understood not as the result of individual failure, but as the inevitable consequence of the economic organization of modern society.⁴³ By the same token, the oppression of women and people of color is seen not simply as the result of personal bigotry, but in terms of deep-seated structures of patriarchy and racism.⁴⁴ Structural analysis also uncovers the overlapping nature of oppressions, such as the concentration of poverty among women and persons of color in the United States, for example.

Of course liberal theologians have also long been committed to struggles against injustice, and use of the social sciences and other analytical tools has been a part of the liberal tradition at least since the Social Gospel movement a century ago. For that matter, even conservative theologians might engage in social analysis. But liberation theology challenges liberal programs of economic and social reform because they leave the basic social structure in place. Much has been written on the failure of these kinds of development programs in Latin America, for example,⁴⁵ and Cornel West has spoken of "the impotency of liberalism in the face of structural unemployment and class inequality" in our own society.⁴⁶ From the liberation perspective, overcoming these structural forms of oppression will take more than new social programs and the good will of the middle class; it will take a radical realignment of the social and economic order.

Praxis is also a key concept in all forms of liberation theology, and it has many dimensions. Most fundamentally, it is linked dialectically to theological reflection. It is common to say that liberation theology constantly moves back and forth between reflection and praxis. This means that it is always striving to link religious beliefs and symbols to action in the world. In other words, praxis provides both a practical grounding and a pragmatic evaluative criterion for theological claims. By stressing the centrality of praxis, liberation theology affirms that its goal is not just conceptual clarity or advocacy of a particular form of social organization, but rather a transformed and liberating way of life.

Of more immediate concern for my purposes is that the liberation emphasis on praxis challenges the liberal-modern conception of the human self. In liberation theology, the self is constituted not by any quality of rationality or subjective experience, but by a way of living in the world, including responsible action in community. The subject is not the autonomous rational skeptic, but the believing poor person, the person whose autonomy is limited by social and economic circumstances of oppression. This is a key to liberation theology's goal of overcoming oppression. As Rebecca Chopp puts it, "it is only by reconceiving the human subject through praxis that we may respond to suffering."⁴⁷ This critique

thus points to the social and class location of liberal theology. Liberation theology aligns itself with the poor and the oppressed, and tends to see liberal theology as aligned with the privileged middle classes, and therefore as primarily addressing their needs. Chopp says that from a liberation perspective, modern liberal theology "functions as an ideology for the bourgeois." 48

Liberation theology thus calls for "class conversion."⁴⁹ It tells us liberals that if we really want to work for justice in the world, we need to rethink our own identity as human beings and move toward an intersubjective solidarity with the oppressed. Praxis calls not just for social action, but for a new way of being in the world, an engaged solidarity with the suffering and oppressed peoples of the world. In other words, a significant factor in the prophetic crisis I identified above, as in the identity crisis, is the lingering hold of the philosophy of subjectivity and its individualistic view of the self.

I want to suggest now that this individualism also contributes to the perceived lack of effectiveness of many liberal religious social programs. As Bellah points out, without a strong sense of religious community, it is difficult to find a common religious motivation that can sustain the social witness:

shared values and principles don't necessarily motivate people to do anything; whereas a vital experience of common worship can send a congregation out into the world with a determination to see that those values and principles are put into practice. 50

Instead, much liberal religious justice work seems to come from individual convictions arrived at independently of the religious tradition. These are important, of course, but they don't help generate a religious or theological grounding for praxis. And since they don't emerge from a sense of shared identity, these actions are difficult to sustain over the long term. This tendency is reinforced by our traditionally individualistic self-understanding: Social involvement is something each of us can choose to do or not do. Liberal burn-out is often the result.

On a deeper level, individualism itself is linked to the issue of social class. This, of course, is not a new idea. Seventy years ago, H. R. Niebuhr noted the link between denominationalism and social class in American religion. As Niebuhr saw it, middle class churches tend to emphasize individual self-consciousness, personal salvation, and financial security, as well as an ethic of individual responsibility.⁵¹ At the same time, middle class religion is usually associated with the social and economic establishment, and as a result cannot engage problems of social justice at a deep level since overturning the existing system would be contrary to its own interests. I noted above that liberation theologians today often register the same basic complaint about religious liberals. And Sharon Welch, herself a Unitarian Universalist, has commented on the class

ideology that lies at the root of the "cultured despair of the middle class" that contributes to the abandonment of social justice work "when one is already the beneficiary of partial social change." 52

Bellah makes a similar point by noting the close link between religious individualism and economic privilege. He is worth quoting at length here:

Freedom of conscience and freedom of enterprise are more closely, even genealogically, linked than many of us would like to believe.... They are both expressions of an underlying ... individualism. It is no accident that the United States, with its high evaluation of the individual person, is nonetheless alone among North Atlantic societies in the percentage of our population who live in poverty and that we are dismantling what was already the weakest welfare state of any North Atlantic nation. Just when we are moving to an ever greater validation of the sacredness of the individual person, our capacity to imagine a social fabric that would hold individuals together is vanishing. And this is in no small part due to the fact that our religious individualism is linked to an economic individualism which ... ultimately knows nothing of the sacredness of the individual. ... What economic individualism destroys and what our kind of religious individualism cannot restore, is solidarity, a sense of being members of the same body.

The way out, Bellah suggests, is to get past our erroneous idea that we are isolated and self-sufficient individuals. The way out, in other words, is to come to understand ourselves as fully social beings - not simply beings who come together in community, but as beings who are always already in community.

I want to suggest now that the liberal emphasis on the individual, which necessarily downplays not only religious community but also social class, is in the end a self-justifying stance that effectively precludes any true reform. This individualism, of course, is anchored in the philosophy of subjectivity that makes the individual primary and the society derivative. I argue, therefore, that the "justice" crisis within Unitarian Universalism cannot be fully addressed until we come to a new and more fully social understanding of the self, that is, of ourselves. As Bellah sums up: "ontological individualism is false both theologically and sociologically." It is a "mistake" with "enormous cultural consequences."⁵³ In the next section, I articulate a social conception of the self I believe to be responsive to these issues.

IV. TOWARD A CONCEPTION OF THE SELF FOR LIBERAL THEOLOGY

In this part, I want to move toward a conception of the self that addresses the concerns I have expressed with respect to liberal religion today. My own offering here is not original. Nearly every contemporary theologian and philosopher who has addressed this issue has endorsed a concept of the self that is

fundamentally social or intersubjective in nature. Different thinkers may address different underlying concerns, or emphasize different aspects of our social nature, or use different adjectives to distinguish their own conceptions. For example, in addition to the basic notion of a social self, we now see references to the biohistorical self (Kaufman), the situated self (Benhabib) the embodied self (Thandeka), the enlarged self (Welch), the narrative self (MacIntyre), the self as other (Ricoeur), the relational self (Johnson), and more. All of these designations are aimed at overcoming the individualism of the philosophy of the subject and affirming the fundamentally social and communal nature of our existence as human beings. It is unlikely, therefore, that I will be able to say anything wholly original here.

Yet this does not mean that the exercise is not worth doing. These different ways of conceiving the self as social emerged as responses to specific problems. Some seek to articulate a conception of the self (or the human) as part of a larger theological program that also reconceives the concepts of God and the world. Some seek to challenge universalizing conceptions by emphasizing gender or race or class location or other forms of particularity. Some seek to reorient the Western attitude toward the community or to encourage solidarity or communal justice work. Some seek simply to deepen our social and scientific self-understanding. All of these are worthy goals. In my own case, as I have indicated, I want to respond to the situation within liberal religion today by moving toward a more appropriate conception of the self. I see this effort, then, as one contribution to an ongoing conversation about the understanding of the self within the liberal religious tradition, and especially Unitarian Universalism.

I begin by identifying three basic themes that constitute the core of the social conception of the self as it has emerged in recent discussion of the nature of the self. This summary then forms the backdrop for the dimensions of the self I want to emphasize as especially important for liberal theology today. First, the self is understood in fundamentally naturalistic and organic terms. That is, the human being is a biological organism that has evolved over many centuries and has adapted by a process of continual and mutual exchange with its environment. In this view, there is no separate or pre-existing "soul" or other disembodied essence that somehow exists apart from the biological organism. Both Wieman and Kaufman develop the biological aspects of the human self at some length, and Kaufman extends this evolutionary perspective into the cultural and historical dimensions of the human situation. This biohistorical condition, as Kaufman calls it, forms the deep organic underpinning of the social self.

Second, to say that the self is social is to say that the self cannot exist in isolation; instead, it can exist only in relation to other selves. The self emerges out of a process of intersubjective exchange that always takes place within a pre-existing social context. This view reverses the philosophy of subjectivity by insisting that the group is primary and the individual is derivative, rather than the other way around. Moreover, individual identity is also constructed

intersubjectively, through participation in shared contexts of meaning. As Seyla Benhabib puts it:

The "I" becomes an "I" only among a "we," in a community of speech and action. Individuation does not precede association; rather it is the kinds of associations which we inhabit that define the kinds of individuals we will become. 54

Third, there is widespread agreement on the centrality of language in this process. Habermas, for example, sees language as the primary medium of intersubjective exchange that enables the development of ego-identity and the moral self. Kaufman emphasizes the constitutive role of language in human experience, including the development of the self as a moral agent. These are typical of current understandings of the central role of language in the formation of the self as social.

These themes, then, form the basic content of what it means to say that the self is social. Rather than start from scratch in my own constructive effort, I now accept this basic understanding as the starting point for any conception of the self suitable for contemporary liberal theology. Indeed, given the philosophical paradigm shift to intersubjectivity, the general recognition of the determinative role of language, and current knowledge in the biological and social-historical sciences, I believe this is now beyond serious dispute. There is no longer any philosophical or scientific justification for the older individualistic view of the self. Using this basic conception as a general framework, I now wish to highlight three specific themes I see as especially important for contemporary liberal theology. I emphasize these because I believe that thinking in these terms can help address the problem of individualism and the crises in liberal religion I described above. The themes I wish to address are participation, identity as orientation, and embeddedness.

Participation

The first dimension of the social self I wish to emphasize for liberal theology is participation. This is an extension of the theme of moral agency. Moral agency begins with the ability of the human being to interact intentionally with others and with the natural and social environments in which one is always situated. Kaufman suggests that the moral dimension of human agency arises with the need to choose among alternative courses of action and therefore to be held accountable for them. I suggest that the moral dimension is also inherent in the fact that these choices are always made within a social context. Agency can be expressed only in social terms, and interaction among social agents is the organic basis of morality. If we express this idea in terms of Habermas's theory of communicative action, we can speak of a moral self when we find an ability to undertake communication oriented not simply toward achieving one's own ends, but toward mutual understanding. In Wieman's terms, we might say that a moral

self has the capacity to engage in creative interchange, a form of non-coercive communication that is oriented toward appreciative understanding and transformation. This idea is also in accord with the contemporary understanding that the self is largely constituted by language.

Participation, now, extends this idea by suggesting that moral agency involves not only communication through language, but also through action or praxis. That is, the self emerges as one engages in activities in the world with other agent-selves and in relation to concrete social situations and institutions. Participation allows us to adopt the perspective of the other not simply by virtue of linguistic give and take, but also as we encounter and engage the other in actual life situations. Sharon Welch criticizes purely communicative approaches as inadequate without the added dimension of shared practice. She sees shared work, or "material interaction at the most basic level,"⁵⁵ as forming the basis on which emancipatory conversation can take place. In this way, shared work also leads to mutual transformation.

This participatory dimension of the social self responds to the justice crisis in liberal religion. By coming to understand ourselves as social beings, liberals may come to see forms of participation such as social justice work not simply as a choice they make (or not make) as individuals, but as playing a constitutive role in the formation of their own identities. In other words, we must come to think of social justice work not simply as something we do, but as part of who we are. If I cannot see myself in solidarity with others whose circumstances are different from my own, then something is missing from my own identity. My sense of self is incomplete. In our self-help oriented culture, we often feel the need to attend to our own well-being before we can reach out to someone else. But liberation theology reminds me that my own well-being is deeply connected to the well-being of others, and that I can be healed only when there is healing - and justice - for others as well.

This understanding echoes the liberation theme, articulated by Chopp, of "reconceiving the human subject through praxis." Moreover, it helps address the problem of class isolation. As Welch puts it:

In working together, the alienation of class is challenged. ... A genuine conversation between those who are privileged by way of class, gender, or race and those who have experienced oppression or discrimination on the basis of those characteristics is possible when the privileged work to end the oppression or discrimination they denounce. As we do more than vote for those opposed to racism, challenging racism directly in our workplaces, in our families, and in our own lives, we can be trusted in a way that enables those oppressed because of race to speak with us more honestly. In our work we see more clearly the costs of racism and the intransigence of structures of oppression. 56

Thus, participation through shared praxis also contributes to the formation of the self as moral agent because it provides a context for applying and testing the moral norms that are inculcated through the normal socialization process.

Identity

The second theme, identity, is also in part an extension of the theme of moral agency. As I am using it here, however, identity involves a sense of orientation that permits the self to take a moral stand. As Charles Taylor has noted, identity has to do with knowing who we are, and this is a relational notion since who we are is always defined with reference to the social context within which our commitments and choices are made. Taylor speaks of an "essential link between identity and a kind of orientation." Thus:

To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary.⁵⁷

A self is more than a moral agent, more than someone who must make decisions. A self is an agent with identity, an agent who can take a moral stand within a defining community. In this sense, identity is also related to participation, since self-identity, as Allison Weir notes, "is constructed through my participation in communities, institutions, and systems of meaning."⁵⁸ Participation, in other words, contributes to the formation of identity by mediating the formation of shared structures of meaning. And these shared structures of meaning constitute the social ground on which we are able to take moral stands.

Taylor's understanding of the orienting aspect of identity is similar in several respects to Kaufman's understanding of religion and the role of theology. Orientation is a recurring theme in Kaufman's work. For example, he speaks of religion as involving "a particular symbolical pattern for orienting human life."⁵⁹ Indeed, this is one of the primary functions of the symbol "God." As a result, one of the central tasks of theology is to construct conceptions of God and other symbols that are "appropriate for the orientation of contemporary human life."⁶⁰ Taylor's concern is similar. But Taylor is less concerned with orientation in terms of large-scale world pictures than with orientation of the moral self-with-identity within particular social contexts or moral communities.

The notion of moral identity can help address the identity crisis in liberal religion. This crisis is partly the result of the liberal tendency to see identification with a community as leading to loss of individuality. The liberal myth is that moral stands are arrived at through unencumbered and disembodied reason. In fact, however, moral stands can be understood as moral only with the context of a defining community. In the contemporary world there are several overlapping communities, and morality is often ambiguous. But for the religious person one of

these communities is surely the religious community and its tradition. If we can come to understand our moral agency not as something we are magically endowed with as adult individuals, but rather as something that emerges only as we learn to take moral stands within the communities in which we are situated, we might be more willing to claim our communities as positive resources rather than as prisons from which we must break free. We can turn to the religious tradition for guidance and support in our moral stances, aware that our stances are stronger when we see them as embedded in a tradition.

Embeddedness

This leads to the third theme I wish to address, namely embeddedness. Here I am starting with the reality that human selves are always embedded in social and historical contexts. This basic fact forms a key part of the background for the themes of moral agency and identity. The notion of an embedded self, however, emphasizes the particularity of these contexts. It also emphasizes the fact that these contexts exist prior to the self, both ontologically and historically. I can make the basic point by looking briefly at Taylor's discussion of the language community. Taylor begins with the constitutive relation between language and the self, and then connects both language and self to a particular language community. We cannot become selves without "being initiated into a language," and "we first learn our languages of moral and spiritual discernment by being brought into an ongoing conversation by those who bring us up." 61 In other words, we are always already embedded in a language community, and this embeddedness is essential to our existence as moral selves-with-identity. The discussion above emphasized that identity involves taking a stand within a defining community. Taylor is now making the point that this defining community is constituted primarily by language. The moral orientation necessary for identity, then, takes place within the framework provided by language.

The other aspect of embeddedness I wish to emphasize is best described by referring to Benhabib's concept of the situated self. Again, Benhabib begins with the notion that the self always exists within a social or communal context. But she wants to move beyond this general idea and to emphasize the fact that the moral self is always situated "decisively in contexts of gender and community." 62 For Benhabib, "the self is constituted by a narrative unity," 63 a coherent and particular story within which the self and its actions acquire meaning. The idea of "narrative unity" reflects the paradigm shift in philosophy from subjectivity to language. Where some observers see this shift as leading to the death of the subject, Benhabib sees "a move toward the radical situatedness and contextualization of the subject." 64 The self is always situated within the social and discursive practices of the community. Echoing Taylor's point about identity, Benhabib notes that "we tell of who we are, of the 'I' that we are, by means of a narrative." 65 And the narrative itself is shaped and colored by the symbolic codes available in the particular community, in particular "the codes of expectable and understandable biographies and identities in our cultures." 66 We

are, in other words, situated beings who always enter in the middle of the ongoing cultural conversation.

The notion of embeddedness can also help address the identity crisis in liberal religion. In subjectivist and individualistic perspectives, we tend to think of our individual selves as both logically and morally prior to the community. We know that we are products of biological evolution and cultural conditioning, but the individualist tends to see evolution as incidental and society as a product of agreement. Moreover, we often apply this same idea to our religious self-understanding. This idea is deeply rooted in the congregational polity that has long governed our church structures, for example. Without advocating a change in our basic polity, I want to suggest that the same ontological individualism that lies behind it also contributes to the problem of religious identity.

If, however, we come to see ourselves as embedded selves, as beings who do not agree to form a society but rather are always already embedded in one, we might begin to develop a different understanding of the religious tradition. When we belong to a tradition, even if we have only recently joined, we are not creating it anew. Instead, we are embedding ourselves within an ongoing movement that is always already there. Just as the self is always situated within a continuously developing culture, a member of the religious tradition is always "brought into an ongoing conversation." True understanding of the social embeddedness of the self would contribute to a deeper understanding of the value of the tradition as part of the embedding context.

The principle of embeddedness can also help address the liberal justice crisis. There is a telling irony here. If liberals were to adopt a more fully social conception of the self, the effect would be a deeper sense of their embeddedness in their own cultural and social groups, including their own religious tradition. Since liberals see themselves as open and inclusive, this sort of culturally defined perspective might seem to have a narrowing effect. In fact, however, the opposite is true. Not until we see ourselves as deeply embedded in our own cultural circumstances will we be able to see the embeddedness of those whose circumstances are different from our own. Appreciating this embeddedness can help make us aware not simply of individuals who suffer oppression, but of the deep structures of oppression in which those individuals are situated. And awareness of these situational differences can open our own eyes to the ways in which we are implicated in these structures, the ways in which our middle class privilege depends on them. This awareness of differently situated selves then becomes a vehicle for critique and a protection against the insularity of a focus that is limited to one's own tradition. Learning to see one's own moral identity as formed within particularized contexts contributes to the awareness that can lead to effective justice praxis in the reality of structured oppression.

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- 1 Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" [1784] Immanuel Kant, *On History* Lewis White Beck, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 3.
 - 2 See Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), 314.
 - 3 See David West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996), 7-16.
 - 4 The following discussion draws in part on *ibid.*, 154-59.
 - 5 Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 3. Hereafter, this work will be cited as TCA vol. 2.
 - 6 Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 209. For an excellent summary of Wittgenstein's theory of language, see John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 12-23.
 - 7 Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, "Editor's Introduction," in Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, eds., *The Hermeneutical Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 16.
 - 8 D. West, *Continental Philosophy*, 108.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, 162.
 - 10 Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 121-22.
 - 11 George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* Charles W. Morris, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 6.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, 2.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, 6.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 140.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 164.
 - 16 Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), part II.
 - 17 Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1: *Socinianism and Its Antecedents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945), chapter one.
 - 18 Conrad Wright, *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1970), chapter one.
 - 19 Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), part two.
 - 20 John Haynes Holmes, *The Revolutionary Function of the Modern Church* (New York: Putnam, 1912), 38.
 - 21 Clarence Russell Skinner, *Liberalism Faces the Future* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 97.
 - 22 James Luther Adams, *On Being Human Religiously* ed. Max Stackhouse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 17.
 - 23 I develop Wieman's conception of the self more thoroughly in my doctoral dissertation, cited above.
 - 24 Robert Bellah, "Is There A Common American Culture?" *Journal of the*

American Academy of Religion 66 (1998) 613-25, 620.
25 Robert Bellah, "Unitarian Universalism in Societal Perspective," in *Fulfilling the Promise* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1998) 7-23, 15.
26 The current statement of principles was adopted by the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1986. It reads:
We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

27 Bellah, "Unitarian Universalism," 10.

28 William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 2; H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), chapter 3.

29 Adams, *On Being Human Religiously*, 5.

30 H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 84.

31 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

32 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

34 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* 2nd ed. [1830], ed. H. R. Macintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), § 4.

35 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902] (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 31.

36 John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 10.

37 See Ernst Troeltsch, "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology" [1898], in J. L. Adams and W. F. Bense, eds., *Religion in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Ernst Troeltsch, *Christian Thought: Its History and Application* F. von Hügel, ed. (London: University of London Press, 1923).

38 Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968).

39 Thandeka, "The Self Between Feminist Theory and Theology," in Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney, eds., *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 79-98.

40 Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 29.

41 Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1946), 269.

42 Henry Nelson Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* (New

York: Macmillan, 1926), 59-61.

43 Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 26-27. The Latin American bishops have called poverty "institutionalized violence." See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), xxi.

44 See, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), chapter 1; Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), chapter 2.

45 Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, chapter 2.

46 West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, 143.

47 Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 122.

48 *Ibid.*, 26. See also Dorothee Solle, *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1990), 17-18: "[Liberal] bourgeois theology is the work of the white middle class It takes no account of the impoverished masses of this earth; the starving appear at most as objects of charity."

49 Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 23.

50 Bellah, "Unitarian Universalism," 11.

51 H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Holt, 1929), especially chapter four.

52 Sharon D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 15.

53 Bellah, "Unitarian Universalism," 16-17.

54 Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 71.

55 Welch, *A Feminist Ethic*, 136.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 28.

58 Allison Weir, "Toward a Model of Self-Identity: Habermas and Kristeva," in Johanna Meehan, ed., *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 263-82, 264.

59 Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 38.

60 *Ibid.*, 31.

61 Taylor, *Sources*, 35 (emphasis added).

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63 *Ibid.*, 5.

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66 *Ibid.*