

**R**eligions  
and **D**iscourse

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Eolene M. Boyd-MacMillan

**Transformation**

James Loder, *Mystical Spirituality*,  
and James Hillman

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Peter Lang

# Transformation

# Religions and Discourse

Edited by James M. M. Francis

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PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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*For Ronald*  
*'a cord of three strands is not quickly snapped'*  
*Ecclesiastes 4.12.*

# Abbreviations

James Loder's main texts:

*EM*     *Educational Ministry in the Logic of the Spirit*

*KM*     *Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of Spirit in Theology and Science*

*LS*     *Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective*

*TM*     *Transforming Moment 2nd edition*



# Introduction

James Loder died suddenly of a heart attack on 9 November 2001. However, he had died every year for almost two decades. He began all of his courses at Princeton Theological Seminary with a description of his death and the continued functioning of the world in his absence. It was an entry into the void, nothingness, what every human being must face at some point: their own non-existence. Loder wanted his students to face the void so that they could face God. As people realize on some level their human limitations, finiteness, they are 'open' to deep, transforming engagement with God as both an on-going process and at particular turning points.

Loder developed his transformation theory over forty years. His doctoral dissertation examined the nature of 'reality consciousness,' understood as consciousness of God, by comparing the theories of Sigmund Freud and Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>1</sup> He examined Freud's theory of reality consciousness (non-neurotic, non-pathological consciousness) as relational image. A person's consciousness responds somatically and creatively to something outside herself through images that relate body and mind, object and subject. Consciousness *is* the relationship. Loder found that Freud's non-pathological consciousness agreed with Kierkegaard's consciousness when responding to a 'bestowal' of the 'Paradox,' the God-man of Jesus Christ. This consciousness was free of illusions, neuroses and pathologies.

From that initial research came what Loder later termed the 'logic of transformation,' a five-phased process that can occur in any order, in a moment or over a life-time (the five phases are conflict, scanning, insight, energy release, and application). The five phases operate transformationally and characterize human knowing. Loder

1 'The Nature of Religious Consciousness in the Writings of Sigmund Freud and Søren Kierkegaard: A Theoretical Study in the Correlation of Religious and Psychiatric Concepts.'

uses the following understanding of transformation: ‘whenever, within a given frame of reference or experience, hidden orders of coherence and meaning emerge to replace or alter the axioms of the given frame and reorder its elements accordingly.’<sup>2</sup> We can think of examples from childhood, when we learn about subsets and sets in maths, geography, and grammar. Other examples include scientific discoveries, artistic creations, and therapeutic insights that identify meaning and coherence from seemingly random data. In his lectures, Loder drew nine dots, arranged in three rows and columns, and challenged students to draw a line through every dot using only four lines and without lifting their writing instruments from the page. Upon discovering how to connect the dots by drawing a line outside the box formed by the dots, one both discovers and creates a hidden coherence that has ordered seemingly disconnected elements, the dots. The phrase, ‘connecting the dots,’ has come to represent a flash of insight when one sees familiar elements in a new way.

Loder asserted that this logic was the structure of creative knowing, human development, and deep, transforming engagement with God. The five-phased logic points to the relational nature of human knowing on many levels: within each phase, between each phase, and among the phases. Moreover, Loder places human knowing in a four-dimensional context (lived world, self, void, the Holy). In human knowing, the five phases and four dimensions all relate between and among each other. In transformed human knowing, the hidden but sustaining presence of God emerges to re-order the elements of one’s life. In Christian transformation, the emergence of God as the ordering presence is Trinitarian and Christomorphic.

In 1970, Loder experienced a transforming moment. Through a car accident in which he thought he was going to die, he experienced a deep, transforming encounter with God. He reviewed his life and identified two other times when he had encountered God in this way (during a walk with his depressed younger sister and while mourning his father’s death). These encounters represented moments of spiritual

2     *KM*, p. 316.

clarity in his long Christian journey, in his engagement with God; the insight from his car accident operated as a turning-point, although he notes that he did not really attend to it for two years.<sup>3</sup> When he did attend to it, his research shifted to focus more particularly on human-divine relationality in Christian transformation.

‘Relationality’ is an awkward term that refers to a relationship that takes on a life of its own. For example, the love between the Father and the Son is somehow a third person called the Spirit in classical Trinitarian theology. Despite the awkwardness of the term ‘relationality,’ I use it because its very awkwardness sets apart the engagement between a person and God in Christian transformation from the current use of the word ‘relationship’ to refer to everything from one’s interaction with one’s automobile to one’s familial commitments. A person’s relationality with God is different from any other relationship, although of course there are analogies with human relationships. Analogies that enable us to grapple with mysteries still, by definition, contain differences.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout human life, Loder understood God both to illuminate the void of human limitations and to offer God-self as the solution to that humanly insurmountable problem. He placed the human sciences, human creativity, development, and accomplishments, all in a larger context of God’s active presence. Moreover, Loder understood all of these wonderful characteristics of human nature—creativity, growth, discovery—as themselves transformed through intentional relationality with God. He understood all of creation to be contingent upon God for its very existence, but in deep, transforming engagement with God, that contingency is transformed into relationality. The hidden

3 See excerpts from interview with Dana Wright, *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology*, p. 16.

4 A full consideration of analogies in religious language is beyond the scope of this discussion, including a discussion about correspondence theory (e.g., as leads to a critical realist position) and coherence theory (e.g., as leads to a constructivist position). In *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Janet Soskice compares the use of models, metaphors, and analogies in scientific endeavor with their use in religious contexts, asserting that their truth significance in a religious context should be the same as in a scientific context.

coherence and meaning of human contingency on God emerge and reorder our lived worlds, our selves, and even the void, through our relationality with God.

In Christian transformation, the way that a person knows is itself transformed. Recall Loder's understanding of transformation: 'when-ever, within a given frame of reference or experience, hidden orders of coherence and meaning emerge to replace or alter the axioms of the given frame and reorder its elements accordingly.' The distinction between human knowing and transformed human knowing lies in its origin and witness. 'Transformed' human knowing originates out of a person's relationality with God, rather than out of a person's ego. Of course, a person, like all that exists, is contingent on God for her or his existence. So, in a sense, all knowing originates out of a type of relationality with God. But, I am distinguishing (and Loder distinguishes) between the relationality of contingency on God and the relationality of deep, transforming engagement with God. In 'transformed' human knowing, a person's insights originate out of an intentional, deeply engaged relationality with God. Instead of witnessing to a person's ego competencies, transformed knowing can point to, reveal, and bear witness to human-divine relationality. 'Transformed' knowing inspires an awe that connects heaven and earth. The relational and transformational characteristics of all human knowing can themselves be transformed to reveal what has become a person's primary identity, her relationality with God.

Asserting an analogous relationship between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit, Loder's theology of the Holy Spirit interacts with Regin Prenter, George Hendry, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Karl Barth, T. F. Torrance, and others. The human side of the analogy comes from psychology, sociology, anthropology and even physics. He studied physics with Jim Neidhardt and together they co-authored a book. Psychologically, Loder draws on both depth and neurological theory, interacting with Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, their descendants, and the neurological work of Ernst Gellhorn and his colleagues, among others. In the following chapters I do not assess the accuracy with which he

draws upon these other theorists. My analysis is of his understanding of various concepts as they contribute to his theory. A source criticism of Loder would be another discussion.<sup>5</sup> Throughout my analysis, I use the words of the primary source authors as much as possible to demonstrate that my assertions are rooted in their own language. While discourse analysis rightly alerts us to the multi-layered meanings and dynamics within any utterance, our only option is not the complete disconnection of a term from a referent or a signifier from the thing signified. I use language as a critical realist.

In his examination of human consciousness of God's transforming presence, Loder identifies an 'ego-relativization.' A person's ego is 'relativized' or made relative to this relational focus of her personhood. Paradigmatically, her ego is transformed from being the guiding agency of her interactions with herself and her world, to being guided by her relationality with God. As discussed, how a person knows (the transformational, relational nature of the person), is itself transformed; Loder talks about 'transformation transformed.' This 'transformation transformed' involves both continuity and discontinuity; a person remains herself, but she is also deeply changed. Through deep, transforming engagement with God a person, including her ego, is related to God, human spirit to Holy Spirit, in a dialectical, 'bi-polar relational unity.' This inelegant phrase is another way of speaking about human-divine 'relationality' to highlight the respect of alterity or otherness in the midst of profound engagement. It bears repeating: a person remains herself, but she is also deeply changed. All of her creativity, development, and accomplishments are drawn into the loving, giving *perichoresis* (*circumincessio*) of the Trinity (the co-inherence or relational life of the Trinity). We are all somehow part of the life of the Trinity simply because we exist. But in 'deep, transforming engagement,' we are drawn more deeply into that life, into relationality with the sustaining Source of the cosmos.

5 E.g., see Ken Kovacs's PhD dissertation, 'The Relational Phenomenological Pneumatology of James E. Loder: Providing New Frameworks for the Christian Life.'



In the following chapters I assert that Loder's theory of ego-relativization reveals the psychological and theological dynamics of personal (which is inextricable from social) transformation in Christian mystical spirituality as presented by four contemporary authors on mystical spirituality: Andrew Louth, Bernard McGinn, Denys Turner, and Mark McIntosh. That is, Loder's interdisciplinary theory places Christian understandings of knowing God in the context of all human knowing. To explore this assertion, I begin with an examination of Loder's theory in chapter one.<sup>6</sup> Chapter two considers selected texts of Louth, McGinn, Turner, and McIntosh. Chapter three asserts an overlap in conceptual fields between Loder's theory and mystical spirituality as depicted by these four authors. That is, I do not assert simple semantic connections, but a shared focus. However, in asserting this conceptual overlap, I do not deny differences among authors. My point is that each is examining the nature of deep, transforming engagement with God. In that shared examination, I assert that Loder's theory contributes the very interdisciplinary analysis that the four authors find lacking:

- (1) His analysis insists on the inseparability of experience and interpretation, on the mutually informing exchange of spirituality and theology (based on the way that human beings know anything at all and thus rejecting an idea of spirituality as a 'free-floating' experience without thematization); and
- (2) His analysis probes without reduction Christian claims to divine 'mediated immediacy' (that is, that they encounter God in an especially 'near' or 'close' way, but it is still mediated through their senses, imagination, and brain processes), an integral component of mystical spirituality.

He does not reduce such claims to purely psychological processes, neurological or cognitive. He also does not reduce such claims to purely theological doctrine stated biblically, fundamentally, or systematically. Rather, he respects the particularity of the human

6 Before he died, Loder reviewed earlier versions of this chapter and approved the accuracy of my depiction of his theory (Typed Letter Signed, 20th December, 2000; Emailed Letter, 20th September, 2001).

sciences and Christian theology, while relating them in a way that illuminates and challenges our understanding of Christian claims to a 'mediated immediacy' in deep, transforming engagement with God.

At least five objections may arise as this discussion begins. The first involves criticisms of Loder, the second involves the use of 'ego' language, the third involves the recommendation of 'ego-relativization,' the fourth involves the use of Freudian or depth psychology and its descendants, and the fifth involves the use of the term 'mystical.' I have italicized the key words of each objection to enable the reader to skip those objections of no interest.

*Criticisms of Loder* have generally focused on two areas.<sup>7</sup> One area of criticism asserts that Loder emphasizes change at the expense of constancy, discontinuity at the expense of continuity, crisis at the expense of equilibrium, transformation at the expense of formation, or conversion at the expense of life-long faith journey. I wonder if some of this criticism stems from the title of Loder's first major text, *The Transforming Moment*, because from my reading of his corpus, he is at pains not to create these false dichotomies. In a typically Loderian move, he asserts a fundamental relationality between each pairing. The words 'transforming' and 'moment' may embed in readers' minds the idea that Loder spurns their opposites, despite his analysis to the contrary. For example, Loder asserts that in Christian transformation developmental stages are 'self-liquidating' in that the 'transformational process may transcend and correct arrested development' or even 'leap over stages of development and incorporate them in an order of its own.'<sup>8</sup> However, he does not assert that this must happen in an instant, but analyzes how this may occur over a life-time through the ordinary events of human existence, crises, and both. The process of transformation itself is a structure of formation. The other general

7 For examples of critical assessments of Loder, see Dykstra, C. (who did his Ph.D. under Loder) 'Theological Table-Talk: Transformation in Faith and Morals' in *Theology Today* (April, 1986, pp. 56-64) and Grannell, A. 'The Paradox of Formation and Transformation' in *Religious Education* (vol. 80, no. 3, Summer 1985, pp. 384-398).

8 *TM*, pp. 131, 135.

area of criticism aims at his Christo-centrism or Trinitarian-centrism. I address this criticism in Chapter Three while discussing the relationship between universality and particularity in mystical discourse. In a sentence, Loder does write from Christian commitments. He does not deny the sustaining work of the Holy Spirit throughout creation, but he does make Trinitarian claims for the reality of God. Loder does not need an apologist, but potential contributions of his theory to spirituality discourse and inter-disciplinarity (and other discussions such as science and religion) have gone largely un-mined. It may be that the technical language and denseness of his writing have discouraged greater interaction. I hope that this discussion demonstrates ways in which the fruits are worth the effort.

The second potential objection is that *ego-language* is sometimes criticized as too culture-bound for contemporary use. My response is that although 'ego' may be an inadequate term cross-culturally, there is some sort of self-understanding and agency that forms and develops in individuals. For example, one proposal is that the Chinese word transliterated from Mandarin as *jen*, which encompasses 'the individual's transactions with his fellow human beings,' describes at least one Chinese self-concept more adequately than the term 'ego.'<sup>9</sup> Yet 'ego' as a psychic agency that negotiates a person's interactions with her environment can also be understood as transactional or relational. The distinction might be in how the transactions or relations are understood and experienced. Outside the scope of this discussion is whether or not a person in any, many, most, or none of the diverse Chinese contexts (e.g., Taiwanese, Hong Kong, northern mainland, to mention a very few that themselves must be broken down further) responds to the birth trauma, absent face, and external restraint in such a way that a person creates her *jen* or *ego* (as Loder asserts for his own culture). However named, some sort of psychic agency mediates a person's inner and outer worlds, ensuring survival and satisfaction, even if her culture understands the mediation and goals differently.

9 Francis Hsu, 'The Self in Cross-Cultural Perspective,' p. 33, italics original.

Similarly, in some way, self and not-self, or even less-self, are negotiated psychologically. Such cultural inquiry lies beyond the scope of this discussion, yet requires the groundwork laid in this discussion.

The third potential objection is to the process of ‘ego-relativization.’ Feminist scholars might reject a call to ego-relativization (or similar calls to ‘subordinate’ oneself to the Christian God) as an appropriate antidote for men, but not for women who struggle to have an ego at all.<sup>10</sup> Sarah Coakley focuses on this issue in her text *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. She considers the fear of ‘heteronomy’<sup>11</sup> and asserts that ‘the apparently forced choice between dependent “vulnerability” and liberative “power” is a false one.’<sup>12</sup> In her first chapter on *kenosis* and subversion, she concludes that in deep, transforming human-divine relationship (such as I assert is the core of Loder’s transformation theory) is ‘the unique intersection of vulnerable, “non-grasping” humanity and authentic divine power, itself “made perfect in weakness”.’<sup>13</sup> She asserts that the *kenosis* embodied by Christ to which Christians are invited to open themselves can be understood as a ‘*special* form of power-in-vulnerability,’<sup>14</sup> that ‘true divine “empowerment” occurs most unimpededly in the context of a *special* form of human “vulnerability”.’<sup>15</sup> In agreement with Coakley, I argue that the call to ego-relativization is valid for both genders, noting that it leads to a particular kind of ‘ego-strengthening’ or enhancement of ego capacities.

The fourth possible objection involves *the use of Freudian and other depth psychological theory*. The journal of The British Psychological Society, *The Psychologist*, devoted an issue to a review of

10 E.g., Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, p. 155.

11 Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submission: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender*, p. xiv.

12 Ibid., p. xv.

13 Ibid., p. 38.

14 Ibid., p. 5, italics original.

15 Ibid., p. 32, italics original.

Freudian theory, focusing on specific tenets in light of modern research. Most relevant for this discussion is that Freud's theory of 'repression proper' seems to correspond with modern cognitive theories of selective forgetting or cognitive avoidance.<sup>16</sup> Loder's use of Freudian theory in ego formation and development focuses on memories of actual events: the birth process, face phenomenon, external restraint, and their associated feelings. At the very least, recent research does not negate Loder's use of this tenet of psychoanalytic theory.

And lastly, some may object to the *use of the terms 'mystical' or 'mysticism.'* The terms have had a varied and problematic history, as noted by Louth, McGinn, Turner, and McIntosh. Thus I am at pains to specify that my use of the term 'mystical spirituality' is *as these four authors depict it*. Entry into the important but arduous debate about the sense of the term, its history, and whether or not it should be discarded is beyond the scope of this discussion.<sup>17</sup> In chapter two I

16 According to Chris R. Brewin and Bernice Andrews ('Psychological defense mechanisms: The example of repression'), Freud uses 'repression' in two ways, joining the two uses in the second meaning. 'One usage referred to a process whereby unwanted material is turned away before it reaches awareness [...]. Rather than quietly remaining in the unconscious, however, this material is likely to enter awareness in disguised ways. In his second usage of the term, Freud proposes that a person becomes aware of these unwanted derivatives of the original repressed material and then deliberately attempts to exclude them from consciousness' (p. 615). F. LeRon Shultz ('Pedagogy of the Repressed: What Keep Seminarians from Transformational Learning?') draws on Loder's theory to suggest that awareness of repressed fears can support transformational learning among seminarians. After describing Loder's four dimensions, Shultz asserts that 'the ultimate answer to the repression that keeps seminarians from transformational learning is to fear the only One worth fearing, so that they can overcome the fears of this "world"' (p. 161). Fear defined as 'a response to the perceived inability to control an existentially relevant object' (pp. 157, 158) is an essential part of love that God takes up into God-self in the human-divine relationality resulting from deep, transforming engagement.

17 For an analysis of the historical influences that contributed to the 'liberal Protestant' reduction of mysticism to an essential core that has contributed to the confusion and debate about the concept see L. E. Schmidt, 'The Making of Modern "Mysticism".'

examine their understandings of the concepts of spirituality, mysticism, and contemplation, proposing the phrase, ‘deep, transforming engagement with God,’ as a synthesis statement of their presentations. I then consider their criticisms of what I have called the ‘mysticism-experience identity.’ All four authors express grave concerns about the identification of mysticism with experience, apart from thematization and the rest of cognition. They reject the separation of experience from thematization, spirituality from theology and ecclesiological contexts. Lastly, I explore their conclusions about the classical mystical authors’ claims to divine immediacy or directness. All four conclude that although the mystical authors use terms like ‘immediate’ or ‘direct,’ their experienced knowing of God is mediated or a partial immediacy. Yet it is a unique experienced knowing from which paradoxical language issues in an attempt to articulate the ineffable.

My use of Louth, McGinn, Turner, and McIntosh arises from their shared concern about the problems inherent to what I call ‘mysticism-experience identity.’ While each of the authors has his particularities, all four survey classic mystical texts and come up with similar understandings of mystical spirituality as ‘deep, transforming engagement with God’ (my summary phrase). And, all four authors focus on the mystical authors’ claims to divine immediacy in their deep, transforming engagement with God. My examination of these contemporary authors’ texts does not assess the accuracy with which they interpret the mystical authors’ texts or the texts of theologians who reflect upon mystical spirituality (e.g., Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan). That inquiry would be yet another discussion. My focus is on the four authors’ views of mystical spirituality as I glean them from their interactions with classical mystical authors and their selected theologians.<sup>18</sup> To a greater or lesser degree, the careers of all four overlapped with Loder’s, maintaining my focus on contemporary analyses of human transformation and mystical spirituality. While stylistically controversial, I use the present historical tense wherever possible to emphasize the immediacy of the issues discussed. Also

18 Denys Turner has reviewed chapter three and affirmed my portrayal of his understandings.

potentially controversial is my predominate use of the feminine pronoun. My major interlocutors are male and making the examples female seemed the best way to avoid confusion and to be inclusive. No doubt, this will annoy some, please others, and remain irrelevant to many. My apologies to the first.

In chapter three, I argue that Loder's theory examines 'deep, transforming engagement with God' in a way that does not reduce such engagement purely to experience. I argue also that Loder's theory presents an interdisciplinary understanding of divine immediacy that accords with the analyses of Louth, McGinn, Turner, and McIntosh. My summary phrase of their four depictions ('deep, transforming engagement with God') operates as an analytical locus between the four authors and Loder. Loder himself links his transformational logic in four dimensions and its neural correlates to mystical dynamics, authors, terms, and patterns. He understands spirituality and theology as interwoven. Moreover, a central argument in his formulation of the transformational logic is the inseparability of experience and knowing (or thematization), of imagination and reason, in a broad understanding of cognition. Lastly, his portrayal of the divine 'mediated immediacy' in 'deep, transforming engagement with God' accords with the four authors. This agreement between the four authors and Loder notably involves writers from different Christian traditions, the four from primarily Catholic and Orthodox theological commitments, Loder from Reformed commitments. My assertion does *not* deny distinctions among these Christian traditions, or the differences among these authors, but focuses on their shared investigations into 'deep, transforming engagement with God.' I regret that Loder did not live to probe further the connections that he himself made and that I identify between his theory and classical mystical spirituality.

If my assertion about Loder's theory and mystical spirituality is justified, then his theory will contribute to debated issues in contemporary mystical spirituality discourse. One such issue involves universality and particularity. Or, how to respect the particularity of each spirituality when every spirituality makes universal assertions (e.g., Jesus is the only Way; or, There is one God and his name is Allah; or, Every religion is a different path to the same God; or, There

is no transcendent God, we are all Gods). The universal assertion of each spirituality negates the universal assertions of all other spiritualities. Yet, if one does away with all universal assertions, then one has not respected the particularity of any spirituality. Some interlocutors in mystical spirituality address this problem by emphasizing human self-transcendence, some by emphasizing divine agency, some by emphasizing the common elements in spiritualities from different faith traditions, some by emphasizing the differences. No one option satisfies everyone.

Consistent with his logic, Loder directly relates the options. He relates universality and particularity in his affirmation of human nature and his appropriation of the Chalcedonian formula. His affirmation of the amazing capabilities of human nature can serve as a meeting place with other spiritualities that emphasize human self-transcendence, often referred to as 'human spiritualities.' However, Loder asserts that despite its wondrous capacities, human nature itself needs transformation through human-divine relationality. Such a transformation involves both continuities (e.g. the capacity for human-divine relationality) and discontinuities (e.g. a psychic structural change, or transformation, via ego-relativization).

Loder envisions human-divine engagement modeled on the Chalcedonian formula of Christ's nature, fully human and fully divine. Loder terms it an 'asymmetrical' engagement to distinguish the nature of Jesus Christ as God incarnate from the human-divine relationality that is made possible through Christ. In the Incarnation, the otherness of the human and divine natures is respected while profoundly engaged. The New Testament scriptures describe the Christian as being conformed to Christ's nature and classic mystical spirituality texts aim to nurture such conformity by following his lived example.<sup>19</sup> In his resurrection, the divine nature of Jesus Christ negates the inevitable

19 See J. Zammit-Mangion's forthcoming doctoral dissertation (University of Cambridge), which probes Pauline spirituality and the nature of Christian conformity to Christ. The Ignatian Exercises, for example, support this conformity through meditation on Christ's life, following the pattern of Holy Week and the Passion.



destruction of the human nature, revealing that the relationship between the two natures is asymmetrical, the divine transforms the human. The ontological prior existence of God as the divine Creator of humanity, of all other creatures, and of all of the cosmos again establishes that an asymmetry must characterize human and divine relationality. Symmetry refers to a mirror image. In human-divine relationality, a person is reconnected with the original in whose image she is made, but this reconnection does not involve perfect mirror images, it is not symmetrical. The asymmetry does not diminish human participation, the collaboration or co-creation issuing from the relationality, but recognizes that God is the Creator and humanity created.

The asymmetry discussed above informs Loder's interdisciplinary methodology. He argues that interdisciplinary research on Christian transformation must involve both theology ('a view from above') and the human sciences ('a view from below'). With a 'marginal'<sup>20</sup> priority given to theology by affirming God as an active reality, in other ways the disciplines can correct and learn from each other. His concern with interdisciplinary methodology appears even in his early research. He attempted to put theology and the human sciences in direct relationship without creating a new discipline or resorting to philosophical reductionism. He rejected methodologies that simply noted semantic correlations or conceptual connections without acknowledging differences in conceptual fields. He focused theologically on the human experience and understanding of Christian awareness of God's presence.

In the context of research into Christian transformation, I place Loder's theory in interdisciplinary and inter-faith (broadly understood) spirituality discourse to suggest a methodology that does not deny or

20 Loder uses the term 'marginal' from Michael Polanyi's 'marginal control' principle (M. Grene ed. *Knowing and Being*, see especially 'The Logic of Tacit Inference,' pp. 138-158). In brief, 'the "lower" level is said to be subject to dual control by the laws applying to its component particulars in themselves and by the distinctive laws that govern the comprehensive unity, i.e., the 'higher' level, formed by them.' *KM*, pp. 55.

reduce polarized viewpoints. For example, an assertion that ‘Jesus is the only Way’ can be polarized from an assertion that ‘All ways lead to God.’ A methodology that insists on creating a direct relationality between two spiritualities with polarizing assertions will probe the awkward and competing particularities. The goal is not to remove the disagreement or even parts of the disagreement, but to prize the dynamic exchange between polarities as a relationship that can take on a life of its own to reveal new insights. According to the five-phased logic, conflict is integral to human knowing, which can come in the form of disagreement.

To test my proposed methodological principles and examine this dynamic exchange of disagreement in action, I relate Loder’s theory directly to James Hillman’s theory of transformation, which may be considered a ‘human spirituality.’ Relating the two theories tests the power of my methodology for inter-faith (broadly understood) and interdisciplinary spirituality discourse. I conceptualized this test while reading through Loder’s writings and was happy to discover that he had done something similar in his doctoral research. That finding encouraged me as I structured my research. As mentioned, he related the reality consciousness theories of Søren Kierkegaard, a Christian, to Sigmund Freud, who considered Christianity an illusion. The exchange that Loder created yielded a relationality that revealed the insights of both his theory and his methodology.

To relate directly the theories of Loder and Hillman, I must examine Hillman’s theory as I did Loder’s. Chapter four investigates the transformation theory of Hillman.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes referred to as a post-Jungian,<sup>22</sup> Hillman is the founder of the archetypal psychology movement. His theory of transformation also involves ego-relativization, but without a transcendent being. Nor does it involve an emphasis on the human spirit. He emphasizes the soul, the human soul

21 Like Loder, Hillman reviewed and approved my depiction of his theory in this chapter (Hillman is still alive): ‘it is excellent work! [...] you’ve done as good a job as any I’ve seen [...] I was honored by both your perspicuity and your assiduousness.’ Hand-written Fax Signed, 16th December, 2000.

22 A. Samuels, *Jung and the Post-Jungians*.

and the ‘soul of the world,’ also referred to as the ‘*anima mundi*’ and the ‘archetypal soul.’ This force initiates, superintends, and maintains the relating of a person’s ego to itself. He calls a person’s ego the ‘heroic ego,’ a short-hand reference to the cultural and social forces in the ‘Christian’ West responsible for its appearance. In ego-relativization, a person’s ‘heroic ego’ is related to the archetypal soul of the world and thereby no longer operates as the guiding force of a person. Rather, a person’s ‘heroic ego’ recognizes that it is only one of an infinite number of images from which a person can operate. A person shifts from a dominating, controlling attitude toward oneself, other people, and the rest of the cosmos to a respectful, reflective attitude. A utilitarian or instrumental stance is replaced by an attentive, contemplative posture toward all that exists.

As evident from even this brief description of Hillman’s theory, his and Loder’s theories run parallel and diverge in their account of human transformation. Thus, Hillman’s theory provides an ideal opportunity to test the power of the methodological propositions made above for interdisciplinary and inter-faith (broadly understood) discourse. Although Hillman does not place his theory in the realm of spirituality discourse, his theory can be understood in this way. As discussed in chapter four, Hillman himself links his theory to religion and theophany (although not categorically, and understanding both terms archetypally). Using the understanding of spirituality articulated by the anthropological approach of Sandra Schneiders (discussed by McIntosh and reviewed in both chapters three and four), Hillman’s theory can be approached as a human spirituality. This understanding of Hillman’s theory as well as his ‘running engagement with Christianity’ facilitates my examination of the relationality between his theory and Loder’s.

Chapter five relates Loder’s and Hillman’s theories in detail. Taking neither the ‘common core’ approach nor the ‘radical constructivism’ approach that are part of current mystical spirituality discourse, my analysis identifies a direct relationality without removing opposing theoretical or world-view tenets. I do not say that Hillman is really a Christian or that Loder is really an archetypal psychologist. Rather, in the particularities of each theory, in the points of agreement and in the differences, there is a relationality: (1) in their

critique of ego-centric living as socially, culturally, and educationally reinforced; and (2) in their analysis of how we can move from ego-centric living to another way of living. From the dynamic exchange between the theories, each theory is better understood, as is the challenge of ego-centric living. Each theory asserts its own universality that in a sense negates the universality of the other theory, but the relationality between the two theories is a reality to be prized. Moreover, contrary to arguments for a *purely* anthropological approach, the use of a methodology that acknowledges views from both above and below facilitates rather than thwarts the discussion. Including Loder's theological assertions and Hillman's criticisms of Christianity illuminates the other theory as well as their own.

Finally, in chapter six, I state my conclusions from the foregoing discussion. Without losing sight of the differences between Loder and the four authors, I identify a relationality among the analyses of all five in their focus on 'deep, transforming engagement with God.' Loder's analysis of that engagement fills the interdisciplinary theoretical lacunae identified by the four authors. In the relationality that I create among all five analyses, God's sustaining presence that constantly invites transforming engagement can draw their analyses ever more deeply into the life of the Trinity where they can continue the Christian journey of being transformed in conformity with Christ. In the words of Catholic theologian Edward O'Connor, God's action transcends 'all institutions and hierarchies on earth, even in the Church'.<sup>23</sup> I then place that relationality from within the Christian tradition in the context of spirituality discourse in general. My proposed methodology for interdisciplinary research and inter-faith (broadly understood) dialogue accommodates both the particularities of Loder's and Hillman's theories and the contradictory universal assertions of each theory. A relationality between the theories of Loder and Hillman as investigations of ego-centrism, its causes and antidotes, provides a needed resource for those who are searching 'for

a new way to see the world'.<sup>24</sup> Hillman's theory rings true for a popular under-current that is concerned about the degradation of the environment and disregard for other creatures, about the denigration of fantasy and imagination in the striving toward empirically set targets, about the reduction of personhood to technological or utilitarian formulae. Rightly or wrongly, many, like Hillman, associate these trends with the dominance of Christianity in the Western world. The 'traditional Western source of spiritual guidance—the church—is perceived as a part of the old cultural establishment that seems to have created our present predicament.'<sup>25</sup> Loder's theory offers the Christian resources of 'deep, transforming engagement with God' in terms that affirm the fullness of personhood, including creative imagination in partnership with reason, as a deeply connected member of creation. The identified parallels with Hillman's theory can help to make the Christian faith more accessible to those wary of Christianity and to make Hillman's insights more available to those wary of archetypal psychology.

Additionally, my examination of Loder's and Hillman's theories demonstrates the power of an approach that is truly interdisciplinary. That is, approaching spiritualities from both views above and below enables a deeper interdisciplinarity, rather than involving only different fields within one discipline (as valuable as that can be). The five-phased logic in four dimensions can operate as a methodological guide to enable investigators of spirituality to probe more deeply and comprehensively, and may even help researchers to avoid ego-centric investigation. Loder, Hillman, and mystical spirituality as presented by the four authors all challenge the adequacy of ego-centric knowing. Throughout his text on the cultural upheavals accompanying our move

24 Drane, J. *Cultural Change and Biblical Faith: The Future of the Church. Biblical and Missiological Essays for the New Century*, p. 105.

25 Ibid., p. 9. And Hillman is not the first. Physicist Fritjof Capra and Christian missiologist Lesslie Newbigin each identify 'old age' (as opposed to 'new age') attitudes that are 'too close to comfort to traditional Christian attitudes'. Ibid., n. 12.

into the twenty-first century,<sup>26</sup> practical theologian John Drane notes the appeal of the classic mystical writers to those who might call themselves spiritual but not religious. Yet, those who mine the mystical writers for techniques without dogma unwittingly participate in the reduction of personhood that they protest; they reinforce ego-centric living by locating themselves as the ultimate arbiter and replacing one dogma with another, even an anti-dogma that can be as rigid as the rejected dogma. The connections between Loder, the four authors, and Hillman can introduce Christians to the resources of Christian mystical spirituality and enable collaboration with those who lament the fall-out from ego-centric knowing and living. Moreover, they can attend to the relational and transformational dynamics of how they know anything and how they know God. Such attention will witness to the Source of all knowledge and transform their knowing. What is at stake is nothing less than the quality of our knowing and our ability to know at all.

26 Ibid.



# Chapter One: Ego-Relativization in the Transformation Theory of James Loder

## 1. Introduction

If my thesis is that the transformation theory of James Loder connects with mystical spirituality as presented by four contemporary authors, then this chapter must set out Loder's arguments for his theory. A central feature of Loder's transformation theory is the paradox<sup>1</sup> of the ego, which he understands as a potentially self-replacing mechanism. Not self-eliminating, but an agency that functions simultaneously to deny and find its replacement to which it can be related. The centered, 'ruling' ego might be understood as a transitional object for human-divine relationality via ego-relativization. That is, the 'centered' ego might function as something that helps us transition from being oriented around our parent or primary caretaker to being drawn into the life of God. As mentioned later, Loder calls the ego a 'truth-producing error.' But full discussion of the centered ego as transitional object is for another text. The point here is that this language about the ego qualifies and critiques the assertions of those writers on Christian spirituality who identify generic ego-strengthening as spiritual deepening or growth.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps their assertions of 'graced

1 Loder and Neidhardt, *KM*, p. 96; Loder, *LS*, p. 37. Fundamental in all his texts, is Loder's engagement with the writings of Søren Kierkegaard in his exploration of paradox and 'union in opposition' (bi-polar relational unity) embodied in Christ as articulated by the Chalcedonian formula.

2 E.g., Ruth Holgate writes about an aspect of spiritual growth, self-acceptance, as increased ego-strength, drawing on the work of W. W. Meissner ('Growing into God,' p. 12).