

THE ROLE OF PARADOX: ABRAHAM'S RELIGIOUS IDEA FOR PEACE IN THE BATTLE OF IDEAS

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On July 7th, 2005, four bombs exploded in the transportation system of London, England. Four more attempts followed two weeks later. These bombs seemed carefully designed to impose destruction and mayhem into the lives of many and the minds of all. The City of London has experienced many bombs before these explosions. Her long history is filled with explosions whenever the perpetrators of discontent or warfare have imposed violence on her citizenry. However, these bombs seemed to mark a different era for Londoners. These bombs were carried on the backs of young religious men, all British citizens, who consciously decided to kill themselves and kill or maim anyone who would be close to them at the moment of detonation. Londoners have been steeled against the destruction of religious sectarian violence with extensive experience of Protestant versus Catholic antagonism; however, the destruction of innocent lives by those of the Muslim faith forced the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair, to call for a new form of battle: a battle of ideas.¹

In a policy speech to his own Labor party as he began his third term of office, Tony Blair defined the confrontation as a clash between civilized people and “an evil ideology.”² Radicalized Islamic beliefs seemed to have impelled these young men to take this path of social destruction. These beliefs were cultivated in a cauldron of propaganda and dogmatic Islamic teachings. However, they also find a source in a more traditional milieu: competing religious structures between major religions and friction between denominations within religions. Blair defines radical ideology as one “founded on belief, one whose fanaticism . . . can't be moderated.”³ He calls the struggle a “battle of idea, hearts and minds, both within Islam and outside it.”⁴ To win this battle, Blair invokes the “power of argument, debate, true religious faith, and true legitimate politics [to] defeat this threat.”⁵ Assisting Blair in his battle demands that all persons who possess the skills and understanding of these four weapons—argument, debate, true religious faith, and true politics—join this war being fought. The alternative remains the power of the bomb—British, American, or mujahidin—with its ability to destroy everything in its orb of carnage. Prime Minister Blair calls on this community of scholars in this setting to join him in this warfare with these ancient weapons that scholars have honed over the centuries. The argument of this paper is that we can and must offer new ideas in the struggle for a new global society that does not invoke sufficient hate to bomb but sufficient ideas to transform. The paper will draw a new idea from an ancient exemplar of action: Abraham, Father of Jews, Christian, and Muslims. Abraham's actions will offer us a Method of Peace within the tension of paradox. This religious methodology will inform us how we personally might respond to violent ideas around us, and how government and education might function to mitigate if not transform the violence of ideas carried in the minds of potential bombers.

The demand to transform a person or a group with ideas means that those reservoirs of effective ideas must either be created, a path we will not explore, or recovered from the past so that any ideas that might have assisted humanity in its past transformation may be reformulated into the present, a path we will explore. Someone must know and then risk the transmission of these ancient ideas so that they can live anew. Whether the transmitter is a prophet, an historian, or an ethicist, recovering ancient ideas serves society well as a proven method of transformation. This technique of every major religion, government, and educational institution supports the value of the method. Transformation also functions most effectively when a mutually approved model of action is offered to assist in the transformation process. Modeling appropriate action is an ancient method of moral pressure to alter ideas and activities. For theists, the most powerful exemplar is one's god. If one's god acts in a certain way, then the follower of that god is expected to act in a similar fashion. History is replete with those attempting to convince others that they know how a god is acting, hopeful that one's audience will act the same way. We continue to see this methodology in all religions including a recent marketing tool to challenge Christian teenagers: bracelets with WWJD, What Would Jesus Do? If one does not have a specific divine model, a heroic model⁶ may then be offered.

If one desires to transform violence to peace, a model of a heroic peacemaker is helpful. This hero is most beneficial if the parties to the conflict affirm the heroic status of the model. Since there is no greater conflict in human society than the warfare between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, a memory of a mutually heroic peacemaker may assist in helping humanity find peace. Since all three religions

claim Abraham as their Father,⁷ the actions of peacemaking by Abraham may be an idea whose memory must be reborn.

Although the story of Abraham⁸ resides in the text of Genesis and is only affirmed as sacred literature for Jews and Christians, the story retains power for all three religions since it provides a source of knowledge about Abraham. As well, the power of Abraham in all three religions is the faith he offered to God.⁹ Any narrative that develops his cultivation of faith in God bears consideration. Within the Hebrew text, the story of Abram, Abraham's original name until Genesis 17:5, opens in Genesis 11 with a narrative of his family that contains no mention of a god. The text returns in the first verse of Genesis 12 to a personal relationship between YHWH, the sacred name of God¹⁰ rendered as LORD in English Bibles, and Abram. The exclusive usage of LORD as the sole name of God is a consistent feature of the Genesis narrative from the story of Cain's conception (4:1) and continues into the story of Abram. A conversation between Abram and his LORD ensues. With our interest in moral action, the moral activity of one's god will be attached to the name of one's god. How a god acts will be assumed to help us understand how the god is perceived and named. Abram's god, LORD, is a god who communicates intimately with humanity.

Father Abram's LORD was a very personal God: a God who calls him (Gen. 12:1), appears to him (12:7), serves as the object of his worship, and his protector (12:17). This God is perceived as, in the language of theology, an Immanent God.¹¹ However, the LORD was not the only relationship of the text for Abram. He also lived in relationship with his nephew Lot. Lot had chosen to live in the vicinity of Sodom, a wicked city of sinners in the eyes of the LORD (13:13). In a war of northern versus southern city-states, the king of Sodom was defeated, his city was sacked, and Lot was taken captive. Abram establishes his heroic status by taking a small army, 318 men, and defeats the kings and reclaims all the goods and his nephew Lot (14:15-16). The king of Sodom goes up to meet him and is joined by the king of Salem, Melchizedek, not one of the warring kings.¹² The name Salem, probably the same city as the modern city named Jerusalem,¹³ gains its significance for our proposal since the name means peace, shalom. In Melchizedek's Salem, the roles of king and priest were integrated, and Melchizedek serves in Salem as king and priest of God Most High, a likely Canaanite appellation that was possibly formed from the conjoining of God (El) with Most High (Elyon) at a previous point in history.^{14, 15} For our moral investigation, this name of God defines a God that rules over the entire universe from the highest imagined vantage point or center of the immaterial, usually defined as heaven. This type of representation of God is defined with terms such as power, kingdom, and majesty. The Psalmist associates this name of God as being the redeemer¹⁶ (Ps 78:35) or savior of humanity with overwhelming power to save. Again in the language of theology, Melchizedek understood his god to be a Transcendent God, a polar opposite God to the Immanent God. No greater distance should exist between these two worshipers of each other's God. In this narrative's setting of war, we can assume that the kings would present themselves as representatives of their own gods. Each king would fight for his primary god such as Ba'al or El and one's pantheon of lesser gods; each victory would be representative of a victory of one's god over the other's god. The stronger god of one king has vanquished the weaker god of the other king. In nation building, the gods of the city-states are often incorporated into the pantheon of the conquering army and become another god of the pantheon with a new dominating god. Newly conjoined names are often the result of a successful military campaign as the conqueror sues for peace with a conquered people, a possible explanation of the origin of the name El Elyon.

Although Abram worships a LORD seemingly with a polar opposite understanding of Melchizedek's God, he accepts Melchizedek's gift of bread and wine and receives a blessing from Melchizedek in the name of God Most High. Abram would have had a number of choices with the presentation of this new priest and god: continue the war with this new priest/king and god, ignore the priest/king and god, integrate the priest/king and god into one's pantheon, or honor this priest/king and god. Abram chose the later. The narrative seems to lean away from an understanding of God as one who needs a priest to intercede between the God and the people, a necessary component of a functioning relationship with a transcendent god. Abram had clearly established the personal relationship between himself and his LORD; a priest would have no role in Abram's conception of God. However, Abram honored Melchizedek with a tithe (a tenth) of all he had, and the narrative immediately shifts to a conversation between the defeated King of Sodom and Abram. In a gracious act of mercy, Abram limits the war booty that would normally be his for the taking. He explains his actions by saying that he has sworn an oath to the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth. He melds the name of his God, LORD, with Melchizedek's God, God Most High, to form this new name. However, this remains one

God, not an addition to one's existing pantheon. The underlying theology of Abram's actions is clear: his God YHWH is the same as Melchizedek's God Most High.¹⁷ The name symbolizes that understanding. In moral theological language, he creates a Transcendent Immanent God, a true paradox, to re-create unity between two people who are serving what must be the same God with two polar names. With the symbolism of a new name for God, peace is established, coined by this author as the Peace of Abraham. This name when seen again in 15:2 becomes shortened to LORD God, the name Abram uses as he calls the name of God; however, the memory of the paradox is retained in the unity of the name and the peace between people.

The significance and the power of this narrative become clear as one moves into the next section of the sacred narrative. The lesson in the creation of peace between people is then followed with a lesson on unity between a person and one's God. The LORD comes to Abram and promises a great reward. After sharing concern on his future heir, Abram is reassured that he would have a son to carry on his lineage into eternity. In what may be the pinnacle or *magnum opus* of the Old Testament, Abram "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (15:6 RSV). This act of belief becomes the model of faith for all future people of God. Out of this belief came a covenant between God and Abram that established unity between God and this person of God and a promise of land for future generations. The unity initiated with an immanent understanding of the LORD would later be tested by a demand of a transcendent God: give me your son. However, Abram's life offers a testimony to his conviction that the LORD God wanted him to remain in peaceful relationship. The disunity that had framed the earlier narratives of the people of God had been resolved with an agreement to become one again: God is, for this moment, at peace with His people of faith. From this ancient narrative comes a methodology of peace, unity, and reconciliation for the people of God; a method offered as a model for the ages. This methodology can best be understood if it is placed in the realm of paradox.

A Methodology of Paradox

A paradox is a crucial tool for many moral teachers. Paradoxical situations and their less volatile counterparts, ambiguity and moral dilemmas, "destabilize the stasis of the present,"¹⁸ a technique that many moral teachers have utilized throughout the centuries. Although Roy Sorensen in *A Brief History of Paradox*, a recent Oxford University Press book, perceives most paradoxes as riddles,¹⁹ he explores how paradoxes often develop a "dynamic equilibrium" when symmetrically equal but opposing forces creates an antagonistic struggle.²⁰ I would argue that the most successful usage of paradox in Western society is found in the Christian doctrinal statement that Jesus is "truly God and truly man."²¹ This statement can be defined as paradoxical when subsets are analyzed. The paradox of this statement is clear in its simplest definitional form: to be human is not to be Divine; to be Divine is not the human. To understand this statement mathematically, a frontier of truth, one is arguing that $A = -A$, a false equation. Logicians have typically perceived of paradoxes as equivalent to this false equation, as perfect contradiction. A paradox then becomes an anathema to logic and to the demands of rationality. However, a modified mathematical equation will allow our inquiry to rely on the precision of mathematics: $|A| = |-A|$.²² This equation represents the concept that when A or its opposite, -A, are surrounded by the absolute, they are equal even though they remain opposite.

Although we have introduced the concept of absolute value—a type of rationality I will define as expansive rationality—into the perception of a mathematical paradox, this introduction will allow us to begin to explore the natural world of paradox—male/female, Adenine/Thymine, and a myriad of other naturally occurring polarities—which we may, if we accept theistic conceptions, equally assume to be framed by the absolute. However, perfect paradoxes such as those represented by mathematics are not the only form of paradoxes that require consideration. Perceptual paradoxes are rarely framed with this level of mathematical precision. Perceptual paradoxes are closer to the equation that conservative equals liberal. The irrationality²³ of this statement is obvious and troublesome; the one is by definition the opposite of the other and the equation is therefore judged irrational by the standards of logic.

When trained minds encounter a perceptual paradox, it often becomes in Western society a puzzle to be solved rationally by some of the wisest in our society: philosophers. Some have not appreciated the drive to rationalize. Philosophers desire, as William James has so plainly stated, "to attain a conception of things which shall on the whole be more rational than that somewhat chaotic view which every one by nature carries about with [one] under [one's] hat."²⁴ The marks of rationality according to James are the same as solving a puzzle: peace, rest and a sense of being at ease. A philosophical

perception of rationality seems to become the absence of any sense of irrationality.²⁵ The sentiment of what I will define as reductive rationality is defined by James as two passions: a passion for simplifying, developing the ability to understand the chaos of facts that encircle us through universality; and a passion for distinguishing, an "impulse to be acquainted with the parts rather than to comprehend the whole."²⁶ With the value of rationality in the Western world, the presence of a perfect paradox creates significant anxiety in those struggling to order and to rationalize life and society. The desire to solve any paradox (and in particular, theistic paradoxes) has been a philosophical goal for millennia.²⁷ Paradoxes create stress and disorder in a setting desiring order. And yet the use of paradoxes has often been an attempt to achieve unity in Christian disputes.

The utilization of paradoxical statements seems to have been employed to resolve bitter disputes that often occurred between divided camps. Within Christianity, the soil of these disputes was often disagreements over biblical analysis or confessional statements of understanding. One side reads the biblical literature and receives one result, while the other side reads biblical literature and receives an opposite result. The dilemma is compounded with the recognition that the biblical witness remains diverse enough to support opposing understandings of central ideas. Jesus' divinity is elevated in many texts for many audiences; his humanity for others. The solution to some of the bitterest debates of the early Christian Church was to use a strategy of the people of God: employ paradoxes to create unity. The Lord Jesus Christ is truly human and truly divine. The methodological strategy for peace must be the same: employ paradoxes to create unity.

However, the struggle to solve or resolve paradoxes is not limited to philosophical inquiry. Reductive rationality of intrinsic paradoxes of the human condition has been a feature of every institution. The resolution to paradox within any organization is often seen as a methodology of control. Within Christianity, Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson have defined disagreements over transcendence and immanence as the dominant issue of 20th century theology.²⁸ Alternations between one pole and the other have framed much of the theological debates of this century.²⁹ One theology constructs a paradigm that is eventually challenged by a paradigm from the other pole. I would argue that this is a central feature of denominationalism in America. As the early church struggled with similar theological conundrums and created peace by invoking a paradox, later institutions fragmented the Church by isolating a pole of the paradox and constructing a paradigm elevating one polar perspective over the other. The challenge of the Church will be to decide how to react to this analysis of paradox. Those in power as a result of rationalized forms of organizational control will be confronted with choices of war or peace in intellectual categories: reductive rationality or expansive rationality with its invitation to invoke paradox. Those who maintain reductive rationality with its peaceful feeling will, paradoxically, be inviting the inverse: ongoing friction with those who perceive their paradigm in polar opposite ways. Only by naming the paradox and accepting it, the Methodology of Abraham, does one find peace and unity.

Peace and unity are not the sole domains of religious institutions. Business institutions also function with the same form of rationalized bureaucratic organization. Max Weber has defined the spirit of modern capitalism as "that attitude that seeks profit rationally and systematically" in the spirit of Benjamin Franklin.³⁰ Weber also helps us to understand the rationalization that forms the bureaucratic organization of government.³¹ This paper argues that these too are formed in the rationalization of a natural paradox of the human condition: a conserving impulse and a liberalizing impulse. Human society must conserve what it has already accomplished, and human society must liberalize to accommodate change in its environment. As we have defined a denominational instinct in religion, we also see the same instinct in government. Those citizens who focus on the conserving instinct lean toward those institutions that maximize a conserving tendency; those that focus on the liberalizing instinct lean toward those institutions that maximize a liberalizing tendency. For a healthy society, both polar positions must be well represented, as every society needs the benefits that come from either position.

One might further argue that the success of a modern democracy may be related to the polar arrangement of Labor versus Tory, Republican versus Democrat, or Social Democrat versus Christian Democrat. Each represents the classic social paradox between individual rule versus corporate rule. Monarchical rule might best represent the rule of the individual. Corporate rule might best be represented by a democratic organization. One of the advantages of a constitutional monarchy such as Great Britain versus a Republic such as the United States of America may be the polar arrangement between the hereditary monarch of one and the elected government by the many of Tony Blair. Americans seemed to struggle during the Nixon administration with the roles of the figurehead and

administrative leader conjoined into one individual. A constitutional monarchy maintains representation in a crisis in leadership of either poles of administration. Stable governments may be predicted if they maintain an appropriate polar arrangement of functions and responsibilities.

The instability of other governments such as tyrannies around the world may be forecast with a paradoxical model. An inability to protect the past or change into the future is limited if the existing government does not offer the checks and balances of a paradoxical relationship. Tyrannies also help us understand the role of the average citizen. Within a tyranny, the citizen is expected to support the sole power. Within a polar arrangement of government, the conservative or liberal positions are constructed with those who espouse distinctly conservative or liberal positions. These individuals are expected to emphasize excessively their polar position. Yet they each need each other. If sailing is used a metaphor of effective government, a boat that leans to the port, or left, needs someone on the starboard, or right, to maintain appropriate control of the forces at work on the boat. As a metaphor for government, the conservative is exceptionally important when the liberal is in power and the reverse is true. Therefore, exceptional spokespeople who dogmatically present the conservative or liberal positions are required for a stable government that is always perceived to be leaning conservative or liberal. Both are required in paradoxical relationship. The Methodology of Abraham does not eliminate the specialized presentation of a dogmatic view of a polar position. YHWH and God Most High, in the fullness of the complete name, are present in the conjoined name offered by Abram.

The keen reader may well observe at this point that most people in a democracy cherish the middle ground between the polarities of competing centers of power. This paper recognizes that the 'great middle' is often confused when an institution such as government effectively presents polar positions. How does an average citizen act well when presented with the polar options of effective liberal or conservative viewpoints? Citizens are usually recruited by either side or other minority parties to define their personal preferences in the form of membership in one party or the other. The label of Conservative or Liberal becomes a necessary appellation for each citizen. However, few citizens are dogmatic Conservatives or Liberals; most would define themselves as conservative in some issues and liberal in others. The Methodology of Abraham offers an alternative response to the presentation of a polar choice in a government: one adopts the name ConservativeLiberal until one enters into the polling booth and selects either the Conservative or Liberal who represents the direction that the citizen may deem to be the direction necessary for the country.

The power of this idea may be affirmed by an example of those who act in this way. Two churches in a small town with significant problems may offer a modest case study. A conservative church defined by a conserving life of holiness was aging quickly. However, they had physical assets such as property and resources that were in abundance. Across town was a tiny liberating Pentecostal church with growing young families that could not expand with limited budgets and space. Leadership sensed potential synergy; however, the benefit would have to come through the humility of the leaders sharing or giving up power. With much effort, these two became one and renamed itself as the New Life Community Church of Creston, British Columbia, Canada. They patiently resolved the myriad of differences of the two communities, and then transformed the social fabric of the town with programs that have flowed from the power of a new community of faith. They lived out the Peace of Abraham.

To test politically this proposal, one might speculate how this solution might influence the political situation in Iraq. The dominant power struggle for centuries has been the denominational distinctions between liberal-leaning Sunnis and conservative-leaning Shi'ites. The leaders of each of these groups draw their power on the affiliation of a significant percentage of the population to their representative camps. When that power is threatened, the leaders call the people to arms for protection of the power of the elites within the specific denominations. A drive to civil war can be argued to be the failure to understand the paradox of conservative and liberal forces in every society. To mitigate this political power in every culture, a symbolic response may be required of the Iraqi people: the realization that they are each SunniShi'ite or Shi'teSunni serving one God in unique ways.

A primary criticism of this symbolic move is the perception of a homogenization of society. To mitigate this critique, society needs to continue to honor those who argue for conservative or liberal agendas. This move becomes a form of social specialization that is crucial to the survival of any society. Just as medicine needs specialists to master specific knowledge of a branch of medicine, each society needs to develop specialists who are experts in conservative or liberal modes of thinking. This move also allows a shift from the salesmanship of politics with its political brinkmanship that risks future societal conflict to a specialization of politics based on the knowledge that society needs. The citizen would

then have the advantage of affirming liberal or conservative ideas when appropriate. Each citizen can choose at any time to absorb oneself in the dogmatic agenda of any political party. Each citizen remains responsible for adding to the collective knowledge of political propositions. Each citizen can continue to draw on the specialized knowledge of the political parties. However, in my judgment, most people in the middle would prefer the appellation of ConservativeLiberal if it would reduce the risk of societal conflict in one's context.

Another expected criticism is the utopian quality of a transforming idea. The utopian critique centers on the perceptions of a future society that would accomplish a higher standard of social goals if key social attributes were modified. Thomas More's *Utopia* was critiqued along these lines by Elizabeth McCutcheon who sensed a lack of ability to know where one stands in a utopian presentation of paradox and ambiguity.³² The response to the utopian argument hinges on the democratic element of the proposal. Each individual is called to accomplish a paradoxical task within the immediate sphere of one's influence. Each citizen is offered an opportunity to consider a political name change to ConservativeLiberal. If no one heeds the advice, the idea dies of its own accord. If the majority of the middle class of each society responds to the idea, the potential for defusing violence is the reward. The key to this proposal now centers on the idea of paradox. If the education of the next generation shifts to affirm the expansive rationality of paradox in society, the proposal may have a possibility of succeeding. If education remains centered on reductive rationality, the acceptance of a paradoxical solution to conflict will remain a distant possibility.

Unfortunately, most philosophical education on paradoxes has centered on the desire to solve the conundrums that paradoxes offer. Postmodern distrust of binary opposition has been fueled by Friedrich Nietzsche's attack on oppositions in thought and language. He opines, "There are no opposites: only from those of logic do we derive the concept of opposites—and falsely transfer it to things."³³ With this perception, paradoxes become a resource for challenging students to rise above the logical impossibilities of individual equals communal. Historically, the Scholastic and then Enlightenment demand for rationality feed this desire and students respond to the challenge. Paradox becomes the preserve of the intellectually weak and logically decrepit in society. This drive for paradoxical resolution is fueled by its descriptions. Nicholas Rescher logically describes the paradox and its demand for resolution, "A paradox arises when a set of individually plausible propositions is collectively inconsistent."³⁴ The resolution of this logical conundrum warrants the abandonment of "some or all of the commitments whose conjoining creates a contradiction."³⁵ Any or all of these premises must arise from a defect of *a priori* insights.³⁶ The abandonment of one of the premises becomes a key move by many in the confrontation of paradoxes. However, not all philosophers are enamored with the rationalization of all fields of philosophy.

Some philosophers have noted that the demands of the modern world cannot be met with more rationality. Bernard Williams has noted that there is pent up frustration since the unprecedented "demands of the modern world on ethical thought" cannot be met with "the ideas of rationality embodied in most contemporary moral philosophy."³⁷ Williams noted that the philosophical thought of the ancient world was "less determined to impose rationality through reductive theory."³⁸ To engage fairly in a critique of modern philosophy, one must admit that rationalist theories function to eliminate incongruities such as paradoxes. The invitation for consideration of paradox as a possible social solution leans into what are defined as voluntarist theories that ground value on the will or the divine. However, with our evaluation of social institutions that enhance denominationalism that arises in completing field of thought, even this admission holds the irony of paradox.

The potential recovery of paradox does not require a voluntarist or theistic orientation. Heraclitus, James, Emerson, and others, accepted the reality of these contradictions. Heraclitus noted that "from the strain of binding opposites comes harmony." William James complains that the philosophical demand for rationality invokes the same attitude as "ordinary men in their theism" who rest in their confidence of a divinely ordered world.³⁹ Emerson, in his essay titled "Nominalist and Realist," defined humans as "amphibious creatures, weaponed for two elements, having two sets of faculties, the particular and the catholic."⁴⁰ Walt Whitman mused that "when loafing on the grass on some transparent summer morning, . . . 'swiftly arose and spread round him the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth."⁴¹ However, other philosophers who explored the realm of theism—Kierkegaard, Hegel, Merton, and Palmer—found ways of understanding paradox and need to be highlighted. Soren Kierkegaard elevated his theistic reflection with his understanding of the supreme paradox: "The attempt to discover something that thought cannot think."⁴² In his attempt to

present the absolute paradox, the knowledge of the unknown (God), he also offers an understanding of the paradox of love, "Man lives undisturbed in a self-centered life, until there awakens within him the paradox of self-love, in the form of love for another, the object of his longing."⁴³ The most profound analysis of the reality of paradox may have come from the writings of Georg W. F. Hegel with his development of love. H.S. Harris notes that Hegel postulated that the "principle of union that is superior both to reason (the principle of mastery) and to positive authority (the principle of slavery) is love."⁴⁴ Love, for Hegel, becomes the uniting of opposites such as subject and object with God becoming the "sole synthesis, the absolute object who is at the same time the absolute subject."⁴⁵ Love, the emotion of resolving the world's conflict, needs, from a Hegelian perspective, paradox to understand it. However, if paradox is not invoked, love may not be found. Thomas Merton, as he worked on the sign of Jonah, found himself defining his whole life as "traveling toward my destiny in the belly of a paradox."⁴⁶ Parker Palmer, drawing on Merton, has called for Christian educators to live out the contradictions of life.⁴⁷ Society needs to redevelop a way of exploring paradox so that the tensions of the globe may have an additional resource for minimizing conflict.

If the exploration of paradox must be elevated in the educational settings of the globe, professors and instructors in our colleges and universities must attune their will to engage positively in the intellectual turmoil that surrounds paradoxical ideas. Unfortunately, the queen of the intellect in our universities remains our philosophy departments that tend to diminish the value of paradox. As well, in many of our universities, the theology departments with their paradoxical concepts have been eroded or replaced with other conceptual frameworks that often show disdain toward the theological ideas of paradox. So the struggle to reengage paradoxical ideas must be met with our scholars of literature, our scholars of Religions such as Buddhism, our sociologists, or those who will elect to leave behind the diminution of paradox in their personal scholarly background.

Some colleges have already made the shift into a collective introspection on paradox. Warner Pacific College, a small private Christian college in Portland, Oregon, USA, has made such a shift. In 1977, as part of a Lilly Endowment grant, Warner launched a Center for Western Man. The center was formed to provide a more holistic educational experience for its undergraduate students, breaking the "reinforced categorization exposing students to specialized disciplines isolated from other course work and from human problems."⁴⁸ The centerpiece of the program was the interrelation of knowledge, holistic thinking, and five major theme areas: freedom and authority, faith and reason, man and his environment, man's historical origin and his future orientation, and relative and absolute faith.⁴⁹ Although the Center only lasted a decade, the richness of the experience for the students forced faculty to transform the idea into a senior thesis that asks the students to write on a paradoxical evaluation of a particular human condition. Each student must develop a perception that recognizes the paradoxes that surround the human experience in the five original areas or in the myriad of other centers of human interaction. The students are socialized to recognize the realities of paradox, they are trained to evaluate the subsets of paradoxical constructions, and they must interrelate their particular human paradox to a variety of the educational disciplines of the college. This entire process is designed and managed by our philosopher who guides students through this labyrinth of thought. With the acceptance of ambiguity⁵⁰ by this generation, extending their thought with paradox is often well received. The result of this intellectual task is often a sense of acceptance of paradoxical modes of thinking, allowing a student to be receptive to paradoxical proposals such as this paper's line of argumentation.

Warner Pacific College serves as just one example of shaping the lives of the next generation using paradoxical thought. A recent review of the literature did not find a study of collegiate senior projects that have been designed to conclude the undergraduate educational experience. In the experience of the author, most American or Canadian programs offer departmental projects that complete a major. A general education senior project seems rare. However, the success of the thesis of this paper depends on a much broader acceptance of paradoxical thought than what seems to occur, if recent publications on paradox serve as a guide, in philosophical education.⁵¹ Students would be better served if they were trained in managing the ambiguities and paradoxes of the human condition. With this exposure, awareness that the competition for a dogmatic position that defines polarities in areas such as government and business would not lead to social conflict. One might refuse to be positioned as a liberal or a conservative if that only serves the needs of those seeking or imbedded in power. One might refuse to continue the denominational distinctions that are so often framed on selecting a dogmatic position of one of the poles of a paradox such as Christ's divinity or his humanity, a conversation that continues to this day. One might stand with Abram and declare that the best idea in

the fight for ideas is that both sides are correct and name it paradoxically. And for that moment, may there be peace.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Tony Blair, "Labor Policy Forum Speech in Full," *Epolitix.com*, <http://www.epolitix.com/EN/News/200507/5cae2365-f920-47d4-b91c-968adfe8ecaa.htm> Accessed on 16 July, 2005.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Thomas Carlyle, "Lecture VI," *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* cited in Robert M. Hutchins and Mortimer J. Adler, eds., *Gateway To Great Books*, Vol. 6: Man and Society (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1963), 110f.
- ⁷ Claus Westerman defines the purpose of our passage under consideration, Genesis 14, as the "glorification of Abraham as a great and powerful prince." Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, translated by John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 192.
- ⁸ The following section is drawn from the forth-coming book by the author: *A Moral Theology of Unity; An Ethic of Paradox*
- ⁹ Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 166.
- ¹⁰ The capitalization of the word God will attempt to portray the perception of one's divine God and one's projection of a god. The usage will be at some level arbitrary.
- ¹¹ The range of the name YHWH in the entire text of the sacred canon includes both immanent and transcendent characteristics of God. For the purposes of this study, we will limit our scope to just the passages under consideration.
- ¹² Concerning Genesis 14's composition, many commentators have repeated Gunkel's remark that "the narrative contains in blatant contrast very credible and quite impossible material." Even if one assumes that this may be an insertion, the moral power of the text remains and deserves elucidation. Cited in Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, translated by John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 189-190.
- ¹³ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary of the Old Testament. Volume 1: The Pentateuch*, translated by James Martin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 207.
- ¹⁴ Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 200.
- ¹⁵ Gerhard von Rad argues that the meaning of the word "highest" is highest in the pantheon. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, translated by John H. Marks (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1952), 175. However, I will argue that the designation "Most High God, creator of heaven and earth" (14:19) could also include the physical characteristic of most distant god, or god who is greater than all creation.
- ¹⁶ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 410.
- ¹⁷ Von Rad states that "such a positive, tolerant evaluation of a Canaanite cult outside Israel is unparalleled in the Old Testament." Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, translated by John H. Marks (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1952), 175.
- ¹⁸ For a more complete development of this topic see the following paper: L. Bryan Williams, "Loving 'Nonperfectly' to Love Perfectly: The Moral Energy that Arises from Paradox," *Wesleyan Philosophical Society Online Journal*, Vol. III. <http://david.snu.edu/~brint/wpsjnl>. Accessed on 19 July 2005.
- ¹⁹ Seduction riddles: making a bad answer appear as a good answer; Mystery riddles: riddles that appear to have no answer; and Literary riddles: elaborate the genres found in folklore. Roy Sorensen, *A Brief History of the Paradox: Philosophy and the Labyrinths of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 5.
- ²¹ Henry Bettenson, "The Definition of Chalcedon," *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 51.
- ²² Personal conversation with Professor Jeralynne Hawthorne, Warner Pacific College, Portland, OR.
- ²³ Williams, "Loving 'Nonperfectly' to Love Perfectly," <http://david.snu.edu/~brint/wpsjnl>. Accessed on 19 July 2005.
- ²⁴ William James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* in Robert M. Hutchins and Mortimer J. Adler, eds., *Gateway To Great Books*, Vol. 10: Philosophical Essays (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1963), 58.

- ²⁵ Ibid., 58.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 59-60.
- ²⁷ The earliest recorded paradox is Anaximander's paradox asking if each thing has an origin? See Sorensen, *A Brief History of Paradox*, 10.
- ²⁸ Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olsen, *20th-Century Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997) as cited in Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration in the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1991), 256.
- ²⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration in the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1991), 256
- ³⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992), 64.
- ³¹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).
- ³² Elizabeth McCutcheon, "Litites: Denying the Contrary," *Morena* (November 1971), 116-121 reprinted in Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, translated and edited by Robert M. Adams (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1975), 224-230.
- ³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hallingdale (New York: Vintage Press, 1968), 298.
- ³⁴ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 6.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 10.
- ³⁶ Sorensen, *Brief History*, xiii.
- ³⁷ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), vii.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 197.
- ³⁹ James, "Sentiment of Rationality," 65-66.
- ⁴⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, n.d.), 203.
- ⁴¹ Walt Whitman cited in James, "Sentiment of Rationality," 65.
- ⁴² Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, original translation by David Swenson, revised. translation by Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 46.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 48.
- ⁴⁴ H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), 294.
- ⁴⁵ Harris, 291.
- ⁴⁶ Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1953), 11.
- ⁴⁷ Parker J. Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox: A Celebration of Contradictions in the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1980), 43.
- ⁴⁸ Marshall K. Christensen, "Center for Western Man," *Warner Pacific College Academic Programs* (August, 1976).
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Tom Bedouin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*. Foreword by Harvey Cox. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).
- ⁵¹ A very helpful text to define carefully the process of offering binary concepts is Kieran Egan, *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape our Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 245-6.

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