



Finding faith in the maelstrom: Storytelling as a source of hope

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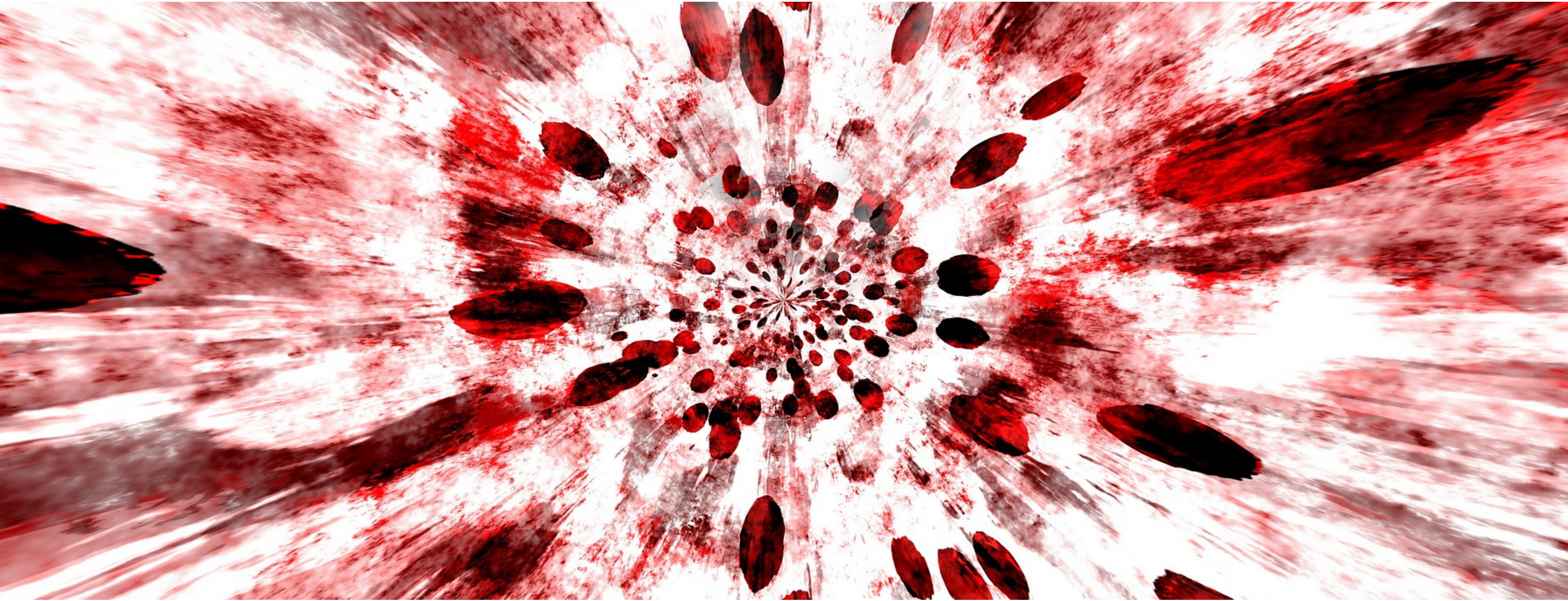
Religious Education Lecture
School of Theology and Ministry / Boston College / Chestnut Hill, MA

10 October 2019

I would like to acknowledge that the land we are meeting on today is the original homelands of the Mashpee Wampanoag, Aquinnah Wampanoag, Nipmuc, and Massachusetts tribal nations. I ask us to acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory, and to honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land on which we gather.

1. finding faith in the maelstrom

maelstrom, turbulence, tumult, turmoil, disorder,
disarray, chaos, confusion, upheaval,
pandemonium, bedlam, whirlwind





my contexts

IN 60 SECONDS...

1 NEW DEFINITION IS ADDED ON UROAN

1,600+ READS ON Scribd

13,000+ HOURS MUSIC STREAMING ON PANDORA

12,000+ NEW ADS POSTED ON craigslist

370,000+ MINUTES VOICE CALLS ON skype

98,000+ TWEETS

20,000+ NEW POSTS ON tumblr

THE LARGEST SOCIAL READING PUBLISHING COMPANY

320+ NEW twitter ACCOUNTS

100+ NEW Linked in ACCOUNTS

1 NEW ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED

THE WORLD'S LARGEST COMMUNITY CREATED CONTENT!

QUESTIONS ASKED ON THE INTERNET...

100+

40+

Answers.com YAHOO! ANSWERS

600+ NEW VIDEOS



70+ DOMAINS REGISTERED

60+ NEW BLOGS

168 MILLION EMAILS ARE SENT

694,445 SEARCH QUERIES

1,700+ Firefox DOWNLOADS

695,000+ facebook STATUS UPDATES

50+ WORDPRESS DOWNLOADS

125+ PLUGIN DOWNLOADS

25+ HOURS TOTAL DURATION

1,500+ BLOG POSTS

79,364 WALL POSTS

510,040 COMMENTS

Google

Google Search

context collapse

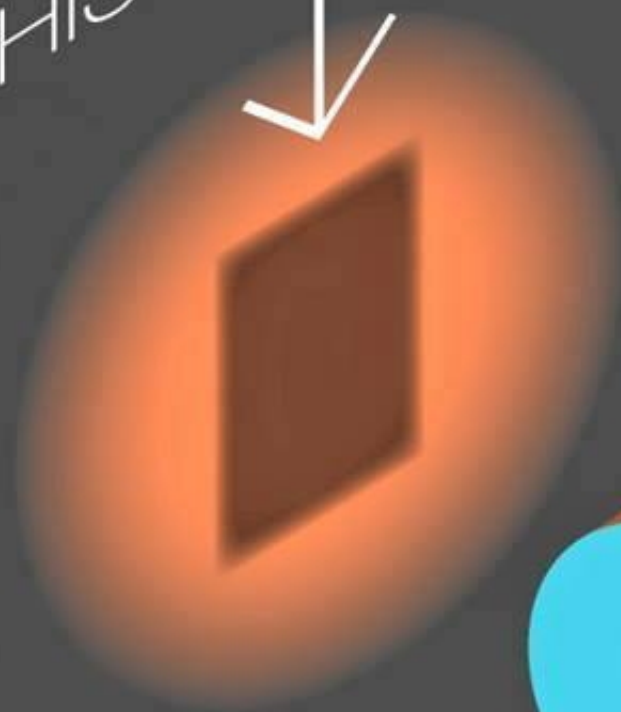


building context requires storying faith

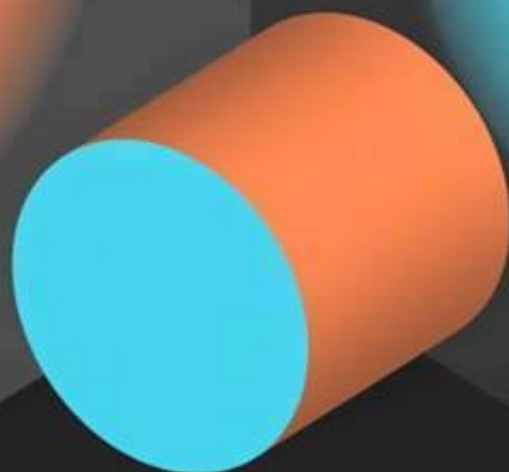
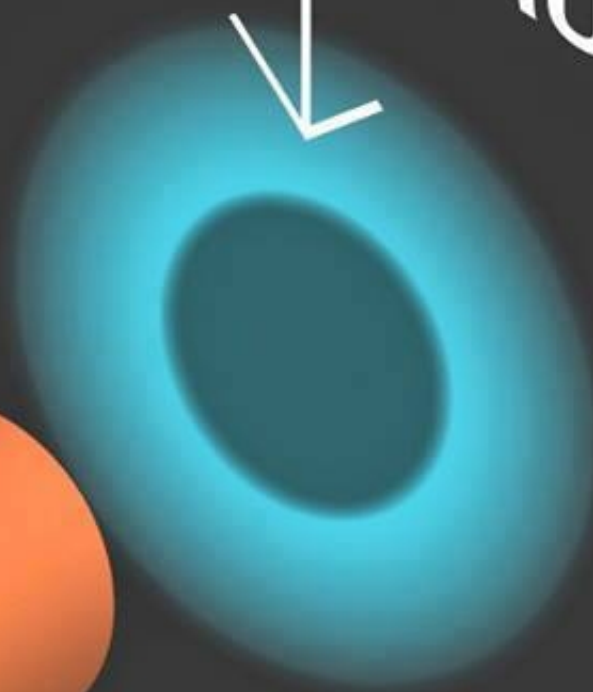


context is essential

THIS IS TRUE



THIS IS TRUE



THIS IS **TRUTH**

please consider this before talking/typing

context is essential and context is collapsing

the trap of objectivity which leads to hubris

the trap of subjectivity which leads away from
transcendence

we need a third path beyond either concrete materialism or naive relativism — that path leads through story

Stories are key to context



authority, authenticity, agency

authenticity shapes authority

“power is the capacity to set expectations about what should be and to translate those expectations into what will be”

personal agency?
collective agency?
God's agency?



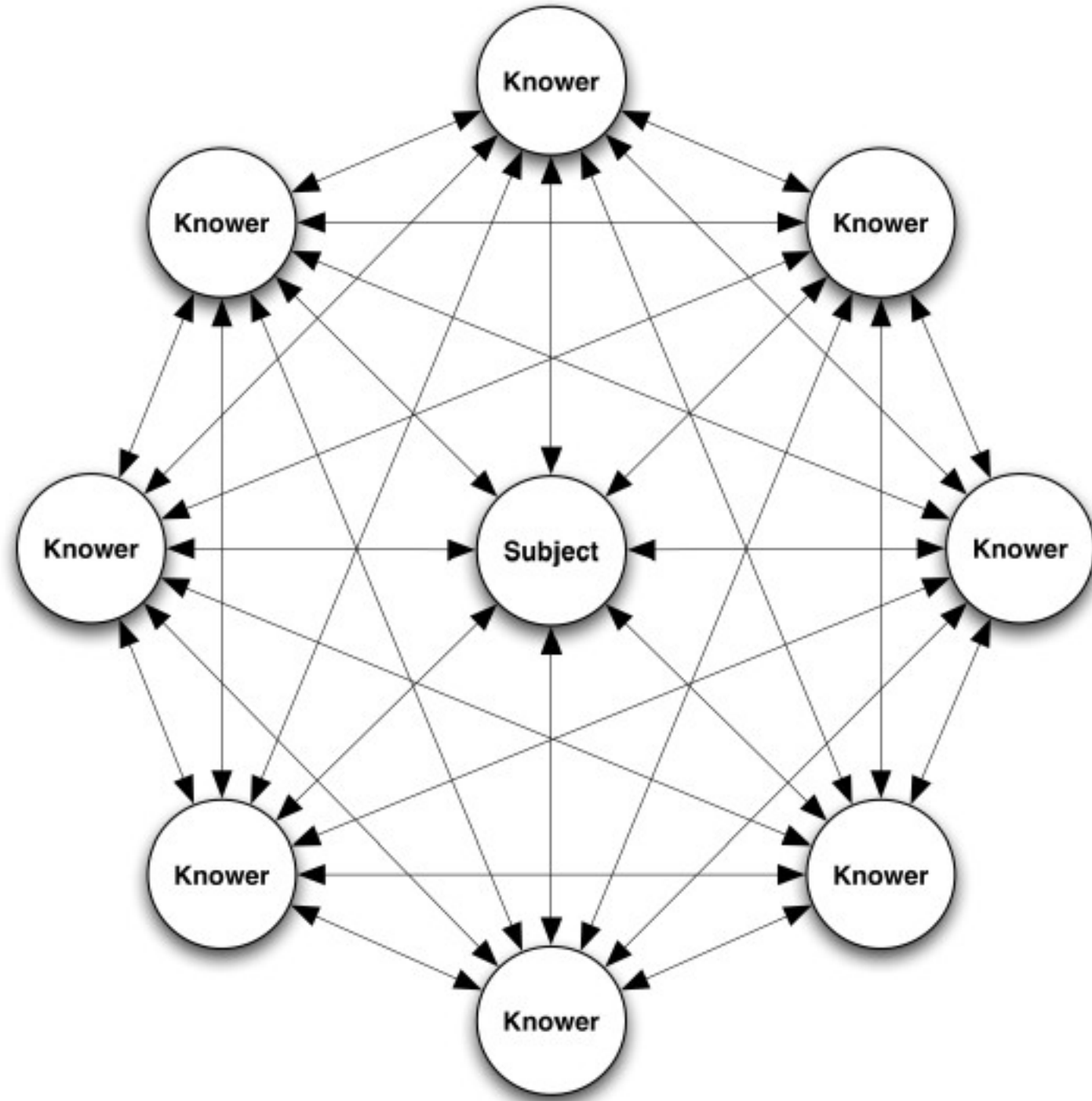
authority, authenticity, agency
agency that's rarely collective, let alone divine
context collapse



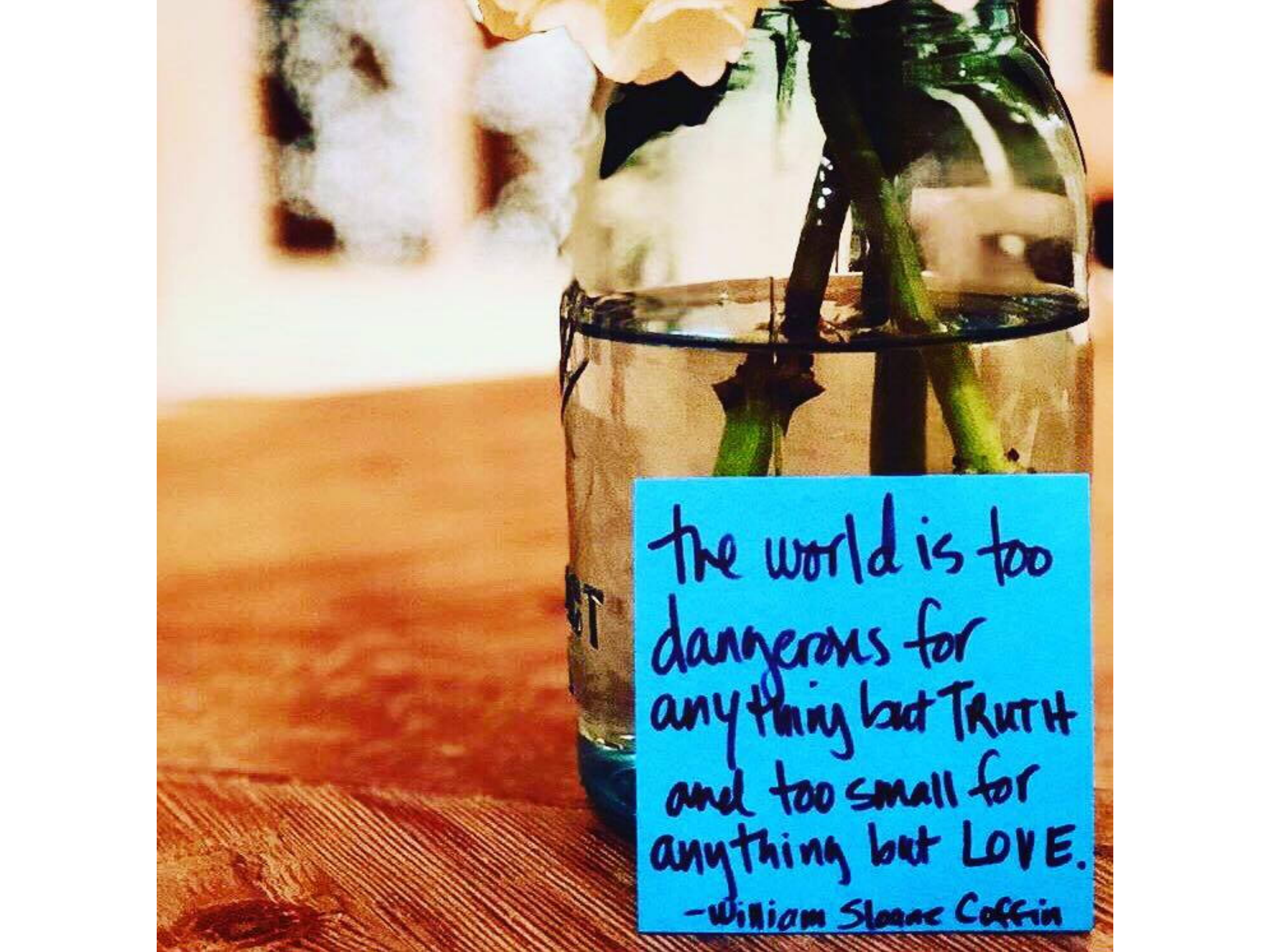
we want to invite awareness of relationship with
transcendence

we want to shape practice in collective ways

we want to “give people access to a tradition, and
make manifest that traditions are always
transforming”



a community of truth

A glass jar containing water and several stems of white flowers with yellow centers. A blue sticky note is attached to the front of the jar. The jar is placed on a wooden surface. The background is a blurred wall with a patterned object.

The world is too
dangerous for
anything but TRUTH
and too small for
anything but LOVE.
-William Sloane Coffin

participatory media offer us great personal creative
agency



BIANCO DI TITANIO 018
MAIMERI
PURA
3x150ml

LATEX
turpenoid
MAIMERI

turpenoid
natural
turpenoid

context is collapsing, but context is essential

we know relationally

we need to know within a relationship with God

we have personal agency but what about collective

agency?

what about God's agency?

how do we learn and grow in the maelstrom?

2. a curriculum of martyria

koinonia

didache

kerygma

leiturgia

diakonia

martyria

“Trauma is described as an encounter with death. This encounter is not, however, a literal death but a way of describing a radical event or events that shatter all that one knows about the world and all the familiar ways of operating within it.”

“Divine love is revealed at the point at which it is most threatened.”

Rambo



“Trauma is described as an encounter with death. This encounter is not, however, a literal death but a way of describing a radical event or events that shatter all that one knows about the world and all the familiar ways of operating within it...

Witnessing the suffering that remains involves encountering the ways in which death pervades life; it entails attesting to the temporal distortions and epistemological ruptures of an experience that exceeds a radical ending yet has no pure beginning.”

Rambo

I see you.

I hear you.

I believe you.

“Divine love is revealed at the point at which it is most threatened. God experiences, within God’s inner life, the forsakenness of those in hell.”

“The exhale and inhale, if interpreted from the middle, suggest a movement that exceeds death and yet precedes the event of life that resurrection narrates. This remainder of divine love. This breath powers a testimony to what is unknown, unaccounted for. This breath powers witness to what is unsaid, unspoken, and inaccessible through language. Witnessing in this space between death and life, those who stand there experience the inarticulable terrain of middleness. Witnessing what cannot be contained within speech, they demonstrate a unique relationship to language.”

Rambo



“Testimonies describe the real in ways that require people to see these events that reason and theory do not count, do not authorize, do not signify. Testimonies challenge us to reimagine theory as the language that serves the fragments, the uneasy nature, the words against words in order to describe the real.”

Chopp

Testimony of this kind needs to be supported by a curriculum that invites it – which means a curriculum of relational knowing, a curriculum open to finding the still point at the heart of the maelstrom.

Faith abides through honest questions
Faith grows strong through doubt and fear
Faith finds grace in imperfections
Faith abides for God is here

Hope delights with expectation
Hope makes hidden pathways clear
Hope inspires resilient action
Hope abides for God is here

Love will not leave us forsaken
Love receives each falling tear
Love restores what death has taken
Love abides for God is here



“The basic message of those who have done the work of silence consists in this: if self-consciousness makes us human, then its elision opens the door to what was once called divinity.”

“The choice for silence or noise, for carefulness or carelessness, is ours in every moment. To choose silence as the mind’s default in an accelerating consumer culture – a culture that sustains itself by dehumanizing people through the unrelenting pressure of clamor, confusion, and commodification – is indeed a subversive act.”

Ross

“[Narrative] means much more than telling stories. It means learning how to hear them, how to nourish them, and how to let them live. It means learning to let stories swim down into yourself, grow large there, and rise back up again. It does not – repeat, does not mean memorizing the lines so you can act the script you’ve written or recite the book you’ve read.”

Ross quoting Bringhurst

we must tell the stories of at-one-ment

[silence]

“Witnessing demands a relationship to life that exceeds the boundaries of logic. Instead, witness requires an imaginative capacity—a capacity to imagine beyond an ending, to imagine life where it is not, in face of the impossibility of a future.”

the curriculum of martyria is at heart about story —
but we need to be careful and thoughtful about
story

4 kinds of stories:

stock, concealed, resistance, counter

a curriculum of testimony seeks to break open the dominant stories and invite the concealed stories into the open

sensing the parabolic in the mythic

Anderson & Foley

“Pope Francis speaks of pastoral conversion, what does this mean? It means something about changing the lives of our communities, which has become more or less bureaucratic community to a missionary-minded community.

It needs to be a church that is outgoing first, not asking people to come to us, but to be outgoing, on the way outwards.

We are reaching out to everybody without excluding anyone... I emphasize this because often we do exclude certain ones, we make a judgement, whereas it should be welcome, welcome should be the first criteria, the first principle by which we act.

The church is becoming aware again that it is missionary in nature, apostolic, and the church wishes to exclude no one.

Our communities need to become a community of persons in relationship with each other, who are able to walk alongside people, pointing out and I would say searching together for the meaning of our lives together.”

Msgr. Fisichella

Listening is about vulnerability. When you ask a genuine question, when you express authentic wonder, you are situating yourself in a stance of openness, you are making yourself vulnerable to learning.

We need to find ways to move into relational knowing that draws on our authentic pain, that listens carefully to our trauma, and in the midst of that remaining hears the voice of the Spirit offering hope.

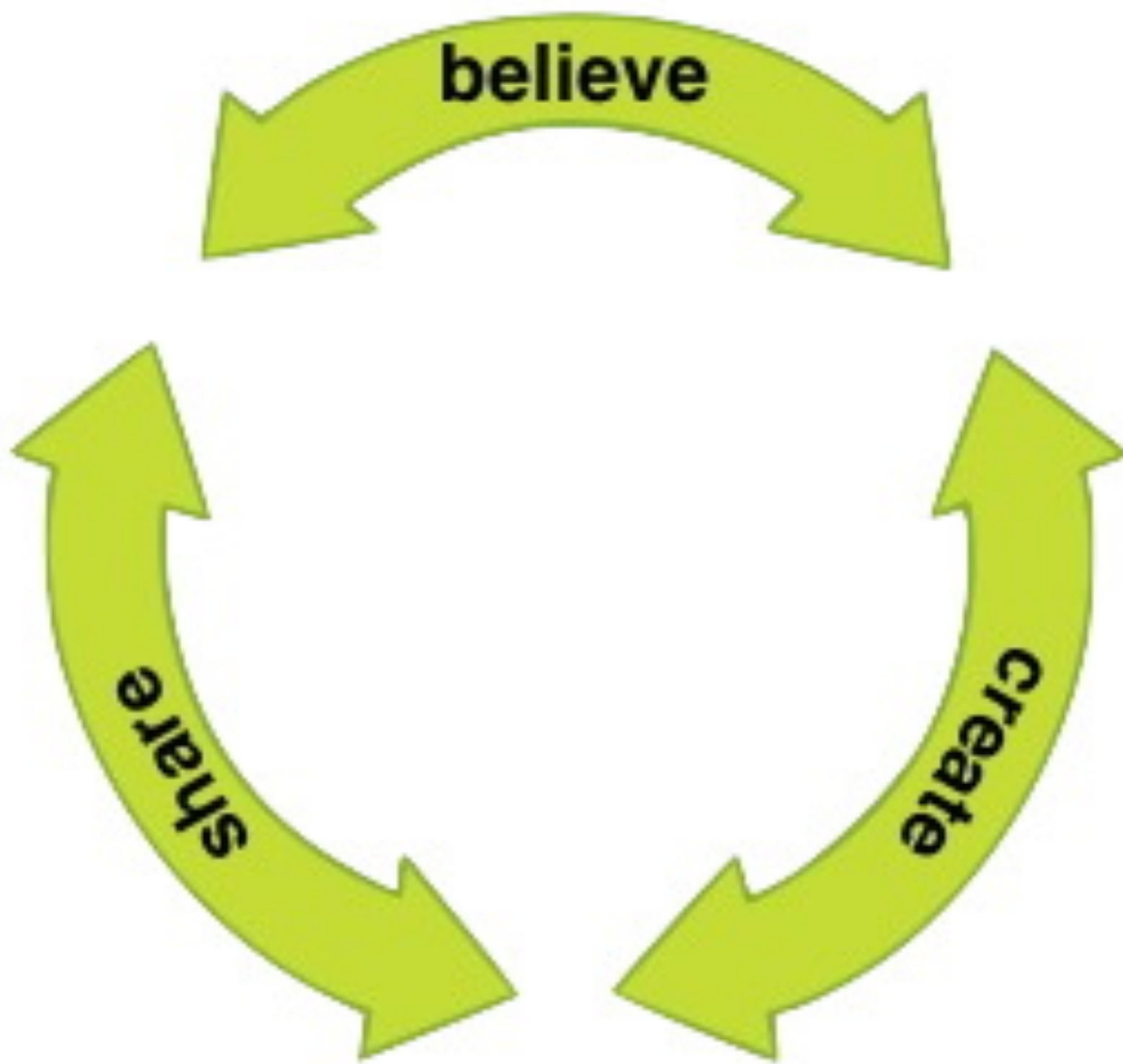
“The act of creation is opposed to the act of consumption: The latter suggests that everything exists to serve our needs and appetites, but the other reminds us of the value and goodness inherent in things themselves, and how creation encourages stewardship and responsibility.”

How can storytelling be a source of hope amidst the maelstrom? It begins in an act of creation, rather than consumption.

We confess God first and foremost as Creator, of all that has been, all that is, all that will be

We confess Jesus as God sharing Godself into the world, pouring Godself into the finite, fractured, human contexts that we inhabit.

We confess the Holy Spirit as advocate, comforter, source of our belief.



3. practical exercises for hope

listening in the midst of popular culture



one practice in a curriculum of testimony, of witness, is listening to popular culture; another is listening to ourselves

THIS IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT

FEEL ALL THE THINGS. FEEL THE HARD THINGS. THE INEXPLICABLE THINGS, THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU DISAVOW HUMANITY'S CAPACITY FOR REDEMPTION. FEEL ALL THE MADDENING PARADOXES. FEEL OVERWHELMED, CRAZY. FEEL UNCERTAIN. FEEL ANGRY. FEEL AFRAID. FEEL POWERLESS. FEEL FROZEN.

and THEN

FOCUS

PICK UP YOUR PEN. PICK UP YOUR PAINT BRUSH. PICK UP YOUR DAMN CHIN. PUT YOUR TWO CALLOUSED HANDS ON THE TURNTABLES, in THE CLAY, on THE STRINGS. GET BEHIND THE CAMERA. LOOK FOR THAT PINPRICK OF LIGHT. LOOK FOR THE TRUTH. (YES, IT IS A THING - IT STILL EXISTS.) FOCUS ON THAT LIGHT. ENLARGE IT. REVEAL THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW. REVEAL HOW SHATTERED WE ARE, HOW CAPABLE OF BEING REPAIRED. BUT DON'T LAMENT THE BREAK. NOTHING NEW WOULD BE BUILT IF THINGS WERE NEVER BROKEN. A WISE MAN ONCE SAID: THERE'S A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN.

GET AFTER THAT LIGHT.

THIS IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT

“a workshop-based participatory media practice
focused on self-representation”

Vivienne

God sees us.
God hears us.
God believes us.

"We are changing all the time. You become what you love. You're always asked to sort of stretch a little bit more. But actually, we're made for that. There's a song that wants to sing itself through us. And we've just got to be available. Maybe the song that is to be sung through us is a most beautiful requiem for an irreplaceable planet, or maybe it's a song of joyous rebirth as we create a new culture that doesn't destroy its world. But in any case, there's absolutely no excuse for our making our passionate love for our world dependent on what we think of its degree of health, whether we think it's going to go on forever."

Macy



“This kind of mutual interdependence I sense to be true. We live in and through one another. We become ourselves only in and through a process of mutual inter-becoming. It all began in God’s own creative, self-giving love. Much deeper than the inevitability of my [physically] resembling my earthly mother is the reality of my core identity, the core identity of all who bear the same family resemblance, a unique but related face of compassion—the same divine Love has birthed us all. God will never be dead as long as we’re alive.”

Nerney

In the morning, in the evening, God is holding you, holding you.
In the daytime, in the nighttime, God is holding you still.

[refrain]

Anywhere you may go, God will go with you.
Anywhere you may go, you are God's child.

In the mountains, in the ocean, God will carry you.
In the forest, in the cities, God will carry you still.

[refrain]

In the good times, in the hard times, God will stay with you.
In your waking, in your sleeping, God will stay with you still.

[refrain]

thank you!

Q&A: Where have you experienced a curriculum of martyria? What was learning like in the midst of it?

more info: meh.religioused.org
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image/video citations (text citations linked to each slide):

storybook (Nong Vang: <https://unsplash.com/photos/9pw4TKvT3po>)

chaos (Gerd Altmann, pixabay)

maelstrom (<https://dwilicnu.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/356952-maelstrom.jpg>)

in 60 seconds (<http://www.go-gulf.com/wp-content/themes/go-gulf/blog/60seconds.jpg>)

context collapse (Photo by [Mikael Kristenson](#) on [Unsplash](#))

truth in 2d (<https://www.facebook.com/coffeeparty/photos/a.313395813326.193473.304981108326/10154084871883327/?type=1&theater>)

stories key to context (Photo by Martino Pietropoli on Unsplash)

tv show images (via google images)

question in the trees (Photo by [Evan Dennis](#) on [Unsplash](#))

community of truth (Parker Palmer, diagram redone by efc)

citations, continued

truth and love (<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10156148048434328&set=a.10152460786089328.1073741826.760589327&type=3&theater>)

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Jesus as refugee (<https://kellylatimoreicons.com/gallery/>)

#eattogether (<https://youtu.be/vDuA9OPyp6I>)

focus / create ([https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155131824305638&set=a.](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155131824305638&set=a.60035375637.97703.672630637&type=3&theater)

[60035375637.97703.672630637&type=3&theater](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155131824305638&set=a.60035375637.97703.672630637&type=3&theater))

wonder bread (anabel proffitt)