Foreword

Many years ago, at a 1993 conference titled Reimagining: A Global Theological Conference by Women, theologian Chung Hyun Kyung delivered a thrilling lecture about breaking taboos. Taboos, she argued, are boundaries set by authorities that often simply protect the power of the privileged. Therefore, we need to question and push at boundaries restricting access, knowledge, and truth that may liberate. On the podium was a big red apple to symbolize the fall in the garden of Eden—the first taboo restricting knowledge in the Bible—and, to the delight of her audience, she took a big bite from it before continuing her lecture.

In this book, *Living Without a Why*, Paul Ingram also demonstrates an interest in transgressing boundaries—both academic and religious—in a mature search for truth. This work is in concert with his most recent publications that demonstrate his interests in Whiteheadian process theology, Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and the science-religion dialogue. His most recent books are *Wrestling with the Ox* (Wipf & Stock, 2006), *Wrestling with God* (Cascade Books, 2006), *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in an Age of Science* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), *The Process of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Cascade Books, 2009), *Theological Reflections at the Boundaries* (Cascade Books, 2011), and *Passing Over and Returning: A Pluralist Theology of Religions* (Cascade Books, 2013). In *Living without a Why*, he engages a wide variety of fields and methods of scholarship such as history of religions, and theology and science, but he seeks, in each chapter, to unite objective scholarship to the intimately personal and subjective knowing that comes through mysticism and religious or personal experience.

In the opening chapters, he argues for a unity of the subjective and objective forms of knowing, an epistemology that does not engage a false (though prevalent) idea that the knower and the known can be separated. He utilizes Whitehead's process philosophy and theology to describe an interrelated reality where these separations are foundationally challenged.

As most of us in the academic field of religion can attest, we live at a time when religious experience is often observed and studied as though it can be separated out from any truth claims of believers themselves. We have bought the scientist assumption that truth, reliability, and objectivity are linked or, worse, that data is truth. Thus, we cannot engage subjective experience as a medium of truth—even when we are studying religion. Ingram argues that this presumed objectivity flattens the very richness of religion and employs false boundaries that block truth itself. Ingram asks that we employ the best of all fields—science, history, religious experience—and methods in a coherent search for knowledge.

Thus, in later chapters, one finds Ingram uniting the methods of his original field—history of religions—with religious experience and theological claims of believers. Also, he explores how mysticism and science, Buddhist and Christian scholars, can cross-pollinate and overlap in ways that lead us further on a path of truth. But, to use the words of Pilate in the Gospel of John, what is truth? When Ingram uses the word *truth*, he is not describing a universal, unchanging, static reality, but rather an ever-developing path on which we are led—it is the Way. This Way is described by famous Buddhist thinkers as well as by Christian mystics and theologians, whom Ingram brings richly together. He deeply engages Christian mystic Marguarite Porete, the Daoist sage Zuangzi, and Martin Luther. In a separate chapter, he embraces the understanding of Jesus as Jewish mystic and political revolutionary who is able to transgress religious and social boundaries, to lead his followers to new, risky forms of living and truth. Along all these lines of inquiry, Ingram finds cross-paths and clues to lead readers to understand the paradox of where knowledge and letting-go-of-knowledge meet in religious experience of truth. Living without a why is the peace that comes from engaging both sides of the paradox fully.

How do we know we are on the path of truth and not delusion? There are three main pointers that emerge over the course of the book. First, in several places in the book, Ingram offers a Buddhist-Christian view that the fruits of the Way are ultimately liberating. When one seeks to define, exclude and control other people or the truth itself, one knows that one is off track. Second, Ingram offers that when we cling to our methods and doctrines and symbols, refusing all others, this is a symptom of fear, and it will lead us to illusion. When we let go of knowing, while simultaneously engaging many ways of knowledge, we will get closer to our objective. Third, Ingram points to Jesus as model of living the Way. Beyond Jesus,

however, he points to examples throughout Buddhist and Christian history of leaders who were able to reach across the aisle to other traditions and norms—to lead to deeper ways of living. Implicit in Ingram's book is the notion that conventional truths and ways of living or relating are often misleading since they point more to culture than to sacred reality.

We can point to the truth or the Sacred with our language, symbols, and ritual, but we cannot own or possess it. While Christian theology has long claimed that God is incomprehensible mystery, Ingram also adds that "the Sacred—however named—is the Ultimate Mystery and ineffable boundary generating the cognitive dissonance inherent in all theological reflection. All religious Ways reflect the Sacred according to their own distinctive ways. But none can own the Sacred or claim absolute truth about the Sacred. The Sacred, however named, is not only ineffable but also radically pluralistic"[1] The Sacred and reality itself is ultimately unknowable but intimately experienced in multiple forms. Thus, Ingram (in a very Lutheran manner) urges religious practitioners to place our trust in the grace that surrounds us and then to let go of reins and live.

In an age of contextual religious studies, Ingram's description of the Sacred is refreshingly universal while still affirming pluralism. While he addresses this in other works, I would offer that Ingram could spend more time discussing how truth or a path of living can be liberating in one context but in another oppressive. As a feminist theologian, I also find that mysticism has certain patriarchal traps—affirming detachment (at least initially) as necessary, rather than full relational engagement. Also, mysticism requires a certain level of luxury or privilege that is difficult to access when one is a full-time caregiver of others. The founder of the Social Gospel movement, Walter Rauschenbusch, wrote how mysticism is important, but it cannot lead away from social engagement. And Ingram agrees heartily with this throughout the book, and offers interesting insight from both Christianity and Buddhism as to how mysticism can lead to social engagement.

No doubt readers will find Ingram's counteracademic moves of reengaging the subjective, the nondata, and the mystical to be refreshing as he affirms these in ways that do not contradict but embrace all forms of knowing. At this particular time in the academic study of religion, it is a very necessary move away from the form of religious study that has been overly shaped by the methods of science and by the insistence that observation alone leads to truth. The empirical method is excellent for some forms of

1. See pages 53–54.

science, but it has reigned supreme and taken over other areas of study in a way that is unwarranted. And, on a personal level, I find the beauty of Ingram's writing and insights to always help me see the Sacred in and between the world religions and human experience in its manifold manifestations. I also cannot help but delight in and affirm the pushing of boundaries between the disciplines and methods that Ingram employs. Dear readers, enjoy!

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