



Make Way for Beauty: The Role of Contemplative Artistic Practice in Navigating Religious Education along the Unknowing Path

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic has plunged us into a liminal situation and led us into an unknown situation. In this article, I propose an apophatic approach to cultivating spirituality in response to this prevailing uncertainty. Within the Christian spiritual tradition, two major approaches exist, i.e. the *cataphatic* (via affirmation) and the *apophatic* (via negation). While religious education often leans heavily towards the cataphatic approach rather than apophatic, I argue that in the face of uncertainty, religious education would benefit greatly from embracing the apophatic approach. One way to achieve this is by creating more space for artistic practices. Contemplative artistic practices, which yearn to find beauty apophatically, play a significant role in navigating religious education through uncertain times. The inclusion of artistic practices in religious education can deepen spirituality, help individuals navigate uncertainty, and enable them to find beauty amidst unknowing paths.

Keywords: arts, apophatic, cataphatic, contemplative artistic practice, religious education.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the world for over two years, and new variants like Omicron and Arcturus continue to create uncertainty. Despite vaccination efforts bringing hope for the future, recent case surges serve as a reminder that we are not yet out of the woods. This pandemic has underscored the fact that knowledge and control are not always guaranteed. Mystery and uncertainty are inherent aspects of life, and sometimes we must embrace them to learn and grow.

In the face of uncertainty, I believe spirituality can offer a means to cope with the challenges we encounter. Spirituality does not necessarily require religion, but rather serves as a way to connect with something greater than ourselves and find meaning in life. Within the Christian spiritual tradition, two approaches exist: the cataphatic and the apophatic. The cataphatic approach seeks to know something about God through affirmation and positive attributes (*via positiva*). Conversely, the apophatic approach seeks to understand God through negation and the recognition of what God is not (*via negativa*). In essence, the cataphatic is the way of knowing God, while the apophatic is the way of unknowing God.

Regrettably, religious education often places excessive emphasis on the cataphatic approach while neglecting the apophatic one. However, the apophatic approach holds significant value in navigating religious education to embrace Mystery and uncertainty. In light of this, the question arises: how can we retrieve and reintegrate the apophatic approach into religious education?

One way to engage in the apophatic approach is through the beautiful and evocative language of the arts. I contend that by integrating contemplative artistic practices that embody both the cataphatic and apophatic approaches, we can allow the beauty of the arts to speak and guide us along the path of unknowing. Thus, I argue that religious education needs to develop a new language that not only upholds truth and goodness but also embraces and shares beauty.

To support my claim, I will first demonstrate that religious education's response to the pandemic is inadequate due to its excessive focus on the cataphatic perspective. Secondly, I will draw upon the wellspring of artists' artwork and their contemplative artistic practices. I will argue that artists' deep yearning to find beauty and give it form and expression encompasses both the cataphatic and apophatic approaches simultaneously. Lastly, I will provide best practices for employing contemplative artistic practices in religious education that embody both the cataphatic and apophatic approaches. By integrating contemplative artistic practices that embody both approaches, religious education can allow the beauty of the arts to speak and guide us along the unknowing path.

METHODOLOGY

In this essay, I employ a qualitative and comparative methodology to survey and explore the tendency towards the cataphatic approach in religious education. I will contrast and compare this with the way artists engage in their contemplative artistic practice and use these findings to provide and develop a way to serve religious education that embodies both cataphatic and apophatic approaches.

DISCUSSION

The gloomy ambiance of the COVID-19 pandemic has immersed us in a state of liminality.¹ According to Susan Beaumont, liminality refers to the transitional space between an ending and a new beginning, whether it applies to an individual, a place, an organization, or an institution.² It can also describe the disorientation of an entire era or civilization.³ Liminality signify the in-between state, the already and not yet, neither here nor there.

As Christians, we acknowledge, honor, celebrate, and embrace liminality in our liturgical trajectory. One example is the Christian rite of Adventus, which recognizes the liminal season where Jesus Christ has already been born, but his second coming has not yet been realized. Susan Beaumont explains, “The Christian story is by design an invitation into liminality... we have already been redeemed, but the fulfillment of that redemption will not be complete until the end times when Christ returns.”⁴ During liminal seasons, our destination is not yet clear,⁵ creating tension as we navigate the intertwining expectations of hope, anxiety, fear,

1 The word liminality or liminal is derived from Latin, *limen*, meaning a threshold. As a term it was coined by Arnold Van Gennep in the field of anthropology in 1909 and popularized by the writing of anthropologist Victor Turner in the 1960s. See: Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal period in Rites de Passage,” *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

2 Susan Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're going: Leading in a Liminal Season* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Inc, 2019), 5.

3 Arpad Szokolczai, “Liminality and Experience: Structuring Transitory Situations and Transformative Events.” *International Political Anthropology Journal* 2. No.1, (2009): 151.

4 Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're going*, 4.

5 Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're going*, 7.

disorientation, and faith. As a result, the church and religious education must help people in moving forward even when the endpoint is uncertain or fuzzy.⁶

The question at hand is how religious education can respond to people living in the midst of uncertainty. Hyun-Sook Kim, in her article “Beyond Doubt and Uncertainty: Religious Education for a Post-Covid-19 World,” addresses this question by suggesting that religion has the capacity to deal with uncertainty.

Kim explains, with the help of Oliwia, that religion allows people to sustain hope and experience a sense of security in the face of the COVID-19 threat.⁷ Kim asserts, “Religious education is an important enterprise that could offer support for the necessary ecological, economic, and ideological changes, through providing a framework.”⁸ She the outlines her ecological, economic, and ideological frameworks for religious education, including providing learners with skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes necessary to make informed decisions and act appropriately in relation to ecological issues, providing learners with understanding on how market-oriented ideology shapes individual and cultural consciousness, encouraging learners to question their fundamental assumptions about themselves and their lives in relation with others, and promoting global interconnectedness, and the capacity to embrace ambiguity in understanding the multiple dimensions of life.⁹

I agree with Kim’s argument that religious education plays an important role in supporting, sustaining, and guiding religious adherents during uncertain times. I also resonate with Kim’s emphasis on the importance of “security” in religious education, aiming to provide a sense of certainty in an uncertain world. However, from the perspective of Christian spirituality, I find that Kim’s perspective leans more towards the cataphatic approach. It appears that Kim’s proposal did not address the apophatic approach. Meanwhile, to make religious education effectively

6 To deepen the relationship between liminality and church leadership, I suggest you read the comprehensive work of Susan Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You’re going: Leading in a Liminal Season*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

7 Hyun-Sook Kim, “Beyond Doubt and Uncertainty: Religious Education for a Post-COVID-19 World,” *Religious Education*. 116:1, (2021): 49-50. DOI:10.1080/00344087.2021.1873662.

8 Hyun-Sook Kim, *Beyond Doubt and Uncertainty*, 49.

9 Hyun-Sook Kim, *Beyond Doubt and Uncertainty*, 47.

support, sustain, and guide religious adherents during liminality and uncertain times, we need seriously employ the apophatic approaches rather than merely engaging in a cataphatic way.

Before delving further evaluating Kim's perspective let's clarify what the cataphatic approach entails.¹⁰ Spiritually speaking, the cataphatic approach employs *via positiva* or positive affirmations and descriptions to understand and express the nature of God. It is the way of knowing, utilizing words, voice, images, ideas, and concepts to approach God.¹¹ According to Christine Valters Paintner the cataphatic approach involves "coming to know God through symbols, art, movement, song, sculpture, architecture, and drama."¹² It is content-based, rooted in positive assertions we make about God, and acknowledge how the sacred is revealed through the sensual dimension of this world.¹³ Examples of cataphatic prayers include litanies, creeds, guided reflections, and spoken intercessions.¹⁴ Susan Beaumont asserts that, that cataphatic prayer stimulates the objective, logical, and analytical part of our brain, grounding our work with word-based content while reinforcing rational thinking and decision-making.¹⁵

Hence, based on Paintner and Beaumont's explanation, we can observe that Kim's proposal for religious education in a post-COVID-19 world lean heavily towards the cataphatic approach. The use of the cataphatic keywords in Kim's articles such as "provide learners skill, knowledge, understanding, enabling learner to make informed decision, developing learners' capacity"¹⁶ demonstrates a reliance on the rational thinking, content-based learning, and the decision-making process. Therefore, from a spiritual perspective, Kim's proposal appears predominantly cataphatic.

10 Cataphatic word is derived from Greek, *Phanai*: speak, *kata-phatikos*: affirmative. More precise etymological characterization of the term, see Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

11 Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going*, 81.

12 Christine Valters Paintner, *Artist Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: Sorin Books, 2011), 50.

13 Paintner, *Artist Rule*, 50.

14 Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're going*, 81.

15 Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're going*, 81-82.

16 Hyun-Sook Kim, *Beyond Doubt and Uncertainty*, 49.

While I appreciate Kim's efforts to guide religious education amidst uncertainty, I believe it is not enough to solely employ a cataphatic perspective in religious education without considering apophatic perspectives as well. Liminal seasons, characterized by uncertainty and Mystery, need to be comprehended through the lens of apophatic theology. So, what does the apophatic¹⁷ approach entail?

The apophatic approach focuses on the negation (*via negativa*) or denial of human concepts and descriptions when attempting to describe the nature of God or the divine. It emphasizes the ineffability and transcendence of God, recognizing that human language and concepts are limited in capturing the fullness of the divine. In apophatic theology, one seeks to approach God *via negativa*, removing all anthropomorphic and finite attributes from descriptions of God and emphasizing what God is not rather than what God is. In a nutshell, the apophatic is a way of unknowing.

Christine Valters Paintner, an author, artist, and Benedictine oblate who is known for her work in the field of contemplative spirituality and creative expression, elaborates apophatic path as contemplative, meditative prayer, of moving beyond image to an experience of the sheer presence of God.¹⁸ According to Paintner, the apophatic way honor "The truth that the sacred is always more vast than the language and images we use for definition. God is always beyond the words and symbols we use to try to understand the nature of the divine."¹⁹

Furthermore, Beaumont asserts that,

Apophatic (prayers) engage the right side of the brain. The right side of the brain is where we perceive and synthesize the wholeness of things. The right side of the brain is where we intuit religious experience and, hence, where we interpret the movement of the Spirit. If discernment is our goal, then emptying prayer is a better entry point.²⁰

17 The word "apophatic" is derived from Greek, *Apo*: other than. *Phanai*: speak. *Apophatikos*: negative. Elaboration of the apophatic theology can be read in: Pseudo Dionysius, "The Complete Works, trans. Colm Luibheid," *a volume of The Classics of Western Spirituality*, ed. John Farina (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987). See also John Peter Kenney, "The Critical Value of Negative Theology," *Harvard Theological Review*. 86, no. 4 (October 1993).

18 Paintner, *Artist Rule*, 51.

19 Paintner, *Artist Rule*, 51.

20 Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're going*, 81.

To effectively navigate the liminality characterized by uncertainty, we need to employ an apophatic perspective. Relying solely on the cataphatic approach in religious education is insufficient. Overemphasis on the cataphatic perspective will lead learners to rely excessively on reason, knowledge, and the decision-making process. Instead of discerning²¹ and surrendering to the unknown path, learners will become overly dependent on intellectuality. I have shown that Kim's statement, "...to provide learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that facilitate learners to make educated decisions and act appropriately..."²² is indicative of the tendency of religious education to cultivate the cataphatic approach rather than the apophatic approach, solely relying on the decision-making process instead of engaging in apophatic discernment.

I resonate with Beaumont's strong assertion that, "We have forgotten our discernment tradition. Our centuries-old practices of discernment feel foreign and out of place in our religious institutions."²³ Let Beaumont's prophetic voice inspire us to ensure that our religious education does not simply operate in a business-as-usual manner. We need to examine whether religious education is solely focused on knowledge-based learning. Are our approaches, methods, and teaching styles excessively reliant on intellectuality?²⁴

Nevertheless, the seasons of uncertainty present an opportunity to pause, embrace the unknown, celebrate the Mystery, and enter a space of discernment. When our churches and religious education can surrender to the Mystery and be present on the unknown path, transformation can occur. Both cataphatic and apophatic perspectives are needed and should be employed interchangeably during these liminal seasons. To truly surrender and be present in the face of Mystery, we must embody both the cataphatic and apophatic perspectives in a concrete way.

21 Susan Beaumont cites Danny Morris and Chuck Olsen in explaining what discernment is. Beaumont stated, "To discern is to see through the essence of a matter. Discernment distinguishes the real from the phony, the true from the false, good from evil and the path toward God and the path away from God." (Beaumont 2019, page 68 of 172).

22 Hyun-Sook Kim, *Beyond Doubt and Uncertainty*, 49.

23 Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're going*, 67.

24 Unfortunately, I have experienced that not every course I attended in my past seminaries, began, and ended with a prayer, silence meditation, artistic practice, or reflection.

Arts as a Way to Embody Cataphatic and Apophatic

To embody both the cataphatic and apophatic perspectives in religious education, the incorporate of the arts is essentials. Cindi Beth Johnson argues that the arts have the power to lead us into unexplored territories²⁵ and bring valuable qualities to religious education. I will now elaborate on three qualities she highlights: mystery, polyvalency, and transformation.²⁶

Mystery

First, the mystery.²⁷ The mystery is beyond known language and exists as a profound unknown that remains unfinished. Liminal seasons inevitably confront us with mystery. As Paul Tillich stated, even when a mystery is revealed, it retains its mysteriousness.²⁸ Johnson further emphasizes that “Mystery, as a characteristic of the arts, is experienced through practice and process; artists ‘live in’ mystery, in a tension between cognition and inexpressible experience.”²⁹ Now, let’s consider the work of artist Kennedy Yanko in Brooklyn, who embraces mystery in her artwork.

Yanko’s chosen artistic medium is sculpture and painting, working with found metal and painted skin and explores the limitations of optical vision. She highlights the opportunities we miss when we solely rely on our eyes for perception.³⁰ Yanko’s expressionist-surrealist style is influenced by Betty Davis, and she approaches her work instinctively and contemplatively. She believes that creativity involves persistence walking and working every day, while intuitively listening to the Maker who enables us to bring forth our creations.³¹ Yanko shares that initially, there was uncertainty as she felt no difference between herself and materials she worked with. She asserts, “At first, it was uncertain. There is no difference between me and

25 Cindi Beth Johnson, *Letting the Arts Lead*, 104.

26 Cindi Beth Johnson, *Letting the Arts Lead*, 105-108.

27 The word Mystery is derived from Greek, *Muein*, means closing the eyes or closing the mouth.

28 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 108-109.

29 Cindi Beth Johnson, *Letting the Arts Lead*, 105.

30 “Kennedy Yanko,” Zoelukov, last modified 2022, <https://www.zoelukov.com/kennedy-yanko>.

31 Jasmin Hernandez, *We Are Here: Visionaries of Color Transforming the Art World* (New York: Abrams, 2021), 136.

the materials.”³² This realization allowed her to listen intuitively to the Mystery, leading her to repurpose things.³³ In the face of profound Mystery, Yanko chooses silence and attentive listening.

Yanko’s contemplative artistic process raises awareness of our tendency to view everything as instruments or tools. This instrumentalist perspective often leads us to treat the Mystery without proper respect, honor, and dignity. We tend to place ourselves at the center, seeking control, and considering everything around us as subordinate. However, Yanko’s inspiration teaches us to shift our perception from “use” to “embody,” from “take” to “receive,” from “control” to “listen,” and to recognize the preciousness and sacredness of the Mystery.

Polyvalency

Secondly, polyvalency.³⁴ Etymologically, polyvalent refers to having multiple values or worths. In the face of uncertainty, an artist is someone who avoids getting trapped in a one-size-fits-all solution and remains open to embracing the multi-worths, or polyvalency. Cindi Beth Johnson stated, “Through this model incorporating art, viewers’ lenses expand beyond the limited frame of their life experiences, opening them to perceive people (and other faith traditions) in polyvalent ways.”³⁵ Now, let us turn to the performance art of Marina Abramović.

Marina Abramović, a Serbian American artist born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia is often regarded as “the grandmother of performance art.” While she does not categorize her own artwork within the framework of feminist art, her exploration of the female body, pain, and the dimension of the physical self-has significantly influenced feminist art. In one of her performances in New York, titled “The Artist is Present,” we can learn simple yet profound wisdom.

The concept of her performance is straightforward. Marina Abramović sits silently in a wooden chair across from an empty chair. She sat for nearly three

³² Jasmin Hernandez, *We Are Here*, 136.

³³ Jasmin Hernandez, *We Are Here*, 137.

³⁴ Polyvalent stems from the Greek prefix *poly* meaning many, much, multi-, and the Latin verb *valentem* meaning, “be worth.”

³⁵ Jasmin Hernandez, *We Are Here*, 136.

months, eight hours a day, waiting for people to sit in the chair and lock their eyes with her for an indefinite amount of time. At first, her curator was pessimistic about the idea, but Abramović wanted to remain open to the multiple worths and embraced uncertainty. She explained, “Nobody could imagine, that anybody would take time to sit and just engage in mutual gaze with me.”³⁶ In fact, the chair was always occupied, and there were continuous lines of people waiting to sit in it. At the end of her performance, she met the gaze of approximately 1,000 strangers, many of whom were moved to tears. Through her artwork, Marina Abramović can transcend the limitation of her own life experience. The audience, who have locked eyes with her in silence, also experienced polyvalency and left the site as changed individuals.

Marina Abramović’s performance art has revealed to us how we can embrace someone else’s soul. What we need is to be present, attentive in stillness, and open our eyes to receive gifts from the other’s eyes. Eyes serve as the windows to the soul, allowing us to embrace and discover the spark of someone else’s soul through interlocking eyes. Abramović also teaches us to embrace uncertainty:

This pandemic brings us uncertainty. And I love uncertainty. I love the idea that people learn to live here and now and just think about the present time as the only reality we have, because we always think that we have other realities, that we have other futures. But how if the asteroid fall from the sky and we’re all death in next few minutes, the only things which is certain is now!³⁷

When uncertainty encompasses our existence, we need is to simply be present, mindful, listen, and receive the polyvalent stories told by all stakeholders intergenerationally. The polyvalent narrative of the past - glorious times, hardships, trauma, crises, uncertainties, and even seemingly trivial stories - will help us reveal our souls and navigate our path.

36 Marina Abramović, “The Artist Is Present,” MoMA Learning, last modified 2010, accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/marina-abramovic-marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present-2010/.

37 Abramovic on post pandemic performance art: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/05/08/exclusive-marina-abramovic-on-post-pandemic-performance-art> See also Abramovic contemplative artistic practice project and methods in: <https://mai.art/> accessed 2/17/2022

Transformative

Thirdly, let's explore the concept of transformation. Artists and art possess the power to effect change and transform the world. Cindi Beth Johnson beautifully illuminates this idea:

When experiencing a piece of music, poetry, or any other art form: "something has happened." In ways beyond language, we are transformed as we "live in" the mystery of the arts experience: during a theater performance, it is that moment when the audience transforms to become part of the story the cast is telling; during a dance recital or spoken-word performance, it is that second when everyone transforms into a collective breath taken amid a deeply moving scene; during a poetry reading or a movie, it is that instant when we transform to a collective body, leaning forward for the pinnacle plot twist or leaning back in utter stillness. These are moments where "something has happened," where transformation has shifted our souls when we "live in" the arts.³⁸

Transformation entails being awake and having the capacity to awaken the other's soul, as demonstrated in the work of Nona Faustine.

Nona Faustin is a conceptual and realistic photographer and visual artist whose work centers around black slavery, intergenerational trauma, the search for identity, and trauma healing. Despite facing underestimation due to her body and skin color, she boldly declares the beauty of endurance, strength, and resistance of black female bodies through her work.³⁹ Her photography, such as the untitled piece "Over My Dead Body" from 2013, captures her walking naked up the stairs of the Tweed Courthouse built on top of an African burial ground. Through this powerful image, Faustine juxtaposes her naked black body and her white shoes, evoking feelings of sadness and highlighting how glory often comes at the expense of exploiting others, particularly in the context of white supremacy. Her work sheds light on the contributions of enslaved black people in building a civilization in New York while challenging patriarchy, white supremacy, and racial discrimination through the transformative power of art.

Faustine's sensitivity in expressing profound trauma through her art prompts us to acknowledge the beauty, endurance, and strength of the black female body. Her work is a testament to the transformative power of art, evoking sensitivity

38 Jasmin Hernandez, *We Are Here*, 137.

39 Jasmin Hernandez, *We Are Here*, 220.

in learners and enabling them to remember histories of slavery and suffering. Religious education can embody art as a tool to stimulate a willingness to embrace trauma and view it as a driving force for healing and transformation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I argue that religious education should embrace both cataphatic and apophatic perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of spirituality. By incorporating contemplative artistic practices, we can help students develop a deeper sense of humility and awe in the presence of the divine. Through the insightful perspective of artists, we can navigate the liminal season of the pandemic with creativity and compassion.

While both the cataphatic and apophatic approaches are integral to religious education, the cataphatic way tends to receive more emphasis. However, to truly embrace the path of unknowing, religious education must also seriously cultivate the apophatic way. Employing evocative and mythical language from the arts is essential for this, as discursive and descriptive language tends to offer legalistic, knowledge-based, constitutional, and dualistic methods and approaches. Religious education needs to develop a new language that not only upholds truth and goodness but also embraces and shares beauty. The beautiful and evocative language of the arts can lead religious education embrace the Mystery.

Through the artworks of Yanko, Abramovic, and Faustine, I have shown their capacity to embody the apophatic ways, enabling them to embrace the Mystery, polyvalency, and befriend uncertainty and trauma. They feel, name, un/learn, and intuitively listen to the Mystery, and come up with transformative and prophetic art in a cataphatic way. Thus, artists who seek to find and give form and expression to beauty embody both the cataphatic and apophatic approaches.

Religious education has an obligation to preach, proclaim, and advocate for truth, goodness, and beauty. The Gospel needs to be shared and expressed through words and deeds, just like Faustine's prophetic and transformative

artwork. However, without stillness and proper solitude, words may evaporate, and teachings may lose their capacity to convey meaning and spirit to ignite learners' souls. Abramovic's silent art performance and Yanko's willingness to listen to the materials she works with remind me of the wisdom of mystics like John of the Cross and Theresia Lisieux, who believe that silence is God's first language, and it does good for the soul. Thus, arts invite religious education to listen, receive, un/learn, and be immersed in silence as a way to welcome the abundant love of God in uncertain seasons.

Finally, I would like to suggest seven contemplative artistic practice models for practical consideration. Point #1 is taken from my experience leading catechism in the Greja Kristen Jawi Wetan (East Java Cristian Church) Sukolilo at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. Points #2-6 were initiated and suggested by Cindi Beth Johnson in the Arts for Leadership course/fall semester 2021 at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, US. Hopefully, through insights and perspectives from artists on how they do their contemplative artistic practice, religious education can concretely embody the cataphatic and apophatic approaches, helping individuals navigate the path of unknowing.

Let's make a way for beauty!

Seven contemplative artistic practices model:

- 1. *Silence*** | Prepare sacred or silent space in your place. Spend 5-10 minutes a day in silence. Pay attention to your inhale-exhale process, your feelings, wisdom, and insights. Write or doodle about your solitude process. Alternatively, take a slow walk or cycle in silence without listening to any music. Be conscious, welcome everything, and receive everything. Pay attention to your body, feelings, and surroundings. Jot down your reflections.
- 2. *Writing Prompt*** | Spend 15 minutes a day observing the same image. Ask yourself, "what is going on in this picture" as a way of checking what you think you see. On the fifth day, jot down a few responses, but for the first

four days, simply observe. The goal of this practice is to do freewriting. Also, check “Where is my creativity beckoning me to pay attention?”

3. **Receive Picture** | Shift your notion of photography from “taking” a picture to “receiving” a picture. Think of a picture as a gift, a mystery, an experience of wonder, and an opportunity for contemplation. Each day, prepare to receive five pictures by holding your smartphone camera at waist level and focusing on what looks interesting. Don’t look through the viewfinder; instead, let the camera surprise you as you “receive” five photos. Afterwards, meditate on what you have received, noticing surprises and new insights. Jot down notes on this contemplative process.
4. **Receive Music** | Select a piece of music that you find contemplative. It could be a piece of classical music, a folk song, a hymn, or a piece of music that you find yourself returning to again and again. Listen to the same song each day, letting the words, tune, and rhythm reveal themselves to you in a way that is different from what you normally hear. Consider listening to the same song 2 or 3 times in each session. Take time to jot down a few notes about what you have experienced each day.
5. **Receive Poem** | Select a poem that you resonate with. Read the same poem out loud several times each day. Reflect on it in a meditative way. Take time to write a few notes about what you have experienced each day. At the end of the week, notice how your experience has stayed the same or changed.
6. **Collage as Theological Reflection** | Begin with a Biblical text/Lectionary. Spend 15 minutes. Have a stack of magazines or catalogs nearby. Thumb through them quickly but with a curious eye. Approach the pages as though you are in a dialogue with the questions. Avoid “visual proof-texting.” “Visual Proof Texting” might mean that you look for a picture of a tree because you want a tree because you think a tree is a symbol of hope. This becomes more about illustrating (or doing a visual “proof text”) as opposed to engaging a theme or concept. Instead, think about listening to what you see. Trust that there are no right or wrong answers, just different ways to engage a theme.

If you think about the tree, maybe what will jump out will be a telephone, a person, or a rectangular shape. Or maybe what you select will be a tree, but it won't be the kind of tree you had in mind. Listen to a dialogue with words, particularly in headlines, articles, images, and advertisements. Listen intuitively to what presents itself. If a magazine doesn't seem helpful, move on to another one and don't overthink. See what bubbles up, what presents itself in the materials you have in front of you. The process is a dialogue, a dialogue between what you are looking for, what presents itself, and what is created as the pieces come together. Trust your eye and your instincts in terms of selecting words and/or images. Trust your instinct in terms of how you lay out the pieces. It isn't meant to be framed but rather to inform your reflection, in this case on a Lectionary Text. Your learning and reflection happen in the process and in analyzing the final product.

7. ***Art-based project & Role Play*** | Matt Reingold,⁴⁰ a teacher at Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto, Canada (CHAT) has a unique way to facilitate students exploring God. The students were allowed to produce a kind of biblical text-based interpretive works of art using the medium of their choice, including visual arts, cyber arts, food, performance arts, and music. *Role-Play* | Rachelle R Green, a lecturer at Fordham University, Graduate School of Religion and Education, Bronx, New York, USA, addressed the necessity to play as a therapeutic response to the context of the uncertainty, death, and pandemic. We can learn from her how to employ play in the online class, motivated by Theatre of the Oppressed methods.⁴¹

40 Matt Reingold gain inspiration from Victoria R. Jacobs, Merryl R Goldberg and Tom R Bennet, who bring the key argument that the arts provide student with the opportunity to “*experience* concept rather than simply discussing or reading about it.” (Matt Reingold 2016, 182-199) Reingold, Matt Reingold, “Exploring God: Using the Arts as a Way to Engage Secondary Students in Discussions About God,” *Religious Education*. 111:2, (2016): 182-199. DOI: 10.1080/00344087.2016.1081017

41 Rachelle R Green receive wisdom from Courtney T. Goto, “being able to reimagine the world is an eschatological capacity that fosters hope and clarity about what humanity needs to do to usher in the not-yet.” Rachelle R Green, “Playing in the Face of Death: Pedagogical Play as Love and Lament in a Time of COVID,” *Religious Education*. 116:1, 24 (2021): 16-25. DOI:10.1080/00344087.2021.1864195.

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Journal 2. No.1

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