Religious Genius

Full Title: Religious Genius and the Interreligious Study of Saints: Constructing a Category, with Implications for Understanding Wisdom , Spiritual Information and Character Development

Concept Paper

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The world today needs saints, new saints, saints of genius (Simone Weil)

Outline

1. Overview and Introduction of project

1.1 Introducing the area of study

All religions recognize there are outstanding individuals, whose spiritual insight, presence and power by far surpass those of others. These individuals help create, define, drive, reform and inspire their traditions. To a large extent they are the models that provide the basis for emulation for others and they are the ideal of the tradition in its concrete manifestation, in the lives of humans.

Historically, most religions have tended to appreciate only those exceptional individuals who have contributed to their own traditions' formation. While on the popular level there has often been some mix of cults, in seeking blessings from individuals who belong to other traditions, the fuller appreciation of special religious individuals has been limited to members of one's own tradition.

The present project seeks to engage the topic of these special individuals from a perspective that is broader than just the individual faith perspective. In part, this is informed by the recognition that in an interreligious age, we must be open to study and to be inspired by the finest models that other traditions can provide. Without such openness, we are missing out on true appreciation of what other religious traditions are and what they have to offer. From a different perspective, the study of such individuals is important because it allows us to approach them as part of the study of the meaning of the fullness of being human and of human potential. From this perspective we are invited to consider what such unique individuals are, how they function, and what they contribute to society, in a way that cuts across the different religious traditions, and draws on them all. Thus, both for purposes of our knowledge and understanding of what it means to be human and for purposes of advancing relations between religions in today's world, the study of exceptional individuals in the field of religion holds great promise.

1.2 The problems we seek to address

In relation to such exceptional individuals, we wish to pose a series of questions, that will drive this project:

a. How to view and understand such personalities? Can we apply categories that exist in other fields of knowledge to better understand them?

b. Can we make sense of these individuals and of their testimony beyond the confines of their faith community?

c. Is there a way of talking of them that will make their meaning and message come alive today? Do these individuals have the potential to enliven our understanding of our own spiritual life and that of others?

d. What can such individuals teach us about the context, practices and dispositions by means of which deep insight/understanding , wisdom and spiritual information can be attained, accessed and manifested?

e. What do such individuals teach us about the fullness of being human and the potential for human flourishing?

f. Do such individuals provide motivation, inspiration or paradigms for character enhancement and development?

g. How can we advance conversation about challenges to the common scientific views, as these arise out of the claims that along with extraordinary religious achievements are at times associated also supernatural events, miracles etc.?

h. How can a new approach to this subject, with emphasis on the notion of "religious genius," impact the scientific study of these individuals, the understanding of the spiritual life, relations between religions, and relations between religious practitioners and other parts of society?

1.3 Addressing our subject - revisiting "saints"

Throughout history and throughout the literature, the individuals under discussion have been known by many names and titles, reflecting their various offices. The categories overlap and their use is usually neither exclusive nor rigorous. The names by which these individuals have been known include: prophets, founders, mystics, saints, heroes, religious virtuosos and more. Categories vary, either in accordance with a tradition's internal structures or theological conceptualization, or in accordance with the scientific theory that provides the framework for viewing these individuals. Categories are to a large degree a matter of convention, and their significance is ultimately a function of the measure to which they are helpful in enhancing understanding and advancing discussion. The present project is founded upon the creation, rather the expansion and development, of one particular category, that of religious genius. Accordingly, the test for its usefulness will lie in the degree to which it allows us to revisit existing issues, to offer new perspectives and to provide new approaches to problems that have not been dealt with in the past, adequately or at all.

The category of religious genius cuts across many of the categories that presently serve in the literature. Nevertheless, by far, most of the potential "inhabitants" of this category presently "occupy" the category of "saints."   Consequently,   our project will impact the understanding and application of that category the most. Therefore "saints" will provide us with a starting point, by means of which to approach the topic, even as we seek to transcend and replace that category, with "religious genius."

1.4. Overview of Project to Date

The John Templeton Foundation has found the project of interest and is presently offering support for an initial planning phase, to test out the ideas of the concept paper in dialogue with other scholars and other partners who might benefit from the project.

In the interest of maintaining a plurality of voices and of allowing incoming partners and participants to follow the course of the project's evolution, the accumulative discussions will be kept distinct from the initial concept paper. A spirit of dialogue will thus be maintained, allowing new participants in the project to insert themselves at whatever point in the project's evolution they deem appropriate, and to identify with any of the various voices that have come to the fore in the context of discussion. Some of the discussion around the paper is available in other documents, and some of it has been incorporated in the concept paper. A series of 13 responses to the original concept paper is available as a separate document. While it is not required reading for joining the project, it does include multiple voices and perspectives, that a prospective project participant might find useful.

A 3 day meeting of the project's steering committee took place in Boston, in June 2012. An unedited transcript of that meeting is available for consultation, as are the recordings of that meeting. A synthesis of that meeting's discussions and conclusions has been incorporated into the concept paper. Voices of various participants have been homologized and are accordingly presented as a consensus that has been reached. Points are presented as bullet points. Section 9 of the concept paper is devoted to presenting the key points that emerged from the Boston meeting.

The conclusions of the Boston meeting are especially relevant for a discussion of the model of Religious Genius presented in this paper, and suggest various ways in which it should be altered. They also make important contributions to understanding the particularity of Religious Genius in relation to saints. The future reader of this paper is encouraged to not overlook the contributions presented in section 9 of the paper.

1.5 Overview of the present document

Following is an overview of the present concept paper. The paper may be broken down into three sections, each featuring several sub-sections.

A. Background Studies

a. Review of literature. A fuller bibliography is available independently. The review of the literature is an attempt to review the key discussions on saints in a way that highlights the parameters of present discussions, allowing us to identify where the present project might advance discussion.

b. This will be followed by a survey of the category of "religious genius" at it appears in the literature to date. Special attention will be paid to its application by Sir John Templeton.

B. Presenting "Religious Genius"

c. Following this will be my own attempt to construct a model of religious genius. The term "model" is used advisedly. A "model" allows us to imagine an ideal type, by means of which we can explore theoretical issues and conduct comparative conversations across cultures. The model here proposed has several characteristics:

1. It is open and invites further discussion. It should be considered as an initial hypothesis, inviting further study and engagement from the scholarly community.

2. It is built on the accumulative testimony of multiple religions and is not indebted primarily to one. It is thus an attempt at a synthetic composite, that emerges from the study of saints in all religions.

3. It seeks to be flexible and multi-dimensional. It allows us to recognize multiple dimensions of what constitutes religious genius and remains open to the addition of further dimensions. With multiple dimensions identified, we will be in a position to make meaningful distinctions between different kinds of religious genius, as well as to suggest what are essential features of religious genius, that could serve as minimal requirements for inclusion in the category. Inclusion is mirrored by exclusion. The model can thus also suggest who might be excluded from the category.

d. Constructing a model is never problem-free. What are the issues that have to be worked out, in view of the proposal, and what are the challenges to the model and to its usefulness.

C. Implications of our model

Following a presentation of the model, I will suggest what its implications are for several key areas of study:

e. Its implications for understanding wisdom and spiritual information.

f. Its implication for character formation.

g. Its implications for and relation to broader discourse on genius. Here I am much indebted to the contribution by Dean Keith Simonton, who has agreed to author this section of the paper, and to provide the entire project his support and expertise, in the study of genius, from historical and psychological perspectives.

h. Its implications for interreligious relations.

i. Finally, its implications for what some perceive as the loss of meaning and significance of the entire notion of "saints" in contemporary religious thought.

2. Studying "Saints" - an overview of methods and approaches to the study of saints

2.1 Purpose of review of literature

As suggested above, the individuals we seek to study through this project are most commonly referred to in research literature as saints.[1] Consequently, identifying how they have been approached in the past and where future discussion might go involves us in a review of scholarly approaches to "saints". The following section of the concept paper seeks to identify the principal methods, achievements and challenges in the study of saints, especially in an interreligious context. A successful review allows us to recognize the state of present knowledge, to draw on existing insights, and to synthesize present knowledge as a basis for taking the study of these individuals to the next level, as the present project seeks to do.

2.2 Overall Characteristics of Literature on Saints

It is worth beginning by presenting data, that gives us a glimpse of the big picture of the study of saints. The following are impressions, formed in the course of reviewing the literature. More specifically, a list of over one thousand titles, available at Harvard University's Widener Library, and indexed under saints, was consulted.[2] What follows is impressionistic and does not reflect careful statistical quantification and analysis. For purposes of obtaining a very broad picture of the scope and interests of the literature, it seems sufficient to lean on impression, allowing for a certain degree of imprecision, that should not upset the overall accuracy of what follows.

Most of what has been written on "saints" refers to saints of the Christian tradition. Most of that, in turn, is concerned with lives of saints and with their hagiography. These are read mainly with an eye to history, be it concern for the historical report, its veracity and authenticity or its historical impact within Christian society. Thus, in terms of method, history defines the larger part of all studies classified as "saints", and history here refers largely to Christian history. I am of the impression that more than half of what has been written on saints falls within this category. As an extension of historical interest in the saint, we find interest in the saint's cult and its social and historical impact. Saints are thus seen for the most part either in terms of interest in their own personal history/biography/hagiography or in terms of interest in the historical impact they had on society at a given period.

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[1]This usage will be problematized below, and for the time being it is sufficient to recognize this common designation of the individuals under discussion.
[2]Due to the enormous size of this listing, it is not attached to this concept paper or to the proposal. It is available upon request.

While these emphases are strongest in the study of Christian saints, they get transferred to the study of saints in other religions. It is my impression that the twofold emphasis on the life of the saint and his/her impact on society drives upwards of 90% of research on saints in all world religions.

The range of concerns regarding how saints and society interact with each other is obviously of interest, but does not lie at the heart of the present project. What the present project seeks to understand is primarily the spiritual reality of those extraordinary individuals that are frequently referred to as saints. Precisely the fact that so much attention has been showered on the historical and social manifestations of their lives makes it all the more necessary to pose the question of whether there might be some means or method through which we can advance a conversation that touches more closely on their inner being, awareness, sense of purpose and existential orientation. And might we do so in a way that cuts across the different traditions, allowing us to project an archetype or a model of "the saint", or however we may chose to refer to him or her? This is the challenge of the present project.

Let me illustrate this orientation, through a lovely incident recounted in Vincent Cornell's *The Realm of the Saint*. [3] Cornell reports the incident of a venerable mystic being told by his companion of Cornell's project of writing a book about Imam al-Jazuli. The mystic replied: "Yes, but what can he *say* about him?"[4] Clearly, the mystic felt that not much could be said about the Imam himself, that could be of any value. As Carl Ernst puts it, in introducing Islamic sainthood and what could be said of it:

> Sainthood in itself is a subject that resists analysis, since according to many accounts it is the result of the self effacement of the individual in the divine qualities. For us it is easier to approach the subject through its effects, miraculous or ordinary, which are primarily recorded in ritual, song, narrative and history. Nonetheless, sainthood, "remains masked by its manifestations and its signs". Although the intimate experiences of sainthood may be beyond our access, the general concept of humans who are close to God has had an extraordinary role in the history of Islam. This volume will elucidate ways in which saints have influenced the religious and social life of Islam.[5]

Avoiding reference to the reality of the extraordinary individual and focusing instead on what is accessible, his or her impact on society, is characteristic of the greater majority of studies of saints in

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[3]Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1998.
[4]P. xliii.
[5]Carl Ernst, *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*, ed. Grace Smith, The Isiss Press, Istanbul, 1993, p. xi. Ernst himself has gone beyond speaking only of manifestations of sainthood in some of his other works. See Carl Ernst, Rūzbihān Baqlī: mysticism and the rhetoric of sainthood in Persian Sufism, Curzon Press, 1996.

all religions. Nevertheless, saints - some saints - do provide for us a means to see beyond the manifestation into their spiritual life and into what drives the outward expressions of their lives. As Cornell replied to the story of the Sufi Sheikh: "one must say something!", hence his quest to make the "inside" view of Moroccan sainthood intelligible to outsiders. The present project is in fact an attempt to touch the "inside" dimension of sainthood, and it is informed by the premise that a portrait of the "inside" of the reality of the saint may be drawn up. And if the social impact of the saint is almost always specific to the one tradition within which he or she emerges, we may begin our inquiry with the hypothesis that the "inside" dimension may be constructed, or reconstructed, through appeal to multiple religious traditions.

I would like to move now beyond these initial observations concerning the literature and what it contains. In reviewing the literature, I would like to divide it into three sections. The first involves broad surveys of the religious life, that include some meaningful reference to saints and their lives. The second are philosophical discussions that appeal to or draw from the reality or example of saints. The third are phenomenological portraits that emerge from the attempt to portray what sainthood is. Significantly, these take place in a broader comparative, or interreligious, context, thereby reflecting concerns similar to those that inform the present project.

2.3 Saints in General Surveys: Van der Leeuw, Wach and James

Two broad survey works dedicate some attention to saints. The one is Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*.[6] The other is Joachim Wach's *Sociology of Religion*.[7] Wach makes authority the main axis of his presentation; Van der Leeuw power. For the former it is because of how religions as social systems operate that authority is central; for the latter it is because the sacred is communicated as power. Wach's work recalls and draws upon the earlier work of Max Weber and his concern for leadership, viewed in terms of charisma and its routinization. For both, saints are primarily appreciated in terms of their special powers. This perspective is important, but it tells us more about the manifestation of the saint and his or her impact as perceived by the community than about the internal awareness, mission and orientation of saints. Van der Leeuw's claim that saints are more significant dead than alive drives the point home. As Van der Leeuw pointedly states: "The world has no use for living saints; they are dead persons, or still better: the potency of the dead".[8]

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[6]Gloucester, 1967.
[7]Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1944.
[8]p. 238.

By far the most important broader work that features saints is William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature.*[9] This is in many ways also the most important work to date on the subject of saints. This work was written by one of the earliest pioneers of the study of religion, who approached the topic from a psychological perspective. In many ways, the kind of study that concerns us in the present project has not advanced much in the more than the century that has elapsed since James. James' is not only the oldest study of saints but also the one that in many ways is closest to the concerns of the present project. His *Varieties of Religious Experience* seeks to spell out the subjective reality of saints. Many of the authors who have discussed sainthood, especially in terms of its contemporary religious significance in the context of changing theological moods, have drawn on James' work. In my view, the most inspiring quotes on the theme of saints that authors in the past century have offered all go back to James' seminal work. Let me share some of James' statements on saints:

> Like the single drops which sparkle in the sun as they are flung far ahead of the advancing edge of a water -crest or of a flood, they show the way and are forerunners. The world is not yet with them, so they often seem in the midst of the world's affairs preposterous. Yet they are impregnators of the world, vivifiers and animaters of potentialities of goodness which but for them would lie forever dormant. It is not possible to be quite as mean as we naturally are, when they have passed before us. One fire kindles another; and without that over-trust in human worth which they show, the rest of us would lie in spiritual stagnancy.[10]

Such quotes can be multiplied. James certainly found saints an inspiration and much that has been written during the course of the twentieth century on saints did not consider inspiration a major asset, for which to turn to the saints.

James is important not only for being the earliest, and in some ways still the best, theoretical presentation of saints. He is also the earliest author to have appealed to the notion of religious genius. Whereas many others have gone on to study various aspects related to the saints, there has been little to no advance on the subject of religious genius since James. James thus provides us with an intersection of religious genius and saintliness and a frame of reference through which to address our own concerns of dealing with exceptional religious individuals through the dual lenses of saints and religious genius. In important ways, the present project may be presented as continuing a

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[9]The original edition came out in 1902, and there are numerous reprints. I will be quoting from the 2008 edition, published by Arc Manor, Rockville MD. This edition is fully searchable on google books, thereby allowing greater ability to study the book in depth. See http://books.google.com/books?id=2AezbiIYHssC&q=genius#v=onepage&q&f=false James' discussion of saints is found in lectures 11-15, which are grouped under two chapter headings: "saintliness" and "the value of saintliness".
[10]P. 263.

conversation that has for the most part not advanced in the more than a hundred years since William James.

In assessing James's contribution to an understanding of saints, two major factors come to mind. The first concerns the strongly emotional orientation of his discussion. According to James, saints are people with a high degree of emotional excitation. His vocabulary includes emotional excitation, a genius for certain emotions, and so on. The saint draws his or her reality from an intensification of the affective life, that makes them aware of a higher order of life, a Presence, around which they construct their lives. One is struck by how affective the process, as described by James, is.

Emphasis on the emotional dimension is closely related to another thesis of James', concerning the close association that James recognizes between saints and mental problems. Focusing on the internal life of saints brings James, as a psychologist, to a dimension that can be understood, thereby presenting saints as operating on the same scale that all humans do, only with greater intensity. This continuum is important also for his notion of religious genius, to which we shall turn in a later section. But it is precisely this continuum and seeing the lives of saints as more intense forms of the emotional life of others that also places them within the range of psychological as well as pathological analysis. One further expression of this continuity is the very fact that James speaks of saintliness as a quality. As a quality it is part of broader human nature and can therefore be cultivated by all. James is conscious in inviting his audience to partake of saintliness as a value, or better yet as an aspect of character and of human experience. Even if they do not reach the heights of some of the saints known in history, the example of these constitutes an invitation to present day readers to cultivate a quality they share in common.

The second factor that emerges from James' presentation is his attempt to capture that which is unique or special about saints. Here James offers four points, through which we learn what James considers essential to saints. Let me quote James at length, since the following is probably the gist of his entire thinking on saints.

> The collective name for the ripe fruits of religion in a character is Saintliness. The saintly character is the character for which emotions are the habitual center of the personal energy; and there is a certain composite photograph of universal saintliness, the same in all religions, of which the features can easily be traced.
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> They are these:-
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> 1.   A feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests; and a conviction, not merely intellectual, but as it were sensible, of the existence of an Ideal Power. In Christian saintliness this power is always personified as God; but abstract moral ideals, civic or patriotic utopias, or inner versions of holiness or right may also be felt as the true lords and enlargers of our life...

2.   A sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and willing self surrender to its control.

3.   An immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down.

4.   A shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards "yes" "yes" ,and away from "no", where the claims of the non-ego are concerned.[11]

Note the reference to saintliness, rather than saints. Saintliness is a quality of character and can therefore be realized by anyone who applies herself to cultivating the needed virtues. Once again, emotions are at the forefront, and serve as the defining ground of saintliness. Note James' reference to the "center of personal energy". We shall encounter the move to language of "energy" time and again, as various authors grasp to express what saints are about.

James' project is the same as our own, or rather the reverse - drawing a composite picture of saints, based on the evidence of all religions. However, I find James' picture lacking. Perhaps the strong accent placed on feeling and emotions is the cause for what seems to me an insufficient portrait. Looking more closely at James' four points, one realizes that in fact we have here not four distinct points, but rather one particular feature, that is expressed in different ways. The feature is expansiveness of being and awareness. The character of the saint is singled out for the *feeling* of being part of a wider life. This, I think, sums up what James found most important about saints. The rest are secondary manifestations of this realization. The sense of contact with the Ideal Power is a sense of inner certitude, nor merely mental conviction. This expansion is experienced as friendly, leading to internal self surrender. As my own model of religious genius will suggest, I consider self surrender an important aspect of religious genius and the lives of saints. For James this seems to be less of a defining feature and more of a consequence of the awareness of the breadth and continuity of being. The subjective dimension of friendliness, leading to surrender, is continued in the third point, where the subjective feelings associated with the awareness of expanded being - elation and freedom - are listed. Further emotional consequences are found in the fourth item - a shifting of the emotional center away from selfishness. All four points express one related complex and all four highlight the shift away from selfishness and into a broader life in terms of emotions and their expanded application.

In positive terms, James has introduced the notion of expansion of awareness and the changed attitudes that flow from it - surrender to God and availability to others. This one principle seems to summarize for James what saintliness, or saints, in *all* religions are about, one single simple principle. Everything else in the spiritual life of extraordinary individuals is seen as a consequence of

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[11]Pp. 202-3.

this one principal. Consequently, James proceeds to discuss the *characteristic practical consequences* of this fundamental inner condition. The following are all subsumed under practical consequences: asceticism, strength of soul, purity and charity. These are all seen as expressions of this fundamental existential orientation, rather than conditions for it, or dimensions of saintliness that should be considered as complementary to the core definition. That James can thus capture the essence of saintliness, and present all other aspects of the lives of saints as its secondary expressions, allows him to pass judgement on the lives of saints, as these have been reported. What follows this fourfold description of the inner orientation of the lives of saints is at one and the same time a presentation of some great moments of inspiration, deriving from the lives of saints, and a criticism of those very lives, judged by James' own cultural sensibilities. Because these are secondary manifestations of what seems to James to be the essence of saintliness, James allows himself to sit in judgement on his subject matter in a way that is neither fitting scholarly presentation nor appropriate as a spiritual perspective of others' spiritual lives.

It would be too time consuming to describe James' handling of the lives of actual saints in detail. I will refer to only one example, and a shocking one at that - James' treatment of Theresa of Avila. James addresses his audience and is himself conscious of his own liberal Protestant orientation. He is, however, unable to position himself beyond his own religious orientation, as we would nowadays expect from a scholar of religion. Accordingly, he feels free to judge the lives of saints of history, according to the yardsticks of his own liberal Protestant identity.   When viewing Theresa of Avila, James writes:

> Her religious ideals were so paltry, that I confess that my only feeling in reading her has been pity that so much vitality of soul should have found such poor employment. In spite of the sufferings which she endured, there is a curious flavor of superficiality about her genius.[12]

I spare the reader the following page, that might be considered one of the most shocking and offensive moments in the history of the modern study of mysticism or of religion. It shows us how much James considers himself a judge of the true religious life of others. It also shows us the inadequacy of his use of religious genius - to speak of the superficiality of Theresa's genius suggests a different usage than the one that informs the present project. But above all, it shows us how badly a frame of reference is needed from within which to assess the data provided by the lives of saints, independently of our own bias. Whether our bias is that of one denomination to another or of one religion to another, we ought to operate within a conceptual framework that can accommodate a broad range of phenomena, making sense of their larger purpose, beyond theological and creedal

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[12]See p. 266. On James' protestant context and its limitations, in the framework of *Varieties*, see David Hollinger, "Damned for God's Glory: William James and the Scientific Vindication of Protestant Culture, *William James and a Science of Religions: Reexperiencing the Varieties of Religious Experience,* ed. Wayne Proudfoot, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 9-30.

differences. James would have liked to provide that. However, his frame of reference is too rudimentary and too Protestant. His ideas were formulated at the end of the nineteenth century. While in some ways they remain the most thoughtful statements on the interior life of the saints, they also point to where discussion must advance.   Given the dearth of discussions, the present project seeks in important ways to revisit James and to pick up where he left off, fully cognizant of his foundational contribution, as well as of his limitations. James' empirical approach to the study of saints, and his recognition that they must be studied across traditions provides a fundamental method to be followed. Surprisingly, few have attempted to pick up where James left off.[13] James did not really study saints; he studied saintliness. An empirical study of historical saints, of all traditions, may be the way to revisit James' project, driving us to formulate new understandings of the exceptional individuals whose lives James studied.

2.4 Philosophical discussions of saints and sainthood - Wyschogrod, Grant, Flescher, Neville

Philosophical discussions that relate to saints can be divided into two. Most approach the subject of saints in the framework of moral philosophy. Saints are brought as types of moral perfection, or of perfection in virtue. The guiding question is what is the import of saints for others: To what extent can others be like saints? Can saints serve as models and exemplars for others? Overall, this philosophical framework tends to see saints as exemplary of virtues that belong to all, and that therefore can be applied and practiced by others. Typically, philosophically oriented discussions ignore some of the more "spiritual" aspects of the lives of saints, while highlighting virtue and how the saints can inspire others to action. It is telling that often in this kind of discussion "saints" are placed in quotation marks; often "saints" and "saintly" are confounded.

At the head of a contemporary trajectory that explores the significance of saints for moral philosophy we may place Edith Wyschogrod. Her *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* [14] appeals to saints of all religions, even though most of the examples she draws from are taken from within Christianity. Wyschogrod's concern is how to build up moral philosophy in a postmodern age. She meets this challenge by turning to saints. A saint is defined by her as a radical altruist, who is dedicated to alleviation of the suffering of others, irrespective of cost to himself .[15] Wyschogrod finds the sensibilities captured in relation to saints appropriate to postmodern sensibilities. She identifies four ways in which saints are suitable for postmodern sensibilities: they

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[13]Even more surprising is the fact that James is always quoted approvingly, as an important spokesman on saints and their meaning. I have not seen any critical assessment of his discussion of saints, that notes the problems associated with his presentation.
[14]Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990.
[15]P. 58. For a slightly longer definition, compare p. 34.

are communicated in and as texts; the narrative of a saint's life is in itself a locus for reflection and action; lives are often concerned with the body and the need to control and transform it; the lives of the saints are grounded in reality and hence they 'read the reader' and challenge her.

Further exploration of the meaning of saints for altruism is found in Andrew Michael Flescher, Daniel L. Worthen, Daniel Worthen's *The Altruistic Species: Scientific, Philosophical, and Religious Perspectives of Human Benevolence*.[16] The authors explore altruism by appealing to the example of saints. Most of their appeal is to saints as a category, at times appearing within brackets. They raise the question of whether the example of saints is relevant only for people within their own tradition or whether it can be abstracted from their tradition. This is an important question that is significant also to the present project: can the message or meaning of sainthood in a given tradition be extracted beyond the tradition, in the service of broader goals. The authors examine a variety of figures such as Dorothy Day, Dalai Lama and Martin Luther King. They claim that the message can be carried out beyond the confines of a specific religion. This is understood as part of the message of the saints themselves, that their altruistic message is not confined to the environment in which it originates.[17] Altruism can thus be learned from the saints, all saints of all religions, by all people, as part of the fuller meaning of being human.[18]

Another discussion on altruism is Colin Grant's *Altruism and Christian Ethics*.[19] Grant adopts the opposite view of saints than that found in the previous two works. While constructing an argument for the importance and possibility of altruism, Grant resists the possibility of seeing the saints as playing a major role in advocating and appealing to altruism, or to virtues as a whole.[20] Some have turned saints into "moral saints". Figuring saints in this way is actually the basis upon which they have been criticized. But saints are not primarily about being moral. Here Grant offers a powerful quote from Victor Frankl: "I think that even the saints did not care for anything other than simply to serve God, and I doubt that they ever had it in mind to become saints. If that were the case, they would have become only perfectionists rather than saints".[21] Grant continues: "Saints may not be morally perfect, but that does not really detract from their sainthood. What makes them saints   is

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[16]Templeton Foundation Press, West Conshohocken, 2007. See especially Chapter 6. Much of the line of reasoning is already worked out in an earlier book by Flescher, *Heroes, Saints, and Ordinary Morality*, Georgetown University Press, 2003.

[17]P. 228.

[18]See p. 238.

[19]Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 2001.

[20]See his discussion, pp. 237-242. Grant does not deny that saints provide examples of altruism. But he considers that casting saints in terms of altruism, or moral perfection, is detrimental to the fullness of what saints are about, and reduces them to a social and humanistic vision.

[21]Quoted from Viktor Frankl, *Mans' Search for Meaning*, New York, Washington Square Press, 1968, p. 158.

not their moral perfection, but the larger vision out of which they live".[22] As he states on the same page: "A saint is one who marches to a different drummer. This is why a moral portrayal is far too prosaic to capture what is most distinctive about the saint".[23] Thus, Grant points us away from the direction of identifying saints as agents of moral perfection in general and altruism in particular, and towards a broader vision of what saints are about.

A completely different philosophical tack is taken by Robert Neville in his *Soldier, Sage, Saint.*[24] Neville too is informed by multiple religious traditions. Unlike Wyschogrod, or even Flescher et al., who quote and provide examples of specific saints, Neville does next to no referencing or quoting of specific saints, of any religion. Rather, he internalizes, in ways that are purely his own, the combined impact and testimony of saints into a synthetic whole. This whole is projected as three models, ideal types, through whom idealistic concerns are applied. The three ideal types are the soldier, the sage and the saint, corresponding to perfection of the will, the mind and the heart. For Neville, this is an abstraction, by means of which he explores these three dimensions. Neville never intended for the types to be distinct from one another, and their distinction is made for purely heuristic purposes.[25] For purposes of our discussion, all three types constitute aspects of the lives of saints and have implications for the notion of religious genius. The distinction between will, mind and heart is undone in the actual lives of saints.[26] One of the main features of saints, in the ideal, is that they lead integrated lives and that these dimensions come together through their spiritual strivings. Neville's discussion is a very important theoretical exploration of the possibilities associated with sainthood. Rather than explore how saints can serve a known goal, such as altruism, he constructs a theoretical model by means of which one might approach the phenomenon of

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[22]P. 241. See also the statement by Pitirim Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors and Techniques of Moral Transformation*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1954, p. 18: "even many saints aspired directly not for altruistic love but for union with God".

[23]For a philosophical undermining of the notion of moral saints, see also James Horne, Saintliness and Moral Perfection, *Religious Studies* 27, pp. 463-471.

[24]Fordham University Press, New York, 1978.

[25]See pp. 5-6.

[26]I am unconvinced by how Robert Cohn, Sainthood, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 13, p. 5, applies Neville's typology, turning it into a phenomenology of saints, by presenting three paths to sainthood. Other than the three works discussed in the section on comparative studies, Cohn's is the only attempt I am familiar with to present a composite image of saints in world religions. Cohn's work informs that of Katherine Young. Cohn contributed an essay, the same essay, to the two collections, by Kieckhefer-Bond and Hawley   Other than this one essay, Cohn does not seem to have worked on the issue of saints extensively, and this comes across in his encyclopedia article. Even though he would like to draw a composite picture of saints in world religions, he does not advance the discussion in a meaningful way, other than turning Neville's heuristic model into theoretical paths for perfection.

special individuals, as these have been known in the history of religions. His approach provides important inspiration for the present project. It too seeks to construct a theoretical model, based upon the testimony of multiple religions, by means of which to understand the particularities and defining features of exceptional spiritual individuals.

2.5 Comparative Studies - Hawley, Kieckhefer and Bond, Young

As stated, nearly all studies of saints and sainthood are tradition-specific. I have been able to identify only three attempts to approach the topic of sainthood from a comparative multi religious perspective. All three resort to the same methodology, convening scholars from different traditions, inviting them to reflect on aspects of sainthood. The three works in this category are John Stratton Hawley (ed.), *Saints and Virtues*,[27] Richard Kieckhefer and George Bond (eds.), *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, [28] and Arvind Sharma, *Women Saints in World Religions*.[29] All three volumes have been very helpful in inspiring my own thinking. Looking at all three as a whole, one notices just how deeply indebted they are to the Christian model of saints. Time and again authors draw their conceptual matrix from Christian resources and then seek to address the phenomenon across the traditions. Clearly, Christianity has done more sustained thinking on this topic than   the other religions. Thus, Hawley's introduction takes its categories directly from Second Vatican Council documents, and seeks to apply their threefold structure to other religions. Various essays explore the subject of saints in other religions by comparing the subject of their studies to the canons of Christian saintmaking. Reading through these essays, one realizes how deeply indebted saint studies are to the Christian heritage and how this debt is both a blessing and a potential shackle, that must be overcome.

The three works make modest contributions to a synthetic view of sainthood. They are content, in the main, to let the reader judge the testimony of the different traditions, without attempting to force uniform definitions or understandings on saints across traditions. Kieckhefer and Bond point out common dynamics that characterize saints in the different traditions - the tension between the imitability and inimitability of the saint. This ends up functioning as one of the major theses and organizing principles of their work. The sum of individual insights into the nature of sainthood, through the various past and present expressions studied in this collection, is of greater significance than the attempt to draw a broader portrait. Similarly, Hawley shuns from an attempt to draw a comprehensive picture of saints in world religions. Kieckhefer and Bond do offer us some minimal observations, suggesting that a combination of   contemplative, ascetic and service provides the

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[27]Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987.
[28]Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988.
[29]Albany, State University of New York Press, 2000.

basic mix of ingredients, that then gives different shades and nuances to saints in the different religions.[30]

Katherine Young offers the synthetic and conceptual framework for Sharma's volume on Women saints in world religions.[31] Her summary covers some of the standard encyclopedic statements on sainthood, before moving on to her own original contribution. She frames her own contribution in terms of chaos and order, and the role that saints play in relating to these two dimensions of life, as these play out in institutional history. Accordingly, she suggests the fourfold typology of saints as norm discoverer, norm preserver, routine norm destroyer and virtuoso norm destroyer.[32] I personally find Young's synthesis less helpful than the synthetic observations found in other works. It tells us less about saints than about how they interact with and contribute to social organizations. In so doing, she ends up approaching saints, inadvertently it seems to me, sociologically rather than religiously. As a consequence, I find little novel insight as to the nature of sainthood in her introduction. The same is true for the volume itself, which does however have an important feature, in that it offers original translations of works by its heroines.

Considering the three comparative interreligious volumes as a whole, it seems there is still much room for discussion and reflection on the nature of sainthood and on the lives and realities of the individuals who are featured in these volumes and their likes. The volumes do not seek to articulate what sainthood is, to understand the nature of being of a saint, or to articulate a theory or model by means of which one might advance the study of saints as a phenomenon, drawing its implications for the religion under study, other religions and broader reaches of society. The three volumes, very helpful as they are, seem content to illustrate a broad phenomenon, as a common feature of diverse religions. Overall, the greatest contribution of these volumes lies in the very opening up of the topic of sainthood to comparative discussion.

The present proposal is much indebted to these earlier efforts. It shares their interest in exploring this area of human and religious life and in doing so from a perspective that is informed by the testimony of all religions. In terms of method it might be described as a crossover between the methodology adopted by Neville and that adopted by the authors of these collections of essays. It seeks to elaborate its categories in novel ways, even avoiding the term saints. It seeks to do so by drawing on the examples of saints from world religions, allowing them to provide the testimony, conceptual framework and parameters from which we might engage in new reflection. Based on the review of the literature it seems the time is ripe for a fresh conceptual approach to the subject. Going beyond historical and sociological studies and building on the insights gained by the

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[30]P. 246.
[31]Curiously, Sharma himself has no contribution in this volume. Young's "Introduction" is pp. 1-38.
[32]P. 29.

comparative studies described above, the present proposal is governed by the quest for understanding the spiritual reality represented by the saint and its potential impact for others.

3 Religious Genius

3.1 The need for a new category

Discourse is often shaped by the conventions of a culture. This is true for religious as well as for academic culture. Given the prominence of Christian culture in the formation of the academic study of religion, the exceptional individuals we seek to study have been studied mainly under the rubric of "saints". As the survey of the literature suggested, discussion of saints, even when it refers to religious figures of other traditions, is conceptually indebted to the Christian discussion of saints. As already stated, other than the standards and criteria used by the Church in proclaiming its saints, there is not in existence any typology, profile, or attempt to identify the traits and characteristics of such individuals. Such a typology should grow out of a study of the religious individuals of all traditions. Both in terms of terminology and in terms of substance, it is useful to approach the topic from a fresh perspective, that owes meaningfully to all religions, and that offsets the heavily Christian parameters of existing discourse on saints and holy people.

The present proposal seeks to build up the category of "religious genius" as a category that can advance conversation on issues related to extraordinary religious personalities, beyond where previous discussion of "saints" has gone. It is acknowledged that "religious genius" is a category that must be constructed, and its meaning and potential will only become apparent once scholars of different faith traditions and different academic disciplines have explored its viability, usefulness and advantages. The following list suggests some of the possible benefits of introducing this category and using it as a means for discussing outstanding religious personalities.

• It would allow us to get past the impasse, according to which some traditions claim they do not have saints, or that the role of saints in their tradition is secondary. The phenomenon of religious genius, as it shall be defined, may be identified in all religious cultures, and focusing on it, independently of its sociological and theological context, should be beyond dispute.

• Religious genius would function as a descriptive category, that is not otherwise theologically charged. The problem with existing categories is that they are both descriptive and generative. The category is part of the theological stock of a tradition, thereby informing its worldview. Once a category exists within a religion, there is a drive to populate it and to identify individuals as belonging to that category. The internal religious and sociological dynamics push the faithful not only to use categories but to inhabit them, and to identify the categories with individuals known in the past and in the present. This places great pressure on any category - saint, *avatar, zaddik, qutb* and more. This pressure detracts from the descriptive potential of the category, making it inextricably bound with the internal dynamics of a particular religion. Thus, adopting a new category allows us to

approach the study of exceptional religious individuals from a purely descriptive and non generative platform.

- It would allow us to approach these individuals in novel ways, that are not predetermined by the notion of sanctity, implied by the term saints.[33] Religious Genius could provide a common ground. The concept itself could be constructed with the help of perspectives coming from multiple traditions, and the process of "making it work" for each of the traditions would be different than adapting a category that is charged with the historical and theological weight associated with one of them. As one possible implication of avoidance of language of sanctity, we might consider the conceptual tension between sanctification and salvation, introduced by Jonathan Z. Smith.[34] What is associated with exceptional individuals is at times more along the lines of salvation than those of sanctification. The use of a new category could free us to recognize such dynamics as they play out across traditions.[35]

- It would allow us to relate more easily to non-theistic traditions, as part of a discussion of exceptional religious individuals. "Saints" is inextricably bound up with God, his gifts, friends and special graces. Adopting a different category would make it easier to include in our purview religions for whom God is not an operational concept.[36]

- It might allow us to approach some wisdom traditions in their fullness, from a purely phenomenological basis, without forcing foreign notions of sainthood on them. The attempts to make the Confucian tradition fit a model of "sainthood" show how forced such an attempt is, and how much juggling, or goodwill, it requires. A new conceptual platform might eliminate these difficulties.[37]

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[33]Some scholars have felt that approaching these individuals in terms of sanctity already colors the discussion in ways that are not appropriate to the tradition under discussion. With reference to Islam, see the comment by Frederick Denny, God's Friends, Sanctity of Persons in Islam, in Kieckhefer-Bond (eds.), *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, p. 69. See, however, the discussion by Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, p. xxix, that argues in the opposite direction.
[34]See, for instance, Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity,* School of Oriental and African Studies and Chicago University Press, 1990, p. 133.
[35]With reference to exceptional individuals, one ought to consider whether holiness might be more descriptive than soteriological claims, associated with a given personality or type. If so, this would justify continued appeal to holiness.
[36]See the comment by Donald Lopez, Sanctification on the Bodhisattva Path, *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, ed. Kieckhefer - Bond, p. 207.
[37]The collections by Hawley and Kieckhefer-Bond both feature articles on the Confucian tradition. For the former, see Tu Wei Ming, The Confucian Sage: Exemplar of Personal Knowledge, pp. 73-86. For the latter, see Rodney Taylor, The Sage as Saint: The Confucian Tradition, pp. 218-242.

- It would allow us to study the individuals in and of themselves, rather than their social manifestation. As we have noted, most saint-studies focus on the social and historical impact of saints. While the historical and social consequences of the life of the outstanding individual may be fundamental to his vision and mission and may provide an indispensible channel for approaching him or her, the focused attempt to reach the individual, as distinct from his or her social impact, could realign the study of "saints", leading us to focus on some of the big questions that are often cast aside, in favor of social and other concerns.

- It would revitalize the appreciation of these individuals and reinvigorate their testimony within their traditions in ways that are spiritually meaningful, and not simply limited to seeking blessings and intercession, on the level of popular faith. "Saints" are on the decline, even, or perhaps especially, in the Christian milieu to whom we owe the category.[38] The decline finds its expression in terms of theology, as well as piety. Use of a new category suggests the possibility of a new approach, leading to new appreciation, where the old category may seem worn out.

- It would make the testimony of these individuals stand out beyond their specific faith content and thereby allow members of other religions to hear them and be inspired by them. This touches on the core rationale of this project - seeking to make the voices and testimonies of exceptional religious personalities meaningful beyond their immediate faith communities.

- It would take some of the deepest and most important expressions of the religious life outside the realm of pure faith and make them the subject of broader study as part of what it means to be human, thereby once again expanding the range of meaning that these individuals carry.

- It could provide us with criteria in light of which we would understand and evaluate phenomena that take place outside organized religion, especially in contemporary times.

- It can open up discourse in ways that are reminiscent of how the term "spirituality" did. However, it may be able to do so without some of the pitfalls that have befallen "spirituality". Spirituality began as a Christian term and its broad application has made its uses so vague as to lose its descriptive capacity. It has also become identified with extra-religious movements (I am spiritual, not religious), that end up undermining the religious foundations that gave birth to the category. Religious genius might be able to bring us back to the roots of religious awareness. Perhaps every generation or period needs its own language, due to the difficulties accumulated in relation to previous language or category. Religious genius might have the capacity to provide such a new frame of reference.

- The category of genius could be particularly helpful in communicating the spiritual life of these individuals to those who neither share their worldview nor appreciate the special gifts and

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[38]See an analysis of this decline by John Coleman, After Sainthood?, *Saints and Virtues*, ed. J. Hawley, pp. 205-226. See also Lawrence Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, Harper and Row, 1980.

spiritual realities of these individuals. "Genius" suggests unique capacities that are not equally distributed, thereby opening the possibility for recognition that others may be endowed in ways that the observer may not.

3.2 Religious Genius - History of a Category

Religious Genius is a category that has never been fully developed. However, it has been on the edges of academic consciousness in ways that we ought to recall. The category is more than a century old, though for most of that period, that is: for most of the history of the modern study of religion, it has lain dormant.[39] As we seek to develop the category, we do well to recall the early pioneers who would have readily resonated with the present project.

3.2.1 William James

I begin with a light touch. If one searches for "genius" in the index to *The varieties of the Religious Experience*, [40] one encounters: "see religious leaders". If that were not enough for us, under religious leaders, the index records only two subheadings "often nervously unstable" and "their loneliness". While this may be taken humorously, it does say something about James' understanding of religious genius and its relationship to personality dynamics, including personal instability.[41] Religious genius is a category that is seen along with a series of other phenomena to manifest exceptional mental states. James' interest in genius goes back as early as 1880. In his 1896 Lowell lectures on exceptional mental states, James discusses dreams and hypnosis, automatism, hysteria, multiple personality, demoniacal possession, witchcraft, degeneration and genius.[42] All these phenomena manifest the workings of the subconscious within the person, and herein lies the key to understanding religious geniuses and the religious life itself. These are understood as reaching to and being inspired by the subconscious, and such contact is closely related to states of great emotional excitability, as already noted above. Such excitability carries with it both the potential for great creativity and some of the difficulties associated with sensitive and excitable personalities. Thus, for James, genius may be recast as the genius of emotions, and their openness to the subconscious. "When a superior intellect

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[39]Needless to say, "religious genius" takes us back to the original Roman use of genius, that referred to personal divine inspiration. From that perspective "religious genius" is a tautology.
[40]Here I rely on the edition of Triumph Books, 1991.
[41]See also Lawrence Foster, The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origins of New Religious Movements, *The Dialogue Journal,*
http://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V26N04_19.pdf
[42]See Eugene Taylor, William James and Depth Psychology, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Centenary Essays*, ed. Michael Ferrari, Exeter, Imprint Academic, 2002, p. 26.

and a psychopathic character coalesce…in the same individual, we have the best possible condition for…effective genius.[43] James' psychological theory draws on contemporary theories of the subliminal consciousness as the source of both pathology and genius.[44] How contemporary James' reference to genius is can be seen from a perusal of the footnotes, where we encounter numerous discussions of and references to genius as a formative category in the study of various individuals, including religious individuals. James' reliance on the category of genius to describe his religious heroes is thus very much a sign of the times, and is conditioned by contemporary discourse on genius. If we witness a century of nearly total silence concerning "religious genius" it is therefore not because the category itself has been critiqued or dropped. Rather, discourse on genius has itself shifted, as has, to a large extent, psychological discourse. Conventions of discourse have thus simply moved away from where they were during James' times, making the category almost irrelevant.

James relies heavily on the notion of genius. While the term "religious genius" appears rarely in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, it is deeply embedded in his thought structure.[45] Given that James' focus is to study religious experience rather than the institutional history of religions, the emphasis on experience is implicitly an engagement with genius, as understood by James. One might argue that for James religious genius is the epitome of the phenomenon of genius. Note the following wording: "Even perhaps more than other kinds of genius, religious leaders have been subject to abnormal psychical visitations. Invariably they have been creatures of exalted emotional sensibility."[46] This captures the essence of religious genius. All genius involves contact with the subconscious, and is closely related to great emotional intensity. But religious genius even more than other kinds of genius involves the carrier, here called religious leader, in regular contact with these dimensions of the self, and their outward manifestations. One may see religious genius as deeper, more intense but most importantly - more productive and transformative, than processes that are based on similar psychic processes. Because of the depth of its impact, religious genius alone has the capacity to bear fruit that is life transforming, like none other.[47] Thus, James does not offer a definition or usage that would set religious genius apart from other forms of genius. Rather, drawing on current notions of genius, understood in particular psychological terms, James offers his readers a way of understanding the religious life as the culmination of genius. This genius is manifest in the

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[43]P. 26.
[44]See Ann Taves, The Fragmentation of Consciousness and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: William James' Contribution to a Theory of Religion, *William James and a Science of Religions: Reexperiencing the Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Wayne Proudfoot, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004,   p. 60.
[45]P. 14 - "religious geniuses" is the sole occurrence.
[46]P. 14.
[47]The term "fruits for life" is a recurring concept in *The Varieties*. It offers us the criteria by means of which to judge the value of psychic and emotional states. Given how close the religious life, religious genius, is to chaotic psychic states, its ultimate value can only be tested through the fruits for life.

lives of saints and mystics. The central place that mystics play in James' presentation of saintliness is understood in light of the appeal to a psychology that sees genius manifest in these individuals.[48]

3.2.2 Religious Genius by S.L (L.Swetenham)

Just how contemporary the concern for genius was in James' day can be seen from the very publication of a book titled "Religious Genius" in 1905, only three years after the first publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.[49] This contemporaneous work provides one further indication for "genius" being part of the *zeitgeist* of the turn of the twentieth century. It is the only volume or study dedicated to religious genius, and it suggests how easily broader concern for genius might translate itself into the religious realm.

The work is clearly a sign of its time and it draws on some of the sources that inspired the work of James.[50] Like James, his work is very inspiring. I found myself deeply moved time and again by the spiritual vision put forth by this almost completely unknown author.[51] There seem to be, however, fundamental differences between the two. James seeks to be scientific, conforming to the psychological standards of his time. Swetenham offers a purely religious message. Both assume a continuity between different forms of genius and see religious genius as one particular manifestation

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[48]Alongside the discussions described above, we find constant reference to genius as a quality of greatness, originality or creativity. Thus, Renan is a literary genius (p. 35), Molinos is a spiritual genius (p. 102), and Augustine is noted for his psychological genius (p. 131). The infuriating quote concerning Theresa of Avila states "there is a curious flavor of superficiality about her genius" (p. 255).

[49]The author is listed by his initials, but further search reveals his full name. The book was published in London by Hodder and Stoughton. I have been unsuccessful in learning anything about the author, other than the fact that he lived in India and the obvious fact that he was Christian, of Protestant persuasion. Judging by the typology of the work and by his identification of evangelical Christianity with religious genius, it is likely he himself was an evangelical (see p. 11). His references to Jesus as "The Master" might suggest some additional spiritual influences, either Indian or theosophical. His attempt at concealing his identity and biography, signalled by publishing the book only by his initials, seems to have been successful. The same author published in 1908 another work, titled *Conquering Prayer; Or, the Power of Personality*, London, J. Clarke Publications. The same religious typology that informs *Religious Genius* is here translated into a typology of two basic forms of prayer. Reprints of *Religious Genius* may be ordered on the internet. An online version may be found at http://www.archive.org/stream/religiousgenius00lsgoog#page/n9/mode/2up

[50]See his reference to F.W.H.Myers, referred to extensively in *The Varieties*, on p. 54. On Myers' impact on James, see also Taves, above n. 44.

[51]The only reference to this work I have found in the literature is a notice/review of the book by David Philips in *The International Journal of Ethics* 16,3, 1906, pp. 397-8. The book offers a powerful spiritual vision, even if it is couched in Christian theological language. In terms of its vision and message it strikes very similar chords to those of Pitirim Sorokin, whom I shall review next. While the work is not scientific, but religious, in nature, it seems to me it deserves to be better known.

of a broader phenomenon. But this phenomenon is explained differently by both. James speaks of the unconscious as the root of genius, and consequently struggles with issues of psychopathology and the complex character of geniuses, religious and otherwise. Swetenham speaks of God and spirit, and sees the various expressions of genius as drawing from the same divine source of inspiration. Judging from the perspective of a century later, one wonders whether James' "scientific" perspective really possess stronger explanatory power than the more naive or straightforward faith-based appeal to God. In any event, introducing the subconscious into the psychological dynamics of religious experience is not part of a reductionary strategy on behalf of James, and at the end of the day both authors will agree that God is the ultimate inspiration for genius and that genius is mediated through the depths or interiority of the individual. Nomenclature thus seems secondary to what may in fact be a common vision. The differences may be more a result of the audience, context and the discourse these impose, than of significant theoretical differences between the authors.

Let us begin by examining Swetenham's notion of religious genius:

> Religious genius, then, let us describe as *intuitive* power to grasp the things of God, in a superhuman and miraculous way, as distinguished from the slow and plodding human methods of reaching up to the Divine life and light.

> Men of the world, together with religious men who have no key in their own experience to this phenomenon,   - while admitting the reality of every other kind of genius, even though they cannot understand how the inspiration is received, nor how it works, - are, with a strange inconsistency, often inclined to deny to religious genius the belief they unhesitatingly accord to the same miracle in spheres of poetry, science and art.[52]

Intuition and inspiration are primary concepts throughout this work. In fact, most chapter titles refer to the "religiously inspired" and only two to "religious genius". For the author the two are identical. Religious genius is the capacity to receive inspiration in the field of religion. The author is fully aware that inspiration is obtained in a variety of fields of life.[53] This actually provides him with a means of presenting and legitimating religious genius to an audience that is not otherwise sympathetic to such concerns. We will recall that this was one of the possible advantages, suggested above for use of the category of religious genius.

The intuitive grasp is better understood when we consider the typology of religious personalities that informs this work. The chapter titled "Religious Genius and Religious Talent" spells this out:[54]

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[52]P. 5.

[53]P. 7 - "we cannot but pause to notice how similar, almost to monotony, is the same experience in every realm of genius. Wagner wakes up one day to find himself a musician...the miracle was wrought and he knew not how."

[54]Chapter 2, pp. 19-34.

One of the laws governing the birth of genius, especially of great genius, in every sphere, we notice to be, with a few rare exceptions this: There are strivings, aspirations, honest, earnest endeavors, cheered by occasional premonitions of coming power, and yet the goal seems very far away until the supreme moment arrives; and then suddenly the soul is there! Caught up and carried in a chariot of fire over ground that the tired feet had so long tried to cover, and into the realms that seemed so inaccessible.

In the religious world, as in the literary world, the scientific and the commercial world, there are two classes of people - the inspired and the uninspired....there are souls carried on the wings of inspiration over mountains of difficulty in the religious life, which other souls, just as worthy, are laboriously climbing. There is a passion for things spiritual and Divine miraculously implanted, living and growing in some, whilst others are painfully striving merely to remove the hindrances to the Godward movement of their hearts. Some are rejoicing in the *gift* of faith, of open spiritual vision, of God-consciousness and realization, whilst their brethren grope in the twilight of human reasoning.[55]

S. L goes on to identify these experiences with conversion, receiving a new heart, being born again in the spirit and related expressions that suggest a natural, spontaneous Godward movement has occurred from within. The spontaneity of the spiritual process is a recurring motive. The keywords that characterize the state of religious genius and inspiration are spontaneity, enthusiasm, illumination, intuitive perception and power.[56] The basic typology distinguishes between a religious life based on exertion and effort, and one that takes place spontaneously, through the workings of the spirit. The latter is identified with religious genius. Swetenham does not denigrate the exertion-based spiritual life; but he does construct his fundamental typology around the axis of exertion and spontaneous gift.

With regards to these two kinds of religious life, which for the sake of convenience let us designate the life of religious genius and the life of religious effort, we see that both are seeking to reach God, but by different roads; both are recognized and loved by Him, both are blessed by Him - the one with illumination and inspiration the other with..."the ennobling spirit of struggle." Both methods of the Divine working are producing character, but of a totally different type. These two types may be described as being, in the one case, that of spiritual insight, or faith, resulting in a strange uplift and elation that gives wings to the soul, and carries it easily and quickly to its goal. In the other case, the chief characteristic is strength of will and purpose, unremitting effort, perseverance, toil, by which the earnest soul marches slowly but surely towards God....

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[55]Pp. 7-9.
[56]See his introduction, unnumbered page.

These two types of religious character are so perfectly the complement of the other that the one is incomplete without the other; nor can we fail to notice that those men who have had the advantage of training in both schools are the most symmetrical and perfect, combining spiritual insight and intuition with force of will and strenuousness of effort.[57] We may be confident that the purpose of the Divine mind is eventually to bring these two separate halves together and weld them into a glorious whole, wedding religious intuition and inspiration to religious effort and discipline....The result of the union will be grand symmetrical character, rapid progress in holiness and power, the appearance among us of a new and diviner order of prophets, teachers, leaders, and the dawning of our high hopes for humanity.[58]

Religious genius is not religious perfection. Time and again the author refers to the possibility of imperfection and inferiority of character of religious geniuses. Geniuses, by this view, can be great or little. Genius is the capacity to receive spontaneously the gifts of God, through intuition, resulting in effortless spiritual movement. But religious genius can falter and fail, if it is not cultivated into a complete life, and its perfection involves a disciplined spiritual life. In some ways this construction recalls the model created by Neville, who distinguishes between perfection of the will - the soldier, and perfection of the heart - the saint. Here perfection of the heart is understood as something involving less effort and growing spontaneously from one's interiority. But just as for Neville, the ideal does not lie in any of his ideal types but in their integration, so for Swetenham the future of spiritual growth goes beyond the inspiration of genius to the fullness of a spiritual life. In fact, Neville's threefold model, relating to the sage, as well as to the soldier and saint, is also prefigured by our author. Swetenham contrasts the spontaneity of the religious genius with the work characteristic of the group that has "religious talent".

> The preaching and teaching of the Religiously Talented is on another plane entirely. It is studied and thought out, rather than natural, eloquence. Marvelously effective, logical, interesting; but its excellence is that of the head, rather than the heart; and its appeals are also to the heads, rather than to the heart. It produces a religion which, like itself, is the result of studied and disciplined action of the mind and will, rather than the spontaneous outflowing from an inner spring of life.

> Of this kind of a religion we cannot speak too highly; the religion of genius needs to be supplemented by it. There is as Phillips Brooks points out "a *mind's* love for God" as well as the heart's....This type of religion is indispensable but it is not primary; it should follow, but

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[57]Here Swetenham mentions two examples, an evangelical preacher - Robertson of Brighton, and Phillips Brooks, an Episcopalian Bishop. We are left guessing what his own denominational affiliation was, but given his way of thinking, this may be the wrong question to ask.
[58]pp. 12-15.

not precede, the religion of the heart. In so doing it would find its highest perfection and power. In the foregoing chapter we dwelt upon the wonderful results ensuing from the insight and natural energy of genius with the efforts of the will and conscience; but when there is added to these the special mental ability and resource which we call "talent" the result may well be incalculable! The fact is that just as genius and "an infinite capacity for taking pains" are the complement of each other, so also genius and talent - the one pertaining to the heart and the other to the head, the one producing natural spontaneous life, the other disciplined mental activity - are also the complement of each other; and perfection only is attained when each adds to itself the other. [59]

It is significant that religious genius is not identified with perfection. James might have readily agreed with this, especially considering how some of the people designated as possessing such genius were treated by him. However, it seems to me that the contrast is more pronounced for Swetenham, precisely because religious genius is built into a typology that by definition recognizes another pole of the religious life, ultimately requiring integration with it for its own perfection. In fact, as we have just seen, Swetenham recognizes two complementary poles, corresponding to the will and to the mind. Religious genius provides the spiritual drive for perfection, but it requires a total spiritual life and an integrated character for its own fulfillment.

And here we come to saints. Just as James related religious genius and saints, so does Swetenham. If for James saints provided natural expressions of religious genius, for Swetenham the perfection of saints really exceeds religious genius, because of the totality of life involved and the multiple paths to perfection undertaken by the saints.

It is interesting, for our purposes, that such fullness is identified with the Saints. It is the saints who take religious genius, wedded to the disciplined spiritual life, and bring them to their combined perfection.

> Sainthood is the highest calling of man, the noblest type of human life: it is genius on the most exalted plane. No wonder, then, that the demand that the world makes on the saint should be enormous! There is an intuitive justice in the intolerance shown towards the imperfections in him that are passed over in others....Of saints Emerson says, "This class is the aim of creation, the other classes are admitted to the feast of being only in the train of this." The ultimate destiny of mankind is sainthood, and towards this all other gifts and callings converge. The world shall one day be full of poet-saints, soldier-saints, scientist-saints, artisan-saints - but it is sainthood that is the goal of all...it is the primary object, and every other calling is secondary...

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[59]Pp. 27-29.

The chief feature [of the saint's character] we find to be *holiness*, and by this holiness is meant *wholeness*, soundness, symmetry....the poet, the artist, the musician, are permitted to be specialists, but the Religious Genius must be a holy - that is a *whole* man. Others may be partial, fragmentary, one-side; but of the saint we require wholeness and symmetry. This universal and instinctive ideal of sainthood, however obscured by tradition, or stifled by disappointments, or supplanted by lower standards, is still always lurking in the human heart and prompting its attitude towards the saint....

This universal attitude of the human heart towards sainthood has its roots in the divinely inspired and original idea of a saint which conceives of him as a complete, or perfect, man, healthily developed on every side of his nature, keenly alive and related to all the life around him, touching it at all points by means of a large and universal sympathy and the intuitive knowledge that comes from such sympathy...

One grace [the saint] must have and that is love - a great, deep, far-reaching, all including love for God and His universe, a love that forges links and chains binding him to everything around him, making him feel that he is part of it and it of him, a love which is the bond of perfectness. *In spirit* at least the saint must be world-wide in his relatedness...his *heart* must be universal in its sympathies and interests, discerning the innumerable mysterious ties that bind God's creation into one, and knit the hearts and lives of men...his spirit must be free to go out to all, and large enough to take in all. [60]

Sainthood is identified with religious genius. In fact, now we find the term in capital letters - Religious Genius. It seems that our author uses the term in two senses. The first designates an aspect of the spiritual life, characterized by spontaneity, intuition and inspiration. Clearly, this aspect of the religious life is the one he most values, at least when contrasted with the other aspects of discipline and study. However, perfection, hence sainthood, hence true Religious Genius, consists in the synthetic integration of all these aspects. Saints are the fulfillment of religious genius, when it has been integrated with the other spiritual paths.

We are also offered a clear distinction between religious genius and other forms of genius. While the processes of inspiration may be the same, the path that follows from them is different. The religious path is not exhausted by receiving inspiration. Inspiration provides the foundation, driving the person to build a total and integrated character and religious life. Only religious genius has this drive for totality and therefore the expectations made of saints are of another order than those made of other kinds of geniuses. Lowercase "religious genius" is similar to other forms of genius, in terms of the subjective processes by means of which inspiration is received. Uppercase "Religious Genius" is qualitatively different. It involves wholeness and integration. The holiness, implied by the notion

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[60]Pp. 98-101.

of sainthood, is cast in terms of wholeness, suggesting that this is the one and only kind of genius of which such wholeness is expected.

The wholeness is ultimately a wholeness of love. Indeed, the concluding chapter of Swetenham's book is titled "Love - the Crown of Religious Genius". The reasoning behind it is that love is a unifying principle. Because it has this integrative capacity, it is the highest perfection. This integration takes place in the heart and heart-love is the wonder working power of the world, to which one aspires, as humanity looks to its future. The integrative capacity of the saint relates to himself and to others. In himself, he integrates the various paths and aspects into a wholeness of being. In others, he offers an integrative approach to life and to reality, by extending love to all. Heart-love is the common denominator that defines the true essence of the saint, the true mark of Religious Genius.

It seems that the uses of "heart" in Swetenham's work also offer a key to the lowercase and uppercase uses of religious genius. Religious genius was earlier distinguished as involving the heart, while other paths involved the mind. However, in the earlier stages, man is reached through the heart, and the spontaneity of revelation of the heart provides the path through which he is to approach God. In this sense it is already an expression of religious genius and an ideal. However, the perfection of the heart and its capacity to truly integrate all within the power of love only occur when one has advanced on the spiritual path, integrating different paths of growth into a sustained whole, that marks the saint and defines perfection. It is the heart that continues to provide definition for religious genius, but now the fullness and wholeness of heart, rather than simply the movement of, or movement through the heart. Far from using the term in an incoherent way, Swetenham actually traces a path of spiritual evolution, using "religious genius" as the key concept, that points to the heart and to the journey of spiritual perfection that is accomplished through the heart, till it is perfected in a movement of total synthesis. Significantly, Swetenham sees in Jesus the perfection of the path traced by him.[61] This suggests that not only did he not consider the language of religious genius to compromise the unique position of his master; rather, he found it a useful and appropriate category that allows us to talk of all levels of spiritual life, from Jesus, through the saints, and down to the every day aspirant who has had a conversion experience. For him, the universality of the term makes it an apt way to describe religious reality, independent of precedent or theological concerns.

Reading Swetenham's description of the Saint and his synthetic and all encompassing love brings to mind James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*.[62] For Fowler, the highest stage of faith, that he calls stage 6, is universalizing faith. This faith goes beyond borders of religion, community and ethnicity. As Fowler states, Stage 6 is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by it have left faith compositions in

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[61] See pp. 119; 218 and more. Note the repeated reference to Jesus as "The Master".
[62] *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* , Harper SanFrancisco, 1995.

which they give expression to their felt sense of an ultimate energy inclusive of all beings. They have become incarnators and actors for a spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. They live with felt participation in a power that unifies the world. Such people are ready for fellowship with persons at any of the other stages of faith or of other faith traditions.[63] Fowler's portrait resembles that of Swetenham's true Religious Genius. It recognizes its rarity, its capacity to go beyond boundaries and the sense of inclusiveness of being that is fundamental to it. Swetenham did not live in an interreligious age; Fowler does. It is thus significant, for the present project, that the type of rare individual classed either as a saint, a Religious Genius, or just as "plane old Stage 6" should also exhibit the capacity to find fellowship with members of other faith traditions.

Swetenham's work is a work of religious inspiration. One imagines it draws on his own personal life and spiritual experience, even though we are told nothing of the author and his circumstances. In presenting Swetenham I assumed that we should not devalue his application of "religious genius," because it is couched in religious, rather than scientific language. At the end of the day, we have here an author who is willing to construct a model of religious genius, and this model has many important features to recommend it. It introduces us to notions of intuition and inspiration. It highlights the centrality of the heart in religious genius. It creates a religious typology, within which religious genius is presented as well as a religious ideal, that is captured through the notion of Religious Genius. It assumes genius as a common element of human nature, and locates religious genius as an expression of the broader phenomenon of genius. It also assumes religious genius is a universal feature of the human person and that one can therefore educate to it and help it to grow. But it also recognizes that true religious genius is rare, and that fulfilled religious genius is a matter of perfection reserved for the few. And it offers some important criteria for recognition of Religious Genius, in the uppercase - the synthetic wholeness of paths that come together, of a life that is complete and of a love that integrates the person and extends to all, without limitation. This is a highly valuable way of constructing the notion of religious genius. It brings into the picture some important dimensions to which we shall have recourse in our own attempt to construct the category. Above all, it is important because it is the only work of religion, and of inspiration, that seeks to elaborate a coherent vision of religious genius. I hope that the singular contribution of this almost unknown author justifies the length to which I have gone in presenting his spiritual vision.

3.2.3 Pitirim Sorokin

The nexus of religious genius, saints and love, so fully developed by Swetenham does not have much of an echo in the decades that follow. For that matter, nor does the constellation of religious

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[63]Pp. 200-201.

genius, saints and emotions, suggested by James.[64] Genius seems to have stopped functioning as a category in the study of religion. This is the case for half a century, until the publication in 1954 of Pitirim Sorokin's *The Ways and Power of Love*.[65] Much like his predecessor at Harvard, William James, Sorokin set out to explore positive aspects of the psyche, against prevailing trends of the day. Sorokin is familiar with James, but shows no awareness of Swetenham. Nevertheless, in terms of types or ideal positions, one may present Sorokin as a midway position, or a synthesis of the methodologies and positions of James and Swetenham. First and foremost, Sorokin is comfortable talking of God, much more so than James. Note how James described saintliness in terms of Ideal Power, almost grudgingly admitting that in Christian saintliness it is personified as God, but he immediately backtracks, affording abstract moral ideas the same status. The frequent quotes from his sources concerning God may obscure the point, but James himself makes precious little appeal to God as an organizing principal of his psychological or religious worldview. Only as he reaches his conclusions, he admits, again in a seemingly grudging manner: "God is the natural appellation, for us Christians at least, for the supreme reality, so I will call this higher part of the universe by the name of God."[66] By contrast, Sorokin is not only comfortable talking of God, but seems to make the divine reality a centerpoint of his construction of a theory of love. Thus, both in terms of love and in terms of God - and perhaps precisely because of the interconnectedness of the two, Sorokin is much closer to Swetenham than to James. In other aspects, though, we may recognize greater continuity with James. For one, his method is scholarly, relying on research, statistics and the testimony of sages and saints of all religions. While primarily indebted to Christianity, he seeks to construct his argument in a more objective fashion, using Christianity as the test case, rather than the theological framework. In conceptual terms as well, we note a closeness that is manifest through an important distinction. For James, the roots of genius and therefore of the religious life lie in the relation to the subconscious. Sorokin too relies on a well defined notion of personal subjectivity, much more robust than the simple appeal to interiority and the interior life that informs Swetenham's work. Sorokin presents his own personality structure, and it betrays his entire

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[64]It is interesting to note how little James makes of love as a defining feature of saints or religious genius. His own emphasis on the unconscious and states of high emotional excitation seems to preclude concentration on love as a defining feature of sainthood. Indeed, in his discussion brotherly love is but a consequence of the feeling of expansion, that he deems the essence of the saint's experience. And absorption in the love of God, that Swetenham would have readily recognized as a fundamental feature of religious genius, is looked down upon as childish absorption, a sign of a feeble intellect and a distraction from more important practical interests. See *Varieties*, p. 253.
[65]*The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors and Techniques of Moral Transformation*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1954. Due to its importance, the book was republished by the Templeton Press with a new introduction in 2002.
[66]P. 374.

orientation. Sorokin considers a fourfold mental structure that he expresses also in energetic terms. The fourfold structure is: unconscious, bioconscious, socioconscious and supraconscious.[67] The key difference with James is that the religious life and religious genius are related, in his scheme, to the supraconscious. After dismissing Freudian notions of the person as products of the phantasmagoric imagination, Sorokin offers an initial description of the supraconscious, one upon which he will expand in several chapters of his book. His brief presentation is telling:

> Finally, there is a still higher level in the mental structure of man, a still higher form of energies and activities...the supraconscious level of energies and activities. These constitute the fourth and highest stratum of man's personality, energies and activities. They are frequently designated as "the divine in man", "the manifestations of Godhead", "the sublimest energy of truth, goodness and beauty", "the highest creative genius" and so on. The supraconscious manifests itself in the greatest creative victories of man in the fields of truth, beauty and goodness.[68]

We note the ease with which Sorokin incorporates God-talk in his description of the human person. This is indeed the case throughout his work, devoted to the study of love and its cultivation. Throughout his work, as for Swetenham, intuition plays an important role in understanding the workings of supraconscious.[69] We also note in this quote that "creative genius" is related to the same conceptual framework as the more explicitly theological notions, such as "divine in man" and other related notions. This provides us with the lead to Sorokin's view of genius. Like James, and unlike Swetenham, Sorokin barely refers to "religious genius" as a self standing concept.[70] The most frequent collocations are "creative genius" , as in the quote above, and "supraconscious genius", in various places. The novelty of Sorokin is to refer to "altruistic genius"[71] or more broadly to a "genius in the field of love. [72] This goes to the heart of Sorokin's concerns. Sorokin seeks to demonstrate how love can be cultivated and grown. The dual notions of genius and the supraconscious provide him with the conceptual framework for developing a theory and model through which love and altruism can be understood and made into focal points of specific educational platforms.

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[67]These are discussed in Chapter 5.

[68]P. 97.

[69]For James, intuition seems to play almost no role. It occurs in quotes from other authors, and is never integrated into James' own conceptual framework.

[70]Only in one place does he come close to using the term. On p. 113 he contrasts the philosophical form of genius, that Plato or Aristotle had, with its religious form, exemplified by Buddha, Confucius and Jesus. This does not suggest a robust notion of religious genius and rather sees genius as a broader phenomenon, that can manifest in the religious life as well.

[71]P. 144, referred to as a mystery; p. 191.

[72]P. 171; 308.

It is at this point that saints come in. Though God does occupy a place of importance in Sorokin's work, his book seeks to cultivate love, and its highest form, altruistic love, not saintliness, as the other works we have covered so far did. Saints are not the goal of Sorokin's project; they are the proof of its viability and they provide the method to achieve the goal. An earlier work of Sorokin's featured the saints as an object of study with reference to altruistic love.[73] The present work uses saints in two ways. The first is as a body of data, from which Sorokin draws some principled conclusions regarding love and the formation of character traits. Family circumstances, circumstances of conversion and longevity are all related to the effects and benefits of love. Taken as a whole, the saints of the Orthodox and Catholic church provide him with a body of data, through which to consider the developmental processes related to love. They also allow him to study it where altruism is most prevalent.

There is one move that Sorokin does not seem to make. Unlike some of the philosophers we studied above, Sorokin never suggests that saints should serve as models or examples of altruism. Saints prove it is *possible*, but the way to realizing love and altruism does not pass through imitation. Rather, it passes through following their path. For this reason, part four of Sorokin's work is devoted to techniques for altruistic transformation. Sorokin takes seriously the lessons of the Christian tradition, particularly the monastic tradition, and of all serious religious practitioners. He realizes that love and altruism cannot be willed; they express spiritual growth, an entry into relationship with God, cultivation of the supraconscious. Saints are not simply proofs, they are teachers. They provide a stock of methods and techniques, that Sorokin makes available in the interest of cultivating the genius of love.

This is a daring and highly original perspective, that combines a religious and a sociological worldview. It seeks to suggest paths for transformation, even as it develops novel theories of the self and its transformation. In all this genius and religion coalesce around the notion of love. Entry into the higher domains of love is the accomplishment and testimony of saints and the purpose of religion. Unlike James and Swetenham, Sorokin does not invite his readers to become saints. He invites them to grow their altruistic capacity, following the techniques taught by the saints.

Does Sorokin, then, help us to develop a notion of religious genius? Yes and no. Sorokin does not set out to develop that notion, but as he develops his notions of genius of love and altruistic genius he does make us realize the centrality that love should have in any attempt to construct a model of religious genius. Sorokin takes love beyond the faith-based declarations of Swetenham, and tries to ground it in a broader theory, that is itself related to an understanding of the human person, the psyche and personal growth. These are all related to the workings of genius, and hence relevant to our own concerns.   Most importantly, the use of genius does not preclude the relevance of the lessons learnt from the genius for others. Sorokin's use of genius and his appeal to the precedent

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[73] *Altruistic Love: A Study of American Good Neighbors and Christian Saints*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1950.

and methods of the saints assume that the qualities of genius, as it manifests in the religious life, can be learned, transmitted and cultivated. This is the core of his project.

3.2.4 Huston Smith

It is fair to say, that with the three figures studied in depth, we have exhausted the testimony of an entire century concerning the meaning and the viability of the category of "religious genius."[74] While all of it has been interesting, possibly also inspiring, it is clear that as we approach our topic, we do so without an adequate foundation, provided by our predecessors. Their usage may inspire us to include various dimensions in a future model of religious genius, but does not present us with any established, accepted or even sufficiently worked out notion of religious genius. For purposes of developing a new category and a new discourse this might constitute a distinct advantage.

Prior to exploring suggestions for the future, I would like to briefly note a passage by Huston Smith, quoted by Sir John Templeton.[75] While the reference provided is clearly wrong,[76] the quote rings true:

> The average man is no more capable of forming his imagination in ways that resolve his feelings nobly than he is capable of being his own scientist. Both tasks require genius. Geniuses in the art of shaping man's imaginings are artists, philosophers, prophets, and seers. Over time their creations coalesce and distill into cultures. As the religious forms of traditional Judaism and Christianity are losing their powers to inform the contemporary mind, humanity desperately needs religious geniuses who can create new imaginable forms, convincing to the contemporary mind which consummate man's needs for home, vocation, and transcendence.

Smith seems to use genius here in ways that are not casual.[77] Genius is a category that cuts across different domains. Prophets and seers provide expressions of genius, and are indeed called religious

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[74]I do not refer to casual uses of genius, such as the following quote, taken from Mircea Eliade's blurb for a translation of the Bhagavad Gita: "Mr. Sargeant must be congratulated on his 'labor of love.' One of the masterpieces of Indian—and human—religious genius has been made accessible in all its splendid and profound complexity." Such uses do not carry with them the baggage of genius-studies, that informed earlier discourse, or a coherent theory of personality, as in the case of Sorokin. "Genius" in most contemporary use simply means: that which is original, unique particular or even inspired.

[75]*Possibilities for Over Hundredfold More Spiritual Information*, Templeton Foundation Press, Philadelphia and London, 2000, p. 44.

[76]The reference is given as Huston Smith, *Empiricism: Scientific and Religious*, 1964, with no page number. Such a title does not exist, by any author, and I was unable to locate an article by that name, by Huston Smith.

[77]This is also true of his use of religious geniuses in *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, Albany, SUNY University Press, 1989, p. 77.

geniuses. The task of religious genius seems to be closely related to the faculty of the imagination. This is an interesting nuance, distinct from reference to the intuition that we encountered with other authors. Geniuses form imagination in ways that resolve feelings and that appeal to the mind, providing it meaning on a variety of levels. Genius seems to wear down and the genius of yesteryear is losing its power, as traditional religious forms no longer inspire the imagination, failing to convince the contemporary mind. Genius gives birth to culture and to religion, and as these advance and lose their power, there is need for new genius. Genius seems to function here much in the same way that charisma and its routinization did for Max Weber. While not providing a full blown theory of genius, as our previous authors did, Smith certainly exhibits a robust understanding of genius. It seems, based on how this quote is positioned in the work of Sir John Templeton, that this brief quote played an important role in inspiring Sir John's own thinking on the issue of religious genius. He may even owe the category to Huston Smith. This provides us with a lead into the thought of Templeton on religious genius, the final item in this conceptual review.

3.2.5 Sir John Templeton

The above passage attributed to Huston Smith is taken from a longer discussion in chapter 4 of *Possibilities for Over Hundredfold More Spiritual Information,* titled: creation through change. In order to appreciate Templeton's thought on the issue of religious genius, I would like to first quote some extended passages from that chapter.

> 1. Increasing evidence indicates that creation is just beginning. Are humans just starting to understand that we may have been given creative talents possibly so we can become helpers in a divine accelerating creative process? Are the old ways of structuring and ordering institutional religions adequate for future progress? Can concepts or rituals sometimes be too rigid, too traditional? Can new, freer, more entrepreneurial and adaptable concepts be helpful supplements to ancient revelations so that man's god-given mind may help spiritual information to increase over 100 fold?

> 6. Throughout history has religion developed and progressed often by the work of those who were first regarded as heretics? The Pharisees were learned, deeply devoted and sincerely holy men, but most of them seemed to have regarded Jesus as a heretic. Others once called heretics were Buddha, Paul, Zoroaster, Muhammad, Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Fox, Smith, Emerson, Bahaullah and Eddy. Christians believe god was incarnated into the world as a human. However, note that Jesus was not a traditionalist urging restudy of Abraham and Moses. Rather, he was an innovator who proclaimed and taught new revelation. Rarely does a historian or conservative become a hero of later history. Many of history's most creative people have been untraditional, far reaching thinkers who seek to improve accepted customs of their time. Often such people have been called radicals.

8. For humanity to progress, should we be eagerly interested to welcome whomever might be the new Columbus, the new Galileo, the new Copernicus? Can creative geniuses enlarge our global vision and help us to comprehend how tiny and temporary we are and how little we have yet discovered?

11. Perhaps only about one child in a million is born with talents which seem almost superhuman in one or more ways. Why does god's process of evolution produce these rare geniuses on earth? Is it the divine plan that they should help all people to progress? The one in a million who contributes a new idea to humanity can be a blessing to billions, which helps god's creation continue to progress.

12. In addition to the geniuses given more-than-human minds, god also creates saints and prophets gifted with more-than-human souls. A prophet is a pioneer in the vast uncharted regions of the spirit. For spiritual progress to flourish, do we need to cultivate interest and humility to listen carefully and learn from such people, recognizing their important gifts? If no two persons are equal or identical in body or mind, is it probable that no two persons are equal in spiritual insight? However much we may yearn for equality, it does not seem to be part of the divine plan.

13. Sören Kierkegaard taught that the human race advances on the backs of those rare geniuses who venture into realms of which most of us are afraid. Did Arend van Leeuwin exaggerate by saying, "Ninety-nine percent of people, irrespective of race, play a passive as opposed to a creative role; and even the creative section are passive with regard to ninetynine percent of their civilization"? And Huston Smith, the masterful chronicler of world religious thought and practice, wrote: And here follows the passage from Smith, quoted above.

15. In our own times have we witnessed several brave religious pioneers who have marched into old areas of religious endeavor with a new bold spirit and program? Brother Roger Schutz, the founder of the Taizé community in France, has answered one of the greatest spiritual needs in the postwar world. His quiet monastic community attracts architects, painters, theologians, lawyers and countless professional people who, after submitting themselves to his program of prayer and reflection, return to the world to pursue their careers more fully committed to creating a more fruitful world of love and joy. His efforts to organize the worldwide Council of Youth in 1970 inspired thousands of young people to go to Taizé and then return to their own countries to work for religious renewal.

16. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, often called by people of many faiths a living saint, demonstrated to the world yet another way that divine creativity can be helped through human (or in her case superhuman) effort. Mother Teresa formed a new order of religious women who have lived among and helped the poorest of the poor in India and many other nations to develop fruitful joyful lives through divine love. Public as well as private charitable organizations could follow her example and methods for providing human

services and love to the outcasts of our age. Malcolm Muggeridge said about Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity:

> When I think of them in Calcutta, as I often do, it is not the bare house in a dark slum that is conjured up in my mind, but a light shining and a joy abounding. I see them diligently and cheerfully constructing something beautiful for God out of the human misery and affliction that lies around them.

17. Another pioneering woman in the struggle for spiritual renewal in the world is Chiara Lubich. Her Focolare, or Fireside Movement, begun in Italy in 1943, has become a successful international means of providing spiritual community to people for whom the church as a system and institution is not enough. Living in lay communities structured as families and imbued with the loving ethos of family life, architects, doctors, engineers, nurses, carpenters, secretaries and others find a sense of spiritual belonging that run-of-the-mill society does not provide. Her innovative program, now adopted by thousands of people the world over, infuses vigorous inspiration into volunteers who seek to reanimate the world in the spirit of love. Her New Family, New Humanity and New Parishes movements are all creative additions to the traditional concept of church organization.

18. Through spiritual pioneers like Brother Roger, Mother Teresa and Chiara Lubich, can new blessings flow? Should freedom be given to people like these three who take seriously the challenge to be humble co-creators with god? Should their messages be studied worldwide? The next stage of human help in spiritual progress may have much to do with the examples and creativity of dedicated men and women, geniuses of the spirit, who will blaze trails for the rest of us to follow. (To encourage progress of this kind Templeton Foundation Prizes for Progress in Religion were established in 1972. A list of awardees is included at the end of this book, in Appendix Five.)

25. Schilling claims that matter and most likely all other manifestations of reality are fundamentally developmental. He suggests reality is a continuing creative process in an unmistakable direction, "from the simple to the complex, from the small to the large, from the isolated individual entities to combinations and integrated systems, and to community."[78]

The numbers in the above quote represent different sections of the chapter. The numbering is not consecutive, indicating my having only taken from the broader discussion those elements that could be relevant to our discussion of religious genius. This discussion itself is grounded in broader concerns for the advance of religion and for growth in our knowledge of God and spiritual reality in view of changes in humanity and advances in scientific thinking. The chapter opens with the notion that humanity's creative talents could help to accelerate divine creativity. We recall from our reading of Sorokin how close genius and creativity are, and indeed a discussion of human creativity is the framework within which Templeton's own reflections on genius are couched. We notice also the explicitly theological framework: human creativity takes place in close association with divine creativity. Templeton appeals to a particular theological notion, that of co-creativity. The governing

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[78]Selective quotes from *Possibilities,* pp. 40-49.

notions in this passage are novelty, progress and the adaptation of religion to future progress. Interestingly, the argument is less about the possible rigidity or incompatibility of religion to the present, but rather to the tasks and challenges of the future. The problem of the inadequacy of the structures of old and the ongoing need for reform or advancement of religion is not simply a contemporary problem. It seems to be fundamental to the nature of religion. As in the view implicit in the above quote from Smith, traditional religious systems require time and again the power of radical reform, that takes the form of a new revelation, an innovation. Creativity, the key term in this discussion, is associated in the view of contemporaries of the creative mind, with heresy. But what is important is the creative drive, that is only appreciated in retrospect.

Templeton's list in paragraph 6 of radicals-in-their-day is a veritable who's who of religious geniuses. The names noted by Templeton almost all appear as examples of genius or saintliness in one of the authors surveyed above, especially James. It is interesting that Templeton himself does not refer to them as religious geniuses, even though this is where his own discussion is headed. Judging by this list, it would seem that the notions of religious genius, or genius of the soul, and those of religious radicals and reformers are quite close, if not identical. This recognition will be important to recall, as we attempt to construct a working model of religious genius. Religious geniuses, in this view, are not simply individuals who have attained the perfect subjectivity of the experience of the divine, or the fullness of love. They are radicals who make a difference in their time, leading their religion and their society through major changes.

Sections 8 and 11 bring us back to the notion of creative genius, though not specifically in the religious field. Columbus, Copernicus and Galileo are the creative geniuses who enlarge our global vision. "Enlarging our global vision" may well sum up the core of Templeton's vision for genius and for creative growth in knowledge and spiritual understanding. It provides a common ground for the two distinct dimensions that are brought together in this chapter as complementary parts of one broader discussion - genius and religious genius. The scientists enlarge our global vision in the field of science and our knowledge of the physical world. Religious geniuses have the charge of broadening our vision in other dimensions - society, relationships, understanding how to live our lives in today's world.

Geniuses are there to help humanity progress.   Section 11 suggests a one-in-a-million ratio of geniuses with superhuman talents. The lack of equality that emerges from recognition of uneven distribution of talent or genius is recognized, at the end of section 12, as part of the divine plan. It is justified because it brings benefits to all of humanity, not millions but billions.

The move from section 11 to section 12 is particularly relevant to our concerns. Templeton moves from geniuses given more than human minds to saints and prophets gifted with more than human souls. The mind-heart distinction we saw in Swetenham receives a different twist here. We have clearly moved from the scientific to the religious domain here. Has the numerical ratio remained the same? Is there significance to the fact that Templeton offers an assessment of the ratio in relation to geniuses of the mind but not in relation to geniuses of the spirit? If the overall goal is to enlarge our vision, then prophets and saints do so in relation to the "uncharted regions of the spirit".   How interesting: in relation to the geniuses of the mind no demand is made of "us". The blessings and benefits to the billions would seem to be obvious, the fruit of the innovation of these geniuses. By contrast, the contribution of the geniuses of the spirit requires our listening. Interest,

humility and the ability to listen seem to be understood as preconditions for the success of the work of these individuals. Cultivating the capacity to understand, appreciate and imbibe the message of the geniuses of the spirit is thus recognized as a task that "we" must confront, if they are to be successful in their God-given mission of aiding humanity to advance on the spiritual path.

In section 13 Kierkegaard and Huston Smith are both quoted as precedents for the need and importance of genius, genius of the spirit and religious genius. As we saw in the above quote from Smith, the task of geniuses is to appeal to the human mind, drawing upon convincing ways of shaping imagination. It would seem from these descriptions that the task is mainly theological-imaginal, in other words a task to be carried out in the realm of the mind and spirit, by means of which our global vision may be enlarged. Against this expectation it is quite surprising, perhaps enriching, to see where Templeton takes the reader next. Following these declarations of the importance of genius, and recalling the list of great teachers, mentioned in section 6 as radicals in their time, Templeton proceeds to introduce us to three contemporary figures, recognized by him through the Templeton prize as individuals who did indeed help further the cause of advancing our spiritual understanding.[79]

Beginning with paragraph 15, we encounter individuals who are religious pioneers, who have a bold spirit and program. One does wonder whether the boldness of program really captures the depth of the intuition required of new religious geniuses in order to make religion work for us today. Does the combined testimony of Brother Roger, Mother Theresa and Chiara Lubich amount to the new imagination that society requires today of its religious geniuses to make religion once again convincing, as Smith demanded? They are certainly inspiring, deeply inspiring. Given the numbers of Christians (even Catholics) they also fall within the one-in-a-million framework. But if we take them as examples of religious genius, and not only as examples of a contemporary application of religion carried out in a spirit of boldness, then we are led to a very important conclusion concerning religious genius. Religious genius is not, as we would have thought, only or primarily about revealing truths, shaping imaginations and discovering uncharted areas of the spirit. It is, and judging by these examples perhaps above all, a matter of how religion is lived in the world.[80] The identification of new forms of religious life, the capacity to adapt our religious vision to changing social needs and circumstances, is itself a major expression of genius of the spirit. Whether what we see here are different dimensions of Sir John's thought, that should not be too readily harmonized, or an application of the broader principles in terms of contemporary social reality is a generative question worth revisiting. It certainly makes us aware of the possibility that "enlarging our global vision" is not only a speculative matter, but a matter of living. Our vision is enlarged when we are able to generate spiritual renewal through encounter with an inspiring community of monks, when we help the poor develop joyful lives through divine love, and when we identify new structures to enhance

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[79]It is worth noting that these prizes to contemporary saints or religious geniuses were given during the earlier years when the prize was distributed. In later years, the prize was awarded to people who contributed to the science-religion interface. This change in policy is interesting, and may reflect the difficulties in implementing Sir John's vision of religious genius as a cause of the foundation.

[80]See also section 25: "Do links between people, between churches and between nations need to be forged as a Mother Teresa or a Brother Roger or a Chiara Lubich would forge them?"

the meaning of community in the world. Templeton recognizes in these expressions of innovation and creativity. Creativity is understood as co-creativity, collaboration with God, and ultimately as an expression of a religious genius suitable for our times, leading people to renewal and to finding new ways of living their spiritual lives in today's world.

Section 18 challenges us once again to state the relationship of creativity, being co-creators and being geniuses of the spirit. Is the understanding here expressed that all acts of creativity, or at least such creativity that brings about meaningful transformation in the lives of multitudes, are also acts of co-creativity. And is this itself a sign of genius of the spirit? Or has the discussion, with the help of the notion of co-creativity, shifted from religious genius, to religious pioneering, only to return once again to the hope of future geniuses of the spirit, impregnating humanity with a new spirit. The sequence of Templeton's presentation runs from religious heretics and radicals to geniuses, one-in-a-million, to geniuses of the spirit to bold pioneers who bring about religious renewal, and thereby co-create with God. Reading the sequence of these ideas as they unfold challenges us to think through the implications of these sequences. Do criteria, goals, expectations and achievements change at every turn of the discussion? Is there a broader stream of innovation and co-creativity that ties the discussion together, even though the actual subject matter and the kind of vision and contribution it entails changes along the way? Or should we read all these expressions as coextensive, pointing to the same level of innovation, genius and creativity? As a reader of midrashic texts, I find the logic and texture of Sir John's text rich in possibilities, and open to multiple interpretations. It is a generative text that can continue to inspire reflection, because of the bumps and open ends it contains. At the very least, it constitutes a call to further reflection on what religious genius might mean and how the category might be constructed with care, attention and rigor. The challenges and possibilities contained in this unfolding of ideas will inform my own construction of a model of religious genius.

Having taken the reader through detailed presentation of several key statements regarding religious genius, I shall move on, in the next section, to offer my own model of religious genius. While it does not reflect an attempt to simply translate, one to one, the various - at times conflicting - insights that we have encountered in this review of a hundred years of use of "religious genius", it does owe much to these earlier discussions. At every point they have both challenged and inspired me. My own synthesis is indebted to the thinking of all those who preceded me. Their categories, tensions and struggles have exposed important aspects and potentialities of the category of "religious genius". It is time to draw these insights together, in my own personal way, by introducing my own working model of religious genius.

3.3 Populating the category of Religious Genius

Shifting discourse from saints to religious genius may be advantageous in many ways but it does leave one major question open - who do we identify as a religious genius. As we saw from the review of the category's history, different authors would lead us to apply different criteria. For James, most of the recognized saints would qualify, but so would many others not acknowledged as saints, who had contact with their subconscious in ways that were powerful. In fact, James provides us with examples drawn from the lives of various Protestant practitioners and heads of denominations, and he is quite critical of many acknowledged Catholic saints. For Swetenham, one would include in the

discussion any person who had experienced a conversion or who felt born again. Alternatively, only individuals approximating stage 6 of Fowler's typology might be included. For Sorokin, with his particular emphasis on the genius of love, it would seem that saints and those who have the genius of love are almost coextensive. Finally, Templeton's presentation challenges us to identify where exactly religious genius might lie, as his discussion alternates between different types, all of whom have had a revolutionary effect on their traditions, but who constitute distinct religious personalities.

How are we to proceed? Should we simply take all the figures who are recognized as saints in different traditions and lump them together under the category of religious genius? This does not seem the right way to go. We are trying to identify a type, that could be recognized across traditions, including those who do not use "saints" as their typical means of expression. To begin with "saints" as a given would therefore undermine the logic of our exercises.

We therefore have to follow an inductive method. We need to suggest those cases that best resonate with the notion of religious genius and identify   the constituent qualities that make them such. Those qualities would then be incorporated into the model of religious genius, allowing us to recognize other figures as religious geniuses. Of course, this method also begs the question: how are we to find the finest exemplars of religious genius. But here the task may be simpler than if we posed the question broadly: who is a religious genius. The most prominent cases of religious genius are those that are recognized as the greatest of saints, the most broadly recognized. We can't escape some circularity, but if we begin by examining those individuals who are "one in a billion" (or half a billion), then we increase our chances of constructing the model of religious genius in a meaningful way. If we focus on St. Francis, the Baal Shem Tov, Ramakrishna, Padre Pio, Rav Kook, Jalal al-Din Rumi or Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, then we surely can identify qualities that characterize individuals who might best fit the profile of religious genius. Broadening our search further would still allow us to include an entire gallery of first rate personalities, who could be distinguished from a whole other class of individuals who are celebrated on a popular level and approached as sources of blessing, protection, identity and more. While both "religious genius" and "saints" defy incontestable definitions, the very attempt to play the two categories off against each other, and to aim for the top, or top of the top, increases our chance of identifying those individuals who in turn will reveal to us what are fundamental aspects or traits that we could use in constructing and populating the category of religious genius.

It must be admitted, the kind of difficulty that Sir John Templeton faces, as he tries to square off his high aiming ideal of genius and religious genius with the finest religious personalities in view is unavoidable.[81] There will always be something tentative about constructing the category and applying it. But that does not make it unuseful. All categories suffer from problems of definitions and limitations. All categories can be deconstructed. Yet, all categories are also useful. At the very least, they are useful in advancing our thought and discussion and in opening up new ways of viewing old realities. Perhaps conscious construction of the category through a collaborative dialogical process, that takes into account the perspectives of multiple religions, multiple disciplines

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[81]Perhaps it is this difficulty that led the Templeton Foundation to shift its orientation in awarding the Templeton prize away from proffering recognition on such individuals.

and many excellent minds can also increase the chances of the new category being constructed in ways that are meaningful and helpful. This, at least, is the ambition behind the present project.

"Genius" might itself provide help for constructing "religious genius". Some broadly recognized components of genius, such as creativity and intuition, could tilt the category of "religious genius" in ways that are particular to it, and quite distinct from traditional views of holy men and women. Intuitively, it would seem that saints should provide the larger pool, from which a smaller group of religious geniuses could be identified. All saints will have aspects of religious genius; we may well concede that in some form and to some degree it is available to all people of faith.[82] But what will make a sub-group of saints stand out is a combination of traits, that in their totality form a different kind of religious personality. Some of these traits may be particular to "genius", others to our sense of what the highest form of the spiritual life is, and how it therefore might contribute to "religious genius".

Another way of refining our search for the ideal of religious genius is to apply multiple criteria in our attempt to construct the category. Most of what we know of saints is derived from hagiographies; story is the primary medium through which we encounter the reality of saints and their religious genius. But there is another medium that is characteristic of religious literature - teaching. Teaching and reflection reveal to us the self understanding of these figures, and of others, concerning what the highest ideals are, that might be incorporated into a model of religious genius. If we can corroborate the evidence of narrative through teaching, this will increase our capacity to define and identify the highest forms of spiritual life, that could be identified with religious genius. Even more to the point, if we are able to identify those teachings that ring of the experience of their author, and provide indirect testimony to his or her spiritual life, rather than the use of conventional tropes, we are on even firmer ground in incorporating such teachings/testimonies into our understanding of religious genius. Therefore, it is envisioned that the proposed project will rely on a combination of narrative and teaching, through which it will seek to identify and draw a profile of religious genius. One example of what I have in mind in referring to teachings as a resource for constructing a notion of religious genius is provided in an appendix to the present concept paper.

This last point leads us to the realization that in any event our project is in some ways predetermined by the fact that it will examine individuals who have a literary legacy, preferably their own, or at least one that is close to them in time and spirit. One of the criteria for inclusion in our research will inevitably be people who have left, or around whom has developed, some kind of literary legacy. We must acknowledge that religious geniuses have and do exist, who have not left any literary legacy. However, we are forced to study those who did, for both practical and theoretical reasons. If we have no literary record of any sort, we are drawn into the domain of anthropology and sociology and may be hardpressed to identify the particularities of religious genius. Much discussion concerning saints in world religions acknowledges the fact that saints are part of popular culture, especially in religions like Islam and Judaism, where the very legitimacy of the phenomenon of sainthood might be called into question.[83] Religious genius, by contrast, would be a way of

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[82]See Lawrence Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints,* p. 79.
[83]See the contributions by Robert Cohn and William Brinner in Hawley's *Saints and Virtues.*

approaching the religious ideal type that is independent of popular culture and that may often appear among the elite, providing some of the finest examples of religious leadership and pioneering. It must, therefore, find some literary expression in order to figure as part of the elite religious culture. Moreover, only a written legacy has the potential to transcend the boundaries of a given faith community, and to find a hearing among the faithful of another tradition. If we seek to construct a model of religious genius that is to serve the needs of an interreligious world, we are pushed to work with those individuals whose life testimony is matched and corroborated by their teaching and by the literary expression of their religious genius.[84]

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[84]For purposes of the present argument, a hagiography of a saint, who did not leave behind a body of teaching, would still be considered a literary legacy.

4. Religious genius - constructing a model

A model is just that. While it might never fully correspond to reality, it does allow us to develop a better appreciation for what there is in reality. It allows us to identify aspects for which we might look. It is a theoretical construct that shapes discourse and orients a vision. The following section is written with the premise that if reference to religious genius will enhance our appreciation of outstanding religious personalities it will do so to a large extent by means of exploring these individuals' lives in relation to an ideal, expressed in a model.

Construction too is not foreign to saint studies. As Caroline Bynum states briefly, saints "are, as the current jargon has it, "socially constructed". "There is no saint without an audience. Fashioned and authenticated in a complex relationship between clerical authorities and the adherents who spread the holy person's reputation for virtues and miracles, the saint herself or himself is lost to view almost from the beginning".[85] Pierre Delooz has helped us to recognize how much to be a saint is to be a saint for others.[86] The image of the saint is continually remodeled according to the expectations of the saint's audience. In time, the saint becomes what Delooz calls a "constructed saint" - one for whom the collective recollection is defined on the basis of universal paradigms.[87] We thus recognize that when dealing with saints we are implicated in the tension between seeking access to the life of the saint and the realm of the imaginary or ideal, that shapes the saint's memory and image. Working with a constructed model of religious genius may be considered as preferable to the retroactive attempt to extricate the saint's historical memory from the accretions of hagiography, one of the principle projects of the modern study of saints, undertaken primarily by the bollandists. Recognition that we are working with a model would allow us to approach the tension between the ideal and the real in a conscious way, creating a continuing dialectic, whereby each informs the other. Rather than being a problem, such a dialectic may deepen our understanding of saints and religious geniuses - ideal and real.

4.1 Fundamental components of a model for Religious Genius

In what follows I offer a first attempt at identifying the key features, by means of which we can construct or identify religious genius. It is acknowledged that this statement is personal, inasmuch as it grows from my own judgement, reflection and attempt to both discern and synthesize the

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[85]Foreword to *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine Mooney, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, p. ix. Laurence Babb's study of the (until very recently) present day sainthood of the Indian Sathya Sai Baba, suggests that dealing with present day saints does not spare us the dynamics of constructed sainthood. See Sathya Sai Baba's Saintly Play, in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Hawley, pp. 168-186. This presents our own project with the challenge of how helpful it is to investigate religious genius among contemporary figures, or whether the problematics associated with working through hagiographic literature present themselves from the outset of the "construction" of the saint. One possible way of dealing with this challenge might be the crossover between stories and teachings, suggested above.
[86]See Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, p. xxxi.
[87]See Pierre Delooz, *Sociologie et canonisations*, Liege, Faculté de droit, 1969, pp. 7-14.

background reading that informs the present project. It is thus a hypothesis and it invites responses, reflections, modifications and adaptations. It is offered precisely as a way of generating a conversation that would test and refine the model. It is hoped that the collective wisdom and expertise of a community of scholars, familiar with multiple religious traditions, will lead to the crystallization of a more advanced form of the present model, that can lend long term significance to the category of "religious genius", making it a functional and helpful category in the study of distinctive and outstanding religious personalities.

I offer initially six dimensions of "religious genius". It is hard for me to suggest a hierarchy between them. They are like different sides of a polyhedron. But the analogy breaks down when we realize that the different dimensions also overlap to various degrees. We thus point to a range, a domain, and recognize that its different components are interrelated and dependent upon one another. Their totality, it is suggested, provides the ideal form of religious genius.

4.1.1 Love

Some of the earlier attempts to develop the image of religious genius have already made us aware of the centrality of love to the ideal of the saint and of the religious genius. While the resources and theological framework from which this recognition was offered were Christian, I think it is appropriate to recognize love as a central defining element in any portrait of religious genius and as a common denominator that emerges from all religious traditions. Love should be understood broadly, certainly not simply as a particular emotion. Therefore, if a tradition such as Buddhism couches its primary spiritual recognition in terms of compassion, rather than in terms of love, for our purposes it falls within the broader range of spiritual attitudes and perceptions signalled by the term love.[88] Consequently, love is manifest as altruism, the supreme expression of love offered selflessly in service of the other. It is significant that so much of philosophical appeal to saints focuses on their altruism. It suggests how central love is to the extraordinary religious personality and confirms the recognition that love should be considered one of the primary identifying features of true religious genius. It may be superfluous to add that love is a reality, a state of being, and that therefore the question of its recipient is almost secondary. A loving heart and presence extends to God, to the fellow person, to the entire world. The more expansive the love, the higher the state of being that is manifested, the greater the expression of religious genius.

4.1.2 Purity

Swetenham remarked that all geniuses can be partial; of religious genius alone we expect perfection. The best way to measure perfection is purity. Purity is the core of the struggle that is

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[88]The Dalai Lama certainly sees things this way, as he views the teachings of other religions. See his *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths: How the World's Religions Can Come Together*, New York, Doubleday, 2010,　and my review of this book, http://www.elijah-interfaith.org/index.php?id=1011

common to all who are on the spiritual path. It is born of the recognition of a tension, produced by an awareness of multiple realities in which the aspirant dwells. On the one hand is her daily life, earthly reality, bodily existence. On the other is another dimension of reality, a higher order, a divine realm, a vision of truth understood as absolute reality. These are never mere cognitions. They are ways of being, states of awareness, realms of sensitivity, sensibility and greater energetic subtlety. The aspirant is thus torn between multiple realities, multiple states of being and consciousness. What is perceived as the higher order, the ultimate, beckons and invites the individual toward greater conformity with its perspective, with its way of being. To attain that purity is required. Without exception, all religious traditions, all saints in all religions, have and must undergo a process of purification in order to be able to enter the domain of their destiny, however it is understood in their tradition. Purity is the condition for such entry and the state that is attained, as they advance into that domain, and are increasingly transformed by it. Purity is indispensible for the spiritual life and must therefore occupy a prominent position in any description of religious genius. Religious genius thrives on, aspires to and is ultimately realized through the increase and assimilation of purity into the life of the religious genius.

James saw asceticism as a by-product of the four attributes of saintliness identified by him.[89] That he lists it as the first characteristic practical consequences of the expanded sense of awareness suggests how central asceticism is to the spiritual path. However, I cannot concur with James on asceticism being simply the passionate transformation of self surrender into self immolation. James' discussion of asceticism shows little understanding of the dynamics of spiritual progress. It is not a whim, a fancy, a tendency grown wild. It is a method of attaining what aspirants realize is the vital precondition for achieving their goal - purity. Asceticism is almost universal and with that comes the recognition of the universality of the quest for purity as a defining feature of the spiritual life, and an indispensable feature of religious genius. Thus, anyone who lacks purity, in a meaningful and recognizable fashion, should not be considered a religious genius, according to the high benchmark here proposed. He or she may be a leader, teacher, theologian, activist or any other kind of functionary who makes a difference in people's lives. But he or she would be no different in their spiritual quality than their counterpart who engages in these same activities from a non-religious platform. The uniquely religious dimension of religious genius, regardless of the form of service or office through which it is expressed, is purity.

4.1.3 Humility

While purity is constituted by a variety of virtues that may each be singled out, one of those deserves special mention and is accordingly presented as a key feature of religious genius - humility. Humility may be understood as proper recognition of one's position in the great scheme of things. Such recognition is quite distinct from the ways in which the ego seeks to assert itself in order to boost one's sense of personal worth. Humility is thus closely related to decentering of the self, and its reorientation in a larger view. It is also the basis for continuing self inspection, leading one to identify faults and to become aware of one's own imperfection. These in turn drive the quest for

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[89]P. 203.

purity. It is no accident that the Bible presents Moses as the greatest prophet that ever lived and as the most humble person on the face of the earth.[90]

4.1.4 Self-Surrender

If humility situates the self in its proper place, self surrender defines a particular attitude and relationship of the self to the higher reality that it seeks to identify with. This dimension more than any other was appreciated by James, in his portrayal of saintliness. He described this self surrender as resulting from awareness of the friendly continuity between the ideal power and our own life. Self surrender leads to reorientation of the self. The personal ego decreases in significance, as one increasingly is identified with the greater reality or goal towards which one is making his way. Self surrender may thus be considered a systematic means of self transcendence. It is also closely related to the capacity to serve others, as one's view of oneself is transformed, and as one increases in loving capacity.

But more is involved in self surrender than simply transcendence of self. Self surrender assumes growing in awareness of a larger presence, or a larger reality, of which one is but a part. As awareness shifts, the question of the true author of our actions increasingly comes to the forefront. Is it the self or the greater Self, the divine, the absolute, that is the true actor.[91] And what exactly is the nature of the collaboration, the synergy, between the ordinary self and the greater Self. Self surrender thus points to a fundamental shift in consciousness, wherein the self, its identity and authorship are all realigned, in view of expanded awareness. Religious genius requires just such a broad awareness. Without it, the virtues practiced are moral exercises, stages on the way to perfection. But the perfection of religious genius only comes with the shift of consciousness, wherein one's self is redefined in relation to the absolute. Systems may vary, with regard to the possibility of absorption in and union with the greater reality. But the capacity to transcend the self and to live from the place to which one is able to surrender would seem to be a universal feature of religious genius.

Some traditions resort at this point to a notion of grace. It is through grace, an explicit expression of divine activity, that the actions of the person who has attained self surrender are carried out. While not all traditions share a concept of grace, it is worth asking whether all can share in identifying a stage in which the sense of authorship of action, the definition of who is the actor, is transformed. Or perhaps we should uphold a typology of traditions, or sub-traditions, according to

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[90]Numbers 12,3 and Deut. 34,10.

[91] How to understand the relationship between the personal self and the greater reality, to which the religious genius opens up, may be a point regarding which we may find meaningful differences. Does one go to the roots of one's self, finding God there? (Compare Peter Brown's reference to finding Christ at the roots of the self, Brown, p. 13); Does one's sense of self extend to include others? (compare Flescher's notion (p. 228) of extending the self, as the basis of altruism); Does one go beyond the personal self to the true foundational Self, as Hindu philosophy would suggest? I note one wonderful phrase that emerged in the framework of a discussion of Confucianism, referring to "establishing your own self identity in terms of what you take to be the absolute" (ref.*). This captures the rich possibilities of how to understand the self and its transformations.

their ability to accommodate a notion of a radically transformed self, such that no longer operates on its own, but by agency of the higher reality to which it aspires.

4.1.5 Expanded awareness of reality

Reference to self surrender already implies awareness of the broader reality to which we belong. But more needs to be said of this, and this seems to be a key element in religious genius and one of the main features that distinguishes it from ordinary piety and even from many expressions of saintliness. A religious genius lives in more than one plane of existence. He or she is simultaneously present to the physical order of life and to the alternative order, to which he or she is increasingly drawn. The latter redefines one's way of being in the physical plane. It establishes priorities, provides meaning and reorients all of one's actions. The genius of religious genius comes from the fact that all actions, engagements, teachings and all expressions of the religious life are experienced from an awareness that transcends the physical plane, even as the individual seeks to transcend his or her sense of limited personal self.

What makes religious genius unique is that it consciously and intentionally seeks to understand and experience this reality in relationship to another. . Whereas other forms of wisdom might postulate what other dimensions of reality might be, religious genius is founded upon some kind of contact, exposure, and awareness of this other reality.[92] Such awareness may find varying expressions: some intellectual, some visionary, some mystical,   some intuitive. What is common to all of them is the conscious recognition of the relationship that exists between these two dimensions of reality. Perhaps religious genius might be presented as that which aids in constructing a conscious bridge between these two dimensions of reality.

Significantly, all religious traditions express their awareness of reality in terms that are dualistic - this reality, the other. Is this merely a function of how different theological or philosophical systems shape religious thought, or do we have here a fundamental expression of religious genius? Does religious genius grasp something beyond, to which it seeks to make its way, subjecting all of life as experienced and understood to that quest? Is a sense of an alternate reality thus fundamental to all expressions of religious genius?

The most common way of describing this alternate dimension of reality is to describe it as the heavenly, supernal, world. The broader view of reality is usually expressed also in cosmological terms, situating the genius and her world within a broader scheme of existence. Such cosmological situatedness is then the foundation for deeper understanding of reality. It consequently provides either new information concerning the heavenly or celestial realm, and the heroes, usually great religious figures, associated with it, or guidance,and teaching and information - laws of life, if you will - for how to better live on the physical plane.

But broader awareness of reality need not be limited to the celestial sphere. If we consider broadening awareness horizontally, then we can consider the expansion of awareness to others, to

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[92]Note the definition of spiritual genius provided by author Winifred Gallagher in her book *Spiritual Genius:The Mastery of Life's Meaning*, Random House, 2001: human beings who seem to live with one foot in another plane.

the world's suffering, to the entire world of social relations that cries out for healing. Perhaps herein lies an important key to the altruism of saints. Their altruism is neither a mandate, nor simply an expression of love. Rather, it expresses a broader sense of their identity and their own sense of expanded awareness that includes the other, the world at large, as part of their own awareness.[93] Perhaps, in today's world the broadening of awareness will find further expansion to the ecological domain, extending the sense of self from society to all of life. The increasing engagement of religious leadership in this direction and the way it harnesses traditional theological resources suggests that this too may be featured as a present or future expression of religious genius.

4.1.6 The Logic of Imitation

Awareness of higher or broader reality does not simply provide meaning and reorientation to physical existence. It leads to an inevitable dynamic wherein one seeks to conform the one reality to the standards, vision or perfection of the other. A constitutive tension ensues, wherein one not only lives in two planes of existence, in two parallel realities, but seeks to emulate and imitate the higher reality within the confines of ordinary existence. I would like to propose that this is a constitutive dimension of religious genius. As suggested, religious genius is the bridge between two realities, and the primary means of constructing this bridge is imitation.[94]

In some traditions imitation plays a crucial role; in others it may be less dominant. However, it is worth considering whether the logic of imitation is not itself a fundamental feature of the higher religious life. The religious genius is not only in touch with a higher vision of life; he seeks to incorporate and implement it in life, or, from the other end, make life on this plane attuned to, commensurate with, harmonious with, that higher reality. Only those who are aware of the tension implied in living in multiple worlds and the suffering, struggle and continuing effort to harmonize and attune our world to another order of reality truly deserve to be called religious geniuses. Here we have a pinnacle of genius - intuiting another order of reality, seeking to ground it, transforming oneself and the entire world in a movement of totality and harmony toward that higher perceived reality. We go here way beyond faith, understood conventionally, or the practice of virtues. We enter here into a domain that is truly the reserve of the few, even if it be the hope of the many. In light of such precision of definition, religious geniuses will emerge as those individuals who are able to maintain this broader awareness and its resultant mandate to imitate, harmonize and conform different orders of reality. Such efforts both require and are made possible through the purity attained, the love offered and the transcendence of self that compose the character of the religious genius. However, those virtues alone do not suffice. They produce excellent spiritually oriented characters, perhaps even saints. But religious genius requires that additional vision, and orienting framework that redefines existence and its meaning, seeking to continually elevate and transform it in light of the higher realization, fruit of religious genius.

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[93]See Flescher et al, *The Altruistic Species*, p. 227.
[94]Kant had suggested that genius implies non imitating. However, the kind of imitation discussed here is quite distinct from the conventional sense, to which he referred.

Christianity provides some of the finest examples of the logic of imitation. Imitation of Christ, or of Mary, shape and redefine consciousness in view of the perceived higher reality.[95] But imitation is not the only way to capture this intuition. Sorokin speaks of self identification.[96] One might also speak of assimilation, or living in the mind of another being, a great spiritual presence. These different ways of expression, all found in the literature, are different ways of capturing the same spiritual drive.

Understanding the logic of imitation might provide a key to understanding some of the tensions that specific traditions exhibit. For some traditions, the founder or key figure is in a class of his own. Thus, Muhammad is distinct from all other prophets and saints. Jesus, the son of God, is in a class of his own, unlike that of the saints. And yet, Muslim saints are constantly assimilated to the figure of Muhammad, even as Christian saints re-present Christ.[97] At times, this produces theological, as well as social and denominational tensions. The matter is further complicated when we consider that saints are also objects of emulation. It would seem that imitation and emulation are deeply ingrained in religious logic, where one order of life imitates the other, and a chain of imitation is created. Muslim saints are distinct from Muhammad, but they are homologized to him through a process of imitation. The faithful in turn draw inspiration by imitating the example before them, who in turn is

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[95]See Joachim Duyndam, Hermeneutics of Imitation: A Philosophical Approach to Sainthood and Exemplariness, *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity,* M.Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2004, 7-21. Duyndam argues that imitation is translating, rather than aping or duplicating. See further Catherine Mooney, Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Mariae? Clare of Assisi and Her Interpreters, *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters,* pp. 52-77. Examples of the depth of the drive for imitation may be found in Peter Brown, The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity, *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Hawley, pp. 3-14. Brown speaks of re-presenting the higher spiritual reality. In a Muslim context, see Chapter 7 of Cornell's *Realm of the Saint*. It is worth reflecting on how central the logic of imitation is to Judaism and what its relationship is to the rise of saints. As Robert Cohn suggests, in Sainthood on the Periphery: the Case of Judaism, *Saints and Virtues*, pp. 87-110, saints do not play a primary role in most of Jewish history. Is the rise in the prominence of saints related to the increase in theological possibility and experiential application of the principle of imitation. Closer examination of the rise of saints in relation to the rise of kabbalah in general and the rise in prominence of the *Shekhina* in particular might be able to provide us with an answer to this question.
[96]See *The Ways and Powers of Love*, p. 175.
[97]See Peter Brown's essay in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. J. Hawley.

imitating the primary religious model.[98] Such schematic presentation suggests to us the depth of possibilities contained in the logic of imitation.[99]

4.2 Religious genius - A new articulation of the meaning of existence

The six core traits are the foundation, the necessary requirements, that are then galvanized, through a creative movement, into producing religious genius. It is unlikely, though theoretically possible, that someone who has perfected himself in all six dimensions, will simply lead a secluded life, with no outward social, institutional or educational impact on others. One might, of course, argue that if religious perfection is manifest through the coming together of the traits described above, then a solitary hermit in a cave, a monastery or a forest, might attain them, without ever contributing visibly to society. The possibility of invisible contribution to global peace and harmony is beyond the present discussion, and does not make such a person eligible to the title of religious genius. Such a person may be a saint, a perfected being, the finest exemplar of a tradition. But religious genius does require something further. What it requires is the creative drive, the moment at which the various preconditions yield some new intuition, understandings, direction, path, way of being. The wealth of the spiritual life is such that its various aspects come together in seemingly endless permutations. These are multiplied as a given religion, society and the world at large, undergo sociological and ideological changes, from one generation to the other. At every turn, the need arises to state the truths, the vision, the broader meaning once again, in fresh terms, that are suitable either for the audience or the circumstances. It may be a traditional society that works out the meaning of its philosophical challenges and debates or a postmodern society that has lost its faith in God and his saints. Whatever it may be, the religious genius is the person who can offer a new statement of meaning, from the platform of existence to which he has reached. "Genius" is when there is a creative drive that takes the above dimensions and frames or restates them in such a way as to produce a restatement of the meaning of existence, and how it should be lived in the here and now.   Whether it is action, service, teaching or relations in the community, the religious genius offers a new vision to address some important contemporary challenge.[100] And his contribution is

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[98]Theology may play an important role here. When a Christian imitates St. Francis, he would be aware of the degree of stature or being associated with Francis and Jesus respectively. When a Hindu imitates one or the other, he would not draw a distinction between them, seeing them on a par. Of course, the kind of imitation of which we speak here is transformative and is therefore rarely extended to someone beyond one's tradition, making differences in theological understanding less vital.

[99]One would accordingly draw the distinction between imitation of the earthly example, which focuses on improvement of one's deeds and qualities, and imitation of the spiritual ideal or primary model, which are the domain of the religious genius.

[100]Some have suggested that the life of the saint is itself a creative act, the highest creative act. I resist this definition, in relation to religious genius, for it would make it impossible to distinguish the religious genius from the saint, here understood as someone who has perfected his personal life, without broader implications for others.

empowered by more than the goodwill of the ordinary person. It is empowered by the fullness of life and power to which his spiritual life has brought him.

This definition is reminiscent of the power of novelty, restatement and spiritual regeneration that Templeton expects of his religious geniuses and spiritual radicals. Let us listen to a more traditional voice, who further corroborates such a vision. Karl Rahner, the great theologian of the second Vatican Council, says of saints:

> They are the imitators and the creative models of the holiness which happens to be right for, and is the task of, their particular age. They create a new style; they prove that a certain form of life and activity is a really genuine possibility; they show experimentally that one can be a Christian even in 'this'' way; they make such a type of person believable as a Christian type.[101]

Rahner's words are true not only of Christian saints and their significance for the Church. They capture the essence of religious genius, as we are proposing it impacts and finds expression in all world religions.

The religious genius thus identifies, suggests or models a new way of being in the world. Herein lies the genius - finding a new way of being, whether that new way relates to oneself, to God, to society or to the world. Suggesting a new way of being in the world is not so obvious, when we consider the fundamental reality of the religious genius. The religious genius lives on two planes simultaneously, or at least her horizons are readily and regularly informed by these two realities. From this dual vision, the saint draws forth a vision for humanity, for society. He announces a new way of being, for others to assume. But how can they, who do not share this dual vision, assume this vision? Is it not largely dependent on the capacity to keep this dual perspective in one's awareness? Herein lies one of the great paradoxes of religious genius. Religious genius seeks to drive humanity forward, to bring others to share the complex perspectives that the genius has attained, while they themselves lack that perspective. In the best of cases, the genius aids others to attain self transformation and to gain the broader vision themselves. In ordinary cases, the visionary may be taken by his word and his lessons may be accepted, at least inasmuch as partial vision allows for their implementation. In the worst case, and this is all too often the case, the genius becomes himself the object of appreciation, unable to communicate to others what he really sees and knows. Here the genius becomes a "saint," in the popular sense of sharing blessing, receiving adulation. The tension of the imitability and inimitabiliity of saints, which we encountered in our review of the literature, can ultimately be traced back to the paradox of religious genius. At its best, the novel statement leads to a new spiritual life for others. In the worst case, the genius, or saint, becomes its victim, or perhaps offers himself in altruistic love in a manner that captures only a part, a small part, of his testimony.

4.3 Manifestations of religious genius' core traits

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[101] Karl Rahner, The Church of the Saints, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, Helicon, Baltimore and London, quoted by Richard Kieckhefer, Sainthood in the Christian Tradition, in *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions,* p. 35.

The spiritual life is complex and multifaceted, its different facets radiating upon one another. The imposition of structure, where one value or dimension of the spiritual life is considered primary and the others its consequences, is of necessity somewhat arbitrary. As we saw with reference to James on asceticism, one man's consequences are another's preconditions. Granted the tenuousness and arbitrariness of some of the ways in which we impose order on the spiritual life, I would like to look at some aspects of the spiritual life that seem to me important in the framework of understanding or identifying religious genius. These aspects bring together, draw upon or otherwise relate to the principal dimensions described above.

4.3.1 Altruism

As the above discussion already hinted, altruism draws together several key dimensions of religious genius. It is founded upon love. It manifests awareness of a broader sense of being, wherein the identity of the one offering love or sacrifice is expanded to include the other. It implicates one in transcending the self, and is founded on a higher sense of self surrender to a goal, a vision, a higher spiritual reality. And more often than not it also exemplifies a logic of imitation. Whether it is the imitation of Christ's supreme sacrifice or the imitation of the Boddhisatva ideal, altruism grounds in a moment of sacrifice a higher spiritual vision.

4.3.2   Intention

Looking at the core features of our proposed model of religious genius, they are closely related to concern for intention. The life of a religious genius is not a casual life. It is a life lived with full intention, seeking to integrate all of life's manifold details into a focused drive for coherence and integration.[102] The very shift of emphasis beyond the self is an act of intention. Moving from caring for the self to caring for others requires, for the most part, some intentional shift of orientation. Reorienting all of life towards a higher vision requires a transformation of the will, and an intentional orientation toward the alternative, absolute reality. Purification is not possible without proper intention. Attention to motivation, to the quiet and hidden desires of the heart, in an attempt to purify them, requires great intentionality. Intention also defines altruism. Were it not for the orientation of intention, we would have no way of knowing whether an act is altruistic or selfish. The epitome of such orienting intention is perhaps the image of the bodhisattva, whose entire being depends on his intention to live for the sake of others.

4.3.3. The totality of demand

Swetenham has reminded us that there are no part time saints. Religious genius as well cannot be thought of as a part time vocation. Religious geniuses are individuals for whom the alternative reality, which they share alongside common reality, places a total claim, a claim for conforming their entire life, and reality itself, to what has become known to them. With it often comes a demand for

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[102]See Robert Neville, *Soldier, Sage, Saint*, p. 126.

full self control, in the service of the larger goal. The broader consciousness of which they partake redefines life and radiates to all its expressions. Hence the radicality of the life of the religious genius. Nothing is simply permissible, optional. Things and situations either do or do not serve the claims made by the ultimate for a totally dedicated, focused, intentional and sanctified life. This total claim is a powerful unifying force. All aspects of life come under control of the six principles. What this means is that religious genius is not simply a capacity; it is a way of being.

The consequence of totality is that everything is included. The life of religious genius is therefore a life of integration, or at least it strives to be. Swetenham spoke of the integrative power of love. I would like to suggest that one of the marks of religious genius is its integrative power. Not only their lives are integrated, bringing together their various aspects under the sign of a unifying spiritual vision; they offer a vision of integration to society. Consider the examples brought by Templeton. The figures of whom he speaks are models of integration, integrating distinct social groups and segments of society within a total spiritual view of society and of reality. Consider the work of the saints of India, who integrate various dimensions of life, in the pursuit of advancing a spiritual vision in society - integrating languages, caste differences and cultural differences. Consider the power of such religious geniuses as Rabbi Kook, whose entire being of love leads to one moment of integration after another, integrating law and spirit, philosophy and mysticism, secular and religious, and more.

If religious genius is a way of being, rather than a set of achievements, this would also lead to a specific approach to him or her. Being radiates, and the recognition that someone's being represents another order and offers a harmonious integrative vision for life, will do more than inspire people to accept the vision. It will draw people to that individual's being, seeking his company, presence and radiation.[103] This is how relationships with saints are formed, and this is why they are carried beyond life, when the saints enter the dimension of being which they already shared and brought forth in their lives.

4.3.4 The power of intuition

The creative drive that galvanizes the vision of the spiritual genius into a new statement of how to be in the here and now draws upon intuition and inspiration. In some cases, these take the full fledged form of revelations and prophecies, leading to the founding of a new religion or the revelation of a new scripture. More often, the religious genius galvanizes his or her integrated spiritual vision in a creative drive by means of an intuition, that redefines the meaning of past tradition and present day living.

Implementing the logic of imitation is also an act of intuition. The higher reality cannot be implemented in a facile way in the physical reality. Even something seemingly straightforward like the centrality of love must undergo some translation as it is extended from the region of divine love and its tenderness to the complexities and mandates of human relationships. Such translation

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[103]John Hawley, in his introduction to *Saints and Virtues*, quotes the second Vatican Council's reference to fellowship, as one of the things we seek from saints. The phenomenon is, I believe, universal.

processes may have to be reasoned, but before they are reasoned, they are intuited. Religious geniuses are masters of higher intuition.

Closely related to intuition is the power of imagination. Let us recall Huston Smith's description of religious geniuses and their capacity to shape the imagination. Let us also recall how central a role the imagination has played in the lives of mystics and prophets. Purification of the imagination is part of the overall purification of the person, but its fruits in the religious genius are such that they serve as a means of revealing the higher order in everyday consciousness, that of the genius or of his community. The capacity to contemplate a higher world, as well as the ability to bring its fruits and testament to the ordinary plane of existence, involve the imagination and the intuition, as these produce creative bridges, through which religious geniuses bridge heaven and earth.

4.4 The challenge of understanding power

In the discussion above the religious genius was portrayed as an ideal type, without any reference to the social implications and manifestations of his presence. The attempt to distinguish religious genius from popular religion's approach to saints and to their cult made that necessary. However, there are some dimensions associated with the lives of outstanding religious figures that must be taken into account in a suggested portrait of religious genius, or at least they must be kept in view, as a challenge to understanding and constructing a model of religious genius. These may be summed up by the word "power".

There are multiple aspects to power, some easier to understand and recognize than others. One easily understood dimension of power is the power of transformation. The religious genius' life itself is transformed through his or her spiritual process, but no less significantly, so is the life of those who come into contact with them. Some of the transformation occurs through the example and the extension of the dynamics of imitation to the religious genius himself, who is imitated by his followers and community. But there is a dimension of transformation that is beholden to the very being of the great spiritual person, rather than to the teaching or example. It is the experience of followers of all traditions that often the very being in the company of an outstanding spiritual personality is transformative. It allows the partaker to touch a reality that is otherwise not available to her and motivates long term changes, in the direction to which one aspires. The power of the religious genius is transformative. It is a purifying power, extending the reality of purity and love that are essential features of the religious genius. One dimension of creativity of the genius is his or her capacity to recreate, reshape, purify and transform those who attach themselves to him.[104] Hence, the company of such individuals is sought and the relationship with them becomes far deeper than simply reading their books and benefiting from their teachings. If the religious figure is passive as far as imitation goes, simply providing the model for others to follow, he or she is active in generating some form of power or presence that impacts the lives of others and aids them in their personal transformation.

Herein arises the first question to be posed with reference to power: How do we understand the transformative power that such religious figures manifest? Nothing in the model above necessarily

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[104]In the typology of religious genius vs. saint, this would be true for the saint as well.

leads to it. And yet, it is a given of religious life and an incontestable fact that can be documented in all traditions.[105] One could of course simply resort to the language of gift, suggesting that what the saint or genius brings to others is his gift. But such language, while not specifically theological, does not really have any explanatory power. What we require is to understand this power of transformation as the science of the saint, not simply as her gift.

Indeed, the question of power provides a far deeper challenge than understanding the dynamics of transformation. It leads us to a topic that is almost completely avoided in serious theological and contemporary philosophical discussion of saints, one that is almost an embarrassment to contemporary sensibilities or to contemporary norms of academic or philosophic discourse. I refer to the special powers associated with people who are often classified as saints and many of whom would fit our own description of religious genius. Such individuals often have special powers that are considered miraculous, whether they be powers of healing, exorcism, producing changes in nature or defying various rules of nature. As far as I can tell, academic discourse on saints relegates these phenomena to the realm of the sociological/anthropological descriptive work. One describes the faith of others in miracles, while distancing oneself from it, in the act of description. There is rarely an attempt to take seriously the miraculous element, associated with the saints.[106] And yet, this is a major aspect of the lives of saints and we cannot overlook it when we set out to describe religious genius. It is this dimension of power that makes saints more than philosophers or religious social workers.

For traditional theological understanding, the special powers are signs of a special relation with God or a sign of accumulated merit. But special powers are manifest also in exceptional individuals who belong to non-theistic traditions.[107] In talking of "religious genius" we seek to identify a way to describe the phenomena *without* appeal to internal theological understanding. At the very least, we ought to be able to state that the religious genius has tapped into some other order of being or reality and that the supernatural is in some way indicative of this attainment. But this minimal statement does not really advance our understanding of how this might occur.

Manifestation of special powers is probably one major difference between religious genius and any other kind of genius - religious genius is often accompanied by signs of power that exceed the

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[105]There is certainly room to reflect on whether all traditions, and sub-traditions, manifest this transformative, presence-based, aspect equally. While it is found in all traditions, it may be concentrated in some more than others. This calls for an explanation, that could be the subject of further reflection. Are the roots theological? Are they related to the expectations that a system generates? For example, does Christianity place less of an emphasis on this aspect of the saints, than, say, Hinduism? Would it be related to the recognition of other agents of transformation (the sacraments?), or to how saints are configured in terms of intercession and the importance of dead saints, as Van der Leeuw has observed?

[106]For a case of willingness to confront this dimension, see Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, p. xliii.

[107]The only tradition that seems to lack descriptions of such special powers is the Confucian tradition. See Rodney Taylor, The Sage as Saint, in Kieckhefer - Bond (eds.), *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*. Taylor claims this is because there is no theological superstructure to justify such powers, but that itself begs the question: Why was there no need for such a superstructure to develop and what does this tell us about Confucianism as a religion?

manifestations of creativity and inspiration found in other domains. One way of tackling this difference might be to point to ways in which religious genius is applied and practiced differently than other forms of genius. It is cultivated in an *intentional* way as part of broader religious training.[108] It is *total* in its demand and in how it implicates the life of the religious genius; it approaches the spiritual life in a *systematic* way, both in terms of the training offered and in terms of its extensivity. And it consciously focuses attention on a realm beyond, however it may be theologically understood. These differences may yield results that are far reaching.

The power dimension of religious genius seems to suggest something about human potential and its relation to something beyond the human or natural order. Some of the capacities that religious geniuses and saints manifest are not simply *more or enhanced* human capacities, such as one normally thinks of genius, but *other* than human capacities, inasmuch as they go against and transcend ordinary limits of human power and ability, as well as the natural order.

Transcending the self might provide a key to understanding how one accesses power, and it may be indeed that religious genius is the only one that intentionally and consciously seeks to go beyond the self. This would lead us to future reflections on the self and beyond, whether in theistic, cosmic or other terms.

As a step in dealing with these issues, I suggest we ought to examine the various theories offered within the traditions for how power is attained by special religious individuals. Beyond that, future development of the model of religious genius ought to keep this issue in mind, in providing possible ways of addressing the nexus of religious genius and special powers.

One possible element with which one might work, and that appears in many traditional accounts of the special powers associated with special religious individuals, is energetic. The three authors who developed the notion of religious genius - James, Swetenham and Sorokin - all appeal to energetic language at some point in their discussion, as noted above. Contemporary authors continue to employ such language.[109] If we could identify a way of establishing the correlates of levels of existence, either in terms of metaphysics or in terms of consciousness, and their related energy states, we might be able to advance our understanding of how and why religious geniuses manifest special power. Recognizing the energetic dimension of whatever spiritual state a religious genius has attained also provides the key to why their presence is transformative and sought after by believers. These seek to be in their energetic field, and not only to benefit from their teachings. That Hindus seek the darshan of the saint and that followers of Zaddikim understand they have an obligation to attach themselves to their masters suggest that being, presence and fellowship may be best understood not simply as important values, but as occurrences that involve an energetic contact or transfer between the saint/genius and his or her community.

4.5 Revisiting martyrdom

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[108]I believe it is fair to present Sorokin as concluding that while genius manifests in various ways, the only systematic and intentional training that leads to the domain of genius and its fruits is in religion. [109]See for instances Lawrence Babb's discussion of Sathya Sai Baba, in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. J. Hawley.

Martyrdom need not necessarily figure in a discussion of religious genius. But it does play a central role in discussions of saints, at least in the cases of Judaism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism. Does our model of religious genius allow us to revisit the traditional application of the title "saints" to martyrs? If religious geniuses are creative, identifying new ways of being and providing new ways of stating the meaning of existence, martyrs are anything but that. After all, their "claim to fame" is what takes them beyond this life, rather than leading to a novel statement of the meaning of life. Nevertheless, it does make sense to revisit the traditional ascription of sainthood to martyrdom in light of our model of religious genius. There may be good reasons for suggesting that martyrs can be considered pointers to or recollections of what we have chosen to classify as religious genius.   Let us consider the elements of   altruism, self surrender and sacrifice, offerings made in the name of love. These all bring to bear fundamental features of religious genius. The moment of martyrdom appears in many reports as a moment of rising above this order of reality and entering another - the broader dimension of reality, that we have suggested is constitutive of religious genius. The dynamics of imitation are also relevant to martyrs. Martyrs often give their lives in imitation of earlier martyrs or of some originary martyrdom, such as the crucifixion of Christ.   Perhaps one can think of martyrdom in relation to religious genius in a manner that is analogous to how certain drug related experiences have the power to reveal authentic religious experience. In a moment's flash one enters a reality, even if that reality has not been fully assumed in the person. Martyrdom may thus be construed as a reaching beyond yourself in a movement that is a symbol of true religious genius. Rather than making a statement of how the experience of the beyond should redefine the meaning of being here, martyrdom makes the statement of why, in light of the ultimate vision, it does not make sense to be here any longer. If martyrdom is not religious genius, it may nevertheless point to it.

5. Challenges, limitations and implications of "religious genius"

Suggesting a model for religious genius is the beginning of a conversation. A successful proposal is only the beginning of a conversation. Many questions follow from how the model has been constructed. The following section identifies some of them. Thinking through these questions is envisioned as part of the task of the long term project that this concept paper serves. Along with stating such questions, the following section will also spell out additional implications for how the model of "religious genius" could be applied.

5.1. Relating the model to reality

The usefulness of any model lies in its ability to help us view the data, and to organize it in ways we may have not previously considered. Any model involves us in the tension of the ideal and the real. Establishing a six point model, supplemented by additional features, as spelled out above, poses the question whether, and to what degree, attainment or perfection in all six points would be considered a condition for inclusion in the category. One may argue that the six dimensional polyhedron represents organic spiritual growth. One does not grow in only one capacity, but in multiple capacities that are interrelated, and therefore one ought to expect growth in all dimensions in parallel. But one can also envision unequal distribution of achievements. Could one live in awareness of another dimension of reality without having attained a meaningful degree of love? Is self surrender or awareness of collaboration with a higher power indeed a requisite component of "religious genius"?   Could one attain the various dimensions of perfection, without applying the logic of imitation? Which of the six dimensions ought to be considered *sine qua non* for inclusion in "religious genius"? The usefulness of the category lies in its allowing us to distinguish true religious greatness, captured as genius, from what might be termed "ordinary excellence", such that practitioners, teachers, religious experts and leaders often exhibit. The category's usefulness lies in its ability to describe, distinguish and classify, for purposes of our recognition and understanding. A clearer sense of what is indispensible for religious genius must therefore be identified.

Another way of capturing this question touches on the relationship of religious genius and perfection. With reference to saints, we encounter time and again the recognition that sainthood and perfection are not identical.[110]   The model of religious genius may be viewed as a model of perfection. Can there be imperfect religious genius? Can there be partial religious genius? What qualities or attributes may be either lacking or weaker than others, and still allow us to refer to someone as a religious genius, rather than as someone who is described by one of the other categories at our disposal? In short, how much imperfection can "religious genius" tolerate? If the uniqueness of "religious genius" lies in the creative and transformative dimension, perhaps more imperfection may be tolerated than might ideally be expected. Could it be that a "religious genius" might trace a path, that others walk with greater perfection than the genius?

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[110]On sainthood not being identical with moral perfection, see James Horne, Saintliness and Moral Perfection, *Religious Studies 27,* pp. 463-471.

5.2 Religious Genius and the structures of religion

Our reference to "religious genius" is to figures who play important roles within religious systems and who achieve recognition within those religions. The question presents itself: must one be a member (or a founder) of a religion in order to be a religious genius? Can there be manifestations of religious genius outside religion, or outside "organized" religion (obviously, a not hugely helpful term), such as in movements like the present day new-age movement? Establishing a model for religious genius could have one of two consequences for our appreciation of phenomena that fall outside the conventional bounds of religion. It could make us realize the value of religions, as opposed to personal initiatives and collective movements that do not possess the thick memory and culture of religions. It is possible that we only find religious geniuses, following the above model, within religions. This would lead to increased appreciation of religions. Religions may have many imperfections, but they alone produce those rare individuals, we choose to call religious geniuses. The alternative is that we might indeed be able to identify religious geniuses outside recognized religions. If so, the model will provide us with a means of discerning the qualities of these individuals and allow us to recognize in them genuine expressions of the highest religious order.

As an extension of this question, we might also ask whether religious geniuses can exist completely independently of community. Regarding saints, it has been claimed that saints belong to communities. Thus René Latourelle: "Heroic sanctity cannot be fully efficacious unless it appears at the top of a pyramid whose base is established in collective holiness'.[111] Would we make a similar claim concerning the religious genius? To the extent that genius is creative, the creativity is likely to manifest in relation to the broader community, making the possibility of "eremetic genius", so to speak, completely hypothetical. If a sense of the interconnectedness of being is fundamental to the religious genius, there may be no point in thinking of the genius as a lone individual.

There are other questions that belong to a consideration of the relation of religious genius and religious structures. Katherine Young has presented a model of saints in relation to existing religious structures, captured in terms of order and chaos. According to her model, saints, presumably by definition, take some significant stand in relation to the structural norms of religion, either by affirming or by reforming them. Does "religious genius" play out similar dynamics and complexities in relation to religious structures?   Are radicality, possibly even antinomianism, constitutive of the religious genius,[112] or would religious genius find expression equally in the conservative drive and in the drive for reforming?

But perhaps the most relevant question for us to consider, under this rubric, is what is the relationship between "religious genius" and other categories that describe the structures of religion or the history of religions. Looking at the literature, one finds a variety of categories that have been

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[111]Rene Latourelle, Sanctity: A Sign of Revelation, *Theology Digest* 15, 1967, pp. 41-46, quoted in Kieckhefer, Sainthood in the Christian Tradition, p. 38.
[112]Sir John Templeton seems to think that religious geniuses have precisely such a reforming/revolutionary capacity. In fact, his use of "religious genius" does not even touch on the possibility of what Young calls "norm preserving" saints.

suggested, that are not always fully useful. Thus, for Van der Leeuw we have the founder, the reformer, the teacher, the philosopher and the theologian. For Wach, we find the magician as a type. He also includes in his typology the diviner, the saint, the priest, the seer, the prophet and the religiosus. And we must not forget the example and the mediator. And we have not yet mentioned the fact that among founders you have prophets, teachers, philosophers, wise men and reformers. Clearly, there is no clear cut consensus as to what categories serve us as we describe religions, and many of the categories that have been suggested have been sufficiently unuseful to never leave meaningful impact. Does "religious genius" provide us a means of identifying an important core, that would cut across some of the typologies already offered? Does it allow us to distinguish between itself and other types of categories? Founders and reformers may both be expressions of religious genius. What then might be excluded from religious genius?

This brings us to the question of the relationship of religious genius and religious leadership. Saints are closely aligned with religious leadership. Saints are usually leaders and there is implicit pressure to recognize leaders as saints, as the continuing efforts at canonizing popes suggestively tell. One of the possible advantages of speaking of "religious genius" rather than of saints is to weaken the nexus of saints and leadership. Genius may accordingly be distinguished from leadership, for the most part, rather than identified with it. Let us consider Shankaracharyas or Popes. From the perspective of the offices they hold, these figures occupy the top of their respective religious structures. To their followers they may seem like the ultimate, leading to ascription of the highest, in whatever terms such ascription is available. But from the perspective of "religious genius" they would be appreciated based on a different set of criteria - their own spiritual attainment, coupled with the novelty of their vision and statement of purpose. Religious genius thus provides us with the possibility of relating to the domain of religious leadership in ways other than as expressions of the highest available categories.

One final point should be raised in the context of religious genius and its relation to religious structures, and that is the question of whether genius is transferable or could be the subject of dynastic continuity. The question provides us with an interesting case of "routinization of charisma." We intuitively think of the religious genius as a lone individual, much as we think of the saint in similar terms. The history of religious institutions shows us, however, that with regard to saints, or outstanding religious leaders, some of them are contextually identified within dynasties, that transfer status, and along with it power, knowledge and possibly piety and perhaps even genius, from one generation to another. Religions that do not have monastic traditions develop hereditary lineages,where father transfers to son the mantle of a spiritual life and a form of leadership that could be a contender not only for sainthood but also for religious genius. Consider the Sikh gurus. Consider some of the Hasidic dynasties, who have produced towering spiritual figures, generation after generation. Is their greatness only in the eyes of the beholder, their own flock, or is there some greatness or genius, that is sown from generation to generation? Consider the Sufi lineages that are hereditary and produce Sufi masters in successive generations. This has significant implications for the problem of genius and its cultivation. If we are able to recognize religious genius meaningfully

within dynasties, this suggests it can be cultivated and grown.[113] This has huge implications for the social and educational consequences of reference to religious genius.

5.3 Who is *not* a religious genius?

For a category to be meaningful, it must include, as well as exclude. Whom might we have thought ought to be a saint that is not a religious genius? Whom might we have tended to regard with great esteem, who would nevertheless not meet our criteria for religious genius? I have already suggested that the pressure to identify those in office with the highest in a given tradition would be relieved by adopting the new category. Who else might *not* be a religious genius?

For one, the imaginary sadhu who is absorbed in meditation, radiating peace and harmony to the world from the intensity of his absorption in the divine. If such a person does exist, he may be a great holy being, but not a religious genius. Fulfillment of the spiritual goals of the tradition should be kept distinct from religious genius, with its dynamic and creative character. Such a figure might validate   tradition for others, but unless he or she is able to restate, update or otherwise make the traditional speak in new ways, should not be considered a religious genius. The test of literary legacy, to which I referred above, comes in handy at this point. If the imaginary sadhu really has something new, or even meaningful, to say, beyond modelling the traditional ideals of the tradition, we would probably know about it, through the channels of dissemination available in the tradition.

Another figure who would be excluded is the priest. The priest has an important role in maintaining the tradition, performing its rituals and providing a bridge between the community and the absolute. But priests are not geniuses. Priests model religious excellence, when they perform their duties properly. So do scholars. But neither is in and of himself a candidate for religious genius. However, religious genius can manifest through either priest or scholar. Consider Padre Pio. Consider Jean Marie Vianney, the Curé of Ars. These individuals advance their tradition by helping redefine the vocation of priests. They do not simply model good priesthood, they redefine it precisely because they bring to bear the fullness of the spiritual life, manifested in the six defining features of the religious genius. From that platform they restate what it means to be a priest, and what it means to be a Christian. Similarly, the religious genius may communicate his genius through scholarship. Examples are numerous, but let us return to the example of Rabbi Kook, already cited. One readily thinks of Al-Ghazalli or Ibn El Arabi as models of religious genius, expressed through scholarship. In fact, scholarship may be one of the most common expressions of religious genius. But while religious geniuses may express themselves through scholarship, most scholars, important and valuable as they are,   are not religious geniuses.

5.4 Modalities of religious genius

Having suggested who is not religious genius, we must ensure that the category is useful. In the tension between the ideal and the real, we must ensure that the category describes meaningfully

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[113]Barring, of course, a purely metaphysical view of dynasties, that relies on providence, reincarnation or some other explanation, that supplants the "nurture" dimension of cultivating genius.

certain individuals. In part, this goes back to the question of whether in order to speak of religious genius we require perfection in all aspects of the proposed model. If we do not require perfection (assuming we could identify when that has been reached), does a meaningful measure of all six qualities allow us to refer to someone as a genius, a "little genius"? After all, how can we measure love or purity, other than the indication that someone *impresses* us as being in possession of those qualities. Perhaps, some religious geniuses would have more of some attributes and less of others, ensuring, nevertheless, that all six "bases" are "covered". Perhaps, we ought to approach the definition from the "back end". Looking at creativity, the impact on society and the restatement of what it means to exist and what the meaning of the tradition is in the here and now, we would then seek to determine upon what foundation these creative expressions take place. Recognizing there is a continuum in the attainment of all attributes, we would nevertheless argue that a creative teacher or theologian, or social activist, who neither strives towards love, purity and self surrender, nor manifests those attributes in a visible way, should be considered a great teacher, but not a religious genius. "Religious genius" would be reserved for those whose creativity and contribution are commensurate with a higher state of being. While we lack the tools for measuring such states of being, we are able to recognize the presence of these attributes, either through the life of the individual, or through their teaching.

Let me illustrate the notion of varying degrees or modalities by appeal to specific cases. Let us begin by contrasting Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. It would take a spiritual brute to fail to recognize the existential superiority of Ramakrishna to Vivekananda. In terms of spiritual height, saintliness, grounding of presence in an alternative order of being, in short, in terms of all the qualities suggested as defining "religious genius" Ramakrishna would emerge as a prime candidate. Ramakrhishna surely has something novel to teach us, especially as we consider the spiritual life in an interreligious context. But if we limit our use of the category to Ramakrishna only, very few people would be recognized, and the category would lose much of its relevance. Moreover, the difficulty in identifying individuals and assessing their spiritual attainment would further complicate use of the category. Let us then consider the possibility that Vivekananda too manifests religious genius. His genius is grounded in the same vision of reality as that of his master. It is obviously grounded in the sincere attempts of his own person to live to the fullest the six fold ideals, that define "religious genius". These we cannot measure, though it would seem that his attainment is of another order than that of his master. That much we can probably say without offending even members of the Ramakrishna order. But in terms of genius, Vivekanda too has genius, great genius. He has the ability to restate the meaning of his tradition for his day. He has the ability to be creative in teaching and in delivering a message. His creativity finds expression in the realization that structures need to be created, in order to ensure the continuity of the message, and in his ability to successfully create such structures. He is thus a founder of sorts, even if in terms of the rarefied vision and personal spiritual standing, he himself would acknowledge how much more advanced his own master is. That one is viewed as an avatar while the other is viewed as a founding Swami sums the point up adequately.

This dynamic may be recognized in other religious movements. Let us take Breslav hassidism as a case in point. Rabbi Nachman of Breslav is a foremost religious genius. He meets all the criteria described above. He brings forth new teachings, new spiritual information, if you will. He speaks

from the exalted heights of his mystical attainment, while addressing a community in the here and now. He is succeeded in leadership by Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov. The latter is his Boswell. He engages in the most brilliant literary activity, drawing forth the implications for daily life of the mystical insights of Rabbi Nachman. He provides structure to the movement, laying foundations for its long term survival. He so deeply identifies with the message and teaching of Rabbi Nachman that he is able to assimilate it, digest it, and bring it forth in a new manner, creative in all respects. Yet, Rabbi Nathan does not seem to enjoy the same kind of direct experience of the other world that Rabbi Nachman did. It remains an orienting framework for him, but his own imitation is largely that of Rabbi Nachman, and by assimilating his teachings he is constantly oriented in light of the six criteria. How much of them he has actually attained in his own personal consciousness, we cannot tell; surely much less than the master himself. He is surely a religious leader; he may be the de factor founder of the movement, he may even be considered saintly, perhaps even a saint. What of religious genius? The present line of argumentation would see in Rabbi Nathan another modality of religious genius. Sufficiently grounded in the core existential and spiritual dimensions of the religious genius, he drives the tradition forward, brings about new articulations of its meaning and creatively, very creatively, restates its meaning for the every day life of the community that he founds or structures.[114]

We could continue to explore this dynamic. Symbolically, we may play out Moses against Joshua, as in the sample text that will be analyzed in the appendix. Historically, we may consider the kinds of genius that St. Francis and St. Bonaventure represent. In contemporary times, we might revisit the contribution of Pramukh Swami to the explosive expansion of Swaminarayan Hinduism, in relation to the religious genius of Swaminarayan himself. This dynamic can be explored in so many contexts that it might itself become a fruitful axis along which to explore the usefulness of "religious genius" and its possible applications.

5.5 Religious genius and religio - cultural contexts

A theoretical model has to be tested against the particularity of religions and different religious cultures. The ideal of religious genius may not manifest itself equally, or freely, under all circumstances, and the tensions between specific religious realities and the ideal model challenges our ability to recognize religious genius. Let me illustrate this with reference to Judaism. I have suggested that love is constitutive of religious genius. Not surprisingly, love as the domain of the saints was highlighted by Christian authors, but certainly the ideal of love, and of sacrificial love, can be identified in all religions. What happens when the broad mandate to love is constrained by cultural or historical circumstances? This question arises, for instance, in the case of Judaism. Judaism has produced some great masters of love. One of those is Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, a Hasidic master of the 18/19th century. He was famous for his loving capacities. A look

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[114]It would be interesting to consider the two figures in terms of power. Does the one type of religious genius manifest more power, either transformative or miraculous, than the other? Does power provide an index by means of which we can further nuance our references to degrees or modalities of religious genius?

at his teachings, however, reveals something disturbing.[115] When it comes to non-Jews, the love-talk is often replaced by its opposite. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak is not alone in this. The greater part of Jewish mystics, and the greater part of manifestations of literary and spiritual genius of the mystical movements, are quite selective in their worldview, in ways that do not conform with the expansive vision that Fowler ascribes to Stage 6, the highest stage of personal religious evolution. This fact is quite disturbing to contemporary students of Jewish mysticism, who seek at the same time to maintain an open perspective towards the "other". But in the present context it constitutes a challenge to the notion that religious genius is characterized by universal love. There are clearly cultural, ideological and historical constraints, that do not allow the model to be expressed in its fullness. Does this mean that these individuals are not religious geniuses, or that religious genius ought to be appreciated while taking into account various contemporary factors and constraints.[116] Perhaps we might distinguish between religious genius that manifests within cultural pressures and norms and such that manifests beyond them. A qualitative distinction between them would allow us to consider differing degrees of religious genius, corresponding to how close the specific case is to the ideal. If so, the contrast between Rav Kook's universal love and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's love of Israel could be construed as a contrast between pure religious genius and religious genius that comes through the limitations and confines of a particular religious culture.

Another illustration of the problem, again taken from Judaism. Religious genius, it has been suggested, has a dimension of novelty, rearticulation and restatement of ultimate truths in new ways, suitable to the times. It is noteworthy that the greater part of those who from a spiritual perspective, i.e. in terms of conformity to the six defining elements of religious genius, would have been considered religious geniuses, have done little by way of advancing a reform or a restatement of Judaism in contemporary terms. The reasons are historical. Reform was undertaken by figures who would not at all qualify, based on our model, as religious geniuses, thereby pushing those whom we would tend to identify as either saints or religious geniuses, into a reactionary historical stance. Their contribution to contemporary posturing has been one of preserving the old, rather than offering fresh articulations to their core spiritual vision. Does that mean that Judaism has, to a large extent, lost the capacity to produce religious geniuses, due to the historical and cultural factors shaping its history for the past century and more? Perhaps. Alternatively, we would have to take these circumstances into account and to seek to identify more limited expressions of religious genius within these constraints.

In a broader way, we might pose the question of whether the ideal polyhedron model will be expressed in more or less similar ways in all religious cultures. Do different religions place a different emphasis on some of its features? When, if at all, should that lead us to revise the model? And can all religions recognize themselves in this model? This may be the first question we ought to ask of the model - the ability of different religions to see themselves in it. The challenge of adapting the ideal to the real is not only a challenge of considering the individual religious genius in light of a

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[115]The tensions are discussed in a forthcoming contribution of Rabbi Or Rose to the Jewish theology of religions database of the Elijah Intstitute.
[116]Need I raise the mirror image challenge of recognizing the spiritual genius of some great Christian mystics who shared contemporary hostile attitudes to Jews?

theoretical model. It is also the challenge that different religions must recognize the parameters that have combined to form a portrait of religious genius as being of central importance to them, and to recognize the model itself as something that they can either assume or recognize themselves in.

5.6 Religious genius and gender

A final thought concerning the prospects included in the use of the category - its implications for gender. There has been some discussion of how sainthood has been constructed in terms of gender, leading to feminist critique of saints, mainly Christian.[117] Does "religious genius" allow us to address this challenge in a new way? Does it provide a fresh beginning? Going beyond a particular tradition and its social constructs (typically: Christianity) might make feminist concerns less pressing. The possibility to construct a novel model might also allow us to identify distinctly feminine dimensions of religious genius.

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[117]Elizabeth Stuart, *Spitting at Dragons: Towards a Feminist Theology of Sainthood*, Mowbray, New York, 1996; Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*, Continuum, New York, 2006; *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timear Szell, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1991; *Gendered Voices, Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine Mooney, Penn University Press, Philadelphia, 1999; *Women Saints in World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma, SUNY Press, Albany, 2000.

6. Implications for understanding wisdom/spiritual information

In the following section I shall attempt to think through some of the implications of the proposed model of religious genius for understanding wisdom. The term genius has some cognitive dimension associated with it. Hence, it seems more than appropriate to reflect on the kind of wisdom that the model of religious genius makes possible. Closely related to the notion of wisdom is the notion of spiritual information.[118] In what follows I shall seek to identify some of the implications of our model for both.

6.1 What is the wisdom of religious genius?

The wisdom of religious genius grows out of a totality of being, a total commitment, and a total view of life. Religious genius is grounded in a situation of mind and being within broader reality. The wisdom that comes of it should therefore be considered primarily as the outcome of such existential repositioning. This means that it is not primarily the gaining of knowledge, the refinement of discipline or methodology or the accumulation of facts.[119] Rather, it is the ground upon which all these activities might take place, and when they do, they are colored in a completely different way than they might be, without the particular existential grounding of the religious genius. If wisdom is founded upon gaining experience, the experience that religious genius provides grows from the total existential grounding that characterizes the religious genius. An important component of this positioning is the understanding of connections, the view of the whole in relation to details, and the regard of wisdom that ensues from such a view.

The wisdom of the religious genius draws heavily on intuition and inspiration. While it may, and frequently does, appeal to reason as it communicates itself and as it checks the validity of its insights and their application, its primary drive has more to do with other means of knowledge, than with reason. It is founded upon attunement to another order of being and the attempt to convey such attunement is the root of wisdom. The intellect provides checks and controls but these often come before or after the core recognition of wisdom. Before - in the training that the religious genius undergoes as part of his formation, and that becomes an inseparable part of him. After - as a second stage, after the primary expression of revelation, inspiration or intuition has done its work.

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[118]The term is very much a Templetonian one, as the title of Sir John's book, *Possibilities for over One Hundredfold More Spiritual Information* suggests. Use of this term in the present document is conditioned by the fact that it is being submitted to the Templeton Foundation.

[119]In view of the centrality of learning and erudition among figures who might be described as religious geniuses, one might ask to what extent we can identify a propensity for religious genius, as presented here, among the learned, who contribute to the literary tradition of their religion. Nevertheless, even if they do make significant contributions to the cumulative knowledge of their tradition, the purpose of religious genius is ultimately not to enhance the knowledge of the particular religious tradition but to provide answers to the most fundamental challenges of existence.

Gaining wisdom is to be distinguished from gaining intellectual information. Wisdom is an apprehension of spiritual reality and provides deeper insight into being itself. Therefore, the constitutive elements of religious genius are not simply character traits or virtues. They are ways of being, and each of them serves an epistemological function. Love is a way of knowing; love-wisdom produces a type of knowledge. Knowledge grounded in humility, in the transcendence of the self, offers perspectives unlike ego-bound knowledge. The connection of heaven and earth, the connection of individual and cosmos, the relationship of the individual to society - all these are profound realizations that produce a wisdom, nay - that are themselves the core wisdom of religious genius. The *genius* of religious genius is how to translate these core recognitions in novel ways, how to communicate them, and how to make them acceptable and practicable, the basis for social relations and a program for daily living. The core spiritual recognition undergoes a process of translation, and herein lies the unique genius of each and every religious genius. This translation draws on his or her mental faculties, intelligence, erudition, social situation, religious training, stock of metaphors, life experience, humour and more. The core reality is similar, if not the same. The means of applying and translating it to different situations - religious, social, intellectual, is where religious geniuses differ from one another, each seeking to articulate his or her vision in conformity with the tools at their disposal and the need they seek to address.

Wisdom is ultimately a statement of how to be in the world, and more particularly, how to be in the world today. Wisdom is therefore active or generative. It is not only the seemingly passive contemplation of eternal truths, but the active application of whatever may be eternal and universal into the concrete and practicable terms of the here and now. Therefore, new social strategies, forms of social organization, action and service in the "real" world, are all manifestations of wisdom. Wisdom recognizes the need and responds to it by providing an appropriate statement, often novel in its application.

Application is key in thinking of wisdom and one of the most important dimensions of applying wisdom is applying it to the lives of individuals. When people seek wisdom they seek it as it applies to their own lives. I have seen "classical" teachers, voices of their tradition, some even saintly, who are unable to apply their knowledge to the life of the individual and to the challenges the individual is having in his or her personal situation. Perhaps such teachers were never challenged themselves to bring forth wisdom into their personal life, a wisdom that would redefine and reorient their own lives.[120] The teacher who is able to make his or her wisdom speak to the personal life situation of those seeking their advice is the teacher who possesses true wisdom. Adapting wisdom to a situation, collective as well as personal, is a creative act, that calls on some of the core features of the religious genius - the integrative capacity, the creative capacity, the intuitive understanding and the fruits of a life lived in selfless offering, transcending the limitations of the personal self. Spiritual direction is thus a fruit of religious genius.[121]

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[120]See James Horne's suggestion, in Saintliness and Moral Perfection,   that holiness requires the ability to read the narrative of one's life.
[121]I wonder whether it would be too strong to suggest that inability to offer spiritual direction is a sign of some degree of lack of religious genius.

6.2 What kind of spiritual information does religious genius reveal?

One may characterize three types of spiritual information, that religious geniuses reveal:

1. Gnostic teachings regarding supernal worlds and the divinity. While there may be room for comparative study of this body of teaching, on the whole this may not be a major source for comparative study, largely due to divergences between teachings. Efforts at harmonization of parallel systems (say: Kabbalah and tantra) are made periodically, and do constitute one way of addressing divergent bodies of knowledge that make similar claims to manifest information, in the capacity that we here call religious genius.

2. Means and methods of how religious geniuses addresses contemporary challenges of the spiritual life and of today's world. Considering that leaders, saints and geniuses of different religions live in similar times, it is interesting to see how they do or don't respond in similar ways to common challenges. As global society increases its impact upon individual faith communities, this challenge becomes more interesting and more promising. To what extent, in view of related challenges, can we identify parallel "messages", "insights" or strategies across religions.

The following thesis is worth exploring: Increasingly, religious genius is being articulated in relation to contribution to society, alleviation of suffering, and caring for the needy. Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism all feature increasing emphasis on this, by those religious leaders who are best candidates for being viewed as religious genius. Is this true for other religions as well, and if not, why not?

3. "Classical" information, involving teachings on proper living. Religious geniuses from all religious cultures at all times have taught how to live. Here the following challenge arises: Do religious geniuses tell us more or less the same thing across religious traditions? How universal is fundamental spiritual information? If the portrait above, based on the six qualities, is indeed universal, one of its consequences would be that those who fit the pattern would offer teachings that are closely related.[122] Is this born out? If not, what are the cultural and historical factors that frustrate such commonality?

Considering the different types of spiritual information provided by religious geniuses, one might ask whether the spiritual information that religious geniuses glimpse or transmit could be classified. Would such classification allow us to develop a typology or taxonomy of religious geniuses, allowing us to approach them from the perspective of their teachings?

Finally, religious geniuses at times repeat age old truths, even if re-presented in novel ways and at times offer novel revelations. Is there anything further that can be said on this matter, besides this generalization? Can the comparative study reveal anything further concerning the dynamics of altering, updating, transforming or offering new information, and the circumstances under which we might proclaim spiritual information to be new? A hypothesis: the three types of information presented will exhibit different emphases in terms of novelty. The first, the Gnostic dimension, is subject to the greatest degree of originality, creativity and transmutation. It is also the least verifiable,

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[122]This is the thesis of the Dalai Lama in his most recent book, noted above. The Dalai Lama seeks to take commonality beyond the rudimentary affinity of the golden rule and to make it more fundamental to the religions' teachings.

and here one must basically rely on the authority of the religious genius. The second will exhibit some innovation, but mainly in terms of methods and means, not in terms of substance. The third is the most permanent or stable form of spiritual information, least susceptible to changes and novelty.

6.3 Validating spiritual information - grounding and limitations of pluralism

The novelty of spiritual information is not gained through discursive process. Subject to intuition and the imagination, some aspects of spiritual information can exhibit great originality. This is particularly true for the gnostic type of spiritual information. This poses a serious challenge for verifiability. How do you know that the theosophy of R. Isaac Luria is valid? How do you know that the revelation of a given scripture is valid? Religious genius brings one into the domain of new information, that often takes the form of a revelation. Having recognized the foundational structures of religious genius, how are we to approach the diversity of revelations? One possibility would be to ascertain that someone belongs to the category of religious genius, having identified significant presence of the various markers and criteria by which religious genius is recognized or defined. Following such recognition, we would be led to recognize in a body of teaching or a revelation a genuine expression of religious genius. This does mean we will necessarily adopt it. But if, say, we concluded that the Book of Mormon was an expression of religious genius, this would certainly change our attitude to the Mormon religion, enhancing respect for it, while leaving open the question of truth.Thus, knowledge of the instrument of the revelation and recognition of those attributes by means of which we recognize religious genius would lead to attitudinal change. At the least it would allow us to recognize in the Book of Mormon an expression of religious genius. This would be more objective than the claim that it is a revealed book, which is purely a faith claim. If the instrument of revelation could be presented in terms of the lifestyle, moral attainment and overall degree of human caliber that could provide a framework for the activation of intuition and vision, yielding a new religious expression, legitimacy of that revelation would be enhanced. The fruits of such recognition would surely be greater respect. Conversely, agents that do not manifest the characteristics of religious genius would be more readily considered as having produced works of their own imagination.

The theological challenge that emerges from this suggestion is whether we can formulate a theory that would allow us to recognize certain revelations as expressions of religious genius without buying into their truth claims and the factuality that they claim for their revelation. Other than brushing aside the description of the agent of revelation as historically untrue, a projection of the faithful of that tradition, we are forced to think through the implications of recognizing multiple expressions of religious genius in terms of a theory of pluralism. Some theory of multiple revelations could be developed that assumes revelations are suited to their audiences, or otherwise compatible, despite appearances. The already mentioned distinction between greater and lesser religious geniuses is also of potential significance here. So is the distinction between different types of spiritual information. The third type of information, the "classical teaching" is to a large extent a guarantee of the overall quality of new information. Deviation and variety in the gnostic dimension may be ultimately of lesser significance than the faithful of any particular tradition, who are concerned with "truth", might think.

7. Implications for character development

Saints have figured long in discussions that are relevant to the concerns of character formation. As exemplars of virtue, they have provided an example that invites emulation. As we have seen, this dimension of the saints' lives has led to reflection on the tension between imitability and inimitability in relation to saints. This was the major contribution of the collection of essays, edited by Kieckhefer and Bond.[123] Most discussions have highlighted the fact that saints do things that others would not and should not wish to do. They are extravagant, out of order and not appropriate subjects for emulation. Take St. Francis' public stripping in the market place in Assisi and you have a perfect example of the inimitability of the saint.

Authors who participated in the Kieckhefer - Bond project all sought to demonstrate similar tensions within their traditions, and doubtless similar tensions can be identified. However, as I have read and reflected on various sources featuring the saints and how they function in different traditions, a suspicion has grown in me as to the centrality of example and imitation in the first place, as a means of capturing the import and function of the saint in traditions other than Christianity. As one who is actually quite close to the strands of Judaism that venerate holy people,[124] I realize that I have never considered the import of *zaddikim* in terms of emulation or moral example. My impression is that the same is true for Hinduism and Islam. Highlighting example along with fellowship and intercession may be a particularly Christian balance.[125] Fellowship and intercession I certainly do recognize from my encounters with other religions. Emulation may play an important role as well, but it does not necessarily follow from the notion of model or example. And here we come to the challenge of articulating the implication of religious genius for character formation. Given the suspicion that in traditions other than Christianity, example is not the main thrust of the saint's contribution to character formation, I would like to propose another way of understanding the genius' contribution to character formation.

Let us also say a word here regarding the notion of moral perfection. As already noted, we find in the literature some discussion as to whether saints should be considered morally perfect. If they are not perfect morally, they have attained some other kind of perfection, by means of which they are recognized as saints. This is usually related to their relationship to God, rather than to morality. Broadening this discussion to religious genius, one might ask whether we assume that a religious genius is morally perfect. Whether or not moral perfection is even possible, it seems to me that what is of utmost importance is the *being* of the religious genius, not his or her moral achievements.

If so, what is the testimony that the religious genius provides for others? If she is not primarily about providing an example, is there any relevance to the religious genius, in terms of character formation? I believe the answer should be positive. The religious genius offers us a testimony of what it means to be human. She points to a fullness of humanity, of human potential, that is

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[123]The tension was already noted by James, *Varieties*, p. 125.
[124]Cohn in his contribution in the Kieckhefer volume claims that for most of Judaism, the notion of holy man is foreign. He acknowledges some divergences from this principal.
[125]See John Hawley's introduction to *Saints and Virtues*.

achieved in relation to a higher order of being. The religious genius thus provides a *model of being*. What is to be emulated are not virtues, actions or qualities, but the very orientation of being in relation to absolute, the larger whole, both horizontal and vertical. But this would seem even more impossible and inimitable than the imitation of actions and virtues. What has been gained by shifting the focus of attention from the genius' manifestation to the core of his existential orientation?

It is here that the logic of imitation, fundamental to religious genius, finds its significance. As suggested, imitation happens in successive stages, wherein one level imitates the other, each looking to the next level ahead, and the entire chain looking beyond. A religious genius, much like the zaddik or guru, is a model of being, a reminder of a different way of orientating oneself in the world. His overall being is a call to emulate, on a lower level, the composite nature of being that he represents. Clearly, the tension of imitability and inimitability could lead to failure to take the genius as a reminder of a higher way of being, turning to him for other purposes instead. As suggested, the tension may be grounded in the existential paradox of imitating a higher order of being. But from another perspective, imitation is possible. The structures and fundamental orientations can be preserved, as one degree of life opens to another, making some kind of imitation possible. Thus, built into the reality of the religious genius is the possibility of evoking the memory or the aspiration for a higher way of being. Much as the religious genius turns towards the ideal reality and seeks to capture it in this world, the follower has the possibility of turning to the religious genius and deriving inspiration for how to be. The religious genius' contribution to character formation thus touches the very foundational challenge of how to be in the world.[126]

What the religious genius can provide for character formation is the orientating framework for being, in light of which questions of priority, meaning and values of life are determined. These provide a framework for the very viewing of one's life and its purpose. Purpose thus emerges as a key term designating what the religious genius can provide in the life of others - a reorientation of being, in light of his own example, that enables the follower to redefine, reorient and awaken the sense of purpose of his or her being. "ordinary" saints model virtues; saints who are religious geniuses provide one with the deep sense of purpose, in light of which to orient life.

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[126]It is worth repeating here the observations of Joachim Duyndam, Hermeneutics of Imitation: A Philosophical Approach to Sainthood and Exemplariness, noted above, concerning the importance of imitation for educational purposes, or what we here call character formation. In a world that increasingly imitates the models put up by commercial forces, recognition of this fundamental dynamic, that enables imitation of being on a higher level, is a much needed corrective.

8. Implications for interreligious relations

The present project grows out of an interest in exploring how saints might provide a site for interreligious conversation and how "religious genius" might allow us to advance our understanding of saints and exceptional religious personalities, in other traditions as well as in our own. From the outset, the category of religious genius was approached with the hope of identifying a category that is not colored by one particular religion. Thus, if the thesis of the present paper is accepted, we have in "religious genius" a category that allows us to speak uniformly and somewhat objectively about outstanding religious personalities, as we encounter them across religious traditions. In what follows, I shall offer further reflections concerning the potential this project has for advancing interreligious understanding.

8.1 Religious genius as an inspiration for other traditions

We begin this section by recalling a brief quote from John Templeton on religious geniuses:

> In addition to the geniuses given more-than-human minds, god also creates saints and prophets gifted with more-than-human souls. A prophet is a pioneer in the vast uncharted regions of the spirit. For spiritual progress to flourish, do we need to cultivate interest and humility to listen carefully and learn from such people, recognizing their important gifts?

The challenge to listen and learn from geniuses of the spirit involves more than simply opening "our" minds. For people who come from religions traditions, it involves going beyond the bounds of their tradition, in order to listen deeply to a message that was articulated within the framework of another tradition. This, as history teaches us, is not always easy. It is something that must be cultivated and justified. It is a domain where, for the most part, our religions provide us with very little precedent and at times they even make such listening impossible, either by directly forbidding it, or by creating conditions that are unfavorable to such listening. The present challenge is therefore how to develop an attitude, a theory, a culture of listening to the wisdom of saints, of religious geniuses from other traditions. If we can achieve this, then we have opened the door to significant advances in relations between religions and created wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth for their followers. This then is our task, to try to apply "religious genius" not only as a means of understanding or respecting the other, but as a path that might lead to greater sharing, inspiration and shared growth between the religions.

It is worth noting that saints have always provided some kind of common ground between traditions. This is particularly true on the level of popular saint worship, though it may be argued that very often the elites too were quite open to receiving influence from others. On the level of popular piety we encounter time and again the phenomenon of common saint worship. Muslims and Hindus share saint shrines in India; Jews and Muslims do so in Morocco and elsewhere; Christians share saint shrines in the various localities in which Christianity has taken hold, in short everywhere. When one seeks blessing and requires intercession, why stop with saints of your own tradition? But when it comes to drawing inspiration or teaching, the situation becomes more complex.

Let us then consider in what way religious geniuses could allow us to receive from another tradition. The above discussion on the contribution of the religious genius to character formation is helpful to the present task. As suggested, the significance of the religious genius for character formation does not lie in the one-on-one attempt to imitate any of his actions or qualities. Rather, it consists in the modeling of being, the invitation, the witness to a way of being in the world. Lawrence Cunningham has spoken of the saint as a parable, by means of which we are called to the spiritual life.[127] This notion is particularly helpful in an interreligious context. The religious genius of one tradition can serve as a parable for the faithful of another. The parable need not be followed in and of itself, but it recalls something for us, that which hides behind the parable. What it recalls is the higher realm of reality of whch the religious genius partakes. And this realm is common to all. Consequently, the faithful of one tradition can be reminded by means of the parable offered by the genius of the other tradition of that which is common to all, the ultimate quest to position oneself in relation to the highest aspects of reality. The religious genius takes one beyond the tradition-specific teaching, through the invitation to imitate and conform to a higher reality, making its transformative power available.[128]

The question of whether it is possible to draw inspiration from saints of another tradition was explored by Flescher et al., in their discussion of altruism. They argued that it is possible to follow the example and the teaching of saints of one tradition, without belonging to that tradition.[129] As they note, increasingly teachers are offering just that kind of teaching. Teachers like the Dalai Lama and many of the teachers coming out of India are offering teachings that are geared not only to their own members, but to the world at large, including followers of other religions.[130]

If one considers not the specifically moral teaching, as did Flescher, but the overall message of the religious genius or saint, one would have to draw a distinction between witnessing and sharing faith. With members of his own faith community, the genius shares his faith. To members of other communities, he offers a testimony of what it means to be religious, what it is like to be planted in two worlds simultaneously, how the perfection of the qualities associated with religious genius can lead to another way of being. He thereby inspires seekers of other traditions to identify how, within their own traditions, they might attain similar heights.

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[127]*The Meaning of Saints*, p. 79.

[128] For clarity's sake it should be stated that the invitation is not to imitate the particularity of what the given religious genius is imitating, but the existential posture of imitation of the higher realm. Thus, if a Christian saint or genius makes Jesus the focus of his imitation, the personal face of the higher reality, this may not translate readily to the experience of someone who cannot relate to the person of Jesus. Still, the structure of imitation and the existential position that comes from it can.

[129]See Flescher et al., Chapter 6.

[130]I am hardpressed to think of "abrahamic" saints or geniuses of whom the same may be said. Perhaps the late Menahem Mendel Schneerson, possibly Judaism's last religious genius, might qualify. We might consider John Paul the IInd, now formally beatified, in a similar light, in view of the global message he offered. And isn't the message of Mother Theresa, independently of her iconic status, itself an interreligious message? Whether these cases are really parallel to teachings offered by teachers of Eastern religions deserves further thinking.

The idea of deriving inspiration from saints and geniuses of another tradition requires establishing or identifying theological mechanisms, by means of which such inspiration might be justified. Some traditions will find this an easier task than others, but all will have to affirm why it is possible, permissible and recommended to draw inspiration from the geniuses of another tradition. This is not the place to spell out possible strategies for each of the traditions. Suffice it to say that this could be presented as one of the practical challenges that the field of 'theology of religions' must tackle and I believe it can tackle it successfully. This does, however, bring our discussion to some examples of borrowing of saints across religious lines.

8.2 Interreligious geniuses

The tradition that is most comfortable with drawing from the testimony and experience of other traditions is the Sikh tradition. Its scriptures are thus constructed, drawing on saints of other traditions, and apparently taking great pride in the fact.

Some have suggested that the model for a modern paradigm of being inspired by saints of other traditions is Gandhi. Interestingly, many have considered Gandhi himself a saint, though Indians have resisted this, possibly accepting Gandhi's own protestations on the matter.[131] Indeed, Gandhi might be an interesting test case for our thesis of religious genius. Even if one has trouble calling him "Saint Gandhi" , as some might have liked, it will be much harder to take issue with describing him in terms of religious genius. But Gandhi is even important in the fact that within his own spiritual universe he constructed an international saintly community. It includes such figures as Jesus, St. Francis and Tolstoy. Gandhi's approach to saints was eclectic, and his eclecticism puts him in the company of many saints, whose mission is to break through some of the boundaries and structures of everyday existence. What drives them is the drive to integration, of which we spoke above. If so, then what more powerful vision of integration than the integration of the saints of different religions into a universal family of saints, a "communion of saints", if you will. In this, Gandhi may be truly modern, pointing to one of the great challenges that faces us. If addressing outstanding religious individuals through the category of religious genius can advance our ability to draw inspiration from such individuals across religious traditions, then it will have justified the development of this category.

Sainthood is in crisis.[132] Few appeal to it; few think seriously in terms of sainthood. It is thus of particular note that those saints that have captured the global mind have done so precisely by going beyond the boundaries of their own tradition. Mother Theresa, Dorothy Day, Gandhi, some might add the Dalai Lama or Pope John Paul, are all figures who bore a testimony of significance that went beyond the confines of their own religious community. With the obvious popularity they enjoyed in the media, they became global saints, interreligious saints. It may be that the future of sainthood or religious genius is interreligious.

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[131]See Mark Jurgensmeyer, Saint Gandhi, *Saints and Virtues,* ed. J. Hawley, pp. 187-204.
[132]See John Coleman, After Sainthood?, *Saints and Virtues*, ed. J. Hawley, pp. 205-226.

8.3 Saints, geniuses and the other

One of the biggest challenges in contemporary thought is the status of the other. This challenge informs much of contemporary reflection on interreligious relations. Two observations can be made here concerning the contribution of saints and religious geniuses to cultivating attitudes to the other.

Edith Wyschogrod sums up her argument in *Saints and Postmodernism* as follows:

> I have argued that desire for the Other imposes a responsibility for the Other that is especially strong in the lives of saints. I maintained (with Levinas) that the face is the an-iconic material expression of the Other that provides the warranty for language and that saints' lives, far more than others, respond to the impingement of alterity.[133]

If saints respond to alterity, does that not lead us to seek those saints and to cultivate the very notion of sainthood for our days so that it addresses directly the greatest challenge of otherness that pertains directly to the realm of the saint - the otherness of the other religion and its saints. Religious genius, then, must be able to contain religious otherness as a feature of the times. Whatever historical, political and social   circumstances may have prevented saints of the past from affording full recognition to the saints of the other, the religious genius of today must practice the depth of universal love and union in such a way that it includes the greatest alterity, the religious other, within the sphere of the one integrated reality of which he is a symbol.

Another observation concerning saints and otherness. Coleman draws our attention to the fact that saints are not democratic; they represent and uphold a hierarchical view of reality. Shifting our reference from saints to religious genius does not change the implied hierarchy; in fact it strengthens it by appeal to the category of genius and the implication of unevenly distributed gifts.[134] Hierarchy, argues Coleman, suggests otherness. It allows us to come to terms with something that often goes against the grain of our egalitarian ethos. It seems to me that if saints legitimate otherness, they thereby open up to all levels of difference and otherness, paving the way to acceptance of otherness between religions as well.

8.4 Religious geniuses - looking to the future

Compared to former periods, not only do we believe less in saints; we also produce far fewer saints than former years did. Why are there fewer saints today? Have our criteria become stricter? Is this the effect of secularization, the fragmentation of modern life, the loss of structures that could bring forth unique individuals? If religious geniuses are there to tell us how to be in the world, perhaps the task is becoming increasingly complex, making it hard to articulate any but the simplest message. And perhaps we are between waves. The saints of old are gone, the religious geniuses of tomorrow have not yet been born. Perhaps we simply require enough patience till a new day comes, when we see a rush of new religious geniuses, coming to help humanity articulate its present stance, in relation to the absolute. Perhaps the saints of tomorrow are those who can indeed articulate a

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[133]P. 223.
[134]Compare John Templeton, *Possibilities*, p. 44.

global message, going beyond the bounds of their specific religious communities. Tomorrow's saints and geniuses may be interreligious.

It may be that our approach to saints is undergoing purification. The cult of saints over the centuries has been mostly self serving, seeking blessing and intercession, rarely seeking the highest of the spiritual life. It has been bound, in probably all religions, to political and sociological factors that have detracted from its purity. Perhaps the decline in sainthood today, for those who experience it, is intended to allow for a higher notion of sainthood to surface. If so, might our own reflections on religious genius contribute to a retrieval of what is essential in sainthood, allowing it to be purified from the multiple human accretions that have made it attractive to past generations, but unattractive to today's world?

It has also been suggested that the difficulties that people experience with sainthood is a difficulty with the notion of tradition.[135] If so, might an approach based on religious genius allow us to revisit the spiritual reality of sainthood from a vantage point that is, in part, liberated from the notion of tradition?

The spiritual life is real. It will continue drawing people and their testimony will continue to inspire others. But the testimony offered will, or should, always be suited to the times. If so, there is sound basis for thinking that tomorrow's saints will be in significant ways interreligious and that we might best understand their contribution in terms of religious genius, as proposed in this essay.

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[135]Coleman, p. 207.

9. 9. Accumulative Discussions of Religious Genius

9.1 Key points from Boston meeting

The concept paper underwent thorough discussion during the first meeting of the project's steering committee in Boston, June 2012.   The following represents a summary of the key points that emerged from that meeting. Note that in the following section RG stands for Religious Genius.

Recognizing the Potential Contribution of our Project

- *A project of translation.* This project may be considered a project of translation on two levels. First, between different communities, who can through this translation better listen to each other. Second, it is a project of translation between religion and others. How extensive the translation project could become will depend on our ability to integrate additional disciplines into our project.

- *The intuitive appeal of genius.* Genius is implicitly admirable, though not in a religious way, which is precisely why using it can be beneficial to a discourse on religious figures. Genius has an aesthetic component, recognizing brilliance and making it intuitively admirable. Genius has the potential to serve as corrective to public image of religion.

- *Improving the image of religion.* What is particular to our project, in relation to most existing saint-studies, is the attempt to approach our subject on a first order basis: what is it to be a saint or religious genius (henceforth: RG)? First order questions concerning the nature of RG, its experience and reality, as distinct from its sociological or historical expressions, also suggest theological interest. Allowing us to engage core theological and religious issues, as refracted through this specific lens, could contribute to improving the image of religion among the wider public. In fact, it could suggest a way of being religious that is an alternative to much of how religion is commonly perceived.   This allows us to present exemplary religion, as opposed to religion as commonly portrayed, especially in the media.   It allows a deeper and more sophisticated approach to being religious. It also permits the study of religion to deepen in terms of first order concerns, similar to those that can be found in fields such as history and philosophy.

- *Deeper appreciation of what it means to be human and religious.* We come to this project with the intuitive sense that certain individuals,   whether we call them saints or something else, have the capacity to speak across traditions. As human beings, they tell us something about the fullness of living a human life. This is why saints excite us, and why their personalities draw us. They speak to our common humanity, even if in order to hear their voices we must enter the specificity of their traditions. What they have to tell us is important in an intrareligious and interreligious context. Thus,

whatever else we may learn about them, they do teach us something fundamental about what it means to be human. And in so doing, they teach us something fundamental about what it means to be religious.

- *Advancing interfaith relations.* The recognition that the same characteristics that one appreciates in figures from one's own tradition can be recognized in figures of other traditions fosters greater respect. Moreover, this creates an attitude that invites learning from other traditions and their exemplars.

- *Pedagogical benefits - Religious Genius as a point of entry to the study of religion.* We face the continual challenge of introducing students to discussions of religion across traditions in a way that engages them. The study of saints and the exploration of their significance in terms of religious genius holds much promise in this context, a promise born out by participants' experience of focusing on saints in world religions on the introductory level. However, for this notion to work on the introductory class level, we might have to approach the topic less strictly than the model suggests. The concept, as well as the model, would, nevertheless, have great heuristic benefits. It would   allow us to engage various individuals, through the lens of religious genius, by asking in what ways is a person who is admired as a paragon for a given religious community worthy of such recognition. For a course to work nowadays, it must be compelling, and the ability to critique and test individuals in light of the model and vice versa can have great appeal.   Establishing the model allows us to engage a broad variety of figures, critically, in relation to a defined model (whether defined strictly or loosely). That RG can be problematized is part of what makes the category exciting.

Defining Religious Genius in Relation to Saints

- The category of RG is not identical to the category of saints, broadly construed. Not all saints are religious geniuses, and as will be noted below - not all religious geniuses are saints. RG has cognitive associations, related to knowledge, teaching, understanding and discovery, as these apply to questions that are fundamental to the religious quest and to the historical traditions within which religious geniuses are found, and to their canons. Thus, a religious genius is a sage-saint. In some way, directly or by example, he or she teaches. One looks to the RG for understanding, illumination, wisdom of a high order. What distinguishes RG from the philosopher is the grounding of wisdom and insight in a higher order of reality, a higher state of consciousness. This contrasts with more common expectations of the saint (who is not a sage), where one looks to the saint for intercession. At times the same personality might provide both functions, but it is often the case that there will be a difference between the ingroup of students who seek the wisdom and the outgroup that seeks the blessings and intercession.

- A RG provides an answer to a question, rather than bringing aid to a situation. The question that is answered may be a collective religious problem, specific to the tradition, or more broader question, relating to the meaning of existence. Because RG in some way addresses the meaning of reality, RG can have appeal across traditions.

- According to this definition, a religious genius may be considered as someone who is innovative in the field of religion, providing solutions to religious problems, or making the teaching of religion more broadly available to others, through how he or she configures or restates the tradition and its teaching, whether in terms of theory or of practice.

- This definition of religious genius in terms of wisdom and cognition also leads us to exclude from our project the long list of messianic leaders who lead revolts against existing orders, even though some aspects of their work and person may be congruent with how we construct the category of "religious genius". If they are suitable at all for inclusion in our discussions, it is on account of other aspects of their person, not on account of their messianic pretenses.

- This distinction has implications for the kinds of materials to be studied. Recognizing that the RG is the sage-saint, we will be drawn to teachings and to such autobiographical or biographical materials that provide a window unto the unique interior vision of the RG. Miracles and intercessory activities typically are expressed in more stereotypical ways in the hagiographical literature, that is not of major significance for our project.

- The upshot of relating saints to RG is that we are not studying saints as examples of RG. Rather, the focus of our study is religious genius, using saints as examples. With the primary emphasis on RG, our study might open up to the study of religious geniuses who are not saints. Because the primary focus is on RG, this means we will be considering the theological questions as first order questions, rather than many of the second order questions, typically associated with the study of saints.

- One of the implications of focusing on RG, as distinct from saints, is the choice of a category that does not carry the same evaluative associations or weight. The term "saints" carries with it an evaluative dimension, whereas RG could be considered more descriptive, even if implicitly admirable. In constructing the category of "religious genius" one does not deal with a pre-populated category, that one seeks to make sense of. Rather, one can construct the category so that it is descriptive of specific aspects that one seeks to highlight.

- Entering the domain of knowledge and the mind can lead us to the domain of competing truth claims. In order to maintain the capacity of "religious genius" to speak across traditions we must find the way of recognizing the genius, its universal significance and its broader existential grounding, while bracketing ultimate truth claims.

- In thinking of genius, we are drawn into the realm of achievement of the mind. Reference to saints, by contrast, brings up associations of the person in his/her fullness. This raises the fundamental tension of whether the category of "religious genius" should be constructed purely on intellectual accomplishments (great authors, philosophers, commentators, etc.) or whether there are some fundamental aspects of sainthood that we would wish to carry over to the category of "religious genius".

- This question could be related to another. Is "religious genius" a genius operating in the field of religion, just as an artistic genius is a genius who operates in the field of art, and a political genius is one whose genius manifests in the field of politics, or is there something particular in the nature of being a *religious* genius. If so, that would lead us to make some fundamental demands in terms of achievements in other dimensions of the person, beyond the purely intellectual or cognitive, in light of which we would consider the person a *religious* genius.

- More particularly, what are our expectations or assumptions in terms of the relational qualities of the RG. Does he or she have a transformative personality? Does he or she show outstanding capacity for human relationships, in terms such as love, compassion, empathy etc.? Two assumptions inform our approach to RG. The first is that the RG excels in the "stuff" of religion, or alternatively stated: is a paragon of religious values. The other is that the RG has what to teach us. Do these dual assumptions lead us to consider that the RG's teaching has consequences that are broader than the teachings of religion, narrowly defined, and do these include also teachings and models of excellence in the field of human relations?

- A working assumption of our project is that the the cognition of the RG is often grounded in a transformed state of awareness. As a function of this broader awareness (see below on porous ego boundaries), the RG exhibits extraordinary capacity for identifying with others and of loving or otherwise living for others.

- The tension between cognitive, on the one hand, and moral and relational dimension, on the other, in the person of the RG, plays itself out in relation to what might be called the "flawed religious genius". Flaws, ostensibly, would not relate to his or her genius, as far as the more cognitive dimensions are concerned, but rather to the relation between these dimensions and aspects of the person typically associated with sainthood. Whether moral or relational imperfections, we would need to consider whether the "flawed religious genius" could sustain a greater degree of imperfection than the "flawed saint". While we could construct a category that assumes a great degree of perfection on both fronts, our discussion of a broad range of personalities, listed below, does problematize the possibility of limiting "religious genius" to only those individuals who were extremely saintly and who attained great perfection, in all aspects of RG as spelled out in the model described in the concept paper. The tension between the "saint" and "genius" dimensions of the RG will thus need to be tested out with reference to a large base of case studies, as we seek to apply

the category in ways that are contiguous with application of "genius" in other fields, while continuing to appeal to a broader range of perfections, usually associated with "saints".

• A final methodological concern, regarding saints and RG. In studying saints we note that different patterns may govern the lives of men and women saints. How does gender awareness impact our approach to religious genius?

The Particularity of Religious Genius

• We may consider the following a working definition of religious genius: the capacity of applying intuition and intellect to bringing about new understanding, grounded in awareness of a broader existential dimension, of reality, that leads to deep transformation of the person. The new understanding offered by the religious genius provides creative and constructive solutions, for solving religious and spiritual problems, usually within the framework of a particular community or tradition. A religious genius will accordingly have high positive output, effectively addressing challenges and issues that are fundamental to a tradition, or more universally: to being religious. A religious genius is thus able to accomplish something, by means of his or her special capacities. Accordingly, the RG may be described as having deep comprehension of a field (reality, God, the spiritual life) that results in a transforming discovery or realization that can be shared with others and that has some enduring impact.

• The contribution of the RG may be a creative presentation of the tradition in ways not previously known, rather than the discovery of a new truth. Much of what RG is about is vivid realization of aspects of reality or of tradition not previously appreciated. This is also a major expression of creativity.

• The creativity of the RG often comes as a response to something problematic. The old ways lose their savor, they don't work any more. Conditions change. The creativity of the RG comes in response to that problematic situation. The problem could be focused intellectually, emotionally or in relation to ritual. Unlike the common saint who ordinarily interprets, according to existing canons, the RG offers new ways of understanding. When old ways of interpretation no longer work, the RG may find new means of engaging tradition or the existential issues it addresses. Example: according to this understanding a figure like Ramana Maharshi might be considered a RG. Ramana taught a path to the discovery of non dualistic truth that one doesn't see previously in the tradition. His method of self inquiry has something creative, innovative. It solves a problem - the problem of self ignorance. Various examples of people seeking for a long time, not finding, and coming to him and discovering that his method works for them, in solving a problem that they couldn't otherwise solve.

• Because RG addresses a problem that is viewed through a contemporary lens, there will always be some interaction between the being and contribution of the RG and the historical and

sociological context within which he or she is being appreciated. While our project seeks to address the first order question of what is a RG, in fact who is a RG and what his or her contribution is will also be determined by the historical perspective within which his contribution is appreciated or overlooked (as our discussion of Mani suggested).

• We take as a working assumption that religious geniuses do not exist outside religious traditions. This working assumption can certainly be reexamined as the project unfolds. Several reasons may be brought for this:

A. Being a paragon in the field of religion requires association with religion.

B. Only religion provides the consistent discipline that would lead to religious genius.

C. Religious genius does not stand in a vacuum, but in relation to canon and community, and therefore belongs properly within religious traditions.

That being said, we must beware of excluding individuals who do not belong to mainstream traditions. The reformer may also be a form of religious genius, as may be someone who launches a new religion or new religious movement. However, discipline seems fundamental to the life of a religious genius, and sets him or her apart from other forms of personality and other psychological and phenomenological happenings.

• Genius is not simply a gift. It grows in relation to and out of disciplined life, study or practice. The particularity of religious genius is the type of practice, lifestyle and processes associated with the cultivation and manifestation of genius in the religious field and of the kind of genius that would be described as religious genius.   In studying religious geniuses, we must therefore pay attention to the relationship between the overall discipline of their religious lives and the specific manifestation of genius.

• Because RG is found within tradition, we must be careful about how we present the relationship between tradition and innovation. In one way, what makes a RG a genius is the innovative approach or understanding to matters of ultimate importance in the field of religion. The RG offers a fresh perspective on important aspects of reality. On the other, this innovation takes place within tradition. The innovation may be a novel form of communication and articulation of the tradition, rather than a new tradition.

• In order to highlight the uniqueness of the RG, it is useful to distinguish between the RG and the adept. The adept would be the Greek Orthodox practitioner who practices theosis. Advancing along a prescribed path of spiritual transformation does not require genius, inasmuch as it does not require, and likely does not value, innovation and creativity. The adept may thus be a saint, but would not qualify as a religious genius.

• The RG may be presented as situated at a point of confluence, wherein some insight, intuition or understanding is received, and then communicated further along. Genius manifests either at the point of reception or at the point of transmission; usually, there is some important connection between them.

- In thinking of how to construct the category and whom we study, some initial sense governs our choice of how narrowly or how broadly to construct the category. Pitching the category too broadly might make it too diffuse; pitching it too narrowly might exclude figures who might seem, to some, as natural candidates. Our initial working assumption is that we will be constructing the category on the narrower side. Beyond the well defined core, there is room for the flawed religious genius and for various stages of approximation. In this way, not every achievement or innovation qualifies an individual for the category of RG.

- There is some similarity between possession and RG, inasmuch as both are open to something beyond, and both bring forth some cognition or understanding that may transcend processes of discursive thinking. However, meaningful distinction may be drawn between them. Someone who is possessed is not a RG, at least not by virtue of or in the very act of possession. What makes a RG more than a case of posession is the broader framework within which transcending faculties of the person occurs. These include lifestyle, capacity for maintaining or integrating discursive reasoning, and the efforts required in the application of the quest for wisdom. Consequently, the medium is not a creative transmitter, as the RG is.

- A religious genius would have habits of heart, mind and will that conform to the broader vision of reality that he/she perceives and that consequently define the manner of being and the contribution of the RG in an ongoing manner.

- Recognition of the processes that involve more than rational thinking and the comparison with possession take us back to the original etymology of genius. We recall that the roots of the term genius are Roman, where the genius was the guiding spirit or tutelary deity of the person. Achievements of exceptional individuals were taken as indications of the presence of a powerful genius, who provided the inspiration. To speak of "religious genius" is therefore in some way to return to the originary meaning of the term, recognizing its religious basis.

- It may be argued that in phenomenological terms "religious genius" is really genius par excellence. Considering the dynamics of discipline, effort, intuition, gift and other dynamics associated with genius (see below with reference to Simonton), these may find their fullest expression in the field of religion, inasmuch as only in religion is there a conscious and intentional effort to approach the field of the beyond and to integrate it consciously, as something that could produce genius. Thus, rather than concentrating on the various activities or fields of life, wherein genius is manifested, in religion we find concentration on the core processes and orientations that can be said to be operative in other fields.

- While the *religious* dimension of RG leads to including in the profile of the RG dimensions that are not part of the common definition of ordinary genius (love, altruism, humility etc.), these

aspects can also be considered as fundamental to religious genius. They grow out of a recognition that consciousness and insight are grounded in the fullness of vision of reality and in the overall advancement of the person, in moral and religious terms. They also express the recognition that the various aspects that are related to perfection (love, altruism etc.) find their fullest expression through a practice of life and awareness, found primarily within religion, wherein perfection of these qualities is related to the same kind of openness to the beyond that characterizes the person of the genius. If genius involves opening up beyond yourself, the various characteristics of RG are similarly based on shifting of self, and of applying the self as vehicle for action beyond the self. This originary notion of genius would then find expression in relation to love, humility etc. If so, these qualities are not simply "add-ons" of *religious* genius to a core notion of genius, but rather core expressions of genius in the fullest sense, that can only be realized within the practice and discipline of the religious or spiritual life.

- We have noted above that the RG shows an extraordinary capacity for loving and living for others. It would seem this is a particularity of RG, where a more total demand or achievement is envisioned, compared with other expressions of genius.

- We might go as far as considering a notion of genius of love, that is: an interpretation of the higher meaning of reality expressed through a life of love and a way of being in the world (rather than through a teaching). Amma Amritanananda Mayi, who could surely   be described as a saint, may be considered in terms of religious genius, thus defined.

- A religious genius does not simply understand. He or she also does. Theoretical knowledge is put into practice, whether for others or in his or her own life. Thus, the cognitive element is complemented by the generative aspect, wherein insight finds expression in the life of the genius and in the lives of others.

- RG must be understood in relation to the goal of tradition and its attainment. Thus, with reference to theistic traditions we might ask whether only someone who has a powerful encounter with God (or reality, in the case of other traditions) would qualify for religious genius. Alternatively, the quality of the journey and its intentionality might suffice for the attribution of RG. In part, this question touches on how broadly or narrowly we construct the category. In part, it also raises the question of how to view saintly figures who struggled with the question of divine presence in their life (consider Mother Theresa of Calcutta, and consider the possibility of time bound absences of divine presence). The test case here might be the philosopher as religious genius. How much we insist on active knowledge or presence of God would determine our view of the philosopher as RG.

The Model - How to Construct, How to Apply

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The model presented in the concept paper may be considered the core of the paper, for here we find a suggestion concerning how RG might be recognized and what makes it unique. It is through the model that we approach the first order questions that are particular to this project.

- By means of the model we seek to attain a greater degree of understanding and precision. Application of the model allows us to identify religious genius across traditions. It also allows us to exclude from our discussion personalities that lack essential and common attributes, and who are nevertheless held up as models, leaders or sources of influence within individual traditions.

- List of attributes. It was suggested that the list is not sufficiently comprehensive, and that we might draw forth from the lives of saints additional features that are not adequately represented in the model's first iteration. Once it is recognized that we must go beyond the initial listing of core attributes, we must remain open to further expansion of the characteristics of RG. Thus, as additional scholars and further figures are brought into dialogue with our project, we will remain open to expanding the list of attributes associated with RG. At the other extreme, scholars who are brought into the project might be able to whittle down the list of attributes.

One of the advantages of having a large set of characteristics that can be correlated is that we avoid the dangers of limiting sources of multiple traditions into the conceptual framework made available by conducting our research in English. Issues that are overlooked in the history of translation may emerge through using multiple dimensions in our model of RG.

The following characteristics were suggested in the course of our discussions as supplements to the model, bringing the number of recognized characteristics up to ten.

A. *Freedom from greed.* Considering greed a fundamental expression of desire, that in turn leads to manifold expressions of activity and that interacts with various aspects of the person, freedom from greed emerges as an important attribute of the saint. Greed includes greed for fame and power. Flawed genius is related to failure to check greed, hence corruption. Expanded awareness is also centerdness in satisfaction, hence overcoming the various forms of greed.

B. Many traditions emphasize the importance of *annihilation of the ego* for the saint. This offers us a complementary perspective to the concept paper's emphasis on humility.

C. *Excellence in the form of the discipline practiced.* Spiritual cultivation and discipline play an important role in many traditions in leading to an expanded sense of reality. In some cases this is integrated into trackable spiritual evolution , such as in various itineraries and ladders of spiritual progression. But achieving some kind of excellence, either in the process or as a consequence of having reached the goal (sainthood; RG), is very common. Forms of discipline may vary according to the type of religion practiced. In some it might be more like emptying oneself of intentions and agencies and being open to spontaneous filling (some eastern traditions). Spontaneity itself may function both as a critique of a certain kind of discipline and as a kind of discipline in and of itself (consider the Baal Shem Tov). In any event, these various forms may be considered expressions of intentionality, manifesting in a focused process and in some expression of discipline. (Note relationship between discipline and purification, already in the model; note also that the notion of gift could qualify the aspect of effort and exertion, associated with discipline). Even if the notion of grace is recognized as

a factor in saint making,   the application of the insight and the practice in the saint's life that follow require some aspect of discipline.   One additional way of considering excellence in the practice of religion is to refer to supererogatory behaviour.

D. Different traditions have a way of expressing a *particular quality of the saint's heart*. A saint's heart is like butter (Tulasidasa), liquid (Cure of Ars),   open to others, responsive to their suffering, capable of transforming others through the quality of a heart that has transformed a natural hardness, associated with ego boundaries.   The deeply cultivated heart is a nurturing presence for others.

- Studies of individual lives will allow us to determine whether all characteristics are required, as part of the profiling of a RG, or whether there are some minimal characteristics that are essential to the RG, while others may be found in relation to some saints, but not others. This will also allow us to assess the possibility of a flawed religious genius. Our discussions suggest that a figure like Martin Luther might be an appropriate case to study, in this context.

- This would lead us to consider what might be essential traits,and what might be possible traits, that in their aggregate allow us to recognize religious genius. Differences between saints, who may be quite dissimilar in character, would then be accounted for by means of family resemblance. The traits associated with saints and religious geniuses would then be broken down to fundamental traits that would be expected of any religious genius and traits that are related to various saints, using the wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance.

To speak of a family resemblance is to suggest saint making characteristics. These are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions. What puts someone into the category of a saint or a RG is that all these people together are distinguishable from those outside. Thus, no individual is necessarily distinguishable in the respect to which that individual qualifies as distinct from another. However, the group as a whole would be distinguishable from any group outside.

- To speak of family resemblance brings us to the possibility of religious genius being a group phenomenon, and not simply an individual achievement. Accordingly,we might ask what are the conditions under which a group of geniuses might emerge. External circumstances or environmental pressures could lead to the emergence of such a group, within which diversity and variety could exist, in accordance with the notion of family resemblance.

- In considering which traits are essential, love and expanded awareness may be considered common and fundamental to all. Consideration of what might be essential characteristics of RG is one of the focal points of the future project.
- With reference to love and its centrality in the model, it is important to highlight that love does not apply simply to the ingroup, but is more extensive. Following Jonathan Haidt's theory of moral foundations, coupled with a view of axial age religions, one may argue that what the great axial

age religions achieved was to relativize the markers of the ingroup. Accordingly, it must be emphasized that in using love in our model we refer to this broader sense of universal love.

• In understanding how the model works, we can think of the various traits as common, rather than essential, traits of sainthood and RG . This will allow us to consider the presence of traits across traditions, while identifying any number of combination as adequate for purposes of sainthood.

• The model thus allows us to construct what might be thought of as "the varieties of sainthood", assuming that not all saints or religious geniuses will have all qualities, certainly not in equal force. It allows us to appreciate the greatness of those individuals who combine the different dimensions of the model.

• In looking at the model and its components, we should include the internal arguments and reasoning of traditions for why the traits of the model are virtues, that would lead us to recognize individuals as saints or religious geniuses. The traits and characteristics that make up the model allow us to consider perfection in a theoretical way that transcends legendary and hagiographical aspects, associated with figures of old.

• In thinking of the different components of the model, we should seek to understand not only the various components of the model, but also their interconnections. Therefore a longer list of characteristics will allow more potential connections and relationships between the various components to emerge. These connections could be appreciated both from traditional sources and from the insight offered by various scientific disciplines that are brought into dialogue with our project. Recognizing the patterns and relationships between the different dimensions, we could then ask scientists for their understanding of the causal relations between these dimensions.

General Points for Consideration

• We ought to maintain awareness of some of the difficult, even shadow, sides, associated with saintliness, and possibly with RG. To take a noted example, St. Theresa of Avila lives her greatest ecstatic moments in periods of illness. Illness, difficulty, unusual behaviour, repulsive behaviour, can all come to expression in the lives of saints. What are associations of this with genius in general and with religious genius specifically?

• Due to some of the eccentric or difficult aspects of saints' lives, one has always sought a balance between appreciating and admiring the saints and imitating them. Saints do not serve as full blown models for imitation. Some saints, or some aspects of individual saints' lives, are not imitable. How does this carry over into RG? While the processes associated with genius cannot be imitated,

the teaching aspect of genius suggests some dimension of repeatability, or carryover, into lives of others. Moreover, important aspects of the teaching delivered by religious geniuses seeks to repeat the processes of attaining insight and understanding and the practice and approach to wisdom within the framework of a community and its canon in the lives of other members of the community. Thus, testing out imitability and inimitability in the lives of saints and in the lives of candidates for "religious genius" is an important dimension of future study of individual figures.

- The imitability of religious genius is a core concern. How do we conceive of the tension between the "admiranda" and the "imitanda", those who can only be admired, as contrasted with those who can be imitated. How does this tension relate to instances of genius in other domains?

- How do we study figures taken as divine (incarnations, avataras, etc.) within their traditions? On the one hand, RG allows us to engage these figures from a broader, non faith-committed perspective. However, for their believers, these individuals are beyond the typical human categories and processes associated with genius. At the very least this would have implications for the availability of material for study and reference, inasmuch as the tradition might preserve and shape the memory of these individuals in accordance with its view of such individuals as divine, and therefore as "non-human" or "other-than-purely-human" in important ways.

These figures pose a particular problem with reference to discipline, as in many instances their lives are not portrayed as the consequence of the application of discipline. Consequently, they are less imitable, inasmuch as imitability relies heavily on the disciplinary dimension of the lives of saints. They represent what we can't even aspire to become through our disciplined efforts.

- Can religious genius find group or collective expression or is it a purely an individual matter? How would this contrast with other forms of genius? As noted in Gellman's responses to the concept paper, and as noted by several people in our discussion, one may cite various historical instances of group genius, that should be considered as part of developing the notion of religious genius.

Appendix 1: Sample teaching on religious genius

The following text is taken from the work titled *Ohev Yisrael* by Rabbi Abraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta (d. 1825), the illustrious great grandfather of the more recent important Jewish theologian by the same name. The text is taken from his commentary to Numbers 27,16-18, that describes Moses' request for a leader who would succeed him: "Let the Lord of all spirits of all flesh appoint someone over the community....And the Lord answered Moses "single out Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit." On these verses the *Ohev Yisrael* comments:

> Within the totality of Israel there are aspects, equivalent to the three types of angelic beings - *Serafim*, Holy Beasts, and *Ofanim*.

> *Serafim* are called those zaddikim (saints, righteous, holy people) whose heart, at every single moment, burns within them, due to the enormity of their ardor (*hitlahavut),* desire, love and awe for the creator, may He and his name be blessed. And they constantly surrender their souls and bodies to his service. Those are in the aspect of the *Serafim*, and they correspond to the *neshama* (the highest level of the soul).

> Holy Beasts (literally: live ones) are those zaddikim who desire God's Torah, and who engage his Torah night and day, for its own sake, to learn and teach, keep and observe. These they are who are called Holy Beasts (live ones), because it is a "tree of life to those who embrace it" (Prov. 3,18), and it is the eternal holy vitality, and they correspond to the *ruach* (the median level of the soul).

> And *Ofanim* are the householders, the pious (or: worthy, appropriate) ones of Israel, who engage in commerce. And they correspond to the *nefesh* (the lowest level of the soul). And the term *Ofanim* is derived from a wheel, that goes up and down, and they are constantly preoccupied with making a livelihood, and occasionally a good and worthy thought comes to them, to go to the synagogue and partake of its rituals (literally, to hear certain responsive prayers, that are said only in public, *kedusha* and *barchu),* or to learn a little (Torah) or t o give some charity, etc. And this good thought comes to them only from those zaddikim whose desire is God's Torah and who are in the aspect of Holy Beasts, from them this good thought proceeds, as is alluded to in Ezekiel 1,20, the spirit (*ruach)* lives in the *Ofanim*, that is: the spiritual vitality of the *Ofanim* is drawn exclusively from the spirit of the Holy Beasts....

> And Moses was a faithful shepherd for Israel, and he asked God to appoint over Israel a good and faithful shepherd, and this is why God replied to him: Take Joshua, in whom is the spirit, in other words, the spirit (*Ruach)* of the Holy Beasts. For Moses corresponds to the *Neshama* and Joshua to the *Ruach*.

The *Ohev Yisrael* offers us a typology of leaders, that provides us with an opportunity to explore different dimensions of religious genius. The typology corresponds to three levels of the soul, and is clearly hierarchical. The hierarchy of soul corresponds to different patterns of spiritual life and to different types of leadership. The highest type, associated with Moses himself, are those zaddikim who maintain constant awareness of divine presence, whose lives and attention are fully consumed by the burning passion of love for God. Their love leads them to full self surrender, offering all they have, body and soul, in the service of God. The totality of this state and its intensity, as well as its constancy, not to mention the analogy drawn with Moses, are all elements that can be extracted from this text, as we seek to identify a language that is internal to the tradition, by means of which to construct "religious genius". I would further suggest, that despite the fact that this text does not speak in the first person, in conformity with the literary conventions of this literature, it nevertheless echoes the personal experiences of the author. A well attuned ear will hear in this text not just some imaginary description of a religious ideal, but the author's own spiritual experiences, or at least aspirations, projected onto the biblical figures, upon whom he comments. When texts like this one add their voice to other similar texts, from other traditions, the result that we can hope for is validation (or variation) of our proposed model. While nothing is said in this text concerning the specifically creative dimension of the *Serafim*, the analogy to Moses does suggest that they are leaders and as such are charged with translating the higher reality to which they are attached to daily life. If the analogy to Moses is drawn to the full, then they would also be the ones who reveal new spiritual teachings. Judging by the overall thought patterns of the author, it is clear that the self surrender and offering of these masters includes the altruistic offering of themselves in the service of their community. Their genius is not simply a reclusive meditative genius, but one that combines the greatest intensity of attachment to God with the active, and creative, service of their community.

The transition from Moses to Joshua is presented as a move to a lower level of spiritual being. Joshua represents a leader who draws his spiritual vitality not from the unmediated intense union with God, but from the continuing attachment to God's Torah. Here too we encounter the drive for constancy, coupled with the purity of intention, as these leaders apply themselves to the Torah with pure intention, for its own sake, rather than in a self serving manner. These leaders draw from the Torah spiritual vitality that nourishes ordinary faithful, the laity, if you will.

On the face of it, the highest level could help define and would correspond to what we have called religious genius. However, it seems the dynamics are more complex. The median level is distinguished from the lower level by the constancy of its attachment to the *mediated* presence, through the Torah. Is this not a form of religious genius? It has the capacity to take the legacy of the highest level, represented by Moses, who passes his mantle on to Joshua, and to translate it to the daily life of the community, in a way that sustains them spiritually. While I have suggested that the analogy to Moses the Torah giver and the broader thought structure make it necessary to assume that the higher types also engage in creative dissemination to the community, the text itself features the second level as those who provide vitality to the community, probably because of the proof text, upon which the teaching is based. In any event, it is clear that the movement of the second type is a generative movement, perhaps even creative. These masters are attached to a higher source and communicate it to the everyday life. Is not their creativity also part of what we might term religious genius?

Herein we encounter a challenge to the use of "religious genius" that could be very constructive. Moses and Joshua represent different kinds of genius. Their dynamic resembles what was proposed above in relation to such pairs as Rabbi Nachman and Rabbi Nathan, Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and others. The tension between the higher and the median levels is a necessary one, pointing to the complexity of the spiritual life, the multiple types it produces and their respective tasks and challenges. It remains for us to ponder on the question of how we should construct the category of "religious genius" and whether to apply to it to one or both types of zaddikim.

Appendix 2 : Methodological discussions and planning, based on Boston meeting

A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Project

The following section outlines various ways in which our project can be brought into dialogue with other disciplines.

- *Integrating existing concepts into notion of RG.* Alongside concepts and categories echoing classical approaches to religion (whether articulated in the traditions or in research on the traditions), understanding RG should also incorporate tools and perspectives developed by other methodologies. Psychology offers us several helpful notions, by means of which we might approach RG:

A. Permeable or expansive ego boundaries. One way of approaching the particularity of saints and of religious genius, and possibly of other kinds of genius as well, is by reference to ego boundaries (James). Saints and religious geniuses wil show a capacity for extending the boundaries of their egos in a way that suggests not only deep empathy for others, but recognition of coextensiveness with reality or significant aspects of it. Thus, the usual division between what is experienced as within yourself and what is experienced as outside yourself may not apply in the case of these individuals.

B. Somatic intelligence. The knowledge and understanding of a RG may follow different procedures, allowing the RG to feel, intuit or otherwise know things in ways that go beyond discursive intelligence. Knowing through the body and the nervous system play into alternative forms of knowing.

C. IQ would remain one of the factors to take into account, as we weigh the genius of religious genius.

D. The capacity to move from one type of intelligence to another, (intellect to body intelligence) in what might be termed, following Eugene Gendlin, "cross and dip". Question - could this capacity be the marker of the religious genius, because RG cultivates it consciously. Does the spiritual domain allow for greater integration of the various intelligences.

- *Advancing conversation with the scientific community.*

A. The broader the interdisciplinary base from which our project is carried out, the more efficacious our project will be in terms of translating fundamental religious realities to other communities. Multiple disciplines may be considered multiple channels of translation.

B. The significance of broadening the interdisciplinary base of the project is that it provides another means of suggesting interconnectedness between the components or aspects of RG. We can consider interconnectedness historically, philosophically and possibly through the influence of one tradition on another. Different sciences may offer further corroboration for the interconnectedness of different parts of our model.

C. In talking with scientists we should not only ask for how they interpret our data, but also request their input into how they would advance the conversation. This initial conversation should take place already at this point, and the history of this conversation (as distinct from its outcomes) could point the way to how the larger project might be constructed.

D. In terms of scientific disciplines we might wish to engage, these include the range of disciplines that have been part of the science-religion conversation. We might present the project to them and ask where our research might be helped by the social and biological sciences. While we recognize there is a tradition within psychological studies that defines genius, we are not tied to it as the exclusive scientific frame of reference.

E. In terms of method, one could take our list of traits, described based on data of religious traditions, and present it to specialists in other disciplines, querying them as to the tools and theories they might have available to them to account for these phenomena. This could be carried out in dialogue with psychologists, neuro-scientists, social psychologists, sociologists and social anthropologists. Increasing interest in cognitive science might provide fruitful receptivity for our project. We might, however, be in a situation that what we describe may be beyond the tools available to some or all of these disciplines. This approach should be carried out as part of the eventual large project.

F. Finally, We need to be mindful and in dialogue with Howard Gardner's 9th category, his existential intelligence, as our project comes into dialogue with social scientists.

• *Parallel neutral identification of traits and characteristics of sainthood.* In thinking through the categories that describe what different traditions consider as appropriate to saints and RGs, we might consider conducting neutral testing, through a questionnaire, identifying what members of different traditions consider as characteristics of sainthood. This would provide us with a more neutral basis for the hypothesis that saints can be studied across traditions. A social science survey could be part of the eventual grant proposal. Our role as religious studies scholars would be to interpret the data. The model would be to turn to a large group, such as university chaplains, or other large and diverse bodies of educated religious, present them with a small number of figures they recognize and then pose the guiding question - what makes these people extraordinary. The results will tend to cluster and point to core configurations of sainthood. These can then be compared with our model, suggesting oversights and complements, ways of modifying our model and pointing to the overall usefulness of our project as a means of translating across traditions. For practical reasons it seems advisable to leave this kind of research for the larger grant, even though it would be beneficial to have its outcome inform our work already at this stage. Also, it would require great care to formulate the questionnaire in such a way that minimizes error, while maximizing the chances that the figures under discussion are known and recognized to participants.

Dialogue with Simonton

The following section focuses on how our project might relate to the work of one specialist, who has dealt with genius extensively, from the perspective of psychology, Dean Keith Simonton.

References to Simonton's work were based on several responses and papers that he had prepared for our project, as well as his summary work, *Genius 101* (Springer Publications, 2009).

Simonton also prepared a questionnaire that would allow us to reflect on religious genius in light of what is known about genius. Working through this questionnaire led us to conclude that indeed religious genius does have a broad common denominator with genius, but it is pitched in a different mode. Contributors to the next phase of the project will be asked to consider the subjects of their study also in relation to this questionnaire.

The following points emerged, with reference to Simonton's work, in the course of our meeting:

- Speaking of our project in broad strokes, we may suggest that our findings are broadly congruent with his. One relevant issue is the relationship of genius and tradition. For Simonton, genius is not avataric individual enlightenment that comes without cultural and societal matrix. Our own recognition that genius is expressed from or within tradition and that it is in some way a restatement of tradition in a fresh way is fully in line with Simonton's findings.

- Attainment of excellence of the RG involves discipline, at times asceticism. Simonton would argue that there is a 10 year learning curve for any genius to master the particular techniques and disciplines. The genius' personality is thus a focus-oriented personality. For religious traditions, discipline consists of learning the discipline well enough to then be able to give yourself totally.

- The combination of discipline and usefulness makes for creativity. This insight may apply for RG as well as for any kind of genius, notwithstanding the fact that some religious geniuses seem to require less discipline and have a greater natural talent (these, however, may develop other forms of practice that may be recognized as a form of discipline as well). Originality is not sufficient for genius. Genius manifests creativity, that is useful for others. Community plays an important role in determining what is useful and of enduring significance. Usefulness for others opens up to the value of tradition and to the test of time, by means of which the religious genius is appreciated.

- In looking at the tension between first order and second order considerations of sainthood, that is: what it is to be a saint and how society appreciates the saint, we are aided by recognition that genius too has a social, historiometric, perspective, complementing the personal psychometric dimension.

- Withstanding the test of time. Historiometric study assumes withstanding the test of time as a means of identifying genius. While there is some arbitrariness to this, and while it could lead to the exclusion of individuals who on other counts might be described as religious geniuses, it allows us to identify genius in a more systematic way. The same would be particularly true in the case of religious traditions, where the test of time is an important component by means of which traditions recognize genius. For our purposes, endurance plays an important role in determining the long term enrichment of a given RG to his/her tradition and to humanity.

- Our discussion of group genius has affinities with his work, that could support the notion of group genius, at least up to a limit. Simonton cites studies of small group dynamics and their impact on the generation of ideas and on   what he considers to be genius. He would likely agree that hassidic study groups and sufi orders are conducive to the production of genius. Certain societies foster genius. Pluralism and diversity of opinion foster more geniuses. That is   broadly in line with what we note in the field of religion.

- One important difference between the RG and genius in other aspects of life might be the moral dimension. Typically, a genius is measured in terms of success and contribution. By contrast, RG, being a paragon, a sign of excellence in the religious domain, cannot be considered independently of the moral dimension. In accounting for imperfections we may have to adopt the notion of a flawed saint or RG, but we cannot completely ignore the moral dimension and concentrate exclusively on the cognitive or creative contribution of the RG.

Appendix 3: Figures who have informed discussion of Boston meeting

The concept paper mentions various figures in relation to the notion of religious genius. In addition, a number of figures informed conversations at the Boston meeting. It may be useful for future participants to be aware of who these figures are, and they are accordingly mentioned herewith.

Andal

Ramanuja

Vivekananda

Mose sofer

Tich Nat Hanh

Amma - Amritananda Mayima

Thomas Merton

Gandhi

Plotinus

Theresa of Avila

Mother Theresa

Bin laden (by way of contrast and exclusion)

Ramana Maharshi

Joseph Smith

Mary Baker Eddy

Mani

Martin Luther

Martin Luther King

Sabbetai Zevi