

Response to “The Boot is On the Other Foot”

David Daniel Klipper

Summary

This response to the report by Hope is a gentle challenge to expand the limits of theological reflection by using Edward Foley’s reflective believing as a way to honor difference.

In “The Boot is on the Other Foot,” Marilyn Hope¹ describes her experience supervising a unit of CPE in which the students were Orthodox rabbis from Chabad and her pleasure at finding ways that these students could engage in their equivalent of theological reflection while remaining consistent with their faith tradition and its practices. My response to this article has been shaped by reading the essay by Edward Foley, on “Reflective Believing.”² He defines a different paradigm related to but different from theological reflection that he proposes is more appropriate to our increasingly multi-faith, multi-cultural world.

Although I am Jewish, my many years in CPE both as a student and as a supervisor acclimated me to the concept of theological reflection. This may have been easier for me to accept because I was brought up in an atheist household, rather than an Orthodox Jewish home. It was through reading Foley’s essay that I realized that one interpretation of Marilyn Hope’s article was that she was seeking a way, albeit respectfully and with deference, to enable her students to engage in theological reflection in the way that she conceived it. In other words, she was finding a way to fit Jewish theology into a Christian conceptualization (arguably, counter to Foley’s essay).

However, as a CPE Supervisor, I say, “Is that so bad?” and my answer is, “No.” I sometimes tell prospective CPE students that CPE is where aca-

Chaplain David Daniel Klipper, Rabbinic Pastor and CPE Supervisor, Stamford Hospital, 30 Shelburne Rd., Stamford, CT 06904-9317 (Email: dklipper@stamhealth.org).

demic theologies come to die. While there is humor in the comment, I am actually dead serious (pun intended). CPE exposes students to human suffering on a scale not typically experienced by those who do not work in the types of institutions where CPE interns are customarily sent (hospitals, hospices, prisons, nursing homes). As can happen in CPE, facing the anguish of a young mother knowing she will die and therefore not be able to raise her two infants would challenge anyone. How do we find or make meaning out of these situations without devaluing or distancing ourselves from the pain inherent in them?

In my experience, this question is best answered by the heart, which speaks its own language that cannot be transcribed to fit on a page such as this without distortion. CPE students learn to engage their minds in the service of the heart—their hearts and perhaps even more the hearts of their patients. Marilyn Hope was able to engage her students in attending to the feelings of the patients they saw, and to shift from a posture of authority with regard to matters of prayer to a warm human being who is receptive to the patient's plight without judgment.

I like Edward Foley's term *reflective believing* because it avoids the trap of falling into a particular faith tradition's theology while still orienting us towards the Mystery that can be lived more than explained. If I want to put the lens on my other eye (so to speak), then I can view Marilyn Hope's efforts as an example of reflective believing. She was able to create a conduit to the Holy in which both she and they could explore different ways of how one acts as a chaplain in the face of human suffering. I applaud this.

However, rather than there only being one boot that is put on the other foot, I envision many boots, each landing in its own domain of reflective belief systems (sometimes also known as faith traditions). As long as they 'walk' with the cultural sensitivity and tact displayed by Hope (could there possibly be a more appropriate name for a CPE Supervisor?) then each of these boots is on the right foot and should keep walking in the direction it is going.

NOTES

1. Marilyn Ann Hope, "A Christian-Jewish CPE Experience in Australia: The Boot is on the Other Foot," *Reflective Practice* 34 (2014), 132–139.
2. Edward Foley, "Reflective Believing: Reimagining Theological Reflection in the Age of Diversity," *Reflective Practice* 34 (2014), 60–75.