



The theme for our colloquium this fall, Divine Multiplicity: Trinities and Diversities, emerged out of the conversations in which last year's colloquium was conceived—Polydoxy: Theologies of the Manifold. While this year's colloquium is not a "Part II" sequel to the conversation begun last fall (only a handful of this year's participants were here last year) there is a significant over-lap of themes and concerns that can be said to constitute a certain continuity. And we have been thinking that this continuity, if highlighted, might function as fertile soil for some of our thinking and writing together for this coming fall. So in an effort to provide a context with as much concrete specificity as possible for participants (and observers) to think in and with as you reflect upon and wrestle with our shared theme, we are adding the text of the Introduction for the volume into which the papers from last year's colloquy have been collected. We hope that this will give a general sense of the kind of conversations we have been having at the TTC, and, more specifically, the recent thinking and discussion that have given rise to this year's theme.

Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation

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Introduction

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A single being is a contradiction in terms.

For where two or three are gathered...

In recent years a discernible movement within theology has emerged around the triune intuition that the daunting differences of multiplicity, the evolutionary uncertainty it unfolds, and the relationality that it implies and are not problems to be overcome in religious thought. They are starting points *for* it. For some, divinity understood in terms of multiplicity, open-endedness, and relationality forms a matrix of revelation rather than a distortion of it or evidence of its lack. The challenges and passions of theological creativity blossoming at the edges of tradition and at the margins of power have shown themselves, far from being distractions from doctrinal or doxological integrity, to be indispensable to its life. And this vitality belies at once the dreary prophecies of pure secularism and the hard grip of credulous certainties.

In fact, given the venerable pronouncements of the death of God, theology at the start of this millennium should be worse off than it is. The undeniable atrophy of those denominations that still support an educated clergy limit the resources for even discerning just *which* God it is that is presumed dead. The hard questions remain hard; the institutional fragilities remain unsparing. And so the buoyancy we see in theology right now is all the more remarkable. This life and movement, which in this volume we are nicknaming “polydoxy,” has multiple sources. Indeed, multiplicity itself has become its resource. What had seemed a liability for Christian theology - its multiplex of difference and its demanding, competing, dissenting “others” who challenge the boundaries of identity - has miraculously turned into its friend. In other words, the diverse challenges and passions of theological creativity have shown themselves, far from being distractions from doctrinal or doxological integrity, to be indispensable to its life. Indeed an emergent commitment to the manifold (shorthand for the processes of creation that enfold and unfold the divine) in terms of a responsible pluralism of interdependence and uncertainty may be functioning as a baseline requirement of theological integrity. It makes possible a deep attention to ancient traditions as well as more robust engagements with serious critics of religion. This is an approach that no longer needs to hide the internal fissures and complexities that “riddle” every Christian text or that wound and bless every theological legacy.

These intuitions and starting points find grounding in the Christian tradition not only because of the rich history of texts and practices therein that support doctrinal and ethical formulations of multiplicity, evolutionary openness and relationality. But also, like other global religions, “Christianity” was never static or One to begin with. Internally multiple and complex, it has always required a supple and spirited approach to theological reflection. We sense that the current resilience of theology in its *becoming multiplicity of relations* is a sign and a gift of that Spirit.

From the plurality of canonized gospels accompanied by the shadows of the excluded gospels, any particular unity achieved at any point in its history by the church was not just debatable but hotly debated. If the debates display the manifold genius of Christian orthodoxy, the habit of producing the heretic as its boundary manifests orthodoxy’s powerful repressiveness, even its necessary closet. Every point in the two thousand year trajectory of Christian theology is a nexus of traditions engaging - in whatever irenic or bellicose spirit - each other and the divine. This means that, despite its linguistic ease of use, “the Christian tradition” does not refer to a singular lineage, nor do Christians speak with one voice even (or especially) when they attend to the same line of scripture. In this sense the Christian tradition is always already polydox; it is irreducible to any one voice or lineage that may claim exhaustively to represent Christian faith, thought and practice. This characteristic complexity is wrought of interweaving cultures and stories, of different political pressures and of myriad communal practices, artistic media and philosophical schools. It becomes a source of richness and revelatory possibility for supple theologies that remain open to the ongoing participation of divinity in the world. It invites theological attention, for the specific complexities of the Christian tradition may also be what enables its mature (as in *not simple*) unity.

In other words, we note that much theology that has been understood as (or understood itself to be) orthodox nourishes and advances its own polydox legacy. If therefore we call the present gathering of texts a polydoxy, we do not intend a new orthodoxy of the Multiple to replace the

orthodoxy of the One. We mean a *confessedly* multiple teaching of divine multiplicity; its hermeneutics and its ontology implicate and explicate one another, which necessarily entails an understanding of deep interconnection, of constitutive relationality between every one and its others. And so by multiplicity we do not mean a mere many, a plurality of separate ones; nor by relationality do we mean a swamp of indifference. Deleuze, a great thinker of the multiplicity, puts it precisely: “A multiplicity certainly contains points of unification, centers of totalization, points of subjectivation, but these are factors that can prevent its growth and stop its lines. These factors are in the multiplicity they belong to, not the reverse.”

Without leakage into the indeterminate, multiplicity disappears into totality and dies. The mystery of relationality is, in part, its inexhaustible depth and openness to emergence, its stubborn resistance to comprehension, which is its multiplicity. A critical apophysis is unavoidable; it is related to the mysticism of negative theology but also to what Trinh Min Ha calls, for postcolonial theory, “a critical nonknowingness.” This priority of multiplicity signifies in other words an emergent openness to the unknown. It conveys the wilder energy of revelation in polydoxy, grounded thematically in our inherited biblical stories of the wilderness, whether grand and desert-exilic or intimate, grieving and Emmaus-suburban.

Michael Serres reminds us that “[t]he multiple as such, unhewn and little unified, is not an epistemological monster, but on the contrary the ordinary lot of situations...” and yet requires us to recognize that its comprehension, like God, always eludes even as it beckons and inspires. “Commonly we know a bit,” Serres concedes, “a meager amount, enough, quite a bit; there are various undulations, even in the hardest and most advanced sciences.” We cannot know it all, in other words, but this unknowing is an energy of epistemological and theological integrity, as the great apophatic thinkers of the Christian tradition from Justin Martyr to Sallie McFague have always insisted. And differently from much mysticism, polydoxy understands unknowing to have a deep relation to creaturely interrelations; it constitutes and animates the actual openness that an evolutionary sensibility requires; it limns the depth of relations and “ordinary situations” with which theology claims to deal.

Polydox Inheritances

Theology that starts from manifold intuitions of multiplicity and relationality is often inspired by stories of liberation, of resistance to some monolithic religiopolitical rule. But it does not therefore dispense with unity and endurance. Rather it refuses to continue Procrustean practices that chop off whole limbs of experience to fit a dominant theological frame of oneness. It refuses, in fact, the false dichotomy of nihilistic dissolution of meaning on the one hand and unification by self-appointed orthodoxy on the other. It seeks instead an evolving coherence in the midst of actual, lived complexity. It remains mindful of the toxic by-products of any doxic certainty. It attends to the semantics of *doxa* as ‘mere opinion’, ‘appearance,’ ‘illusion’ and ‘glory’ inflecting the doxologies of Christian confession. Indeed it glories in the complexities as sites of enfolded revelation, which is to say, of the embodiment of love according to the discernment of spirits.

But how, one might ask, will we remain *coherent* enough to make polydox claims of truth and justice? How will a theology that is energized by the tangle of ancient texts and teachings within and well beyond Christianity, that engages the emergent and divergent histories of trauma, survival, remembrance, celebration and liberation, avoid the “dissolution in multiplicity” that

Augustine fears, with reason? Evidently it will seek a polyvocal kind of coherence. Its logic is not that of an abstract order of pyramidal meaning. Rather it hangs together by “network thinking,” as Hardt and Negri say of the emergent “multitude.” The net, however, does not remain in the logic of virtual space but embodies itself in the webs of living interaction, in their sticky logic: To “cohere,” after all, means in Latin “*to stick together.*”

The solidarity of such togetherness cannot be conceived theologically apart from a radically widened sense of the incarnation. Indeed the abstractions of philosophical or systematic theologies exist relative not only to each other but to the bodies that produce them. Feminist theory across the disciplines has labored to keep thought responsible to its relational contexts of embodiment, mindful of what Donna Haraway has dubbed its “situated knowledge.” And according to Alfred North Whitehead, who earlier unfolded a relevant theo-cosmology of radical pluralism (issuing from William James’ “pluriverse”) “no entity can be conceived in complete abstraction from the system of the universe.” This is because all key notions, or metaphors, in a system of thought “presuppose each other.” Yet Whitehead is here defining “coherence” to mean not just that the signifiers “are definable in terms of each other; it means that *what is indefinable* in one such notion cannot be abstracted from its relevance to the other notions.” The unknown is not excused from the multiplicity of its relations!

The theology introduced in this volume sticks together without plastering over its differences. As invitations to polydoxy, these essays do not let go of creative divergences and stubborn tensions. They variously point to an incarnational depth in those occurrences from which Christian faith and teaching can renew itself. If that depth also requires of us a disciplined unknowing, it is not as an escape from knowledge. Rather it lends contemplative attention to what Judith Butler calls the “opacity” of our own self-constitution in an intimate multiplicity of relations. Otherwise we may miss the point at which the planetary multitude lays its specific claim, its truth and its justice, upon our gifts.

By way of introduction to this volume and its performances of polydoxy, we suggest an economic trinity of themes - multiplicity, unknowing, and relationality - to serve as a loose guide to the text. This interactivity of multiplicity, unknowing and relationality hints at the mystery of a divine manifold eluding and inspiring our collaboration. It also lets us begin to explicate the relations among the texts as they create the manifold of polydox theology.

Multiplicities of Christian Theology

Polydoxy takes seriously the context of vibrant and enduring religious and spiritual diversity in the world. At the same time, polydoxy reads that context as indigenous to Christian history and its theological legacy. The theologians in this volume who share the intuitions and commitments that polydoxy here collects, also recognize the novel *avowal* of that radical diversity as prolegomena to theology’s future vitality and intellectual integrity. It is for this reason that, despite fundamentalist fears to the contrary, internal and intersectional multiplicity is no embarrassment to theology something to be masked or dismissed as evidence of Christian failures to *be* Christian. There is a doctrinal claim at play in this volume about what it means to be Christian in this world, involving a receptive posture toward the manifold of texts within and beyond the Christian corpus of interpretations, practices, and spiritualities that animate the heart of those who claim the tradition/s of Jesus.

However, multiplicity as such remains a risky and powerful concept, tricky to handle. It constrains any claims of orthodox exclusivity. In the process it can wash out the ethical or cultural authority with which - in the interest of justice and even of truth - we ourselves presume to speak. Increasingly, however, there are transdisciplinary clues among philosophers and poets who pit the multiple against the logic of the One. Sometimes, as with Deleuze & Guattari, they take aim at God the One as irreversibly totalizing in His mission. But on the whole, even among poststructuralists still attending the funeral of God (as caricature of the death of European metaphysics), the animus of difference directs itself against the mono-doxies and mono-politics that constitute a history of vengeful and imperial unities. These monoliths of the One bristle with *ressentiment*. They shore up boundaries of exclusion in vain efforts to deny the very multiplicity that constitutes them - that as Mary-Jane Rubenstein points out in her theological reading of Butler, also undoes them. If as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it "the origin is irreducibly plural," then it is no surprise that the multiplicity of lived existence repeatedly interrupts the deafening monotones of empire forthright or neoliberal, theocratic or totalitarian. But it is often in the name of pluralism, difference and interconnection that the globalization of the economy continues to flatten the planet like a One World credit card. It levels cultural difference and old growth forests, commodifying and annihilating the very multiplicity it craves and sells. The injustices that late capitalism imposes and the rage its rapacious indifference provokes are not new, only - multiplying. The peculiarity and promise of this moment may lie in the planetary pressure that a growing multitude feels to find and practice a saner, more sustainable common life.

If there is a startling vitality in newer theologies growing in the depleted soil of mainline churches, they are not incidental to this pressure. They began to arise like a wave when major social crises of the mid 20th century solicited responsive echoes in biblical prophetic movements. The one God of the Christendom that took up the Roman pattern and built empires on the labor of slaves had, through centuries, provoked many rounds of exodus. The US civil rights movement and the birth of Black theology along with Latin American liberation theology churned up new Christian discourses of exodus. And soon the international women's movement, followed by gay, lesbian and other queer movements deepened challenges to the God of orthodoxy. God's faces and names began to proliferate. And God's façade of bourgeois decency began to slip, adding to a growing sense that the logic of the One may stand more in the way of justice, liberation and love than not. Entwining faith with social analysis in their different singularities, these emergent theologies have come through decades of fragile, often brittle solidarity with each other. In the process they have formed vibrant and resolute counter- (not anti-) traditions. Which is not to say that any of these explosive movements have always gracefully engaged their own complexes of multiplicity.

The plurality of issues that energize these emergent theologies are informed by a plurality of extra-theological theories, multiplied by cultures and infused with spirited faiths of many sorts. We have some sympathy for various conservative retreats from this tragicomic multiplication of identities and its noisy complication of the work of theology. One may in some gesture of impatience with liberation, some moue of postfeminist or even postcolonial sophistication, relegate these social movement theologies to the past millennium. Which of these after all is innocent of the logic of the One? But we suspect that a more delicate operation is needed and

indeed underway, if we are not to lose their vitality even as we tease their often-single issue simplifications toward a coalitional manifold.

Each of the contributions to this volume takes up the concept of multiplicity and the question of pluralism as an organizing principle in theology, though each does so in a distinctive way. Unlike triumphalist theologies that find themselves again and again comfortably ensconced with the political programs of empire, the theological voices in this collection articulate a coherence that neither retreats from uncertainty nor falls into nihilistic disarray. Not surprisingly, they do not all speak with one voice or use a single strategy to pursue their intuitions of coherence in multiplicity. For example, Roland Faber uses Whitehead's richly "irreducible interplay of the multiplicities of creator, creatures, and creativity" to take on the idea of God's peace within an interweaving concept of "theoplicity," "polyphilia" and "para-dox." He does so in order to better account for worldly multiplicity and the divine multiplicity revealed in and through it. Laurel Schneider argues for multiple modes of reasoning that can help remedy theology's typical and stultifying over-reliance on presuppositions and frames of thought forged in Europe's cultural context. She seeks to "loosen Christian theology's cramped grip on seriousness, a tired habit of solemnity that undermines its lush capacity for wisdom." Divine multiplicity, revealed by incarnation and accessible through postures of openness and humor, is grounded in the rich inheritance of canonical and extra-canonical stories about it, their plurality and limber ambiguities.

Sharon Betcher investigates the global city as a locus of bodily and spiritual multiplicity that, rather than being a problem for Christian pneumatology, is a source of insight for it. With her eye on growing cosmopolitan "spiritual but not religious" populations in the midst of centrifugal urban forces, she teases out the "ligatures" of connection that indicate a spiritual vitality. She gestures toward a nascent ecclesiology of the multiple, in which "the prosthesis of Spirit, the locus of opening and the harness of corporeal generosity might imply practicing...ways of 'being with' one another in the city." And Catherine Keller thinks toward the con-vitality of polydoxy with the help of the little known Anne Conway, "the first writer of the relational multiplicity." Conway's reasoned challenges to the emergent, desensitizing dualism of early modernity crackle with explosive potential, though her small voice, nurtured in a multiplex of thinkers and activists, bided the centuries as philosophy and theology gradually benumbed themselves with the mechanized view of the universe. Of course the fact that we have any philosophical writing by any woman of any era before our own is a wonder, a testament to the same canny Spirit of multiplicity that flows through the fissures and gaps permeating the patriarchal hubris of biblical and early Christian writings. In Conway we find an ancestress for the explicit avowal of multiplicity as the relational fabric of existence itself, who argues that "a creature must *be* manifold...in order to receive 'the assistance of its Fellow-Creatures.'"

All of the contributions to this collection reflect angles on the logic of multiplicity that undergirds polydoxy as a mode of Christian constructive theology. They variously demonstrate the fold, the *pli*, which distinguishes multiplicity from mere plurality. That enfolded and unfolding relationality suggests not a relation between many separate ones but between singularities, events of becoming folded together, intersecting, entangled as multiples. It is such connectivity that allows, indeed implies (*implicatio*), the becoming coherence of polydoxy.

Stories of the Unknown

If plurality addresses the diversity unfolding as a cosmos, and relationality addresses the interconnections that enfold creatures one in another, neither concept will necessarily divulge its own mystery. Mystery clouds the *eschata* as well as the origins. Do we not need a conceptual space in which to address, *in media res*, both the bottomless beginnings and the glorious and unnerving openness of all of reality to the future? We believe so, and for this reason, embed unknowing in the middle of this collection, between the thematic energies of plurality and relationality. Change, novelty, and evolutionary emergence all characterize the interactivity that gives meaning to relations and to diversity. But they also characterize its uncertainty. Is it not this element of the unknown that gives philosophies of becoming and theologies of process their provocative edge, unsettling for many?

If a polydox planetarity calls for unprecedented attention to uncertainty, it is because creation is not static, nor is it unfolding predictably from an origin to an end. This condition of epistemic limitation is often addressed by saying we lack a “God’s eye view,” which is surely the case. But the phrase implies something we do not, that God not only sees it all but sees it in advance, from an eternity beyond time. Many Christians find comfort in such providential remedies to human uncertainty. We however do not find it reassuring to rob God of the new. If uncertainty goes all the way down - as ontological quantum theories indicate - we suspect it goes “up” as well. We might leave divine unknowing in the cloud of our own unknowing of the divine. But we would still agree that the indeterminacy of the creation is the creative condition of its genesis - its becoming multiplicity. Some of us would affirm that God is also becoming in the internal relations of this becoming; others of us would negate our capacity to distinguish between the being and the becoming of what we call “God.” And these are not incommensurable positions. Negative theology, as in Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘brilliant darkness,’ both relativizes and revives the affirmative utterance - as prayer, confession, and speculative offering - but then precisely not as dogmatic certainty. Our unknowing, linked in this way to the ancient tradition of apophatic mysticism, “unsays” its own certainties - identities, essences, bodies, objectifications, exclusions and other last words - in order that we may keep speaking.

Polydoxy presumes that mindful uncertainty makes possible what Nancy calls the “auto-deconstruction of Christianity,” as it loosens theology’s limbs, allowing for a greater responsiveness to the world and to the intimate unfolding of its stories. The irresistible postmodern interplay between deconstruction - with its asymptotic proximity to atheism - and any negative theology - with its asymptotic proximity to theism - further tests our spirits and tones our discourse. With the help of Jacques Derrida’s notion of “*sans*,” Colleen Hartung takes up this unsaying of certainty in her exploration of a polydox faith in the face of real-world limitations. “Polydox theologies foreground the multiple and the uncertain,” she writes. They “take seriously this deep-seated, embodied experience of indeterminacy. Derrida’s pursuit of the *sans* provides language that makes a faith without God, that is open to what is wholly other, theoretically intelligible.” The apophatic therefore signifies at once the humility of not-knowing-it-all and the excess of expression in the face of it All.

Uncertainty in other words is at every level implicated in *multiplicity* - as the very density and cloud of *relationality*. Polydox theologies need not retreat to divine proscriptions or veils of authorized revelation to accept this unknowing, which is itself known to us at every juncture of

the creation. This generative unknowing is also known to us in a creator doctrinally enmeshed in the mystery of the triune multiplicity. In their contributions, John Thatamanil, Hyo-Dong Lee and Catherine Keller all delve specifically and variously into the relationality signified by the trinitarian symbol as a particularly rich and traditioned aspect of polydoxy's long inheritance in Christian thought. Lee offers insight into a trinitarian pantheism with the help of neo-Confucian emphases on the openness of the Spirit to embodied abundance in part due to its being "empty and tranquil, without any sign" which is paradoxically necessary to the Spirit's *presence* in embodiment. He suggests that neo-Confucian struggles with openness and presence can provide a great deal of help to Christian trinitarian thought struggling to move past the shackles of monological ontology. A dialogue between them, he argues, "will be able to strike a balance between the apophatic and the kataphatic by recognizing a depth in God while refusing to call that divine depth God's ground."

Apophasis is never a mere "not." In its theological forms it cannot be confused with the pseudo-certainty of mere denial. The gesture of unknowing entails an apophatic leap of faith. This space in which unknowing transforms certainty in to open-armed uncertainty (a fertile, receptive, and promiscuous openness) can be perhaps symbolized by the Holy Spirit, which for the 15th century cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (following Augustine) is "connection itself." This Spirit implicates every relation in the "negative infinity" of his One which "not a one that is opposed to the many": the divine *complicatio*. This infinite, which "folds together" all creatures in itself, even as they unfold of themselves, cannot close the multiplicity into a monistic totality. It may then resist definition by its own orthodoxies - but not their resources of erudition, transmission and inspiration. It does not fold orthodoxy down, it *complicates* it.

Mary-Jane Rubenstein plumbs the apophatic wealth of vulnerability and inscrutability that comes with relationality in her dialogical reading of Augustine's *Confessions* alongside Judith Butler's *Precarious Life*. She finds in Augustine's confessional account of conversion, far from achieving a personal and a divine end of multiplicity, a kind of testament to it. "Or," as Rubenstein suggests, "in a more polydox register - perhaps conversion does not bring about the static unity it promises. Perhaps, far from annihilating multiplicity, the confessional journey uncovers and reconfigures it." With the help of Butler's reflection on the *ex-stasis* of grief and desire - the constitutive "being beside oneself" that pushes even at ordinary meanings of relationality - Rubenstein thinks about many of the key turnings in Augustine's stories as so many processes of faithful "undoing," not only of his own sovereignty, but presumably of his God's sovereignty. "Exhausted from his struggle in the garden with an omnipotent God, Augustine gives himself over to the *incarnate* God, renouncing his own sovereignty for the kenotic diver who renounces *his...*"

Being undone by ecstasy is not, in a polydox sense, a bad thing here, just as multiplicity is not the epistemological monster that the bishop seems to have feared. It is a confirmation of being alive and of accepting that gift. The only way around this, Augustine himself finds, is an austere closing down of both modes of ecstasy - desire and grief - which simply does not seem to succeed in his own, stubbornly passionate life, and certainly not in his theological accounting of that life. And therein lies an exquisite and poignantly unpretentious basis for orthodoxy's own polydox self-understanding. As Schneider argues, the incarnational theology implicit in Christianity's own stories dismantle every legitimate bill of sale, pedigree, or authorized

provenance in favor of disreputable, improvised and impure emergence that polydoxy recognizes as necessary to the integrity of its work. The challenge for polydoxy therefore does not lie in whether Christian theology is multiple and shady in its sources and foundations. Rather the challenge is how its syncretic folds can be understood theologically, what interpretive authority/ies can be made possible through a more generous and humorous acceptance of Christianity's own messy, fertile ancestral lures and complications.

All Our Relations

While attention to plurality and a certain apophatic openness marks - to different degrees and with divergent feelings - all of these essays, the theme of relationality appears to be the most fundamental to its emergent theology. Because multiplicity falls into incoherence and apophysis into mere negation in abstraction from their implicate relations, polydoxy presumes at several levels the ligatures (to use Betcher's image) of relationality that imbricate and undo multiplicities as they emerge. The relation of a subject to an inexchangeable other, itself already related to other inexchangeable others, is what makes possible the plural manifestations of worldly experience. This descriptive truth takes on normative force at another level. Relationality distinguishes pluralism from the mere relativism that swamps judgment and inhibits resolution. Historically speaking, the authors in this volume also presume a certain debt to the heritage of feminist thought, much of it in theology, that explicates the systemic relationality of our personal and political condition. Sociality immanent to our individualities, not external to some prior essence, had other antecedents, especially of Hegelian and Whiteheadian provenance; but the gender analysis of our primary relations across sexual and racial divides first rendered this discourse of constituent relationality ethically unavoidable.

Also feminist theological alliances with ecology and process theology embedded interhuman sociality in layers of cosmological accountability. Certainly Keller, Schneider and Faber have been long involved in the methodological webs of feminist, pluralist, poststructuralist and process theories that highlight the explication of multiplicity and relationality as such, especially in its stimulation of a counter-ontology for Christian constructive theology. Brianne Donaldson builds on this foundation in her exposition of interspecies care. She reminds us, with the help of an ecofeminist reading of Whitehead and the Jain concept of *ahimsa*, that "the realm of embodied particularity has long been associated with women and nature." This is a position that some feminists have sought to move past, but Donaldson retrieves it for a deeper understanding of polydoxy as a mode of theology that attends to planetary life beyond the human realm. In other words, polydox relationality extends through and beyond participation in the familiar or familial to our more alien affinities. Betcher touches on this relational thinking as well in her Deleuzian suggestion of "becoming whale," and Keller lifts it into prominence in her concept of "the conviviality of creation." Only in the discernment of the vibrant webs of a prehensive interdependence does pluralism escape from the banal series of separate ones: plastic bottles tossed by a desert road.

These essays want theology to come to grips with the problematic and promising immensity of our creaturely interdependence. However we articulate divine relationality, it seems to be inviting a more mindful participation in itself, and therefore in the cosmopolitan, ecological and posthuman senses of our planetarity. What is more, if we open the fold between self and other in

these terms we expose the margin of entanglement that holds us in relation - akin to what Anne Joh refers to as Jeong, or “sticky love” in her postcolonial Christology - and renders our multiplicities coherent. Relationality, in this sense, laps over and suffers difference without letting go. It bears the memories of the oppressed and excluded and so cannot deny the force of hybridity, miscegenation, queer fertilities, and revelatory contaminations in the formulation of sacred wisdom. It will not repress the promiscuity and – *à la* Marcella Althaus Reid – the indecency of divine love itself.

Relationality is also the theme that most grounds us, as whole human beings in our processes of thinking and writing, in the materiality of connection. As a number of the authors in this collection demonstrate, there exists a wealth of narrative sources originating outside of the European mainstream. Schneider argues that these sources and modes of reasoning are not merely, as Andrea Smith points out, exotic objects for study; they also *produce theory*. There is something commonsensical, banal even, about the observation that not all good theory comes from Europe; but remarkably, most Christian theology limits itself in a parochialism that diminishes it at every level of rigor, relevance, and quality. One feature of polydoxy’s concern, therefore, is a return to theoretical rigor in theology in the form of openness and interest in intersecting traditions, narratives, and philosophies. It seeks a careful and adventurous engagement with the multiplicity of relations that characterize Christainity’s global character en route to a planetary spirit. In this spirit, Monica Coleman follows the ancestral lures and voices of Oya through a postmodern womanist attention to the multiplicity of Black women’s experiences and narratives. She attends to the presences of past and future that link us all to our own and each others’ ancestors in theologically potent ways. In an HIV age that has grown terrified (anew) of blood, especially of African blood, Coleman thinks with Tananarive Due’s novel *The Living Blood*, about soteriology as complex healing-in-community. She grounds soteriology in the ever-shifting ligatures of community, blood-bound and chosen. “As boundaries bend and cross in the narrative world of *The Living Blood*,” she tells us, “this reading also suggests that practicing polydox soteriology is transnational, transcontinental, postcolonial, feminist, womanish, and dangerous, while also necessary for our health.”

Some of the challenges of polydoxy reside in its attention to injustice, as well as its commitments to naming and claiming the multiple interconnections between communities that have survived by any means possible. However, exposing oppression as a challenge to the privileged is only one side of the theological work of relationality, as Homi Bhabha has so persuasively demonstrated. “For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory.” The work of decolonization is a work of recognition: ambivalence structures the hybrid relations and complicated desires that circulate in the empire’s wake. Oppression, in one sense, is the denial of elemental relationality, shored up by doctrines of separation and the legitimization of violence. Exposing, naming, and even claiming the promiscuous intersections and interdependencies of bodies *across* lines of oppression is also a side of relationality that can be dangerous for those who have turned identities forged in oppression into a powerful bond of resistance and exclusion, an internally-policed sameness that mirrors the policing energies of oppression itself. These strategies of survival persist, and the work of challenging the logic of the One makes polydoxy itself an ambivalent gift, even as it stretches theological imagination toward more fluid and open-ended notions of identity; a peaceable kin-dom in which relations

bind, but also unfold. In other words, ambivalent attractions, uncertain hopes and attention to the least (who are never identical with us, no matter our location) give guidance to polydox relationality.

This means that colonialism and its spawn of institutionalized racial and sexual violence are a primary legacy with which theology can fruitfully contend - when it has the courage to do so. We do not turn away from Christianity's implication in every level of the relational denial that has enabled the genocidal trajectories of imperialism; but neither do we turn away from Christian counter-movements, out of which real alternatives to the force of imperialism have flowed. Stories of enemy-love and resistance to oppressive domination (whether political, ecclesial, economic, or social) can be found even at the heart of imperial and missionary schemes, confounding the easy caricatures of Christian missionaries that tend to permeate contemporary discourse. Marion Grau traces just such a story of resistance and complex conversion in the Anglican mission to the Zulus led by the Colenso family, and the mission to the Colensos led by the Zulus. The deep relationality that this story exposes makes a simplistic reading of mission (from either side) impossible. Reciprocity attends relationality, when it is read as constituent, not as something that I 'do' with you. Indeed John Milbank's insistence on the "asymmetrical reciprocities" of a participatory ontology has resonance, at this angle, with postcolonial, polydox theology.

As we have said, relationality is the connective tissue that makes multiplicity coherent, and it is the depth that makes our relations, all of them, strange and unknowable, even, or especially, in intimacy. The immensity of the manifold converges, as Cusa would have it, upon a divine maximum, which itself coincides with the minimum. Or as Mayra Rivera notes in her essay, divine glory transcends the great, and manifests in the neglected, even the smallest, exchanges of life. "Glory appears not only as the shock of injustice," she writes, "but also as the irreducible difference of that which is closest to us, which lures us beyond ourselves." She is challenged by injustice - which sticks to bodies and shapes them - to seek "concrete, material, fleshy images of the divine," for which she relies on "biblical images of glory as earthy and elemental."

The very excessiveness of biblical images of glory is what makes those images a fertile resource for polydoxy. God cannot be contained in single narratives or in single bodies, there is an elemental vitality in the divine that exceeds - transcends - conceptual closure in just the ways that flesh elementally exceeds all grasping, all imperial, rapacious or puritan control. There is relationality at play in glory, just as there is multiplicity and the beckoning strangeness of the unknown. We are immersed in divine glory, embedded in it and brought forth out of it. Or in other words, the world itself is implicated, complicated, and explicated through divine glory. It is a trinity of relation, with its deeply orthodox conviction of polydox dimensions.

It is to the trinity to which John Thatamanil, in the concluding chapter (by no means a closure!) brings us. As an indigenous ground for Christian thinking about multiplicity, ineffability, and relationality, the trinity offers an apt place to launch the beginning that an ending may yield. Like Keller, Thatamanil sees in trinitarian thought a strong basis for polydoxy. Through it he is able to approach Christian theology's proximity to other religious traditions as a source of enrichment and mutual correction rather than mere competition or dismissal. "Might it be possible" he asks, "for Christian theologians to envision a trinitarian engagement with religious diversity that is

marked by a sense of *anticipation* that other traditions may have something to teach us about how to think even about trinity?" He not only finds this vision possible, but does much to actualize its promise. Through his own construction of a triune scheme of "contingency, ground, and relation" he shows this intersectionality to be necessary to an improved, less anemic, understanding of Christian ideas in themselves. In other words, the differences between religions are important to the ecological health and internal integrity of the religions, but even more so the differences between and among religions reveal diversity in divine life itself, a healthy and mysterious multiplicity of relations.

Engaging the endogenous plurality of traditions, texts, and practices in Christianity is therefore one aspect of our intent to develop greater integrity and rigor in the mode of Christian theology that we are calling polydoxy. But the exogenous plurality of traditions have also (always) had a shaping effect on Christian thought, a pressure and influence the recognition of which serves to improve the clarity with which we can think about the distinctiveness of our claims.

Thatamanil's essay, like those contributed by Lee, Donaldson, Coleman, Keller and Schneider, also recognizes the ways in which traditionally non-Christian modes of approaching common questions of meaning also sometimes offer new lines of flight through doctrinal impasses. Those closures persist, even if a polydox sensibility suspects internal discourses can never be hermetically sealed! The presupposition here is that polydoxy positions Christian theology where it already stands - in the midst of a boundless array of intersecting conversations and modes of reasoning. Furthermore, as we noted in beginning, polydoxy does not see the challenges of such a boisterous and sometimes bellicose environment to be only a distraction and a problem for Christian theology. It also delivers the very ecological diversity upon which its own health depends. Christian thought cannot avoid the multiplicity that constitutes it at its textual and narrative core. Nor can it avoid the multiple relations to others who in ongoing interchange, friction (as Grau points out), and mutual inspiration constitute its existence in an actual world.

In conclusion, the essays in this volume form an invitational introduction to polydoxy as a vibrantly engaged mode of doing constructive theology. We suspect that the evolutionary leap of the manifold - the processes of creation that enfold and unfold the divine - will embody itself in emerging, uncertain, endlessly promising coherencies. If Christian renditions of this unfinished incarnation are also to emerge and stick together, they will need the energy of ancient intuition multiplied by the 'infinite speeds' of our newest thinking. Faith, hope and *caritas*: if the uncertainty translates into faith, multiplicity translates into love by way of a hope that indeed our chosen multiplicities, as Coleman suggests, prove loveable. And furthermore, that the unknown will prove liveable.

We hope that the present performances of polydoxy find resonance among many other emerging efforts, especially to encourage younger theologians in their commitment to a richer, more rigorous thinking of Christian multiplicity. Our own multiplicities, enfolded here in the structure and personalities of this volume, unfold as a finite corpus within the body of Christ, itself multiply incarnate in a logos-invoked cosmos. This polydoxy will help to right theology - *orthos* - to the extent that it teaches us (and some stranger neighbors) to trade certainty for faith and *anathema* for *caritas*. Polydoxy - by whatever name - happens whenever a few of us gather in a faith *seeking* understanding. Without yet again presupposing the answers.