Made in the Images of God: A Pedagogy for Converting Imaginations in the Postmodern World

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MADE IN THE IMAGES OF GOD:

A PEDAGOGY FOR CONVERTING IMAGINATIONS IN THE POSTMODERN

WORLD

a dissertation

by

PATRICK R. MANNING

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Abstract

Made in the Images of God:
A Pedagogy for Converting Imaginations in the Postmodern World
by
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Dissertation Advisor

What is at the root of the struggles in faith of today's American Catholics? What can Catholic religious educators do to promote faith in the present postmodern context? In an effort to address these pressing questions, this dissertation argues for the central role of the imagination in human cognition and living, faith, and religious education. Following an initial survey of sociological data that points to disruption of traditional Christian patterns of imagining as a major factor in Catholics' current struggles in faith, subsequent chapters analyze how the human imagination functions and malfunctions and how religious education can help to reintegrate it when it is disrupted. Building upon these findings, later chapters lay out a pedagogical process whereby religious educators can invite learners to participation in the reign of God and to greater integration in their lives.

For Margaret,

through whom I fell in love

in a quite absolute, final way

and who so seized my imagination

that I can now imagine no better life.

True to Fr. Pedro Arrupe's warning,

it has decided everything.

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Acknowledgements

Each of us is profoundly indebted to the people in our lives for helping us make sense of the world, ourselves… even our intellectual projects. This dissertation is no exception. The ideas expressed in these pages are the fruit of countless conversations, classes, and experiences made possible by kind and brilliant people whom I have been blessed to know. It is only right that I should acknowledge some of these more notable influences here, even if a few words on a page hardly amounts to adequate thanks.

In the first place, I must thank my parents, who have always encouraged me to follow my passions, even when they must have wondered how I was ever going to earn a living. I owe a debt of thanks to my former students at Bishop Byrne High School in Memphis. The image of their faces has served as the inspiration for and reminder of what I was working for ever since I left full-time teaching to pursue graduate studies. Thanks also go to my student-teachers in the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) at Notre Dame and my students in the Confirmation program at St. Ignatius Parish in Chestnut Hill, who have prompted many of the insights that appear in the following pages and who were good enough to indulge me in the occasional pedagogical experiment.

I have been repeatedly humbled by the generosity and unwavering support of my dissertation committee—Dr. Thomas Groome, Dr. Patrick Byrne, and Dr. Michael James. I could not have asked for three better models of how to work in academia with integrity and concern for others. Besides my committee, many others have supported my work on this project. These include Dr. Hosffman Ospino and Fr. Robert Imbelli, who were valuable conversation partners at various points in the process, as well as the numerous

other professors with whom I studied during my time at Boston College. Lastly, I am forever grateful to my classmates in the Ph.D. in Theology and Education for the mutual support and fellowship we shared these past years. If we learn some of life's most important lessons through our friendships, then no one has received a finer education than I.

Introduction

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).[1] Such was the alluring promise that Jesus made to his disciples. In so doing, he conveyed what God had hoped for human beings from the beginning—a life in which they might enjoy not only the particular goods of God's creation but also (and more importantly) the unsurpassable good of loving relationship with God and one another. Jesus fulfilled God's hopes for humanity as no one had been able to do before. The "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), he manifested before human eyes what life in abundance looks like and provided a model to which they might aspire in their own lives. Imitating Jesus, following after him in this way of life, human beings are able to experience in this lifetime peace and joy, which—comforting though these experiences—are only a foretaste of the fulfillment of the longings of the human heart that they will enjoy in the world to come.

The common desire of all human beings, this life in abundance and the practices that contribute to it have been described in myriad ways—the good life, human flourishing, etc. Christians, who have found imitating Jesus' example to be the key to peace and happiness, for their part describe this way of life as the path of "discipleship". This life of Christian discipleship is an all-encompassing affair. Jesus makes clear in his life and teaching that following after him makes demands on the whole person—head and heart, body and soul, affect and will. He summarized this imperative to total commitment in the words, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your

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[1] All biblical quotations from NRSV unless otherwise stated.

soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Lk 10:27). Discipleship, in other words, requires devoting one's whole life—everything that one is and does—to God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Although some might perceive such an absolute commitment as limiting, nothing could be further from the truth. Far from inhibiting genuine human development and flourishing, the way of Christian discipleship in fact makes it possible for people to achieve their full potential as beings created in God's own image and likeness.

The perpetuation of this way of life depends upon followers of Jesus handing on their Christian faith from one generation to the next. For this reason Jesus commanded his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded" (Mt 28:19-20). Jesus' phrase "make disciples" appropriately indicates the holistic nature of this endeavor. If discipleship is rightly understood as following Jesus into the life in abundance that he promised, then the work of forming disciples must involve, not merely handing on information, but, more broadly, leading others into this way of life. It involves helping others to respond to God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind.

Challenges abound amidst disciples' efforts to persist in this way of life and to help others do likewise. All human beings yearn for the sense of wholeness and integration to which God calls us, but the sometimes misguided ways in which we pursue fulfillment can often leave us feeling empty and divided within ourselves. We desire the perfect love only God can give, but the many lesser substitutes we desire—pleasure,

wealth, esteem—tear us in competing directions. This perennial battle for the human heart has been immortalized in the Hebrew Scriptures' account of the Israelites' constant struggle with idolatry, of how they repeatedly found solace in God's tender care, turned away out of fear or lust or hunger, and always eventually returned to God. Even if most of us have never seen a golden calf, there is no denying the fact that the battle rages on in our own time. Indeed, single-minded love of God may be harder to achieve today than ever before.

This dissertation is about this struggle of Christian disciples to achieve wholeness in their lives of faith (and their lives in general) in today's world and the role religious education might play in promoting this integration. More specifically, it is about Catholic Christians and Catholic religious education in the United States context. In so defining the scope of this project, I do not mean to suggest that the matters treated herein do not concern non-Catholics. Indeed, many Christians—I might even say many who practice some form of religion and/or spirituality—will recognize the situation and challenges described in the following pages as their own. Insofar as this proves the case, I expect that Christian educators working in a variety of traditions and contexts will benefit from this investigation. I address this work primarily to Catholics in the United States because this is the context, the tradition, and the population within which I have been formed and have conducted my own teaching ministry. Therefore, writing from the vantage point of my Catholic tradition and community, I hope to offer something that will serve that community but also many others besides.

It is possible, even likely, that some Catholics will not recognize the situation and

challenges I describe here as their own. For example, my account of the secularization of Western culture and dissolution of a spiritual view of reality will likely not ring true to the experience of Latino-American Catholics who live and practice their faith in Christian communities that remain permeated by the ethos of their native cultures. Notwithstanding, historical trends suggest that even those populations who are not presently confronting the challenges of postmodern culture to Christian faith may find themselves facing those challenges soon enough. As such, this dissertation may hold valuable lessons for these audiences as well.

As a doctoral dissertation, this project is highly academic and technical in nature. It is therefore most appropriate for scholars of Christian religious education and perhaps research-minded leaders in Catholic religious education. Nevertheless, my ultimate aim in this dissertation is to develop pedagogical guidelines that will support the praxis of those responsible for the formal education in faith of Christian disciples, that is, parish catechists and religion teachers in Catholic schools. As such, I intend for this dissertation to provide the foundation for future works more appropriate to this larger audience.

As an interdisciplinary project, this dissertation will draw upon research in multiple fields to the extent that each illuminates some aspect of the issue at hand. I take as my point of departure a body of empirical sociological research, which offers a glimpse of the lived reality of Catholics in 21st-century America, and the questions that arise from this research. I will subsequently draw upon psychology, cognitive science, educational theory, philosophy, and theology to address questions that the tools of sociological investigation are not equipped to answer. These preliminary discussions will

serve as an entrée into the primary focus of this dissertation, namely, a pedagogical approach for religious education capable of promoting vibrant Catholic faith in the face of the challenges identified by research in the aforementioned fields.

My argument in this dissertation is essentially the following: The particular challenges presented by postmodern American culture to Catholic faith necessitate an approach of handing on the faith that attends more carefully to the role of imagination in people's cognition and living and that intentionally facilitates the formation (indeed the transformation) of imaginations in a authentically Christian manner. In one sense, appealing to the imaginations of disciples and would-be disciples is nothing new. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus walked the shores of Galilee teaching about God and the life God wants for human beings, he did so in a highly imaginative manner. Recognizing the value of his example, we will look to the Master Teacher to learn what lessons we can about teaching for faith in the present context. Still, each age brings its own blessings and challenges. As we will soon see, one of the greatest challenges of the present age is the challenge modern technology, advertising, and pluralism pose to people's efforts to imagine reality in a coherent way. Jesus may have been the definitive revelation of God and a master teacher, but he never had to contend with Facebook and smartphones. Christian educators must appropriate anew the lessons of faith and teaching in every age. In this dissertation, I strive to contribute in some modest way to this work of re-appropriation for our own time.

Chapter 1

The Challenges and Context of Catholic Religious Education in the 21st Century

"Without vision the people perish."

(Proverbs 29:18)

Introduction

For all its joys and grace-filled moments, the work of forming disciples has always been fraught with challenges. While the joys have in no way diminished, the challenges seem to have intensified for modern disciples in this regard: In the past, Christians' lives were much more of a single piece. The world they—and just about everyone, for that matter—lived in was simply a religious world. Few people thought to envision it otherwise. This remained the case for most American Catholics up through the early half of the 20ᵗʰ century, but today it is a different story.

As a teacher, I see that my students do not experience the world in the same way that their forebearers did. Take Thomas, for example. Several years ago Thomas was the brightest student in my freshman Confirmation class at a parish in Boston. His knowledge of Catholic teaching exceeded that of any of his high school-aged peers. Yet he found the teachings he had learned from his parents and from formal religious instruction incommensurate with his own lived experience and with the world he knew from his reading and study of science. He knew full well that the world was supposed to be created by a loving, omniscient, omnipotent God. However, Thomas could not reconcile these beliefs with scientific accounts of an evolving universe or the never-ending reports of natural disasters and human-initiated violence around the world. Faced with these seemingly contradictory visions of reality, when forced to choose, he found himself unable to affirm the Christian account and the vision of discipleship that follows from it.

Thomas's experience would have been virtually unfathomable in ages past, but it is typical of our own. For many today, God no longer occupies the center of their lives

and their faith is no longer the determining principle in their experience of the world. Ours has been called a "secular age,"[1] a time in which "sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."[2] Social theorists like Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim have contended that this decline in religiosity, as evidenced in the experiences of people like Thomas, is the natural result of an increase in scientific knowledge and a corresponding decrease in superstition. Some would go so far as to call the current U.S. culture "post-Christian."[3] Headlines about the "decline of American Catholicism" and the "fall of the Church" have been common fare in recent decades. These tales of decline are often accompanied by diagnoses (sometimes accusations) of what has gone wrong and prescriptions for what Church leaders or parents or religious educators ought to do to remedy the situation.

Yet assessing the health of a religious way of life is tricky business. Who is to say whether one Catholic's choice to forgo Mass on a given Sunday in favor of spending time in private prayer will bring them closer or separate them further from God, or whether their dissent from official Church teaching is an act of immorality or of moral integrity? What is clear when we compare the lives of Catholics in this country to those of their counterparts from a century or even 50 years before is that a significant change has taken place. Still, this observation raises more questions than it answers: Are today's Catholics living the life of Christian discipleship less fully than previous generations of Catholics, or are they just living it differently? Though some old habits of devotion have

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[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007).

[2] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), 107.

[3] See, e.g., John Meacham, "Meacham: The End of Christian America," *Newsweek*, April 3, 2009, http://www.newsweek.com/meacham-end-christian-america-77125.

faded, new expressions of spirituality and greater attention to social justice might be signaling the emergence of new forms of faith. Who or what is responsible for these changes? Is it Church leaders, educational models, parents, or wider social changes?

I will argue below that something has indeed gone amiss in the Church's work of forming disciples. While one could point to numerous current challenges to this work, I believe that inadequate formation of Christians' religious imaginations is one of the most, if not the most, pressing. It will be my aim in this dissertation to elucidate the nature of this problem and to present Christian religious educators with pedagogical guidance for addressing this challenge.

I begin in this chapter by describing how certain elements of modern and postmodern culture have caused a fragmentation of American Catholics' imaginations, which underlies many of the problems adverted to by journalists, scholars, and concerned Catholics. As a first step in this chapter's inquiry, I will examine sociological data on the faith lives of American Catholics through the latter half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. I will then contextualize this data relative to significant historical happenings in 20th-century American Catholicism and to trends in the general population's religious attitudes and behaviors during the same time period. Following this discussion of the relevant data, I will present my interpretation thereof, corroborated by those of other cultural observers. In the final section, I will draw several conclusions about the possibilities and challenges of forming disciples today and present a proposal for addressing these challenges that will guide the rest of this project. The remaining chapters will then explore in depth why the imagination is so crucial to people's living,

including their lives of faith, and develop this proposal for what Christian religious educators can do in the classroom context to form imaginations adequate to the challenges of living as Christian disciples in the 21st-century United States.

The Changing Lives of American Catholics

Whence has the narrative of Catholic decline originated? The quality of a person's or group's religious practice is difficult to quantify, yet it is unlikely that this alarming account would have gained traction if it were totally unfounded. Fortunately, we have at our disposal today an abundance of sociological data concerning American Catholics' beliefs, religious knowledge, practices, and patterns of (dis)affiliation. While survey data never gives the full picture of historical phenomena much less spiritual ones, it does provide some basis for assessing how Catholics' faith lives have changed across generations and why some people have perceived a decline within American Catholicism. A comprehensive analysis of all available data is neither within the scope of this project nor necessary for its aims. My more modest aim is to understand what (if anything) undergirds this narrative of decline in American Catholicism. It will thus suffice for the purposes of this chapter to assess (a) if American Catholics are in fact failing to live out their call to discipleship in ways that go beyond the quotidian lapses and shortcomings to be expected of fallible human beings and (b) to what extent it might be possible to improve this situation through efforts in Catholic religious education.

I will examine the data on Catholics' religious beliefs and practices as they fall under four categories—knowledge of the faith, participation in the Christian life,

celebration of the sacraments, and prayer. My choice to employ these as my organizing categories is in keeping with a longstanding tradition in the Christian community, which since the first century has invoked them in its efforts to articulate what constitutes the fullness of the Christian life. They are reflected in New Testament accounts of the nascent Christian community (see Acts 2:42) and in the traditional "four pillars" of catechesis—professing the faith, living the faith, celebrating the faith, and praying the faith.[4] While the faith can be expressed in as many ways as there are Christians, one would be hard-pressed to argue that Catholics are acting as faithful disciples of Christ if they are neglecting any of these four elements.

Catholics' Knowledge of the Faith

In his Great Commission, Jesus charged his disciples with teaching the people of the world everything he had commanded. Knowledge of Jesus' teaching and that of his Church is thus foundational to the life of discipleship. Unfortunately, the common opinion nowadays seems to be that Catholics—young Catholics especially—are "religiously illiterate."[5] Many Catholic educators will readily offer anecdotal evidence testifying to the same. Nevertheless, while researchers like Christian Smith have corroborated some of these general impressions,[6] it is more difficult to find reliable

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[4] Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Revised (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), no. 3. Henceforth *"CCC"*.

[5] See, e.g., Heidi Schlumpf, "Stemming Rampant Religious Illiteracy," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 6, 2010, http://ncronline.org/news/stemming-rampant-religious-illiteracy, and Rachel Zoll, "Religious Literacy: Americans Don't Know Much About Religion," *Huffington Post*, September 24, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/09/28/religious-literacy-americ_n_741391.html.

[6] Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

longitudinal data to support the more sweeping claims.[7] Very little data exists for the years prior to Vatican II, perhaps because people generally assumed that Catholics knew their faith. The matter is further complicated by the fact that no one measure or survey was used consistently through the later half of the past century. Still, it is worth examining the little data that exists.

In 1979-80 the NCEA administered the REOI and REKAP exams (predecessors of the ACRE) to students in Catholic schools *and* parishes, recording 64% accuracy for eighth-graders (REOI) and 63% accuracy for eleventh- and twelfth-graders (REKAP).[8] Results from the 1994-5 NCEA ACRE may reflect gains in students' knowledge of their faith with eighth-graders achieving 72% accuracy and eleventh- and twelfth-graders achieving 68%.[9] The ACRE results several years later in 2011-12 reflected modest gains with eighth-graders achieving 73% accuracy and eleventh- and twelfth-graders achieving 71%.[10] Given this data, we are unable to make any certain claims about changes in Catholics' religious knowledge since the '60s, though we can at least assert that students in Catholic schools and parishes have grown more knowledgeable in the past two

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[7] In the preface of a 2010 study, the Pew Forum likewise notes the dearth of data on levels of religious knowledge during the middle part of the 20th century. (See the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey* (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, September 28, 2010), 4, http://www.pewforum.org/U-S-Religious-Knowledge-Survey.aspx.)

[8] John J. Convey, *Catholic Schools Make a Difference: Twenty Five Years of Research* (National Catholic Educational Association, 1992), 72.

[9] John J. Convey and Andrew D. Thompson, *Weaving Christ's Seamless Garment: Assessment of Catholic Religious Education* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 1999), 43. As with the REOI and REKAP, the ACRE was administered to students in both Catholic schools and parish programs. Though the 1994-5 ACRE scores are clearly superior to the 1979-80 REOI and REKAP scores, we cannot determine conclusively that student knowledgeability increased in those years since different instruments were used.

[10] National Catholic Educational Association, "2011-12 ACRE Results," *National Catholic Education Association Testing*, 2012, http://ncea.caltesting.org/docs/ACRE%20National%20Scores%202011-2012.pdf.

decades.[11] When it comes to adult Catholics, even less data is available. Andrew Greeley's analysis of General Social Survey (GSS) data reveals a decline in knowledge levels between 1963 and 1974.[12] As to how adults' knowledge of the faith has improved or declined since then, however, we are in the dark.

If knowledge of the faith is indeed declining among Catholics, this does not bode well for their ability to live out that faith. However, the data examined here should make us hesitant to declare any such diagnosis or to prescribe better teaching of doctrine as the clear solution to the ills of American Catholicism. There is no hard evidence (at least that this author could find) that Catholics are less knowledgeable today than they were at mid-century.[13] Assertions that more thorough indoctrination will provide the silver bullet are likewise undermined by research showing that knowledge of the faith is not strongly correlated with religious commitment.[14] Clearly, then, we have to look beyond measures of religious knowledge in order to understand more fully the current health of American Catholicism.

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[11] Another study of Catholic knowledge levels was conducted in 1962 by the University of Notre Dame. This survey found that 88% of the 14,519 eighth- and twelfth-graders surveyed in Catholic schools provided "acceptable" answers to questions about teachings of the Catholic Church. (Reginald A. Neuwien, ed., *Catholic Schools in Action: A Report* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 167.) Unfortunately, these figures are somewhat inflated and so do not offer a reliable basis of comparison since (a) the study only surveyed students in Catholic schools and (b) the survey questions were written in such a way that students had a 3-in-5 chance of providing an "acceptable" answer to any given question as compared to one acceptable option on REOI, REKAP, and ACRE exam questions.

[12] Convey, *Catholic Schools Make a Difference*, 73; cf. Andrew M. Greeley, William C. McCready, and Kathleen McCourt, *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1976).

[13] Peter Steinfels, citing reports from catechetical directors and pastors, asserts the opinion that current efforts at Catholic religious education are as rigorous as ever and that today's students may yet prove to be more knowledgeable than the generations raised on the Baltimore Catechism. (See Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), 229.)

[14] In its 2010 study, the Pew Forum found that atheists and agnostics were more knowledgeable about religion than any other religious group. (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey*, 17.) Furthermore, in the same study people with low levels of commitment actually averaged more correct answers (16.0 / 32) than those with medium commitment (14.8 / 32) (Ibid., 39).

Catholics' Celebration of the Sacraments

In the Christian (and especially Catholic) view, the sacraments play a crucial role in the economy of salvation. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states unambiguously, "for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation."[15] Yet the available data appears to indicate that the sacraments are playing less and less of a role in American Catholics' lives. In 1945, over 60% of Catholics attended Mass nearly every week.[16] By 1963, weekly Mass attendance had risen to an astounding 72% (though no more than 29% of those in attendance were actually receiving Communion).[17] However, by 1977 attendance had dropped to 42%, where it remained through the early '90s.[18] After this period of relative stability, Catholic rates of Mass attendance again began to dip in the late '90s, this time dropping below historic averages. According to Gallup, in 1999 weekly attendance dropped below the 40% mark for the first time to 37% and continued to drop to 34% in 2005 and 31% in 2011.[19]

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[15] *CCC*, no. 1129.

[16] Andrew M. Greeley, *Religious Change in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 45.

[17] Andrew M. Greeley, *Crisis in the Church: A Study of Religion in America* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1979), 10; James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 214. More difficult than comparing rates of Mass attendance is quantifying Catholics' participation in the Eucharist. As rates of Mass attendance declined in the wake of Vatican II, weekly reception of Communion increased (from 29% in 1963 to over 50% and growing by 1976). In addition to encouraging more frequent reception of Communion, the Council encouraged the "full and active participation" in the Mass of all in attendance through singing, more frequent responses, and increased opportunities to serve as liturgical ministers (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14). Yet it would be inaccurate to describe preconciliar Catholics as totally passive during the old Mass. Though seldom engaged in the ritual action, many Catholics of the time engaged in a variety of devotions during the Mass.

[18] Ibid.

[19] The Pew Forum put Catholic weekly Mass attendance in 2008 a bit higher at 42% (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, June 2008)). However, in a later analysis of the General Social Survey, Pew corroborated observations of this downward trend, recording a decline in weekly Mass attendance from 47% in 1974 to 24% in 2012 (Michael Lipka, "What Surveys Say About Worship Attendance – And Why Some Stay Home," *Pew Research Center*,

When we look to the other sacraments, the pattern of declining participation is more consistent. In the year of 1945, there was one baptism for every 31 Catholics.[20] As the century wore on, that ratio declined to 1:33 in 1965 to 1:51 in 1985 to 1:64 in 2005. Catholic marriages followed a similar pattern, declining from one for every 99 Catholics in 1945 to 1:130 in 1965 to 1:151 in 1985 to 1:323 in 2005. While data for Confirmations is not as readily available, Gallup records that reception of that sacrament dropped from one for every 99 Catholics in 1995 to 1:104 ten years later. No national statistics exist for Reconciliation, but regional figures consistently reveal a drastic decrease in reception of the sacrament beginning in the 1960s. For example, in 1944 some Milwaukee parishes would receive as many as 1,300 or 1,800 penitents a month.[21] Compare those figures with those of two decades later when between 1965 and 1969 recipients of the sacrament at St. Therese's Parish in Milwaukee dropped from 405 to 100 a month. Our Lady Queen of Peace saw its numbers drop from 1,200 to 300 a month in the same time period. In both cases, these decreases occurred despite gains in parish membership.

Looking at these statistics, the trend is overwhelmingly clear. Celebration of the sacraments declined dramatically among American Catholics in the latter half of the 20th century. Confronted with this data, one must ask, if the Catholic magisterium has not changed its teaching on the necessity of the sacraments for salvation, why is it that American Catholics have availed themselves of the sacraments less and less over the

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September 13, 2013, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/13/what-surveys-say-about-worship-attendance-and-why-some-stay-home/.

[20] William V. D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 55, citing data from Gallup.

[21] James M. O'Toole, "In the Court of Conscience: American Catholics and Confession, 1900-1975," in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 134–85.

course of the past half-century?

Catholics' Participation in Christian Living

As religious educator Thomas Groome has noted, "Although our beliefs are integral to our faith…how we *live* our faith is really the nub of Christian discipleship."[22] Affirmation of official doctrines and attendance at weekly worship tell us something about religious affiliation, but how people spend their time and make decisions tell us more about which commitments and values have truly penetrated to the core of their being. Even more so than the previous two categories, this dimension of people's lives of faith is difficult to assess. It is highly contestable which measures or questions will give us the best basis for assessment. Since my own research has not involved collection of sociological data, I am limited here to examining data that others have collected in response to the questions they believed to be significant. Given my interest in long-term trends, I am further limited to survey questions that have been asked consistently over the course of multiple decades. The selection of survey items examined below reflects these limitations.[23] Limited though this analysis may be, it may yet reveal telling trends in the lives of American Catholics.

I begin with American Catholics' perceptions of their own commitment to living the faith. In this area numerous surveys indicate that the importance of the faith for Catholics has declined in recent decades. According to Gallup, the percentage of

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[22] Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 114.

[23] For example, the survey data below does not adequately reflect the strong support among American Catholics for social justice issues like fair labor practices, care for the poor, and war. Unfortunately, reliable data for such issues is difficult to come by.

Catholics who rank the Catholic Church among the most important parts of their life decreased from 49% in 1987 to 43% in 1993 and has remained at that level since.[24] The percentage of people who identify themselves as "strong Catholics" has steadily declined over the years from 46% in 1974 to just 27% in 2012.[25]

Other measures provide a picture of how Catholics' flagging commitment has affected their lives of faith and the life of the Church as a whole. The decrease in Catholic vocations to the priesthood and religious life has been widely noted. In 1965, 58,632 priests, 179,954 sisters, and 12,271 brothers were serving the American Church. By 2014 those figures had dropped to 38,275, 49,883, and 4,318, respectively.[26] On this point it is important to note that, while Catholics left the religious life in droves following Vatican II, the number of lay ecclesial ministers exploded and has continued to grow. In the past two decades alone, over 16,000 new lay ministers have been added to the ranks.[27] These gains in lay ministry are often overshadowed by the rate at which Catholics have not just left the religious life but left the Church altogether. In 1972, the Catholic Church in the U.S. had a retention rate of 85%.[28] Thirteen years later it dropped slightly to 84%. Accounting for converts and other newcomers to the Church, these figures translate into a net loss of 2% of Catholic membership, which Andrew Greeley notes is consistent with

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[24] D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics Today*, 40.

[25] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "'Strong' Catholic Identity at a Four-Decade Low in U.S.," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, March 13, 2013, http://www.pewforum.org/2013/03/13/strong-catholic-identity-at-a-four-decade-low-in-us/.

[26] Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "Frequently Requested Church Statistics," *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*, 2014, http://cara.georgetown.edu/caraservices/requestedchurchstats.html.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 45.

attrition rates in previous decades.[29] However, by 2008 the retention rate had dropped to 68%, translating into a net loss of 7.5%—a significant shift from previous decades.[30] In its 2008 report on religious affiliation, the Pew Forum notes that Catholicism has endured the greatest net loss of members of any Christian denomination in recent years.[31]

What about the people who have remained in the Church? A comparison of a 1964 NORC study and a 2008 Pew study might suggest that Catholic participation in church activities has increased since mid-century.[32] According to the NORC study, in 1964 23% of Catholics reported being "active" in at least one church organization.[33] In 2008 a larger percentage (31%) reported participating at least monthly in congregational activities.[34] Though these figures may suggest increased participation among Catholics over time, Catholics still lag well behind other denominations in terms of their activity at their local church. In the same year (2008), Pew recorded a 37% participation rate among the general population and 49% among Protestants.[35]

If these statistics are ambiguous in their implications, other measures are less so. For example, Catholic financial contributions to the Church declined between 1963 and 1983 from 2.2% of household income to 1.1% and has remained at low levels since

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[29] Ibid.

[30] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, February 2008).

[31] Ibid., 5-6. The report further notes that the losses would have been even greater were it not for the influx of Catholic immigrants into the country.

[32] Again, I employ tentative language in this case and any other when comparing data that was collected by different agencies or that was collected using different instruments on different occasions.

[33] Andrew M. Greeley and Peter Henry Rossi, *The Education of Catholic Americans* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1966), 70.

[34] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant*, 42.

[35] Ibid.

then.[36] A more recent study found that in 2001 Catholic giving averaged out to 1.5% of household income as compared to 2.9% among mainline Protestants.[37] Some estimate that Catholic giving as declined by as much as 20%.[38] Are we to infer from these statistics that today's Catholics are less convinced than Protestants of the worth of investing their hard-earned money in the institutional Church?[39] Statistics on enrollment in Catholic schools raises similar questions. Today the nation's 6,594 Catholic schools educate a total of 1,974,578 students.[40] Those figures reflect a dramatic decrease since early '60s when Catholics sent over 5.2 million children to 13,000 schools.[41]

As suggestive as these findings are, they may still be considered somewhat removed from the heart of Catholics' everyday concerns. In this regard, survey data concerning Catholics' moral attitudes may provide us a better understanding of how their faith really affects their living.[42] For example, American Catholics' support for the death penalty, which official teaching effectively condemns, has diminished in recent decades. Excluding a temporary rise in the late '80s, the percentage of Catholics who favor the death penalty for murderers has continued to fall over the years—from 68.5% in 1976 to

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[36] Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 68.

[37] Julia Duin, "Giving in Different Denominations," *Philanthropy Rountdable*, June 2001, http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence_in_philanthropy/giving_in_different_denominations.

[38] "Earthly Concerns," *The Economist*, August 18, 2012, http://www.economist.com/node/21560536.

[39] This is a legitimate question. The disparity in contributions between Catholics and Protestants may be somewhat mitigated by the fact that many of today's American Catholics are immigrants from cultures where little emphasis is placed on financial contributions.

[40] National Catholic Educational Association, "Catholic School Data," *National Catholic Education Association*, 2014, http://www.ncea.org/data-information/catholic-school-data.

[41] Patrick Doyle, "Resurrection," *Boston Magazine*, November 2012, http://www.bostonmagazine.com/articles/2012/10/archdiocese-catholic-church-rebuild-after-scandal/4/. CARA reports 5,120,264 students in 12,194 schools in 1965.

[42] In this section I have made a conscious effort to include data on a range of moral issues, not merely issues dealing with sex and reproduction. Nevertheless, as noted above, my examination is limited by the availability of data that was collected in a consistent manner over the course of multiple decades.

58% in 2012.[43] Catholics' approval of euthanasia, which the Church likewise deems morally unacceptable, has fluctuated over the years, rising from 56.5% in 1978 to 68.5% in 1988 before dropping somewhat to 67.5% in 1998 and more dramatically to 63.3% in 2006.[44] In more personal matters, the Church has been very clear in its condemnation of premarital sex, homosexual relations, divorce, artificial birth control, and abortion. In some cases, surveys reveal continued or even increased support among American Catholics for these teachings. For instance, the percentage of Catholics who say that divorce laws should be easier has declined from 27% in the years 1972-5 to 23% in 1982-5 to 21% in 2012.[45] Similarly, Catholics' support for abortion in cases of danger to the mother, after remaining steady at 86% from 1972 to 1985, had dropped to 54% by 2012.[46]

Support for official Church teaching has been less strong in other areas. For example, the percentage of Catholics who in 2012 said that premarital sex is never wrong was lower than that recorded in the early '80s but higher than in the early '70s.[47] Official Church teaching on contraception has always faced massive resistance. In the years 1972 to 1975, 71% of Catholics favored providing information about birth control to teenagers, a figure that rose in the '80s.[48] In 2012, 82% deemed birth control morally acceptable.[49]

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[43] The Association of Religion Data Archives, "General Social Surveys," *The Association of Religion Data Archives*, 2014, http://www.thearda.com/Archive/GSS.asp. (Henceforth GSS.) Where not otherwise specified, GSS data is cited from the ARDA website.
[44] GSS. Respondents were asked if they thought it was acceptable for a doctor to end the life of a patient with an incurable disease with the family's consent.
[45] GSS cited in Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 91.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

On the issue of homosexuality, Catholics' attitudes have shifted dramatically away from official teaching. In the years 1972 to 1975, 71% of Catholics said homosexuality is always wrong.[50] In 2012, by contrast, only 20.5% of Catholics disagreed or strongly disagreed that homosexuals have the right to marry (versus 25% who agreed or strongly agreed).[51] While the wording of the survey questions concerning these last two issues was not consistent, comparison of the results strongly suggests that Catholics have shifted their views on this issue.

Taken together, these findings concerning a variety of social and personal moral issues reveal that today's Catholics are inconsistent in their agreement with the Church's official teaching on moral matters. Perhaps the most salient conclusion one arrives at from surveying this data is that American Catholics are less influenced by the authority of the institutional Church than they used to be. In 2005, a majority of the Catholics surveyed said that one could be a good Catholic without following Church teaching on birth control (75.3%), remarriage for divorced persons (65.7%), and abortion (58.1%).[52] All of these figures are up significantly from the late '80s. The importance Catholics attributed to Church authority continued to decline dramatically from 2005 to 2011 among all age groups, with only three in ten Catholics saying the Vatican's claim to teaching authority was very important to them.[53]

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[49] Gallup data cited in The Association of Religion Data Archives, "News Polls," *The Association of Religion Data Archives*, 2014, http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Polls.asp. Where not otherwise specified, Gallup data is cited from the ARDA website.

[50] GSS cited in Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 91.

[51] GSS.

[52] Gallup.

[53] William D'Antonio, "Survey Reveals Generation Shift in the Catholic Church," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 24, 2011, http://ncronline.org/node/27162#figure1.

The picture emerging from this data about how American Catholics live out their faith is thus a complex one. Religious vocations and financial donations have declined considerably while lay ecclesial ministry has grown. Catholics affirm Church teaching on some moral issues and adamantly reject it on others. To infer from these findings that today's Catholics have grown weak in their faith is too facile a conclusion. It is clearly the case that many of today's Catholics no longer adhere to Church moral teachings as consistently as they used to or express their faith in their lives in the same ways that Catholics did in the past. However, it is also an open question whether Catholics' attitudes about controversial issues like birth control and homosexuality represent a severing of a "seamless garment" of Church teaching or a stitching together of a Christian ethic that is consistent, albeit according to a different standard.

Catholics' Habits of Prayer

Beyond knowing the content of the faith, celebrating the faith in the sacraments, and enacting that faith in one's life, discipleship inescapably demands a personal relationship with God as expressed in prayer. For a look at Catholics' habits of prayer over the decades, we have to compare surveys administered by several different organizations, which limits the conclusions we can draw from the data. That being said, there is no data to suggest Catholics are praying any less today than they were in the early '70s, and it is probable that they are even praying more. According to Andrew Greeley, the percentage of Catholics praying at least once a day increased from 52% in 1972 to

62% in 1984.[54] Gallup reported figures as high as 66.8% in 1983 and then a somewhat diminished percentage of 62.5% in 2005. The Pew Forum published a more modest estimate in 2008 of 58%, which, though somewhat lower than recent figures, may nevertheless indicate persistence of higher levels of prayer as compared to the early '70s.[55] Other surveys seem to indicate that American Catholics are not only praying more but also experiencing God more frequently. In 1998 and 2008, the General Social Survey asked participants, "Did you ever have a religious or spiritual experience that changed your life?" In those years, the affirmative response rate among Catholics increased from 23.0% to 32.2%. While there is not enough data for this question to make any positive claims regarding more frequent encounters with God among Catholics, at very least we can make the more reserved observation that none of the available data suggests that Catholics are encountering God less than they used to.

Initial Interpretation and Analysis: Dis-integration of Catholic Lives?

Does the above survey data corroborate common assertions about the decline of Catholicism in the United States? Are there ways in which American Catholics are failing to live out their call to discipleship that go beyond the usual lapses and shortcomings of human beings? If so, what patterns emerge in these areas of deficiency? In the hopes of addressing these questions, we have just examined historical trends in American Catholics' lives of faith as represented in four categories—knowledge of the faith,

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[54] Andrew M. Greeley, *American Catholics Since the Council: An Unauthorized Report* (Chicago, IL: Thomas More Press, 1985), 51.

[55] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant*.

celebration of the sacraments, participation in the Christian life, and habits of prayer. Concerning knowledge of the faith, we found scant evidence that Catholic knowledge is worse today than it was in the '60s (even if it is not particularly impressive at present). We saw that Catholics' celebration of the sacraments is undeniably in decline. Continued fidelity to certain Church moral teachings and increased numbers of lay ministers suggest signs of hope in Catholics' living. However, in many regards (e.g., financial giving, certain moral attitudes, self-evaluated measures of importance), Catholics' faith appears to be influencing their living less than in the past. As for prayer, today's Catholics seem to be entering into direct communication with God at least as much as in the past.

What are we to make of these trends? Given the changes in Catholics' sacramental celebration and moral attitudes, one can understand why some perceive Catholicism to be in decline. Yet, if there is indeed a problem, it is evidently not a lack of knowledge or a decrease in Catholics' affinity for the spiritual. Neither does the data support secularization theorists' narrative of a general decline in religiosity. Rather, it seems that for some reason Catholics' desire for God and knowledge of the faith is not translating into a life that would be considered distinctively and consistently Catholic by the standards of the mid-century Church. Some might argue that those standards reflected a style of religious expression from a bygone era and that a new era has dawned with its own norms for religious devotion. There may very well be truth in this assertion, but two points need to be made here.

First, regardless of any shift in norms that may be occurring, the fact of the matter is that the Christian life lacks a unity for many contemporary Catholics that their

ancestors in faith once enjoyed. The change experienced by American Catholics over the course of the past half-century might thus be most aptly described, not as a simple decline, *but rather as a dis-integration*. Second, even allowing for some diversity of legitimate religious expression, participation in the four dimensions of the Christian life examined above would seem a baseline standard for fidelity to the demands of discipleship. Even if one rejects the interpretation that shifting habits in other areas indicate a decline in American Catholicism, the drastic declines in sacramental celebration present an undeniable indicator that many contemporary Catholics are failing to participate in aspects of the Christian life deemed essential to discipleship since the earliest days of the Church. An integrated view of the Christian life that goes back hundreds if not thousands of years has fallen apart. Granting this conclusion, the question then arises, what factors have contributed to this fragmentation of Catholics' faith as their predecessors professed, celebrated, lived, and prayed it? In order to begin answering this question, I now turn to an examination of the dynamics at play within the Catholic Church during the past half-century.

Internal Change

When situating the above statistics in historical context, the trends in American Catholics' changing lives of faith begin to make more sense. Patterns of immigration and assimilation and events like the Second Vatican Council, the promulgation of the papal encyclical *Humane Vitae*, and the clergy sex abuse scandal have undoubtedly affected how American Catholics learn about, celebrate, pray, and live out their faith. A number

of scholars of American Catholicism have explored these historical moments in great depth, elucidating how they have shaped Catholics' faith as we see it today.[56] However, we gain deeper insight into how these events have impacted the lives of Catholics when we consider them, not as isolated events, but rather in terms of their cumulative influence on Catholics' religious imaginations. As I will argue at length in the next chapter, human beings rarely change their behavior without a corresponding change in the way they imagine themselves and their environment. Events like Catholic immigrants' assimilation into American culture, Vatican II, the promulgation of *Humane Vitae*, and the clergy sex abuse scandal altered Catholics' religious behaviors because they changed the way Catholics imagined their relationship to the transcendent and the mediators thereof. In Chapter Two, I will argue this point by drawing support from cognitive science, psychology, and phenomenology, but for the time being we can begin to appreciate the importance of the imagination from a sociological perspective.

When it comes to religious imagination, there has been no more influential voice in sociology than that of Andrew Greeley. Over the course of his 50 years of sociological research, Greeley concluded that the imagination was the key to understanding people's attitudes, commitments, and behaviors.[57] Through various studies, he found that people's

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[56] See, e.g., O'Toole, *The Faithful*; Steinfels, *A People Adrift*; Greeley, *American Catholics since the Council*; Mark S. Massa, *The American Catholic Revolution: How the '60s Changed the Church Forever* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://www.oxfordscholarship.com.proxy.library.nd.edu/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199734122.001.0001/acprof-9780199734122.

[57] Greeley's hunch about the importance of the imagination began to develop in the '70s, during which time he developed a set of survey tools designed to evaluate how people imagined God and how those ways of imaging correlated with other aspects of people's lives. One of these tools was a "forced choice" question included in the General Social Survey (GSS) that asked participants to place their image of God along a continuum between more traditional images of God (e.g., Father, Judge, Creator) and more modern images (e.g., Mother, Lover, Healer).

preference of religious images was more predictive of behaviors and attitudes than prayer habits, religious intensity, church attendance, confidence in religious leaders, and doctrinal orthodoxy—in short, more than any other measure of religion and, indeed, more than all the other measures of religion put together.[58] This finding becomes even more interesting for the current project in light of Greeley's discovery that the correlation between images and attitudes was stronger among Catholics under 45 (that is, so called "Vatican II Catholics" who grew up in the years surrounding the Council) than among older Catholics and all Protestants.[59] This fact is significant because, as Greeley notes, this difference suggests "something…happened in the last twenty-five years [between 1960 and 1985] which notably affected the religious imagination of Catholics in a more benign and gracious direction but which had no effect on the religious imagination of Protestants."[60] What was it that happened?

Greeley points to Vatican II. He argues that the images that predominated in Catholics' minds prior to the Council were fearful ones (e.g., God as exacting Judge) whereas, after the Council, Catholics tended to have warmer images of God (e.g., God as Lover or Friend). Historian Peter Steinfels expresses similar suspicions that the postconciliar drop in Mass attendance was related to a de-emphasizing of teachings on

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[58] Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 100; cf. Greeley, *American Catholics Since the Council*, 105, 201. Greeley's conclusions might be challenged based on the small sample size of some of his studies. However, they have been corroborated by the research of Andrew Thompson (see Andrew D. Thompson, *That They May Know You* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1982), 62–3). Christian Smith's study of American adolescents might be seen as providing further corroboration (see *Soul Searching,* 41). In Chapter Two I will show that research in other fields likewise support Greeley's claims about the importance of the imagination.

[59] Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 100.

[60] Ibid., *American Catholics Since the Council*, 202.

hell and damnation.[61] However, we must be careful about describing the contrast between pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II Catholicism in too stark of terms, as Greeley tends to do at times. It is not the case that prior to the Council Catholics thought of God exclusively as a wrathful judge and afterwards as a loving parent or friend.[62] Notwithstanding, Greeley is certainly right that the Council prompted a shift in Catholics' religious imaginations… and not only in the way they imagined God. As a result of the changes issuing from Rome in the early '60s, American Catholics came to see the world, the Church, and themselves in radically new ways.

Concerning the first of these, Vatican II marked a radical departure from the way the Catholic Church had viewed the "world"—that is, everything outside of the Church— for much of its history. As theologian Sandra Schneiders explains, "The history of negativity toward the world (defensiveness, cooptation, competition and secularization, isolation and animosity) was now supplanted by a positive evaluation of and an embrace of a kind of equality and solidarity that really had no large-scale precedent in the Church's experience, even in the Middle Ages."[63] Indeed, the documents of the Council broke down the mental barriers between the Church and the world long imagined by Catholics. For example, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council's pastoral constitution on the

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[61] Steinfels cites as an example John Paul II's *Dies Domini* (1998), a letter on the Lord's Day in which the pope devotes only one sentence out of the entire document to the grave obligation to attend Mass and even then in only an oblique manner. Steinfel's further illustrates his point by quoting Bishop Kenneth Untener, who once said, "When I grew up you had two choices: go to Mass…or go to hell. Most of us chose Mass" (Steinfels, *A People Adrift*, 172).

[62] For proof of this one need only consider the devotion to God's more tender side as imagined in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was immensely popular from shortly before the turn of the century until just before the Council.

[63] Sandra M. Schneiders, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2013), 21. See pp. 4-23 for an extended discussion of how the Church's understanding of its relationship with the "world" has changed over time.

Church in the modern world, speaks of God's Spirit filling the whole world and asserts that "the earthly and the heavenly city penetrate each other."[64] The result of these teachings, claims historian James McCartin, was that "Vatican II energized the already substantial intercourse between the distinct realms of 'sacred' and 'secular,' significantly blurring an imagined partition established in the age of the immigrant church."[65] Significant in McCartin's words is the observation that the sacred and the secular, the Church and the world, were never perfectly separated. What shifted at Vatican II was the Church's willingness to speak of the world in language that permitted Catholics to reimagine the world in less antagonistic terms. Recent survey data illustrates how lasting this shift in perspective has been. A 2008 Pew Forum survey found that American Catholics are less likely than the general population to perceive a conflict between religion and society (34% versus 40%).[66] It also found that the majority (54%) of Catholics do not perceive Hollywood as a threat to their values.[67]

The more irenic attitude adapted at Vatican II applied not only to "secular" people and aspects of life but also to members of other faith traditions, whom Catholics had previously viewed as enemies at worst and in dubious spiritual standing at best. For example, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Council's decree on ecumenism, states, "Catholics must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common

[64] Paul VI, "Gaudium et Spes," nos. 11, 40.
[65] James P. McCartin, *Prayers of the Faithful: The Shifting Spiritual Life of American Catholics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), 103.
[66] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, 69.
[67] Ibid., 70.

heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren."[68] Vatican II also introduced Catholics to a new vision of the Church itself. For one thing, the teachings of the Council marked a shift in focus from *ad intra* to *ad extra* affairs, emphasizing the Church's mission to the world. *Gaudium et Spes*, for example, proclaims, "Therefore, this sacred synod, proclaiming the noble destiny of man[kind] and championing the Godlike seed which has been sown in [them], offers to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all [people] which corresponds to this destiny of theirs."[69] Secondly, these documents spoke less of the "Mystical Body of Christ," previously the preferred image for the Church, and more about the "People of God." This change in emphasis had the effect of shifting attention away from the Mystery of the Church and its union with God and toward the people who comprise the Church.

In addition to privileging a more democratic metaphor for the collective Church community, the Council dramatically reshaped its vision for the lives of individual Catholics. First of all, Vatican II redefined Catholics' self-understanding, especially as it concerned their relationship to the world, by emphasizing the goodness of the world and Christians' call to serve therein. Schneiders notes that this was particularly difficult for religious, who had previously defined themselves by virtue of "leaving the world" and who were now told that they were expected to minister in the world. Recognizing this shift helps to explain why so many religious abandoned their habits, engaged in more political activities, and even left the religious life completely in the years immediately

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[68] Paul VI, "Unitatis Redintegratio," 1964, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html, no. 4.
[69] Paul VI, "Gaudium et Spes," no. 3.

following the Council. It also provides some insight into the vocations crisis of the latter part of the 20th century. No longer were priests, nuns, and religious brothers afforded the special status they once held, at least not to the same degree. For many, this change raised the question, Why enter the priestly or religious life if one can achieve an equally holy life without sacrificing the pleasures of family life and a professional career? Seen in this context, the statistics cited above on declining priestly and religious vocations might be interpreted as reflecting not a simple fading of commitment within the Church but rather a new openness to alternative forms of religious commitment.

A similarly dramatic transformation occurred among the laity. Previously lay people had been given to view themselves as occupying the lowest rung of the hierarchy of holiness below religious brothers and sisters, priests, and bishops and their state in life as a concession to temporal concerns. However, the Council informed Catholics that it was not only priests and religious who have a call to holiness but rather that this call is universal. [70] "Every person," declares *Lumen Gentium*, "must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith."[71] The distinction between the laity and the clergy was further softened in the Council's "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," which states that members of the laity have the "right and duty" to enter into "full and active participation" in the liturgy.[72] Again, recent survey data demonstrates that these teachings of the Council effected a lasting change in

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[70] Paul VI, "Lumen Gentium," *Vatican Website*, 1964, no. 39, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.
[71] Ibid., no. 41.
[72] Ibid., "Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," *Vatican Website*, 1963, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, no. 14.

lay Catholics' attitudes about themselves and their role in the Church. For example, a 2005 Gallup poll showed that the overwhelming majority of Catholics believe lay people should have a greater say in the Church.[73]

Lastly, just as Vatican II knocked down many of the walls that divided religious from the laity (sometimes literally) so too did it knock down the walls that partitioned different areas of lay Catholics' lives. Documents like *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Gaudium et Spes* not only removed the stigma of lay life as a concession to worldly concerns; they went so far as to declare that lay people are "bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit."[74] The result, explains Schneiders, was that "the 'Sunday Catholic' who had lived in two self-enclosed worlds could now be, in good conscience, a seven-day-a-week secular Catholic, and a seven-day-a-week Catholic secular."[75]

Some historians like Mark Massa and James McCartin assert that it was postconciliar changes in the liturgy and devotional practices that, even more than official Council documents, had the greatest influence on Catholics' religious imaginations. Prior to Vatican II, the members of the congregation were for the most part passive observers as the priest performed the rites of the Eucharist, employing Latin words that few understood. Since the priest was offering the sacrifice of the Mass on behalf of the people, the people were encouraged to occupy themselves with other pious devotions such as praying the rosary or reading devotional books. Catholic publishers of the time produced a great variety of such prayer books, which encouraged laity in growing

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[73] Gallup.
[74] Ibid., "Gaudium et Spes," no. 43.
[75] Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 22.

numbers to unite themselves imaginatively with the priest as he offered the holy sacrifice.[76] After the Council, Catholics arrived at Mass to discover a ritual that was hardly recognizable: the priest now faced the congregation, the altar had been pulled away from the wall, the laity were encouraged to participate actively through vernacular responses and song, and traditional organs were joined or replaced by guitars in many parishes.

Though initial reactions to the changes to the liturgy were largely positive, many began to feel that something had been lost. One Catholic gave expression to these sentiments in 1976, saying, "The Eucharist has some kind of pervasive meaning in our lives, and we seem to have forgotten what it is."[77] By 1999, 131 out of 181 U.S. dioceses had resumed offering Masses of the preconciliar variety in response to requests from the laity, who were seeking to reclaim something of the old experience.[78] It would seem that, in abandoning the ancient sounding Latin, the personal devotions, and the aura of mystery, the Church's celebration of the Eucharist lost its hold over many Catholics' imaginations.[79]

The changes of Vatican II also affected Catholics' practice of popular devotions, not only during Mass, but outside of Mass time as well. Historians generally recognize the period from the 1920s to the mid-1950s as the heyday of American Catholic devotionalism.[80] One of the most popular was the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

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[76] McCartin, *Prayers of the Faithful*, 64.

[77] Monica K. Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 1.

[78] McCartin, *Prayers of the Faithful*, 175.

[79] Many of the physical spaces in which Catholics worshiped were likewise altered in the wake of Vatican II in such a way that reduced their power over congregants' imaginations. See, e.g., ibid., 25, 118.

[80] For a more in-depth exploration of popular devotions, see Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth:*

which emphasized God's love and tenderness and fostered in many Catholics a sense of intimate friendship with God in Jesus. This time period also saw the flourishing of devotions to Mary and the saints, whom Catholics looked upon as spiritual friends and protectors. The popularity of these devotions was due in part to the strong imaginative dimension involved.[81] On the one hand, these devotions sometimes bordered on superstition.[82] On the other, they vitalized the prayer lives and shaped the imaginations of Catholics in a way that framed how they saw the world and guided their everyday actions.[83]

By the '50s, however, popular devotions were on the decline, a process that was expedited by the Second Vatican Council but related to numerous other factors as well. Scholars like Margaret McGuiness, Paula Kane and Joseph Chinnici have pointed to various influences including higher levels of education among American Catholics, better understanding of the Mass among laity, increased time in front of televisions, more successful assimilation into American society (which made distinctive identity markers less important), and the subsiding of social crises like the threat of communism.

The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[81] Popular guides described praying the rosary as involving "entering an imaginative context in which 'the mystery of a Christian life is aroused and awakened'" and in which Jesus becomes the vital force "in our memory, in our thoughts, even in our imaginations" (McCartin, *Prayers of the Faithful*, 86).

[82] According to historian Paula Kane, devotion to Mary was often dependent on the medieval concept of a "treasury of merit" and an image of Mary as "a kind of Catholic fairy godmother." During the '50s, it was common belief among devotees that they could expect an indulgence of 300 days for each novena they prayed and seven years for each day of a novena during October, the month of the rosary (Paula M. Kane, "Marian Devotion Since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?," in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O'Toole (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 122, 96).

[83] As Kane explains, these devotions "combined and encapsulated public and private realms by offering Catholics a 'protocol' for public behavior as well as capturing their emotions and mirroring their real experiences" (Kane, "Marian Devotion Since 1940," 93).

In this sense, Vatican II may be seen as simply expediting or consummating changes to the Catholic imaginal context that were already underway.[84] The imaginative and devotional practices of Catholics in the first part of the century reflected their situation as immigrants trying to maintain their identity in a sometimes hostile culture and as Americans facing threats from abroad. When the danger of those perceived threats subsided, the imaginal synthesis that had sustained American Catholics since the 19th century began to fall apart and the importance of the Catholic way of life grew more obscure.[85] Holding together the old synthesis was further complicated by the enrollment crisis in America's Catholic schools. At their peak in the '60s, Catholic schools had immersed over five million students in a Catholic world of religious art, habited nuns, and sacred ritual. As enrollment declined throughout the rest of the century, so too did Catholic schools' influence over the imaginations of the nation's youth.[86] Perhaps even more pervasive was the influence of Catholic media, which took advantage of the growing popularity of radio and then television during the '30s, '40s, '50s, and '60s.

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[84] Joseph Chinnici explains, "while the devotional practices of the 1930s often appeared superficially similar to their predecessors, they were constantly reflecting a changing pattern of prayer, which located the community within a specific historical, political, economic, theological, and cultural era" (Joseph P. Chinnici, "The Catholic Community at Prayer 1926-1976," in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O'Toole (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 75).

[85] Chinnici describes the situation this way: "Such public rhetoric coupled with the popular symbols [e.g., Enthronement of Sacred Heart, Family Rosary Crusade, May Day practices, Eucharistic and Marian rallies] remained internally coherent as long as there existed a common socioreligious consensus against secularism and atheistic communism. But as a 'system of the sacred' dependent on a combination of social, political, and moral values, its underlying fault lines and uneasy synthesis would have a short life once the common enemy no longer dominated the horizon of thought and action" (Chinnici, "The Catholic Community at Prayer 1926-1976," 53). John Allen has suggested that Islamic radicalism may be emerging as the new enemy in the mind of American Catholics. See John L. Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 440.

[86] This decline in enrollment was sudden and dramatic. The seventies opened with one Catholic school closing every day (Frances Forde Plude, *The Flickering Light: What's Happening to Catholic Schools?* (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1974), 12).

However, while Catholic TV personalities like Archbishop Fulton Sheen and Fr. Patrick Peyton enjoyed massive appeal during the middle part of the century, even their influence had begun to fade by the end of the '60s.[87] Likewise notable is the impact of the feminist movement, whose proponents challenged the patriarchal bias of traditional Christian symbols that for 2,000 years had served as the pillars of most Christians' religious imaginations.[88]

On account of these myriad changes, many American Catholics experienced a sort of "piety void" in the years following Vatican II in which they no longer found meaning in the old devotions and religious habits.[89] This is not to deny the many positive developments to come out of the Vatican II era—vibrant new spiritualities, new attention to Scripture, greater emphasis on social justice issues, liturgical renewal, and new lay ecclesial movements, to name a few. However, as I will argue more at length in the next chapter, human nature abhors an imaginal vacuum. When one imaginative synthesis falls apart, as happened around the middle of the 20th century, people immediately begin the search for new sources of meaning. The emergence of these new practices and movements reflects such a search for meaning. Still, survey data and anecdotal evidence suggest that, despite these disparate spiritual developments, a new synthetic vision of the Christian life is yet to emerge to match the strength of the old one. If anything resembling a new synthesis exists today, it is influenced most strongly, not by Church teaching and practice, but by the opinions and customs of the wider American culture.

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[87] *Variety* magazine once wrote that the success of Fr. Peyton, who would attract 60 million viewers for a single TV special, showed that the power of film was "mightier than books and Bibles in penetrating the consciousness of Christian people" (McCartin, *Prayers of the Faithful*, 77).
[88] Steinfels, *A People Adrift*, 276.
[89] Kane, "Marian Devotion Since 1940," 116.

Wider Trends of Change

Having situated the relevant data within the historical context of 20th-century American Catholicism, we can now better appreciate some of the causes of the dis-integration experienced by Catholics in recent decades. As we widen the scope of this inquiry, we will see that this lack of integration is not a problem unique to American Catholics but rather a challenge confronting much of the Western world.

Americans' Changing Religious Habits and Attitudes

I begin by returning to the four dimensions of the Christian life that structured my examination of the changing lives of Catholics above. There I highlighted, in the first place, the lack of evidence that today's Catholics are less knowledgeable about their faith than their predecessors. This finding is consistent with a wider trend reflected in Americans' improving religious knowledge. By way of evidence, consider the fact that the percentage of Americans who could name all four Gospels increased from 35% in 1954 to 46% in 1982.[90] According to Pew, that percentage remains high today.[91] Similarly, the percentage of Americans who could correctly identify Jesus' place of birth increased from 64% in 1954 to 70% in 1982 and has remained steady since then.[92] While some analysts, such as those at the Pew Forum, are not impressed with Americans' religious knowledge, the best available data suggests that levels of religious knowledge today mark an improvement since mid-century. According to the Pew survey, Catholics

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[90] Greeley, *American Catholics Since the Council*, 17.
[91] In 2010, Pew found that 45% were able to name all four Gospels. See The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey*, 21.
[92] Ibid.

are actually less knowledgeable when it comes to basic facts about Christianity (e.g., names of Gospels, Jesus' birthplace, biblical figures) than the general American public, but there is no survey evidence to suggest that Catholics are less knowledgeable than they used to be.[93] To the contrary, Catholics, like the rest of the general U.S. population, may actually be more knowledgeable about religion than in the past (at least by some measures).

Second, we saw above that Catholics' celebration the sacraments has declined significantly over the course of the past 50 years. Comparing the data on Catholics to the general population, the modest decline in worship attendance among the general population pales in comparison with what the Catholic Church has seen. For most of the century, Americans' weekly worship attendance has hovered around 40-41%, with a modest spike in the late '50s and early '60s.[94] Those percentages have declined slightly as of late, dropping to 39% in 2008 and 37% in 2013.[95] Regarding the difference in rates of attendance in the '70s, the 30% decrease among Catholics represents a clear divergence from the wider trend among Americans. While this drop in attendance seems dramatic—and indeed it is—we gain better perspective on the matter when we recognize that Catholic attendance rates in the '40s, '50s, and '60s were well above averages for the general population—20 and even 30 percent higher than historic averages. Viewed in

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[93] See The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey*. It is not the case that Catholics are simply less knowledgeable in general than the general population. The Pew survey reveals that Catholics are less knowledgable about Christianity relative to the general population than they are about general knowledge. It is also worth noting that, according to the 2010 Pew study, Latino Catholics consistently scored worse than White Catholics on measures of religious knowledge (p.17). That being the case, we might ask how the growing proportion of Latinos in the American Church is affecting measures of Catholic knowledgeability.

[94] Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 43.

[95] Lipka, "What Surveys Say About Worship Attendance." Gallup reports the same figure for 2013.

context, the subsequent decline appears a return to more normal attendance levels.

Still, the question remains, What contributed to the dramatic decrease in attendance? Greeley points to *Humanae Vitae* as the primary cause for the decline, noting that rates of attendance began to plummet the year after the encyclical was promulgated and then leveled out within the following decade.[96] Steinfels suggests a postconciliar shift in magisterial rhetoric might be partly to blame.[97] Nevertheless, when we look at data for the past decade, we see that Catholic rates of Mass attendance match the wider trend. Americans in general are attending weekly worship slightly less than they have in previous decades.

Third, when discussing today's Catholics' participation in Christian living above, we found that many Catholics' relationship with official Church expectations was complicated, we might even say lacking in coherence. Comparing Catholics' behaviors and moral attitudes with those of other Americans sheds some light on this otherwise confusing picture. To begin with, despite the claims of some scholars about the secularization of Western culture, recent survey data reveals that weakening sense of Catholic identity is a distinctly Catholic problem. Where Catholics are identifying less strongly, Protestants have increased in their readiness to identify themselves as a "strong Protestant."[98] The secularization theory is further discredited by the fact that Catholics, like Americans in general, remain as active in their parishes as they ever were.[99] At the same time, the Catholic retention rate, though significantly lower than it was for most of

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[96] Greeley, *American Catholics Since the Council*, 54.

[97] See Steinfels, *A People Adrift*, 19.

[98] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "'Strong' Catholic Identity at a Four-Decade Low in U.S."

[99] GSS as reported in Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 60. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic*, 42.

the 20th century, is still significantly higher than that of Protestantism as a whole (albeit lower than Mormon, Orthodox Christian, and Jewish traditions).[100] In terms of financial giving, the general trend among Americans since the early '60s has been toward declining contributions, though Catholic contributions are far lower than those of mainline Protestants.[101] Taking all of these measures into consideration, unnuanced claims about the declining religiosity of Americans appear unfounded. If Americans have soured on religion in some ways, there remain many respects in which Americans value religion highly.

Looking to the moral attitudes of the general American population helps us to make further sense of the moral attitudes of Catholics, who, as we saw above, hold to official Church teaching in some issues but not in others. As it turns out, Catholics' moral views have grown increasingly hard to distinguish from the wider population. Though slightly lower on average, the percentage of Catholics approving of the death penalty,[102] birth control,[103] euthanasia,[104] and divorce[105] has historically approximated that of Americans in general. In the past two decades, Catholics have grown more similar to the general population in their views on abortion.[106] Prior to that time, Catholics were actually far more permissive, as they have been consistently on the issue of premarital

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[100] Ibid., 30.

[101] Duin, "Giving in Different Denominations."

[102] GSS.

[103] Frank Newport, "Americans, Including Catholics, Say Birth Control Is Morally OK," *Gallup*, May 22, 2012, http://www.gallup.com/poll/154799/americans-including-catholics-say-birth-control-morally.aspx.

[104] GSS.

[105] Greeley, *Religious Change in America*.

[106] Gallup, "Abortion," *Gallup*, 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx.

sex.[107] Catholics have likewise followed the general trend of increasing acceptance for gay marriage and lifestyles.[108] In light of these statistics, we can see that Catholics are less and less likely to adhere to official Church teaching where it diverges from popular opinion. In some cases (e.g., homosexuality, divorce), the divergence between popular opinion and Church teaching has widened over time, carrying many Catholics along with the pull of popular opinion. In some cases Catholics' moral attitudes do not diverge from Church teaching to the same degree as does the general population, but the influence of the surrounding culture seems clear. Though the Church perhaps never had a complete hold on Catholics' moral imaginations, it is evident that their imaginations are less influenced by Church teaching than they used to be. Other more persuasive voices are increasingly exerting their influence.

Finally, we saw above that American Catholics are not praying or experiencing God any less than in the past and might even be doing so more. Again, this fits the general trend among Americans. Greeley reported an increase of those who pray every day from 54% in 1972 to 59% in 1985.[109] In 2008, the Pew Forum reported that that figure was holding steady at 58%.[110] The percentage of Americans reporting ever having a spiritual experience has increased from about a third of respondents in 1972 to 38.5% in 1998 to 43.1% in 2008.[111] Hence, whatever changes may be occurring in the U.S. context, it does not appear that Americans are growing more distant from God.

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[107] GSS.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 57.

[110] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant*, 45.

[111] Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 59.

From this comparison of Catholic religious knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors with that of the general American public, we see that changes in these areas of Catholics' lives have generally followed wider trends. Undoubtedly, events of a more internal nature like Vatican II and the sex abuse crisis have greatly influenced Catholics' attitudes and behaviors. Notwithstanding, changes within the Church cannot fully explain phenomena like recent declines in Mass attendance and increasing rejection of the Church's teaching on homosexuality. Only in looking at the experience of Americans in general do the seemingly incoherent behaviors of Catholics make sense.

Changes in 20th-Century U.S. Culture and Religion

One thing is for sure—the changes experienced by Americans in this time period have been many and dramatic. Beginning with the '60s, Americans entered into a period of social upheaval during which time many long-held assumptions about society, family, and certain groups of people were challenged. As James McCartin says, "the rapid alteration of a range of established social and cultural norms diminished the value of the past and the significance of tradition and furnished the context in which American Catholics' spirituality underwent dramatic revision."[112] One example of changing norms identified by McCartin, O'Toole, and others is the rise of an individualistic, "me-centered" culture in the United States, a phenomenon that manifests itself in Americans' spirituality as well as in consumer habits.[113] McCartin observes that recent demographic,

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[112] McCartin, *Prayers of the Faithful*, 95.

[113] The U.S. has always been a nation of "rugged individuals," but communal religion has also been a prominent feature of the social landscape since the nation's founding. Recent decades have seen an individualistic brand of spirituality rise to greater prominence than ever before.

technological, and cultural changes have created an atmosphere of isolation in which spiritual life is increasingly dependent on each individual's commitment and creativity.[114]

Keying in on one of these contributing factors, the rapid development of technology has wrought dramatic changes in the contemporary world. An ambivalent force in modern life, technological advance has brought increased potential for communication and the elimination of suffering but at the same time has contributed to increased isolation and the breakdown of communities. New technology and media, according to McCartin, "hastened the collapse of the vital core of the immigrant church, the ethnic conclave that came to dominate American cities during the late nineteenth century."[115] In the age of 4G networks and the 24-hour news cycle, Americans are constantly made aware of events transpiring around the world and fewer and fewer people find themselves in a cultural ghetto where life is uncomplicated and neighbors are all of one mind.

The rapid change and complexity of contemporary life has thus made it increasingly difficult for Americans to live well-integrated lives and especially well-integrated spiritual lives. Political scientist Alan Wolfe describes the current condition of American religion in these terms:

> Religion moves people because its ideas are powerful, yet Americans, who shun overly intellectual ideas on radio and television, are also likely to avoid faiths that ask them to take doctrine seriously. They define themselves and each other by their religion, yet they are willing to shape and reshape their traditions that offer religions their distinctive identities. They pay homage to a force larger than themselves, even while asking for things for themselves. Americans know that faith offers fellowship, but then they treat the institutions capable of offering fellowship with a decided suspicion. They believe that religion is a precondition for morality but are not at all surprised when religious figures prove themselves immoral. They understand that God judges some of what they do as

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[114] McCartin, *Prayers of the Faithful*, 107.
[115] Ibid., 98.

sinful, but they do not believe him to be too demanding and they avoid trying to judge each other. And those who feel a special obligation to spread their faith acknowledge that, for the sake of neighborliness, they are reluctant to shove anything down anyone else's throat.[116]

It would seem that the United States' Christian identity is, if not disappearing, then certainly growing more disjointed. Books could and have been written about how each of the above factors has contributed to the changing face of American religion in the 20th century.[117] For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I will focus on one factor that brings the rest into greater clarity, namely, Americans' changing religious imaginations.

Americans' Changing Religious Imaginations

Earlier we examined how American Catholics have come to imagine the world, the Church, and themselves differently on account of the changes of Vatican II and a number of other events and influences. Looking to data about the general American public, it is clear that it was not only factors internal to the Church that were responsible for this change in imagination. Americans in general (and much of the Western world, for that matter) have undergone a dramatic change in the way they imagine their reality.

On the one hand, traditional religious symbols still exercise significant power over the imaginations of many Americans. Belief in heaven and hell seems to be as high today as it was in the '50s,[118] and, while belief in God seems to have declined somewhat

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[116] Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005), 245-6.

[117] See, e.g., Steinfels, *A People Adrift*, O'Toole, *The Faithful,* and Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion*.

[118] Compare Greeley, *Religious Change in America*, 14 with The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, 234.

since the '60s, belief in the Devil and angels has actually increased since 1990.[119] On the other hand, these symbols do not dominate modern Americans' view of reality as they did that of their predecessors.[120] Today many other images vie for Americans' imaginations—images of patriotism and financial success; images of other religions' gods; images of a mechanistic, creatorless universe. The cumulative effect over time has been that, even as most Catholics have remained Catholic in name, their imaginations have become as generically American as those of the general population.

This imaginal shift did not come as a bolt out of the blue. Rather, it was the result of a longer history of sweeping but subtle change. No one has written on the changing religious context with greater breadth of scope or scholarly acumen than Charles Taylor. Though Taylor's *A Secular Age* tends to be European in its focus, his narrative remains highly illuminating for the American context. In this work, Taylor debunks a popular model for explaining the plight of Christianity in modern times—what Taylor terms the "subtraction theory" of secularization—which purports that belief inevitably fades with the rise of science and modern knowledge. Against this theory, Taylor argues that an increase in scientific learning (and, I would add, events like the sex abuse scandal and Vatican II) could not have had anywhere near the deleterious effect on belief and practice they have had without a concurrent shift in the way people spontaneously imagine and

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[119] GSS; The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, 26; Gallup, "Religion," *Gallup*, 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx#3. One might wonder to what degree tragic—some would even say evil—events like 9/11, which transpired during this time period, contributed to this resurgence of the Devil in Americans' imaginations.

[120] Charles Taylor, too, has observed this phenomenon in which certain religious symbols remain a part of a language and culture well after they have ceased to function as a coherent symbol system.

experience reality.[121]

Taylor refers to this ensemble of ways people imagine the world they live in as their "cosmic imaginary."[122] This cosmic imaginary "makes sense of the ways in which the surrounding world figures in our lives," that is, in our religious images and practices, cosmological doctrines, and in the stories we tell.[123] Some such imaginary is operative in the consciousness of every human being, and, even though this imaginal synthesis may undergo radical revision over the course of a lifetime, a person never relinquishes an element of that imaginary until they have replaced it with another that allows them to maintain coherence in the way they imagine the world. Hence, argues Taylor, when Western people began to abandon their Christian beliefs and worldview it was only because an alternative view—what Taylor calls "exclusive humanism"—had infiltrated their imaginations.[124] The old imaginary was never directly refuted. Rather, new possibilities for imagining reality crept into people's minds, subtly eroding the old imaginary until nothing but a hollow shell remained.[125]

Taylor, following Weber, describes this subtle, pernicious shift as a movement out of an "enchanted" imaginary to a "disenchanted," mechanistic one. In the old enchanted imaginary, which held sway up until 500 years ago, people perceived themselves as living in a world where natural events were controlled by God and evil spirits and in which the boundaries between human agency and external influences were porous.

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[121] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 325.
[122] A related term for Taylor is "social imaginary," which refers to "the generally shared background understanding of society, which makes it possible for it to function as it does" (*A Secular Age*, 323).
[123] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 323.
[124] Ibid., 84.
[125] Susanne Langer comes to the same conclusion as Taylor. See *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 270-2.

Taylor associates this enchanted imaginary with "Latin Christendom," which he describes as "a civilization where society and culture are profoundly informed by Christian faith," that is, in which people's social and cosmic imaginaries were deeply Christian.[126]

Looking more specifically at the American context, Andrew Delbanco describes how the process Taylor narrates manifested itself here. "In the first phase of our [American] civilization," writes Delbanco, Americans expressed their sense of the purposefulness of life "through a Christian story that gave meaning to suffering and pleasure alike and promised deliverance from death."[127] In this God-centered phase, which lasted for the better part of 200 years, colonials (mostly Protestants) ascribed nothing to chance; all was within God's providence, from the weather to crop yield. Their imagined conditioned, which was formed primarily by the 15,000 hours of sermons each person was likely to hear in their lifetime, was that of helplessness in a world largely beyond their control and of utter dependence on God. Delbanco writes, "It says to the sufferer, your only deliverance is to discover and submit to something larger and more enduring than yourself. This was the core idea of the first phase of American history."[128]

Taylor charts how, beginning around the time of the Renaissance, new interest in understanding nature and applying rigorous methods of reasoning to inquiry precipitated challenges to long-held, naive beliefs about God, the world, and society. Initially this new

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[126] Ibid., 514. Many others have described the pre-modern situation in similar terms. See, e.g., Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 27.

[127] Andrew Delbanco, *Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3–4, http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10318500.

[128] Ibid., 37.

interest in science and learning and the newfound confidence it inspired in the human ability to know about and control nature posed no direct threat to belief in God. However, in order to accommodate new understandings of the natural world, Christians adjusted their image of God, resulting in what Taylor terms "Providential Deism."[129] On this view, God is imagined as a distant Creator who created the universe and then stepped back from his creation in order to allow it to operate upon fixed laws, which are knowable by the human mind.

At the same time, people began to re-imagine everyday life. In the spirit of the Reformation, some Christians rejected the presumption that holiness was the special possession of a few priests and religious and so made an intentional effort (which Taylor calls the "Reform" as distinct from the Reformation) to affirm the "ordinary" life lived by the vast majority of people. Ironically, in holding everyone to a supposedly higher standard of holiness, the elites discouraged ordinary Christians from participating in many of the practices that had sustained their faith. Taylor explains:

> on the Protestant side, there was an in principle denial of any hierarchy of vocations. Everyone was called on to live their faith to the full. And this meant that the lives and practices of ordinary people couldn't just be left as they were. They had to be exhorted, commanded, and sometimes forced and bullied into giving up, e.g., the veneration of saints, the adoration of the Sacrament, dancing around the maypole, and so on.[130]

This Reform thus amounted to an "excarnation" of the Christian faith.[131] Taylor writes:

> We have moved from an era in which religious life was more "embodied", where the presence of the sacred could be enacted in ritual, or seen, felt, touched, walked towards (in pilgrimage); into one which is more "in the mind", where the link with God passes more through our endorsing contested interpretations—for instance, of our political identity as religiously defined, or of God as the authority and moral source underpinning

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[129] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 221.
[130] Ibid., 104.
[131] Ibid., 554.

our ethical life.[132]

It is significant for our narrative that the United States declared its independence and established its founding principles during the Age of Enlightenment, when Providential Deism held widespread currency. During this period, Enlightenment rationality came to exert its influence on Christianity with the result that, as Delbanco explains, the sense of transcendence Americans had previously experienced in relation to God was replaced by an experience of transcendence in relation to nation. The same thinking that Taylor describes as being applied to the natural world was applied to the world of politics. America's Founding Fathers established the new nation upon certain truths that they deemed "self-evident"—that is, knowable through the use of the natural powers of reason—and that therefore ought to form the foundation of social relations among human beings.

Hence, as thrones were toppling around the world, God was displaced (in practice if not in name) to make room for a newly deified people and nation. This new religion was nourished by an emerging body of American literature produced by authors like Longfellow, Emerson, Hale, Whitman, and Melville, who facilitated the transformation by converting old religious symbols into symbols of national transcendence.[133] Where Americans had previously looked to God as their savior from the dangers and evils of the world, increasing numbers now looked to the "redeemer nation".[134] Interestingly, at the same time that Americans were implicitly deifying the nation and thereby blurring the

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[132] Ibid.

[133] Delbanco cites as an example Melville's use of the language of transubstantiation to describe the intimacy he felt for Nathaniel Hawthorne (see Delbanco, *Real American Dream*, 56).

[134] Ibid., 77.

imagined lines between the transcendent and the worldly, they were explicitly separating the affairs of the State from those of the Church. However, as the rhetoric of founding a new nation "under God" would suggest, God was still very much active in the American imagination.

At this stage, Christians still by and large believed themselves to be acting in a manner faithful to their religion. On their understanding, God had given them these powers of reason and expected them to make use of them. Notwithstanding, however well intentioned, this reimagining of God's role vis-à-vis the created world subtly yet significantly changed people's attitudes about transcendent reality. They increasingly came to perceive their universe through an "immanent frame" in which all sense of the sacredness of certain times and places had given way to an impersonal order of laws and matter. According to Taylor, this mechanistic view of the universe:

> undermines enchantment, the expression-embodiment of higher reality in the things which surround us, and thus made the presence of God in the cosmos something which was no longer experience-near, or at least not at all in the same way. God's power was no longer something you could feel or see in the old way; it now had to be discerned in the design of things.[135]

Because people had ceased to imagine God as immediately present in the natural world, it became difficult to imagine what role God played at all. Hence, it was only another short step to excluding God altogether. Having been thoroughly hollowed out, the shell of Christendom that remained was now easy to reject.

With God thus excluded from people's ways of imagining reality and the universe imagined as an impersonal order, a gaping hole appeared in modern people's lives. God

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[135] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 329.

had been gradually edged out of the picture in favor of "exclusive humanism."[136] Yet, having pursued this ideal of human flourishing for its own sake and by merely human efforts, people now found this alternative equally unsatisfying. For the first time in human history, the question of the meaning of existence became a real issue. As Taylor notes, this problem would have been totally incomprehensible to people of previous eras, whose world was replete with meaning and with spiritual beings and cosmic forces impinging upon them at every turn. Yet modern Westerners, now confronted with two seemingly untenable options, began to despair of the meaningfulness of reality. A plethora of alternative accounts of human fulfillment emerged, seeking to fill the void and resulting in what Taylor describes as "a spiritual super-nova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane."[137] However, none of the many new positions possessed the power of the old Christian synthesis.

We see these dynamics at play in the United States during the 1960s when Americans began to grow disillusioned with the national ideal on account of the war in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal. Having displaced God, the deified nation now found itself out of favor. This led into what Delbanco terms the stage of the "self," which in many ways reflects Taylor's description of exclusive humanism and the "expressive individualism" that emerged through the "nova effect".[138] In this current stage of American history, many people have ceased seeking something greater than themselves, instead making diversion and self-gratification their chief aim. People still experience a

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[136] Ibid., 19.
[137] Ibid., 300.
[138] Ibid., 473.

longing for transcendence and fulfillment, but, as Delbanco explains, "the idea of transcendence has detached itself from any coherent symbology."[139]

In the same way that Protestant Americans eventually experienced the processes Taylor describes taking place earlier in Europe, so too did Catholic Americans belatedly follow down the same road as their Protestant counterparts.[140] Regarded as outsiders in the U.S. until the middle of the 20th century, Catholics remained in an enclave mentality and so resisted the secularizing trends of the surrounding culture until a relatively late date. However, by mid-century Catholics were becoming thoroughly assimilated into American culture, and a shift occurred. As suggested above, the Second Vatican Council seemed to accelerate a number of changes that were already underway. As the elites' efforts of Reform had done for European Christians centuries before, Vatican II encouraged Catholics to think of vocations in less hierarchical terms and affirmed marriage and other lay vocations. This shift in emphasis was soon followed by a decline in religious vocations as well as in popular devotional practices, a consequence that follows the pattern of excarnation described by Taylor.[141] Encouraged by greater acceptance and success in American society and by Vatican II's assurance of the

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[139] Delbanco, *Real American Dream*, 5. In the same vein, Langer observes that in modern society "[e]very person finds his Holy of Holies where he may; in Scientific Truth, Evolution, the State, Democracy, *Kultur*, or some metaphysical word like 'the All' or 'the Spiritual.' Human life in our age is so changed and diversified that people cannot share a few, historic, 'charged' symbols that have about the same wealth of meaning for everybody" (*Philosophy in a New Key*, 288).

[140] Based on these patterns of change, one might reasonably predict that the current wave of immigrants from Central American, who presently seem more resistant to pervasive trends of disaffiliation, will follow a similar pattern in future generations. I will return to this point in Chapter Two.

[141] There is ample evidence that American Catholicism has undergone the sort of excarnation described by Taylor. I have already noted the post-Vatican II "piety void" that Paula Kane describes. Robert Orsi's *Between Heaven and Earth* likewise provides an intimate account of the postconciliar iconoclasm that purged American Catholicism of the concrete practices that had previously made heaven present to Catholics and that left in its wake a bland religion of ideas and ethics.

goodness of their everyday lives, Catholics' practice of their faith in the late 20th century became less about gaining proximity to God through weekly Mass, priest-mediated sacraments, and private devotions and more about living "a good (Christian) life."[142]

Catholics' successful assimilation, combined with Vatican II's relaxation of rules that had hitherto distinguished Catholics from their fellow citizens (e.g., abstaining from meat on Fridays), thus contributed to the diluting of distinctively Catholic values to the point that the values of many self-described Catholics became indistinguishable from those of the wider American culture.[143] However, as Andrew Greeley has argued, most Catholics are not rejecting Catholicism altogether. Even with rates of disaffiliation increasing since Greeley conducted his surveys, his central point remains valid: Most Catholics seem to like being Catholic and are reluctant to give it up, even when confronted with internal scandal and teachings with which they disagree.

Yet Taylor's account gives cause to sound the alarm at the sight of such trends, even if most Catholics are not rejecting the faith outright. According to the story of secularization that Taylor weaves, European Christians believed themselves to be acting as good Christians even as they gradually diluted their faith to the point that it simply dissipated. The source of the problem, claims Taylor, was not a frontal assault on Christianity but rather a subtle shift in the way Christians imagined their world. Something similar seems to have transpired within American Catholicism. Today significant numbers of Catholics are openly defying ecclesiastical authority and formally

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[142] On the reduction of Christianity to a set of ethical codes, see Chapter 6 of *A Secular Age*.

[143] Alan Wolfe has predicted that other minority religious groups in the U.S. will likewise abandon their distinctive values and practices in future generations. (See Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion*, 249.)

leaving the Church or simply choosing not to adopt the faith of their parents. Such actions were more or less unimaginable a couple of generations ago. So what has changed? As we have seen, many significant events have transpired in the past 50 years. However, more significant for the faith lives of Catholics than any single event or combination of events is the transformation that has occurred in American Catholics' imaginations.

The Imaginal Situation in the U.S. Today

Taylor and Delbanco argue that God no longer occupies a central place in many people's imaginations. Delbanco contends that even the ideal of the nation has lost its hold, and so many Americans, now bereft of coherent symbolic intercourse with the transcendent, continue to pursue it through New Age spirituality, environmentalism, the quest for ancestral roots, and any number of other meaning-seeking endeavors. However, none of these is able to satisfy completely. None provides the all-encompassing, imaginative synthesis that the old theocentric worldview did. Each of these pursuits individually—and even when combined, as often happens—lacks the unified symbol system of the old Christian synthesis, which allowed people to make coherent sense of their relationship to the world and the transcendent.[144] Anthropologist Clifford Geertz once commented that, without a coherent symbol system, the human person becomes "a

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[144] Richard Kearney, following Walter Benjamin, describes this shift in terms of "anti-humanist allegories" replacing "humanist symbols": "The symbol carries an 'aura' which is to the world of objects what 'mystery' or 'depth' are to the world of human experience. The symbolic aura humanizes things and endows them with the 'power to look back'; it invites us to experience objects as unique, whole and original. Allegory, by contrast, may be said to typify the reproducible object; it represents a fragmented and impersonalized thing-world where the very idea of an autonomous image is meaningless. As a form of representation, voided of any living experience, allegory testifies to the numbness and flatness of a contemporary society where things are reduced to commodities and human experience to a series of disconnected sensations" (Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 336.).

kind of formless monster with neither sense of direction nor power of self-control, a chaos of spasmodic impulses and vague emotions."[145] Looking at the lives of many contemporary Americans, he appears to have been right.

Above I noted Delbanco's observations that sermons and literature were the primary modes of forming Americans' imaginations in earlier stages of the country's history. In each case, the media of choice formed people in a unified vision—either of a universe under God's control or of a nation in which people could together achieve some sort of transcendence. But what media are forming contemporary Americans' vision of reality, and how are they doing so? As opposed to the text-based culture of the past, today's culture has been called the "civilization of the image."[146] Where artificial images were rare in previous ages, today images crowd into our visual field from every direction—from billboards, the sides of vehicles, clothing, TV, computers, and handheld electronic devices. The average North American now sees approximately 6,000 marketing messages each day,[147] and, thanks to the proliferation of handheld electronic devices, young people now pack 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into 7.5 hours of consumption every day.[148] As people's lives become more and more filled with images, text occupies less and less attention. Popular social media like Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest make their living by dealing in images while

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[145] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 99. Speaking to the modern context specifically, Langer similarly warned, "This loss of old universal symbols endangers our safe unconscious orientation" (*Philosophy in a New Key*, 288; cf. 290).

[146] Roland Barthes, "Lesson in Writing," in *Image Music Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 175.

[147] Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, "Beyond the Culture Jam," in *Critical Pedagogies: Living and Learning in the Shadow of the 'Shopocalypse'*, ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge, 2010), 224.

[148] Victoria J. Rideout, Ulla G. Foehr, and Donald F. Roberts, *Generation M^2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds* (Kaiser Family Foundation, January 2010), 2.

increasingly marginalizing text. Twitter limits users to messages of 140 characters or less. Educational theorist Jack Mezirow has described our contemporary environment well, stating that it is "less a river of messages, symbols, and images into which we occasionally dip than an ocean in which we perpetually swim."[149] Though today's "digital natives" think nothing of it, this state of affairs marks a radical departure from human experience in all preceding history.

In times past, Americans received information and heard stories from a limited number of sources. This ensured a relatively unified set of meanings and messages that served as the foundation for Americans' social world. In colonial times, it was the Christian message as proclaimed from the pulpit by preachers. Beginning in the Revolutionary era, the nationalist cause became the dominant message, thanks largely to a growing body of American literature. In the current era, however, the media sources have proliferated and so too have the messages. Philosopher Richard Kearney describes the situation thus: "All we have is a series of random and conflicting meanings which cancel each other out, leaving us with nothing but a flux of surface images."[150] Rapid advances in communication technologies have provided Americans unprecedented exposure to diverse cultures, religions, and worldviews and multiplied exponentially the sources informing their minds and imaginations. This onslaught of conflicting messages and images undoubtedly presents a significant challenge to one's efforts to form a coherent vision of life. In the words of theologian Ray Hart, "For an American Christian

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[149] Jack Mezirow, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 235.
[150] Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 381.

to see via satellite television the life-style of a self-immolating Buddhist priest in Saigon is for him to see another human being whose existence is ordered by radically different self-images."[151] If such incidental contact with alien images causes this sort of internal conflict, how much more so must the targeted visual attacks launched by the marketing industry? McDonald's, Pepsi, Amazon, Gillette, Marlboro, Macy's, Toyota, Ikea, NBC, Yoplait, Apple, Turbotax, and Abercrombie and Fitch all assault consumers with images fabricated to capture their imaginations and envelop them in their version of reality.

Predictably, the consequence of living in the midst of this imaginal maelstrom has been the fragmentation and disorientation of Americans' lives. In the words of Sharon Daloz Parks:

> They find themselves living fragmented lives, piecing together various scraps of discrete meaning, each with its own center of value, power, and affection, each with its own god…many people yearn for a sense of deep integration in their lives but experience even the worlds of home and work as separate, each sphere oriented to differing values, expectations and loyalties.[152]

Taylor testifies, "everyone understands the complaint that our disenchanted world lacks meaning, that in this world, particularly youth suffer from a lack of strong purposes in their lives."[153] Battered about by so many conflicting messages and images, people are overwhelmed by the prospect of having to choose a single path or of selecting from among the many options one good that is especially worth devoting their lives to.

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[151] Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 199.

[152] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 22.

[153] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 303. Illustrating precisely this point, Delbanco relates the reflections of a pediatrician, who over the course of the past 30 years has found his child patients less and less responsive to his standard question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?": "In the past he got lots of answers following the formula 'I want to be like _____,' with the name of a sports hero, or a scientist, or even a politician filling in the blank. Now he gets a shrug, or an 'I dunno,' or, sometimes, the name of a TV cartoon character" (Delbanco, *Real American Dream*, 98).

Thus overwhelmed, many have grown numb to any prospect of a meaningful future, even the future that is but a few minutes away. "This desensitizing of human experience," writes Kearney, "is compounded by the erosion of narrative coherence and continuity caused by the fragmentary nature of TV production and consumption."[154] The average half-hour TV program typically runs for four to seven minutes at a time before cutting to a commercial break, prompting many viewers to develop a compulsive habit of "channel surfing". The immensely popular YouTube has lowered the bar even further, with the average video lasting only four minutes and twelve seconds.[155] Numerous studies have reported on Americans' diminishing attention spans and capacity for concentration.[156] In a survey by the Pew Forum, 76% of teachers shared the opinion that students have been conditioned by the Internet to find quick answers, resulting in the so-called "Wikipedia problem," the habit of giving up when they are unable to quickly locate an easy answer.[157] Such diminished expectations of and success in arriving at meaningful answers in response to serious questions has affected every area of Americans' life—education, work, sexuality,[158] family life, social interactions,[159] even

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[154] Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 321.

[155] Sysomos Inc., "Inside YouTube Videos," *Sysomos*, February 2010, http://www.sysomos.com/reports/youtube/.

[156] See, e.g., Ziming Liu, "Reading Behavior in the Digital Environment: Changes in Reading Behavior Over the Past Ten Years," *Journal of Documentation* 61, no. 6 (December 1, 2005): 700–712.

[157] Matt Richtel, "Technology Changing How Students Learn, Teachers Say," *The New York Times*, November 1, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/education/technology-is-changing-how-students-learn-teachers-say.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

[158] Delbanco notes, "in the 70s Walker Percy said 'Sex had become the last "sacrament of the dispossessed."' Thirty years later we find ourselves 'engulfed in a haze of quasi-pornographic images,' and the efficacy of the sacrament is in doubt" (Delbanco, *Real American Dream*, 102).

[159] One manifestation of the breakdown of relationships in our society is the proliferation of school shootings in the past 15 years. Scholars have argued that many of the shooters behind these massacres have been influenced by images in violent video games, TV, and movies. See, e.g., G. Comstock et al., *Television and Human Behavior* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), and L. D. Eron, "Prescription for Reduction of Aggression," *American Psychologist* 35 (1980): 244-52; also Jay G. Hull et

architecture.[160]

Religion, too, has suffered the effects of our imaginally overloaded, overly produced culture. As theologian Roberto Goizueta describes the matter:

> the only religious faith acceptable for a consumerist society is precisely that which presupposes symbolic malleability and interchangeability (separation of form and content) since, lacking a social body that distinguishes such faith from its environment, it is the kind of faith most easily subsumed within the social body that we call the Market. A disembedded, disembodied, deinstitutionalized spirituality will become de facto the spirituality of the thoroughly embedded, embodied, institutionalized global Market of late capitalism.[161]

Indeed, this is precisely the sort of Catholicism that survey data shows to be emerging. In past ages when people's cosmic and social imaginaries were centered around an all-powerful God, that vision determined their conduct in society and in the wider universe. In the present day, by contrast, many have adopted an image of God modified to accommodate "scientific" presuppositions or the predilections of consumerist culture, as a result of which religious symbols have become just another option on the store shelf. In such a state of affairs, the symbols that are most prominent in people's lives are not those that mediate the transcendent most adequately but rather the flashiest or most highly visible. "Our most conspicuous symbols," laments Delbanco, "are the logos of corporate advertising—the golden arches and the Nike swoosh."[162] Nevertheless, Delbanco notes, "though vivid and ubiquitous, such symbols will never deliver the indispensable feeling

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al., "A Longitudinal Study of Risk-Glorifying Video Games and Behavioral Deviance," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 107, no. 2 (2014): 300–325.

[160] See Christian Norberg-Schulz, *New World Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), especially pp. 50 and 53.

[161] Roberto S. Goizueta, "The Symbolic Realism of U.S. Latino/a Popular Catholicism," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 271.

[162] Delbanco, *Real American Dream*, 5.

that the world does not end at the borders of the self."[163]

Where does all this leave us today? Contemporary Americans have the ability to satisfy virtually every desire, and yet we are less satisfied than ever. "We live in an age of unprecedented wealth," writes Delbanco, "but in the realm of narrative and symbol, we are deprived. And so the ache for meaning goes unrelieved."[164] Everyone acknowledges that something is missing. Everyone longs for something more. We retain the sense that there is "'something further to be sought after, besides what we have found in ourselves'—but our symbols for this 'something further' are terribly weakened."[165] Without a coherent symbol system through which to interpret our experiences, our reality has become utterly distorted.[166] Hence, many today not only lack a sense of meaning in their lives; they don't even have a clue how they would go about discovering that meaning. It is no wonder a sense of hopelessness has overcome so many of today's young people.

Future Prospects

It is clear from the above analysis that the faith lives of American Catholics have undergone dramatic changes in the course of the past half-century. I have characterized

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[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid., 107.

[165] Ibid., 115. John Dewey similarly pronounced, "The new age has no symbols consonant with its activities" (John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1976), 142).

[166] Richard Kearney describes the situation this way: "Seduced by the summary ideologies of the latest media cult or craze, we seem to have entered an age where reality is separable from the image, where the original has been replaced by its imitation, where our understanding of the world is preconditioned by the electronically reproducible media of television, cinema, video and radio" (Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 251-2). Delbanco offers a similar assessment, claiming that the modern self "breaks down under bombardment by images that merge fantasy with reality, or by advertising that becomes news. In such a world it is impossible to distinguish foreground from background or the spurious from the authentic" (Delbanco, *Real American Dream*, 104).

this change as the disintegration of an old synthesis. As I will argue at greater length in Chapter Three, the old synthesis was compact and somewhat naive in its composition. It often presumed rigid dichotomies between Church and world, sacred and secular, and regarded all of the Church's teachings as equally essential.[167] To be a Catholic meant to affirm the necessity of it all. In reality, it was never the case that every individual believed and observed every aspect of Catholic faith, but that was the commonly understood expectation.

That expectation is not present in the same way today, despite commonplace criticisms of "cafeteria Catholics" and the like. Less than half of Catholics view their faith as very important to their lives,[168] and many younger Catholics especially seem unable to see how the faith they profess should translate into their living.[169] These are symptoms, not merely of personal shortcomings, but of a large-scale shift in the way American Catholics experience their lives of faith. Many of today's Catholics, while remaining true to their faith in some sense, possess a sense of Catholic identity that, in the words of Peter Steinfels, is "not very coherent."[170] This is certainly not the reality of all American Catholics, but it is true for a disturbingly large segment—perhaps the majority. Without discounting the numerous positive developments in contemporary Catholic spirituality and practice, it seems safe to say that the present state of affairs falls short of

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[167] The irony of this old Christian synthesis was that, even though it sharply distinguished the sacred and the profane, Christians' religious beliefs permeated the various aspects of their lives to a much greater extent than is the case for many modern Christians. By contrast, Vatican II explicitly broke down barriers between the holy and the temporal, and yet the faith of many Catholics today is entirely compartmentalized from other areas of their lives. Speaking to this point, Pope Paul VI wrote in 1965, "This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43).

[168] D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics Today*, 40.

[169] See Smith, *Soul Searching*, 130.

[170] Steinfels, *A People Adrift*, 210.

the "life in abundance" to which Jesus called his disciples.

Given this state of affairs, it is clear that Christian educators have much work to do, but in what exactly does that work consist? The problem is complex and so too will be the solution. No single effort or corrective will ensure personal integration for American Catholics. In the space of this dissertation, I will only be able to focus on one proposal, but before narrowing my focus it will do to recognize current educational efforts that we might build upon in fashioning the needed response to the present situation.

Current Efforts in Catholic Religious Education

To begin with, we do well to recognize the numerous positive elements of current Catholic religious education that should be retained. The Church's emphasis on prayer and social justice must be counted among the greatest of these strengths. From the writings of Pope Francis to the emphasis on relationship with Jesus in authoritative catechetical texts to the wealth of prayer resources made available by Catholic publishers,[171] Catholic educators have made clear the importance of prayer and provided American Catholics with ample resources for nurturing a life of prayer. Catholic Social Teaching has likewise become a staple of Catholic religious education, earning a place in the U.S. bishops' *Curriculum Framework* (see below) and in the course sequence of most Catholic schools. In light of these efforts, the Church and its educational representatives surely deserve some credit for Catholics' continued commitment to prayer and for their

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[171] For an example, see Loyola Press's website: http://www.loyolapress.com/prayer.htm.

blooming commitment to social justice.

Without a doubt, the magisterium's greatest educational emphasis in recent decades has been on doctrinal knowledge. This emphasis was evident, for example, in the U.S. bishops prioritizing the publication of a national catechism to adapt the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for an American audience.[172] Since 1976 the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) has published guidelines and assessment tools for measuring students' knowledge of doctrine (and later affective responses to faith).[173] The bishops' concern for imparting knowledge of doctrine was demonstrated most recently in the 2008 *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* and the 2010 *Adaptation*, which adapts the *Framework* for use in parish and youth ministry programs. Though professing the goal of putting young people "in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ," the document is comprised almost entirely of *Catechism* citations arranged into course outlines.[174] In the time since the Conformity Review Committee began reviewing textbooks for compliance with the *Framework*, it has become manifestly clear that the committee's chief concern is that these texts clearly present Church teaching.

As was the case with prayer, survey data indicates that the American Church's

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[172] See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (Washington, D.C: USCCB Publishing, 2006).

[173] The Religious Education Outcomes Inventory (REOI) and the Religious Education Inventory of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (REKAP) were first implemented in 1976. In 1978 they were combined into the Assessment of Catholic Religious Education (ACRE).

[174] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* (USCCB Publishing, 2008), 1, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/upload/high-school-curriculum-framework.pdf.

efforts in this area have been effective. The ACRE results examined above show that Catholic schools and parishes (the former more so than the latter) have been reasonably successful in promoting doctrinal knowledge in students. Knowledge of the faith is clearly necessary for living a life of discipleship, so Catholic educators should make every effort to maintain the currently high standards of doctrinal education. They should also strive to extend religious education to the many young people who are not enrolled in Catholic schools and do not receive systematic catechesis through their parishes.

Another strength of Catholic religious education since Vatican II has been recognition of the importance of engaging people's lived experiences and giving them access to the faith through the generative themes of their lives. The *National Directory for Catechesis*, following the *General Directory*, impresses upon educators that "human experience is a constituent element in catechesis. It…provide[s] the sensible signs that lead the person, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to a better understanding of the truths of the faith."[175] This articulation of the role of experience builds upon the work of Catholic religious educators like Thomas Groome, who in recent decades have advocated persistently for greater attention to the actual lives of believers.[176] The NCEA, for its part, includes guidelines in the ACRE for experiential dimensions of learning, including students' relationship with Jesus, their relationships with others, and students' own

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[175] United States Council of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 2005), 97.

[176] See, e.g., Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Harper San Francisco, 1991), 155–214. Groome in turn acknowledges his debt to other famed educators like John Dewey, whose *Experience and Education* (1938) has been tremendously influential on the field.

concerns. [177] The *National Conference for Catechetical Leadership* likewise makes frequent appeal to learners' experiences in its publications.[178] Of course, the extent to which educators appeal to experience varies from classroom to classroom, but by and large the Church's official documents on religious education and the works of the country's leading catechetical associations and publishers reflect such a commitment. As with rigorous teaching of doctrine, consistent engagement with lived experience is an element of Catholic education that has strengthened American Catholics in their faith and that should be maintained

While such elements of Catholic religious education in the U.S. ought to be affirmed, others must be denounced as corruptions of authentic Christianity and eliminated from the educational process. One of these is presenting the faith in a "judicialized" manner.[179] I borrow this term from Charles Taylor, who claims that the immanent frame that has replaced theocentric Western people's social and cosmic imaginaries is a product of a "corruption" of Christianity.[180] That corruption consists in elite Christians responding to people's failure to care for one another and to form caring relationships by attempting to create a system that compels Christian conduct through "(a) a code or set of rules, (b) a set of disciplines which make us internalize these rules, and (c) a system of rationally constructed organizations (private and public bureaucracies,

[177] National Catholic Educational Association, "NCEA ACRE Interpretation Manual" (National Catholic Educational Association, 2002), http://ncea.caltesting.org/docs/NCEA%20ACRE%20Interpretation%20Manual.pdf.
[178] See, e.g., the *Echoes of Faith Plus* series of catechetical booklets (RCL Benzinger, 2007).
[179] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 740.
[180] Ibid., 737.

universities, schools) to make sure that we carry out what the rules demand."[181] As Taylor demonstrates over the course of hundreds of pages, this approach to Christian education is deeply engrained in the Church. We see it reflected today in the attitudes of Christian educators and in catechetical texts that reduce Christianity to a set of moral rules to be obeyed and doctrines to be memorized. This is the danger in overemphasizing doctrinal knowledge in the educational process. By focusing too narrowly on rules and doctrines that can be precisely articulated, we run the risk of excluding much else that is necessary for authentic faith.

Besides such outright corruptions in the educational process, there are some elements of Catholic religious education that have been neglected in recent decades and that need to be reclaimed or compensated for by alternate means. Chief among these is the formation of students' imaginations. Ray Hart has observed, "Since imaginative discourse is noticeable largely by its absence, at least by its infrequency of use, in the rhetoric of the church today, we must conclude that the effectiveness of the Christian tradition in its imaginative dimensions is weak."[182] The recent data and trends that we examined above corroborate Hart's claim.[183]

One reason the American Church has received such criticism is its inadequate attention to an essential aspect of the work of handing on the faith, namely, persuasive

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[181] Ibid., 742.

[182] Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination*, 275.

[183] Although the situation has undoubtedly improved since then, it is telling that in an edited volume published by the NCEA in 1999, leading catechetical authorities acknowledged that visual methods of religious education are probably less in use today than they were half a century ago. (See Carl J. Pfeifer and Janaan Manternach, "The Process of Catechesis," in *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, ed. Thomas H. Groome and Michael J. Corso (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1999), 74–6.)

use of symbols in proclaiming the Gospel.[184] To be sure, various authors and educators have drawn attention to the importance of symbol over the years,[185] but Christian symbols have never been raised to the level of importance that doctrine has in texts like the *Catechism* or the USCCB *Framework*.[186] For example, in the U.S. bishops' 1972 pastoral message on Catholic education, *To Teach as Jesus Did*, the authors write: "In proclaiming all things which His Father commanded Him to reveal, Jesus used images from the lives of His hearers and spoke in the idiom of his day. The Church, too, must use contemporary methods and language to proclaim the message of Christ to men and women today."[187] Here the bishops clearly acknowledge the power of teaching through images, yet this insight is not developed at all in the rest of the document. Such undeveloped thinking about the pedagogical value of symbols is typical of much of the catechetical literature generated since Vatican II. The symbolic richness of preconciliar Catholic culture and education was one of the Church's greatest assets and something that today's educators should work to recover.

In identifying this failure of the American Church to nurture Christian imaginations, it should be acknowledged that the Church would have been hard pressed

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[184] Bernard Lonergan is one scholar who has highlighted this essential role of symbol in the communication of religious meaning: "religion has to retain its identity and yet penetrate into the cultures of mankind, into the manifold fabric of everyday meaning and feeling that directs and propels the lives of men. It has to know the uses of symbol and story" ("Theology and Man's Future," in *A Second Collection: Philosophy of God, and Theology*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 141).

[185] I will examine the work of these authors in depth in Chapter Five.

[186] It might be objected that doctrine often contains symbolic elements, and that is true enough. However, seldom has doctrine been taught in a manner that draws out the symbolic, imaginative dimension. As I will argue in Chapter Two, symbols can be flattened and lose their symbolic force, and that is precisely what happens when they are incorporated into doctrines, which are then taught as material for memorization rather than exploration.

[187] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education" (USCCB Publishing, 1972), 5–6.

to do better.[188] American culture underwent momentous changes in the latter half of the 20th century, and there is only so much an institution can do to respond. In the past, Christians could not help but be formed in a Christian way of seeing the world on account of the fact that the surrounding culture was largely Christian in character. For hundreds of years, most people lived within eyesight of the local church. For Catholic Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the parish was the center of social life and the home was full of religious images and sacramentals. The Catholic schools that were bursting with students prior to Vatican II were operated by priests and religious with extensive spiritual formation.[189] Catholic-themed movies like *The Song of Bernadette* (1943), *Going My Way* (1944) and, *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945, 1959) enjoyed great popularity among American theater-goers, not only Catholics.

Today's American Catholics, by contrast, live in a culture that decidedly lacks this Christian character. They live further away from their parishes and rely on them less as social centers.[190] The Catholic character of the average home is in many respects weaker than it used to be. [191] Despite continued growth of the Catholic population in the U.S., Catholic schools today enroll more than three million fewer students than they did in the early '60s. Moreover, the students who do attend those schools are educated by mostly lay teachers who typically do not received anything like the spiritual formation

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[188] Steinfels, for one, defends that major shifts in the wider culture rather than shortcomings in religious education are chiefly to blame for the troubled state of the American Church. (See *A People Adrift*, 210.)

[189] See Neuwien, *Catholic Schools in Action*, 126-144 for a detailed description of the spiritual and professional formation received by various educating orders.

[190] CARA reports that 39% of Millennials live closer to another parish than the one they attend versus 27% of pre-Vatican II Catholics, 30% of Vatican II Catholics, and 33%, of post-Vatican II Catholics. (CARA, *The Changing Face of U.S. Catholic Parishes* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, July 2011).

[191] For example, less than half of Catholic teens report having sacred images or an altar in their home (Smith, *Soul Searching*, 48). Smith also reports that 66% of Catholic teens say their family talks about religious matters a few times a month or less (ibid., 55).

received by the priests and religious who formerly educated America's Catholic youth.[192] Finally, while Catholics still maintain a media presence through TV stations like EWTN and other outlets, that presence has diminished considerably in influence as the number of channels has proliferated from three to over 200 (not to mention Netflix, YouTube, and other digital entertainment providers), most of which air content that more often than not conflicts with Catholic values.

The net effect of these changes in American culture is that Catholics today are seldom spontaneously enculturated into a Christian worldview in the way past generations were. Given pervasive trends toward greater plurality and quasi-secularization, it is highly unlikely that American culture will ever regain the Christian character it once had. Consequently, the Catholic Church will need to compensate for this loss through more intentional efforts at socialization and forming the imagination of its members. Efforts to strengthen community, revitalize parishes, and support parents in creating Christian homes will all be important. That Catholic educators recognize this need is evident in discussions of intentional socialization in Vatican documents like *Evangeli Nuntiandi, Familiaris Consortio, Catechesi Tradendae,* the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,* and the *General Directory for Catechesis* as well as in national documents like *To Teach as Jesus Did* and the *National Directory for Catechesis.* However, recognizing the need and addressing it effectively are two different matters.

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[192] See Steinfels's discussion of the challenges presented by the shift to a primarily lay teaching force in Steinfels, *A People Adrift*, 218-9.

A Proposal

A historic change has occurred in Western Christianity. Christianity has lost its privileged position of virtual coextension with Western culture, a position it had occupied since at least the early Middle Ages. In the midst of this cultural shift, many people have lost or are losing their sense of the meaningfulness of life because the images and symbols that formerly mediated that meaning have been "demythologized", critiqued, and discarded.[193] Yet, in spite of it all, the old Christian symbols still live. We need only learn how to see them with new eyes—eyes that are wide open and yet able to see with a renewed sense of wonder.[194]

Beyond the resilience of the symbols themselves, Christian religious educators have many assets at their disposal in their work of forming disciples for the 21st century. The past half-century has seen a blooming of new, vibrant spiritualities and a culture of genuine spiritual seeking. It has brought greater respect for diversity, including different ways of knowing and cultural and religious differences. It has afforded religious educators the benefit of cognitive science, phenomenology, modern methods of theological and biblical studies, and many other advances in modern learning. Today's religious educators also enjoy the advantages of increased powers of technology and communication, which make it possible to share a vision of faith more easily and with

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[193] Paul Ricoeur has observed to this effect that the present moment "is that of forgetfulness and restoration. Forgetfulness of hierophanies, forgetfulness of the signs of the sacred, loss of man himself insofar as he belongs to the sacred [sic]" (Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 349). Edward Farley likewise highlights the fading of important symbols in postmodern culture in *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

[194] David Tracy speaks to the same, asserting that modern people need to recover a sense of the "uncanny". (David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 362.

more people than ever before.[195] All of the above present opportunities to help Christians recover coherent meaning in their lives.

Still, as we have seen, the current context presents many unprecedented challenges. Given the novelty of the situation, an adequate response will demand more than augmenting the positive aspects in Catholic religious education and correcting lapses. It will be my contention in this dissertation that, as a result of these cultural shifts, in order to remain committed disciples most Catholics will need to undergo an evolution in the way they understand their faith and reality as a whole. I believe that the imagination is key to this transformation. Indeed, the reports of all the various sociologists, historians, and philosophers examined above converge upon this conclusion: Empowering today's Christian disciples to live integrated lives of faith in today's disorienting, fragmentizing postmodern culture will require greater attention to the function of images and symbols in human cognition and in the process of handing on the faith.[196] Emboldened by the corroborating research of so many distinguished scholars, I intend to make my own contribution by developing common sentiments about the

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[195] For a more extended discussion of the potential for growth in faith within postmodern culture of see Harold Daly Horell, "Cultural Postmodernity and Christian Faith Formation," in *Horizons and Hopes: The Future of Religious Education*, ed. Thomas H. Groome and Daly Horell Harold (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

[196] Andrew Thompson, for example, reiterates, "The significance of the NCEA and Greeley research is found in the direction it gives religion teachers, pastors and parents to attend to the affective and imaginative elements in their efforts at catechesis and religious socialization" (Thompson, *That They May Know You*, 64). Andrew Greeley, states the matter well himself: "The artist (musician, story teller, poet) is a 'sacrament maker,' a person who calls out of his materials insights and images into the meaning that lurks beneath them. For most of its history the Catholic Church has realized that the sacrament makers are not luxuries but necessities for its life and work. One would like to think that as a new religious sensibility develops the church leadership will understand that the only way it can guide and direct the development of that religious sensibility is not denouncing it, not trying to limit it or contain it, but rather influencing its direction and flow through works of the fine and lively arts" (Greeley, *American Catholics Since the Council*, 222).

importance of imagination into a distinctive approach for shaping a Christian "imaginary".[197]

In this first chapter, I have defined the problem I am seeking to address and described the context in which this problem arises: The greatest problem facing American Catholics today, as I see it, is an inability to view their lives through the eyes of faith in a way that meaningfully integrates their experiences and illumines their reality. In order to substantiate this claim more fully, it will be necessary to explore the role of the imagination in human cognition, especially as it concerns humans' efforts in constructing their reality. This, along with the role of revelation in human meaning-construction, will constitute the content of Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, I will draw upon developmental psychology in order to demonstrate that the struggles of contemporary American Catholics can be accounted for in great part by a gap between the mental demands of postmodern culture and their mental resources for imagining reality. I will further suggest what more adequate ways or levels of imagining might look like. In Chapter Four, I will explore the possibilities suggested in multiple fields of research for how educators can promote a more adequate manner of imagining in their students. Having identified these possibilities, in Chapter Five I will begin to articulate general pedagogical principles for an approach or process of forming Christian imaginaries, drawing upon the example of Jesus as well as that of other notable Christian educators. Finally, in Chapter Six I will synthesize and expand upon these pedagogical precedents in order to articulate a pedagogical process whereby educators might be better able to form their students in a

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[197] I borrow this term from Taylor. In Chapter Two I will explain the reasons for my preference of this term over "imagination" when speaking of a community's imaginative framework for viewing the world.

Christian imaginary, that is, a manner of envisioning the reign of God that will enable them to make coherent sense of their experience and integrate their living in the postmodern world.

Chapter 2

Meaning-Construction, Imagination, and Revelation

"What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything."

(Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J.)

Introduction

While there are many signs of hope in contemporary U.S. Catholicism, today's Christian disciples and the people who form them face significant challenges. The disorienting maelstrom of images, messages, and experiences that characterizes postmodern culture poses what at times seems an insurmountable obstacle to a coherent life of faith. Even though the Catholic tradition offers a wealth of resources to religious educators seeking to address this obstacle, the specific nature of these challenges makes it imperative that educators understand what has happened to U.S Catholics' imaginations and how this imaginal change has affected society at large. In Chapter One, I argued the importance of images and imagination for people's lives of faith through sociological analysis. The present chapter will deepen the argument by demonstrating the importance of imagination through a careful examination of the dynamics of human meaning-construction and of the role of divine revelation therein. Chapter Three will build upon this analysis by describing what is happening psychologically when meaning breaks down, as has happened in contemporary U.S. culture. Having illuminated the current situation of U.S. Catholics with these sociological, historical, scientific, phenomenological, philosophical, and theological perspectives, later chapters will explore possibilities for developing meaningful, unifying ways of imagining through Catholic religious education.

What is Meaning?

As we saw in Chapter One, the present U.S. context has been characterized as a

culture suffering from a widespread sense of meaninglessness (Taylor) and American Catholics as suffering from a lack of coherence in their lives of faith (Steinfels). At the heart of these assessments is the concept "meaning". At first blush, this concept seems simple enough. We speak of "meaning" countless times a day and presume it in the vast majority of our actions. However, if pressed to explain, most people will quickly find themselves at a loss for words when it comes to articulating precisely what "meaning" is. What is this thing that many American Catholics seem to have lost?

Contrary to conventional ways of talking about meaning (e.g., "finding" meaning in a song or "discovering" new meaning in one's life), meaning is not something "out there" to be found, like a coin in a field.[1] It is, rather, primarily something human beings do, namely, an act of interpretation.[2] Yet one would be equally mistaken to describe meaning as the pure creation of the human mind.[3] Interpretation requires something to be interpreted—a text, a situation, or, in the most basic cases, sensory input received through interaction with one's external environment. Human beings construct or organize this input that is given to the senses and imagination into intelligible patterns or forms,

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[1] Bernard Lonergan has argued persuasively in *Insight*, *Verbum*, and elsewhere against this naive notion of how human beings understand. He receives ample support from Mark Johnson, who cites dozens of empirical studies that undermine what he terms the "objectivist" account of meaning and rationality. (See Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xi-xiii, n.2-9.

[2] Cf. Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 11. Speaking from a cognitive science perspective, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner describe how this apparently simple thought process is actually deceptively complicated: "elements of mental life that look like primitives for formal analysis turn out to be higher-order products of imaginative work" (Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending And The Mind's Hidden Complexities* (Basic Books, 2003)).

[3] The two conflicting epistemological theories alluded to here are those of the "discovery" and "constructivist" schools of thought, neither of which is completely adequate. I will present what I believe to be an adequate resolution of this debate in my discussion of the role of judgment at the end of the section below on metaphor and abstract thought.

thereby giving coherence to their actions in and perceptions of the world.[4] As philosopher Mark Johnson explains, "An event becomes meaningful by pointing beyond itself to prior event structures in experience or toward possible future structures."[5] In short, to speak of "meaning" is to speak *most basically* of human beings' activity of interpreting patterns in sensory and imaginal input.[6]

Again, contrary to the common, naive understanding, we never see the world simply "as it is."[7] Nor is the work of constructing meaning ever dispassionate. "Before we look for answers," observes Bernard Lonergan, "we want them."[8] Martin Heidegger suggests the same when he describes the human being as "always also absorbed in the world of its concerns."[9] On the most basic level, one's interpretation of sensory and imaginal input is more often than not motivated and constrained by one's needs, desires, and wishes.[10] This is an ineluctable fact of human existence resulting from the way our

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[4] Because this activity is more accurately described as organizing meaning than creating meaning, I will follow developmental psychologist Robert Kegan in employing the term "meaning-construction" rather than the more common "meaning-making". (See Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 29.)

[5] Johnson, *The Mind in the Body*, 177. An "event" in Johnson's sense would include a sensory or imaginative impression as well as historical occurrences in the life of a person.

[6] This initial discussion offers only a basic understanding of the process of meaning-construction. I will continue to fill out my description of this activity in the following sections.

[7] Cf. Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Our Minds, Our Memories: Enhancing Thinking and Learning at All Ages* (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2011), 26. As author Anaïs Nin says, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."

[8] Lonergan, *Insight*, 34; cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the Philosophy of Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1988), 83.

[9] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and John Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 237.

[10] From a neuroscience perspective one might say that a person's brain only changes when one perceives that something matters. (Cf. *Brain Plasticity with Michael Merzenich*, Brain Science Podcast, accessed September 5, 2014, http://brainsciencepodcast.com/bsp/2014/bsp-105-merzenich.) Neuroscientists have even identified the brain systems that seem most essential to attention and desire. David Hogue explains, "the human brain has a basic system deep within its core [viz., the mesolimbic pathways] that…selects

organism is constituted and develops. In human beings as in other organisms, the systems

most critical to survival—cardiovascular, respiratory, central nervous, etc.—are the first

to develop. Similarly, instinctual, emotional responses develop prior to more

sophisticated capabilities like abstract reasoning. Hence, explains neuroscientist Antonio

Damasio, "since what comes first constitutes the frame of reference for what comes after,

feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business."[11]

Neither Damasio nor I would want to overemphasize the dominance of the affect over the

intellect or vice versa. Likewise, I would not restrict human concern to biological needs

and egocentric interests.[12] The crucial point to grasp here is the inseparability of the

two—every intelligent thought is attended by affectivity, and feelings and desires[13] are

often the impetus for further thought.[14]

    Inseparable though the intellectual and affective dimensions are in the work of

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objects in the environment that it needs or wants and prompts seeking them" (David A. Hogue, "The Desiring Brain: Contemporary Neuroscientific Insights into Pleasure and Longing," in *City of Desires - a Place for God?: Practical Theological Perspectives*, ed. Reinder Ruard Ganzevoort, Rein Brouwer, and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 53.

[11] Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994), 160; cf. 197. Psychologist Jeanne Ellis Ormrod cites multiple studies demonstrating the greater power of events and objects with greater perceived personal relevance to attract and hold our attention. (See Ormrod, *Our Minds, Our Memories*, 53, n.6.)

[12] I will return to the question of the limits and expansiveness of human concern below.

[13] Though the terms "affect," "feeling," and "emotion" are often used interchangeably in common parlance, I will be employing them in a more technical sense. I take "emotion" to refer to innate, unconscious, non-intentional affective responses resulting more or less directly from changes in body states. "Feeling," by contrast, indicates an affective response mediated by noematic contents (e.g., images, thoughts, values). I employ "affectivity" as a more general term encompassing emotion, feeling, and any other elements that contribute to one's felt condition, as opposed to one's condition as known intellectually. To speak of an "affect" is to indicate a general disposition, felt state, or mood.

[14] Ormrod, *Our Minds, Our Memories*, 81; Luiz Pessoa. "On the Relationship Between Emotion and Cognition," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 9 (2008): 148–158; ibid., "How Do Emotion and Motivation Direct Executive Control?," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 13 (2009): 160–166; Alexander J. Shackman, J. S. Maxwell, B. W. McMenamin, L. L. Greischar, and R. J. Davidson, "Stress Potentiates Early and Attenuates Late Stages of Visual Processing," *Journal of Neuroscience*, 31 (2011): 1156–1161; Alexander J. Shackman, T. V. Salomons, H. A. Slagter, A. S. Fox, J. J. Winter, and R. J. Davidson, "The Integration of Negative Affect, Pain, and Cognitive Control in the Cingulate Cortex," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 12 (2011): 154–167.

construction meaning, it is illuminating to distinguish the different contributions each makes to this work. For this reason, some thinkers have distinguished between two equiprimordial modes of self-presence or being in the world—*Verstehen* (understanding) and *Befindlichkeit* (mood or disposition) in Heidegger's terms,[15] or "intentional operations" and the "sensitive psyche" in Lonergan's. Lonergan explains:

> we are conscious in two ways: in one way, through our sensibility, we undergo rather passively what we sense and imagine, our desires and fears, our delights and sorrows, our joys and sadness; in another way, through our intellectuality, we are more active when we consciously inquire in order to understand, understand in order to utter a word, weigh evidence in order to judge, deliberate in order to choose, and exercise our will in order to act.[16]

Again, I would emphasize that, even though we can distinguish these two modes of consciousness[17] in theory, they are inseparable in one's actual living. Still, this distinction is a crucial one for understanding how human beings construct meaning. Meaning is not a purely intellectual construct. When we speak of something as "meaningful," we typically mean that it is desirable, valuable, or worthwhile (or undesirable or not valued or worthwhile) in addition to being intelligible.[18] Without sensitivity, life for us would be flat and insignificant. Without intellectuality, life would

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[15] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 171-2; cf. Robert Doran, "Two Ways of Being Conscious: The Notion of Psychic Conversion," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012), 6.

[16] Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, eds. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 139. More precisely, when Lonergan speaks of the sensitive psyche, he refers to the corporeal/affective/imaginative component of human consciousness, the stream of sensations, images, emotions, bodily movements, and spontaneous intersubjective responses that attends human experience. I will follow his meaning when I employ the term "psyche" in this dissertation.

[17] I follow Lonergan in my understanding of "consciousness" not as some sort of introspection but rather as an "awareness immanent in cognitional acts" (*Insight*, 346).

[18] As Lonergan puts it, the world we live in is mediated by meaning, but it is also motivated by values. (See Bernard Lonergan, "Reality, Myth, Symbol," in *Myth, Symbol, and Reality*, ed. Alan M. Olson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 31.) While some thinkers distinguish between meaning as a product of intelligence and value as a product of feeling, my usage of "meaning" connotes the involvement of both the intellectual and affective dimensions of the human person unless otherwise specified. I will say more about values presently.

be, to quote Shakespeare, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."[19] Drawing together these different elements into a pithy phrase, theologian Rosemary Haughton describes meaning as "a summing up of experience in a total emotional-intellectual grasp."[20]

Both of these modes of consciousness or dimensions of meaning-construction undergo development across the human lifespan. I will describe the stages of this development in more detail in the next chapter, but some initial comments will illuminate the present discussion of meaning. At the beginning of life, the fetus's and the infant's world is a world of immediacy. Their sense of their world, self (if we can speak of a "self" at this early stage), and needs are compact and undifferentiated.[21] They respond instinctively to these needs as they arise from changes in their environment or internal states without, as Lonergan says, "any perceptible intrusion from insight or concept, reflection or judgment, deliberation or choice."[22] As the human person develops, however, one's manner of responding to stimuli becomes more differentiated[23]. One grows progressively better able to detect patterns in sensory and imaginal input, employ

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[19] William Shakespeare, "Macbeth," Act 5, Scene 5, *http://www.gutenberg.orgdirs/etext00/0ws3410.txt*, accessed October 12, 2014, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2264/pg2264.html.

[20] Rosemary Haughton, *The Transformation of Man: A Study of Conversion and Community* (Springfield, Ill: Templegate, 1980), 76. Along similar lines, developmental psychologist Robert Kegan describes meaning as being "about knowing and being, about theory-making and investments and commitments of the self" (*The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 45.

[21] In Lonerganian terms, we might say that at this stage the self is identical with the psyche or the empirical level of consciousness, which is constituted by the subject's sensations, perceptions, and flow of mental images. (See Doran, "Two Ways of Being Conscious," 12-13.)

[22] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 76. William James made similar observations in 1891: "The baby, assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin, and entrails at once, feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion" (*The Principles of Psychology* (Cambdrige, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983)).

[23] According to Kegan, this activity of differentiation and reintegration is the very source of thought and feeling. (See Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 44.)

prior understandings as a basis for new understanding, and make reasonable judgments about the accuracy of one's understanding.[24]

One's concerns and feelings likewise become more differentiated.[25] At first, infants' concern extends only as far as their physiological needs (e.g., warmth, nutrition, excretion). As those needs are consistently met and children grow, their concern expands to include concern for their safety, and subsequently for a sense of belonging and being loved, being esteemed, and, most abstractly, a sense of self-actualization. This course of development represents an expansion of concern from the mere satisfaction of needs and desires to an aspiration toward "values," that is, objects of human striving that are recognized as worthwhile independently of their benefit to oneself.[26] Value in turn admits differentiation, resulting in a scale of values that ascends from vital values (e.g., health, strength) to social, cultural, personal, and religious values.[27] Still, while the human person's range of concerns expands in this manner beyond more primitive needs, it never leaves them behind. Anyone who has ever been jolted out of deep thought by a growling stomach or by tripping on a crack in the pavement can testify as much. Regardless of

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[24] In *Insight* Lonergan helpfully distinguishes between these levels of consciousness—viz., empirical, intelligent, rational (as well as reasonable)—and argues that fully mature cognition requires differentiation among these levels of consciousness and affirmation of these intentional operations in one's own knowing.

[25] Such is the foundational insight at the heart of Abraham Maslow's theory of the "hierarchy of needs," which I allude to in the following sentences. (See Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370–96.)

[26] Jack Mezirow, Damasio, and others argue that it is feelings that generate and perceive values. (See Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), 11; Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 173.) Some neuroscientists even believe they have identified specific brain regions responsible for the perception of value. (See Luiz Pessoa, *The Cognitive-Emotional Brain: From Interactions to Integration* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).)

[27] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31.

whether they are more basic or noble, our concerns determine what we attend to[28] and even what we perceive.[29] The endless possibilities for differentiation of a human being's concern accounts for how people from different places and cultures and even from the same culture can perceive the world and specific events so differently.[30]

However diverse the concerns of different people, one concern takes center stage for every single human being—the concern for meaning itself. "No need is more fundamentally human," observes educational theorist Jack Mezirow, "than our need to understand the meaning of our experience."[31] It is, according to Kegan, "the primary human motion."[32] As compared to animals, which generally develop very early on all of

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[28] As Lonergan puts it, "According to our measure of interest and concern, that is, in the measure in which things are relevant to us, we pay more or less attention to them" (Bernard Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, ed. Frederick E Crowe, Robert M. Doran, and Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 288).

[29] We only ever attend to a small portion of the sensory impressions that make their way to our brains. Lonergan explains, "the flow of sensations, as completed by memories and prolonged by imaginative acts of anticipation, becomes the flow of perceptions. It is of the latter, perceptual flow that we are conscious" (*Insight*, 96). As an illustration of the selectivity of attention, you might consider your ability to focus on one particular conversation (either the one in which you are involved or another elsewhere that seems more interesting) in the midst of a crowded room. Experimental research in neuroscience corroborates such anecdotal evidence of how affectivity influences perception. (See Adam K. Anderson and Elizabeth A. Phelps, "Lesions of the Human Amygdala Impair Enhanced Perception of Emotionally Salient Event," *Nature* 411, no. 6835 (2001): 305–9, and Ralph Adolphs and Michael Spezio, "Role of the Amygdala in Processing Visual Social Stimuli," *Progress in Brain Research* 156 (2006): 363–78.)

[30] It is this phenomenon to which Lonergan refers when he speaks of the various "patterns of experience," e.g., biological, dramatic, artistic, intellectual. (See *Insight*, 213-4.) Different people and even the same person at different times will experience the same sensations and impressions differently depending on how they are "patterning" their experiences. (Cf. Ference Marton and Shirley Booth, *Learning and Awareness* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1997)).

[31] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 11; cf. Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation*, 3. A multitude of studies in neuroscience support this claim. See B. N. Frazier, S. A. Gelman, and H. M. Wellman, "Preschoolers' Search for Explanatory Information Within Adult-Child Conversations," *Child Development*, 80 (2009): 1592-1611; S. A. Gelman, *The Essential Child: Origins of Essentialism in Everyday Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); D. G. Kemler Nelson, L. Egan, and M. B. Holt, "When Children Ask, 'What Is It?' What Do They Want to Know About Artifacts?," *Psychological Science*, 15 (2004): 384-389; N. N. Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007); E. Tulving, "Subjective Organization in Free Recall of 'Unrelated' Words," *Psychological Review*, 69 (1962): 344-354.

[32] Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 19.

the drives and capacities that will guide their behavior for the entirety of their lives, human beings continue to construct new meaning throughout our lifetimes. Our craving for meaning seems insatiable. Lonergan describes this insatiable desire for meaning as a "pure desire to know" or, alternatively, a "notion of being," which aims at knowing all there is to be known.[33] This notion of being is complemented by a "transcendental notion of value," which incites us toward and leaves us unsatisfied with anything less than goodness in its fullness.[34] On account of this drive to construct meaning, we feel increasingly content to the degree that we understand our experiences and perceive ourselves to be involved in something worthwhile. The flip-side of this phenomenon is that we feel ill at ease and depressed when we fail to make sense of our experiences. As we will see below, our ability to construct meaning is wound up with our very sense of self. In consequence, the negation of the meaning one has constructed is tantamount to a negation of the self. And, in the words of Lonergan, "The subject's fundamental anxiety, his deepest dread, is the collapse of himself and his world."[35] For this reason, the human mind is strongly resistant to major revisions of its reality constructions and, to a lesser degree, to ambiguity or uncertainty of any kind.[36]

At this point one might ask, What powers this relentless drive for meaning and governs the magnificent orchestration of bodily, affective, and intellectual activity

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[33] Lonergan, *Insight*, 377.

[34] Ibid., *Method in Theology*, 36.

[35] Ibid., *Topics in Education*, 90; cf. Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 287.

[36] See, e.g., Shelley E. Taylor and Jonathon D. Brown, "Illusion and Well-being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health," *Psychological Bulletin*, 103, no. 2 (1988): 193–210. Stated positively, the human mind exhibits what cognitive scientists call "confirmation bias," the tendency to give more credence to information that supports one's current beliefs. (See, e.g., Ormrod, *Our Minds, Our Memories*, 172.)

involved in meaning-construction? Cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner offer a compelling proposal. They argue that careful examination of the cognitive strategies and mechanisms governing humans' construction of meaning discloses a single overarching goal—achieve human scale.

In order to understand what Fauconnier and Turner mean by this phrase, one needs to recognize that, from an evolutionary standpoint, constructing meaning is for human beings a matter of survival.[37] The way any organism survives is by successfully negotiating its environment and attending effectively to its own needs. In other words, the organism must assess its situation through the lens of its concern for its own survival. Human beings have become remarkably successful in this activity—much more so than any other species—by employing several cognitive strategies or subgoals: sharpen or simplify what is vague or diffuse, obtain global insights that unify complex networks of mental spaces, strengthen frequently recurring conceptual relations (e.g., change, identity, time, space, cause-effect), come up with a story, go from many to one.[38] Operating according to these (largely non-conscious) strategies, humans are able to efficiently focus their experience of an incomprehensibly complex, dynamic world to the "human scale,"[39] which translates into streamlined guidelines for how to conduct ourselves in the world in

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[37] Cf. Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 19.

[38] Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 312.

[39] Most essentially, "human-scale situations" are those that "have direct perception and action in familiar frames that are easily apprehended by human beings: An object falls, someone lifts an object, two people converse, one person goes somewhere. They typically have very few participants, direct intentionality, and immediate bodily effect and are immediately comprehended as coherent" (Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 312). A statement attributed to Joseph Stalin illustrates how the cognitional drive for human scale impacts our perception of the world: "The death of one person is a tragedy, but the death of a million persons is a statistic."

ways that prove most advantageous to us.[40]

Fauconnier's and Turner's explanation of what drives human meaning-construction is helpful but incomplete. Discussion of Lonergan's notion of the unrestricted desire to know and value, which I will provide in the section on "Human Transcendence" below, will fill in this explanation. Notwithstanding, this preliminary description of humans' drive for meaning on the human scale is essential for understanding why we construct meaning the way we do.

The Dynamics of Meaning-Construction

Having established a general notion of meaning as an interpretive activity that human beings engage in through interaction with their environment, I will now describe the specific processes whereby we construct meaning.[41] This in-depth exploration of meaning-construction will provide the necessary background against which we can better understand what has happened in American Catholicism in recent decades (Chapter Three) and what kind of pedagogical response would be adequate to improving Catholics' present imaginal situation (Chapters Four, Five, and Six).

The Body, Neural Patterns, and Mental Images

Up through the Middle Ages, the predominant epistemological position was that

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[40] For a discussion of how the human-scale principle is applied in scientific, corporate, and marketing contexts, see Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House, 2008), 143–7.

[41] In presenting the following description I will have to be selective in my focus. My purpose here is not to sketch out a complete cognitional theory but rather to highlight the central role of imagination in the way humans construct meaning.

espoused by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, namely, that "nothing is in the intellect that was not previously in sense."[42] Centuries later Enlightenment thinkers enamored with the ideal of "pure," "objective" reason rejected Aristotle's and Thomas's position, instead espousing an epistemology that conceives of reason and concepts as disembodied and free from the adulterating influence of bodily sensations. Even though this Enlightenment epistemology continues to dominate the popular consciousness in our own time, modern neuroscience has reaffirmed the validity of the classical position. For example, Antonio Damasio, one of the world's leading neuroscientists, writes, "our very organism rather than some absolute external reality is used as the ground reference for the construction of the ever-present sense of subjectivity that is part and parcel of our experiences… [O]ur most refined thoughts and best actions… use the body as a yardstick."[43] Today the view articulated by Damasio is generally accepted in the world of science and is gradually taking hold in theology and philosophy.[44]

According to the best available account, then, human meaning-construction begins from the senses, which are stimulated by interaction with the external environment. Sensory receptors on the surface of the skin and in the eyes, ears, and mouth receive impressions from outside the organism. Sensory and motor nerves then

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[42] Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), q.2, a.3, arg.19, http://dhspriory.org/thomas/english/QDdeVer2.htm.; cf. Aristotle, "Metaphysics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 980.

[43] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, xvi.

[44] See, e.g., Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New* Key, 266; Katrina Schwartz, "How Emotional Connections Can Trigger Creativity and Learning," *KQED*, March 15, 2013; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2005); Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 507; Robert Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God: Theology After Cognitive Linguistics* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2014); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and It Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

carry signals from the receptors to the brain. Damasio suggests that these signals fire the brain's neurons in different patterns corresponding to the different stimuli.[45] Whenever neurons fire, the synapses connecting them grow stronger, altering the topography or structure of the brain. Damasio refers to each resulting structure as a "neural" or "dispositional representation," "a dormant firing potentiality which comes to life when neurons fire, with a particular pattern, at certain rates, for a certain amount of time, and toward a particular target which happens to be another ensemble of neurons."[46] Through this process what the person encounters in their external environment becomes "mapped" onto the brain.

These neural representations serve as the physiological basis for mental "images". According to Damasio's hypothesis, mental images present themselves to consciousness when neurons fire in patterns similar to the patterns that occurred when the perceptual representation was first formed.[47] It should be noted that Damasio's use of "image," which will be consistent with my own and that of other authors cited here unless otherwise specified, diverges from popular usage.[48] For Damasio, the word "images" indicates "mental patterns with a structure built with the tokens of each of the sensory modalities—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somatosensory."[49] Significant in

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[45] Though his descriptions of these processes are fully consistent with available evidence, Damasio is careful to qualify that the evidence is not definitive enough for him to claim more than a high degree of plausibility for his descriptions.

[46] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 103-4.

[47] I say "hypothesis" because, again, Damasio acknowledges that the precise mechanisms by which neural representations translate into mental images have thus far eluded neuroscientists.

[48] Damasio also employs the term "mental pattern" as a synonym for "mental image."

[49] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2000), 318.

Damasio's definition is the fact that the term "image" is not limited to the visual.[50] One's recollection of a friend's face, a catchy melody, the smell of a favorite flower, the taste of a favorite fruit, and the feel of a loved one's touch would all qualify as "images" in this sense. These various images are all laden with affect conditioned by the circumstances that initially gave rise to the neural representations and by the circumstances in which one subsequently reactivates (e.g., by remembering) those neural representations.

This process of transmission (whereby sensory input passes from sensory receptors through the nerves to neural representations on the brain and finally into mental images) is a permanent feature in the operations of the human organism. So long as one is awake or dreaming, one experiences a constant stream of images through one's consciousness. This stream of images is, according to Damasio, "probably the main content of our thoughts."[51] The capacity for image formation varies with each person. In some, including geniuses like Albert Einstein, the generation of images is more rapid.[52]

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[50] Inclusion of other sense sources in this notion of "image" is consistent with the usage of many other authors. (See, e.g., Arthur W. Staats and Jeffrey M. Lohr, "Images, Language, Emotions, and Personality: Social Behaviorism's Theory," *Journal of Mental Imagery* 3, no. 1–2 (1979), 87; Lonergan, *Insight*, 34-5; Terrence W. Tilley, *Faith: What It Is and What It Isn't* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 91.) If at times my usage of "image" seems excessively focused on visual experiences, this is only because visual images tend to be the most prominent in the average person's meaning-construction. I do not intend for my use of the term to be taken in a way that excludes auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somatosensory images.

[51] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 107. Damasio is in good company in noting the indispensable role images play in human thought. Cf. Aristotle, "De Anima," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 431a, 16; Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New Advent, 2008, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/, I, q.79, a.4, r.3; Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 348; Lonergan, *Insight*, 33.

[52] According to Einstein himself, "The words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be 'voluntarily' reproduced and combined" (cited in Jacques Hadamard, *An Essay on the Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field* (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 142).

Nevertheless, every single person possesses this capacity to some degree.[53] The ability to generate, attend to, and mentally manipulate these images—"imagination" in the most basic sense of the word—is the "transcendental condition"[54] of consciousness (to borrow a phrase from Sartre) and the foundational mechanism of human meaning-construction.[55]

Image Schemata, Metaphor, and Abstract Thought

At this point in the development of a human being's meaning-constructing capacities, the subject's thinking is still bound to the concrete and that which can be experienced more or less directly. This level of mental functioning (what Lonergan would identify as "empirical consciousness") is sufficient for enabling most animals on the planet to behave in an adaptive manner, but it does not yet come anywhere near to explaining the complex ways in which human beings construct meaning and organize their living.[56] So how does one get from this basic level of empirical consciousness to the fully developed human being who can execute computations with irrational numbers, ponder the meaning of life, and affirm truths about reality?

Today few will be satisfied by a solution that involves positing that human beings, unlike animals, have been endowed with a rational soul, if by "soul" one means a Cartesian "ghost in the machine" with no relation to the physiological development of the person. In light of modern cognitive science, numerous authors—including several cited

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[53] Ormrod, *Our Minds, Our Memories*, 81, n. 15.

[54] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Citadel Press, 1948), 273.

[55] In the words of Fauconnier and Turner, imagination "is the central engine of meaning behind the most ordinary mental events" (*The Way We Think*, 15).

[56] Lonergan, *Insight*, 346.

above, but most notably Mark Johnson—have argued convincingly that rational and conceptual thinking are not disembodied, as "objectivist" theorists maintain, but rather are ultimately and invariably rooted in concrete, bodily experience.[57] For this reason there can be no absolute distinction between abstract and imaginative thought. *All* thought originates in the body and emerges in mental images deriving from that bodily experience.[58]

A decisive step from immediate sense experience towards abstract thought (i.e., from empirical consciousness to "intelligent consciousness") occurs when we begin to anticipate sensory and imaginal input rather than receiving it more passively, as we all do at the beginning of life.[59] This increased power of anticipation is made possible by the patterning of neural structures in response to repeated exposure to stimuli. The more intense and emotionally charged the stimuli, the more likely they are to create enduring neural structures, which translate into stronger habits of expectation and, eventually, conscious memories.[60] Only with reference to this stage of neural and cognitive

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[57] See Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*. Along similar lines, Langer writes, "But it is only where experience is already presented - through some other formative medium, some vehicle of apprehension and memory - that the canons of literal thought have any application. We must have ideas before we can make literal analysis of them; and really new ideas have their own modes of appearance in the unpredictable creative mind" (Philosophy in a New Key, 201).

[58] Johnson puts it this way: "beliefs are merely the surface of our embodied understanding which we peel off as abstract structures" (ibid., 138). Elsewhere he writes, "Imaginative projection is a principle means by which the body (i.e., physical experience and its structures) works its way up into the mind" (ibid., xxxvi-xxxvii). For a particular example of this process, see *The Body in the Mind*, 39-40.

[59] I qualify "*more* passively" because in reality human beings are never completely passive in our interaction with our environment. As discussed above, our interactions are driven from the very outset by a desire for meaning. Nevertheless, our ability to make sense of our experiences is very limited in the beginning. As we accumulate more experiences and insights, we are better equipped to actively organize sensory and imaginal input.

[60] Cf. Jack Mezirow, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 4; Ormrod, *Our Minds, Our Memories*, 82.

development can we begin to talk about interpretations and experiences in a richer sense.

"Experience," as I employ the term here, may include perceptions, movements, emotions, imaginings, thoughts, and sensations that involve some degree of awareness on the part of the subject experiencing them.[61] This definition presumes the subject's capacity for interpreting the sensory and imaginal input reaching their brain. "Interpretation" in turn presumes some mental apparatus for organizing the flood of sensory and imaginal input. While most cognitive scientists reject the hypothesis that human beings are born with a store of *a priori* ideas or concepts, they do affirm that humans are genetically disposed to develop in a way that they will construct mental categories based on their interactions with their environment.

The most fundamental of these rudimentary mental categories are what Mark Johnson calls "image schemata". "An image schema," Johnson explains, "is a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience."[62] Image schemata, which are abstract, unconscious, and pre-propositional, should not be equated with what Johnson calls "rich images," which can be pictured in the mind's eye in relatively vivid detail. Schemata emerge when the subject, over the course of thousands of repetitions of perceptions and bodily movements and activities, establishes mental connections and patterns in different experiential domains. For example, the VERTICALITY schema derives from one's bodily experience

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[61] Needless to say, this understanding of "experience" differs from common usage (e.g., "She had a great experience studying abroad," or "I've never experienced anything like that ride"). Like Mark Johnson, I find the popular and classical empiricist understanding of experience as passively received sense impressions inadequate (cf. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xvi).

[62] Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xiv; cf. 29, 79.

of UP-DOWN orientation.[63]

Once established, an image schema provides one with the means of anticipating, associating, asking questions about, and eventually naming a category of similar experiences. This development marks the first major step in the infant's passage from the world of immediacy to a world mediated by meaning. Now equipped with a rudimentary mental framework for interpretation, the child's responses to the environment depend less and less on somatic states (e.g., feeling hunger) and more on mental representations of these somatic states and orientations (e.g., recognition that one is hungry).[64] As one accrues additional experience and becomes aware of more and more patterns, one begins to form more complex mental categories like ANIMAL, TABLE, and THING.

Still, the mental processes described so far in our account of meaning-construction have been limited to those that simply increase the quantity of neural patterns derived from bodily experiences and connect similar patterns of experience. However, higher order meaning-construction depends upon humans' capacity to relate unlike patterns to one another. Mental images are the ground of this possibility. While derived from bodily experience, mental images generate objects of attention distinct from immediate sensory impressions. This ability to generate, retain, modify, and manipulate mental images makes it possible to project patterns from one domain of experience onto another, a cognitive phenomenon that linguistics and cognitive theorists refer to as

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[63] My use of capitalization here follows Johnson's conventions.

[64] Cf. Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 184.

"metaphor".[65]

As opposed to image schemata, which emerge through establishing similarity in repeated bodily experiences (e.g., VERTICALITY from experiences of UP-DOWN orientation), metaphor connects inherently different kinds of experiences as, for example, in the metaphor MORE IS UP (e.g., "prices are up," "the temperature is rising"). These linkages are made possible by a series of "compressions" in which many experiences are consolidated into a single image or concept and the different images or concepts then related to one another.[66] Unlike image schemata, compressions are the result of conscious acts of understanding. This ongoing process of compression gives rise to an emergent structure of metaphors and concepts that, by consolidating lots of sensory and imaginal input into a single mental entity, frees up the mind for more complicated and reflexive cognitive operations.[67] For example, this capacity to construct and connect different "mental spaces" enables us to relate representations that in the real world are incompatible with one another.[68]

Relating these normally incompatible entities creates the possibility of

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[65] Mark Johnson, e.g., defines "metaphor" as "a pervasive mode of understanding by which we project patterns from one domain of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind" (*The Body in the Mind*, xiv-xv). Alternatively, psychologist Annette Karmiloff-Smith describes the same activity in terms of "representational redescription" (*Beyond Modularity: A Developmental Perspective on Cognitive Science* (MIT Press, 1996), 15). Some cognitive researchers have identified the angular gyrus as the part of the brain primarily responsible for metaphorical thinking. (See Vilayanur S. Ramachandran and Edward Hubbard, "Hearing Colors, Tasting Shapes," *Scientific America-American Edition* 288, no. 5 (2003): 52–59 and *A Journey to the Center of Your Mind*, Podcast, A Taste of TEDTalks, October 21, 2007.)

[66] Fauconnier and Turner offer the example of a commencement ceremony or, even more compact, the action of a graduate flipping the tassel from one side of the mortarboard to the other. In these symbolic actions, the whole college experience is "compressed" into a single moment and a single image or concept (*The Way We Think*, 31).

[67] Ibid., 393.

[68] By "mental spaces," Fauconnier and Turner mean "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action. They are very partial assemblies containing elements, structured by frames and cognitive models" (ibid., 102).

"counterfactual reasoning" and "presupposition projection," which are essential to planning and pursuing goals.[69] Most essentially, however, through metaphor we are able to make sense of less familiar phenomena and abstract concepts by linking them to objects and experiences that are more concrete and familiar. Metaphor also makes it possible for us to relate two known entities in such a way that results in a "tectonic reconfiguration" of our field of meaning.[70] On account of these processes, human beings can construct meaning not only through incremental accumulation of experience but also in gestalt shifts. Thanks to metaphor, it is possible for us to think genuinely new, creative thoughts.[71]

While going into great detail would distract from the focus of this chapter on the role of imagination in meaning-construction, it is imperative at this point to note the role of judgment in the process. Mental images and metaphors make possible the generation of new, intelligent understandings about one's sensory and imaginal experiences, but those understandings can be mistaken. For example, you can have the insight that it is raining based on the sensation of something wet continuously striking the top of one's head and then realize that, in fact, someone is spraying you with a garden hose. Hence, understanding is not yet knowing.

In order for one's efforts to construct meaning to progress from understanding to knowing (i.e., from intelligent consciousness to "rational consciousness"), one must arrive at a "virtually unconditioned" through the exercise of reflective judgment. That is

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[69] Ibid., 30.

[70] Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 63-4.

[71] Cf. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 200-1.

to say that one must grasp both the conditions that would have to be fulfilled for something to be true and the fact that those conditions are fulfilled.[72] Recognizing this role of reflective judgment in human knowing and meaning-construction allows us to affirm "discovery" theorists' belief in objective meanings as well as "constructivists'" insistence on the necessity of human activity in constructing meaning without succumbing to the fallacies of either theory.

Sign and Symbol

In addition to metaphor, two other concepts prove indispensable for understanding the complexities of human meaning-construction, namely, "sign" and "symbol". As a young child's cognitive capacities develop, it acquires the ability to think of images as representing something other than themselves, that is, as "signs". Language is the primary manifestation of signifying, though other instances abound—for example, facial expressions, gestures, and fabricated signs (e.g., traffic signals). The relationship between many signs and their referents is arbitrary, the result of human decision and convention. However, between some signs and their referents there exists an intrinsic connection.[73] To such signs we give the name "symbols".[74] Natural objects, artifacts,

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[72] For Lonergan's detailed explanation of reflective judgment and the "virtually unconditioned," see chapters 9 and 10 of *Insight*.

[73] To quote Paul Ricoeur, "I shall always understand by symbol, in a much more primitive sense, analogical meanings which are spontaneously formed and immediately significant" (Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 18). Many other authors have defined symbols by virtue of their participation in the reality they symbolize. (See, e.g., Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations* 4 (1966): 221–52; Paul Tillich, "The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols," in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 3–11.)

historical events, deeds, gestures, persons, and dreams can all be symbols. Though

symbols always carry this potential connection with the reality they symbolize (e.g.,

water symbolizing cleansing), human intelligence and intentionality are required to

establish this connection.[75] In other words, the concept of a symbol presumes prior

experience and background knowledge on the part of the symbolizer.[76] We cannot simply

read the meaning of a symbol on its surface any more than we can simply see the world

"as it is." Both are always acts of interpretation.[77]

Symbols are further distinguished from signs by their affective valence. Where a

mere sign—for example, a stop signal—is unlikely to elicit much of an affective response

from anyone, symbols like a national flag or a picture of a loved one touch something

deep within the human person, calling forth a response not just of the intellect but of

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[74] The term "symbol" is employed in very different ways in different fields and often even by different authors in the same field. For example, Judy Deloache, who has conducted extensive research on "symbolic" thinking, intends something closer to what I have described as "mental images" when she speaks of "symbols". Others (e.g., Paul Tillich and Avery Dulles) use Philip Wheelwright's term "steno symbols" to distinguish what I describe as signs proper from "tensive symbols," what I would regard as symbols proper.

[75] What Fauconnier and Turner say of language generally might be appropriately said of symbol specifically, namely, that it "does not represent meaning directly; instead it systematically prompts for the construction of meaning" (*The Way We Think*, 142; cf. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 177). Numerous studies in cognitive science support this understanding of the cognitive functioning of symbols. (See, e.g., Judy S. DeLoache, "Dual Representation and Young Children's Use of Scale Models," *Child Development* 71, no. 2 (2000): 335; Judy S. DeLoache, Olga A. Peralta de Mendoza, and Kathy N. Anderson, "Multiple Factors in Early Symbol Use: Instructions, Similarity, and Age in Understanding a Symbol-Referent Relation," *Cognitive Development* 14 (1999): 299–312; Paul Bloom and Lori Markson, "Intention and Analogy in Children's Naming of Pictorial Representations," *Psychological Science* 9, no. 3 (May 1998): 200–204; Paul Bloom and Lori Markson, "The Role of Intentionality in Children's Naming of Pictures" (presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Washington D.C., 1997); cf. S. A. Gelman and K. S. Ebeling, "The Influence of Shape and Representational Status on Children's Naming" (biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Washington D.C., 1997).)

[76] As Susanne Langer says, "The mind, like all other organs, can draw its sustenance only from the surrounding world; our metaphysical symbols must spring from reality" (*Philosophy in a New Key*, 291).

[77] In the words of theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet, "Reality is never present to us except in a mediated way, which is to say, constructed out of the symbolic network of the culture which fashions us" (*Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995), 84.

feeling as well.[78] By virtue of their affective valence, symbols, unlike intellectual concepts, can serve as carriers of value as well as of intelligible meaning.[79] It is with reference to this capacity that Lonergan notes, "symbols….reveal the attitude and the orientation of a person in the world and towards other persons."[80]

Another trait that distinguishes symbols from signs in the more limited sense is the excess of meaning found in the former.[81] Where a sign answers a single question or conveys a single, narrow meaning (e.g., a stop sign signals that one should stop), a symbol incites the mind to new thoughts and raises a multitude of questions. The meaning of a symbol can never be exhausted or strictly determined.[82] In consequence, every symbol is open to many interpretations.[83] For example, water is commonly interpreted as a symbol of purity and cleansing as well as of life and of destruction. Symbols' multivalence gives rise to unique possibilities and challenges. On the one hand, it can lead to confusion and conflicting interpretations. On the other, it makes possible a kind of knowing that is inaccessible through empirical observation and conceptual understanding and yet indispensable for human meaning-construction and living.

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[78] Cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 129.

[79] Cf. Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 234.

[80] Bernard Lonergan, "Time and Meaning," in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1958-1964*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 99.

[81] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 38; Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1983), 132; Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 201.

[82] As Chauvet puts it, "Symbolism is precisely the very impossibility of completing our thinking process, grasped by it *as we always-already are* as subjects together with our 'world'" (*Symbol and Sacrament*, 533. Italics original.).

[83] Hence Ricoeur's famous dictum: "The symbol gives rise to thought" (*The Symbolism of Evil*, 348).

By virtue of their multivalence and affective charge, symbols are able (in the words of Avery Dulles) to "arouse tacit awareness of things too vast, subtle, or complex to be grasped in an explicit way."[84] This manner of knowing is not a form of intellectual mastery; it is not achieved by detailed analysis or comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon in question. Rather, it involves the integration of diverse ideas, impressions, memories, feelings, and experiences that defy conceptual synthesis and unites the subject with the reality mediated through the symbol.[85] Ricoeur explains, "the symbol in fact is the very movement of the primary meaning which makes us share the hidden meaning and thus assimilates us to the thing symbolized, without our being able to get hold of the similarity intellectually."[86] More concretely speaking, the knowledge mediated by symbols is akin to the knowledge one acquires of another person. Human beings are incredibly complex entities, so much so that we remain mysteries even to ourselves until our dying day. Yet we nevertheless can claim to know another person well, even intimately, because we have shared experiences, feelings, and concerns with them. This is the kind of intimate knowledge connoted in the Hebrew word "yada" (ידע) that appears frequently in the Hebrew Scriptures[87]. It is a knowledge that comes from participating in the reality that one would know.

Therefore, while symbols do not bestow declarative knowledge or conceptual

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[84] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 257.

[85] Cf. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 147. Hence the etymology of the Greek term "symbolein" (to gather together). Emphasizing the integrative, holistic manner of knowing facilitated by symbols, Chauvet writes, "symbolic action 'embraces' the whole of the subject, rather than directing itself solely to the brain" (*Symbol and Sacrament*, 265).

[86] Paul Ricoeur, "The Symbol: Food for Thought," *Philosophy Today* 4 (1960): 200.

[87] E.g., Gen 4:1; Deut 34:10; Job 18:21; Ps 25:4.

clarity, the knowledge they do bestow is in many ways deeper and more crucial for our living as human beings, who most essentially are not analytical, computing machines but rather meaning- and value-seeking beings-in-relationship.[88] Symbols' importance becomes more evident when we consider the paradoxical situation of human beings in the world: We desire to know all that can be known. Yet, no matter how much we learn, there is always much more that we do not know. In the meantime, we must negotiate the concrete demands of living in the world. With comprehensive understanding of reality beyond our reach, we have to utilize alternative means of orienting ourselves in the world and of relating to that which is unknown or imperfectly understood.[89] Part and parcel of this exigency is the matter of integrating the sensitive psyche, which, as noted above, is beset by anxiety in the absence of meaning.[90] Symbols satisfy this need.[91] As images that are partly concrete and yet intellectually inexhaustible, they enable us to imagine, name, ask about, and grow in understanding of what is initially unknown and to achieve some level of internal integration in the absence of complete knowledge. Put otherwise, they mediate on the "human scale" a reality that exceeds human comprehending. Since we never acquire complete knowledge in this life, the human need for symbols is

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[88] As Chauvet puts it, "Far, then, from being opposed to the 'real,' as the reigning logic of signs would have it, the symbol touches the most real aspect of ourselves and our world" (*Symbol and Sacrament*, 123). Haight applies the term "symbolic realism" to this capacity of symbols to manifest reality (*Jesus Symbol of God*, 11).

[89] Lonergan describes this realm of which one lacks knowledge as the "known unknown" and the "field of mystery and myth" (*Insight*, 557; cf. *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 77).

[90] Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 570, and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 212.

[91] Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 557; Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 289.

permanent.[92]

In sum, symbols and symbolic thinking are essential to any meaning-construction that we would consider genuinely human. We depend on symbols for making sense of our world, achieving personal integration, and, as we will see later in the chapter, relating to the divine. For this reason human beings have received the appellations the "symbolic species" and the "symbolic animal".[93] As I continue to develop my argument through this chapter and those that follow, it will become even more evident how important symbols are to human existence and to a solution to the current struggles of American Catholics.

Meaning Frameworks and Worlds

In the preceding sections, we have seen how imaginative processes, including the generation and manipulation of mental images and the organization of image schemata, create a basic mental framework through which human beings can interpret and make sense of sensory and imaginal input. With the above discussion of metaphor and symbol, we began to see how humans, while always rooted in the bodily and concrete, are able to construct an understanding of what they cannot experience directly. Fauconnier and Turner, Robert Masson, and others argue that this capacity for metaphoric and symbolic

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[92] Cf. Lonergan: "Though the field of mystery is contracted by the advance of knowledge, it cannot be eliminated from human living. There always is the further question" (ibid., 570).

[93] As Lonergan explains, the human being "is regarded as the symbolic animal, whose knowledge is mediated by symbols, whose actions are informed by symbols, whose existence in its most characteristic features is constituted by a self-understanding and by commitments specified by symbols" (Bernard Lonergan, "Religious Experience," in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Paulist Press, 1985), 115; cf. Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944), 26; Terrence William Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Human Brain* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997); Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 27-8).

thinking was the very condition for the emergence of human culture as we know it, with its languages, number systems, rituals and sacraments, art, technology, games, and money. Still, at this point we have only glimpsed the beginnings. We have not yet come into full view of the rich world of meaning we all experience on a daily basis—a world of complicated relationships, life goals, personal and communal causes, culture, and religion. Only when we arrive at an account of this fuller world of meaning will our inquiry into the source of American Catholics' sense of meaninglessness come to a head.

How, then, does human meaning-construction advance from the emergence of image schemata that make possible basic survival-oriented functioning in the organism's environment to a more sophisticated framework of meaning that enables human beings to live in a "world"? Crucial to answering this question is recognizing that meaning-construction is a communal activity.[94] None of the developmental processes described above ever occurs in a social vacuum. At the same time that young human beings are developing image schemata based on emerging patterns in their interactions with their environment, they are also imitating other human beings' behaviors and developing language schemata based on their verbal interactions with them.[95] Though image schemata initially play the dominant role in incipient efforts at constructing meaning (and always remain primary to an extent), language plays an increasingly significant role as

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[94] Cognitive research substantiates this commonsense observation. See, e.g., Staats and Lohr, "Images, Language, Emotions, and Personality"; L. L. Namy, "What's in a Name When It Isn't a Word? 17-Month-Olds Mapping of Nonverbal Symbols to Object Categories," *Infancy* 2 (2001): 83; J. S. DeLoache et al., "Grasping the Nature of Pictures," *Psychological Science* 9 (1998): 208; cf. T. C. Callaghan, "Early Understanding and Production of Graphic Symbols," *Child Development* 70 (1999): 1314–24.

[95] See Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 49, on the distinction between schemata that depend upon the mastery of language and those that do not.

linguistic competence develops.[96]

Language is but one communal asset that contributes to each individual's efforts to construct meaning.[97] Others include nonverbal cues, metaphors, symbols, traditions, rituals, and stories. These various mediations of interpersonal meaning—which constitute the core of a "culture"[98]—facilitate the construction of a complex mental framework for interpreting one's experience that is far more extensive than anything that could be constructed on the basis of personal experience alone and they do so far more rapidly than would be possible for an unaided individual.[99] Noting the pervasiveness of this process, Lonergan explains:

> It remains, however, that these operations occur within a context and that this context is all the more complex and extensive the richer the culture and the more nuanced the social arrangements one has inherited. Nor is this context just some inert datum that attains influence only in the measure that is it noted, understood, verified, evaluated. Rather it exerts a major influence on the interest that motivates our attention, on the language that selects what we can name and study, on the preunderstanding that underpins our further advance, on the opinions that have to be revised before anything novel or new can be entertained or accepted.[100]

In short, from the very beginning of life, the way we construct meaning is subtly yet powerfully influenced by the people and culture around us.

Above I quoted Fauconnier's and Turner's conclusion that humans' meaning-

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[96] As Mezirow explains, one typically attempts to construe—that is, understand or interpret—one's experience first through "presentational construal" and then through "propositional construal" if necessary (ibid., 33).

[97] Every language carries with it a distinct way of understanding various people, places, situations, and phenomena, which each of us internalizes unwittingly as we learn the language. Mezirow identifies a number of other cultural influences on meaning-construction in *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 43.

[98] Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi. Clifford Geertz offers a more expansive definition of culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (*The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89).

[99] To this point, Lonergan says, "it is only with respect to the available common meanings that the individual grows in experience, understanding, judgment" (*Method in Theology*, 79).

[100] Lonergan, "Religious Experience," 126.

constructing activity is guided by the overarching goal "achieve human scale." One of the concerns that distinguishes "human scale" from "animal scale" (to riff on Fauconnier's and Turner's term) is the mental demand to "come up with a story." Animals do not worry about where their life is going or who they really are; their primary—and often sole—concern is survival. But for human beings, who through symbolic thought transcend the immediacy of biological needs and satisfactions, these existential matters are of paramount concern. For us living is a work of art, a story we weave with ourselves as the protagonist.[101] A life lacking in such artistry and movement is viewed as an unfulfilled life. Beset with these post-biological compulsions, human beings have a need for existential integration that other animals do not.

Communal stories and symbols are the indispensable mortar by means of which we construct an integrated life.[102] A symbol, to borrow some language from Sandra Schneiders, includes "an intuition of relationship of parts to a whole….that not only unifies seemingly unrelated facts and experiences but also facilitates their interpretation."[103] It "illuminates the parts while the newly meaningful parts build up the whole."[104] Lonergan adds, that, beyond integrating our perceptions and experiences, symbols "intimate to us at once the kind of being we are to be and the kind of world in

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[101] Cf. ibid., *Insight*, 210.

[102] See Tilley, *Faith*, 74-87 for an enriching discussion of the different types of stories communities share in their traditions.

[103] Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 104. In this particular passage, Schneiders is describing her meaning of "image", which is richer than the use of the term as developed here. The richness of her notion of image makes it appropriate to apply her words to the present discussion of symbol.

[104] Ibid., *The Revelatory Text*, 104.

which we become our true selves."[105] Seizing upon the same insight, Schneiders identifies three "master images" (we might say "master symbols") that decisively guide one's participation in reality—one's God-image, self-image, and world-image.[106] These master images or symbols give expression to our "hunches" about certain truths of human existence that elude precise formulation or explanation.[107]

Because we desire greater clarity than symbols can give, we tell stories. Most basically, a story is a symbol or group of symbols expounded in narrative fashion.[108] When a story pertains to some central concern of human existence or to realities that transcend human comprehension, we refer to it as a "myth". "Myth" should not be understood here in the pejorative sense of fantastical stories or fairytales. While myths may devolve into stories that have no bearing upon actual reality, "myth" in the more general sense is, in the words of Terrence Tilley, "*a story that sets up a world*."[109] Without yet getting into what Tilley means by a "world," we can say that myth

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[105] Lonergan, "Reality, Myth, and Symbol," 34. Speaking to the same point, Ricoeur writes, "the consciousness of self seems to constitute itself at its lowest level by means of symbolism and to work out an abstract language only subsequently, by means of a spontaneous hermeneutics of its primary symbols" (*The Symbolism of Evil*, 9). Damasio likewise writes, "You cannot have a self without wakefulness, arousal, and the formation of images" (*Descartes' Error*, 238).

[106] Again, Schneiders's meaning of "image" here more closely approximates my meaning of "symbol" than it does my meaning of "image". Ray Hart likewise employs the phrase "master image" to indicate that by which is known rather than that which is known (*Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 304. Hart's application of the term is less selective than Schneiders's. As compared to Schneiders's three master images, Hart cites numerous examples including Covenant, Israel, New Jerusalem, Second Adam, Son of Man, Kingdom of God, black power, and the Southern way of life (see Hart, *Unfinished Man*, 301).

[107] Lonergan, "Reality, Myth, and Symbol," 33.

[108] Cf. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 237. Stating the relationship inversely, Lonergan describes symbols as "a more elementary type of story" ("Reality, Myth, and Symbol," 34).

[109] Tilley, *Faith*, 76. Italics original. Roger Haight defines "myth" as "a traditional story that represents deep truths about the world, nature, and human existence" (Roger Haight, "Sin and Grace," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 389).

synthesizes into narrative form an account of reality that enables us to make some sense of obscure aspects of our experience. In this sense, myths are not the crutch of the feeble-minded and eccentric but rather a cognitive and existential necessity of every living person. The way the average layperson (and perhaps many scientists) imagines the universe originating in a "Big Bang" functions as a myth just as the creation stories of Genesis 1-2 do for others.

Most of the symbols and myths operative in our consciousness are inherited rather than our own creations. As David Tracy says, "we find ourselves most surely not through out own achievements but through and in the classic signs and symbols scattered in our world."[110] As Tracy suggests by designating certain symbols as "classics," some symbols and stories are more potent than others in their capacity for helping us to make sense of reality. These expressions of the human spirit arise within a particular time and culture but, because of their power for eliciting thought about our most deep-rooted concerns, exercise a claim to attention for all peoples and times.[111] Homer's *Iliad*, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the Buddha, Gandhi, the French Revolution, and the American Civil Rights Movement might all rightly be considered classics. Such texts, symbols, persons, and events invariably and irrevocably alter the imagination of anyone who engages them seriously. It is largely thanks to these inherited mediations of meaning that each of us is able to advance from living in an environment of sensory stimuli to living in

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[110] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 307.

[111] Of these classics Tracy says, "If, even once, a person has experienced a text, a gesture, an image, an event, a person with the force of recognition: 'This is important! This does make and will demand a difference!' then one has experienced a candidate for classic status" (ibid., 115-6).

a world rich with meaning.

Through the accumulation of these socially-mediated carriers of meaning, language schemata, and image schemata, human beings gradually develop what Jack Mezirow terms "meaning perspectives".[112] Mezirow describes a meaning perspective as "a habitual set of expectations that constitutes an orienting frame of reference that we use in projecting our symbolic models [i.e., schemata] and that serves as a (usually tacit) belief system for interpreting and evaluating the meaning of experience."[113] Many image schemata, language schemata, symbols, stories, beliefs, and values contribute to the shape of a particular meaning perspective. Meaning perspectives are further distinguished from schemata in that, "Rather than simply serving as frameworks for classifying current experience, meaning perspectives are informed by an horizon of possibility that is anticipated and represents value assumptions regarding ends, norms, and criteria of judgment."[114] Though schemata contribute to the development of meaning perspectives, meaning perspectives ultimately operate as the criteria by which schemata are selectively employed in interpreting one's experiences.

As Mezirow notes, various thinkers have employed different terms to describe such interpretive frames of reference. These include "lifeworlds," "paradigms," "schemas," "language games," and "horizons". Lonergan is one such thinker to employ

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[112] Mezirow identifies three types of meaning perspectives—epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological. (See *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 43.) In later works, Mezirow refers to these meaning perspectives as "frames of reference". (See *Learning as Transformation*.)

[113] Ibid., *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 42.

[114] Ibid., 49. Mezirow adds that meaning perspectives are also distinguished from schemata in that the former "reflect developmental stage perspectives, cognitive and learning styles, and perceptual filters as well as social ideologies, professional or academic disciplines, cultural and linguistic codes, self-concepts, introjected value systems, and predispositions shaped by personality and neurosis" (ibid.).

the language of "horizon," though there are some key differences between what he has in mind and Mezirow's meaning perspective.[115] Notwithstanding the differences, both thinkers indicate that these interpretive frameworks (meaning perspectives and horizons, respectively) are influenced by the subject's experiences, education, language, socialization, and concerns. Adopting the language of "horizon" from the analogy of a person's field of vision, Lonergan describes a horizon as the limit of what one can see from a given vantage point. Applied to a person's cognitive operations, one's horizon is the limit of what one can or cares to ask about. One's horizon is thus determined by one's particular concerns.[116] Since different concerns occupy one's mind at different times, a person's horizon shifts as their consciousness flows out of one pattern and into another. As Lonergan puts it, "the flow of consciousness is the subject with his concern constructing a horizon that selects his world."[117] This highly significant sentence merits some unpacking.

First, depending on what concern prevails at a given moment, one will pattern experience differently at different times. Lonergan explains that intellectual wonder generates an intellectual patterning of experience in which one is open, not merely to things as they appear or things as related to one's own narrow interests, but rather to things as they are. By contrast, concern for how one is perceived by others generates a dramatic patterning of experience in which one is more acutely aware of the roles one is

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[115] For example, Mezirow limits meaning perspectives to three different types while Lonergan's usage of "horizon" suggests a concept that is at once more general and more variable in its manifestations. For an in-depth explication of this term in Lonergan's work, see David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 9-21.

[116] Cf. Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 89–90.

[117] Ibid., 85.

playing in the drama of life and how well one is playing it. Each pattern of experience facilitates the construction of one's horizon in a different way, inclining one to pay more attention to some input and less to others. The cumulative result of all that one has experienced, learned, and imagined—which is invariably experienced in different patterns throughout one's life and on any given day—is one's "world". This concept—often referred to by the German "Weltanschauung"—is a crucial one in philosophy and theology, as it is in this dissertation.[118] A "world" in this sense is not the Earth on which we live but rather the imaginative construct of a particular person. Due to the limits of human perception, knowing, and affectivity, none of us ever experiences or knows reality in its fullness. The portion of reality that one knows and is concerned about is one's "world". Our world, in other words, is "a horizon of horizons," the sum total of all one's horizons, that is, of all one has experienced, imagined, and asked about.[119] Lonergan summarizes, "The subject's concern determines his horizon, and his horizon selects his world."[120]

One's world in turn determines how one interprets all subsequent learning and experience. This interpretation goes far beyond real-time processing of sensory input or even reproducing images in the mind (what Schneiders and others call "synthetic" and

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[118] In philosophy, see, e.g., Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which has greatly influenced subsequent philosophical reflection. For a recent example in theology, see Sandra M. Schneiders, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2013) in which the author builds her argument upon a foundational analysis of the meaning of "world". This concept has likewise made its way into the popular lexicon and even into sociological studies. (See, e.g., Amy Mitchell et al., "Political Polarization & Media Habits," *Pew Research Center's Journalism Project*, October 21, 2014, http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/.)

[119] Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 85; cf. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 287. Elsewhere Lonergan speaks of one's world "lying within" one's horizon (*Phenomenology and Logic*, 288).

[120] Ibid., 85.

"reproductive" imagination, respectively).[121] As Schnieders explains, constructing a world requires a highly sophisticated "capacity to construct reality, to create dynamic images through which we interpret and respond to reality not as a collection of fragments but as a complex whole composed of wholes."[122] One's world is thus the result of the human powers of imagination operating at their fullest capacity. It is the highest synthesis of all one's experiences, imaginings, questions, and concerns—the magnum opus of the human imagination. This synthesis is different for every person (in some cases very different, in others less so). The world of some is a realm of beauty and wonder; for others it is the product of impersonal, mechanistic processes. One's world may be limited to one's own narrow concerns, seldom overlapping with the worlds of others, or, to the extent that one overcomes bias and yields to the human potential for unrestricted questioning and valuing, one's world encompasses a wide sweep of reality. In short, one's world is what gives coherence and meaning in the richest sense to a person's life.

The Centrality of Imagination in Human Living

Along the way I have offered occasional comments about the benefits of possessing these imaginative capacities, but, here at the end of this examination of the meaning-construction process, it behooves us to acknowledge more directly just how

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[121] Schnieders, *The Revelatory Text*, 102-3. In *The Wake of the Imagination*, Kearney discusses how similar categories for imaginative functions have been used and debated over the years. Immanuel Kant was the first to make the influential distinction between the "productive" and "reproductive" functions of the "transcendental" and "mimetic" imagination, respectively. The English romantic, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, made a similar distinction between "imagination" proper (i.e., productive/synthetic imagination) and "fantasy" (i.e., mimetic imagination). (See *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 167-71, 182.)

[122] Schnieders, *Buying the Field*, 37.

central imagination is in constituting a life that we would recognize as fully human. In so doing, I would not oppose imaginative and rational thought to one another. The latter arises from the former, and the interplay of the two is essential to the sort of sophisticated meaning-construction described in this chapter. Abstract conceptualization and reasoning, scientific inquiry, mathematical proofs, even what we commonly regard as "literal" statements all depend upon symbolic and metaphorical processes.[123] Moreover, contrary to common misconceptions about the nature of mathematical and scientific method, current research in multiple fields indicates that new discoveries and solutions to problems most often arise through image-centered thinking.[124] For his part, Antonio Damasio defines thought itself as the process of ordering mental images.[125] On this understanding, to characterize certain patterns of thought as imaginative and others as abstract is a matter of distinguishing degrees of proximity to the originating image rather than differences in kind. For this reason, Mark Johnson argues, "any adequate account of meaning and rationality must give a central place to embodied and imaginative structures of understanding by which we grasp our world."[126]

Beyond providing the material of thought and a basic interpretive lens, imagination gives direction to our living. As Ricoeur says, "One lives only that which

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[123] Cf. Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 52; Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 123

[124] See, e.g., Michael Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publisher Inc., 1983) and the body of research on "analogical reasoning," e.g., D. H. Helman, ed., *Analogical Reasoning: Perspectives of Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive Science, and Philosophy* (Boston: Springer, 2010).

[125] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 89.

[126] Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xiii. Masson likewise asserts, "The imaginative aspects of cognition—metonymy, metaphor, and mental images—are crucial and primary, not derivative and secondary" (*Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 33).

one imagines."[127] Famed educator Parker Palmer similarly asserts, "Our seeing shapes our being."[128] Even executing relatively simple actions—for example, locating an object or walking to a particular destination—requires visualization of the action to be completed. In fact, it is especially in the case of day-to-day living and real-time thinking and deciding that we rely most heavily upon rapid acts of imagination rather than discursive reasoning.[129]

As much could be said about the "imagination" of animals, but humans' more sophisticated imaginative capabilities also generate ontological possibilities beyond those accessible to animals. Animals are more or less bound to the concrete and present and therefore unable to consider counterfactuals or project future possibilities. Human beings, by contrast, are not constrained to the same extent by a limited set of instincts and perceptual capacities.[130] Our ontological potential is expanded exponentially by our

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[127] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 278. Ricoeur adds, "even Life is a symbol, an image, before being experienced and lived." In the same vein, David Tracy writes, "human beings need story, symbol, image, myth, and fiction to disclose to their imaginations some genuinely new possibilities for existence" (David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996), 207. Maria Harris similarly notes that people are not moved by direct appeal to the will so much as by inciting their imaginations to hoping and acting (*Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 20).

[128] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), xi.

[129] Cf. Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 179-80. Psychologist Justin Barrett adds, "what we say we think and know and what we think and know in real-time problem solving sometimes are two entirely different things" ("Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraint and the Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999), 325).

[130] While human beings have often been distinguished from other animals and their primitive ancestors by our use of reason (hence appellations like "homo sapiens" and "rational animal"), these considerations suggest that it is really our imaginations from which we primarily think and live. In fact, researchers have recently pointed out that one thing that distinguishes human beings from other animals is the size of the angular gyrus, the part of the brain primarily responsible for metaphorical thinking, which is disproportionately (eight times) larger in humans than in apes and monkeys. (See Ramachandran and Hubbard, "Hearing Colors, Tasting Shapes," 58, and *A Journey to the Center of Your Mind*.)

ability to imagine and become what we presently are not.[131] This is what Ricoeur means when he refers to imagination as "par excellence, the instituting and constituting of what is humanly possible." Indeed, "in imagining possibilities, human beings act as prophets of their own existence."[132] To exercise the sort of control over one's existence implied in Ricoeur's words—in other words, to fashion a "life"—involves a number of highly imaginative tasks, including establishing and maintaining a sense of identity, customs, and relationships with others.[133] Theologian William Shea explains, "Human action rests on the ability of human beings to project in imagination an ideal for the sake of which the present can be understood and transformed. The ideal promotes a unification of feeling and understanding which in turn becomes a unification of action."[134] Stating the matter negatively, Robert Doran says, "Forgetfulness of the images reduces and in the limit eliminates the probability that we will have the insights we need, not only to get on with our individual lives, but also to fulfill our historical responsibilities."[135]

In addition to providing direction for our living, imagination also channels the emotion and feeling necessary for motivating action. Without feeling and emotion, we

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[131] As a matter of fact, cognitive research has shown that the mere act of imagining can stimulate development in the brain. (See I. G. Meister et al., "Playing Piano in the Mind: An fMRI Study on Music Imagery and Performance in Pianists," *Cognitive Brain Research* 19, no. 3 (2004): 219–28.)

[132] Paul Ricoeur, "The Image of God and the Epic of Man," in *History and Truth* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 127.

[133] Antonio Damasio puts it this way: "My view then is that having a mind means that an organism forms neural representations which can become images, be manipulated in a process called thought, and eventually influence behavior by helping predict the future, plan accordingly, and choose the next action" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 90).

[134] William Shea, "Feeling, Religious Symbol and Action," in *The Pedagogy of God's Image: Essays on Symbol and the Religious Imagination*, ed. Robert Masson (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 86.

[135] Robert M. Doran, "Reception and Elemental Meaning," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 20, no. 2 (2004), 155. Doran is supported in this claim by research in behavior science. (See Staats and Lohr, "Images, Language, Emotions, and Personality," 99.

would lack the motivation to do any of the intentional actions (e.g., walking, eating, lifting objects) involved in our day-to-day living. Even mundane actions such as these require some degree of attention, and, as Damasio observes, "Somehow, what does not come naturally and automatically through the primacy of feeling cannot be maintained in the mind."[136] As we saw earlier, there exists a close relationship between imagination and affectivity. Ray Hart points out that among the whole range of mental acts, imagination is "closest in proximity to the event itself, and so aims to embody the extensional wholeness of the event without loss of significant feeling-tone."[137] Explanatory, abstract thinking, by contrast, is less proximate and therefore less affectively charged. For this reason, explanation, in the words of Lonergan, "does not give man a home."[138]

Human beings are ineluctably concrete creatures. A consequence of being concrete creatures is that, cognitively and affectively, we are most at home on the level of the concrete, easily visualized, and tangibly felt. This was the import of Fauconnier's and Turner's, concept of the "human scale". Cognitive linguists like Eleanor Rosch testify that the mental categories that are most "human-sized"—what researchers in this field term "BASIC categories"—are those that are a function of our interaction with our

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[136] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 154. More colloquially, Shea says, "every action requires some minimal unification of heart and mind" (Shea, *Feeling, Religious Symbol and Action*, 86).

[137] Hart, *Unfinished Man*, 231. Along similar lines, Aristotle writes, "When the imagination moves it does not move without desire" ("De anima," 433a).

[138] Lonergan, *Insight*, 570. This is not to say that explanatory, abstract thought is unimportant. Imagination is not sufficient in itself for authentic cognition. Lonergan has argued compellingly for the need for an explicit metaphysics, which through an emphasis on the role of judgment guards against distortions of mythical, symbolic thinking (see Chapter 17 of *Insight*). This need will become more apparent in my next chapter.

environment and imagined with ease (e.g., chairs, tables cats).[139] Because of our need for

such concreteness, Lonergan explains, explanatory knowledge "can become effective in

[one's] concrete living only if the content….can be embodied in images that release

feeling and emotion and flow spontaneously into deeds no less than words."[140]

Another reason imagination is crucial for human living is its role in facilitating

unification within the person.[141] As we have seen even from this relatively narrow

account of human meaning-construction, human beings are unfathomably complex

organisms. Like other animals, we are constituted by physical, chemical, biological,

organic, and psychic levels of integration.[142] Unlike other animals, we have the additional

need for integration of these lower manifolds with intellectual activity. Each manifold

exerts its own demands that must be met for the sake of the overall health of the

organism. So, Lonergan explains, "if developments on different levels are not to conflict,

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[139] Cf. Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 43-4. These easily imagined categories are the earliest
to develop in childhood and the ones that form most naturally across the human lifetime. Masson notes,
"CSR [Cognitive Science of Religion] contends that believers frequently operate at the basic level
theologically for the same reason that professional scientists in everyday life rely on naive physics and
biology: representation and computation at the basic intuitive level in such situations is often more
appropriate and efficient than complex theoretical analysis and calculation" (*Without Metaphor, No Saving
God*, 180).

[140] Lonergan, *Insight*, 570. Walter Conn likewise asserts, "Concrete, historical human persons do not live
and act on the strength of universal, abstract ideals of the human good, however. The concrete personal
conscience responds to value as embodied in concrete, affective images, symbols, and stories" (*Christian
Conversion*, 158). Sandra Schneiders would add that, in order for something to be "real" to us and affect
our living, it must be integrated into our imaginative constructs of world and self (*Buying the Field*, 39-40).
Such claims are well supported by a growing body of experimental research. (See Masson, *Without
Metaphor, No Saving God*, 179 for a discussion of this research in cognitive science of religion.)

[141] This unifying power is reflected in the German word for imagination, "Einbildungskraft," which
literally means "the power to form into one." This term fittingly describes imagination's power to not only
unify one's experiences and impressions but also to unify the many levels and dimensions of the human
organism.

[142] Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 484.

there has to be a correspondence between their respective operators."[143] As noted above, mental images provide the point of communication between bodily and mental operations.[144] Imagination is therefore indispensable to promoting correspondence among the various manifolds of the human person insofar as it unifies not only one's intellect but also one's bodily movements, sensations, impressions, emotions, and feelings in an orientation toward being and value.[145] Commenting on this need, Lonergan writes, "we become normal human beings only by mastering vast systems of symbols and adapting our muscles, our nerves, our cerebral cortex, to respond to them accurately and precisely."[146] The quality of living we all recognize as distinctively "human" simply could not be achieved otherwise.[147]

In light of this understanding of imagination's role in human meaning-construction and living, imagination cannot be regarded as merely one cognitive function among many. In the words of Ray Hart, imagination "is not alone a mode of cognition

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[143] Ibid., 555.

[144] This is a point I emphasized in the earlier discussion of metaphor and one captured well in Marion Woodman's assertion, "Metaphor comes out of your bones; it's organic in the body" ("In Her Own Voice: An Interview with Marion Woodman by Ann A. Simpkinson," *Common Boundary* 10, no.4 (July/August 1992): 27); cf. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, and Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*.

[145] Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 555-6. There is also a growing body of research drawing attention to how the way people imagine or "package reality differently" impacts their health. (See Sandra Blakeslee, "Birthdays: A Matter of Life and Death," *New York Times*, September 22, 1992, http://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/22/news/birthdays-a-matter-of-life-and-death.html, accessed December 7, 2014; cf. Ellen Langer, *Counterclockwise: Mindful Health and the Power of Possibility* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009).

[146] Bernard Lonergan, "Religious Experience," in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.,* ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Paulist Press, 1985), 127. Ricoeur similarly notes, "the same symbol unifies several levels of experience or representation: the exterior and the interior, the vital and speculative" ("Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 2, no. May (1962): 201).

[147] We might again recall Clifford Geertz's assertion that a human being deprived of symbolic mediation is "a kind of formless monster with neither sense of direction nor power of self-control, a chaos of spasmodic impulses and vague emotions" ("Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 99).

but also fundamentally a way of being human."[148] It is, perhaps more than any other feature of our being, what defines our humanity. Hence, only in recognizing the complex work of the imagination we can talk about a "meaningful" life in the fullest sense—one enriched by perceptions of truth and value and by participation in the human family's store of communal meaning.

The imaginatively-constructed "world" each of us lives in determines how we experience the events of our lives, what our lives will be about or, alternatively, if we will fail to see any point to life at all. Such was the thrust of Charles Taylor's argument concerning "social" and "cosmic imaginaries," which we engaged in the previous chapter. An "imaginary" in Taylor's usage is not the same as a "world" as I have defined it here. "Imaginary" describes a community's collective vision or understanding of the cosmos or society where one's "world" is particular to each person. However, the terms are closely related, for an imaginary is constituted by elements of meaning shared among many people's worlds and people's worlds are shaped by the imaginary that predominates in their culture. Taylor argues that, in order to understand how the Christian West has given way to a secularized culture, one must attend to the story of how Western people's imaginaries changed over the centuries. Having made a similar argument in the first chapter with regards to Catholic U.S. culture specifically, my aim up to this point in the present chapter has been to highlight the cognitive processes that lie behind human beings' construction of meaning and, indirectly, these historical shifts. Construction of a world—and even more so of a social or cosmic imaginary—is a wonderfully complex

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[148] Hart, *Unfinished Man*, 184.

process that draws upon innate human capacities, personal experience, social influence, and (as we will soon see) divine mediation of meaning. Disruption in any of these factors will radically alter the way a given person sees the world and how they live their life.

Revelation, Imagination, and Religious Meaning

Human Transcendence

As we have seen, humans' meaning-construction capabilities make possible complicated constructions like values, relationships, self-images, and worlds. When human beings develop a value system or aspirations about the sort of people we would like to be, we expand our experience of reality well beyond mere sensing of and reacting to a physical environment. In this sense, human beings represent the point where the material world transcends itself.

If we are to take into account this human capacity for transcendence, we must now qualify Fauconnier's and Turner's claim that human meaning-construction is driven by the need to achieve "human scale". Insofar as meaning-construction operates as a mechanism for survival, their description is accurate. However, our drive for meaning does not terminate in the achievement of conditions necessary for survival. When all of our basic needs are met, desires of a different order persist. Our concern drives us ever onward, constituting an ineradicable "openness" in our being that Christian theologians have traditionally understood as the means by which God orients humans to Godself.[149]

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[149] The classic formulation of this belief is Augustine's famous profession, "you have made us for yourself, [Lord,] and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), I., i; p.3).

This openness is manifested in two forms corresponding to the two modes of consciousness identified above—intellectuality (or *Verstehen*) and sensitivity (or *Befindlichkeit*).

Regarding the first, human beings exhibit an insatiable desire to know and understand. This intuition of all there is to know is expressed in our ability to ask a seemingly unlimited number of questions. As previously mentioned, Lonergan refers to this intuition as our "notion of being".[150] Our affectivity likewise orients us into the transcendent. There is no end to our desiring in this life. Even if it were possible to satisfy permanently all hunger, thirst, and sexual desire, we would still yearn for something more. Doran describes this transcendent desire as *Befindlichkeit*'s "vertical finality" (as distinct from the "horizontal finality" manifest in our desires for physical gratification).[151] More famously, Paul Tillich has drawn attention to human concern for issues of ultimacy, that is, for spiritual concerns that, even more than vital concerns like those for food and shelter, determine the shape of one's life. If such a spiritual concern claims ultimacy, writes Tillich, "it demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name."[152]

Hence, while it is true that human meaning-construction aspires to achieving human scale, it neither originates nor ends there. Human beings are constituted such that

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[150] Lonergan, *Insight*, 377.

[151] Doran, "Two Ways of Being Conscious," 17. Lonergan claims that, just as our questions for intelligence head for the fullness of Being, so too do our questions for deliberation intend a goodness beyond criticism. We not only ask questions that lead to self-transcendence but also experience a stirring of our very being when we glimpse the possibility of moral self-transcendence. (See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 36, 38.)

[152] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2001), 1.

fully realizing our humanity demands openness to what lies beyond ourselves, our limited knowledge, and our creaturely desires. In this sense, human striving toward the transcendent is an ineradicable part of how we construct meaning. Understood within this framework, religion is the human response to God's initiative, the means by which we try to make sense of the transcendent dimension of our experience. Initially ill-equipped to make sense of the intuition of transcendent meaning (or presence) beckoning them beyond the familiarity of temporal experience, human beings seek to understand, respond to, and normalize relations with that "beyond" by whatever means we have at hand. As Mircea Eliade and Paul Ricoeur note, we first read the supernatural on the natural world—in a sacred rock, river, or mountain. These natural elements become symbols of the supernatural—tangible, imaginable elements whereby we might lay hold of that which transcends the tangible and imaginable. "It is through symbols," Eliade writes, "that man finds his way out of his particular situation and 'opens himself' to the general and the universal. Symbols awaken individual experience and transmute it into a spiritual act, into metaphysical comprehension of the world."[153] To speak of "religion," therefore, is to speak most essentially of a system of such symbols of the supernatural or sacred.[154]

Though primitive religion almost inevitably admits some admixture of superstition (as do less primitive forms), theologians and believers resist denigration of these symbols of the sacred as mere projections, fabrications of the human mind that

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[153] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, 211.

[154] In Clifford Geertz's oft-cited definition, religion is defined as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations…by formulating conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 90). While Geertz defines religion purely in terms of human behaviors without presupposing the intervention of supernatural revelation, his definition nevertheless contributes to our present investigation insofar as it emphasizes the role of symbols in religion.

reflect no actual transcendent reality. As already suggested and as Rahner, Lonergan, and many others have argued, the human orientation into the transcendent originates in the transcendent itself.[155] According to Tillich, when human beings experience the sacred through the mediation of certain symbols, we can affirm that the social and psychological impulses controlling the selection of these symbols "are themselves the operation of a primordial shaping of life, and therefore the intuition of the Unconditioned."[156] That human beings from time to time mistakenly deify material things does not negate the fact that real knowledge of God is, in the words of Rahner, "mediated by a categorical encounter with concrete reality in our world, both the world of things and the world of persons."[157]

Modes of Revelation

According to Christian faith, God not only endows human beings with capacities and orientations that aid their meaning-construction vis-à-vis the transcendent; God also actively prompts this meaning-construction by revealing Godself to humanity in specific historical moments and processes.[158] This "divine revelation" is properly regarded a form of "grace," God's gift of Godself to human beings. What distinguishes revelation from

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[155] This is a another reason why I prefer the term "meaning-construction" over "meaning-making"—human beings never create meaning *ex nihilo* but rather employ God-given capacities to act upon divinely-bestowed signs.

[156] Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 306.

[157] Rahner, *Foundation of the Christian Faith*, 52. Elsewhere Rahner describes revelation as leading human beings toward the "transcendental" through the "predicamental".

[158] While acknowledging that the human person's orientation to God is itself a gift from God, Catholic theology has traditionally distinguished between "natural reason," through which human beings can come to some vague knowledge of God, and "revelation," in which God reveals truths about Godself not accessible to natural reason.

other forms of grace is that in this case God's gift of self takes the form of human knowledge of God.

Ray Hart's notion of revelation as "fundament of faith" provides a helpful basis for clarifying the nature of this gift and the manner in which we receive it.[159] Revelation, Hart explains, is neither simply content nor simply process, for process always involves a given that cannot be reduced to process. Therefore, to speak of revelation as fundament is to speak of "that constitutive process whereby the *what* or substantive bearing of revelation is built up as the intentionality of human being in historical time. *This constitutive process comprises an inseparably triadic movement; fundament refers to the already founded, to founding afresh, and to the yet to be founded.*"[160] In the first place, then, revelation involves an "already founded," something given. Yet this does not imply that God implants propositional truths in the human mind and requires no response on the part of humans. To speak of revelation necessarily involves speaking of God's action of revealing—the "founding" in Hart's terms. Finally, God's revelation includes an invitation to the recipient. Taking up the concept of "obediential potency," Hart explains that it is "that point in man's reality-sense at which revelation inserts itself."[161] Revelation is the actualization of this potency, the solicitation to see oneself as existing out of the ontological possibility offered by God. In sum, revelation involves not only a

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[159] Hart, *Unfinished Man*, 83.

[160] Ibid., 85. Italics original.

[161] Ibid., 177. On the meaning of obediental potency, see also Thomas Aquinas, "Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus," a.10, ad 13, trans. Ralph McInerny, *St. Thomas Aquinas' Works in English*, 2013, http://dhspriory.org/thomas/QDdeVirtutibus.htm, and Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 (Limerick, Ireland: Mary Immaculate College, 2000), 167. Rahner employs a closely related term, the "supernatural existential," to refer to the fulfillment of this openness through the gift of God's self-communication even prior to human response.

given but also the giving and the invitation to respond to the gift.

As suggested by importing the concept of obediential potency, God's self-revelation to humanity accommodates the "mode of the receiver."[162] In the case of human beings, the mode of receiving is an embodied, image-centered process of constructing meaning.[163] Therefore, in order for human beings to come to some knowledge of God, God employs a mode of revelation that bridges divine transcendence and human materiality. Symbol supplies this bridge. Today most leading Catholic theologians therefore consider it most adequate to speak of revelation as "symbolic" in its mediation, a position articulated most notably in Avery Dulles's *Models of Revelation*.[164] Symbols, as suggested above, convey that which cannot be immediately experienced or intellectually dominated and make visible what is invisible, thereby providing us with the means of rising beyond the enclosure of materiality and egocentrism into an awareness of the real. Because God transcends the material realm and defies conceptual description,

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[162] Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," I, q.84, a.1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *New Advent*, 2008, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/. Indeed, as Dulles and others note, God's revelation is not restricted to Christian people, images, and rituals. God also reveals Godself in a multitude of ways in other religions.

[163] Affirming this point, Anthony Godzieba writes, "The intentional thrust 'outward' (the body) and into the future (the imagination) function as analogues and indeed the substrata for faith as intentionality, our uncontainable seeking for fulfillment in God" ("Knowing Differently: Incarnation, Imagination, and the Body," *Louvain Studies* 32 (2007): 378).

[164] Similar to Hart, who describes the process and content of revelation as inseparable, Dulles finds it appropriate to speak of revelation as symbolic in nature insofar as revelation is both "intelligibility and embodiment," "manifestation and accomplishment" (*Models of Revelation*, 67). Hart himself writes, "The firmament of images is the primal noncategorial schematization of revelation as fundament" (*Unfinished Man*, 95). In the same vein, David Tracy writes, "all authentic limit-language seems to be initially and irretrievably a symbolic and metaphorical one…In fact…even explicitly religious language (e.g., the language of the scriptures or of the Christian mystics) is intrinsically symbolic and metaphorical limit-language" (*Blessed Rage for Order*, 108). This understanding of revelation is not limited to Catholic theologians. H. Richard Niebuhr, for example, defines revelation as "that special occasion which provides us with an image by means of which all the occasions of personal and common life become intelligible" (H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 80). Tillich likewise writes, "All knowledge of God has a symbolic character" ("The Religious Symbol," 316).

symbols are the most suitable mode of mediating God's self-communication to human beings.

When defining "symbol" earlier, I noted that symbols can be images, texts, objects, persons, and events. We see the same sort of variety in the ways God reveals Godself. To begin with, Christians have always identified the sacred Scriptures—first the Hebrew Scriptures and later the New Testament—as a privileged locus of God's revelation. Reading and praying over the images, stories, teachings, and wisdom sayings contained therein, Christians have consistently experienced transforming encounters with God. In light of this experience, Christians affirm these texts as "divinely inspired". In other words, they recognize that God has inspired certain achievements of human imagination that the human authors set down in the texts of Scripture, which through subsequent interpretation continue to mediate to others an encounter with the divine.

In addition to Scripture, God also reveals Godself in the events of human history. Relating the historicity of God's revelation to its symbolic nature, Dulles explains, "If God reveals himself in history, he does so by means of symbolic events, and if these events are to be revelatory for later generations, they must be recounted in language that carries their salvific meaning."[165] As with Scripture, we come to know God through interpreting the meaning of these historical events. Because such historical revelations are always also trans-historical, grasping their meaning is never a matter of simply seeing what God reveals to be seen.

Most significant among the events of God's self-revelation is the event and person

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[165] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 206.

of Jesus Christ. Picking up on Rahner's phrase, Dulles asserts, "The whole form of Christ's human existence, from his Incarnation to his Cross and exaltation, is held to be a 'realizing' symbol of God" in the sense that Jesus, the symbol of God par excellence, both is God and makes God present.[166] He is, in Roger Haight's words, "the historical mediation of God for the Christian imagination."[167] Introducing paradox, tension, and questions in one's mind, Jesus sets the imagination in motion and thereby promotes a unique awareness of and invitation to relationship with God.

If we acknowledge that God's revelation invites and requires interpretation, it is reasonable to affirm that the process of revelation involves not only historical events and inspired texts but also "Tradition," that is, the handing on of these stories and texts along with the whole way of life they engender.[168] This way of life includes practices, attitudes, beliefs, and teachings not explicitly contained in Scripture, including the official teachings of the Church known as "doctrines". Without minimizing their importance, doctrines should be considered carriers of God's revelation in a derivative sense.[169] As Dulles states the matter, doctrines "are not independent revelation; they live off the power

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[166] Ibid., 159. Dulles explains that a "realizing" symbol, as described by Rahner, involves two levels of reality—the ontic level of the concrete object or person itself and the fuller reality, which can't be reduced to the object or person but which the object or person symbolizes.

[167] Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 112. Haight and other have also referred to Jesus as the "parable" of God. Even though Haight's use of this phrase skirts the issue of Jesus' divinity, I note it here because the appropriateness of this label will assume prominence in my discussion of Jesus' parables in Chapter Five, where I explore how Jesus' parables in particular mediated this unique revelation.

[168] Cf. Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004). Highlighting how Tradition influences one's imagining, Ray Hart asserts, "It belongs to the historicity of human being to be 'oriented,' to be inserted into human being according to the ways of previous active, historical imagination, i.e, according to tradition" (*Unfinished Man*, 212).

[169] Cf. Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 161.

of the symbols."[170] Doctrines are formulated through reflection and reasoning about the symbols (events, texts, persons) of revelation. In the same way that conceptual thinking operates at a further remove from the "extensional wholeness" of a given event than does imagination, doctrines exists at a further remove from the power of the revelatory event than do symbols.[171] Notwithstanding, even doctrines always retain some symbolic element "in the sense that they communicate more than can be contained in clear concepts."[172] Here I would emphasize again that, regardless of whether we are speaking of Scripture, historical events, persons, doctrines, or any other mode of revelation, these mediations can only be considered genuinely revelatory insofar as we recognize them as objects of interpretation. God addresses God's revelation to human beings, who understand by interpreting. If human beings do not interpret so as to understand, God's self-communication goes unheard.

Knowledge of God

The matter of interpretation raises a further issue: I have been arguing that revelation is essentially symbolic in nature, but I have not yet clarified the nature of the "knowledge" mediated through symbolic revelation. In a culture where scientific certainty is upheld as the gold standard of all knowledge, many dismiss any form of

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[170] Ibid., 84. To this point, Hart writes, "This imaginative language is the underived language of faith, language in closest proximity to the paradigmatic events themselves" (*Unfinished Man*, 290). Haight likewise observes that interpretations of revelation "unfold at various degrees of distance from the core of revelatory experience" (Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 10).

[171] Hart, *Unfinished Man*, 231. We have seen support for this claim both in research in the cognitive science of religion noted in this chapter (cf. Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 180) and in the sociological research of Andrew Greeley, which found that professed doctrinal beliefs influence people's lives less than their images.

[172] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 226; cf. Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 108.

knowing that cannot be verified through empirical observation and testing. However, much that we know as human beings—including the things that make our lives most meaningful—are inaccessible to such limited modes of inquiry. Knowledge of God lies within this realm of knowing.[173]

In an attempt to clarify the nature of this mode of knowing, Dulles has described it as a "participatory knowledge".[174] This form of knowledge is circumspective, nonreflective, and pre-theoretical.[175] Yet, despite lacking the clarity of concepts, engaged participatory knowledge is not an attenuation but rather an extension of the range of human awareness.[176] Earlier we saw how complex is the process by which human beings construct meaning of their experiences and how selective the mind is in admitting sensible and imaginal input into consciousness. Given this complexity and the limits of human attention, we, in the words of multi-disciplinary thinker, Michael Polanyi, "can know more than we can tell."[177] This is especially true when it comes to our relating to the transcendent, which evokes an excess of meaning. As Dulles explains, "Revelatory knowledge rests on the tacit integration of clues which to conventional thought might appear disconnected and incoherent."[178]

God's self-communication stimulates thought and raises questions. As one

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[173] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 157; cf. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 11; Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," 316.

[174] Avery Dulles, "The Symbolic Structure of Revelation," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 60–1; cf. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 9.

[175] Hart, *Unfinished Man*, 93.

[176] Cf. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 9.

[177] Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 4.

[178] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 258. Dulles continues on to explain how revelation as symbolic effects this integration: "By arousing the imagination, the affections, and the heuristic impulses, symbols initiate and direct a process whereby the mind, relying partly on unspecifiable clues, perceives radically new patterns and meanings in particular constellations of data" (ibid., 258).

becomes aware of this communication, one feels compelled to interpret and speak to the revelation that God has bestowed, yet our words never succeed in encapsulating the fullness of its meaning.[179] This is what Hart means when he describes revelation as not "terminal and conclusive" but rather "inceptive and provocative."[180] It seizes us in our totality and demands a response of our whole being—intellect, affectivity, volition, and action.[181] In this way, trying to express the meaning of revelation is like trying to describe to a third party one's love for the beloved. One can spill a profusion of words (as those in love often do), but they inevitably prove inadequate to express the truth that one feels to be crying out from every fiber of one's being. Still, despite the enamored person's inability to fully articulate all that they know, no one would deny the depth of their knowledge of the beloved or that they see things about that person that no one else can see. Revelation likewise inspires and invites us to relationship with a reality that can be experienced and known but never comprehended or adequately described.

The change effected in the recipient by revelation is not only epistemological but also ontological.[182] As we saw above, what and how we imagine constitutes our identity and our reality. Recognizing the centrality of imagination, numerous theologians have defined the revelatory event as the reconfiguration of one's guiding images.[183] In one

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[179] This is what Hart means when he describes revelation as not "terminal and conclusive" but rather "inceptive and provocative" (*Unfinished Man*, 92).

[180] Ibid., 92.

[181] Cf. ibid., 92. Haight describes it as an "existential" and "experiential" consciousness (*Jesus Symbol of God*, 9).

[182] Citing scriptural convention, Thomas Groome employs the language of "wisdom" (alternatively "conation") to encapsulate the ontological as well as cognitive effects of God's self-communication to human beings. (See *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Harper San Francisco, 1991), 26–32.)

[183] See, e.g., Hart, *Unfinished Man*, 279; Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 80.

attempt to articulate the dynamics of this transformation, Robert Masson describes it as "a tectonic conceptual blend that reconfigures the available field of meanings creating new conceptual and logical space that enables otherwise unavailable possibilities for understanding and characterizing reality."[184]

David Tracy's development of the concept of the "religious classic" (a special category of the "classics" discussed above) presents another illuminating example. In a religious classic—and any symbol deemed genuinely revelatory would certainly qualify as a classic—"the most serious questions on the meaning of existence as participating in, yet distanced, sometimes estranged from, the reality of the whole are posed."[185] Engaging these symbols, one perceives one's life to be at stake in the meaning expressed therein. One senses that one is confronted at this moment with what truly matters most. This confrontation demands a response, and, as Tracy explains, "in the actual moment of response to a religious classic, religious persons are convinced that their values, their style of life, their ethos are in fact grounded in the inherent structure of reality itself."[186] Anyone who both attends to and responds to God's revelation will thus find their lives radically altered. One's values, commitments, and behaviors are changed, and, through a sort of "symbolic labor," God's self-communication penetrates and restructures the most real dimension of believing subjects, namely, their relations to God and one another.[187]

The Judeo-Christian tradition tells of God inviting such transformations of human

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[184] Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 133.

[185] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 155.

[186] Ibid., 163.

[187] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 442. Niebuhr echoes this sentiment: "The heart of the participating self is engaged in this work and through it the soul is reconstructed" (*The Meaning of Revelation*, 85).

meaning time and again, thereby opening up new possibilities in the lives of God's people. God's revelation made it possible for the inspired authors of the Book of Genesis to envision the world as created by a provident God rather than by capricious, warring deities. It made it possible for the Israelites to envision and encode a way of life devoted to worship of a single God and care for the marginalized among them. It made it possible for the prophets to see a better path and call the people to it when society had fallen into dissolution. Finally, in a definitive way, God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ made possible a new vision of reality as encapsulated in the symbol "reign of God."

As in the economy of God's salvation, so too in this chapter do we arrive at a culmination in this symbol. Hence, it is worth pausing here at chapter's end to dwell upon this symbol of the reign of God, which will be crucial in the rest of this dissertation. There is virtual consensus among New Testament scholars that ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, the "reign (or kingdom) of God," represents the controlling symbol in Jesus' teaching and ministry.[188] No such consensus exists, however, regarding the precise meaning of this symbol. Jesus' usage seems to indicate a reality in which all beings recognize God's sovereignty and participate in the universal peace (*shalom*), justice, and love that God wills.[189] Beyond this, we can say little more, as Jesus never clearly articulated the

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[188] See John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina 2 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002), 72; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961), 71, 81; Bernard Brandon Scott, *Jesus, Symbol Maker for the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 6; Gerald O'Collins, Christology, 2nd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 54.

[189] Cf. Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 44; Pheme Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 17; N. Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 14-17.

meaning of this symbol. In truth, we might have expected as much given the understanding of symbolic revelation developed in this chapter. God's revelation cannot be neatly described. However, it can be experienced and—if Scripture offers reliable witness—was experienced by Jesus' disciples. Bernard Scott argues that all Jesus' words and actions—his sermons, parables, questions, challenges, prayers, healings, table fellowship, and prophetic gestures—together formed an underlying grammar or performance of his worldview and beckoned others to enter into that world.[190] Sandra Schneiders similarly describes how Jesus' whole life, especially his paschal mystery, forged in the minds of his disciples a new way of imagining that made possible a fusion of their worlds and his own vision of God's reign. This "paschal imagination":

> worked upon the memories supplied by Jesus' contemporaries, shaking loose the ossified forms of their experience so that new connections, hidden meanings, possible implications emerged from the words and actions and attitudes of the earthly Jesus. It worked upon intention, projecting the significance of Jesus upon the experience of his postresurrection followers and inviting them to enter a future that they would share with the glorified Jesus in the reign of God. But it worked especially in the present as principle of organization, interpretation, and appropriation of the ongoing life experiences of the disciples.[191]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn upon recent work in philosophy, theology, cognitive science, and other fields in order to reestablish an understanding of the centrality of imagination in human meaning-construction and living and in our relating to God. I say "reestablish" because this insight is not a novel one. It was familiar to rabbinic Judaism,

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[190] Cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol Maker for the Kingdom*, 5, 167.

[191] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 106-7. Masson similarly writes, "Affirming that Jesus is the Messiah makes possible logical moves otherwise unthinkable. It inaugurates a new worldview—ultimately a new religion" (Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 59).

in which the imagination was seen as key to humanity's ultimate salvation. Richard Kearney explains that in the Talmud "imagination is deemed to be that most primordial 'drive' of man which, if sublimated and oriented towards the divine way (*Talmud*), can serve as an indispensable power for attaining the goal of creation: the universal embodiment of God's plan in the Messianic Kingdom of justice and peace."[192]

I believe this insight to be absolutely crucial for efforts to rejuvenate the faith lives of Christian disciples today. Indeed, so long as educators neglect the imagination, all other efforts to foster an integrated, living faith are destined to fail. Fortunately, Jesus has set before our eyes a vision of the way forward. In Jesus' vision of the reign of God, the potential of the human imagination reached its pinnacle and fulfillment. That worldview—what I propose to call the "Christian imaginary"—remains for us today the key to our beatitude and salvation and, I suggest, the key to reintegrating the faith lives of U.S. Catholics. In the coming chapters, we will examine more closely the nature of Jesus' vision for the reign of God and how educators can invite others into that vision.

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[192] Kearning, *The Wake of the Imagination*, 46. Italics original.

Chapter 3

Towards a More Adequate Christian Imagination

"For the glory of God is the human being fully alive,
and the true life of humanity is the vision of God."
- Irenaeus of Lyons

Introduction

As we can now better appreciate, the imaginative work of meaning-construction is a marvelously orchestrated enterprise that has been carried out by billions of human beings over thousands of years. In the previous chapter we explored the dynamics and process by which this work normally occurs. However, human beings' efforts to construct meaning sometimes go astray or fail altogether. Most of us have had some exposure to such failures, whether in our own lives, in those of people we know, or in the news. The most extreme cases are manifested in those tragic incidents when people fall so deep into despair and their view of reality becomes so distorted that they take their own lives and/or those of others. Until recently such instances of people falling into a sense of meaninglessness were relatively rare. Yet, as we observed in Chapter One, a sense of meaninglessness has spread to unprecedented proportions in much of the contemporary Western world. The old Christian imaginary having been dispelled and replaced with a multiplicity of competing accounts, many people today—including many American Catholics—lack a unifying vision for their lives and for reality as a whole. As a result, they put off the questions of ultimate meaning, distracting themselves with various diversions, or else fall into the sort of despair that in past times was viewed as an isolated misfortune.[1]

Fortunately, the spread of this sense of meaninglessness has not been inexorable. Throughout the United States and the world, Christian (and non-Christian) communities

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[1] Psychologist William Lynch describes the source of such despair in this way: "To the degree that our images of things and of life are left in fragments we cannot cope. The consequence of not being able to cope is hopelessness" (*Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1965), 245).

continue to thrive and live joyful lives. Their continued witness to the potential of the Christian faith to give meaning and purpose to life implores us to keep hope alive by looking for solutions to the challenges confronting today's disciples. I began my search for solutions in the first chapter by uncovering some of the historical and social factors that have led to the widespread disruption of meaning. In the present chapter, I will continue this effort by examining how these disruptions occur on the level of the individual's consciousness. I begin by refining the account of meaning-construction articulated in the previous chapter, highlighting the regular transformations through which a person's meaning-construction capacities develop across a lifetime. As I explore these different patterns of constructing meaning, I will note the various ways in which distortions in one's imaginative thinking can short-circuit the meaning-construction process. At the end of this exploration, I will be in a position to explain why the way American Catholics have historically made sense of their faith lives has become inadequate in the present era and to propose what more adequate ways of imagining reality through the eyes of faith would look like.

Stages in the Development of Meaning-Construction Capacities

In Chapter Two we saw how human capacities for constructing meaning develop from the impulsive responses of the infant to the complex "world" of the cognitively mature person. Impressive though this path of development is, it does not yet offer us a complete picture of how our meaning-construction capacities develop. Not everyone who is capable of generating a world-image constructs that image in the same way. By this I

mean that different people (and the same person at different stages of life) imagine differently not only in terms of the specific images operating in their minds but also in terms of the way they think about those images.

This recognition of variation in the way human beings construct meaning at different points in their development is the foundation of developmental psychology. Jean Piaget, who is credited with being the progenitor of this field, was the first to observe that human beings' cognitive capacities develop, not only through gradual assimilation of new information to existing frameworks, but also in leaps from one distinct "period" or "stage" to another.[2] A stage is characterized by an overall structure that explains major behavioral patterns. According to Piaget, stages are non-interchangeable, follow a fixed order of succession, and are integrative (that is, later stages integrate the properties of early stages). Piaget identified four developmental stages[3]—sensorimotor (ages zero to two), pre-operational (two to seven), concrete operational (seven to eleven), and formal operational (eleven to adult).[4]

Each stage represents a qualitatively different way of structuring thought. In the sensorimotor stage, the child mentally constructs action-schemas through sensorimotor coordination of actions without the intervention of mental representations. In the pre-operational stage, the child is able to internalize actions thanks to an emerging capacity for symbolic or representational thought (what Piaget terms the "symbolic" or "semiotic

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[2] Jean Piaget and Barbel Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 153.

[3] At times Piaget refers simply to "three great periods," grouping two of the four stages together (ibid.,152).

[4] Regarding the last of these four, Piaget further distinguishes between "early" and "full" formal operational phases.

function"), but has not yet attained the capacity for logical patterns of thought.[5] In the concrete operational stage, the child acquires the ability to think logically about concrete objects, and, in the formal operational stage, the child becomes able to abstract from the concrete and to think in terms of hypotheticals.

In keeping with the findings of the previous chapter, Piaget acknowledges that there is an affective as well as an intellectual dimension to human development and meaning-construction. In fact, according to Piaget, the mechanism driving all human acts of intelligence and development is "the need to grow, to assert oneself, to love, and to be admired."[6] In this light, the different stages of development can be understood as "a series of active compensations on the part of the subject in response to external disturbances and an adjustment that is both retroactive…and anticipatory."[7] They are, in other words, varied means of reestablishing equilibrium or self-regulation in response to threats to one's affective integrity.

Developmental psychologist Robert Kegan, inspired by Piaget's work, likewise acknowledges distinct stages of development in the human person's capacity for constructing meaning. For Kegan the "self" is not a static reality but rather an "evolving self" that repeatedly reshapes itself so as to attain progressively more adequate cognitive means of structuring reality.[8] What is most profoundly constitutive of the self is,

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[5] Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child*, 51. "Logical" rather than "reasonable" is the more precise and therefore more appropriate term here since many scholars describe logic and imagining as two forms of reasoning.

[6] Ibid., 157-8.

[7] Ibid., 157.

[8] Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982).

therefore, not a particular belief or set of beliefs or even a particular way of viewing reality; it is rather the activity of constructing meaning, an activity which looks different at different stages of a person's development. Seizing upon Piaget's insight that this development represents an adaptive response to threats to psychological equilibrium, Kegan prefers the terms "balances" or "orders" of consciousness to the language of "stages".[9] What distinguishes one order from the next in Kegan's account is what the person regards as self (i.e., "subject") and what that person regards as distinct from self (i.e., "object"). The person's life-long struggle to establish a sense of self takes the form of a back-and-forth movement between "differentiation" (in which the person distinguishes subject from object) and "integration" (in which the person establishes a new manner of relating to what was previously subject).

Initially (zero to two years) the child is able to make no distinction between itself and anything else. Its reality is a largley unmediated, undifferentiated experience of its own reflexes. Advancing from this "Incorporative" self to Kegan's first order, the child (two to seven years) gains control over its reflexes and sensations and so distinguishes itself from them. In Kegan's words, the child "comes to have reflexes rather than be them."[10] The new "Impulsive" self is now constituted by that which coordinates the reflexes, namely, impulses and perceptions. In like manner, each subsequent order makes object what was previously experienced as subject—impulses and perceptions become object to a subject constituted by needs, interests, and wishes (the second order

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[9] Ibid., 44; Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 34.

[10] Ibid., *The Evolving Self*, 85.

"Imperial" self); needs, interests, and wishes in turn become object to interpersonal relating (the third order "Interpersonal" self); interpersonal relating becomes object to self-authorship and sense of identity (the fourth order "Institutional" self); and finally self-authorship becomes object to the interpenetrability of self systems (the fifth order "Interindividual" self).

What order of consciousness one operates from carries global consequences for how one experiences reality and behaves. In *In Over Our Heads*, Kegan illustrates how people operating from different orders interpret and respond differently to various situations like assuming the responsibilities of young adulthood, partnering and parenting, working, relating to people who are different from oneself, psychotherapy, and classroom learning. For example, he contrasts Lynn, a high school educator, and Peter, an executive for a bedding manufacturer, both of whom have recently been thrust into new positions of leadership.[11] By virtue of their new roles, both are expected to assume a sense of ownership for their work, evaluate themselves, pursue their own vision, take responsibility for what happens at work, achieve mastery of their roles, and recognize how their work fits into the organization as a whole. All of these tasks represent fourth-order demands on consciousness. While Lynn takes policy changes at her school as an opportunity to redefine and reestablish ownership of her work, Peter responds to his promotion by attempting to preserve what he perceives to be his proper place within the company and in relation to his boss. Lynn is able to respond more flexibly and creatively because she is constructing her reality from a fourth-order consciousness that allows her

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[11] See Chapter Five of *In Over Our Heads*.

to see not only her personal needs and wishes but also her relationships as object, that is, as distinct from herself. Peter, on the other hand, is still embedded in a sense of self constituted by his relationships (i.e., third-order consciousness). In consequence, he feels unprepared for his new responsibilities at work and finds himself wishing things could go back to the way they were before when he was simply responsible for executing the plans set forth by his boss.

It is important to note at this point that the fact that Lynn operates from a fourth-order consciousness while Peter operates from a third-order consciousness does not necessarily make her a better person. When speaking of the human person's movement through developmental stages, I will often employ language like "progressing" and "advancing," which might give the impression that later stages are intrinsically better than earlier stages. However, my use of this language is not meant to indicate that a person becomes more valuable or holier the more developed that person is. It merely indicates that a person who has "progressed" to later developmental stages is able to negotiate a greater array of cognitive and affective challenges in a wider variety of contexts than is someone operating at an earlier stage. Hence, people should not hurry to attain later stages without need. Rather, as James Fowler and other developmentalists have advised, each person should strive to realize the full potential of each stage's strengths and to develop as psychosocial demands necessitate.[12]

Kegan's work represents one of numerous efforts by developmental theorists to explain how cognitive development impacts the way people interpret and respond to their

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[12] See James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 114; cf. Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 351.

experiences.[13] It is not necessary for my purposes in this chapter to discuss all of these theories. However, one additional scholar's work does require consideration here given the concern of the present project with human meaning-construction as it bears upon our relating to the divine. I refer to James Fowler's work on the stages of faith. Fowler, linking faith very closely with meaning-construction in general,[14] defines it as:

> people's evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others and world (as they construct them) as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence (as they construct them) and of shaping their lives' purposes and meanings, trusts and loyalties, in light of the character of being, value and power determining the ultimate conditions of existence (as grasped in their operative images—conscious and unconscious—of them).[15]

Faith, Fowler argues, is a universal feature of human beings' meaning-making, not the sole possession of the explicitly religious.[16] Given the crucial role imagination plays in constructing meaning, it should come as little surprise that Fowler also describes faith as a sort of imagination.[17] He notes that, by virtue of our existence as beings who live by meaning, we are faced with the constant challenge of giving unity and coherence to the dynamic fields of forces in our lives. "Faith, as imagination," he suggests, "grasps

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[13] Some of the most influential include Lawrence Kohlberg, *Collected Papers on Moral Development and Moral Education* (Cambridge: Moral Education & Research Foundation, 1973); Jane Loevinger, *Ego Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976); Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954); Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963).

[14] Kegan, for his part, affirms this central insight in Fowler's work, asserting that the spiritual dimensions of human development are at the very heart of meaning-construction. (See Robert Kegan, "There the Dance Is: Religious Dimensions of a Developmental Framework," in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity*, ed. International Conference on Moral and Religious Development (1st: 1979: Abbaye de Sénanque) (Morristown, NJ: Silver Burdett Co, 1980), 409.)

[15] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 92–3.

[16] William Lynch describes faith in similar terms: "a great primal human force that in its beginning is as yet indeterminate and is antecedent to all thought and to all verification" (*Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 125).

[17] In this regard, too, Fowler seems to follow Lynch, who describes faith as "a way of experiencing and imagining the world" (*Images of Faith*, 17).

the ultimate conditions of our existence, unifying them into a comprehensive image in light of which we shape our responses and initiatives."[18]

Fowler identifies six stages of faith development—six "turning points in the *ways* faith imagines"—beyond the initial, undifferentiated faith of infancy.[19] The first "Intuitive-Projective" stage begins around the age of three when the child gains the ability to imitate others and to be influenced by the actions, moods, and faith stories of its parents. The child's imagination at this stage is highly fantastical and uninhibited by logical thought. In the second stage, the "Mythic-Literal," the child begins to appropriate for itself in a literal way the stories, symbols, and beliefs of the faith community. In the third, "Synthetic-Conventional" stage, a person's manner of imagining the ultimate conditions of existence have become less literal and more finely attuned to the expectations of significant relations. In other words, the person's beliefs mirror those of the community rather than expressing a personally-developed perspective. Many adults never advance beyond this third stage.[20] In the fourth, "Individuative-Reflective" stage, the person establishes this sort of personal perspective by critically examining the stories, symbols, and beliefs of the community. Attainment of the fifth, "Conjunctive" stage, comes with a new capacity to embrace paradox as a result of which the person is able to re-appropriate much that was rejected in the previous stage, albeit this time in a more critically aware "second naiveté". In the final, "Universalizing" stage, which Fowler

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[18] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 25.

[19] Ibid., 31. Italics original. Note that in Fowler's numbering of the stages the undifferentiated faith of infancy is designated "stage 0". In this regard, Fowler's enumeration of the stages is consistent with that of Piaget and Kegan, who identify the sensorimotor stage and Incorporative balance, respectively, as stage 0.

[20] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 112, 114, 161.

believes is rarely attained, the person's sense of an ultimate environment becomes inclusive of all being and the person transcends the paradoxes of the Conjunctive stage.

Table 1: Piaget's, Kegan's, and Fowler's Stages/Orders

Age	0-2 yrs	2-7 yrs	7-11 yrs	11-15 yrs	Early adulthood	Early middle age or later	Midlife or later
Piaget's stages	Sensori-motor	Preoperat-ional	Concrete operat-ional	Formal operation-al (Early)	Formal operation-al (Full)	-	-
Kegan's orders	Incorpor-ative	Impulsive	Imperial	Inter-personal	Institut-ional	Inter-individ-ual	-
Fowler's stages	Undif-ferent-iated	Intuitive-Projective	Mythical-Literal	Synthetic-Convent-ional	Individ-uative-Reflective	Conjunc-tive	Universalizing

A Consistent Pattern: Three Phases

Despite some clear parallels in the frameworks of the authors discussed above, there is little consensus in the field of developmental psychology about what constitutes a "stage," how many stages there are, even whether evidence supports the idea of a developmental stage at all. Critics have been particularly skeptical about the existence of later stages such as Fowler's or Lawrence Kohlberg's stages five and six.[21] The fact that different authors emphasize different aspects of the developmental process (e.g., cognition, faith, moral reasoning) also contributes to the confusion and divergence in scholarly opinion. Still, in spite of all the disagreements, it is the rare scholar indeed who

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[21] See, e.g., William Kurtines and Esther B. Greif, "The Development of Moral Thought: Review and Evaluation of Kohlberg's Approach," *Psychological Bulletin* 81, no. 8 (1974): 370, doi:10.1037/h0036879.

today would deny that human beings develop cognitively, affectively, morally, and socially and that there are a number of distinct landmarks along the journey of development.

I would suggest as another minimal claim that we find strong warrant in the collective body of developmental research for the existence of at least three general developmental phases: (1) an initial pre-critical consciousness, (2) critical consciousness, and (3) post-critical consciousness. I employ the term "phase" in order to avoid confusion with the specific stages or orders described by Piaget, Kegan, Fowler, and Kohlberg, but these three phases as I understand them do meet the general criteria for "stages" as set out by these thinkers (namely, they follow a fixed sequence, no stage can be skipped in advancing to the next, etc.). In identifying these three phases I am intentionally building upon Paul Ricoeur's writing on the three modes of thought that he calls "first naïveté," "criticism," and "second naïveté".[22] However, Ricoeur is not the only thinker to identify this three-fold development in human consciousness. Other philosophers, theologians, and educators have observed a similar pattern.[23]

This three-fold pattern is also evident in the stage theories of the developmentalists mentioned above. On this very point, Sharon Daloz Parks observes, "Current developmental theories (represented by Kegan and Fowler) continue to describe

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[22] See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 352.

[23] Cf. Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 165; Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 6-14; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 85-99; Phil Mullins, "Cognitive Development in the Introductory Course: The Pedagogue's Typological Imagination," *Teaching Learning Issues* 62 (1988), 8–9. Mullins's description of precritical, critical, and postcritical "postures" in particular is fully consistent with the one I present here.

the movement to mature adult faith as a three-step process whereby conventional (or adolescent) meaning-making develops into a critical-systemic faith (or order of consciousness), which then evolves into a mature adult faith that can hold both conviction and paradox."[24] In Fowler's theory, the first three stages of faith development describe varying degrees of pre-critical, literal consciousness. These are followed by the advent of critical reflection and the internalization of authority in the Individuative-Reflective stage, which is in turn followed by the re-appropriation of previously demythologized beliefs, symbols, and practices in the "second naïveté" (Fowler explicitly borrows Ricoeur's term) of Conjunctive faith. For Kegan, the naive embeddedness in sensation, wants, and relationships of the early orders yields to critical thinking and self-authorship most notably in the transition to the Institutional order. The critical Institutional self in turn gives way to the more integrated consciousness of the Interindividual self. In addition to Fowler and Kegan, I might have also mentioned Lawrence Kohlberg, whose description of development from early conformist modes of moral reasoning to the relativist reasoning of Stage 4½ to the post-critical reasoning of Stages Five and Six follows the same pattern.[25] In sum, the research of all the above thinkers consistently discloses this pattern of development from an initial state of undifferentiated immediacy to a critical differentiation and finally to a new integration of critical capacities coupled with a renewed appreciation for previously rejected positions.

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[24] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 14.

[25] See Lawrence Kohlberg, "Continuities in Childhod and Adult Moral Development Revisited," in *Life-Span Developmental Psychology*, ed. P. B. Baltes and K. W. Schaie (New York: Academic Press, 1973), 179–204.

Table 2: Three Developmental Phases in Kegan, Fowler, and Kohlberg

Phase	Pre-critical					Critical	Post-critical	
Fowler's stages	Undif-ferent-iated	Intuitive-Projective	Mythical-Literal	Synthetic-Convent-ional		Individ-uative-Reflective	Conjunc-tive	Universalizing
Kegan's orders	Incorpor-ative	Impulsive	Imperial	Inter-personal		Institut-ional	Interindividual	
Kohlberg's stages	Amoral	Punish-ment-Obedience	Instru-mental	Inter-personal	Social order	Relativ-ism	Social contract	Universal principles

As discussed above, Kegan describes the process of development as an ongoing negotiation between differentiation and integration. This dynamic is evident in the three phases I have just described: Challenges to naive meaning-construction demand differentiation beyond the initial, pre-critical synthesis. However, this differentiation comes at the cost of personal equilibrium, so, after an intermittent period of critical consciousness, a new post-critical integration may occur. Of course, people can and do remain suspended in different moments of this developmental process. It is one of my central contentions in this project that many American Catholics presently find themselves so suspended. The causes for arrested development are myriad, each phase of development presenting unique challenges and pitfalls.[26] Therefore, if we are to understand the current struggles in the faith lives of American Catholics, we will have to devote further attention to these breakdowns in meaning-construction. In the following sections I will explore in greater depth the three general phases of development and the

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[26] A strong case might be made that the style of leadership that has predominated in the Catholic Church in the past half century is among the factors contributing to the suspension of Catholics' development.

cognitional errors particular to each.[27] As I do so, I will emphasize the imaginal dimension of each developmental phase since every new development always involves in a central way a transformation of the way one imagines reality.

Pre-critical Symbolic Consciousness

Description and Capacities

Concrete Consciousness.[28] At the beginning of life, a child's consciousness is constituted by an undifferentiated experience of immediacy. By the second year, the first manifestations of the symbolic function emerge. This capacity for generating mental representations enables the child to bring to mind objects that are not immediately present and to employ objects as signs for other objects. One can observe this capacity coming to bloom when a child begins to use gestures and verbal language. Later the child will be able to imitate a model after its disappearance and to engage in symbolic play and drawing.[29] Acquiring this capacity for symbolism opens up a world of new possibilities. The child can more effectively communicate its desires and intentions and understand those of others. Its store of experiences and understanding of reality increase exponentially as it mediates and mentally retains meaning generated immanently and in collaboration with others.

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[27] On pages 244-5 of *Stages of Faith* Fowler provides a helpful chart that includes a breakdown of symbolic function by stage. Readers may find this chart a useful supplement to the more detailed descriptions I provide in the following pages.

[28] I have borrowed the phrase "concrete consciousness" from Marianne Sawicki. (See Marianne Sawicki, *The Gospel in History: Portrait of a Teaching Church: The Origins of a Chritian Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 15.)

[29] See Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child*, 53-4.

Still, that meaning is as of yet a confused meaning. As Ernst Cassirer explains, "It is typical of the first naive, unreflective manifestations of linguistic thinking as well as the mythical consciousness, that its content is not sharply divided into symbol and object, but both tend to unite in a perfectly undifferentiated fusion."[30] No clear distinction is made between symbol and referent or between the quality of what the child imagines and what it encounters in its physical environment.[31] The child may have acquired the capacity to manipulate mental images of objects that are not physically present, but it still thinks of these images in literal, concrete terms.[32] For example, talk of Jesus' resurrection from the dead or the Body of Christ will elicit for young children images of Jesus sitting up in the tomb and a piece of bread that tastes like human flesh. The child perceives practically everything that is sensed and imagined as equally real. In the words of, Susanne Langer writes, "In a naive stage of thought, facts are taken for granted; matters of fact are met in practical fashion as they become obvious."[33] If the pre-critical thinker requires further facts to explain a particular situation, the imagination supplies them. In this way, all of reality is made to conform to the limited store of images at the child's disposal.[34] The child is unaware of his or her own role in constructing meaning, instead perceiving meaning as something given from the outside.[35] In short, for a person thinking in this naive manner—and that person may be an adult as well as a child—reality is

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[30] Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 88-89.

[31] Cf. Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 151.

[32] For Sawicki's discussion of the development of symbolic thinking, see *The Gospel in History*, 15-21.

[33] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 269.

[34] Ibid., 278.

[35] Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 31–2.

simply what one senses and imagines, and it never occurs to the person that it might be otherwise.[36]

Since cultures are comprised of individual human beings, we can see concrete symbolic consciousness (and all forms of consciousness, for that matter) expressed collectively in communities and cultures throughout history.[37] For example, in the practices of primordial religion we see the dynamics of this early stage of symbolic consciousness writ large. When human beings first began to acquire the symbolic function as a species, the world was suddenly charged with meaning and presence. For this reason Langer describes this stage as the creative period for religion.[38] Suddenly a rock was no longer just a rock; it was imbued with the power of the sacred. In the words of Eliade, "familiar everyday life….is transfigured in the experience of religious man; he finds a cipher everywhere."[39] The primordial human is hemmed in from all sides not only by wolves and other human beings but also by gods and spirits. Taylor describes this sort of enchanted culture in this way:

> they lived in a world of spirits, both good and bad. The bad ones include Satan, of course, but beside him, the world was full of a host of demons, threatening from all sides: demons and spirits of the forest, and wilderness, but also those which can threaten us in our everyday lives.
> Spirit agents were also numerous on the good side. Not just God, but also his saints, to whom one prayed, and whose shrines one visited in certain cases, in hopes of a

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[36] This description coheres with Kegan's account of the "Incorporative" and "Impulsive" self.

[37] In the words of Robert Doran, "to speak of culture as a function of consciousness is to state that the meanings and values that inform and constitute a given way of life will be dependent on the relative differentiation or compactness of the realms and functions of meaning in the consciousness of the men and women of that culture" (Robert M. Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006), 37).

[38] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 162.

[39] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 183.

cure, or in thanks for a cure already prayed for and granted, or for rescue from extreme danger, e.g., at sea.[40]

As the reader will recall, this was the mentality that occupied Christian minds in the United States for most of the first 200 years after the first pilgrims arrived.[41]

Conventional Consciousness. With the benefit of additional social interaction and cognitive development, children eventually learn to interact appropriately with external and internal representations and to understand the meaning of symbols in more abstract terms. This leads to a new equilibrium, a form of consciousness that Fowler and Marianne Sawicki have described as "conventional".[42] As the "Impulsive" self gives way to an "Imperial" and then an "Interpersonal" self, one comes to value and appropriate the views of others.[43] In this transition, the subject's world expands yet again, this time yielding a vision of reality that includes not just what "I" see but also what "we" see. One applies the communal discourse to one's own thinking. The result, Langer explains is that "the wishful imagination of man has been disciplined, by public exposure and realistic reflection, into a genuine art-form, as far removed from personal dreaming as the ritual dance from self-expressive bouncing and shouting."[44] Fantastical fears about the monster under the bed are checked by common understanding that there really is no such thing.

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[40] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 32.

[41] Cf. Chapter One, pp. 36-7. See also Sawicki, *The Gospel in History*, Ch.6 for an extended discussion of how a concrete level of symbolic consciousness manifested itself in Western Christianity during the seventh century.

[42] Because of the significant differences between concrete and conventional consciousness, it is necessary for me to distinguish them here. Most significantly, the achievement of conventional consciousness is properly regarded a reintegration rather than an initial synthesis like concrete consciousness. Nevertheless, conventional consciousness remains uncritical in several important ways, which I will explain shortly. For that reason, it will be most helpful to analyze it here alongside concrete consciousness under the general heading of "pre-critical consciousness" rather than categorizing it as its own phase or treating it alongside post-critical consciousness.

[43] See Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 95-100.

[44] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 174.

The image one previously formed of Jesus sitting up in the tomb may remain, but that image now takes on the larger meaning of the new possibilities for life and relationship with God attached to that image by the believing community.

Despite the internalization of checks on the subject's fantastical imagining, conventional consciousness remains largely uncritical. One operating from this form of consciousness has banished the monster from under the bed, but only because the community has declared the monster illusory. People in this developmental phase take for granted the beliefs and imaginary of the community just as they formerly took for granted the objects of their own imagination. Hence, while conventional consciousness certainly marks an advance beyond the utter naïveté of the prior phase, it is still very much vulnerable to error. The personal advance from concrete to conventional consciousness is typically contingent upon the gradual accumulation of practical insights within a community or culture. At this stage, prior to the emergence of critical consciousness within the culture, the community's growth in understanding of reality is adventitious and unsystematic. Because the insights of the community are largely the result of trial and error rather than systematic, critical reflection, collective conventional consciousness often admits a mixture of truth and error. Individual persons operating from a conventional consciousness may thus access a more adequate grasp of reality through the insights of the community than they could on their own, but they are also limited by the limited knowledge of the community.[45] This is why, as Taylor notes, the "enchanted"

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[45] On this note, Lonergan's distinction between "major" and "minor" authenticity provides us with one criterion for distinguishing uncritical from critical consciousness. According to Lonergan, one can be authentic to the norms of a tradition or a community (minor authenticity) while still being inauthentic to the

worldview persisted in the Christian West in varying degrees up until as recent as 500 years ago (and persists still in many quarters).

Before moving on, I note again that concrete and conventional forms of consciousness need not carry a pejorative connotation. Many ancient and contemporary saints have lived from this form of consciousness. Moral goodness does not depend on advanced cognitive development, though it may help. In the words of Lonergan, "A person may be apprehending symbolically a very high morality even though he seems to be apprehending no more but the particular good."[46] Even when it comes to a person's understanding of reality, an accurate grasp is fully within the capacities of conventional, even concrete, symbolic consciousness. "For," Lonergan explains again, "as long as man operates intelligently and reasonably, he will succeed in every particular case in determining what is and what is not real and which realities are distinct."[47] Notwithstanding, the fact of the matter is that other desires often interfere with the disinterested desire to know, resulting in errors in the way people construct their view of reality. To these errors we now turn.

Errors and Limitations of Pre-critical Symbolic Consciousness

The acquisition of the symbolic function opens up a new world of possibilities to human beings, but it simultaneously opens up a new world of dangers unique to humans.

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demands of authentic cognition. In other words, one can align one's thinking with that of the community and still be mistaken in one's views of reality. (See *Method in Theology*, 79–80.)

[46] Ibid., *Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the Philosophy of Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1993), 98.

[47] Ibid., *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding, Volume 3*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1992), 560.

As Langer says, "The cat's world is not falsified by the beliefs and poetic figments that language creates, nor his behavior unbalanced by the bootless rites and sacrifices that characterize religion, art, and other vagaries of a word-mongering mind."[48] In addition to the physical dangers that are part and parcel of creaturely existence, humans are susceptible to illusions, misconceptions, and heartache to which only beings who live through a mediated experience of the world are subject. Our imaginative capacities expand our world by allowing us to bring to mind what is not immediately, physically present… including things that have no objective reality whatsoever.

Some errors are to be expected as a normal part of the development process. No child goes from crawling to walking without taking a few falls. Likewise, no one transitions from a world of immediacy to one mediated symbolically without a few mental slips. Child psychologist Judy DeLoache has carefully observed and documented these sorts of developmental errors over a lifetime of research on symbolic thinking in children. She has noted that very young children do not distinguish clearly between mental images, fabricated images (e.g., photographs), and physical objects. Where a two-year old is beginning to understand that a picture represents another object, a nine-month old infant will grasp at a picture as if it were a three-dimensional object.[49] Crucial to the intervening development is the child's ability to master what DeLoache terms "dual representation," the ability to view a single object simultaneously as a concrete object in its own right and in its abstract relation to another entity that it represents or

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[48] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 36.

[49] See Christine J. Ziemer, Jodie M. Plumert, and Anne D. Pick, "To Grasp or Not to Grasp: Infants' Actions Toward Objects and Pictures," *Infancy* 17, no. 5 (2012): 479–97, doi:10.1111/j.1532-7078.2011.00100.x.

symbolizes.[50] If a child is ever to function "normally" in the world, it must refrain from responding to the symbolizing object as if it were the object it represents.[51] Though this capacity has begun to emerge by the second year of life, it will take years to master.[52] In fact, as I will explain in the following section, many people never fully master this inhibitory function, which is part of the reason idolatry remains a perennial temptation for human beings.

Errors of impatience present another common stumbling block in the development of symbolic thinking. Previously I noted that, before we ever attain understanding, we desire it. This desire is thus the beginning of all knowledge. However, that desire can also be the source of error if it is allowed to race ahead of judgment. Langer explains, "An overactive mind is uncritical, as a voracious appetite is unfastidious. Children mix dream and reality, fact and fiction, and make impossible combinations of ideas in their haste to capture *everything*, to conceive an overwhelming flood of experiences."[53] Accurate grasp of reality requires reflective judgment, that is, the act of confirming the understanding of reality generated by one's images and insights. Mental images themselves are never true

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[50] Judy S. DeLoache, "The Symbol-Mindedness of Young Children," in *Child Psychology in Retrospect and Prospect: In Celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Institute of Child Development*, ed. Willard W. Hartup and Richard A. Weinberg, vol. 32 (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 78. Cf. Langer: "This dual operation of datum as sign and symbol together is the key to realistic thinking: the envisagement of *fact*" (*Philosophy in a New Key*, 267).

[51] Judy S. DeLoache, "Dual Representation and Young Children's Use of Scale Models," *Child Development* 71, no. 2 (2000): 336.

[52] In DeLoache's experiments, for example, two-year olds were shown to be unable to use scale models to learn information about the full-sized rooms they represented because they were so fixated on the models themselves. (See Judy S. DeLoache, "Symbolic Functioning in Very Young Children: Understanding of Pictures and Models," *Child Development* 62, no. 4 (1991): 736–52; Georgene J. Troseth and Judy S. DeLoache, "The Medium Can Obscure the Message: Young Children's Understanding of Video," *Child Development* 69, no. 4 (1998): 950–65.)

[53] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 148.

or false.[54] They can, however, be more or less adequate to a given question or problem (and the perceptions and insights they generate can be judged incorrectly). Inevitably, a young child has a limited store of images to work with and so is poorly equipped to interpret the multitude of experiences it undergoes. Every time the mind generates an image, it immediately generates the question, Is it true/real? Were the child to have the restraint to exercise the judgment that its images are insufficient for providing accurate understanding no illusion would arise. Yet, in the child's eagerness to understand, it overextends its limited repertoire of images and, as Lonergan explains, ascribes reality to any "object of a sufficiently integrated and a sufficiently intense flow of sensitive representations, feelings, words, and actions."[55] It takes for granted that its images are adequate rather than judging their adequacy. Again, this sort of error is not limited to young children. The fantastical myths and magic typical of primitive cultures are products of the same kind of impatient thinking.

In time children and communities acquire the cognitive capabilities and the practice necessary to consistently distinguish reality from fantasy. Yet, even once people have overcome these early developmental struggles, other sources of error persist. Besides the unrestricted desires for truth and goodness, human beings experience many other desires such as the desire for pleasure and the desire for esteem. These latter desires have the potential to short-circuit the unrestricted desire for truth and goodness. Even

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[54] Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, ed. Frederick E Crowe, Robert M. Doran, and Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 13.

[55] Lonergan, *Insight*, 561. For Lonergan's discussion of what constitutes sufficient evidence for a prospective judgment see ibid., 305-6.

more deeply-rooted than our desires for pleasure and esteem is our desire for self-preservation. As Roger Haight explains, because the human being "cannot fully commit or determine the self in being, because it always suffers the threat of nonbeing, it is always tempted and in some measure seeks to secure itself in being on its own terms."[56] As beings whose sense of identity is every bit as precious to us as the integrity of our bodies, the threat of nonexistence menaces us not only in the form of predators and perilous situations but also in the form of challenges to our understanding of self and reality. The meaning we construct of our experiences is hard earned, and we resist staunchly any perceived assault on that meaning. As Jack Mezirow explains, we often construct and employ our meaning perspectives in such a way as to self-deceive, block attention, and diminish awareness of anything that might provoke the anxiety of uncertainty and change.[57] In the same vein, Lonergan states, "The whole tendency of present perceptiveness, of present affectivity and aggressivity, of present ways of understanding and judging, deliberating and choosing, speaking and doing is for them to remain as they are."[58]

We are quite ingenious in all the many strategies we employ to this end, most of them unconscious.[59] When these unconscious cognitive strategies subvert the dynamics of authentic cognition (that is, persistent questioning, attention to experience,

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[56] Roger Haight, "Sin and Grace," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 395.

[57] See Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 5, 18.

[58] Lonergan, *Insight*, 501; cf. Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), 18.

[59] Cf. David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 11.

understanding, judging, and deciding), we describe them as "biases". One bias that has been well documented in psychological studies is "confirmation bias," the unconscious tendency of people to give more credence to information that supports their current beliefs.[60] If one believes that all politicians are in cahoots with Big Business, one is more likely to notice and remember headlines about government corruption than headlines about corporate regulation. Through such selective patterning of attention, people come to enclose themselves in what Paolo Freire terms "circles of certainty."[61]

Lonergan has analyzed several other forms of bias, including "dramatic bias".[62] Dramatic bias is operative when a person's anxieties actually prevent certain mental images from emerging to the level of consciousness for fear of the unwanted understandings they might lead to. This is the type of bias at play when a bigoted person suppresses positive images of a despised group of people (e.g., gays, African-Americans, women). Dramatic bias thus preserves oversimplified understandings of certain potentially anxiety-producing realities. The dynamics of this bias are closely related to what William Lynch has called humanity's "absolutizing instinct," our proclivity for turning one part of something into the whole.[63] Such absolutizing is exemplified in the Catholic who reduces all Christian morality to a crusade against abortion or the scholar who believes that his niche interest is the key to unlocking all the secrets of the universe.

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[60] Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Our Minds, Our Memories: Enhancing Thinking and Learning at All Ages* (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2011), 172.

[61] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1994), 20.

[62] For Lonergan's discussion of bias in its multiple manifestations, see *Insight*, 214-27, 244-51. I focus on dramatic bias here because it is the form of bias that is most relevant to the operations of the imagination.

[63] See Lynch, *Images of Hope*, 105-28, 243-4. According to Lynch, Erik Erikson referred to this phenomenon by the term "totalism" (ibid., 244).

All of the above biases and cognitive errors can afflict a person at any developmental level, but people operating from an uncritical consciousness are most susceptible.

Moral Errors of the Imagination: Sin and Idolatry[64]

Because human living involves thinking about not only what is true but also what is good, the malfunctioning of the imagination can result in moral as well as cognitive errors. In other words, improper use of the imagination can contribute to sin. Most people tend to conceive of sin primarily in terms of evil actions, but sinful action proceeds from distorted imagining. To say as much is not to reduce all sin to misguided imagining but merely to note the central way in which imagination is implicated in sin.[65] As H. Richard Niebuhr says, "the impoverishment and alienation of the self, as well as the destruction of others, issues from a reasoning of the heart that uses evil imagination."[66] In using the term "evil imagination," Niebuhr does not mean to suggest that some imaginations are created good and other bad. The problem is not the image or the imagination itself; the problem lies, rather, in how human beings employ them.[67] When failures to regulate the

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[64] In this chapter, I will discuss idolatry as it is manifested in each of the pre-critical, critical, and post-critical forms of consciousness. For this reason, it is necessary to establish a foundational understanding of idolatry before moving on from this section on pre-critical consciousness to critical and post-critical consciousness.

[65] For example, it is common enough for people to imagine clearly the right course of action and still choose otherwise. Such inconsistency between imagination and action relates to the concept of "moral impotence".

[66] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 75.

[67] Speaking from a neuroscience perspective, Antonio Damasio similarly writes, "Symbolic processing may be advantageous or pernicious, depending on the topic and the circumstance" (*Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994), 184).

imagination disrupt one's relationships with God and others, those failures are rightly designated sins.

As suggested in the previous chapter, the imagination is crucial for our relating to God. Humans are created in God's "image and likeness," and our vocation and beatitude lies in conforming to and reflecting that image.[68] Yet, many other things vie for our attention. "From the moment of birth," writes Parker Palmer, "other powers imprint our souls with images less than divine."[69] Jean-Luc Marion sounds a similar note, observing, "The will to power forges 'gods' at every instant….each instant not only furnishes them but even demands and produces them….The barbarous surging forward of terrible and trivial 'idols'."[70] This incessant surge of idols presents a major obstacle in our efforts to image God because we humans are "mimetic" beings (as René Girard and others have noted).[71] We conform to that which commands our attention, whether it be an image of the divine or something less than divine.

Because God alone offers life in its fullness, we can achieve integration and fulfillment only by fixing our sights on God and allowing our imaginations to be formed by God's self-revelation. To focus on anything less is to close the imagination

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[68] Gen 1:26; cf. Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18. The history of debate of the meaning of this phrase is a long one. In the following discussion, I primarily emphasize the meaning of image as visible. However, I acknowledge that there are other legitimate ways to understanding the meaning of the *imago Dei* and that there are dangers in limiting its meaning to a visible image. Protestant and Orthodox Christians especially tend to be wary of these dangers, but there is also a strain in the Catholic tradition of theologians (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, Lonergan) who have found it necessary to suggest a non-imaginable "image" (viz., within the human soul) in order to give a sound interpretation of this biblical phrase.

[69] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 17.

[70] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2012), 38.

[71] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48; Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

prematurely, to elevate one part of reality to the whole. It is to reduce reality to what can be measured by one's own gaze rather than receiving reality from its very source.[72] The temptation to do just this is strong, for our own existence is a constant concern for us. As we have seen above, we find comfort in simplifying reality, reducing it to the human scale, and clutching to the view of reality we have constructed. And so, Eliade explains, we invest our hopes in a particular vision or image and ask it "to put an end to the tension and anxiety caused by relativity and disorientation—in short, to reveal an absolute point of support."[73] Just as cognitive errors result from closing out further experiences, images, and questions, likewise does idolatry result from the premature closure of the religious imagination, from the refusal to allow God to continually shape one's imagination.[74]

The effects of this premature closure are dire and wide ranging. Like the Israelites at the foot of Sinai, we cut ourselves off from God's ongoing self-revelation and mistake an image of our own making for the one true God.[75] Losing sight of the true source of all reality, we fixate on this created image (a person, a possession, an image of success) and then another and then another in a futile attempt to ground our existence. None is able to satisfy for long, and we are left feeling fragmented, unfulfilled and captive. Bound to conform ourselves to the objects of our attention, the divine image in us grows faint as

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[72] Marion, *God Without Being*, 11.

[73] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, 27–8.

[74] Cf. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 71; Paul Ricoeur, "The Symbol: Food for Thought," *Philosophy Today* 4 (September 1, 1960): 203; Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's *De Doctrina*," *Journal of Literature & Theology* 3(2) (1989), 142.

[75] This idol may be a picture or a statue or—more likely today—an object of our passions or an image that represents ourselves. (Cf. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 98–9.)

we become more and more like the worldly things to which we are beholden.[76] Unable or unwilling to see God's image in ourselves, we are even less capable of recognizing it in others. This is precisely the situation Paul laments in his letter to the Romans: "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God….They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (Rom 1:28-31). Mere objects in our eyes, other people receive none of the love and respect they deserve as beings created in God's image. Instead we treat them as means to our personal ends, as a screen for the projection of our personal hang-ups and insecurities, and as scapegoats for our personal disappointments and fears.[77]

Idolatry is a temptation for every human being on account of the tension we all experience between the desire to form a stable, reassuring view of reality and the call to patiently allow our imaginations to be formed by God's ongoing revelation. However, those who have not yet learned to inhibit their spontaneous responses to powerful stimuli or to exercise reflective judgment consistently—that is, those operating from a pre-critical consciousness—are particularly at risk. As distinct from later manifestations (see below), the idolatry of pre-critical thinkers is most often not an idolatry born of pride but rather of confused imagining and insufficiently restrained desiring. It is the idolatry of the golden calf and the mostly pious but somewhat superstitious pre-Vatican II Catholic. As people develop the capacity to judge their imaginings more adequately, this particular

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[76] Cf. Rom 1:23.

[77] Girard has thematized this "scapegoating mechanism" prominently in *Violence and the Sacred*.

form of idolatry becomes less of a temptation. Still, idolatry in varying forms remains a

persistent temptation for the whole of one's life, no matter how "developed" one

becomes. As such it will be necessary to revisit the issue of idolatry in each of the

following sections on critical and post-critical consciousness.

Critical Symbolic Consciousness

Description and Capacities

As noted above, Robert Kegan has described the operative mechanism of

development as an alternating pattern of differentiation and integration ("decentration"

and "recentration" in Piaget's terms).[78] We can clearly recognize a movement toward

differentiation in the transition from pre-critical to critical consciousness. As one

develops beyond the initial naive consciousness, one gains awareness of the inadequacies

of one's former state. However, the transition to critical consciousness does not happen

all at once. The first, tenuous step occurs in the transition from concrete symbolic

consciousness to conventional consciousness described above. As the child becomes

disembedded from radical egocentrism and begins to develop a sense of "other," it also

becomes aware of the difference between how it speaks about the world and how others

do so. Awareness of this difference prompts a crisis that challenges the child's previous

way of imagining reality. At the same time, development of the capacity for logical and

abstract thinking provides new controls over imagination. The child's hitherto rampant

imaginings come under the control of the logic of the community as internalized by the

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[78] Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 31.

child. Thus, while still embedded in the collective consciousness of the community, this transition involves a critique of the prior egocentric, undifferentiated consciousness and a step toward critical consciousness.

Many people remain at this conventional level for the whole of their adult lives.[79] However, some undergo a further differentiation of consciousness during their college/early employment years or later, through which they become critical of the conventional ways of imagining typical of their community. This differentiation marks the definitive transition to critical consciousness.[80] In critical consciousness, imagination is controlled by the imminently generated logic of the individual rather than that of external authority. Becoming more aware of their own cognitive operations, people in this phase may experience a strong desire to get to the meaning "behind" the symbols or to abolish the symbols altogether if they perceive them to be void of any deeper meaning. For example, they might conclude that Jesus never physically sat up in the tomb or that the bread and wine consecrated in the Eucharist are "mere" symbols. These perceptions may lead them to deny previous beliefs and abandon old religious practices and can be attended by feelings of loss, dislocation, guilt, or resentment at having been misled by others.[81]

Critical consciousness enables them to overcome a naive over-reliance on supernatural powers and affords greater conceptual clarity and resistance to

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[79] Cf. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 161.

[80] Cf. Ibid., 174-83; Sawicki, *The Gospel in History*, 18-20.

[81] Cf. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 180.

superstition.[82] According to Susanne Langer, it is this sort of consciousness that separates a civilized mentality from a savage mentality. The difference between uncritical and critical thinking, we do well to note, is not that fantastical images cease to emerge for the critical thinker but rather that the critical thinker responds to those images differently. In the words of Langer, "bizarre and monstrous imagery pops into [civilized] heads, too, but is rejected almost instantly by the disciplined reason."[83]

When critical consciousness comes to pervade the common consciousness, a culture enters into what Ricoeur calls a moment of "forgetfulness of the signs of the sacred".[84] It is an age of "disenchantment" (Taylor) and "demystification" of old myths and symbols (Ricoeur), an age when language becomes "more precise, more univocal, more technical in a word, more suited to those integral formalizations which are called precisely symbolic logic."[85] In such a period, the old enchanted imaginary through which people once interpreted their experiences is replaced by an "imminent frame".[86] The events of daily life and the workings of the universe are no longer explained by appeals to supernatural powers but rather by scientific laws. This period is thus the golden age for science and historical method. Such was the ethos that defined the Enlightenment in Europe and the United States during the 18th century. Such is the situation that, in many respects, we contemporary Americans recognize as our own.

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[82] Cf. ibid., 180.

[83] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 181.

[84] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 349.

[85] Ibid., 349.

[86] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

Errors and Limitations of Critical Symbolic Consciousness

While critical consciousness brings with it new strengths and abilities, it also has its limitations. If the primary limitation of uncritical consciousness is lack of logical control over an excess of meaning, the primary limitation of critical consciousness is excessive rationalization resulting in a dearth of meaning. On the one hand, disdain for symbol and ritual and overvaluation of logical reasoning can amount to its own form of idolatry. As Marion notes, the idolatry of the concept is just as real as the idolatry of the image.[87] On the other hand, by formalizing language and relentlessly searching for the meaning "behind" the symbol, a critically-minded person may end up emptying language and symbol of its meaning and power.[88] That person may consequently conclude that there is no truth to the symbol at all and so reject symbol, ritual, and religious belief entirely. This experience can lead to a feeling of disillusionment and to a relativist and even antagonistic stance toward religion. The person might very well view the symbols and beliefs of others with equanimity but fail to experience the deep meaning of any of these symbols for him- or herself.[89] While recognizing that they cannot in good conscience return to their old, naive ways of symbolic thinking, people at this developmental phase may nevertheless experience the regret of having lost something important.

Marked as it is by a new capacity for reflexivity, critical consciousness represents a state of incomplete self-knowledge. On the one hand, people operating from critical

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[87] See Marion, *God Without Being*, 22-23.

[88] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 349; cf. Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

[89] Cf. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 354.

consciousness are aware that meaning is not simply externally imposed but in great part immanently generated. They recognize that they experience reality in this way because they construct it so. This self-knowledge makes possible greater precision of thought and a fuller grasp of reality than was possible before. On the other hand, Ricoeur explains, "the being which posits itself in the *Cogito* has still to discover that the very act by which it abstracts itself from the whole does not cease to share in the being that challenges it in every symbol."[90] In other words, such a person may become so narrowly concerned with their own thought that they lose sight of their situatedness within the wider realm of being. They may fail to recognize that the symbols they interpret are not merely a *tabula rasa* against which they projects meaning but rather a system of signs pointing to a world of inexhaustible meaning. It may not occur to this person that their work of constructing meaning is an activity done in collaboration with something or someone beyond him- or herself and that their meaning-constructing ability is, in the first place, a gift. Critically-minded people are thus likely to undervalue tradition and overvalue their own rational capacities and understanding of faith, which may be blind to real tensions and complexities in the world. Such people's self-knowledge is also incomplete in the sense that they fail to recognize their personal need for symbol and the integration it facilitates. To the extent that human beings have reduced themselves to a *Cogito* or a mind, they have, in the words of Robert Doran, "transformed the potential operator of human integration [viz., the sensitive psyche] into a defective operator of human

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[90] Ibid., 356.

disintegration."[91] Captivated by their newfound powers of rational analysis, they facilitate internal dis-integration through neglect of other dimensions of their being.

Post-critical Symbolic Consciousness

While Enlightenment thinkers and modern day rationalists would have us believe that the critical phase represents the pinnacle of human thinking, the inherited wisdom of our religious traditions and the insights of modern psychology reveal that they are mistaken. The end of human consciousness is not to expose as illusions the symbols that give rise to thought but rather to recover the fullness of their meaning through critical yet receptive interpretation. It is, in the words of T. S. Eliot, "to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time."[92] The feelings of loss and longing and the "disenchantment with disenchantment"[93] that often attends the twilight of critical consciousness are hints that there is more to meaning than can be perceived through rational analysis. As David Tracy has suggested, even after we acquire the capacity for critical thought with all its benefits, "[t]his need for and this possibility of fiction remains, it seems, an uncommonly common matter of fact of our shared experience."[94] We find that the possibilities for human living disclosed to us through symbols and myths are in fact more powerful and more authentic than those revealed through a demythologizing lens.

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[91] Doran, *Psychic Conversion*, 183.

[92] T. S. Eliot, "Four Quartets," IV.

[93] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

[94] Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 209; cf. Sawicki, *The Gospel in History*, 20.

At this moment in the developmental journey, the weary critical thinker is primed for a new integration. However, unlike the undifferentiated integration of the pre-critical phase, this new integration does not come at the expense of true self-awareness. As Kegan would say, this integration does not take the form of *embeddedness in* image and symbol. Rather, it is an integration forged by *relationship to* them. In this way, what was dissected in the critical movement is now reintegrated in a more resilient, more adaptive synthesis. Paul Ricoeur has famously described this third phase in the evolution of symbolic consciousness as a "second naïveté," "the post-critical equivalent of the precritical hierophany."[95]

Post-critical consciousness emerges when symbolic power is reunited with conceptual meaning.[96] The reintegration of the two—an integration that seems impossible to critical consciousness—is made possible by what Fowler, following William Lynch, terms the "ironic imagination."[97] Fowler defines the ironic imagination as "a capacity to see and be in one's or one's group's most powerful meanings, while simultaneously recognizing that they are relative, partial and inevitably distorting apprehensions of transcendent reality."[98] Ricoeur, Fowler, and others make clear that this second naïveté does not involve a return to naive immediacy or a repudiation of the critical thinking achieved in the prior phase. Though development of post-critical consciousness does

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[95] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 352. Sawicki describes this mode of symbolic consciousness as "conjunctive" (*The Gospel in History*, 20).

[96] Cf. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 197. Fowler adds, "Postmodern thinking, when it allows itself to be practical, reclaims the local, the commonsense, and the wise, as they are grounded in symbol, myth, and metaphor" (*Faithful Change*, 15).

[97] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 198.

[98] Ibid., 198.

involve a reclaiming of the immediacy of symbol, it is a thinking *from* symbols rather than thinking *within* symbols, as was the case in pre-critical consciousness.[99] The images that arise in imagination are not taken as explanatory but rather understood as symbolic.[100] Availing oneself of the tools of critical thought, one discovers that it is possible to recover the power and meaning of symbols with all their disclosive possibilities, now through interpretation instead of naive imaginings.[101]

As with previous developmental transitions, the transition to post-critical consciousness involves the risk of leaving behind the ways of thinking and imagining that one finds most comfortable. In this case, if one is to move into a more adequate form of consciousness, one cannot continue analyzing symbols from a safe distance. One must, in the words of Ricoeur, make a "wager" that thinking from symbols will enable one to see reality more clearly. Ricoeur explains, "It is necessary, then, to participate in the struggle, in the dynamics, in which the symbolism becomes a prey to a spontaneous hermeneutics that seeks to transcend it.… but then one must abandon the position—or rather, the exile—of the remote and disinterested spectator, in order to appropriate in each case a particular symbolism."[102] To access the illuminating power of the symbol one must enter into the world of the symbol and risk belief in that power.[103] From a critical stance such belief seems naive and irrational. Yet the truth is that some realities simply cannot be known standing at a distance, as we saw in the previous chapter. Especially when it

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[99] Cf. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355.

[100] See ibid., 350. Lonergan would add that the constitutive meaning of the images is now clearly distinguished from their cognitive meaning. (See *Method in Theology*, 89.)

[101] See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 351.

[102] Ibid., 354.

[103] Cf. ibid., 351.

comes to the realm of the transcendent, knowing requires giving up the neatness of a transparent, rationally-ordered world and entering once again into a world of complexity and mystery.

The reward for taking this risk is reclaiming a world infused with meaning and wonder. "In fact," writes Ricoeur, "the symbol, used as a means of detecting and deciphering human reality, will have been verified by its power to raise up, to illuminate, to give order to that region of human experience, that region of confession, which we were too ready to reduce to error, habit, emotion, passivity."[104] Combined with a newfound openness to being grasped by the symbol, criticism can now serve a restorative rather than merely reductive function.[105] Rather than dissecting the symbol into discrete elements and translating its meaning into neat concepts, interpretation creates the possibility of accessing a more expansive meaning, thereby revivifying thought and restoring the feelings of wonder and fulfillment that characterized the first naiveté.

By way of example, a person transitioning from critical to post-critical consciousness might resume participation in the Mass. He or she does so fully aware of the superstitious ways people imagine Jesus' presence in the Eucharist, yet with a deeper insight into God's presence-in-absence and a renewed appreciation for how the sacrament of Jesus' self-gift serves to unite Christians to God and one another. In the process of reclaiming the power of symbol, one simultaneously acquires a new depth of self-knowledge, affirming not only the possibility of accessing a fuller reality through critical symbolic thought but also the personal need to do so.

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[104] Ibid., 355.

[105] See ibid., 350.

This deeper self-knowledge does not preclude cognitional errors and sin entirely. Post-critical thinkers still face the everyday exigency of reflectively judging the adequacy of their images and insights. They still face the temptation of idolatry, though they are less likely to succumb to idolatries of the golden calf variety than pre-critical thinkers or to conceptual idolatry than critical thinkers. Thanks to successful self-appropriation of their imaginative capacities, the recurring pattern of cognitive operations that makes possible a fuller grasp of truth and goodness has become routine if not automatic. Therefore, even if authentic cognition is never achieved permanently,[106] post-critical consciousness does provide a level of protection against error that eludes pre-critical and even critical thinkers.[107]

How does this post-critical symbolic consciousness manifest itself historically? We are yet to see. Those who write about it speak of it primarily as an emerging reality and as a need for the (immediate) future. Ricoeur, for his part, asserts, "if we can no longer live the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can….aim at a second naïveté in and through criticism."[108] Fowler identifies the present moment as "a watershed in the evolution of cultural consciousness" in which the emergence of a distinctly postmodern consciousness—that is, one that parallels "Conjunctive" faith consciousness—will be necessary to overcome the incommensurate

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[106] Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 252.

[107] Because the limitations of post-critical consciousness are fewer (or perhaps not fully recognized at this point in time), I have elected to include this brief reflection here rather than in a separate section on limitations.

[108] Ibid., 351. Ray Hart sounds a similar note with regard to the theological task in the contemporary context. (See Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 95.)

thinking underlying current culture wars.[109] Having found scant evidence for the existence of Conjunctive consciousness prior to present day, Sawicki deems extensive discussion of it to be beyond the scope of her historical survey of Christian education.[110] Lonergan, similarly to Fowler, observes, "The second stage of meaning is vanishing, and a third is about to take its place."[111] By all indications, then, we are living at a pivotal moment in the evolution of human consciousness. If we are to understand the implications of this historic shift, we will do well to consider the dynamics of human development more carefully within the present historical and cultural context.

Phases of Symbolic Consciousness in Historical and Cultural Context

The Transition to Postmodern Culture

As I have noted briefly in each of the previous sections, it is not only individuals but also entire societies that progress through distinct phases of development. Various scholars have described this evolution of cultures in different terms. Taylor describes development from enchantment to disenchantment to an as yet indeterminate future. Lonergan speaks of stages of common sense, theory, and interiority. Kegan and many others write about traditional, modern, and postmodern cultural consciousnesses. However one describes it, a particular form of consciousness comes to pervade a culture on account of products of human meaning becoming expressed and imbedded in

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[109] Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 172.

[110] See Sawicki, *The Gospel in History*, 20.

[111] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 96.

language, customs, institutions, and structures[112]. With the passage of time these institutions and structures can seem to take on a life of their own. So it is that human beings can come to a point where they find themselves overwhelmed and lost within the society they have built.

Some people become overwhelmed because their cognitive development has not kept pace with that of collective society or certain segments of society. Kegan has observed that "the distinguishing feature of contemporary culture is that for the first time in human history, three mentalities exist side by side in the adult population…the traditional, the modern, and the postmodern."[113] Certain populations of the Western world have advanced to modern (critical) or even postmodern (post-critical) consciousness while other populations, including much of the so-called "second" and "third" worlds, continue to operate from a traditional (pre-critical) consciousness.[114] When people from traditional pockets of society come into contact with pockets imbued with a modern or postmodern mentality, misunderstanding and confusion often results.

Still, even those whose developmental levels are on par with that of the majority can find aspects of their daily lives overwhelming. The world as we experience it has grown so complex that it is now virtually impossible for the average person to form a coherent social or cosmic imaginary or to envision our reality on anything resembling the

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[112] Such manifestations exemplify what Lonergan means by the term "constitutive" meaning (*Method in Theology*, 78).

[113] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 303–4.

[114] It is precisely for this reason that I have had to carefully limit my investigation to contexts particular to the United States. The situation that I describe in following does not apply in the same way to Christian-colonized cultures like those of Africa, South and Central America, and even certain populations within the U.S. For an eye-opening discussion of the Catholic Church of the future, including the rise of supernaturalism, see John L. Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

"human scale".[115] The immediacy of mass media and the ubiquity of electronic communication devices create an image- and information-inundated culture in which we are incapable of performing even a fraction of the cognitive tasks demanded of us.[116] We are all (or at least most of us) in this sense "in over our heads" in contemporary society.[117] Robert Doran describes the situation in this way:

> To the extent that the social relations of the infrastructure have become more complex than the cultural differentiations or mentalities whose purpose it is to order them, they have become senseless. And because these relations set conditions for the growth and decline of persons, because the psyche is a complex of social forces, because the dialectic of community has a relative dominance over the dialectic of the subject, the noetic senselessness of the social order is joined to an existential and historical destructiveness.[118]

Since the time of the Enlightenment, Western people have engaged in a relentless pursuit of what *could* be done—what regions of Earth and space could be accessed, what biological limitations could be overcome, what mechanical power could be harnessed— with insufficient regard for what *should* be done or what is genuinely salutary for the human person holistically conceived.[119] The result is a social situation that is tragically out of sync with the psychic, emotional, and social needs of human beings.

This situation is radically different from anything Christians (and humans in general) have confronted in the past. Christianity was born in a classical context, which

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[115] As Wilfred Cantwell Smith explains, "In simpler times, each society had ideally one [*Weltanschauung*]; in a modern complex society, and perhaps even in most of its individual members, several may co-exist" (*Belief and History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 54).

[116] Cf. Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 9.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 501.

[119] Doran describes this dilemma as the result of "anthropological constitutive meaning" (wherein the human is the measure of society) coming to dominate "cosmological constitutive meaning" (in which the divine cosmos and then society is the measure of the human being). (See Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 507.)

offered early Christians a particular set of resources for making sense of their lives and reality as a whole. Since that time, the world has undergone not one but two major transformations with the advent of modernity and now postmodernity. The ways Christians previously imagined their world have become outdated and inadequate to the mental challenges of contemporary living, leaving most people struggling to cope and, more often than not, clueless as to the cause of their disorientation. Hence, the challenge to contemporary Christians, explains theologian Paul Lakeland, is "to keep alive in the postmodern world a religious vision created in a distinctly premodern cultural context."[120] Even though Catholic doctrine has not changed dramatically in recent history, the way Catholics think about it has. And the people who still think about it in a pre-critical manner are finding it increasingly untenable to do so.

Simply put, postmodern culture presents challenges to faith that Christians operating from a critical or pre-critical consciousness are incapable of handling. Fowler and his peers are consistent in their assertion of what is necessary for Christians to adapt: "the construction of….postmodern, multiple systemic forms of consciousness represents a practical necessity for reflective persons in our era."[121]

Criteria for the Adequacy of Forms of Consciousness

Many of today's most astute cultural observers assert that the forms of

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[120] Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1990), 39.

[121] Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 174. Kegan likewise diagnoses the "lack of fit between what the culture demands of our minds and our mental capacity to meet these demands" (*In Over Our Heads*, 9). Striking a similar cord, Lonergan asserts, "[n]ever has adequately differentiated consciousness been more difficult to achieve. Never has the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater" (*Method in Theology*, 99).

consciousness out of which most contemporary people operate have become inadequate relative to the challenges of postmodern living. But what makes one form of consciousness more adequate than another? In this matter, too, the scholarly opinions diverge. Different thinkers propose different criteria in accordance with the particular challenges they address in their work on human development.[122] Rather than attempt to adjudicate among these diverse opinions, I will limit the following discussion by focusing on two categories of criteria of particular relevance to American Catholics: (1) the adequacy of a form of consciousness vis-à-vis the cognitive demands of the present U.S. context and (2) adequacy vis-à-vis the demands of Christian faith.

Before discussing these two sets of criteria, however, it is important to note some baseline indicators of the proper functioning of human cognition that remain valid for any and all cultural and religious contexts. First among these is the set of cognitive skills required to achieve "human scale" in one's interactions with one's environment, namely, the ability to compress and integrate diffuse sense and imaginal data, to obtain global insight, strengthen vital relations, and synthesize a story. A person who lacks any of these basic capacities (which is different from occasionally struggling with these tasks) would experience great difficulty in carrying out the practical functions of everyday living. Second, proper cognitive functioning at any level requires constant generation of and openness to further questions.[123] Failure to ask further questions—which we earlier associated with bias—drastically limits the person's understanding of reality and

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[122] For a brief summary discussion of these diverging opinions see Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 151.

[123] Lonergan describes this requirement as giving free reign to the unrestricted desire to know. Mezirow characterizes it as being inclusive of information and permeable to different points of view.

eliminates the mind's most reliable safeguard against error. Third, in addition to openness to further questions, the exercise of reflective judgment plays a crucial role in helping one to verify the truth of one's understandings and to avoid illusion and error.[124] Though the importance of judgment becomes more explicit in later stages of the evolution of consciousness, it is possible even for children to exercise judgment as necessary in each particular instance where it is required. Finally, proper cognitional functioning demands the emotional resilience necessary to cope with change. Human beings need to adapt to new information on a daily basis. Sometimes the new information can be perceived as threatening to the integrity of the self, triggering a strong emotional reaction. If the person is not capable of coping with moderate amounts of stress and anxiety, any novel situation or learning could potentially result in a breakdown of cognitive operations.

Adequacy vis-à-vis Context. Beyond these baseline requirements, what makes a form of consciousness adequate or inadequate to the current postmodern context? Susanne Langer has written:

> A mind that is oriented, no matter by what conscious or unconscious symbols, in material and social realities, can function freely and confidently even under great pressure of circumstances and in the face of hard problems. Its life is a smooth and skillful shuttling to and fro between sign-functions and symbolic functions, a steady interweaving of sensory interpretations, linguistic responses, inferences, memories, imaginative prevision, factual knowledge, and tacit appreciations.[125]

While we might object to Langer that none of us sails through the whole of life on calm waters, her core insight remains valid. A firmly established orienting frame is the

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[124] In Chapter One, we noted Charles Taylor's observation that the dissolution of the Christian social and cosmic imaginary resulted more from subtle shifts in people's imagining than from a frontal assault on the Christian faith. Taylor further argues that people thought themselves to be acting as good Christians even as their beliefs and actions became increasingly secular. Had these people been more intentional about questioning and judging the fidelity of their imaginings to the Christian faith it is likely that history would have turned out differently.

[125] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 289.

difference between a life of coherence and purpose and one of confusion and purposelessness. Until relatively recently, that orienting frame—which we earlier identified as a Christian imaginary—was simply taken for granted in Western Christendom. Because this view of reality was seldom if ever challenged, Christians could go through their whole lives without ever seriously questioning the accuracy of their understanding of reality. Since that time, the multiplication of accounts of reality has rendered naive and conventional forms of symbolic consciousness inadequate. Some religious groups and individuals have responded with a head-in-the-sand approach, harkening back to fundamentalist readings of the Bible, more traditional forms of liturgy, and/or stringent doctrinal orthodoxy.[126] In so doing they have opted for perceived certainty at the expense of openness to new learning. This is a fragile position to adopt, one in which a crack in a single brick can bring the whole rigidly constructed edifice crumbling down.

By contrast, a form of consciousness that is adequate to the current context is one that is capable of adapting to new information and perspectives in addition to assimilating new information to existing frameworks of imagining and understanding.[127] This sort of cognitive flexibility requires a significant capacity for self-regulation. In the past when authority was consolidated in a single source (namely, the Catholic Church), it was

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[126] Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with traditional liturgical forms or doctrinal orthodoxy. The trouble lies in the naïve assumption that simply returning to older practices and beliefs will overcome the challenges to meaning-construction posed by postmodern life.

[127] This is a major theme in current conversations within the education world. Much of the discussion of "21st-century skills" focuses on the importance of teaching students critical thinking skills and strategies for making use of information technology rather than mere acquisition of declarative knowledge. (See, e.g., Bernie Trilling and Charles Fadel, *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).)

possible to more or less unthinkingly appropriate a unified worldview by absorbing the teachings of the Church and participating in the lifestyle built around those teachings. In the present context where authority is fractured and diffuse, there is greater need for internal authority, that is, for the ability to adjudicate among conflicting truth claims and render judgments based on immanently generated criteria. In Kegan's framework, a person acquires this capacity for self-authorship in the transition from "Interpersonal" to "Institutional" consciousness. Fowler would describe the development as an advance from Synthetic-Conventional to Individuative-Reflective consciousness in which the subject attains the ability to "compose (or ratify) meaning frames that are conscious of their own boundaries and inner connections."[128] Both claims amount to a demand for development from pre-critical to critical consciousness.

Still, when we consider additional demands placed on contemporary Americans' imagining, it is apparent that even critical consciousness has become inadequate. Robert Masson cites the controversy surrounding the critique of Elizabeth Johnson's *Quest for the Living God* as an illustrative instance of contemporary persons' struggle to uphold, on the one hand, true knowledge about God and, on the other, the value and legitimacy of symbolic modes of knowing. According to Masson, the bishops' concern with affirming that revelation transmits true knowledge of God "is legitimate but must be balanced against the overly facile conception in the popular media and the current 'culture wars' that the only alternative to a merely metaphorical, improper knowledge of God is the sort of literal knowledge normative in the sciences and in non-analogical, fundamentalist

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[128] Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 63.

understandings of Christianity."[129] Masson's assessment of the Johnson case (and we could cite many more examples like it) suggests that the disparaging of symbol typical of critical (i.e., Institutional or Individuative-Reflective) consciousness is contributing to social conflict and personal confusion just as much as unreflective conventional thinking.

In fact, Fowler claims that current culture wars can be largely attributed to clashing between two incommensurate forms of consciousness (namely, Synthetic-Conventional and Individuative-Reflective). Based on this diagnosis, Fowler concludes that this impasse is unlikely to be overcome without development to Conjunctive consciousness.[130] A person imagining reality from Conjunctive consciousness appreciates the value and power of symbolic expression but also recognizes the difference between symbolic knowing and more literal forms of knowledge. Because people who think in this Conjunctive manner are able to hold the concerns of both Synthetic-Conventional and Individuative-Reflective thinkers in tension, they would be able to reconcile the perspectives of the two warring sides. In this way, Masson and Fowler both point to the need for a more self-aware mode of imagining, that is, for post-critical consciousness.

This last point leads to a final criterion for the adequacy of forms of consciousness to the current postmodern context. Beyond the exigencies for adaptability and reaffirmation of imagination, postmodernity presents what Lonergan terms the "critical exigence," the necessity of understanding how one knows something, why that

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[129] Robert Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God: Theology After Cognitive Linguistics* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2014), 206.

[130] See Ch.10 of *Faithful Change*.

constitutes knowing, and what one knows when one does that.[131] The diffusion of authority and fracturing of cosmic and social imaginaries makes it necessary for contemporary persons to consciously examine and appropriate the dynamics of cognition that give rise to all knowledge and value. Addressing similar concerns, Fowler explains that thorough self-awareness eludes those operating from a critical or Individuative-Reflective consciousness, for they are "[f]requently overconfident in their conscious awareness, [and] attend minimally to unconscious factors that influence their judgments and behavior."[132] Consequently, they are susceptible to being excessively influenced by scientific and critical methods, logical analysis, and non-conformist individuals just as conventional thinkers are excessively influenced by institutions and tradition.[133] Only by affirming oneself as an originator of meaning and value can one recognize scientific and symbolic knowledge as equally rooted in the dynamics of human cognition that orient us into the real. Self-appropriating one's own knowing and valuing in this way empowers one to adjudicate among the multiplicity of truth claims at play in postmodern culture while still recognizing one's dependence upon something greater than oneself, something that can be known only tacitly and symbolically. In light of these considerations, we must affirm with theologian Walter Conn that "[t]he facts of contemporary life dictate that critical self-appropriation, which was once a moral luxury, is now for many a necessary

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[131] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 83.

[132] Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 63.

[133] Cf. ibid., 168-9. Lonergan points out that philosophy and the sciences can be just as misleading as degrading myths. (See *Topics in Education*, 64.)

component of authentic human living."[134]

Adequacy vis-à-vis Christianity. As Lonergan has noted, one can be authentic to a tradition or culture while being inauthentic in a more significant sense.[135] In this way, a form of consciousness can be adequate to the demands of the cultural context while failing to measure up to the those of faith. For this reason we now proceed to consider the demands of the Christian faith upon symbolic consciousness.

While certain symbols are certainly more adequate for faith than others,[136] their adequacy is determined primarily by the manner in which they are used.[137] As Marion has observed, the same objects can serve both as idols and as true icons: "[T]he idol and the icon are distinguishable only inasmuch as they signal in different ways, that is, inasmuch as each makes use of its visibility in its own way."[138] The most basic way we misuse a symbol is identifying the sign with that which it signals, mistaking the creation for the Creator.[139] In *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine explains that God alone is supreme reality and the proper object of our enjoyment while all else are merely signs referring us to and helping us in our journey toward that supreme reality.[140] For those operating from a pre-critical consciousness, such error can result from one's inability to

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[134] Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 126.

[135] See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 79-80.

[136] It is important to attend to the disparity in the adequacy of various faith images because, in the words of Sharon Daloz Parks, "The quality of faith ultimately depends upon the adequacy of the images it employs" (*The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 110.).

[137] I will devote more attention to the relative adequacy of specific symbols in the coming chapters.

[138] Marion, *God Without Being*, 9.

[139] Cf. Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire , 147.

[140] See Saint Augustine, *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1996), II.1.

distinguish between symbolic and explanatory meaning. Roberto Goizueta explains, "The danger of medieval sacramental or symbolic realism was that, by locating the supernatural within the natural, it could lead to an identification of the natural with the supernatural. When symbolic truth—the most profoundly real truth—is mistaken for empirical truth, the result is idolatry."[141] Symbolic consciousness is thus adequate to faith to the extent that it is able to preserve the "transparency" of symbols, that is, to consistently see "through" them to their transcendent referent.[142] Such seeing becomes possible with attainment of conventional consciousness, but its proper functioning can remain tenuous for people at any level.[143]

In general, a form of symbolic consciousness will be more or less adequate to the demands of Christian faith according to the extent that it remains "unfinished" or open to that which lies beyond it.[144] Sharon Daloz Parks, following Niebuhr, describes the failure of religious imagination to remain open as leading to a practical "henotheism."[145] So-called henotheists are so narrowly focused on a single cause or center of meaning—career, popularity, even a narrow concept of God—that "they are unable to relate that center to any larger frame of trustworthy meaning."[146] As a result, they fall into

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[141] Roberto S. Goizueta, "The Symbolic Realism of U.S. Latino/a Popular Catholicism," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 269.

[142] Cf. Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 316.

[143] See DeLoache's research on "dual representation" cited above.

[144] Cf. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination*.

[145] Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 22.

[146] Ibid. Here Parks effectively describes in religious terms the cognitive phenomenon that Mark Johnson describes in more general terms, namely, that the metaphors by means of which we make sense of reality inevitably limit our patterns of inference, perception, and action. (See Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 113, 136.)

fanaticism or succumb to disillusionment when challenged by complexity. Although it is possible for anyone to remain open to mystery on a case-by-case basis, those operating from a post-critical consciousness will be best able to tolerate paradox, disruption, and uncertainty. Their greater consistency derives in part from their enhanced self-awareness and ability to recognize the need to seek mechanisms for keeping the disruption alive or at least retrievable.[147] For example, post-critical thinkers might intentionally alternate the God-images they use in reflection and prayer or regularly seek to be exposed to new ways of thinking about God.

In the same vein, a symbolic consciousness that is adequate to the demands of Christian faith is one that remains active and dialectical. The primary source of error for the pre-critical consciousness is its lack of logical controls over imagination. For the critical consciousness, it is over-regulation and stifling of imagination. The unchecked imagination is inevitably seduced by idolatrous images; unimaginative reasoning invariably loses sight of the divine. Vibrant faith therefore requires constant interplay of the two,[148] for, in the words of Marion, "we can glimpse Gød only in the intermittent halftimes of our idolatries."[149] While it is possible for uncritical thinkers to avoid these double horns, their lack of differentiation makes it extremely difficult. By contrast, those operating from a post-critical consciousness are better able to strike the balance between symbol and logic, imagination and explanation. Thanks to greater awareness of the

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[147] Cf. Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God*, 72.

[148] Relating these matters to the theological enterprise, Roberto Goizueta writes, "As the primary expressions of religious faith, symbols and rituals demand theological explanation and critique, but theology can never forget its roots in the symbols and rituals that embody the lived faith" (Goizueta, "The Symbolic Realism of U.S. Latino/a Popular Catholicism," 270).

[149] Marion, *God Without Being*, 108.

differentiation among their cognitive operations, they can sustain a consistent dialectic between imaginative and logical thought, alternating between each as the situation dictates.

Finally, post-critical consciousness is most adequate to the demands of Christian faith because only one imagining in this manner can maintain a coherent vision of reality in spite of being fully aware of the paradoxes of faith and symbol. Parks, again following Niebuhr, describes people who are not able to form such a coherent vision as "polytheists." These individuals "find themselves living fragmented lives, piecing together various scraps of discrete meaning….each with its own god."[150] People operating out of a critical consciousness are particularly susceptible to this error on account of their proclivity for analytical thinking. Driven to get at the "real" meaning of the symbol, they dissect it into discrete components but then are unable to re-envision a new synthesis. What they lack that post-critical thinkers possess is the capacity for the "ironic imagination" mentioned above. William Lynch explains that the ironic imagination, the imagination proper to faith, "deals not with appearances, but with the very opposite of appearances, and….its main task is to keep opposites together in a single act of imagination."[151] The reconciliation of opposites is precisely what critical consciousness finds impossible, and yet such reconciliation seems essential for enduring

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[150] Ibid.

[151] Lynch, *Images of Faith*, 83. In this sense, the images of faith serve a salutary and necessary function. In the words of Lynch, they "do not try to destroy the imagination but give it freedom and life" (*Images of Faith*, 22). In the same vein, Sharon Daloz Parks writes, "Religion, at its best, provides a dynamic distillation of images (symbols, stories, smells, sounds, songs, and gestures…) powerful enough to shape into one the chaos of existence—powerful enough to name a community's conviction of the character of the whole of reality that its members experience as both ultimate and intimate" (*Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 118).

faith. Theologian James Cone states the matter eloquently: "One has to have a powerful religious imagination to see redemption in the cross, to discover life in death and hope in tragedy."[152]

Though we could certainly point to other criteria (and I will do so in subsequent chapters), those identified here will suffice for the time being for framing our thinking about what forms of symbolic consciousness or imagining are most adequate to the demands of Christian faith.[153]

Conclusion: The Goal—Promoting a More Adequate Christian Imagination

The consensus among the major authors discussed in this chapter is that the forms of consciousness through which most contemporary people think and imagine are incommensurate with the social and psychological challenges presented by postmodern culture. Their assessment coheres fully with the description of American Catholics' situation in Chapter One and offers us significant insight into the underlying causes of their struggles to live as faithful disciples. Having established this diagnosis, further questions now emerge: Is it possible to facilitate people's transition to a more adequate form of Christian imagination? If so, how? Upon these questions, we now pivot from the analytical portion of this project to the constructive. In the next chapter, I will lay the foundation for a (partial) solution to the imaginal challenges confronting today's

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[152] James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 157-8.

[153] In this section I have consistently employed the qualified language of "most adequate" so as not to exclude the possibility of pre-critical or critical thinkers living healthy lives of faith. The deficiencies of these modes of consciousness may make faithful living more difficult but not impossible, as proven by the example of Jesus, who in all likelihood did not operate from a post-critical consciousness.

American Catholics. However, it will do to gesture here toward a crucial component of the proposed solution.

What is needed is a new form of consciousness, a new way of imagining reality through the eyes of faith. Yet it is no easy thing to change the way people imagine their world. As we saw in the previous chapter, a person's manner of imagining reality is profoundly personal and inextricably wound up with affectivity and sense of self. Because imagination is such a personal matter, it is highly resistant to external modification. Laws can compel certain behaviors and policing can enforce them, but neither can force human beings to alter the way they view reality. Even inculcation of moral imperatives does not always succeed in penetrating to the depths of the imagination. In fact, Charles Taylor argues that this is precisely the way Christian elites attempted to remedy society's woes in the past, but these methods failed to produce the desired result.[154] "Codes, even the best codes," writes Taylor, "can become idolatrous traps, which tempt us to complicity in violence."[155] Though codes in some form or another are indispensable, they cannot change a person's heart or worldview, and they are just as capable of leading people to hypocrisy as they are of leading them to holiness.[156] For this reason, Taylor suggests, "We should find the centre of our spiritual lives beyond the code, deeper than the code, in networks of living concern."[157]

If not through civil or moral codes, then how does a society nurture such networks of living concern? To answer this question one must recognize that the wellbeing of

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[154] See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 707.

[155] Ibid., 743.

[156] Consider the hypocrisy and hardheartedness of the Pharisees and scribes who Jesus so often criticized.

[157] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 743.

society depends on the wellbeing of individual persons. As go the lives of individual citizens, so goes society as a whole. Whenever real social transformation has transpired in history, it began with individual conversion. As Taylor explains, "many of the great founding moves of a new spiritual direction in history, involve a transformation of the frame in which people thought, felt and lived before. They bring into view something beyond that frame, which at the same time changes the meaning of all the elements of the frame. Things make sense in a wholly new way."[158] As examples, Taylor cites individuals like Jesus, the Buddha, Francis of Assisi, and Saint Teresa, whose personal transformation provided the impetus for wider social transformation.

Nothing less than this sort of momentous transformation of the frame is needed in our own day. The imaginative synthesis that held together the world and the faith lives of our ancestors has dissolved. We postmodern women and men struggle to integrate our thoughts, feelings, and actions and to grab hold of something that will enable us to give unity and purpose to our lives. We are well past the point where clearer presentation of Church teaching or more impassioned admonitions to moral rectitude might have sufficed to right the ship. The storm has raged for too long. In some quarters, the disorientation is virtually complete. Whatever the solution is, it will have to involve a total reorientation. It will have to go straight to the center of the human person, to that place from which people live and love. For nothing less than a radical transformation of people's orienting frame of reference will suffice to restore Catholics to the life of meaning, joy, and

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[158] Ibid., 730-1. The reader will recall that Masson described the "tectonic reconfiguration" effected by metaphor in very similar terms.

purpose that Jesus promised.[159] What is needed, in other words, is a conversion of the imagination. How we are to understanding this conversion, how it differs from natural human development, and how it can be facilitated—these are the questions that will occupy us in the next chapter.

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[159] Doran conceives the solution in similar terms: "I understand this task as one that, by evoking a change in the meaning constitutive of the situation, will mediate a transition from this situation to an alternative situation more closely approximating the reign of God in human affairs" (Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 4).

Chapter 4

Converting the Imagination

"…every real conversion is first a revolution at the level of our directive images."

- Maria Harris

Introduction

Ever the astute observer of the seasons and subtleties of the human spirit, spiritual writer Ronald Rolheiser has described the reality of today's adult Christians in this way: "we often find ourselves living in that time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, when the God we were raised on has been crucified but a sense of the resurrection has not yet sufficiently illumined our imaginations so that we can recognize the God who is walking beside us."[1] Rolheiser's words give poetic expression to the situation I have described in the preceding chapters—that of many American Catholics whose traditional ways of understanding life and faith have largely passed away, leaving them without a clear vision of a way forward.

Yet, as Rolheiser insinuates, Christians have found themselves in this sort of situation before. It surely must have seemed to Jesus' disciples that their former hopes and beliefs were so much folly when he was taken from them and executed in the public eye. It was only when Jesus appeared to them on the third day that their hope was renewed and reinvigorated as never before. Given the prognostications of some of today's most perspicacious scholars, we have good reason to believe that, like the disciples on the third day, American Catholics are presently entering into a third phase of faith consciousness. As was the case for the disciples, a period of adjustment will be necessary. The new relationship to which Jesus called his followers after the resurrection went beyond the concrete, flesh-and-blood manner of relating to which they had grown

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[1] Ronald Rolheiser, *Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity* (New York: Image, 2014), 99, paraphrasing Edward Schillebeeckx from a workshop at the American College, Louvain, Belgium, March 1983.

accustomed. Their post-resurrection faith was more complicated but also more resilient. I believe that today's Christians are likewise being called to a more mature, more resilient form of faith consciousness. Many have predicted that the future of the Christian faith will hinge upon how Christians respond to this call.[2]

In the previous chapter, I utilized the resources of developmental psychology to flesh out a picture of what this new form of consciousness might look like: It will be marked by greater awareness of the one's own cognitional operations and affectivity, an ability to reconcile critical thought with humans' psychic and existential need for symbol and myth, and an enhanced capacity for holding together in a coherent imaginative synthesis the paradoxes of faith as well as the many facets of pluralistic postmodern experience. It will provide the ground for a faith that is intentionally affirmed rather than passively presumed. Furthermore, this form of consciousness (like those that preceded it) will eventually pervade the consciousness of entire communities and societies. That is to say it will shape not only individual imaginations but also communal imaginaries.

An imaginary is the result of innumerable factors, many of which are beyond the direct control of any person, community, or network of organizations. However, we are not without means of shaping a Christian imaginary in our society. One such means is the

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[2] Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 20 (Limerick, Ireland: Mary Immaculate College, 2000), 143; Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding, Volume 3*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1992), 552; James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 175; Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 27; Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart, James Laughlin, and Naomi Burton Stone (New York: New Directions, 1975), 338; Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 265.

production and manifestation of Christian art, film, music, and literature.[3] Others include

participation in liturgy and in Christian practices and works of justice.[4] Instrumental

though these elements are in forming Christian imaginaries, it goes well beyond the scope

of the current project to develop their role in any depth. Instead I will focus my attention

on the possibilities for reviving a Christian imaginary through the conversion of

individual imaginations in the more personal and local context of the classroom. My

focus on *converting* or *transforming* individual imaginations further distinguishes my

approach from other religious educators who have written more generally about *forming*

Christian imaginations.[5] I will make the distinction between formation and

transformation more explicit later in the chapter.

This focus on transforming individual imaginations in no way implies neglect of

the social dimension of imagining.[6] Though not sufficient in itself for shaping a collective

imaginary, transformation of individual imaginations and thereby the individual person is

the *sine qua non* of social transformation. While Jesus undoubtedly challenged the unjust

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[3] I do not think it overstating the matter to say that authors of fiction like Flannery O'Connor and especially C. S. Lewis did more to bolster Christian faith in their day than any of their contemporaries in academic theology.

[4] In the words of Craig Dykstra, "These symbolic actions have a way of training us and shaping us at preconscious levels so that over time their order becomes imbedded in us" (Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 106).

[5] See, for example, Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry : The Way of Shared Praxis* (Harper San Francisco, 1991), 26-32; Robert Imbelli, *Rekindling the Christic Imagination: Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014); Phillip S. Keane, *Christian Ethics and Imagination: A Theological Inquiry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

[6] Any conversion, including a conversion of the imagination, always affects the convert's relationships. In this sense, no conversion is ever a solely individual affair. Notwithstanding, I employ the language of "individual" rather than "personal" conversion because the language of personal conversion has connotations in the conversion literature that I do not mean to implicate here. (Cf. Rosemary Haughton, *The Transformation of Man: A Study of Conversion and Community* (Springfield, Ill: Templegate, 1980).)

social, political, and religious structures of his day, he strived to usher in the reign of God

first and foremost by extending personal invitations to conversion.[7] From the seeds of

those individual conversions grew a community of loving disciples that has transformed

societies around the world and across the ages. I aim to proceed in like manner.

Devoting greater attention to the imagination will unavoidably pose challenges to

old models of education. In suggesting as much, I am far from the first to point out that

we cannot continue to educate the way we have in the recent past. Jack Mezirow, for

example, argues that formerly accepted models of learning no longer suffice for a

population faced with rapid change and an irreducible plurality of beliefs, values, and

practices.[8] Mezirow's observations are corroborated by the data analysis I presented in

Chapter One and the discussion of cognitive errors in Chapter Three. Accumulation of

knowledge cannot ward off the disorientation and fragmentation precipitated by

postmodern culture, nor, as Chauvet reminds us, can conceptual sophistication overcome

idolatry.[9] Today's Christian religious education must transform learners at a deeper level,

namely, that of the imagination.[10] To this point, David Tracy offers, "one may state that

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[7] Cf. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2012), 45.

[8] See Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 2. Speaking more directly to the Christian experience, historian Wilfred Cantwell Smith argues that "a fateful change of vision" has resulted from the simultaneous impoverishment of the concept of "belief" and its elevation to the center of Christian life and, we might add, of religious education. (See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Belief and History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 68.)

[9] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2012), 42-3, 535.

[10] Transformation of the imagination can effect change far beyond that effected by mere accumulation of knowledge. In the words of Maria Harris, we "alter our existence by changing our imaginations" (*Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 4). Harris is in good company in making this claim. (Cf. William F. Lynch, *Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 56; Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character*, 78.) Thomas Groome, in describing his educational approach for "conation" (a word that for him implies holistic transformation), likewise argues for the

the present need becomes that of finding symbolic language which can allow the disclosure of the Christian God to 'happen' for the present actual situation."[11] If we could reach people at the level of the imagination, "we might experience again a dimension to life which renders it whole."[12]

Christian educators are not the only ones concerned at present with transforming imaginations and promoting personal integration. The work of developmental psychologists like James Fowler and Robert Kegan is immensely helpful for understanding the dynamics of development in people's cognitive and imaginative capacities, although they offer less in the way of practical strategies for promoting such development.[13] Fortunately, scholars in two other areas of contemporary research—transformative learning and conceptual change—are also deeply interested in these issues and have made valuable discoveries regarding why people come to see things differently and how educators can facilitate the process. Indeed, the research in these areas has yielded far greater clarity about the functioning of human cognition and learning than related research in religious education. Discussion of transformative learning and conceptual change thus provides an ideal starting point for our work of developing a pedagogy for converting imaginations and as such will receive sustained attention in the first half of this chapter.

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importance of intentionally engaging learners' imaginations (Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 9, 26-32). I believe it is necessary to sharpen Groome's claim further. Given the centrality of imagination for human meaning-construction and living, holistic transformation of the person necessitates, not just exercising the imagination, but transforming it.

[11] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996), 189.

[12] Ibid., 133.

[13] This is not to say that they do not offer some helpful advice. What they do offer will be interjected intermittently in the following.

Notwithstanding, for all its valuable contributions, the research in these areas does not provide us with all the resources we need in order to develop the desired pedagogical approach. The following discussion of transformative learning and conceptual change will raise the question of the relationship between the types of changes facilitated by these approaches and conversion as we understand it in the Christian tradition. Hence, the latter portion of the chapter will elucidate this relationship and explain what Christian religious education can contribute that transformative learning and conceptual change cannot. At that point we will be in better position to discuss the possibilities for facilitating conversion, which invariably involves a conversion of the imagination.

General Strategies for Transforming Meaning Frameworks

Overview

The development from pre-critical and critical to post-critical consciousness demanded by postmodern culture constitutes a transformation of the human being at its core, of the very "self," as Robert Kegan would say. It is a transformation of the "subject," that through which one experiences and interprets reality.[14] As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the interpretive frameworks that constitute subjective experience have been variously described as "meaning perspectives" (Mezirow) and "horizons" (Lonergan, et al), among other terms.[15] Whatever the term employed (I will use "meaning framework" as a generic term in this chapter), all the authors mentioned here describe these

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[14] Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 39.

[15] Again, I would remind the reader that the two terms are not strictly interchangeable. Mezirow's concept of a meaning perspective is narrower than is Lonergan's concept of a horizon.

interpretive frameworks as a function of the human person's imaginative capacities.

Contemporary research in the fields of transformative learning and conceptual change has yielded significant insights into how people come to change their ways of constructing meaning and what educators can do to facilitate such change. The transformative learning field has built up around the work of Jack Mezirow, whose writings we engaged occasionally in the preceding chapters.[16] Mezirow and his associates aspire to articulate a theory of learning that can "explain how adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, the nature of the structures that influence the way they construe experience, the dynamics involved in modifying meanings, and the way the structures of meaning themselves undergo changes when learners find them to be dysfunctional" and to develop educational practices based on this theory.[17] Among the "structures that influence the way people construe experience," the most crucial for transformative learning theory are meaning perspectives. Transformative learning can be described essentially as learning aimed at transforming learners' meaning perspectives. In other words, transformative learning aims to change not merely *what* learners know but rather *how* they know and interpret their experiences. Though Mezirow does not speak about transformation in terms of developmental stages, it is helpful for our purposes to note that transformation of meaning perspectives is inherent in development from one form of consciousness to another.

Related work is currently being done on the topic of "conceptual change"—

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[16] The reader should note that I will consistently employ the phrase "transformative learning" in the technical sense suggested by Mezirow. I will occasionally employ "transformation" and "change" as the more generic terms.

[17] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, xii.

defined as changing prior misconceived knowledge to correct knowledge rather than adding knowledge—which has attracted interest from scholars in cognitive developmental psychology, science education, and history and philosophy of science. Researchers in these fields typically approach the topic with questions about how people's concepts (most commonly scientific concepts) change over time and which learning strategies facilitate this change. Conceptual change involves a narrower, more localized type of change, one that is less likely to involve a global revolution in a person's worldview as is the case with transformation of meaning perspectives and development between orders of consciousness. Notwithstanding, this body of research provides valuable insights into how people change their minds and suggests strategies that can contribute to transforming thinking on a global level.

Though the questions and perspectives of scholars in transformative learning and those in conceptual change differ in many cases, research in both fields has converged on several key findings. One of these findings concerns the indispensable role of learners' active engagement (i.e., "student-centered learning," etc.) in facilitating change of entrenched beliefs and ways of knowing.[18] As Mezirow explains, a person's thinking grows increasingly resistant to change as it becomes reified in concepts and cognitive habits. In order to overcome this resistance, educators need to "reactivate the intentionality implicit in perception," that is, they need to reopen questions for learners

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[18] As Patricia Cranton notes, "learner empowerment is both a goal of and a condition for transformative learning" (*Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults,* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 72). For a conceptual change perspective, see John Clement, "The Role of Explanatory Models in Teaching for Conceptual Change," in *International Handbook of Research on Conceptual Change*, ed. Stella Vosniadou (New York: Routledge, 2008), 421-2, 432; and Ference Marton and Ming Fai Pang, "Phenomenography and the Pedagogy of Conceptual Change," in *International Handbook of Research on Conceptual Change*, ed. Stella Vosniadou (New York: Routledge, 2008), 540-1.

and prompt them to approach the matter with fresh eyes.[19] A second, related finding concerns the role of mental images and imagining in the transformative process. Scholars in both fields consistently draw attention to how understanding the function of images in cognition illuminates the dynamics of this process and to the effectiveness of employing images in efforts to facilitate change in meaning perspectives and conceptual understandings. Given the focus of this dissertation, I will devote special attention to this imaginative dimension of their research in the following sections.

While the body of research produced in transformative learning and conceptual change is extensive and the recommended strategies diverse, certain patterns emerge in the research, making it possible to group most of these strategies within a few categories. Jennifer Garvey Berger has done as much in her exceptionally helpful article, "Dancing on the Threshold of Meaning: Recognizing and Understanding the Growing Edge."[20] Based on her research and personal experience of coaching people though transformative learning, Berger concludes that the essential responsibilities of teachers in facilitating transformation are (1) helping learners to find and recognize the edge, (2) being good company at the edge, and (3) helping learners to establish firm ground on the other side.[21] These three categories will offer us a convenient framework for examining educational practices that facilitate significant changes in the way learners think and imagine.

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[19] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 22; Paolo Freire describes this sort of approach as "cointentional" education (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1994), 51). Bernard Lonergan similarly describes the necessity of employing "active methods" (Bernard Lonergan, *Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the Philosophy of Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1993), 104, 197.

[20] Jennifer Garvey Berger, "Dancing on the Threshold of Meaning: Recognizing and Understanding the Growing Edge," *Journal of Transformative Education* 2, no. 4 (October 1, 2004): 336–51, doi:10.1177/1541344604267697.

[21] Ibid., 345-6.

Phase I: Finding the Edge

The indispensable first step in facilitating transformation is raising learners' awareness of the limits or inadequacy of their knowing and imagining. A major reason for the difficulty in effecting change at the level of meaning frameworks is that these frameworks are the lenses through which we experience everything else. We take these frameworks for granted and seldom think about them just as a person wearing contact lenses seldom thinks about them during the course of a day. It is precisely because these frameworks are so close to us and contribute seemingly automatically to our experience of reality that we often fail to notice their inadequacies. Only when contact lenses begin to irritate do we pay them any mind.

The first step in facilitating transformation, then, involves causing irritation. Educators must help learners to recognize the distortions and blind spots in their way of seeing things. Paulo Freire, whose work influenced Mezirow tremendously, describes this as a process of "conscientization".[22] Educators can promote such awareness or conscientization in numerous ways. Freire proposes that teacher-students (i.e., the educators) enter into conversation with learners about the "generative themes" that concern them most deeply, having them "name" their praxis of those themes for themselves, and then re-present learners' thematic universe to them in familiar but problematized terms.[23] For example, one might enter into a discussion about the well that sustains the life of the village before raising questions about who owns the well and why no one else can share in ownership of the well. Ference Marton and Ming Fai Pan,

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[22] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 90.

[23] Ibid., 89.

writing from the perspective of their research in conceptual change, similarly note the value of focusing learners' attention on the "the *lived* object of learning" as opposed to more abstract or theoretical objectives.[24]

Scholars and practitioners in various other fields have affirmed the importance of problematizing the topic of interest for participants. For example, scholars in psychology of learning maintain that an appropriate level of challenge promotes greater engagement and more resilient learning—a principle referred to as "desirable difficulty".[25] Communications scholar Paul Messaris explains that the power of images in advertising and propaganda derives in great part (somewhat counter-intuitively) from their lack of clear syntax and univocal meaning. Because people tend to pay little attention to things that fit readily into their existing schemas, creators of advertisements will often seek to create minor confusion in viewers' minds in order to intensify and prolong attention.[26] Lack of explicitness can also have the desirable effect of requiring greater mental participation from the audience. As a result of such increased participation, writes Messaris, "the viewer's interpretation of a visual argument is more of a product of her or his own mind than it would be if the argument were completely explicit to begin with."[27]

These insights fly in the face of traditional approaches to education, perhaps especially in Catholic catechesis in which doctrinal orthodoxy has sometimes seemed the

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[24] Marton and Pang, "Phenomenography and the Pedagogy of Conceptual Change," 555. Emphasis added.

[25] Robert A. Bjork and Marcia C. Linn, "The Science of Learning and the Learning of Science: Introducing Desirable Difficulties," *The APS Observer* 19, no. 3 (2006).

[26] See Paul Messaris, *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (SAGE, 1997), 171, 178.

[27] Messaris, *Visual Persuasion*, xviii. Messaris cites the example of the original 1984 Apple commercial for the new Macintosh computer, which most viewers found confusing and yet is regarded as one of the most successful commercials of all time. This commercial can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtvjbmoDx-I>.

sole concern of Church officials.[28] In this traditional mindset, education consists primarily (if not entirely) in eliminating ignorance and confusion and attaining knowledge and clarity.[29] However, advances in psychology of learning have helped us to recognize the inadequacy of this approach to education. The fact of the matter is that people tend not to devote much thought to that which seems clear to them. The appearance of clarity can thus actually short-circuit learning, if by learning we mean expansion of a person's thinking rather the mere accumulation of declarative knowledge. It is in the liminal space, in which things seem less clear, where such robust learning is most likely to occur.[30] Some degree of confusion and uncertainty is therefore desirable for educators whose goal is facilitating the transformation of learners' frameworks for imagining reality and constructing meaning.

Like professionals in the advertising business, educators can intentionally generate this sort of healthy uncertainty, prompting what Lonergan calls a "crisis" and Mezirow calls a "disorienting dilemma".[31] As Lonergan suggests, one cannot reason people out of an inadequate meaning framework because, by the logic of their own framework, their present perspectives and positions seem perfectly reasonable and alternative logics unreasonable.[32] Neither does the mere addition of new information

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[28] Cf. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Belief and History*.

[29] One recalls the adage "error has no rights," which was so commonly evoked by Catholic officials in the years prior to Vatican II. Cf. John Dewey on traditional education (John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 17-18).

[30] Berger, "Dancing on the Threshold," 338.

[31] Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 101; Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 148. Psychologists generally refer to the precipitation of mental discomfort arising from conflicts in a person's beliefs or understandings in terms of creating "cognitive dissonance." For a seminal work in this area, see Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, vol. 2 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

[32] See Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 105, 179.

suffice for such transformation, as researchers in the field of conceptual change have consistently discovered.[33] Transformation of meaning frameworks requires more drastic methods.[34]

Educational scholars and practitioners have developed an array of such methods. When it comes to prompting learners to critically examine their own beliefs and assumptions, nothing is more effective than direct, personal experience (with social injustices, different cultures, etc.).[35] The ever-growing popularity of service learning programs and experiences in secondary and tertiary academic institutions testifies to this fact.[36] On a related note, Mezirow strongly advocates for undertaking the transformative learning process within "communities of discourse".[37] He explains that, when engaged in reflective discourse together, people with different experiences and assumptions naturally challenge one another and validate new perspectives. Questions raised in such a context, whether by other learners or by the teacher, can be a highly effective means of transformation when learners are unable to answer those questions within their current meaning framework. For example, a person operating from a critical consciousness, who engages in regular discourse with post-critical thinkers who faithfully celebrate the Eucharist yet betray no sign of magical thinking about the ritual, may begin to wonder if

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[33] See, e.g., Stella Vosniadou, "Conceptual Change Research: An Introduction," in *International Handbook of Research on Conceptual Change*, ed. Stella Vosniadou, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), xiv.

[34] In Lonergan's phrase, learners must be "dynamited" out of a horizon that has become a closed system (*Topics in Education*, 179).

[35] It was, of course, John Dewey who reoriented the world of education toward pedagogy that takes serious the role of experience. (See Dewey, *Experience and Education*.)

[36] On the effectiveness of service-learning in facilitating meaningful learning, see Janet Eyler, Dwight E. Giles, Jr., and Alexander W. Astin, *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), and Roger Bergman, *Catholic Social Learning: Educating the Faith That Does Justice* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

[37] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 212.

perhaps they know something that he/she doesn't.[38] Whatever the method, Lonergan and Mezirow and his associates recommend prompting such crises indirectly rather than directly challenging learners' deeply held beliefs and assumptions.[39]

While I could spend pages upon pages examining the roles of these various strategies for disrupting complacent thinking (and others have), my present concerns demand that I focus my attention on the role of images in this process, a role that has emerged as particularly important in my research and that of others. Lonergan contends that, while employing old words in a new way may suffice to expand an existing viewpoint (i.e., meaning framework), the emergence of a totally new viewpoint demands new experience and images.[40] Walter Brueggemann similarly observes, "The deep places in our lives—places of resistance and embrace—are not ultimately reached by instruction. Those places of resistance and embrace are reached only by stories, by images, metaphors and phrases that line out the world differently."[41] Modification of people's mental images transforms their thinking at its source, at the level of imagination whence their explicit beliefs and reasonings originate.

Numerous researchers of conceptual change offer corroborating evidence for the

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[38] Mezirow and his associates suggest that engagement with literature and media can be another way of raising such questions.

[39] Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 105; Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), 156. Even though some research shows that intense emotion, particularly surprise, facilitates transformative learning, direct challenges to learners' deeply-held beliefs and assumptions can produce a level of anxiety that impedes new learning. (See Edward Taylor, "Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 291; cf. S. J. Egan, "Learning Process in Family Therapy" (University of Toronto, 1985) and C. Gehrels, "The School Principal as Adult Learner" (University of Toronto, 1984), both cited in Taylor, "Analyzing Research," 303.)

[40] Lonergan, *Insight*, 569.

[41] Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 109-10.

effectiveness of transforming students' thinking by means of image-centered interventions.[42] According to scholars in this area, knowledge is represented in various "grain sizes," including individual beliefs (e.g., "the human heart has four chambers") and mental models (e.g., a general image of the human circulatory system).[43] Because a mental model is composed of many beliefs and because a flawed model often contains a mixture of correct and incorrect beliefs, correcting beliefs one by one is a tedious and often ineffective method of transforming an inaccurate mental model. Cognitive scientist Michelene Chi hypothesizes—and an initial experiment has confirmed[44]—that a more effective method might be a process she terms "holistic confrontation" in which visual representations of flawed models are compared with correct models.[45] Even though the transformation of mental models represents a change on a smaller scale than the transformation of meaning frameworks, this research in conceptual change is highly suggestive of subtler strategies that might cumulatively contribute to the more dramatic transformations with which we are concerned.[46]

Chi's hypothesis finds support in the work of John Clement on the role of

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[42] See Michelene T. H. Chi, "Three Types of Conceptual Change: Belief Revision, Mental Model Transformation, and Categorical Shift," in *International Handbook of Research on Conceptual Change*, ed. Stella Vosniadou (New York: Routledge, 2008), 63.

[43] In her 2008 chapter, Chi identified three grain sizes (beliefs, mental models, and categories). In her revised 2013 chapter, she identifies at least four (adding schemas). (See Michelene T. H. Chi, "Two Kinds and Four Sub-Types of Misconceived Knowledge, Ways to Change It, and the Learning Outcomes," in *International Handbook of Research on Conceptual Change*, ed. Stella Vosniadou, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 49–70.)

[44] S. Gadgil, T. J. Nokes, and Michelene T. H. Chi, "Effectiveness of Holistic Mental Model Confrontation in Driving Conceptual Change," *Learning and Instruction* 22 (2011): 47–61.

[45] Chi, "Three Types of Conceptual Change," 68; cf. ibid., "Two Kinds and Four Sub-Types of Misconceived Knowledge," 55.

[46] In the discussion of disruption vis-à-vis conversion below, it will become clearer how similar strategies for exposing misleading images can contribute to changes not only in people's mental models but even in their meaning frameworks as a whole.

explanatory models in teaching for conceptual change. Clement defines an explanatory

model as "a (mental) representation of a system that focuses the user on certain features

in the system and that can predict or account for its structure or behavior."[47] According to

Clement, explanatory models are *the qualitative core of meaning for scientific theory*

and *the center of sense making for students*."[48] Clearly, then, the question of how to

correct erroneous models is a crucial one. Clement has found the use of multiple,

complementary visual analogies, particularly when employed as "bridging analogies," to

be more effective than use of a single analogy in helping learners to overcome

misconceptions.[49] As an example of a series of bridging analogies, Clement describes

how an instructor aiming to help students recognize that a table exerts force on an object

resting upon it might show them in sequence an object resting on a spring, a piece of

foam, a flexible wooden board, and finally a table. Though the image of the spring

exerting force on the object might strike students as too dissimilar to the image of the

table to serve as a pedagogically effective analogy, the series of bridging analogies (e.g.,

foam and wooden board) helps them to gradually recognize in the table the same

properties that are more obvious in the spring. Clement cites a dozen studies that

corroborate the effectiveness of this method in a range of academic subjects.[50] Messaris

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[47] Clement, "The Role of Explanatory Models in Teaching for Conceptual Change," 418.

[48] Ibid., 443. Emphasis original. Many if not most researchers in conceptual change are primarily concerned with applications in science education.

[49] Cf. M. H. Chiu and J. W. Lin, "Promoting Fourth Graders' Conceptual Change of their Understanding of Electric Current Via Multiple Analogies," *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 39, no.8 (2005): 688-712. However, Clement does note that different kinds of conceptual change may require different approaches.

[50] Clement, "The Role of Explanatory Models," 431-2. Marton and Pang argue that a "phenomenographical" approach to conceptual change is even more effective than one that focuses on mental models. Their approach establishes outcomes related to the world experienced, seen, and lived by

supplies examples of similar tactics in propaganda and advertising.[51]

Concerning this strategy, too, scholars emphasize the need for teachers to eschew an unhelpful fixation on correct understanding. More specifically, Clement enjoins, "teachers and students using such approaches need to become comfortable with the idea of discussing intermediate models that are partially incorrect, prior to students developing a more sophisticated model."[52] This process, though perhaps uncomfortable at times, prompts students to engage more actively and, consequently, to achieve a more resilient form of knowledge. Resolving learners' discomfort too quickly only prevents them from engaging in the cognitive struggle necessary for transforming erroneous thinking.

Chi's and Clement's research exemplifies the work of a field of scholars who take seriously the role of mental images in effecting changes in the way people think and who have achieved impressive educational results as a result. Still, prompting the imaginative insight into the inadequacy of learners' old habits of thought is only a small, first step. Mezirow and Taylor suggest that, in order for learners to continue forward in the process of transformation after this initial disorienting dilemma, they must (1) gain further awareness of the contexts of their beliefs and feelings and (2) critically assess their assumptions about the content, process, and premises of their meaning perspectives.[53] Because of the threat such self-examination poses to a person's sense of self, learners will typically require significant support in order to overcome the affective resistance to

the learner rather than what educators suppose learners have in their minds. (See "Phenomenography and the Pedagogy of Conceptual Change.")

[51] Messaris, *Visual Persuasion*, 169-70.

[52] Clement, "The Role of Explanatory Models," 432.

[53] See Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation*, 290. Though Groome does not engage Mezirow's work, it so happens that movements 1 and 2 of Groome's shared praxis approach, respectively, serve to achieve these two exigencies identified by Mezirow.

change and make the daunting leap into a new meaning framework.

Phase II: Being Good Company at the Edge

Mezirow, Berger, Kegan, and many others acknowledge the need for support as learners transition into new ways of thinking and imagining. Berger notes that, when learners have had the foundations of their sense of reality shaken, "the past seems untenable and the future unidentifiable."[54] In this situation, new learning is not a merely intellectual matter; it becomes highly personal and fraught with emotion. Given human beings' affective resistance to change, explains Edward Taylor, an associate of Mezirow, "critical reflection can only begin once emotions have been validated and worked through."[55] On this point, he receives support from numerous authors and studies.[56] Educators must therefore find a way to give learners hope of going forward lest they despair and retreat backward. Coupling this advice with the imperative for educators to disrupt students' complacent thinking, we recognize the delicate balance teachers must strive for when aiming to promote transformation. Kegan describes the ideal this way:

> people grow best when they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge….Environments that are weighted too heavily in the direction of challenge without adequate support are toxic; they promote defensiveness and constriction. Those weighted too heavily toward support without adequate challenge are ultimately boring;

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[54] Berger, "Dancing on the Threshold," 344.

[55] Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation*, 303.

[56] Cf. Robert Kegan, "What 'Form' Transforms?: A Constructive-Developmental Approach to Transformative Learning," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 35–70; Haughton, *The Transformation of Man*, 38; P. M. Coffman, "Inclusive Language as a Means of Resisting Hegemony in Theological Education: A Phenomenology of Transformation and Empowerment of Persons in Adult Higher Education" (Northern Illinois University, 1989); J. H. Morgan, "Displaced Homemaker Programs: The Transition from Homemaker to Independent Person" (Teachers College at Columbia University, 1987); K. Sveinunggaard, "Transformative Learning in Adulthood: A Socio-Contextual Perspective," in *35th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, ed. D. Flanner (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1993).

they promote devitalization.[57]

How, then, do educators provide the support learners need without undermining the transformation process? Here the support of a learning community proves invaluable.[58] Mezirow highlights the benefit of learners receiving the assurance that others have shared the discontent that they are currently experiencing and eventually overcame it.[59] Pairing learners with a person who is one step ahead in the process can be especially helpful in this regard since it provides them with a relatable image or model of how to move forward. Crucial to the success of this strategy is empowering learners. As in the initial disorienting dilemma, so too in this second phase educators must take pains to recruit learners' active participation in their own transformation. Lonergan's observation that "the failure of intellect to develop entails the failure of the will" highlights the need for educators to persuade as well as instruct learners.[60] They must help learners recognize the advantages of the new form of consciousness and invite them to decide for themselves to develop rather than coercing them. Lonergan recommends satire and humor as effective means of softening the ill will of one who resists other forms of persuasion.[61]

Recognizing the overly cognitive emphasis of Mezirow's early work, some of his

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[57] Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 42.

[58] For a conceptual change perspective, see Naomi Miyake, "Conceptual Change Through Collaboration," in *International Handbook of Research on Conceptual Change*, ed. Stella Vosniadou (New York: Routledge, 2008), 453–78.

[59] Kegan additionally points out the value of helping learners recognize that they have successfully made their way through such transformations in the past. (See Kegan, "What 'Form' Transforms?," 58-9.)

[60] Lonergan, *Insight*, 714. Augustine makes a similar case in *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1996), XII.27.

[61] Lonergan, *Insight*, 647-9.

associates have highlighted the need for an extra-rational complement to Mezirow's method of "critical reflection". They describe this complementary approach as a sort of "discernment," a method of critical self-examination that attends to the learner's affects and images through "a process of seeing patterns of relational wholeness that begins with an attitude of receptivity and appreciation."[62] By way of initial suggestions, they propose incorporation of visual and dramatic arts as well as intentional modification of the learning environment as some means of inviting discernment.

In a similar vein, Robert Kegan emphasizes the need for "sympathetic coaching" in helping learners to transition from one order of consciousness to another. Utilizing D. W. Winnicott's term, Kegan speaks of creating a "holding environment" for learners,[63] a learning context "that provides both welcoming acknowledgement of exactly who the person is right now as he or she is, and fosters the person's psychological evolution."[64] An ideal holding environment validates learners' feelings and struggles even as it challenges presently held assumptions. Take for example the holding environment appropriate for a person transitioning from a fourth-order Institutional self to a fifth-order Interindividual self (one aspect of the transition from critical to post-critical consciousness).[65] For a learner at this stage, educators should affirm the person's

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[62] Elizabeth Kasl and Dean Elias, "Creating New Habits of Mind in Small Groups," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 231. Building upon Lonergan's work, Robert Doran and Patrick Byrne have similarly sought to develop approaches for transforming the feeling and valuing dimensions of the human subject along with the cognitive dimension. (See Robert M. Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006).)

[63] Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 115.

[64] Ibid., *In Over Our Heads*, 43.

[65] Kegan presents a chart of bridges between the different orders of consciousness in *The Evolving Self*, 118-20.

independence and self-authoring while also encouraging actions and attitudes of self-surrender and efforts to risk new levels of intimacy. Here the educator's challenge is to help the learner relinquish his or her *identification* with the form of the Institutional self while protecting the form itself. Kegan cites ideological self-surrender (either religious or political) as one "bridge," or medium of transition, for this particular evolution of self.

In sum, whatever particular means educators employ, at this transitional moment in the transformation process they must provide learners with emotional support while continuing to challenge them to synthesize a more adequate way of thinking and imagining.

Phase III: Helping to Establish Firm Ground in a New Place

Part and parcel of instilling learners with the confidence to change is showing them how. Such is the emphasis of the third responsibility Berger sets forth for educators. One element of helping learners to re-establish a foundation is providing them with appropriate language for describing the process they are going through and for the new meaning framework that is coming into focus.[66] Kegan suggests that images and metaphorical language are particularly well suited to facilitating such transitions, especially when employed with an ear to learners' own usage.[67] One benefit of imaginative, metaphorical language is that it invites learners' participation. Kegan

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[66] See Jack Mezirow, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 154. Lonergan is addressing this need when he describes the "heuristic structure" of all human inquiry, which makes possible the transition from unknowing to knowing. That structure is (1) name the unknown, (2) work out its properties, (3) use those properties to guide inquiry (*Insight*, 68).

[67] See Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 260.

explains, "A metaphor is interpretive, but it is an interpretation made in soft clay rather than cold analysis. It invites the client to put his hands on it and reshape it into something more fitting to him."[68] Especially when the image or metaphor captures something of learners' internal circumstances, students, by taking up and playing with that image or metaphor, can shape the very way they think and imagine. In this way, images, symbols, and metaphors can serve as a sort of mental pivot point that engages learners with something familiar and enables them to temporarily hold onto that familiarity even as they move into a new mode of thinking.[69]

Mezirow suggests several additional steps for helping learners to establish themselves firmly within a new meaning framework.[70] First, learners explore new roles and actions that are compatible with the new meaning framework. Educators can assist in this step by creating the necessary opportunities (or, alternatively, by leading students in imaginative exercises).[71] For example, a person transitioning from critical to post-critical consciousness, who had stopped attending Mass, might start attending again with a post-critical thinker and discuss the ritual's significance afterward. These experiences—supplemented with conversations that reinforce them in the learner's memory and imagination—help to verify personally the viability of the new perspective and to cultivate a felt sense of comfort in the new role. Second, learners plan a course of action

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[68] Ibid., 260.

[69] The language of "mental pivot point" is my own. Clement's explanatory model approach to conceptual change operates upon a similar principle. (See Clement, "The Role of Explanatory Models.")

[70] See Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*,168-9.

[71] An analogous strategy in conceptual change is the model-based instruction discussed above. (See Clement, "The Role of Explanatory Models in Teaching for Conceptual Change.") Presenting learners with viable replacements for their old, defunct models helps them to take constructive steps forward when former ways of understanding collapse.

consistent with their new perspective (e.g., regular participation in the sacraments, a daily prayer routine) and then acquire—from the educator or elsewhere—the knowledge, skills, and resources they will need to carry out the plan. As noted above, one of the greatest obstacles to transformation is the inability to envision a way forward. Developing plans with the help of a trusted guide diminishes this obstacle significantly. Finally, educators provide continued support so as to build learners' confidence and competence as they reintegrate their life as a whole in accord with the new meaning framework.[72]

The Ethics of Transformation

This brief overview of research in transformative learning theory and conceptual change has manifested some of the pedagogical possibilities for facilitating changes in, not merely the quantity of learners' knowledge, but the very way people imagine reality. That educators have employed many of these methods with considerable success over the past three decades assures us that religious educators need not resign themselves to waiting passively for the new evolution in consciousness described in the previous chapter. Educators have the ability—limited though it is—to facilitate transformation by (1) helping learners recognize the limits of their present means of constructing meaning,

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[72] It may seem to the reader that Mezirow repeats himself in this last point. In anticipation of this charge I offer two important considerations: The first is that educators need to support learners—cognitively and emotionally—throughout the entire learning process. This admonition bears repeating because it is so integral to the process of transformative learning. Second, this process seldom unfolds in the sequential manner I have described here. I have enumerated three general phases for the sake of clarity, but researchers and practitioners of transformative learning maintain that the process is typically "recursive, evolving, and spiraling" rather than linear (Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner and Jack Mezirow, "Theory Building and the Search for Common Ground," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 333; cf. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 274; Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 108.). Strategies that I have organized under one heading or another often bear upon other phases of the learning process.

(2) supporting them as they struggle with this realization, and (3) helping them to construct meaning in a new way.

Notwithstanding, the fact that educators have the ability to prompt such transformation does not necessarily give them the right to do so. Respect for the autonomy and dignity of our students demands that we ask, When is it appropriate for educators to prompt transformation, and what is the difference between facilitating people's cognitive development and manipulating their thinking? It must be stated, first of all, that educators should never push learners to new forms of consciousness before the latter are developmentally capable of negotiating the transition.[73] Methods of transforming thinking should be employed as resources for helping people to cope with the cognitive challenges they encounter in their everyday lives, not for the personal gratification of educators. In this dissertation, we have been investigating the dilemma of Catholics whose critical or pre-critical manner of constructing meaning has become inadequate to the challenges for faith in postmodern American culture. I present the strategies and resources of this chapter and the following for use by religious educators who seek to address this dilemma, but the reader should beware of imposing them on Catholics who do not fit the profile described here and for whom an invitation to post-critical consciousness would be premature.

Regarding the manipulation question, it is difficult to compel the transformation of another person's meaning framework against their will given the desire and activity

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[73] I made this point in the previous chapter, as have Kegan and Fowler in their writing.

required on the part of the learner. Still, we should not rule out the possibility.[74] The difference between persuasive invitation to change and manipulation lies in the extent to which the educator promotes the active participation and authentic cognition of learners. People exhibit authentic cognition insofar as they consistently perform patterned acts of attending, understanding, judging, and deciding.[75] Manipulative methods subvert these actions. For example, many advertisers design commercials in such a way as to demand viewers' attention and entice an impulsive (rather than thoughtfully considered) decision to buy a particular product. By contrast, educators seeking to invite their students to imaginative transformation should encourage them not only to attend to their own cognition and feelings but also to understand the changes occurring within them, judge whether or not they want those changes to occur, and personally decide to go forward or avoid change.[76] Furthermore, educators and those who supervise them should take care to regularly inquire into their own methods and motivations: Do I make transparent the methods I am using to facilitate transformation, or do I keep my students in the dark as to what is happening? Do I raise my students' awareness of the changes in their thinking, or do I downplay these changes? Such self-examination not only helps to guard against manipulation but also provides a model of growth for students (see Phase II above).

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[74] Indeed, the success of the advertising industry makes it clear that it is entirely possible—even easy—to *seduce* people into imagining and feeling a particular way. (Thanks to Professor Patrick Byrne for raising this point.)

[75] See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 104-5.

[76] To say that educators should promote authentic cognition in learners is not to say that all students must fully understand the transformation in order for it to happen to them. (See Haughton, *The Transformation of Man*, 137.) Still, promoting such understanding does add another safeguard against manipulation.

Transformative Learning, Development, and Religious Conversion

The above discussion of research in transformative learning and conceptual change demonstrates that people do undergo radical change in the ways they construct meaning and that educators can play a significant role in facilitating that change. Mezirow and his associates especially offer us valuable resources for promoting more adequate forms of consciousness through which postmodern people can achieve the personal integration that evades so many today. Nevertheless, despite their efforts to address affective and social as well as cognitive dimensions of the human subject,[77] these approaches fall short of effecting a total transformation and integration of the human person. For it is not only postmodern culture that foments personal fragmentation but also sin, a factor for which educational research does not account.

Since sin is an aberration of the spiritual realm—the realm of reality with which religion is ultimately concerned—Christian education can supply something that research in transformative learning and conceptual change cannot. A truly holistic account requires addressing the spiritual dimension of the person, the faith that Fowler argues is the driving force for human meaning construction. Inclusion of the spiritual dimension leads to a more expansive understanding of the transformation required for personal and communal integration. It is to this more expansive notion of transformation that the Christian tradition refers by the term "conversion". Since my concern in this project is with the faith lives of American Catholics, it is essential to elucidate this key concept and its relevance for the education of contemporary Catholics.

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[77] See Mezirow, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, 12.

The Meaning of Conversion

The concept of conversion is an important one in the Bible. The word employed in the Hebrew Scriptures for this concept, *shub* (שׁוּב), means to turn back or return. The primary term in the New Testament, *metanoeó* (μετανοέω), means to change one's mind.[78] Both terms imply a total transformation or reorientation of the person, as suggested in Joel 2:12: "Yet even now, says the Lord, return (*shub*) to me with all your heart." Consistent with this meaning, Lonergan describes religious conversion as "total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations."[79] In more explicitly Christian terms, it is being in love with God on account of "God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us."[80] This definitive self-surrender involves transcending one's egocentric concerns, biases, distractions, and sins such that God is allowed to take over the very center of the self.

Because this transformation is of the whole person in all its anthropological complexity, conversion can and has been described in myriad ways. James Fowler describes conversion in terms of change in cognitive content. Others like William James and Virgil Bailey Gillespie define conversion in terms of the process by which it occurs and its function, or the effects it has on the subject. Lonergan distinguishes between intellectual conversion (i.e., transcending a naïve realist understanding of reality, objectivity, and knowing), moral conversion (i.e., transcending the desire for personal satisfaction as the primary criteria for one's choices and decisions), and religious

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[78] The Hebrew *nacham* and Greek *epistrophe* are also used.

[79] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240.

[80] Ibid., 241.

conversion, which I have just described above. Robert Doran adds psychic conversion to the list.[81]

Even though I will discuss psychic conversion in more depth below, it will illuminate the present discussion to clarify here the meaning of two dimensions of conversion that are of central interest in this chapter—namely, psychic conversion and what I am calling "imaginative" conversion—and their relationship to religious conversion.[82] From one perspective, the gift of God's love that constitutes religious conversion is always the cause of psychic conversion, imaginative conversion, etc.[83] It is "an under-tow of existential consciousness" pulling one toward development and conversion in all dimensions of one's being.[84] From another perspective, however, imaginative and psychic conversions (as well as intellectual, moral, and affective conversions) contribute to the full flowering of religious conversion in one's life. Through imaginative conversion, one's spontaneous way of imagining reality is transformed in a manner consistent with Jesus' vision of the reign of God. Through psychic conversion, one's sensitivity and affectivity are transformed such that one achieves the willingness required to consistently enact that vision in one's life. Both are necessary components of what it means to be a "subject in love," that is, a religiously converted person in the sense that Lonergan and I intend.[85] From a pedagogical

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[81] Related but distinct is Walter Conn's concept of affective conversion. (See Conn, Christian Conversion, 134-53.)

[82] For Lonergan's explication of the relationship among intellectual, moral, and religious conversions, see *Method in Theology*, 238-43.

[83] Cf. ibid., 243.

[84] Ibid., 240.

[85] Ibid., 242.

viewpoint, both serve as invitations and steps toward full-fledged religious conversion.

For the purposes of the present exploration, I will take as my point of departure Lonergan's dual description of conversion as self-surrender and self-transcendence, which characterization I believe captures the essence of this radical change.[86] These two terms imply a transformation conducing to the fulfillment (insofar as fulfillment is possible in this life) of the very "self," the core of one's being. What, we might ask, constitutes the person or self who is transformed? Lonergan suggestively describes a gradually unfolding thrust, an "eros of the human spirit," a desire for self-transcendence that orients the human subject toward fulfillment.[87] This description suggests that the self that is surrendered, transformed, and (for a time) fulfilled in conversion cannot be identified with the manifestation of the self at any particular stage in this process but rather is more closely identified with the unfolding itself.

The writings of Robert Kegan and Walter Conn, an interpreter of Lonergan, further illuminate the nature of this unfolding thrust at the core of the human person. Kegan describes an "evolving self" rather than a static reality. The self, he argues, is as much a process as it is a thing. In other words, what is core to the self is not a particular belief or set of beliefs or even a particular way of viewing reality, but rather the activity of making meaning, which looks different at different stages of a person's development. Making use of the term "conscience," Conn describes a similar activity constituting the

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[86] While acknowledging the benefits of these various approaches, I privilege Lonergan's and Conn's descriptions of conversion in the following because they present a more adequate account that encompasses content change, process, and function. When I henceforth employ the term "conversion," I mean it in the more general, religious sense of the word unless otherwise specified.

[87] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 13, 242.

core of the self.[88] This conscience is "the radical desire of the human spirit for meaning, truth, value, and love," a desire and activity that leads the personal subject through successive levels of self-transcendence.[89] Conn argues that this drive for self-transcendence is consistently implied, if not explicitly recognized, in the developmental theories of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, James Fowler, and Robert Kegan.[90] All dimensions of the human spirit—cognitive, affective, volitional—are involved in this self-transcending activity, and the transformation of the self that occurs in conversion involves the transformation of all the above.

The picture of the human person that emerges from conversion literature is therefore that of a work in progress, a "homo viator," in Gabriel Marcel's classic phrase.[91] This makes for a paradoxical manner of existence. Lonergan describes the paradox in terms of a tension between limitation and transcendence, between the desire to maintain a comfortable status quo and the desire to become something more. The human person, he explains, "functions as an animal in an environment, as a self-attached and

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[88] Conn defines the "self" as "a dynamic, developing, dipolar, embodied reality constituted by two dialectically related poles, subjective ('I') and objective ('me'), and radically oriented beyond itself to the other" (Walter Conn, *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 138.

[89] Ibid., 35.

[90] Piaget describes this "decentering" process as a development from cognitive egocentrism to critical, realistic judgment. Erikson describes psychosocial/affective development from self-centeredness to mutuality of love and communality, from internalized prohibitions to universal sense of values. Kohlberg describes a development in moral reasoning from egocentric hedonism to universal principles. Fowler describes development from an egocentric Intuitive-Projective to a Universalizing faith. Kegan describes development from embeddedness in personal needs to objectification of needs, relationships, and self-authorship.

[91] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2010). In his treatment of conversion, William James points to this paradox by his description of the "divided self" (*The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Modern Library, 1929), Lecture VIII. Though James coined the phrase, its paradigmatic expression comes from Paul's letter to the Romans (7:14-25).

self-interested center within its own narrow world of stimuli and responses."[92] However, it also functions as an inquiring and reflecting subject that by virtue of an unrestricted desire to know and value "is carried by its own higher spontaneity to quite a different mode of operation with the opposite attributes of detachment and disinterestedness."[93] The same tension lies at the heart of Kegan's subject-object theory. Therein he describes the evolution of the self as a series of differentiations from and reintegrations with that which is not the self, an ongoing process aimed at resolving the tension in the person's desire for both autonomy and relatedness.[94] Humanity's struggle with idolatry is yet another manifestation of this tension: We simultaneously yearn for the fulfillment that only the true God can bestow and desire a god that we can comprehend and control. This tension at the heart of human existence has only been exacerbated by the conditions of 21st-century life.[95] Compounded by the radical plurality and profit-driven multiplication of desires that characterize postmodern culture, this internal struggle has deteriorated into outright fragmentation for many of today's Catholics.

So long as we live we never resolve this tension completely.[96] Nevertheless, it is possible for human beings to make considerable strides toward personal integration and authenticity insofar as we transcend our sensitive, affective, intellectual, and volitional

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[92] Lonergan, *Insight*, 498.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 326.

[95] We found ample evidence of this growing tension in Chapter One. Cf. Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas Of Identity In Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), Ch.3, on the "populated self" and the "expansion of inadequacy".

[96] As Lonergan says, "no matter how full the success, the basic situation within the self is unchanged, for the perfection of the higher integration does not eliminate the integrated or modify the essential opposition between self-centeredness and detachment" (Lonergan, *Insight*, 499).

egocentrism.[97] Indeed, our native desire for intellectual and moral transcendence orients us toward God, who alone can bestow the integration for which we yearn.[98] When people undergo conversion and achieve this integration, they commonly recognize that it has come from beyond themselves. David Tracy explains:

> they find themselves compelled to honor that realized experience as an eruption of a power become self-manifestation from and by the whole in which, by which, and to which they live. They employ language like 'liberation,' 'emancipation,' 'wholeness,' 'salvation' to articulate the conviction elicited and empowered by that experience itself. That conviction, that faith, takes many forms: ethos and worldview are radically united; wholeness in life has come not as personal achievement but as gift from the whole; above all, how one ought to live is ultimately grounded in what reality itself is.[99]

Conversion can occur in various ways—suddenly or gradually, quietly or dramatically, individually or communally—but, when it happens, it always comes as God's free gift.[100]

Human beings can cooperate with the gift of God's grace that makes conversion possible, but they can never cause it on their own, whether by pedagogical methods or any other means.[101] Still, God never converts a person without their cooperation.[102] In fact, conversion involves a great deal of human effort, for it is never a permanent

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[97] The criterion of human authenticity, suggests Conn, "is the very *self-transcendence* which is effected in the realization of value through critical understanding, responsible decision, and generous love," that is, through conversion (*Christian Conversion*, 18).

[98] Lonergan puts it this way: "There is to human inquiry an unrestricted demand for intelligibility. There is to human judgment a demand for the unconditioned. There is to human deliberation a criterion that criticizes every finite good. So it is…that man can reach basic fulfilment [sic], peace, joy, only by moving beyond the realm of common sense, theory, and interiority and into the realm in which God is known and loved" (*Method in Theology*, 83-4).

[99] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 173.

[100] For a variety of descriptions of the nature and dynamics of religious conversion, see Newton Malony and Samuel Southard, *Handbook of Religious Conversion* (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Press, 1992).

[101] See Aquinas, ST II.I, q.111, a.2 on cooperative grace. Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 107; Doran, *Psychic Conversion*, 148.

[102] According to Lonergan, God presents to each person an enticement to conversion as an "under-tow of existential consciousness," which one may willingly submit to or resist (*Method in Theology*, 240).

achievement.[103] It is a once-in-a-lifetime event in the sense that it effects a radical reorientation of one's life. Once it happens, there is no returning to the way one saw things before. Nevertheless, even once one has received God at the center of one's life, one struggles to live consistently for love of God and neighbor.[104] Hence, conversion remains an ongoing activity even for the so-called converted. As for what role religious educators might play in inviting conversion in others, that will be a topic for later in this chapter.

Conversion Versus Development

Conversion is identical with neither ordinary cognitive development nor with the transformation of meaning frameworks that attends such development. Exploring more precisely the relationship of development to conversion will afford us greater clarity regarding the respective contributions of transformative learning theory and Christian religious education to facilitating learners' conversion.

To begin with, conversion can be distinguished from development in that development is characterized by a predictable pattern of changes leading progressively toward the enhancement of certain capacities. By contrast, conversion marks a radical reorientation, turning, or about-face in a person's way of thinking and living. As Lonergan puts it, conversion "comes out of the old by repudiating characteristic features; it begins a new sequence that can keep revealing greater depth and breadth and

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[103] Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 110; Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 157.

[104] The classic articulation of this struggle is Paul's words in Romans 7:14-25. Theologians in the Christian tradition have described this disconnect between a person's conviction of what is right and actually doing what is right by the phrase "moral impotence" (see, e.g., Lonergan, *Insight*, 650-3).

wealth."[105] Where development implies continuity, conversion implies disruption.

The distinction becomes even clearer when we look closely at the transitions between certain developmental stages. People may or (more often) may not be aware that they are going through a stage change, yet, Conn observes, at certain points some sort of conscious decision is necessary for further development. For example, Conn claims that the transition from Kohlberg's stage six to stage seven requires one to answer for oneself the question, Why be moral? and subsequently to decide for or against morality in general. Conn identifies similar decision points in the transitions to Kohlberg's stages four and six; Erikson's stages five, seven, and eight; Fowler's stages four and six; and Kegan's level four.[106] Developmental theory cannot fully account for why some people choose to progress at these points and others do not; it merely presents evidence that this is the case. Hence, for Conn, conversion is distinguished from natural development by conscious decision.[107] He explains: "The one transforming process has two dimensions: one unconscious and spontaneous, one conscious and deliberate."[108] The unconscious and spontaneous dimension is that which developmentalists describe as stage transition; the conscious and deliberate dimension pertains to conversion.

Transformative learning represents an interesting middle ground. Because

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[105] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 237-8.

[106] Interestingly, Kegan himself cites religious self-surrender as one medium of the transition from fourth-order to fifth-order consciousness (i.e., the transition from critical to post-critical consciousness with which we are most interested). (See chart in *The Evolving Self*, 120.)

[107] Conn also argues from other grounds for the necessity of the concept of conversion in addition to that of natural development. In particular, he explains that a stage by definition must be commonly recurring in the human population, yet Kohlberg and Fowler insist upon the existence of later stages that are rarely attained. Conn suggests that the reason for the rarity of these later stages is that their attainment depends upon conversion.

[108] Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 129.

transformative learning typically recruits learners' willing, active participation in the process, it would seem to fall on the conscious side of the line that Conn draws between development and conversion. Yet, transformation of meaning perspectives need not always be conscious, and, as we will see presently, other factors distinguish transformative learning from conversion.

Though distinct, conversion and development are intimately intertwined. On the one hand, conversion presupposes development.[109] In some instances, normal developmental crises provide the occasion for conversion.[110] Conn explains, "The adolescent and adult crises of psychosocial development occasion and provide the necessary existential conditions for conversions as well as for major structural stage transitions.[111]" It also may be the case that conversion does not occur until a person has attained a certain level of development, for "conversion requires at least the previous acquisition of basic formal cognitive operations, a successful identity integration reaching toward intimacy, and moral reasoning of a conventional level. Typically, then, Christian conversion would minimally require the development of advanced adolescence."[112] Indeed, it stands to reason that, if we do not consider people psychologically prepared to

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[109] James Fowler would challenge this claim, asserting that conversion can occur without stage change (see *Stages of Faith*, 285). His dissenting opinion can be accounted for by two considerations: (1) Fowler employs a narrower (and, I would argue, less helpful) definition of conversion as change in contents of faith. (2) Following from (1), conversion in the sense employed by Conn presupposes certain levels of development for reasons explained below, even if the decisive moment of conversion does not coincide with development to a new stage.

[110] Fowler does believe that development can precipitate conversion, however.

[111] Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 157.

[112] Ibid., 209. Edwin Starbuck, William James, and numerous others affirm the conclusion that conversion seldom if ever occurs prior to adolescence. (See James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lecture IX.) An exception is James Fowler, who, because he defines conversion in terms of change in contents of faith, allows for the occurrence of conversion during childhood. (See Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 286.)

commit themselves to marriage until the age of 18, we would not suppose them prepared to accept God as the center of their being before achieving a certain level of cognitive and emotional maturity.[113] Notwithstanding, assuming that this baseline level of development has occurred, conversion can occur at any stage of adult development and will manifest itself according to the level of the individual.[114]

On the other hand, full human development is impossible without conversion.[115] As developmentalists point out, development from one stage to another is not automatic. Many people remain suspended at an intermediate stage, as we saw with regard to American Catholics in the previous chapter. In some cases, such stabilization in development may merely be the result of having achieved a level of reasoning, faithing, etc. that is adequate to the demands of one's environment. In other cases, however, people are unable to progress due to psychological impediments such as bias, sin, and moral impotence.[116] They may be unwilling to admit that their current beliefs are mistaken or to trust a person whom they have held in suspicion or to give up their current place at the center of their imagined world. Whatever the specific impediment, when development to a new stage requires a conscious decision, these people are unable to make the requisite affirmative decision. Eventually they may be able to overcome this

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[113] Even if we would not restrict the occurrence of conversion to older adolescents and adults as Conn and others do, all evidence suggests that instances of conversion at earlier stages in life are rare.

[114] Conn argues that conversion can be "critical" or "uncritical," meaning that people who have surrendered themselves unconditionally to God may understand that self-surrender in terms of conventional or postconventional moral reasoning (Kohlberg) or faithing (Fowler).

[115] As Conn puts it, "optimal resolution of psychosocial crises requires conversion" (*Christian Conversion*, 157). Though Fowler asserts that conversion can prompt stage change, he also maintains that it can actually block development (*Stages of Faith*, 286). Clearly this cannot be the case if conversion is understood in the sense employed in this chapter rather than in Fowler's narrower sense.

[116] Cf. Doran, *Psychic Conversion*, 148.

resistance, but developmental theory cannot offer an explanation for what enables them do so, nor can transformative learning theory.

The reason, explain Lonergan, Conn, and Doran, is that only conversion, which comes as God's gift, can overcome the bias and moral impotence that block development.[117] Without God's intervention, human beings remain trapped in a vicious cycle: they require a more developed, authentic intelligence in order to recognize and correct the deficiency in their willingness (i.e., moral impotence), but their deficient willingness impedes the disinterested inquiry that engenders authentic intelligence. God's gift of conversion endows human beings with a love for God motivated by something beyond themselves (namely, God's own goodness), thereby reorienting them towards knowing and valuing all that is as it really is, that is, as God has ordered it.[118] It is because human overcoming of bias and moral impotence depends upon God's gift of willingness that even transformative learning, with its strategies for recruiting the conscious cooperation of learners, is insufficient for causing conversion.

In sum, Conn offers these words concerning the relationship between conversion and development: "development requires conversion [at key points], and conversion always occurs within a developmental process."[119]

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[117] In Lonergan's terms, intellectual conversion is the transcending of cognitive self-centeredness, moral conversion is the transcending of self-centered pursuit of satisfaction, and religious conversion is the remote cause of both.

[118] Doran offers and in-depth explanation of the need for universal willingness and its origin in God's gift in *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 185-206.

[119] Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 157.

The Imaginal Dimension of Conversion

In Chapter Two we saw the central role imagination plays in human meaning construction. In this chapter's discussion of transformative learning and conceptual change, we again saw how greatly attention to images facilitates educational efforts to alter learners' meaning frameworks. It should come as little surprise, then, that transformation of the imagination turns out to be a crucial aspect of conversion. I have described conversion as a radical reorientation of the self. Other theologians employ the language of reorientation of the person's "fundamental option"[120] or "dominant direction".[121] To speak of conversion in these terms necessarily implicates the imagination, the combination of capacities that synthesizes and projects this basic existential orientation.

Many authors make the imaginal dimension of conversion explicit in their treatment of the phenomenon. James Fowler, for example, describes conversion as "*a significant recentering of one's previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories.*"[122] Conn asserts, "Christian conversion involves a new set of images, symbols, values constituting the *effective central* interpretative story in one's life."[123] Mary Boys highlights the particular

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[120] For an overview of various theologians' use of this term in relation to conversion, see Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 199.

[121] Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 219.

[122] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 282. Italics original.

[123] Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 208. Italics original.

importance of ongoing expansion of one's images of God and God's Kingdom.[124] None of these authors would consider it adequate to describe conversion purely in terms of the acquisition of new mental images and symbols (like stamps or baseball cards added to one's collection), for what one chooses as one's orienting images shapes one's whole perception of and living in the world.[125] Therefore, even though the acquisition of new images is not sufficient in itself, a change that does not touch a person's orienting images cannot be regarded as conversion in the full sense of the word developed here.

The Possibility of Facilitating Conversion in General

Now that I have described the nature of conversion and distinguished it from natural development, I am in better position to describe the possibilities for facilitating conversion. As already noted, conversion is always a gift from God, yet it is a gift that requires human cooperation. The need for human cooperation points to the possibility of religious educators facilitating the conversion process in others (and in themselves).[126] To be sure, that role is limited.[127] As theologian Rosemary Haughton qualifies, no amount of formation can ever amount to transformation. Stating the matter even more forcefully,

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[124] Mary C. Boys, "Conversion as a Foundation of Religious Education," *Religious Education* 77, no. 2 (1982): 223.

[125] Even Fowler, who defines conversion essentially in terms of change of content, indicates that this change of images is wrapped up with the reshaping of one's life as a whole. (See *Stages of Faith*, 281-2.)

[126] On the importance of educators themselves undergoing conversion as an aid to promoting it in others, see Boys, "Conversion as Foundation of Religious Education," and Thomas H. Groome, "Conversion, Nurture and Educators," *Religious Education* 76, no. 5 (1981): 482–96.

[127] Religious educator Anton Vrame notes that teaching is like a sacrament in that human beings play a role in the transformation, but that transformation ultimately depends on God (Anton C Vrame, *The Educating Icon: Teaching Wisdom and Holiness in the Orthodox Way* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), 182-3).

she asserts, "Transformation therefore can only occur when formation breaks down."[128] In fact, Haughton and others suggest that trying to force conversion upon others can actually do serious harm. A challenge to convert issued too soon might create an obstacle to future transformation.[129] Furthermore, suggests Virgil Bailey Gillespie, manipulative methods aimed at compelling conversion can lead to "counter-conversions," or superficial changes that appear to indicate conversion but that are accompanied on a deeper level by negative effects on the person's identity.[130]

Notwithstanding, Haughton insists that, even if formation does not cause transformation, still no transformation is possible without some sort of formation. Indeed, a third party (such as a religious educator) may very well be the means by which God invites someone to conversion. This view is very much in line with the many biblical narratives in which God's work is not neatly distinguished from that of God's creatures.[131] So it seems that, even if human beings can force neither God's hand nor another person's free decision to accept conversion, it is possible for them to serve as mediators of God's grace and to support others in accepting God's invitation to be transformed.[132]

What particular forms this mediation and support might take has been explored

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[128] Haughton, *Transformation of Man*, 35.

[129] See ibid., 166.

[130] Virgil Bailey Gillespie, *Religious Conversion and Personal Identity: How and Why People Change* (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Press, 1979), 193.

[131] For example, in the story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50), Joseph declares that God had been at work in the events of the narrative, even though God is never explicitly mentioned prior to then (Gen 50:20).

[132] Religious educator Michael Corso captures the role of the educator in the phrase "giving access to conversion" ("Christian Religious Education for Conversion: A Lonerganian Perspective" (Unpublished dissertation, Boston College, 1994), 327).

extensively in conversion literature.[133] While it lies beyond the scope of the present chapter to discuss this literature in any great depth, it will suffice for our purposes to identify several general strategies that recur in this body of research. In examining these approaches, the reader will notice many parallels with those employed by practitioners of transformative learning and conceptual change. Indeed, as Mezirow himself has noted, any conversion will include the sort of transformation of meaning perspectives targeted in transformative learning.[134] In this respect, the pedagogical strategies associated with transformative learning can certainly contribute to conversion. What distinguishes the following strategies is the concern they imply for holistic transformation (including attention to the spiritual dimension of the person) and the manner in which they explicitly seek to open people to the workings of God's grace. Because conversion occurs in many contexts, not only that of the classroom, I have opted to describe the following strategies for promoting conversion in general terms, deferring explicitly pedagogical considerations to the final two chapters.

An essential first step toward conversion involves increasing one's receptivity to God's grace. Minimally, one must be aware of God's offer of grace and the possibility of conversion in order to receive it.[135] The enduring imperative to Christians to proclaim the Gospel follows from this exigency.[136] More often than not, however, this receptivity

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[133] For a compendium of a variety of approaches to this question, see Malony and Southard, *Handbook of Religious Conversion;* cf. Corso, "Christian Religious Education for Conversion."

[134] See Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 91, 180.

[135] God can certainly prompt a conversion at any time without forewarning. The first time one becomes aware of the possibility of conversion may very well be the moment God offers it. Still, conversion stories of this sort are rare. Most often people undergo a conversion following a period of preparation.

[136] See Mk 16:15.

emerges only after many distractions and obstacles—biases, addictions, vices—have been exposed and one is finally forced to confront one's inability to save oneself.[137] Sometimes people "bottom out" on their own. In other cases, it takes a concerned third party to bring the matter to a head and reflect a person's shortcomings and oversights in a way that the latter cannot help but acknowledge them.[138] The conversion literature often describes this moment as a "crisis," which shares many similarities and in some cases corresponds with the "disorienting dilemma" described by Mezirow.[139] Since we already have some understanding of strategies that instigate a disorienting dilemma from that discussion above, I will forestall further explanation until the next section, in which I describe in greater depth how the use of images can prompt such a crisis.

Second, as in transformative learning, so too in the midst of conversion do people require emotional and intellectual support. To this point, Fowler emphasizes the importance of "sponsorship" in helping people work through their conversion.[140] Such sponsorship may include providing encouragement, guidance, modeling, a safe space for exploring new possibilities, accountability and challenge, as well as experiences and spiritual direction that serve to deepen commitment and growth. Even more

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[137] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 242; Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 195-6.

[138] Indeed, sometimes we are blind to the "plank in our own eye," as Jesus puts it (Mt 7:3-5; cf. Lk 6:42).

[139] See, e.g., James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lecture I; and Lewis R. Rambo, "The Psychology of Conversion," in *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Press, 1992), 165. In common parlance, the term "crisis" generally connotes a negative experience. However, even though a crisis in the sense described here inevitably involves unpleasant feelings, the outcome can be highly beneficial. Kegan speaks to this double nature of crisis in these terms: "the Chinese draw 'crisis' with two characters: one means 'danger,' the other 'opportunity.' This, literally, is the character of crisis; for the crisis is the transformation of meaning, the costs of evolution, and the death we fear may be, as much as anything, the death of the old self that is about to be left behind" (Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 266).

[140] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 286-8. Sharon Daloz Parks makes a similar argument, preferring the term "mentorship". (See Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).)

fundamentally, community affords the opportunity for loving relationships, which open the human heart to conversion and to the life of love that follows.[141] Most authors dealing with the topic of conversion are similarly adamant about the individual's need for communal support throughout the conversion process.[142]

Third, converts need help building a new foundation upon their conversion experience. It is at this point that formal and informal religious education plays a key role by providing people with the language they need to articulate what they are experiencing and by giving them access to the inherited wisdom of generations of Christians who have undergone similar experiences.[143] Prayer—both communal and private—is likewise valuable in building a new foundation.[144] Participation in communal liturgy in particular facilitates the ritualizing and ingraining of habits, attitudes, and sensibilities that accord with the convert's new values and orientations.[145] Engaging in the practice of discernment—for example, as developed in the Ignatian tradition—helps one to grow more attuned to the promptings of God's Spirit and to respond appropriately to one's conversion.[146] All of the above leads in the direction of personal decision.[147] This

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[141] Cf. Haughton, *The Transformation of Man*, 114.

[142] Cf. Rambo, "The Psychology of Conversion," 171-3; Eddie Gibbs, H. Newton Malony, and Samuel Southard, "Conversion in Evangelistic Practice," in *Handbook of Religious Conversion* (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Press, 1992), 282; Corso, "Christian Religious Education for Conversion," 29; William Sims Bainbridge, "The Sociology of Conversion," ed. H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Press, 1992), 189.

[143] See Haughton, *The Transformation of Man*, 74, 99, 136, 224; Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 217-8; Corso, "Christian Religious Education for Conversion," 291-300.

[144] Cf. Corso, "Christian Religious Education for Conversion," 301-7.

[145] Cf. Dykstra, *Vision and Character*, 106.

[146] See Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading*, ed. David L. Fleming (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 204-19.

personal decision is the final, indispensable ingredient needed for God's offer of grace to materialize into a life lived for love of God and neighbor. The initial crisis, the support and guidance of others, further learning, and experiences of worship and prayer can bring one to this point, but, without the decision to risk one's life on God's offer of grace, it all amounts to no more than new trappings on an essentially unchanged life.

I have indicated here some of the general guidelines Christian scholars have proposed for facilitating conversion. Acknowledging that others have developed these proposals in far greater depth, I have kept my treatment of them brief in order to allow more space to explore the possibilities for facilitating conversion through the transformation of the imagination specifically. To that task we now turn.

Converting the Imagination

Back in Chapter One I made note of Andrew Thompson's study of the NCEA ACRE, from which he deduces the importance of the imagination in religious education. In that study Thompson concludes, "motivating participants and helping them in the process of ongoing conversion…depends heavily on the ability of the catechist to evoke images which capture the imagination of the students."[148] Walter Conn arrives at a similar conclusion based on his work with developmental psychology: "when our concern is the affective, cognitive, moral, and religious totality of the person, we must

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[147] Cf. Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 266-7; David H. Read, "The Evangelical Protestant Understanding of Conversion," in *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Press, 1992), 142.

[148] Andrew D. Thompson, *That They May Know You* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1982), 61.

focus as sharply as possible on that communicator of human reality that best relates in an integrated way to the many dimensions of that totality," namely, the symbol.[149] Since we are in fact seeking methods capable of transforming Christians in their totality, we will follow Conn's advice and focus our attention on the role of symbols—and by implication, imagination—in promoting conversion. We have already made a good start in examining the image-focused strategies of transformative learning and conceptual change. However, the transformation of meaning perspectives does not necessarily amount to conversion in the fuller Christian sense. If we are to address the particular dilemma of contemporary U.S. Catholics beyond the more general struggle of people to make sense of the postmodern world, then we need to push beyond transformative learning to conversion. As we do so, it will be convenient to organize the following strategies for converting the imagination into the same three phases enumerated above.

Phase I: Disrupting the Imagination

The first step in inviting a conversion of the imagination involves a moment of crisis.[150] Where above I described the moment of crisis in terms of a challenge to previous knowing, numerous authorities point out that the most forceful (and potentially most effective) challenge is a disruption of the way one imagines.[151] Jesus' image of a Samaritan man stopping to care for the victim lying on the roadside would have

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[149] Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 75-6; cf. 150.

[150] Craig Dykstra calls it the phase of "discovery" (Dykstra, *Vision and Character*, 81) and James Loder the period of "conflict" (James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 31).

[151] Ray Hart employs the phrase "imaginative shock" to describe this sort of disruption (*Unfinished Man*, 216). Hart notes that "imaginative shock" is the mental correlate of the "ontological shock" described by Tillich.

precipitated such an imaginative disruption for his Jewish audience, disturbing their accustomed way of envisioning this despised social group.[152] Real-life tragedies can have a similar effect: The image of a loved one lying in a casket or of oneself stuck in an office cubicle for the rest of one's life can provoke major disruptions in one's view of life.

Such disruptions shake up one's imaginative syntheses and ossified categories of thought. They force one to reactivate the imagination, which originally generated those images and categories but then grew complacent once those images and categories were confirmed by subsequent experience. Imagining anew, one begins to ask questions again and to reexamine ontological possibilities. This disruption is not identical with conversion, but it opens one up to the possibility of conversion. It creates the space wherein conversion might take hold.

As Hart explains, the imagination is disrupted "only by language spoken in its own tongue," that is, the first-order language of metaphor, symbol, and poetry.[153] Language that does not engage the emotions or penetrate to the level of one's being whence meaning is constructed and from which one spontaneously lives does not disturb or even significantly alter one's thinking.[154] Even within the realm of symbol, not all images are equally effective to this end, for some bear greater disruptive potential than

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[152] Though our focus is on imaginative disruption as conducing to conversion, it is important to note that such an experience of disruption can cut both ways. The image of Catholic priests abusing children so shocked the imaginations of many Catholics that it disrupted their whole image of the Church and precipitated their departure from the Catholic community.

[153] Hart, *Unfinished Man*, 216; cf. Haughton, *The Transformation of Man*, 136. As Richard Lennan argues and as I will explain further in subsequent chapters, both metaphorical and critically reflective language play crucial roles in the Christian life. (See Richard Lennan, "The Church as Sacrament of Hope," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011), 274.) However, when it comes to the initial invitation to conversion, the first-order language of the imagination is indispensable.

[154] This was the central import of much of the transformative learning and conceptual change research discussed above.

others. The "classics" David Tracy describes in *The Analogical Imagination* (which we discussed in Chapter Two) are an example of a class of symbols with this special potential. Classics, Tracy claims, facilitate the sort of journey of intensification through which contemporary persons might experience an encounter with the "uncanny," that is, with something supremely meaningful that breaks one out of the flatness of postmodern culture.[155] The classic unsettles us and provokes us to think that "something else might be the case."[156] Because it evokes our deepest human concerns, engaging the classic compels us to confront questions of profound existential meaning. Religious classics in particular—for example, the Exodus, the crucifix, the Buddha, Gandhi—draw us into an encounter with reality as a whole and with the Source of all that is.[157] They attract us, but at the same time they baffle us and confound our comfortable ways of understanding and imagining.

As Tracy explains, "The classic images for the Christian are those related to that event [viz., God's self-manifestation in Jesus the Christ] and that person: the dialectics of the symbols of cross-resurrection-incarnation."[158] William Lynch affirms that Jesus Christ is "in a completely literal way, the basic image of faith."[159] Not insignificantly, Lynch adds, "It seems to me that if Christ is the most central image of faith he is also the

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[155] Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 362. Richard Kearney makes a similar argument regarding the function of the "sublime" in Kant's *The Critique of Judgment*. (See *The Wake of Imagination*, 175.)

[156] Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 102.

[157] Susan Langer likewise notes the inescapable draw of religious symbols: "The contemplation of sacra invites a certain intellectual excitement….the excitement of *realizing* life and strength, manhood, contest, and death" (Susan Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 152).

[158] Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 249.

[159] Lynch, *Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination*, 96.

most bothersome image of faith."[160] Indeed, Jesus of Nazareth disrupts many of our categories and expectations: In his person, God manifests Godself, not in power and might, but in humility and weakness.[161] Through this one man, who lived in a particular time and a particular place, people of every nation and every age receive the offer of salvation. Perhaps most shockingly of all, it is Jesus' ignominious death that restores the possibility of life for God's children.[162] In this manner, the image of Jesus Christ disrupts the complacent imagination and inspires an "ironic imagination," the imagination Lynch believes proper to Christian faith.

Jesus' invitation to a new manner of imagining is an indispensable element in the economy of salvation. Its significance becomes more apparent when we consider that humanity's rejection of God was (and is) in large part a failure of the imagination. Paul explains, "Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" (Rom 1:22-23; cf. 2 Cor 4:4). In other words, human beings were beholden to images of their own making and consequently lacked awareness of their inadequacy, which we identified above as a prerequisite for conversion. In response to this state of affairs, God condescended to accommodate humanity's fallen condition and sent a true image of Godself, Jesus the Son, to correct human imaginations.[163] As the one true image of the living God, Jesus holds a unique power to confound misguided

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[160] Ibid., 121.

[161] Cf. 1 Cor 1:25

[162] Lynch places this irony—that of the image of the curse being converted into the image of the blessing—at the very heart of the ironic imagination: "To believe in this irony is precisely faith" (*Images of Faith*, 162).

[163] Cf. Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15.

imaginations, bestow meaning on life, and constitute a new reality for those who pursue this new vision.[164] That new vision and reality is expressed in a definitive way in Jesus' symbol of the "reign of God."[165] I will explore the import of this symbol in greater depth in the following chapter, particularly as it is evoked by Jesus' parables.

Phase II: Reintegrating the Psyche

Once the imagination has been disrupted, one needs time and support to cope with the shock.[166] In our discussion of transformative learning, we recognized the necessity of attending to learners' emotional state as their world is turned upside-down. All the recommendations discussed there apply here as well. The supporting role of community is particularly relevant. For one thing, observes Conn, "all personal conversions are so intrinsically dependent on the quality and vitality of the symbols and stories available in one's community."[167] Not only does the Christian community "tradition" (i.e., hand on) the symbols that prompt conversion; it also provides a supportive environment and mentoring relationships in the context of which one can begin to make sense of those disconcerting symbols and eventually develop fluency with them. Hence, intentionality concerning the supporting community's use of symbols is of the utmost importance for

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[164] Cf. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 127; Anthony Godzieba, "From the Editor," *Horizons* 41, no. 2 (December 2014), vi.

[165] While maintaining Jesus as the central image of faith, Lynch also asserts that the "ultimate image" is that of a new heaven and a new earth (*Images of Faith*, 165). Lynch does not contradict himself, for the image of Jesus is only properly understood in relation to the image of the reign of God that Jesus put at the center of his ministry.

[166] Loder describes this phase as an "interlude for scanning" during which time one engages in further dismantling erroneous ways of thinking, wondering, waiting, and grasping for solutions (*The Transforming Moment*, 32).

[167] Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 125; cf. 133; cf. Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 307.

facilitating converts' adjustment given the strong influence mental images exert on people's affectivity.

Robert Doran has made this concern a central theme in his work on "psychic conversion," which sheds considerable light on the sort of support converts need. Doran describes the exigency motivating his work in these terms:

> The role of the neglected psyche in the reconstitution of humanity is central. We might say that even now, at the tether of its exasperation with the blindness of biased practicality to its enriching potentialities, the psyche is projecting those very images that are needed for the insights, the judgments, and the decisions through which alone we can reverse the longer cycle of decline.[168]

Conversion in the full sense cannot be realized simply by teaching the right propositional statements, nor is it enough to show people the right images. As an additional condition, the psyche (i.e., the human being's sensitive consciousness) must first be freed up to generate and receive the images required for intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving action in the course of daily life (e.g., personalized images of the reign of God). Furthermore, even once the free flow of salutary images is established, there remains the matter of bringing one's existential spontaneity into correspondence with the vision of the Christian life afforded by those images. Psychic conversion is the achievement of this integration, "the acquisition of the capacity for internal symbolic communication among spirit, psyche, and organism."[169]

Doran's notion of psychic conversion supplies the valuable insight that the psyche is not merely a nuisance to be assuaged in order to prevent a sabotaging of the transformation of the intellect. Neither, I might add, is emotional support beneficial only

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[168] Doran, *Psychic Conversion*, 145.

[169] Ibid., 222.

to the extent that it furthers cognitive development. Rather, the psyche is an indispensable collaborator in the conversion of the human person and in God's solution to the problem of evil. Psychic conversion is the achievement of a new level in the functioning of the sensitive dimension of the human person corresponding to the new form of consciousness described in the previous chapter as a "second naiveté". As Doran says, "The existential and psychic complement to the disinterestedness of the pure desire to know is a movement toward the second innocence of agape…It is a movement toward the non-alienation of those who are free to seek only the kingdom of God and his righteousness."[170]

How, then, is psychic conversion facilitated and supported? As we might expect, Doran claims that the process can be aided symbolically. Most basically, prompting psychic conversion involves learning to attend to one's mental images and the feelings they evoke. To the extent that one increases one's awareness of how one spontaneously responds to different images, one is better able to modify those responses and so bring them into ever closer alignment with the objective scale of values.[171] Doran's recommendations may recall for the reader Mezirow's prescription to help learners discern the context of their former views, beliefs, and feelings as might the sort of consciousness-raising facilitated by Saint Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises.[172] For his part,

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[170] Robert M. Doran, *Subject and Psyche: Ricoeur, Jung, and the Search for Foundations*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1977), 178.

[171] Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 32; Doran, *Psychic Conversion*, 103-4.

[172] In all likelihood this affinity is not coincidental given the fact that Doran is a Jesuit formed in the tradition of the Exercises. On a related note, Robert Imbelli suggests that the Greek term for conversion, "metanoia," might also be translated as "consciousness raising" (*Rekindling the Christic Imagination Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization.* (Liturgical Press, 2014), 54).

Doran emphasizes the value of explanatory narrative for such consciousness-raising.[173] He maintains that, through telling one's personal story, one is better able to objectify, interpret, affirm, and evaluate the mental images and symbols that influence one's feelings and behavior.

Doran's notion of psychic conversion also goes beyond the fostering of attentiveness suggested by Mezirow insofar as the former devotes greater attention to the possibilities of actively modifying one's spontaneous desires and affective responses. The necessity of this psychic training is evident in light of our anthropological explorations in Chapter Two, which yielded the insight that, in the context of life's quotidian tasks and situations, we operate most often on the basis of our spontaneous imaginings and feelings rather than discursive reasoning. Because it is on this level that we primarily live, conversion must transform people in their spontaneous manner of imagining, feeling, desiring, and relating if it is to truly reorient their living toward love of God and neighbor. Indeed, from the Christian perspective, a change that impacts only the way one thinks in the tranquil confines of a classroom or study leaves much to be desired.

Doran highlights the role of persuasion in effecting change at this deeper level.[174] Even once one recognizes intellectually the worthwhileness of Christian values, it requires further effort and persuasion—by oneself and others—to fully embody those values. Communal persuasion might come in the form of praise for one's triumphs of virtue and accountability for one's shortcomings. Yet, for as helpful as the community can be in this capacity, Doran is careful to point out that the willingness to submit to the

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[173] See Doran, *Psychic Conversion*, 204, 211.

[174] See ibid., 148.

persuasion of others in the first place (not to mention full religious conversion) can only come through God's grace.[175]

Doran discusses these factors in psychic conversion primarily with reference to the context of clinical psychotherapy, but he does acknowledge the viability of other approaches as well.[176] Religious retreats, group workshops, and classroom instruction are all contexts in which the community can facilitate and support psychic conversion.[177]

Phase III: Reintegrating the Imagination

Like conversion in general, psychic conversion is an ongoing process. Even after the definitive experience of conversion in which one accepts God as the focal point of one's meaning-construction and living, one continues to imagine anew, which necessitates continuous reintegration and realignment of the psyche, intellect, and will. For this reason we cannot clearly separate this phase of conversion from the next. Likewise, the final phase we will examine here, the integration of a new form of imagination, should not be presumed to follow neatly upon the prior phase. Subtle changes in the affect effect the imagination and vice versa. Nevertheless, for the sake of

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[175] Ibid., 150-2.

[176] Theologian Timothy O'Connell in his book *Making Disciples* discusses a technique called "Neuro-Linguistic Programming," which serves a similar purpose. NLP employs clinical strategies such as guiding subjects to associate or dissociate from particular mental images and memories and helping people to negotiate troublesome feelings through imaginative exercises. (See Timothy E. O'Connell, *Making Disciples: A Handbook of Christian Moral Formation* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 106.)

[177] Doran has also endorsed Eugene Gendlin's method of "focusing". (See Eugene T. Gendlin, *Focusing*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1981).) Towards the end of *Stages of Faith*, James Fowler describes the role of these sorts of experiences and methods in facilitating people's reworking or "recapitulating" their images of power following conversion (see *Stages of Faith*, 286-91). Specifically, Fowler mentions consistent experiences of community worship and education as well as individual or small-group prayer, spiritual direction (including guided meditations), and psychotherapy. He also references psychoanalyst William Meissner as someone who has explored this process of recapitulation in greater depth.

clarity, we will focus in this section on how the imagination can be reintegrated following a disruption.

According to James Loder, this period of reintegration is characterized by constructive acts of imagination, the release of tension created by the initial conflict, an experience of openness to new ideas and images, and interpretation (i.e., application) of a new imaginative synthesis in one's world.[178] Before converted subjects can coherently reinterpret their world, they must reconstruct an imaginative synthesis to replace the one that was disrupted. Obvious though it seems, this fact is often overlooked. Too often parents, educators, and community leaders, overwhelmed by the ubiquity and seductiveness of degrading images in popular media and advertising, default to simply criticizing these images and prohibiting young people from looking at and listening to them. Given the ceaseless manner in which images present themselves to the human consciousness, this approach is doomed to fail from the start. As H. Richard Niebuhr explains, "The errors and superstitions fostered by bad imagination in this realm cannot be overcome by eliminating ideas of self and of value for selves but only by more adequate images of the same order."[179] In other words, the only viable solution is to populate people's imaginations with salutary images and to help them to imagine in a manner more consistent with Jesus' vision of the reign of God.

Christian symbols are able to function in this double capacity as disruptors of distorted imagination and integrators of healthy imagination. Doran's notion of

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[178] See Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 32-4.

[179] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 79. Fowler likewise notes the necessity of reworking or "recapitulating" old images and the negative consequences of naive attempts to simply reject old images or leave them behind. (See *Stages of Faith*, 288.)

"anagogic" symbols pertains to this second mode. Doran defines the anagogic symbol as "the transformation of psychic energy by grace,"[180] typically in the subject's dreaming.[181] Following Lonergan, Doran maintains that these anagogic symbols play a crucial role in the divine solution to the problem of human evil. In this role, they serve a double purpose: first, they facilitate the integration of the whole human person, who experiences an unending tension between limitation and transcendence, between creaturely needs and a transcendent vocation; and, second, they make possible humans' overcoming the struggle between good and evil. Doran elaborates, "as sacramental transformations of psychic energy, these symbols give what they manifest,"[182] that is, they "simultaneously reflect and bring about the conversion of human sensitivity to participation in the divinely originated solution to the problem of evil."[183] Through them, God operates upon the psyche so as to lead human beings into cooperation with the work of ushering in the reign of God.

Anagogic symbols are thus a manifestation of God's grace, without which human beings would not be able to overcome evil or even to achieve the life of faith, hope, and love for which God created humanity. Lonergan explains the function of these symbols this way: "since faith gives more truth than understanding comprehends, since hope reinforces the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know, man's sensitivity needs symbols that unlock its transforming dynamism and bring it into harmony with the

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[180] Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 289-90.

[181] One finds ample biblical support for the idea that God communicates with human beings through their dreams. Cf. Genesis 15:1; 37:5-9; 41:1-7; 46:2; Judges 7:13-15; Job 4:13-16; Daniel 2:19; Matthew 1:20.

[182] Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 291.

[183] See Doran, *Psychic Conversion*, 242.

vast but impalpable pressure of the pure desire, of hope, and of self-sacrificing charity."[184] In other words, these divinely bestowed symbols provide human beings with the material means of realizing their spiritual vocation.

Though Doran's treatment of anagogic symbols focuses on symbols encountered in dreams, it draws our attention to the broader category of divinely revealed symbols.[185] To be sure, God's self-revelation is not limited to oneiric symbols. The functions of anagogic symbols noted above—integrating the human person and drawing humans toward their eschatological finality—are also fulfilled by the images of Scripture, the sacraments of the Church, and the witness of holy people, to name a few examples. Each of these symbols represents an instance of God leading human beings through material and psychological phenomena toward spiritual realities that they could not grasp otherwise.

It hardly needs saying that engaging these divinely revealed symbols goes far beyond the strategies for "establishing firm ground in a new place" described in the transformative learning literature. While supporting people in new roles and providing the language people need to understand changes in their meaning framework can certainly help them to consummate their conversion, such strategies will never lead to a complete reorientation in their living without the intervention of God's grace. For this reason, any Christian striving in earnest to facilitate conversion in themselves or others

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[184] Lonergan, *Insight*, 744.

[185] Doran provides this reason for focusing on dream symbols and their exploration in psychotherapy: "I grant a privileged role to dreams in the ongoing commerce of the poles of the subjective dialectic because their elemental symbolic expressions of the energic complexes of the sensitive psyche are less under the control of the repressive censorship of unwilling intentionality" (*Psychic Conversion*, 269).

must look to utilize the symbols God has given us for the purpose of facilitating a transformation of the whole person—intellect, will, imagination, and affect. The opportunities for making use of revelatory symbols to this end are legion. Pastoral counseling, liturgy, and art (film, music, literature, visual and performance art) all carry their unique potential.[186] However, it is the possibilities available to us in the realm of religious education that will occupy our attention in the final two chapters of this dissertation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked to the fields of transformative learning and conceptual change to learn what we can from them for the purpose of helping American Catholics develop a form of consciousness that is more adequate to the demands of postmodern culture. While these secular fields have much to offer us, it has become clear from our discussion of conversion that they are not sufficient for achieving the ends aspired to by Christian religious educators. Religious educators would thus do well to appropriate the methods of these educational fields while also looking to the resources of Christian faith for what it alone can contribute to the work of promoting conversion. Religious educators also do well to utilize these pedagogical resources—whether secular or religious—with a sensitivity to their historical-cultural context. Among the various strategies and approaches explored in this chapter, we have discerned at least three

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[186] For an example in pastoral counseling see Conn, *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence*; in literature see the writings of C. S. Lewis, Flannery O'Connor, and Graham Greene.

common responsibilities or phases in the pedagogical process—disrupting learners' imaginations, providing support during the transition, and facilitating a new integration. Although all three are always necessary in some form or another, certain phases may be more or less crucial in different contexts.

In our present postmodern context, disruption and dis-integration of the imagination is the everyday reality for many American Catholics. (Such was the argument of Chapter One, where I highlighted the serious challenges to faith caused by this disruption.) Yet, what appears a challenge from one perspective can be seen as an opportunity from another. In previous eras, religious educators had to struggle mightily to break through Catholics' complacent assumptions about faith and reality as a whole, and many Catholics went through their whole lives never thinking to question accepted views of God, the world, or the Church. Today far less is taken for granted. Fewer people identify with the Catholic Church, but at the same time a movement of spiritual seeking and openness to discovering God's work in a variety of forms has seized large segments of the world's population. This openness represents a major opportunity for today's religious educators. Therefore, while the need to unsettle the complacent undoubtedly remains, the main work today lies in helping Catholics to synthesize a new vision of faithful living and to live into that vision.

Fortunately, this is a work well underway. Today's religious educators have the benefit of following upon the precedent of gifted pedagogues and scholars who have addressed similar challenges in their own historical and social contexts. Although some of them taught long ago, others are contemporary thinkers who have wrestled with many

of the postmodern challenges addressed in this dissertation. Examining the work of the latter especially will enable us to build upon the more general strategies for converting imaginations discussed in this chapter and thereby develop a pedagogical approach designed with particular attention to the need for post-critical consciousness in our time.

Chapter 5

Pedagogical Foundations for Converting the Imagination

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord…
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together."

- Isaiah 40: 3, 5

Introduction

I have been arguing that many American Catholics' current struggles in faith have resulted in great part from the failure of their collective cognitive development to keep pace with the emergence of new cognitive demands in postmodernity. Drawing upon the research of scholars like Robert Kegan, James Fowler, and Jack Mezirow, I have proposed that an evolution in consciousness will be necessary if these people are to continue finding meaning for their lives in the Christian faith. This evolution in consciousness will crucially involve (as do all such evolutions) a transformation of the ways people imagine.

In the preceding chapter, I examined research from secular and Christian educators that demonstrates the general possibility of such transformation and that presents numerous approaches for realizing this possibility. This body of research also points to the many additional benefits of an imagination-focused pedagogy. For one, such a pedagogy operates in accord with the dynamics of human cognition that we explored in Chapter Two, attending to the images that underlie learners' mental categories and habits of thought. Engaging cognition at this level facilitates the occurrence of insights and learners' rapid grasp of meaning. It also promotes learner interest, motivation, and ability to apply learning in meaningful ways. Furthermore, placing symbols at the center of the educational process creates pedagogical anchors that provide continuity in learning from one year to the next and facilitate the integration and deepening of learning. Such an approach is conducive to meeting the learning needs of people at all stages of cognitive

development and from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and faith traditions.[1] Perhaps

most importantly for religious educators, symbol is the form of expression that is most

adequate to mediating God's self-revelation and the human responses and participatory

knowing elicited by revelation.

Having acknowledged these many benefits, I now intend to advance the

discussion beyond the previous chapter's general treatment of transforming imaginations

to a discussion of specifically pedagogical (versus clinical, liturgical, etc.) approaches

suggested by prominent Christian educators. To this discussion I bring a particular

concern for how these educators' work can help us meet the educational exigencies that

we identified in the preceding chapters. The reader will recall that the overarching goal

established for the current project is the reintegration of the lives of American Catholics.

Our investigation of the research in Chapters Three and Four converged upon several key

pedagogical strategies for facilitating the sort of transformation that leads to reintegration.

The most important of these were:

- attend to the needs and limits of human cognition (i.e., respect human

  limitation),

- promote transcendence of egocentrism and openness to God's grace (i.e.,

  facilitate human transcendence),

- recruit the active participation of learners in their own transformation,

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[1] While most people may lack the intellectual differentiation of consciousness necessary for making sense of theoretical formulations, symbolic thinking is within the capacity of virtually all human beings. (Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 276; ibid., "Sacralization and Secularization," 1973, 11-12.) On the advantages of symbol-centered learning for people from a variety of faith traditions, see Patrick R. Manning, "Engaging Our Symbols, Sharing Our World: Forming Young People Around Symbols for Participation in the Public Sphere," *Religious Education* 109, no. 4 (2014): 440–54.

- provide emotional and communal support during the transition.

In Chapter Four we saw that attending to these goals consistently gave rise to a threefold pattern in the transformative process: (1) engage and disrupt current ways of thinking/imagining, (2) support the expansion of learners' thinking/imagining, and (3) invite willing appropriation of the new manner of thinking/imagining.

In this chapter, I begin to put flesh on the skeleton of this transformative, imagination-focused pedagogy. I start by examining how the above-mentioned strategies found expression in the teaching of Jesus, who is the model *par excellence* for all Christian educators. In the latter half of the chapter, I supplement this discussion of Jesus' teaching by surveying the contributions of several contemporary educators, who present helpful proposals for adapting Jesus' image-centered pedagogy for the present context.[2] In so doing, I aim to establish the foundations of a pedagogical approach to converting the imaginations of today's Christian disciples.

Jesus' Teaching for the Conversion of Imaginations

General Overview

Regardless of whether one professes Jesus' divinity or not, there is no denying his pedagogical genius. His preaching and prophetic actions so inspired and provoked his hearers that people continue to recount them 2,000 years later. Those of us who call ourselves Christians believe that, beyond being a great pedagogue, Jesus was God's definitive self-revelation to humanity. In his teaching we recognize, not just an

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[2] In order to avoid unnecessary repetition, I will consign to the footnotes suggestions from other educators that merely reiterate or reinforce rather than further developing Jesus' pedagogy.

exceptional cleverness and penetrating insight into the inner workings of human minds and hearts, but God's own teaching incarnate.

Jesus intended his teaching to promote wholeness in those who received it (see Jn 10:10). He warned against that which divides one within oneself (see Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13) and admonished his disciples to devote their full selves to the one thing that matters above all else: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind" (Lk 10:27).[3] Jesus did not need the methods of modern cognitive science to recognize that singleness of vision is the key to unity within oneself.[4] All that he said and did, therefore, aimed at drawing others into his vision of reality as originating from and ordered to God's love, a vision he conveyed through the symbol "the reign of God."[5]

There is a virtual consensus among biblical scholars that this symbol constitutes the focal point of Jesus' preaching and ministry.[6] All that he said and did flowed from the horizon of meaning emanating from this symbol and aimed at inviting others into that

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[3] Jesus was quick to add that one should also love one's neighbor as oneself, but even this second command remains subordinate to the first. We are to love neighbor and self first and foremost out of love for God. (Cf. Saint Augustine, *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1996), I.20-21 (pp.114-5).)

[4] To this point, Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness" (Mt 6:22-23).

[5] Cf. Bernard Brandon Scott, *Jesus, Symbol Maker for the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 16.

[6] Cf. Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 1; Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus*, trans. Raymond Lord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 51; John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 23; Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 6; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina 2 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002), 71; Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 44; Bruce Chilton, "Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: I-Ma* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 521; José Antonio Pagola, *Jesus, an Historical Approximation* (Miami, Fla: Convivium Press, 2009), 125. It is Norman Perrin who deserves credit for properly classifying the reign of God as a symbol rather than a concept or myth. (See *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*; cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 2.)

manner of imagining reality.[7] Jesus gave expression to this vision through diverse signs including proverbs, parenetical sayings, beatitudes, apocalyptic images, and prophetic words and gestures.[8] The most distinctive form of his teaching, however, was the parable. The Gospels even go so far as to say, "he did not speak to them except in parables" (Mk 4:34; cf. Mt 13:34-35). In this sense, Jesus' parables constitute the primary source for our understanding of the symbol of God's reign.[9]

The word "parable" (*mashal* in Hebrew, *parabole* in Greek) covers a range of meanings, including a comparison, symbol, proverb, riddle, simile, similitude, allegory, or illustration. The term is appropriately vague since Jesus spoke parables in a variety of forms and lengths.[10] C. H. Dodd's definition manages, without imposing restrictive categories, to capture how Jesus employed parables. According to him, "the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."[11] Like symbols in general, it is parables' indeterminate nature that makes them particularly suitable mediators of Jesus' vision of the reign of God.[12] Rather than illustrating information that could stand on its own, Jesus' parables prompt the hearer's participation in the reality of the reign of God to which they refer. Indeed, this participation goes beyond the merely cognitive. Pheme Perkins explains, "we

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[7] Cf, Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 2; Chilton, "Kingdom of God," 516.

[8] Cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 128; Pheme Perkins, *Jesus as Teacher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[9] Perrin, *Jesus and the Language*, 1.

[10] Many scholars have offered their own categorizations of the parables, but in practice these distinctions tend to break down as arbitrary designations.

[11] C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961), 5.

[12] Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 11.

respond to a parable on many levels with our minds, with our feelings, and perhaps even with an unconscious resonance to its archetypal themes. Such levels of response," she adds, "are the ground of any conversion."[13]

Perkins's observation highlights why Jesus' teaching—his parables especially—present fertile ground for our thinking about the sort of pedagogy that is capable of transforming imaginations, and through them, the whole person. As the following sections will demonstrate, Jesus' parable-telling incorporates many of the pedagogical strategies discussed in the previous chapter. Though we must be careful not to anachronistically project modern ideas and methods onto Jesus' teaching, the truth of the matter is that many of the methods we have examined are merely new manifestations of old pedagogical insights. In the following sections, I will take a closer look at the "grammar" or dynamics of Jesus' parables in order to better understand how they prompt a conversion of the imagination.[14] My examination will follow a similar pattern to that employed in Chapter Four, for in Jesus' parables we observe a recurring pedagogical pattern of (1) engaging the audience's imagination, (2) disrupting their imagination (while still offering support), and (3) inviting appropriation of a new way of imagining.[15]

Parables as Engaging the Imagination

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[13] Pheme Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 4.

[14] Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 2.

[15] I do not presume to encapsulate Jesus' pedagogical genius within these three strategies. Rather, drawing upon the research of the previous chapter in this way allows us to focus in on the dynamics of Jesus' parables that make them so conducive to inviting conversion of the imagination.

Though the authors we discussed in the previous chapter seldom made the point explicit, it was nonetheless evident how necessary it is to engage people's imaginations en route to transforming them.[16] This fact is perhaps so obvious that we can understand why these authors tend to skip over the initial moment of engagement in their discussions of the process and jump straight to the moment of disruption. Indeed, the two moments frequently overlap, chronologically speaking, in the transformative event. Jesus' parables are no exception in this regard, and yet his mastery of engaging imaginations is so striking that it merits at least a brief discussion here.

Jesus possessed a true talent for speaking to the situation of his audience and for expressing his message in language that captured people's attention.[17] He tended not to speak in maxims and abstractions but rather to paint stories in living color, an approach that Dodd characterizes as Jesus' "realism".[18] The events he described in his parables corresponded to the everyday activities of his hearers—casting nets in the sea, laboring in vineyards, baking bread, shepherding sheep. Conspicuously missing among these activities are woodworking and construction, which one would expect to hear plenty about from a man who presumably spent the better part of three decades observing his

[16] By contrast, other religious educators like Thomas Groome and Maria Harris are quite explicit about the importance of engaging learners' imaginations. (See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Harper San Francisco, 1991), 205; Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).)

[17] Groome attributes great importance to this pedagogical strategy in his approach. (See *Sharing Faith*, 155-214.) Anne Marie Mongoven likewise affirms the importance of beginning learning on people's own terms. (See Anne Marie Mongoven, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis: How We Share the Fire in Our Hearts* (Paulist Press, 2000), 125.)

[18] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 10. As Dodd puts it, Jesus' parables "are the natural expressions of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures rather than conceives it in abstractions" (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 5). For contemporary perspectives on the importance of the concrete and particular in religious education, see Nicola Slee, "'Heaven in Ordinarie': The Imagination, Spirituality and the Arts in Religious Education," in *Priorities in Religious Education: A Model for the 1990s and Beyond*, ed. Brenda Watson (Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press, 1992), 54, and Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 41-59.

father and working himself as a craftsman. The lack of such stories perhaps points to the intentionality with which Jesus spoke to the experiences of his audience.[19] Another way Jesus heightened the realism of his parables was by portraying complex characters. These include a rich master who expects to reap where he did not sow, a despised Samaritan who shows uncommon compassion, and a man who gathers the outcast into his home for a great banquet and then casts out a poor man who lacks the proper attire. Such characters reflect the complexity of human nature, compelling more thought and self-identification than would caricatures and stereotypes.[20]

In addition to describing familiar activities and realistic characters, Jesus told parables about the objects and events of the natural world that constituted the background of everyday life in first-century Galilee and Judea. He described the natural beauty of flowers, birds who neither sow nor reap, and seeds that sprout into plants. Some scholars have even suggested that, while telling stories, Jesus took cues from his immediate setting in order to add to their realism.[21] For example, James Martin describes arriving at the so called "Bay of Parables" on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and finding himself standing upon terrain marked by rocky ground, fertile ground, and even a thorn bush— precisely what Jesus described in the parable of the sower (see Mt 13:1-23; Mk 4:1-34;

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[19] On a similar note, Michael Corso has commented, "The teacher who seeks to communicate the message of Christianity to a particular culture conducts various sorts of research on that culture in order to discover the commonsense language and symbols which will most effectively embody and realize the good news of Jesus Christ" (Michael J. Corso, "Christian Religious Education for Conversion: A Lonerganian Perspective" (Unpublished dissertation, Boston College, 1994), 422). That Jesus conducted such "research" is evident in examples like these from his storytelling.

[20] Cf. Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus*, 156.

[21] See Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 35.

Lk 8:4-18).[22] Jesus also drew liberally from the imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures, which would have been so familiar to his mostly Jewish audience. In so doing, he often heightened the realism of these images by reducing the cosmic language of Scripture to a more personal scale.[23] For example, rather than speaking in grandiose terms of God and the nation of Israel (e.g., Ps 14:7; Isa 1:4; Jer 3:6), Jesus preferred to compare God's action to that of a shepherd tending his flock (Mt 18:12) or a woman looking for a coin (Lk 15:8-10).

Whether describing everyday activities, realistic characters, scenes from nature, or Scriptural images, Jesus kept his teaching rooted in concrete images and stimulating symbols. To be sure, he also taught in moral exhortations and the legal language of his Jewish tradition, but these were not the starting point for his teaching and he evidently did not consider them adequate to his message. His teaching embodied the insight articulated by Avery Dulles that laws and doctrines "live off the power of the revelatory symbols."[24] Like concepts and theories more generally, laws and doctrines are more remote from the religious experiences whence they derive and more limiting of meaning and feeling than are symbols. Symbols engage people more readily, mediate the reality of God's mystery more powerfully, and are more congruent with common sense living and

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[22] James Martin, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 198.

[23] Cf. Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus*, 22, 35.

[24] Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1983), 143. Parker Palmer strikes a similar cord when he writes, "Indeed, if truth is personal, then creeds and institutions are only the objectified shells of the truth-seeking life that pulses in every human heart" (Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 50).

practical and dramatic patterns of consciousness.[25] Once experience and symbol have drawn one into mystery, however, more technical language can serve the useful purpose of clarifying, extending, and differentiating one's thinking.[26] Still, image and symbol offer the most propitious starting point for teaching about God and God's reign.

This much is evident in the teaching of Jesus, who deliberately spoke his message in imaginative language and on the scale of everyday life. He made his hearers feel, see, taste, smell, and hear the reality of God's reign. In this way, he showed great attention to the needs and limits of human cognition and invited his audience into active participation in the realities he taught about—two of the key pedagogical exigencies mentioned above. Though Jesus would not have described what he was doing in these modern terms, he surely knew that such an approach was the best way to prepare his hearers to receive a new vision of the reign of God and to engender trust in that vision.[27]

Parables as Disrupting (and Supporting) the Imagination[28]

Jesus clearly recognized the pedagogical necessity of respecting the inclinations and limitations of the human mind. Nevertheless, he also recognized the spiritual

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[25] For this reason, Niebuhr asserts, "the preacher's use of the dramatic image comes nearer the requirements of the reasoning heart than does the theologian's application of a conceptual pattern" (H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 92).

[26] Cf. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 294, n.57.

[27] Cf. Pagola, *Jesus*, 126; Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus*, 76. Consider this pedagogical approach in comparison with modern commercials, which attempt to establish credibility by giving viewers a visual experience of the superiority of a product (e.g., video of their product in action alongside an inferior competitor). (Cf. Paul Messaris, *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (SAGE, 1997), 186.)

[28] In Chapter Four, I discussed strategies of disruption and support in two distinct sections for the sake of elucidating each. However, I made clear even there that these two elements are seldom cleanly separated in the transformation process. While continuing to acknowledge the importance of both elements, I will treat them together in the present section in order to better represent their interaction.

imperative (another of the exigencies mentioned above) to open up his hearers to divine mystery, inviting them to transcend the constraints of their egocentric perspectives and accustomed ways of thinking.[29] As effective as Jesus' parables were in engaging what was familiar to his audience and presenting his teaching in concrete terms, he never rested upon the familiar and easy for long. More often than not the familiar elements of his teaching quickly gave way to a major disruption. Commentators generally agree that such disruption was the express purpose of Jesus' parables.[30] In the words of Walter Conn, "it is the parable's precise design and purpose to shake the foundations of our safe and comfortable world of convention."[31]

Jesus' parables effect this disruption in a number of ways. First, he constructed narratives in such a manner as to lead the hearer down a seemingly familiar path before delivering an unexpected outcome.[32] One manifestation of this approach is the so called "rule of three," a rhetorical strategy common in folklore in which two instances set up an expectation that is upset by the third.[33] For example, in the parable of the lost sheep in

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[29] This theological imperative is likewise evident in movement 2 of Groome's "shared Christian praxis," which challenges to learners to critically examine their own actions and thinking. (See *Sharing Faith*, 187-214.) For another perspective on generating fruitful conflict in the classroom, see Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 96.

[30] See, e.g., Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 223; Terrence W. Tilley, *Faith: What It Is and What It Isn't* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 85. That Jesus' parables are intended to confuse and discomfort may not be obvious to the average reader. Indeed, many of the parables seem to have perfectly straightforward meanings (e.g,. Mt 13:1-9, 18-23). However, most New Testament scholars agree that explanations of the parables are later insertions of the evangelists. Hence, when I speak of Jesus' parables, I refer primarily to the parables as Jesus told them as opposed to these later versions (as best we can distinguish the two).

[31] Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 213.

[32] Cf. Perkins, *Jesus as Teacher*, 47; Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 29, 100.

[33] Cf. Levine, *Short Stories* by Jesus, 45. This strategy might be thought of as an inversion of the "bridging analogy" strategy discussed in Chapter Four (see John Clement, "The Role of Explanatory Models in

Luke 15, the shepherd realizes that he has lost one of his one hundred sheep and diligently goes out in search of it.[34] In the parable of the lost coin that follows, a woman recognizes that one of ten coins has gone missing, and she diligently searches for it. In the following parable of the prodigal son, the pattern is disrupted when the father with only two sons fails to go in search of the lost son. In fact, according to Levine's interpretation, the father does not even recognize which son he has lost. So concerned is he with the younger son that he is in danger of losing the elder at the end of the story.[35] A similar pattern occurs in the parable of the good Samaritan. All Jews of Jesus' time would have heard the story beginning with a priest and a Levite and expected the third figure of the Scriptural trio, an Israelite, to follow.[36] Instead a Samaritan appears. As Levine playfully suggests, "In modern terms, this would be like going from Larry and Moe to Osama bin Laden."[37] More generally, Jesus seems to have commonly deployed parables and images in pairs and triplets,[38] often developing a theme in one set of parables and then reversing that theme in another set.[39] Making use of a variety of images in this way, Jesus safeguards God's transcendence by preventing the audience from identifying God

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Teaching for Conceptual Change," in *International Handbook of Research on Conceptual Change*, ed. Stella Vosniadou (New York: Routledge, 2008), 417–52).

[34] Here I am following the interpretation of Amy-Jill Levine. (See *Short Stories by Jesus*, 45.)

[35] Cf. ibid. Levine also points out that the parable of the prodigal son disrupts the well-established expectation that it is best to identify with the younger of two sons in a story (e.g., Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob).

[36] Ibid., 94-5. Cf. Ezra 10:5 and Nehemiah 11:3.

[37] Ibid., 95.

[38] See Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 154.

[39] As an example, Crossan contrasts the expected outcomes of one set of parables about servants (the doorkeeper, the overseer, the talents, the throne claimant) with the unexpected outcomes of another set (the unmerciful servant, the servant's reward, the unjust steward, the wicked husbandman) (*In Parables*, 96-119).

or God's reign with any particular image.[40]

Another way Jesus disrupted his hearers' imaginations was by pivoting upon a familiar image into an unexpected vision or meaning.[41] By way of example, in the parable of the mustard seed Jesus describes the seed growing into a large shrub or vegetable with large branches in which "the birds of the air can make nests in its shade" (Mk 4:32).[42] This phrase is likely an illusion to Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Ps 104, Ez 31, Dn 4) in which it is usually a mighty cedar tree giving shade to birds and animals.[43] However, Jesus has unexpectedly substituted the cedar tree with the mustard vegetable, a plant that carried ambivalent connotations for his Jewish audience.[44] This substitution would have had the effect of shaking up the facile categories of his audience, prompting them to think afresh about what God's reign is like. In creating such dramatic contrasts— particularly as set up by the juxtaposition of two fundamentally different categories of reality in a metaphor—Jesus invites a transformation in people's experience of reality that no other mode of language can effect.[45]

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[40] For a modern religious educator's perspective on how to educate people for healthy relationships with religious images, see Anton C Vrame, *The Educating Icon: Teaching Wisdom and Holiness in the Orthodox Way* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999).

[41] The transitions from movement 2 to movement 3 in Groome's shared praxis and from movement 1 to movement 2 in Mongoven's "symbolic catechesis" reflect a similar dynamic, although neither Groome nor Mongoven emphasizes the unfamiliarity or surprise of the new vision to the extent that Jesus' parables do.

[42] The NRSV translates λαχάνων as "shrub," but Levine argues that "vegetable" is the better translation (*Short Stories by Jesus*, 157).

[43] Cf. Crossan, *In Parables*, 105; Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 163-4.

[44] Cf. Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 160-3. Levine argues that the mustard seed is not unambiguously noxious, as some commentators contend.

[45] See Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 195, 202. Perrin's explanation of the effect of metaphor in Jesus' parables is consistent with Robert Masson's account of how metaphor effects "tectonic reconfigurations" in people's thinking (see Chapter Two). Recognizing the unique power of this sort of language, Groome, Harris, Mongoven, and Eileen Mary Daily all give symbol and metaphor a prominent role in their educational approaches. (See Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 197-8; Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 47-50; Mongoven, *Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 87-112.)

Nevertheless, Jesus' use of "pivot" images serves not only to disrupt but also to support his hearers cognitively as they transition into this new experience of reality. Like the "bridges" proposed by Robert Kegan, these pivot images allow the hearer to keep one foot planted in the familiar while stepping with the other into an unfamiliar and uncomfortable world of meaning. Even if Jesus' parable completely overturns the meaning of a particular image, the familiarity of the image itself provides some limited sense of continuity in the hearers' efforts to make sense of reality and their relationship to God.

A third strategy Jesus employed to disrupt his hearers' imaginations (while also attending to their emotional needs) was his use of humor, frequently in the form of exaggeration and hyperbole. For example, Jesus tells a story of a servant who owes 10,000 talents, which in modern terms would be like saying he owed several billion dollars.[46] No single person—no matter how prodigal—could possibly amass such a debt. In another parable a woman hides some yeast in three measures of flour (somewhere between 40 and 60 pounds), a similarly outlandish amount.[47] For the people listening to Jesus as he told these stories, the effect of such comic hyperbole would have been to put them at ease and loosen up their thinking.

Use of humor would thus have been a valuable strategy for Jesus as he endeavored to uproot his audience from their prior assumptions and ingrained ways of

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[46] See Perkins, *Hearing the Parables*, 124. For purposes of comparison, Perkins notes that the annual income for Herod the Great's entire kingdom was 900 talents.

[47] See Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 121.

thinking[48]. As we have seen in previous chapters, human beings instinctively feel threatened when their world of meaning is disrupted. Humor mitigates the sense of perceive threat on the emotional level—even if the cognitive challenge is every bit as poignant—because we associate humor primarily with positive feelings and benign intentions. By adding an element of humor to his parables, Jesus was able to challenge his audience while mitigating the resistance and resentment that his stories might (and often did) elicit.[49] In the words of Levine, "Jesus knew that the best teachings come from stories that make us laugh even as they make us uncomfortable."[50]

Questions also played an important role in Jesus' disruption of imaginations.[51] His parables raise questions about what is most important in life, how to deal with other people, what God expects of us, how to respond to Jesus' message, and how we have been living our lives, among many others.[52] Sometimes Jesus posed these questions explicitly. He asked the lawyer which person in the parable of the good Samaritan had been a neighbor to the victim. In like manner, at the end of the parable of the man with two sons, he asks, "Which of the two did the will of his father?" (Mt 21:31). At other times the questions were merely implicit in the parables. Whether the questions were

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[48] Cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 72-3; Perkins, *Hearing the Parables*, 135.

[49] Cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 72-3; Perkins, *Hearing the Parables*, 109-10, 135.

[50] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 276.

[51] Cf. ibid., 275; Perkins, *Jesus as Teacher*, 49. The ability to pose generative and insight-prompting questions is a hallmark of good teaching. On the essential role of questions in religious education see Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 182-4, and Mongoven, *Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 123.

[52] Because honest questioning is indispensable in the human search for God, in the words of Roger Haight, Jesus (and, by extension, his parables) "will not function as a mediation of God for a person with no religious question" (*Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 200).

stated or implied, it seems that Jesus preferred to leave them open for his hearers to mull over rather than answering them himself.[53]

These various rhetorical strategies at play in the parables—plot twists, pivot images, humor, questions—all serve the purpose of shaking Jesus' audience out of their complacent ways of thinking (or rather assuming) and reactivating their imaginations.[54] Conn describes the parables' effect eloquently: "Having robbed us of the certainties of our given world, they would leave us at the brink of relativity, naked and totally vulnerable before the divine mystery that is God."[55] As capable as Jesus was of speaking to people in their own terms, he clearly told his parables with the intent to discomfort. His parables destroy the hearer's sense of certainty, compelling one to rely upon God rather than oneself.[56]

This is an outcome all of us tend to resist. We have already discussed from a psychological perspective the roots of this instinctual resistance in human affectivity and the desire for ego integrity. Biblical scholars, too, recognize resistance as the natural reaction to challenging teachings like those of Jesus. Levine offers, "As much as we might respect the idea of divine freedom and mystery, we are ultimately more comfortable with answers rather than questions, with the tried and true rather than new

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[53] Cf. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 98; Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 37; Pagola, *Jesus*, 148. Most scholars believe that in many places the evangelists have supplied answers to questions that Jesus himself left open. This strategy of Jesus' recalls the advice of Clement and other educational specialists to resist the urge to resolve students' questions and discomfort too quickly. (Cf. Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 64, 73.)

[54] As Ray Hart puts it, "the parable shocks the intention of a world…in which, and only in which, one can see what the parable says" (*Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 225).

[55] Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 214.

[56] Cf. Pagola, *Jesus*, 126, 143, 152.

thoughts,"[57] with "proclaiming a creed than prompting a conversation or pursuing a call."[58] It is an anxiety-producing experience to have the foundations of our world shaken, and that is precisely what the parable is designed to do. It should perhaps come as little surprise, then, that people resisted the import of Jesus' parables in his own time just as we do today. Indeed, efforts to domesticate Jesus' parables are evident in the Gospels themselves.[59] The evangelists appended explanatory endings and morals to the parables, which may have served a legitimate purpose within their respective communities but which undermine the parables' intended effect. Such is the inevitable result of imposing allegorical interpretations or reified categories upon Jesus' parables: the experience of the reality Jesus intended his parables to mediate is lost. Therefore, suggests Levine, if we are to let Jesus' parables speak as he intended, "We might be better off thinking less about what they 'mean' and more about what they can 'do': remind, provoke, refine, confront, disturb…."[60]

As I conclude this section and anticipate the next, I put Jesus' disruptive approach in context by noting that, for him, such disruption was always a means to an end. In addition to urging reliance on God, Jesus' parables encouraged his disciples to rely more on each other. (This is one more way in which he provided support even as he disrupted people's worlds.) Precisely because Jesus' parables are startling and confusing, they

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[57] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 278.

[58] Ibid., 3.

[59] Cf. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 9, 99; Crossan, *In Parables*, 21; Chilton, "Kingdom of God," 517-8; Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 277.

[60] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 4.

prompt further conversation.[61] Evidence of such conversation comes through in numerous places the Gospels, and the parables continue to generate conversation today.[62] If not conversation about the parables specifically, most of us have had the experience of conversation with others about a complicated film, book, or piece of art that sent our minds racing. We can therefore appreciate the community-forging power of Jesus' parables. For even if others cannot give us the answers we seek, we find comfort in wrestling with the questions together.[63] In just this way, Jesus' parables formed people into community—a foretaste of the reign of God—even as they struggled to understand what his perplexing stories meant.[64]

Parables as Inviting Appropriation of New Ways of Imagining and Living

Jesus told parables with the intent of disrupting people's ways of imagining reality, but he did not do so for the pure pleasure of pulling the rug out from underneath people. Rather, he did so in order to help them imagine reality more adequately. This is to say that Jesus' parables do not deprive the one who hears them of meaning; they beckon one into a richer realm of meaning than anything one has experienced previously. To be more precise, the parables invite one into the world of meaning constituted by Jesus'

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[61] Groome, Mongoven, Harris, Palmer, and many other contemporary educators reaffirm the importance of promoting dialogue not only between teacher and students but also among students themselves. (See Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 244; Mongoven, *Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 126; Harris, *Teaching and Religious Education*, 110-2; Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 17-18.)

[62] See Mk 4:10; Mt 13:10, 13:36.

[63] The reader will recall that Jack Mezirow makes this same point, which we discussed in Chapter Four.

[64] Levine again glosses the matter fittingly: "Jesus knew that the best teaching…comes from stories that community members can share with each other, with each of us assessing the conclusions others draw, and so reassessing our own" (*Short Stories by Jesus*, 275).

experience of God and generated by his symbol of the reign of God and the myth that symbol evokes.[65] Essential to one's entry into that world of meaning (i.e., into the reign of God) is responding to Jesus' invitation to imagine reality as he does. In order to understand how Jesus elicits such participation in this imaginative enterprise, we need to examine more closely the focal symbol of the reign of God.

In Chapter Two, where I first introduced this symbol in the context of my discussion of symbolic revelation, I pointed out that Jesus never offered a clear articulation of its meaning.[66] It even seems at times that Jesus intentionally frustrates his hearers' efforts to understand his meaning. He offered no explanations for his parables.[67] He employed one set of images for God's reign and then employed a different set that seems to contradict the first. He also had an affinity for comparing the reign of God to actions (rather than or in addition to static objects), which has the effect of frustrating our instinctive attempts to visualize God's reign in terms of one or even a few standard images.[68] The reason for Jesus deliberately confusing our understanding of God's reign will become clear in subsequent sections, but for now this leaves us with relatively little to say about the central symbol of his ministry.

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[65] Cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 16; Andrew D. Thompson, *That They May Know You* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1982), 62. Norman Perrin explains that the function of the symbol of the reign of God in Jesus' preaching is to evoke a myth, namely, that of God acting as king on behalf of God's people. (See Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 5, 22.) The reader will recall the relationship we established in Chapter Two among symbol, myth, and world: A myth is a narrative extension of a symbol or set of symbols, and the myth sets up a world.

[66] Cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 11; Chilton, "Kingdom of God," 522.

[67] Biblical scholars generally consider explanations like those in Mk 4:13-20, Lk 18:1, 6-8, and Mt 13:18-23 to be later insertions of the evangelists. (See Pagola, *Jesus*, 127, and Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 226). In a similar vein, Slee emphasizes the importance of religious educators "letting the symbol speak" for itself, tempting though it is to explain ("Heaven in Ordinarie," 55).

[68] Cf. Perkins, *Hearing the Parables*, 90. 94. For example, Jesus compares the reign of God, not to a seed, but to the scattering and growth of that seed (Mk 4:26-29). Again, he compares God's reign, not to a merchant, but to a merchant searching for pearls (Mt 13:45-46).

What *can* we say? To begin with, Jesus' usage of the word translated as "reign," "rule," or "kingdom" (*basileia* in Greek and *malkuth* in Hebrew), primarily denotes God's activity in shaping human experience.[69] Its meaning as a geographic area of rule is secondary, making "reign" a more appropriate translation than the more static "kingdom".[70] According to Jesus, God's reigning or activity in the world involves casting out evil elements (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20), liberating the captive, healing the infirm (Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22), and raising the dead (Mt 11:5). It meets us from the outside and yet is within us (Lk 17:21).[71] Its coming occurs subtly, like a bit of hidden yeast leavening a huge batch of flour (Mt 13:33), and as a gift, like a seed growing through the night (Mk 4:26-27). It reverses the order of things in the world like a landowner who gives the same payment to workers arriving late as to those who began early (Mt 20:1-13). That this activity is manifested in the person of Jesus indicates that God's reign is already here (Lk 17:21) but not yet fully realized (Mk 9:1). Jesus claimed to be ushering in God's reign in his ministry (Mt 11:5; 12:28; Lk 7:22; 11:20), yet invited his disciples to pray for its coming and to work for it themselves (Mt 6:10; 6:33; 7:21 Lk 11:2).

Much hinges upon this final observation, for it suggests that God's reign pertains not just to divine activity but to human affairs as well. As Bruce Chilton explains, "in Jesus' teaching the kingdom is an activity, emanating from God but taking human beings up within its performance in the world."[72] Chilton's point offers us an insight into why Jesus taught in parables and why he crafted them in the form he did. Jesus refrained from

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[69] Chilton, "Kingdom of God," 512.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Cf. ibid., 522.

[72] Cf. ibid., 521.

describing God's reign in literal, explanatory language because it is not a static object or place that can be so described. In the words of Pheme Perkins, Jesus' message about God's reign "is not knowledge to be remembered. It is a reality that is to reshape the whole life of the disciple."[73] Chilton corroborates, "the kingdom of God is not merely a concept, but a task that is ever more necessary."[74] If the reign of God is not a place or a concept but a reality and a task, then, like Godself, it can only be known by participating in it.[75] Hence, Jesus taught about God's reign in parables because, as we have already discussed at length, only the language of symbol and metaphor is capable of facilitating this sort of participatory knowing.

It follows that, if we are to share the vision of the reign of God that Jesus mediated through parables, we need to, in the words of Levine, "take them seriously not as 'meaning' but as soliciting our meaning making."[76] Jesus did not explain his parables and even told seemingly contradictory parables because he sought to draw his hearers into actively imagining reality as ordained by God's rule.[77] It is precisely the parables' lack of obvious meaning that requires one to make an active effort to understand and

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[73] Perkins, *Hearing the Parables*, 9.

[74] Chilton, "Kingdom of God," 522.

[75] See my discussion of "engaged participatory knowing" in Chapter Two. Groome and Harris both emphasize the necessity of striving for this deeper sort of knowledge. (See Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 30, and Harris, *Teaching and Religious Education*, 68, 130.)

[76] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 276. The educational approaches of Groome, Harris, and Palmer all strive to promote learners' active meaning-construction. (See Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 119-31; Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 38-40; Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 69, 80, 82, 99.)

[77] Saint Augustine reinforces the practicality of what we would anachronistically call a "constructivist" approach to teaching: "Regarding each of the things we understand, however, we don't consult a speaker who makes sounds outside us, but the Truth that presides within over the mind itself, though perhaps words prompt us to consult Him" (Augustine, "The Teacher," in *Against Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), XI.38).

imagine in this way.[78] As any experienced teacher knows, providing answers with the appearance of completeness tends to shut down learners' thinking.[79] Attaching a facile interpretation to a parable (as the evangelists often did) is like teaching exclusively through lecture or simplifying a complex advertisement: It might make the message more clear, but it does so at the expense of its power to engage and form the audience's imaginations. Jesus told stories that resisted easy interpretation because the truth of God's reign transcends moral precepts and doctrinal propositions. We know its truth when we participate in it. When Jesus told parables, therefore, he did not tell his audience what to think about the reign of God but rather invited them to "come and see" for themselves (Jn 1:39).[80]

In this sense, the parables are better conceived as exercises of the imagination than fables with clear morals.[81] Put otherwise, the point of the parable lies in what it does to us rather than in the information it conveys. That Jesus' parables do not give us a set of definitive, unambiguous images for God's reign is not a pedagogical shortcoming.[82] More than bestowing a particular set of images, Jesus' parables train us how to imagine as he did. They train us to see beyond reified religious and social categories (e.g., Jew and Samaritan, Pharisee and publican, man and woman) and beyond worldly standards of power and worth (e.g., physical and military strength, wealth, self-reliance). They train us

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[78] Cf. Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus*, 23, 38. In the previous chapter, we saw the same strategy utilized in transformative learning and modern advertising.

[79] Cf. Groome's distinction between "closure" and "disclosure" styles of teaching (*Sharing Faith*, 243-4).

[80] Cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 149; Perrin, *Jesus and the Language*, 202.

[81] Cf. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 87, 117; Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 21, 169, 182; Crossan, *In Parables*, 68; Perkins, *Hearing the Parables*, 39; Pagola, *Jesus*, 126.

[82] This is not to say that Jesus' parables do not have unique pedagogical value. In fact, they do. However, their effectiveness derives, not from the clarity of the images they bestow, but from the manner in which they engage and form one's imagining.

to recognize opportunities for real happiness when they arise. They train us to see ourselves and others as God sees us—with compassion and mercy. Most of all, they train us to keep seeing the world anew and to remain open to God's activity breaking into our lives in ever new and unexpected ways. And yet the word "training" does not do justice to the change parables effect in our imaginations. The change is not a partial or easy one; it is a complete overturning and reorientation of one's imagination. It is, in a word, a conversion.[83]

As with any real conversion, this conversion of the imagination requires a personal decision. Indeed, Jesus constructs his parables so as to invite just such a decision. For example, in the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus abruptly ends the story without telling us the elder son's response to his father's plea. The hearer must fill in what happens next, and how one does so constitutes a judgment that reveals one's presuppositions about God and humanity.[84] In general, Jesus' parables bear the character of an argument that entices the hearer to make a judgment upon the situations Jesus describes.[85] The judgment may be about God, as in the parable of the vineyard workers (Mt 20:1-16), or about Jesus and his mission, as in the parable of the wicked tenants (Mk 12:1-11).[86] Perhaps most often it is a judgment upon oneself elicited before one knows

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[83] B. B. Scott sums up the point nicely: "The parable is an invitation to enter, but in order to enter one must in a sense undergo a conversion, in which the parable becomes a lens refracting everyday experience under the symbol Kingdom of God" (Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 29).

[84] Cf. Perkins, *Hearing the Parables*, 4.

[85] See Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 11, 86.

[86] Cf. Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 230.

that one has condemned oneself, as in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37).[87]

Regardless of whom the object of this judgment turns out to be, Jesus' parables always also prompt a decision about how one will respond in one's life.[88] Because Jesus crafted his stories in such a way that his audience would experience rather than merely hear them, the parables are not like textbook lessons from which people learn information that may or may not interest them.[89] One cannot remain indifferent in the face of a parable, for one recognizes one's life at stake therein.[90] Because the situations Jesus described in his parables were so familiar, it was difficult for his hearers to remain at a psychological distance. The parables' inviting familiarity, coupled with their open-endedness, encourages hearers to blend their life stories with the narratives of the parables.[91] In consequence, rendering a judgment about the persons and realities described in the parables naturally leads to not only judgments but also decisions concerning one's own life. Once one enters into Jesus' vision of the reign of God, one cannot continue living as before.[92] Conversion of one's imagination leads to conversion in one's living.

What the reign of God is becomes clear when, and only when, we enact in our lives the vision into which Jesus draws us through his parables. Jesus did not intend his

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[87] Cf. ibid., 29. After asking the lawyer which person had been a neighbor to the robbery victim, Jesus turns the man's judgment upon himself with the admonition, "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37).

[88] Likewise recognizing the importance of decision-making for translating learning into lived faith, Groome devotes the final movement of his shared praxis to inviting decisions. (See *Sharing Faith*, 266-93.)

[89] Chilton puts it this way: "Because God as kingdom is active, response to him is active and ethical, not merely cognitive" (Chilton, "Kingdom of God," 516).

[90] In this sense, the parables function as "religious classics". (See Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 115-6.)

[91] See Perkins, *Hearing the Parables*, 48-9.

[92] Cf. Pagola, *Jesus*, 127.

parables as carriers of information about God and God's activity in the world; he intended them to coax us into an experience of God's ways, to convert our imaginations to a God-like perspective, and to invite a decision to live life from that vision. Therefore, Jesus' vision of the reign of God cannot be fully described in words or drawn in pictures. It only becomes visible in the lives of those people who live from that vision as Jesus did.[93]

At the heart of Jesus' vision of the reign of God is community (*koinonia*). This is the goal toward which his parables—indeed, his whole teaching and ministry—aim.[94] To enter Jesus' vision of reality in which God reigns supremely and lovingly is to enter into the community that shares and is constituted by that vision. That is to say that this vision of the reign of God is inherently communal. Only when the personal "world" of the individual Christian unites with the "imaginary" of the Christian community does it attain its fulfillment. Jesus' preaching for the reign of God was so efficacious that it forged an imaginary that dominated Western culture for the better part of two millennia. However, the inheritors of that imaginary have struggled to maintain its vitality in the face of postmodernity, and that failure has contributed to the dis-integration we see in the faith lives of many American Catholics today. Fortunately, a new generation of Christian educators has emerged in recent decades with ambitions to reclaim and reinvigorate Jesus' vision of the reign of God.

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[93] In the words of Chilton, "Once experience and activity are taken to be the terms of reference of the kingdom, what one actually does is also an instrument of its revelation, an aspect of its radiance" ("Kingdom of God," 516).

[94] Faithful to this central tenet of Christian life, contemporary religious educators identify community as both the means and end of religious education. (See, e.g., Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 20; Mongoven, *Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 141-3; Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 110-16.)

Contemporary Approaches to Converting Imaginations

Adapting and Expanding upon Jesus' Pedagogy

We have now seen how Jesus' teaching through parables embodied in a preeminent way the pedagogical desiderata that have emerged in the course of the present investigation: His engaging use of familiar, human-scale images respected the limits of human cognition even as he pivoted upon those images into the unfamiliar and thereby prompted openness to God's transcendence. He invited hearers' participation in imagining God's reign by smashing hardened categories, posing questions, and eliciting judgments and decisions. At the same time, he provided cognitive and emotional support in the midst of his audience's transformation by employing humor and forming community. All of the above transpired within a consistent pattern of engaging imaginations, disrupting them, and inviting appropriation of a new way of imagining.[95]

As we turn to contemporary developments in Christian religious education, it is important to acknowledge that these desiderata still apply. Although I could cite many ways in which the educators discussed below address these desiderata (and I attempted to do so in the footnotes above), this would prove somewhat redundant with the above discussion of Jesus' teaching. Therefore, I will focus the ensuing discussion on how these educators have adapted and expanded upon Jesus' pedagogy in order to meet the exigencies of postmodern culture.

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[95] It is worth noting that Thomas Aquinas (following Pseudo-Dionysus) followed a similarly trifold pattern in his teaching about God. The so called "triplex via" begins with the "via affirmationis," which affirms some creaturely perfection in God. Second follows the "via negationis," a critical moment in which one acknowledges the inadequacy of the analogy. Finally, the "via eminentiae" reaffirms the creaturely perfection as belonging to God in a supereminent way. (See, e.g., ST I, q.13, a.2; cf. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 11; Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 18.)

While Christian educators should obviously aspire to teach as Jesus did, a number of factors make a strict imitation not only impossible but undesirable as well. For one, the symbolic resources available to today's teachers differ in several respects from those employed by Jesus. To be sure, some symbols we can make use of much as Jesus did. For instance, many of the symbols of the Hebrew Scriptures retain significant meaning and power for modern audiences (e.g., the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tower of Babel, the golden calf). Likewise, Jesus' parables by and large maintain their ability to engage and transform modern persons. However, other symbols—for example, leaven, the cedar tree, the Samaritan—are not meaningful for modern audiences in the way that they were for Jesus' original hearers. Such symbols therefore require rehabilitation or replacement.

Conversely, modern educators have a wealth of Christian symbols at their disposal that Jesus did not.[96] Primary among these is Jesus himself.[97] Though Jesus did engage in prophetic actions and so made a symbol of himself in a sense, his subsequent death, resurrection, and situation at the center of Christian faith have greatly enhanced his symbolic significance. Consequently, Christian educators can present Jesus as a symbol or "parable" of God in a way that he could not during his lifetime.[98] Jesus' central place in Christian faith points to another difference between Jesus and modern educators: Jesus

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[96] Given the impossibility of a strict imitation, Christian educators are confronted with the question of how properly to select and interpret symbols for religious education. While I will attend to this question in the final chapter, other educators have already developed substantial guidelines. See, e.g., Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 156-60. 223-40; Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 154-92.

[97] Others include the cross, the saints, and the symbols of the sacraments and liturgy.

[98] David Tracy, "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Schussler Fiorenza, Francis and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 113.

is the definitive symbol of God in salvation history, and we are not. Therefore, while Jesus rightly drew attention to himself (albeit always as a symbol of God's reign), it would be blasphemous for us to do likewise for ourselves.

Finally, there are significant differences in context and audience. Jesus had the pedagogical advantage of being able to presume a relatively coherent Jewish imaginary in his audience, given their shared cultural context. When he spoke of the reign of God, he evoked a myth and a worldview that most people in his audience held in common and understood thoroughly. His challenge was getting his hearers to see beyond their reified categories of what God's reign is like and how they should live their lives. Disruption was thus a pedagogical priority for Jesus. The audience for today's religious educators, by contrast, largely lacks a coherent imaginary. The most salient feature of their imagining is its fragmentary nature. As a consequence, modern educators lack the benefit of being able to appeal to a widely shared imaginary. Their primary task, therefore, is not disruption as it was for Jesus. Certainly disruption remains a perennial exigency to some degree. In addition to the disruption that exposes bias, sin, and moral impotence, postmodern people can benefit from disruptions that expose the limits and blind spots of critical consciousness. Notwithstanding, it is reintegration of the imagination that constitutes the primary task of today's religious educators.

The priority of reintegrating imaginations is one of several pedagogical exigencies that our investigation has shown to have emerged in recent decades. In addition to the perennial desiderata enumerated above, today's religious educators must address the following:

- reintegrate the fragmented imaginations of today's learners,

- promote the cognitive flexibility needed to adapt to the radical pluralism and rapid pace of change of postmodern culture,

- foster awareness of learners' own cognitive operations and psychic activity, including a post-critical re-appropriation of symbols.

The task of today's Christian religious educators, in short, is to facilitate the formation of Christian imaginations that reflect post-critical symbolic consciousness. This task along with the more specific desiderata listed here will provide the foci for the following discussion of contemporary imagination-centered approaches to Christian religious education.

Reintegrating Fragmented Imaginations

Among contemporary approaches to religious education, three stand out for their attention to symbol and imagination, namely, those of Thomas Groome, Anne Marie Mongoven, and Maria Harris. Though I will occasionally interject contributions from other educators, the following discussion will focus primarily on these three. These educators all have much to say about the role of imagination in religious education. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will limit my treatment of their work on imagination to those elements which bear upon the three pedagogical exigencies in focus in this latter part of the chapter.

Groome's "shared Christian praxis" approach (or "life to Faith to life," as he calls it in his later works)[99] aims to educate "for lived Christian faith and for the wholeness of human freedom that is fullness of life for all," in the service of promoting God's reign in people's lives and in the life of the world.[100] Pursuant to this end, Groome develops an approach in five movements (plus an opening activity to focus the learning event): (1) help learners to identify their current praxis[101] in relation to a generative theme, (2) invite critical reflection on learners' current praxis, (3) give access to the Christian "Story" and "Vision,"[102] (4) invite critical appropriation of that Story and Vision, (5) invite decision and action based on learners' appropriation. Due to the fact that Groome intends shared Christian praxis (henceforth SCP) as a comprehensive approach to religious education and pastoral ministry, it is less contextually specific and less focused on the imagination than the approach I am developing in this dissertation.[103] Nevertheless, the role of imagination is so crucial in shared praxis and SCP is so well suited to the postmodern context that Groome's approach merits serious attention here.

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[99] See Groome, *Will There Be Faith?*.

[100] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 14.

[101] Groome defines "praxis" as "the consciousness that emerges from and the agency expressed in their whole way of 'being' as 'agent-subjects-in-relationship' in place and time" (*Sharing Faith*, 135).

[102] For Groome's explanation of what he means by the terms "Story" and "Vision," see *Sharing Faith*, 216-7.

[103] Where my project specifically addresses dis-integration in the lives of postmodern Catholics, Groome by and large does not frame his project as a corrective to a particular educational exigency. If anything, his earlier writing evinces a concern to correct overly cognitive, knowledge-focused models of Christian religious education. (See Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 12; *Sharing Faith*, 2.) However, Groome's most recent book does acknowledge the challenges of postmodernity more explicitly. (See Groome, *Will There Be Faith?*, 1-2.)

Groome's body of work offers religious educators a number of valuable resources for addressing the fragmented imaginations of today's learners.[104] In *Sharing Faith*, for example, Groome demonstrates a healthy awareness of the potential for dis-integration in the lives of Christians (and even in Christian religious education itself). He warns that critical consciousness—an instrumental aspect of SCP and a hallmark of postmodern thought—"can deteriorate into personal arbitrariness and/or total relativism" under the wrong conditions.[105] Groome proposes dialogue and communal testing as safeguards against such deterioration, but SCP offers additional resources for promoting integration that he does not call attention to as explicitly.[106] In his description of movement 3, Groome, drawing upon Avery Dulles's theology of symbolic revelation, highlights the pedagogical benefits of providing learners with symbolically rich encounters with the Christian faith.[107]

Though not mentioned among these benefits, Groome might have included the power of symbolic education to counteract the dis-integration that can result from overly critical educational approaches and the fragmenting forces of postmodernity.[108] As we have seen, it is the imagination that gives unity to human experience, and symbolically rich teaching is more likely to nurture this work of the imagination. In line with Jesus' teaching, Groome points to the reign of God as a symbol with unique potential for

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[104] The reader should again note that my discussion of Groome's work on imagination will be limited in this chapter to those elements which bear upon the three above-mentioned pedagogical exigencies, the first of these being the need to reintegrate fragmented imaginations.

[105] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 107.

[106] See ibid.

[107] See ibid., 196-8.

[108] Groome elsewhere notes the potential of the imagination to give unity and order to people's lives. (See ibid., 205).

unifying educators' presentation of the faith. As Groome puts it, the reign of God provides the "metacriterion" for interpreting and sharing the Christian Story and Vision.[109] This is to say it provides a touchstone for decisions about what to teach and a reference point to which all material should be related. In this way, Groome builds upon Jesus' pedagogy by explaining more precisely how this symbol can guide teachers' pragmatic decisions about curriculum and presentation of material.[110]

Even more directly to the point, Groome explains that movement 4 of SCP aims to help learners "integrate Christian Story/Vision by personal agency into their own identity and understanding."[111] Movement 4 facilitates this integration or appropriation by means of "dialectical hermeneutics" in which learners reflect on how a particular symbol of Christian faith affirms, challenges, and/or calls them beyond their current praxis.[112] Groome's proposal is helpful insofar as it offers a practical approach to helping learners integrate new learning in a controlled setting, but it is limited insofar as the work of integration he describes does not directly address the challenges posed by the fragmenting forces of postmodern culture.[113] Facilitating learners' integration of the

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[109] See ibid., 227-9. In a similar vein, James Fowler explicitly links the vision of the reign of God with Stage 6 faith. (See James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 210-11.)

[110] The symbol "the reign of God" can only be conceived as a criterion in a very loose sense, for criteria presuppose a level of conceptual clarity that symbols by definition do not possess. Technically speaking, then, the reign of God can serve as the starting point for reflection on educational praxis (including the articulation of educational criteria) but not as a criterion itself. I believe Groome's explanation of what he means by "metacriterion" to be consistent with this distinction (*Sharing Faith*, 227-8).

[111] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 250. Groome's explicit use of the language of "integration" is rare. His writing evinces a preference for the language of "appropriate" and "make one's own."

[112] Ibid., 251.

[113] This is not to say that Groome is unaware of social influences on people's imagining. To the contrary, in his writing on SCP he takes great pains to attend to people's social contexts. Groome occasionally notes (see, e.g., *Sharing Faith*, 178) and more commonly presumes that social influences inform learners'

Christian Story/Vision with their personal stories and visions, as is Groome's aim, is different from aiding the daily work of integrating one's imagining in the face of the multitudinous, conflicting imaginal influences that people encounter in postmodern culture. Immediately following a SCP learning event, learners might emerge with a clear, unified vision of some aspect of Christian life, but what happens when in a week's time they have watched several movies and TV shows, listened to hundreds of songs, and viewed thousands of advertisements, many of which contradict that Christian vision and each other?

Anne Marie Mongoven presents an alternative approach to catechesis, which she calls "symbolic catechesis". Symbolic catechesis proceeds in four movements: (1) reflecting together on common human experience, (2) correlating the experience with a faith symbol (usually under the catechist's direction), (3) moving outward from the experience to acts of justice together, (4) praying together about the experience through rituals.[114] The purpose of the four movements and of symbolic catechesis as a whole is to call both individuals and the community to conversion.[115] Even though genuine symbols (in the sense that we have been using the term) do not function as prominently in Mongoven's writing as one might expect, her approach nevertheless offers some useful suggestions for forming the imaginations of postmodern Christians.[116]

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personal stories and visions. Notwithstanding, he does not offer explicit guidelines for dealing with the fragmenting effects of these social influences on learners' imaginations.

[114] The reader will note that Mongoven's approach is more general than Groome's and less contained to the learning event itself. Consequently, Mongoven's book offers far less pedagogical guidance than does Groome's work.

[115] See Mongoven, *Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 26.

[116] Mongoven categorizes a number of things as symbols (e.g., Church doctrines) that would not qualify under the definition employed in this dissertation. The author explains, "I call this approach 'symbolic

Like Groome, Mongoven does not directly address the challenge of fragmented imaginations in the lives of contemporary Christians. Still, despite lacking an explicit focus on promoting personal integration, her process of symbolic catechesis is somewhat conducive to this outcome. Mongoven describes symbolic catechesis as a venue through which participants can seek meaning in the Christian faith.[117] Indeed, her approach provides an effective medium for synthesizing meaning to the extent that it centers reflection around the generative symbols of the Catholic faith. Like shared praxis, symbolic catechesis begins from the participants' experiences and questions (movement 1) before bringing them into sharper focus through correlation with a faith symbol (movement 2). The third movement then encourages participants to relate their needs and concerns with those of the wider world through communal service. Though Mongoven organizes the learning process slightly differently from Groome, the effectiveness of the two approaches in facilitating integration derives from the same source: It is the symbols of Christian faith that give unity to the process and to participants' thinking about their experiences and questions and those of the people they encounter through service.

Maria Harris gives fuller attention to the imagination in her writing on teaching. In *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, she describes teaching explicitly as an activity of religious imagination. She argues that teaching should be an incarnation of the subject matter in such a way that leads to its revelation, a revelation through which students

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catechesis' because in this approach the catechist and the community seek meaning by correlating the events of their daily lives with the primary Christian symbols of God's presence: the Sacred Scriptures and the teaching, life, and worship of the Church" (*Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 3). Mongoven's comment that she thought of calling her approach "relational catechesis" instead of "symbolic catechesis" is revealing of the fact that deep engagement with symbols is perhaps not as central to her approach as the label suggests. (See *Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 142.)

[117] See ibid., 123.

discover themselves as subjects possessing the power for re-creating themselves and the world.[118] Harris identifies five crucial steps or moments in the teaching process: First is the moment of "contemplation" in which the teacher takes in and visualizes what will be involved in the teaching act. Second comes the moment of "engagement" wherein teachers immerse themselves deeply in the subject matter so as to achieve intimate knowledge of it. Third, the teacher "gives form" to the subject matter, selecting from among many possibilities what to present to learners. In the fourth step, the moment of "emergence," learners take possession of the received form. At this point the teacher must "release" (step five), allowing new possibilities to come to fruition in students' interaction with the subject matter.

More so than Groome or Mongoven, Harris addresses the challenge of fragmentation in contemporary society, although she is more concerned with restoring relationships and personal integrity in general than with integrating the imagination specifically. On the topic of integration of the human person, she notes that metaphor is more integrating and leads to more holistic knowing than mechanical, technical language.[119] For this reason she advises teachers to choose their words with care and to show a preference for metaphorical, poetic language. Expanding upon this insight, Harris writes, "the sense of wholeness seems to come through more easily by helping the students encounter the material universe by working in the intuitive, the imaginative, and the perceptual modes proper to art."[120] Art, she argues, engages not only the intellect but

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[118] See Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, xv.
[119] Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 46-7.
[120] Ibid., 154.

also feeling and experience in a mode compatible with the manner in which they are intermingled in the human mind. Providing opportunities for artistic exploration "provides an oasis where people can, in peace, let their understanding, their intellect, and their feeling come together without pressure."[121]

A chorus of other voices joins Harris in calling for a more prominent place for art in educational practices.[122] For his part, Groome often recommends artistic learning activities in his descriptions of SCP.[123] Eileen Mary Daily has devoted an entire dissertation to the topic.[124] Nicola Slee argues with particular force and eloquence about the integrating potential of art in the context of religious education. Slee writes, "It is perhaps by a growing ability to discern the shape, pattern and coherence of things in the work of the creative artist, that pupils may be enabled to discern such shape and pattern in their own lives and in the wider world of confusing and disparate experience."[125] Here Slee makes explicit the reason why art presents such a valuable resource to educators striving to promote their students' personal integration in a fragmented age: Art can contribute to the training of learners to once again imagine their lives in a coherent way. Slee's research also points to the potential of art for helping critical thinkers move into post-critical consciousness. She offers, "the arts can perhaps penetrate the sceptical [sic] consciousness of secular human beings in a way which religious language and myths can

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[121] Ibid., 148.

[122] This convergence of opinions concerning the integrating power of art no doubt derives in part from the hard lessons of the modern marginalizing of the arts in most school curricula.

[123] See, e.g., Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 185-6, 240.

[124] Eileen Mary Daily, "Seeing and Being Seen: A Visual Approach to Religious Education" (dissertation, Boston College, 2001).

[125] Slee, "Heaven in Ordinarie," 55.

no longer do."[126] For a population that has grown disenchanted with religion, art may be the best candidate for a means of rediscovering the transcendent in their lives.

In summary, the above authors propose numerous strategies that can assist today's religious educators in reintegrating the imaginations of postmodern Christians. Still, these proposals are not sufficient in themselves for meeting the exigencies of postmodern religious education. Groome's and Mongoven's work points to the potential of symbol—especially the symbol of the reign of God—to give unity to teachers' presentation of the faith, but neither addresses the question of how to promote unity in people's imagining in the face of the daily onslaught of conflicting images and messages. The symbols that learners engage in religious education are only one imaginal influence among many to which they are exposed, and their exposure to the images of popular media and advertising is typically far more extensive and intense. What, if anything, can religious educators do to increase the likelihood that Christian symbols take pride of place in the imaginations of their students? Furthermore, even if Christian symbols come to occupy that central place, is that enough to unify people's imaginations? The proposal of Harris and others that art plays an important (and often neglected) role in religious education is a fertile one. Even though Harris does not speak specifically to how art can serve to integrate imaginations, her writing points to the potential of focusing educational efforts on imaginative activity rather than on content. I will pick up this thread when I address these lingering questions in the final chapter.

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[126] Ibid., 52.

Promoting Cognitive Flexibility

A second exigency to emerge in postmodernity is that of promoting a form of consciousness resilient enough to adapt to regular challenges to one's existing meaning frameworks. The rapid pace of change and radical plurality of postmodern culture pose a constant threat to those who construct meaning at a pre-critical level. Some people's edifices of meaning are so rigidly constructed that a blow to any part could bring the whole structure tumbling down. This is a precarious state to live in today since such blows are now a virtually daily occurrence. Though generally more adaptable than pre-critical consciousness, critical consciousness too remains somewhat susceptible on account of its own rigidities (e.g., resistance to religion and myth).

Thomas Groome, appropriating the thought Freire and Lonergan, presents a vision of Christian religious education that promotes the sort of cognitive flexibility needed. Groome makes the achievement of "critical consciousness"[127] of faith an explicit goal of SCP and describes "engaging people's dynamic structure for conation" as the indispensable means to that end.[128] His understanding of what constitutes "authentic cognition" (echoing Lonergan) informs the whole of his shared praxis approach.[129] In contrast with "domesticating" pedagogies that constrain students' thinking and imagining even as they impart new information,[130] Groome articulates a pedagogy that actively encourages learners to: attend carefully to their own experiences (movement 1), grow in

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[127] See Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 188, where he explicitly draws upon Lonergan. Cf. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1994), 33.

[128] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 115.

[129] Ibid., 119-31.

[130] Cf. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 33, 47.

critical awareness of their personal history, social context, and current praxis (movement 2), participate actively in the Christian Story and Vision rather than receiving it as a closed message (movement 3), render informed judgments about and critically appropriate the truth and value of the Christian Story and Vision for their lives (movement 4), and make responsible decisions regarding how they will translate their learning into new praxis (movement 5). By engaging learners regularly in these activities, SCP facilitates their liberation from intellectual dependence on others and bolsters their capacity to autonomously process and act upon information. Groome rightly notes that this sort of pedagogical approach requires a degree of "relinquishment" (kenosis) by educators.[131] That is to say it requires a willingness to cede some control of the learning event so as to allow students to exert their agency.

Harris and others likewise argue for the value of allowing learners creative space in the learning process.[132] If students are to develop their cognitive and imaginative capacities rather than merely repeating what the teacher says and imitating what she does, the teacher must allow them some degree of freedom. Such freedom includes mental and physical space for learners to explore and experiment in their own way as well as the flexibility to pursue new directions that emerge in the learning event. Provision for spontaneity, Harris is careful to point out, should not be equated with lack of planning. To the contrary, creativity and innovation are most likely to result from careful preparation and intentionality vis-à-vis the learning environment.[133] Speaking to this

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[131] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 263.

[132] Cf. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 69-74; Slee, "Heaven in Ordinarie," 55.

[133] See Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 134.

point, Mongoven recommends that catechists be prepared to discuss multiple faith symbols for any learning event, given that one never knows where conversation may lead or what symbols will seize people's imaginations.[134] Michael Corso observes that regularly changing the artwork in a learning space stimulates creativity and invites new awareness on the part of learners.[135] In addition to creating a stimulating environment, educators seeking to promote cognitive flexibility can plan creative and artistic projects, group work, time for independent thinking and writing, and encounters with different perspectives.[136] In short, Harris says, teachers must take risks and encourage learners to take risks. For the goal of a truly transformative education is not for the students to say at the end, "the teacher did it," but "Ah! We did it ourselves!"[137]

All of the above recommendations point to the necessity of a more dynamic mode of education for postmodern learners. Today's educators generally recognize that, though it would be a mistake to abandon content, curricula, and textbooks altogether, our teaching must prioritize formation of mental habits and cognitive capacities over memorization of information if our students are to survive and thrive in the postmodern world of rapid change and radical plurality. The strategies proposed by the above-mentioned educators all contribute to this sort of cognitive flexibility. Still, for the most

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[134] Mongoven, *Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 129.

[135] Corso, "Christian Religious Education for Conversion," 447.

[136] Cf. Slee, "Heaven in Ordinarie," 51; Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 98. Mongoven's work does not offer much in the way of guidance for promoting cognitive flexibility. However, one aspect of her approach that may prove beneficial in this regard is the opportunity to engage the needs and concerns of others in movement 3.

[137] Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 39, paraphrasing Lao-Tzu. Along similar lines, what William Lynch says about the artist could also be said of the teacher: "In the case of the artist, not all the images he creates are his own work; they are as much the images he makes us form ourselves, and he is a better artist if he makes us thus active, if, that is, he makes us do half the work" (*Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 19).

part they do so in a merely incremental fashion. A more reliable way to promote the cognitive capabilities needed to sustain faith in a postmodern context is to facilitate learners' "self-appropriation," a task we will now discuss in detail.

Promoting Self-Appropriation

Related to but distinct from the task of promoting cognitive flexibility is that of promoting "self-appropriation," that is, enhancing learners' awareness and intentional performance of the operations constituting authentic thinking, imagining, and valuing. As noted in previous chapters, many American Catholics today operate out of a critical consciousness that is sophisticated enough to recognize the naiveté of many religious practices and beliefs yet lacking sophistication insofar as it fails to grasp the necessity of symbol and ritual for human integration and general well-being. Coming to greater awareness of one's own cognitive operations and psychic activity is thus crucial for reclaiming faith in a post-critical manner.

It is my opinion that Lonergan's work on self-appropriation and Doran's complementary approach to psychic conversion offer the most robust guidance available on this topic. However, their writing does not generally explicate the dynamics of self-appropriation in terms that are practicable for the average teacher. I intend to incorporate such a practicable adaptation of their work in my constructive proposal in the final chapter, but, first, it will be helpful to comment on how Groome's shared praxis approach relates to this work of self-appropriation.

As mentioned above, Groome's SCP aims to bring learners to "critical consciousness". For the most part, Groome focuses on promoting critical consciousness of learners' praxis rather than critical consciousness of their cognitional structure, as Lonergan does. For example, he explains that the intent of movement 2, "is to deepen the reflective moment and bring participants to critical consciousness of *present praxis*: its reasons, interests, assumptions, prejudices, and ideologies (reason); its socio-historical and biographical sources (memory); its intended, likely, and preferred consequences (imagination)."[138] Notwithstanding, as this quotation illustrates, Groome's consciousness raising vis-à-vis praxis often involves some critical reflection on cognitive operations (e.g., reason, memory, imagination). At times he makes this latter focus more explicit. Concerning movement 4, for instance, Groome says, "The educator is also to fashion questioning activities that prompt participants to turn to their own interiority."[139] These activities might include questions like "Is it true for *you*, and *how do you know*? What consequences do you perceive, and *why do* you *perceive them*?," which prompt participants to attend to, understand, and judge not only their praxis but also their cognitional acts of attending, imagining, understanding, and judging.[140] Furthermore, even though Groome does not make the point himself, I would add that inviting learners to make decisions (e.g., in movement 5) can have the effect of bringing the inner workings of the mind and heart to light. Indeed, our decision-making and behavior often reveal desires and motivations that we subconsciously hide from ourselves.

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[138] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 187. Emphasis added. Cf. "Conversion, Nurture and Educators," 493-4.
[139] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 252; cf. 257.
[140] Ibid. Emphasis added.

When addressing the imagination specifically, Groome's writing exhibits the same focus on praxis, though he does acknowledge obliquely the value of heightening awareness of one's imagining activities.[141] Recognizing that "there is nothing inevitable about people appropriating their symbols in a dialectical way," Groome designs movements 4 and 5 in such a way as to promote learners' critical appropriation of the Christian Story/Vision, including its faith symbols.[142] Since the questions and activities that Groome describes for these movements focus on the Story/Vision and participants' praxis more so than on the dynamics of their imagination, those dynamics may remain obscure to participants even as they gain a more mature understanding of particular Christian symbols. The difference, in other words, is between, on the one hand, coming to recognize the Eucharist as more than a visible reminder of Jesus and, on the other, gaining awareness of the limitations of one's former critical symbolic consciousness and the superiority of one's new post-critical consciousness.[143] It is the difference between raising consciousness of *what* images occupy one's imagining and raising consciousness of *how* one's imagination works upon images in general.

Hence, even though Groome's shared praxis is already well disposed to promoting learners' self-appropriation, several minor shifts in emphasis and implementation of SCP would greatly enhance its effectiveness in consistently, systematically prompting the sort of self-appropriation demanded by postmodern culture.

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[141] See especially Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 205-8.

[142] Ibid., 359.

[143] More specifically, the superiority of post-critical consciousness lies in the ability to recognize the Eucharist as a symbolic mediation of grace and meaning that cannot be adequately expressed in words, an ability that is lacking in a person who can only accept more literal expressions of meaning.

One such shift would be making explicit *for learners* the hermeneutical guidelines that Groome explicates for educators in his discussion of movement 3.[144] In this discussion, Groome encourages teachers to systematically reflect on their own interests and perspectives (guideline 2) and to employ a "hermeneutic of suspicion" (guideline 5) when selecting and presenting the Christian Story and Vision to learners.[145] This reflection has the effect of making educators more aware of their imaginative and cognitive operations. However, Groome nowhere suggests making these or similar hermeneutical guidelines explicit for learners in the same way that he does for educators. Doing so (perhaps in movement 4) would greatly facilitate the learners' self-appropriation of their imagining. Furthermore, supplementing Groome's approach to fostering critical consciousness (primarily of one's praxis and social context) with Lonergan's approach to self-appropriation of cognitive operations is more likely to provide learners with the awareness of and control over their imagining needed for today's Christians to maintain their faith in a disenchanted, often antagonistic culture.

Guidelines for self-appropriation are more notably absent in the work of the other religious educators discussed above. Mongoven's process of symbolic catechesis includes opportunities for reflection on personal experiences and group conversation in which participants might mirror each other's thinking back to one another. Such activities could incidentally facilitate self-appropriation. Nevertheless, Mongoven does not identify self-appropriation as a goal, nor does she develop the sort of questioning and activities that

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[144] See ibid., 227-35.

[145] Groome also discusses other hermeneutics. I mention the hermeneutic of suspicion because it is the most relevant for critical examination of oneself and others.

would promote self-appropriation in any substantial sense. Similarly, Harris focuses on helping learners come to intimate knowledge of the subject matter more so than of themselves. Some aspects of her approach—for example, her insistence on allowing learners time and space to explore and think creatively—might create circumstances conducing to learners growing in awareness of their abilities and limitations.[146] However, like Mongoven, she does not explicitly target this outcome or develop strategies that make such an outcome likely.

Other educators have described strategies that might prove more useful for our purposes. Scholar of art history and visual studies Margaret Miles proposes several strategies for training oneself to use images appropriately. These include attending carefully to the messages one receives from the images with which one lives, asking questions about the images employed in the media, and intentionally building a repertoire of life-giving images.[147] Ethicist Timothy O'Connell, writing about possibilities for moral formation, takes a cue from a psychological approach called "Neuro-Linguistic Programming" (NLP), which modifies undesirable behaviors and emotional responses by deliberately modifying a person's mental images.[148] One common technique employed by practitioners of NLP called "reframing" involves calling people's attention to the "intent" of the feelings arising from certain images, for example, feelings of guilt resulting from a recent memory of an episode of binge eating. Drawing attention to the

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[146] See, e.g., Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 76, 88.

[147] See Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 147-9; cf. Daily, *Seeing and Being Seen*, 16-17.

[148] See Timothy E. O'Connell, *Making Disciples: A Handbook of Christian Moral Formation* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 106-11.

fact that these feelings arise from the desire for some value (e.g., health), NLP practitioners invite clients to discern the value those feelings intend and negotiate within themselves more positive ways of achieving that value.[149]

Both Miles's and O'Connell's proposals suggest concrete practices that could contribute to students' self-appropriation of their imagining capabilities. As I now move into the final chapter and my constructive proposal, I will look to incorporate these various strategies and the suggestive possibilities of Groome's approach to fostering critical consciousness into a pedagogical process that systematically promotes learners' progress toward post-critical consciousness.

Conclusion

Daunting though the task may seem, our review of pedagogical precedents in this chapter offers much hope for the future of Catholic religious education in this country (and elsewhere). We have identified in the teaching of Jesus, especially his parables, an unsurpassable model of how to invite learners into a life lived for the reign of God through the conversion of imaginations. We have also examined the efforts of several distinguished religious educators to carry on Jesus' work of teaching for God's reign in a way that responds to the new pedagogical challenges of postmodernity. Helpful as these educators' work is, our examination has made it clear that additional pedagogical exigencies remain to be fully addressed. In order to nurture a Christian imaginary capable of withstanding the challenges of postmodernity and reintegrating the lives of American

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[149] O'Connell proposes additional imaginative exercises, including some in the tradition of Ignatian contemplation. (See *Making Disciples*, 106, 109-14.)

Catholics, religious educators will require more comprehensive guidance for converting imaginations than is currently available. In my final chapter, I aim to show how the insights of this dissertation can be synthesized into a pedagogical process that will meet this need.

Chapter 6

A Pedagogy for Converting Imaginations in the Postmodern World

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."

- Romans 12:2

Introduction

In this dissertation we have been asking how Catholic religious educators can prepare their students to meet the imaginal challenges of postmodern culture and so promote integration and wholeness in their lives of faith. Exploring the dynamics of human cognition and development, we came to a greater appreciation for the centrality of the imagination in constructing meaning. Investigating diverse research on how and why people change the way they see things, we recognized the instrumentality of imagination-focused strategies in prompting this sort of transformation. In the most recent chapter, we saw how Jesus and notable contemporary educators have incorporated these strategies in their teaching for Christian faith. Emboldened by the promise of these pedagogical precedents, I move in this final chapter to synthesize their educational wisdom and my own constructive proposals into a pedagogical approach suited to the needs of postmodern disciples.

Many of those needs are the same for today's learners as they were for learners in Jesus' time. Regardless of differences in cultural and historical context, teaching that aims to transform people's ways of thinking and imagining must:

- attend to the needs and limits of human cognition,

- facilitate transcendence of egocentric thinking, imagining, and feeling,

- recruit the active participation of learners in their own transformation,

- provide emotional and communal support during the transition.

Historical and cultural developments have given rise to additional exigencies that are specific to the postmodern context. As we have seen, these include the need to:

- reintegrate fragmented imaginations,

- promote cognitive flexibility,

- foster learners' awareness of their own cognitive operations and psychic activity.

In Jesus' teaching, especially his parables, we find a preeminent model of how to meet the former set of exigencies in the context of converting imaginations to the reign of God. In the work of contemporary educators like Thomas Groome, Maria Harris, and Anne Marie Mongoven, we find some helpful resources for addressing the needs of learners that are particular to postmodernity while still addressing these perennial exigencies. Still, despite their many valuable contributions, these educators' work nevertheless leaves a number of questions unanswered: Concerning the integration of postmodern learners' imaginations, we are left wondering, What, if anything, can religious educators do to help anchor Christian symbols at the center of their students' imagining? Furthermore, even if Christian symbols come to occupy that central place, is that enough to unify people's imaginations? Our survey of these authors likewise left us still in search of a systematic approach to promoting learners' self-appropriation of their imagining, another of the major exigencies identified above.

In this final chapter, I will address these lacunae in the religious education literature, proposing an imagination-focused pedagogical approach capable of engendering and sustaining lived faith in the midst of postmodernity's fragmenting forces. I begin with some prefatory comments about the current exigencies and potential for U.S. Christian religious education in general in order to situate my own pedagogical

proposal. The remainder of the chapter will detail the three phases of the proposed pedagogical process, explicating how the dynamics of this process satisfy the perennial and postmodern exigencies described above.

A More Imaginative Approach to Catholic Religious Education in the United States

The work of forming disciples in a Christian imaginary is an endless labor that requires the efforts of an entire community and utilizing the diverse gifts of all its members. Formal religious education is, therefore, only one aspect of a comprehensive formation that also includes liturgy, works of justice and charity, art and literature, family life, personal relationships, and each person's daily choices and actions. In a well-rounded Christian formation, religious education works in concert with these less formal formative experiences. Religious education relies and draws upon people's grace-filled encounters in the liturgy, the personal growth achieved in serving and relating to one's fellow human beings, and the aesthetic power of artistic expressions of faith. In turn, religious education provides the venue for intentional reflection on these areas of Christian praxis, helping disciples to better learn from their experiences and to return to them with eyes more open to the grace at work in those experiences. In this way, formal religious education plays a crucial, albeit limited role in forming a community's imaginary.

Our investigations in this dissertation point to a number of ways in which Catholic religious education (which I understand to encompass parish catechesis,

Catholic school religion classes, adult faith formation, and sacramental preparation[1])
might better fulfill its role in forming the individual imaginations that together shape the
community's Christian imaginary. To begin from the most general, Catholic religious
education programs in this country consistently fail to form people in habits of ongoing
learning.[2] It is a widely acknowledged problem that many Catholics emerge from their
childhood religious education under the impression that they have learned all that they
need to learn in order to faithfully live a life of Christian discipleship (or, more
minimally, to achieve salvation). In consequence, they live their entire adult lives based
on an eighth-grade level understanding of the Christian faith. The fact that most
Catholics' participation in formal religious education ends before they have reached an
age where they are capable of developing post-critical consciousness is a major reason
American Catholics' faith has proven so vulnerable to the intellectual and cultural
challenges of postmodernity. This problem is only exacerbated by the regular failure of
Catholic religious education programs to challenge naive assumptions about the adequacy
of an elementary education.

The research examined in previous chapters has demonstrated the need for
cognitive flexibility in the face of the rapid change, instantaneity of communication, and
radical plurality that characterize today's world. In this context, a faith that stands still is

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[1] I exclude from this list college theology courses, which practically speaking serve a function distinct from
that of these other forms of faith education. College theology courses tend to be more exploratory in nature
and to eschew the sort of formative exercises described below. Therefore, while much of what I say below
may apply, such courses typically are not the most appropriate venue for providing the sort of Catholic
religious education I intend. This raises the question of where college-age young adults can receive the sort
of faith formation I describe in this chapter. Campus Ministry programs are the immediately obvious
possibility, but Catholic religious educators would do well to consider what other options would be viable.
[2] Protestant churches tend fair better than Catholic parishes in this regard, offering more in the way of adult
faith formation.

sure to be left behind. Modern media form people's imaginations continuously and for the duration of their lifetimes. Catholic religious education must do likewise if it is to provide sufficient counter-formation. Speaking on more theological grounds, the exigency for ongoing education also arises from the fact that we can never fully comprehend God's mystery. Religious education should disabuse learners of the assumption that we can, and the most effective way to do so is to set the expectation and create the capacity for life-long education for all Christian disciples.

Leaders in Catholic education could take a number of steps to address this need. To begin with, parishes and schools should make it a priority to convey to students who have reached the perceived end of their formal religious education (e.g., Confirmation candidates, high school seniors) the importance of continuing their education in faith and to direct them to available resources and programs. Needless to say, this creates the imperative for parishes and schools to develop adult faith formation programs where they do not already exist. Furthermore, many religious educators will need to adapt the curricula and methodology of their programs so as to provide learners with the preparation they need to live out their faith in a culture that is dynamic and sometimes antagonistic to faith. More specifically, curricula should clearly target the development of cognitive skills (e.g., evaluating information sources, judging truth claims, asking and answering key existential and religious questions) in addition to outlining doctrines to be covered.[3]

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[3] The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework* (2008), an outline for religion curriculum in U.S. Catholic high schools, falls short in precisely this regard. I have presented an argument for how educators could teach this curriculum in a more adequate way in Patrick R.

Since it is the imagination that integrates people's feeling, thinking, and living, it is imperative that formation of learners' imaginations be established as a central objective of Catholic religious education. With the exception of the authors discussed in Chapter Five, this focus on the imagination is generally lacking in Catholic education.[4] When textbook publishers and teachers incorporate art and media into instruction, they typically do so in a haphazard manner and merely for the sake of maintaining learner interest. Meaningful formation of learners' imaginations, by contrast, requires instructional activities carefully designed with this end in mind. Designing instruction of this sort requires at least a basic understanding of how images function in human cognition and living. Increasingly Catholic schools are adopting outcomes-based methods of instructional design that target certain cognitive capacities, particularly methods based on the research of Benjamin Bloom and Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe.[5] Schools have been slower to apply such methods to religious instruction and slower still to target imaginative capacities (e.g., planning, creating, evaluating mental images).[6]

Manning, "That Your Education May Be Complete: Implementing the Bishops' Curriculum Framework in Continuity with the Christian Teaching Tradition," *Catholic Education* 15, no. 2 (2012): 160–78. Other religious educators are increasingly giving voice to the need to focus on skills and dispositions in addition to content. For example, see Eileen Mary Daily, "Core Outcomes for Catholic Religious Education," *Religious Education* 110, no. 1 (2015): 10–15.

[4] Scholars of religious education have given considerable attention to the topic, but so far scholarly interest has by and large not translated into practice in Catholic schools and parishes.

[5] See Benjamin Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1956) and Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998).

[6] To say that the application of outcomes- and assessment-based practices to the imagination has been slow is not to say that it is non-existent. The NCEA IFG: ACRE (Information for Growth: Assessment of Child/Youth Religious Education), for example, has for years included questions about learners' religious perceptions and images of God (see https://www.ncea.org/our-services/religious-education-assessments). Even still, it is a giant leap from assessing learners' images and forming them in an effective and authentically Christian way.

In general, religious instruction in Catholic elementary and high schools remains essentially content-focused, and parish programs are seldom better in this regard. Students learn the seven sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and official Church teaching on a variety of topics. In more advanced departments and programs, they might also learn to "analyze" scriptural and theological texts. Catholic religious education that took the imagination more seriously would balance (not eliminate or water down) attention to Church doctrine in curricula, textbooks, and lesson planning with attention to the central symbols of the Christian faith. Without a doubt, Christian symbols usually find their way into textbooks and lesson plans. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to avoid them. Even official Church doctrines can be seen as elaborations of key faith symbols. Notwithstanding, teachers are rarely encouraged to engage these symbols qua symbols. More common is to discuss them in the abstract language of definitions and doctrines, which deprives these symbols of their engaging, thought-provoking power. A more adequate education would engage these symbols as symbols, which requires openness to questioning, storytelling, poetic expression, and spontaneity.

In a similar vein, a more adequate approach to teacher preparation would involve training educators to function as symbol-makers and exploration-leaders rather than mere information-dispensers. The symbols and stories of our faith have no life if people do not share them. Sharing symbols is every bit as much an art as creating them. It requires training and practice in pedagogical skills like selecting appropriate symbols around which to focus learning, telling stories, designing artistic projects, and incorporating media and art into one's teaching. Such skills are seldom included in teacher training

with more common pedagogical skills like scaffolding students' thinking, facilitating group work, and differentiating instruction. These gaps must be addressed if we expect our teachers to adequately prepare students to live out their faith in today's postmodern context.

A Pedagogical Proposal: A Three-Phase Process for Converting Imaginations

Overview

Of all the various factors involved in learners' formal education, none is more important than the way the instructor teaches the subject matter. This is particularly true for religious education in which the primary objective is not so much students understanding certain facts or even developing a particular skill set as it is their growth in relationship with God and neighbor. A teacher can cover all the appropriate topics and explain every term and doctrine with exceptional clarity and still fail to achieve this goal. For this reason, an adequate response to the educational exigencies of today's postmodern context requires a re-envisioning of not only the curriculum, materials, and outcomes of Catholic religious education but also the teaching methods we employ to give students access to the faith. In the introduction above, I outlined the most pressing of these exigencies, which can serve as guideposts for a pedagogical approach capable of promoting integration in people's living through the conversion of imaginations to a Christian imaginary. Though a single chapter is hardly sufficient to explore all the possibilities of this approach, I will flesh it out as best I can within the constraints of the

remaining pages of this dissertation.[7]

The pedagogical process I describe here presumes Groome's shared praxis approach as its foundation. As we saw in the previous chapter, SCP offers the most comprehensive guidance for forming imaginations of any existing approach to Christian religious education. The process I describe builds upon Groome's insights and supplements them with insights drawn from other educators; the research in Chapters Two, Three, and Four; and my own praxis, which addresses pedagogical exigencies that are not addressed or not fully developed in SCP. In the following description, I will clearly indicate how the three phases of this process and the strategies employed therein align with the five movements of SCP. I have elected to structure this process in three phases rather than simply adopting the five-movement structure of Groome's approach because doing so makes it easier for teachers to attend to the dynamics of imagination transformation that we saw evidenced in the cognitive science, transformative learning, and conceptual change research and in Jesus' teaching.

The three phases of this pedagogical process are as follows: *Phase One—Engaging the imagination*: The purpose of this first phase is to engage learners cognitively and affectively by stimulating activity at the level of their mental images where dramatic, enduring changes in thinking and behavior originate. Key to this phase is presenting images and questions that prompt learners to actively imagine reality as they experience it and encouraging them to give expression to their mental images. Phase One corresponds to the focusing activity and movement 1 of Groome's SCP. *Phase Two—*

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[7] The strategies and examples I provide below should thus be taken as illustrative rather than exhaustive of the possibilities for this approach.

Challenging learners' imagining: Having activated learners' imagining in Phase One, Phase Two aims to challenge their current imagining so as to open them up to ways of imagining that are more adequate and more authentically Christian. It involves questioning and/or activities that problematize or expose limits in learners' current imagining as well as exploration of key symbols from the Christian tradition that offer greater promise. This phase corresponds to movements 2 and 3 of SCP. *Phase Three—Appropriation of Christian imagining*: After Phase Two has disrupted learners' inadequate ways of imagining and posed the possibility of more adequate ways, Phase Three presents the opportunity and support needed to forge a new, more adequate imaginative synthesis. Key activities in this phase include exercises that promote growth in awareness and control over learners' imagining as well as opportunities to render personal judgments about the adequacy of their orienting symbols and those of the Christian tradition and to make decisions about their lives based on those judgments. This phase corresponds to movements 4 and 5 of SCP.

Table 3: Relationship of Three-Phase Process and Groome's Shared Christian Praxis	
Three-phase process	***Shared Christian praxis***
Phase One	focusing activity
	movement 1
Phase Two	movement 2
	movement 3
Phase Three	movement 4
	movement 5

As will become more evident in the following, this pedagogical process provides a salutary structure not only for individual lessons but also for the long-term process of facilitating learners' cognitive development (ideally toward post-critical consciousness). Like Groome's SCP, a learning event conducted in accord with this approach may progress through these three phases within a 45-minute class or over the course of a week or even a semester. Although previous chapters have provided an anticipatory glance of how the process can facilitate long-term development and even conversion, this will become fully clear only after I have described in greater detail the dynamics of the three phases and the process as a whole. How this process facilitates learning of a particular topic in shorter learning events will likewise become clear in the following.

The major moments of this process are more appropriately described as "phases" or "movements" than "steps" in the sense that the activities of the different phases frequently overlap and blend with one another.[8] For example, the invitation in Phase One to identify patterns in learners' imagining may instantaneously generate awareness of the inadequacy of this manner of imagining, an awareness that is targeted specifically by the disruptive exercises of Phase Two. The language of "steps" is also less appropriate insofar as it suggests a linear process leading to a definitive endpoint. It is one of the key assertions of this chapter that the process I prescribe, in order to achieve its intended outcomes, must be carried out in a recursive manner. That is to say that it will be most effective when learners become habituated to the process through repeatedly engaging in the three-phases over an extended period of time. Furthermore, in its ideal execution,

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[8] When describing my pedagogical process, I will employ the term "phases" in order to avoid confusion with the movements of Groome's SCP since I will be regularly relating the two.

learners will revisit the same Christian symbols at least every year or so but as often as multiple times in the same semester or meeting period.

I will be in a better position to explain why repeating the process is essential to achieving its aims after I have discussed the three phases of the process in greater depth. For now suffice it to say that only an ongoing educational process that prioritizes habits of imagining above and beyond memorization of content can foster faith resilient enough to withstand the challenges of postmodern living. Indeed, the three-part process of attending to one's imagining, challenging that imagining, and appropriating new ways of imagining is not only the means but also the goal of postmodern religious education. By leading learners through the process repeatedly over time, this approach ingrains habits that will enable them to consistently imagine their reality in a manner consonant with and likely to nurture Christian faith.

Conducting this process in a recursive manner does not mean repeating the same content in the same way year after year. Rather, returning to the same topics repeatedly over time allows for deepening and nuancing of learners' understanding of those topics.[9] An illustrative image for this dynamic would an upward spiral as opposed to a flat circle (see illustration below). High school students are capable of thinking about the stories of Scripture in a more sophisticated way than second graders, and adults are capable of more sophisticated thinking still. Catholic religious education should therefore challenge learners to continuously deepen their learning to the extent possible for their level of

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[9] This "spiraling" approach to curriculum, originally advocated by Jerome Bruner, is a common approach among textbook publishers. Cf. Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education*, Revised (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

cognitive development and reinforce the idea that there is always more to learn, especially when it comes to the mystery of God. Such continued growth requires an openness on the part of learners, a willingness to continually reach beyond themselves to something greater. A recursive process that regularly challenges learners to expand their imagining is well suited to promoting this disposition.[10]

Illustration 1: Graphic Representation of Recursive Pedagogical Process
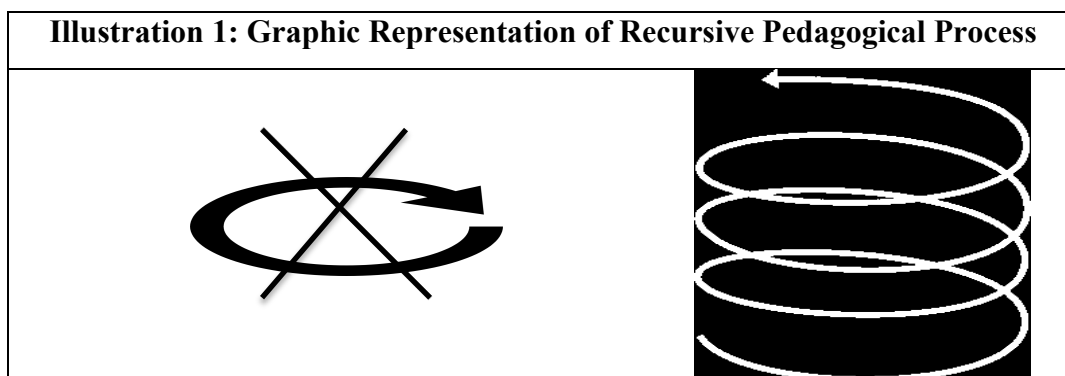
Another advantage of this pedagogical approach is its flexibility. Although the process is distinctive in its capacity to meet the particular needs of postmodern learners, it is designed such that its basic movements accord with the invariant dynamics of human cognition, making the process suitable for nearly all learners.[11] This imagination-focused pedagogy is appropriate for young children since the prominent use of images is more

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[10] This recursive pedagogical process might be appropriately characterized as "perichoretic" insofar as its dynamics reflect those of the Trinitarian community. Within the Trinity, God goes out from Godself in begetting the Son, who returns back to his source in the Father. Their union in turn spirates the Spirit, who likewise returns to her source in the Father and Son. In a similar way, learners undergoing this three-phase process go out from themselves and their former ways of imagining (i.e., they self-transcend or decenter) for the sake of eventually incorporating their new horizons into a stronger personal integration. In both cases, there is an ongoing process in which an ec-static movement results in something more than was originally present while paradoxically tending toward unity.

[11] As with any pedagogical approach, this one too requires considerable adaptation for learners with cognitive disabilities.

likely to attract and hold their attention than, for example, an approach that focuses on definitions and doctrines. Yet it is no less appropriate for adults in whose cognitional processes images continue to fulfill essential functions. For this reason, the basic pedagogical pattern of engaging learners' imaginations, challenging their imagining, and inviting a new appropriation effectively expands and integrates the imaginations of people in all age groups.

Of course, as with any pedagogical approach, the effectiveness of this process depends to a degree upon the teacher differentiating instruction according to the needs of learners. For young learners, more time will be spent on examining images, telling stories, and undertaking artistic projects so as to respect the limits of their short attention spans and concrete manner of thinking. Adults, by contrast, possess longer attention spans and the ability to engage in abstract thought. In their case, learning experiences can and should incorporate more detailed presentation of Christian teaching and more sophisticated questions. In addition to differentiating instruction according to learners' age, teachers should adapt this approach according to the learners' social context and cultural background, emotional maturity, and comfort level with one another.

The flexibility of this approach also makes its implementation feasible for teachers of all abilities. In its most sophisticated form, the process is designed to promote post-critical symbolic consciousness in learners, which requires teachers themselves to be operating from a post-critical consciousness. After all, teachers cannot help learners to develop awareness of the way images function in their cognition and living if the teachers do not understand these dynamics themselves. This might seem to pose a problem for this

pedagogical approach since, as we have seen, post-critical consciousness requires a high level of development that most people have not yet attained. However, the dearth of post-critical thinkers does not spell doom for this approach. What it does highlight is the need for training teachers of adolescents and adults in a certain skill set and nurturing their growth in post-critical consciousness. When it comes to more basic forms of this approach (e.g., those used with children learners), it is less important for teachers to be post-critical thinkers since children are incapable of attaining post-critical consciousness. For younger age groups, this pedagogical process aims at forming imaginations in a Christian manner and deepening learners' understanding of and thinking about religious and existential matters but not promoting post-critical consciousness. Achieving these more limited aims is within the capabilities of virtually all competent teachers.

With these preliminaries out of the way, I will now proceed to describe in detail the three phases of this pedagogical process. In the following I will explicate the goal(s) and function of each phase, the presuppositions about human cognition underlying the strategies of each phase, and the methods and procedures themselves. In describing the methods for each phase, I will presume young adult and adult learners as the default audience, since that is the demographic with which this dissertation is primarily concerned. However, I will occasionally offer suggestions in-text and in the footnotes concerning how this process can be adapted for younger learners. Two appendices at the end of the chapter provide (1) an example of a learning event that embodies these guidelines and (2) a quick-reference comparison of how this approach can be adapted for learners of different ages.

Phase One: Engaging the Imagination

Goal(s) and Function

Phase One's primary function is to engage learners' interest and activate their imaginations. The process as a whole aims to promote integration through conversion of learners' imaginations, but, as we saw in previous chapters, radical transformation in people's imagining rarely happens quickly and cannot be imposed from the outside. No significant learning and no transformation will occur if teachers are not first successful in recruiting learners' active engagement with the subject matter and the questions it generates. The design of Phase One respects these limitations by beginning the learning event from what is familiar and interesting to learners and consonant with their accustomed ways of imagining reality. In this way, Phase One addresses two of the pedagogical exigencies outlined above, namely, attending to the limits of human cognition and inviting learners' active, conscious participation in the process of constructing meaning.

Cognitional Underpinnings

Where the dynamics of Phases Two and Three will prove especially conducive to promoting development toward a particular form of symbolic consciousness (viz., critical and post-critical consciousness, respectively), the dynamics of Phase One reflect the necessary starting point for imaginative growth for people of all ages and developmental levels. Whether a pre-critical, critical, or post-critical thinker, development and conversion only occur when one's imagination is engaged and active. In Lonerganian

terms, only if one first attends to the data presented to consciousness can one generate the insights that lead to new understanding and, perhaps, new behaviors.[12]

The pedagogical strategies of Phase One are designed to accord with what cognitive science has revealed about the invariant dynamics of human cognition. To begin with, the decision to begin the learning event with image- and experience-focused activities is based on the understanding that thought originates in sense impressions that the brain represents as mental images. All the research examined in earlier chapters leads us to believe that, since conceptual thinking derives from more basic mental images, the most meaningful and durable learning is that which modifies not only learners' conceptual understanding but also their image schemas. Another relevant insight from research in the cognition of learning is that new learning depends on the learner's ability to make sense of novel input in terms of what is already familiar and understood. This finding likewise highlights the advantage of beginning instruction at the level of the imagination since images are inherently more familiar than concepts and therefore present a more propitious starting point for learning events. For example, describing—or better yet, showing—the movements and significance of a particular sacrament creates more fertile ground for future learning and connection-building than does having learners memorize a general definition of a sacrament.

In Chapter Two, I explained the interrelatedness of cognition and affectivity. One of the implications of this relationship is that the more one's feelings and emotions are aroused during a learning event the more resilient one's learning will be. Since images

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[12] Each of the three phases described here facilitates fulfillment of one or more of Lonergan's transcendental precepts. Phase One encourages learners to "be attentive."

generally carry a stronger affective charge than concepts, definitions, and theories, teaching that begins from images is more likely to result in significant, lasting changes in learners' thinking. Engaging learners on an emotional level becomes even more important when the goal is, not just modifying their thinking, but inviting a conversion in their imagining. The reason for this is that a person must desire conversion or at least be emotionally amenable to it in order for it to occur. In other words, they must be both intellectually and emotionally open to being changed. For this reason as well, a learning experience that begins from affect-laden images is more likely to lead to meaningful growth.

Method and Procedures

Phase One corresponds to the focusing activity and movement 1 of Groome's shared praxis approach. Therefore, all the activities and procedures he describes vis-à-vis these moments of SCP apply here as well. For all the reasons mentioned in the section above, I, like Groome, argue that the learning event should begin with an activity or experience that stimulates learners' imaginations and relates to their personal experiences and concerns—what he, echoing Freire, often calls a "generative theme" (i.e., a "focusing activity"). The activity should present or evoke an image or images that resonate with the way the learners imagine reality. Jesus began his stories with familiar images like a mustard seed and a shepherd tending his sheep. Contemporary teachers might begin with the image of an iPhone or a young professional working at an office desk. Whatever the image(s) teachers choose, it is important that it have an inherent connection to the

Christian symbol or symbols that they intend to engage in Phase Two.[13] The reason this connection is so important will become clearer when I discuss "pivot" images below. For the time being, however, it will suffice to note that if teachers employ an image that is interesting but loosely related to the Christian symbol in focus, learners will likely remember the image or the story but not the point of the lesson.

Teachers might present an image using a paper handout, by projecting a picture on a screen, playing an audio recording or a video clip, telling a story, leading learners in a guided imaginative meditation, or (less ideally) describing the image verbally. Alternatively, they might ask questions that prompt learners to imagine an image for themselves.[14] Regardless of how one elicits the image, the most effective images will be those that are vivid, on the human scale, and easily reproduced in the imagination. Since the purpose of the focusing activity is to engage learners on the level of their everyday imagining and living, teachers should conduct this preliminary activity in a way that taps into reality as learners know and experience it and makes them feel at home in the discussion.[15] To this end, images drawn from quotidian experiences and popular culture will prove most effective.[16] Teachers might present such images, for example, by telling a

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[13] See the section on Phase Two below for guidance concerning the recommended order teachers should follow in planning learning events.

[14] Less experienced teachers may be more comfortable presenting images than constructing and posing a series of questions.

[15] Teachers will find two superb models of this approach in the writings of C.S. Lewis (e.g,. *Mere Christianity*) and a contemporary preacher named Rob Bell (e.g., *Velvet Elvis*; see also Bell's Nooma video series at http://nooma.com). These two authors/teachers exhibit exceptional deftness in using everyday objects and experiences as a means of leading people to a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the teachings of the Christian faith.

[16] Since the concrete language and imagery appropriate to this focusing activity is accessible to all school-age learners, the only significant difference in presentation styles among different age groups will pertain to the kinds of images and background experiences learners can relate to.

relatable story (about hanging out with friends, the frustrations of work, etc.) or by playing a popular song in the current radio rotation. Teachers should generally avoid abstract, technical language at this time, instead favoring the language of people's everyday lives.

Once the focusing activity has sufficiently stimulated learners' imaginations, the teacher begins to shift the cognitive burden to the students by inviting them to identify and give expression to some aspect of their current imagining (à la Groome's movement 1). Teachers can prompt this transition in a variety of ways. Most simply, the teacher might ask learners a question or series of questions or invite them into conversation around the focusing image. The conversation might even take the form of learners sharing personal stories that relate to the focusing image. Or, rather than telling stories, learners might work together in groups to create and perform skits that express the way they collectively imagine and think about the topic at hand. Alternatively, learners might engage in an art project wherein they give expression to their imagining through the media of paper, paint, clay, etc. For learners who are less imaginative or have a harder time articulating their mental images, forced decision exercises can prove helpful (e.g., Is the society you live in more like a wild jungle or one big family?).

All of these activities can be easily adapted for teachers and learners of different abilities. Although teachers might appropriately rely on conversation more with adult learners than with children, a healthy dose of conversation is appropriate for children just as opportunities for artistic expression are beneficial for adults. Regardless of the specific activity or level of sophistication, it is important than teachers encourage learners to

express their imagining as they experience it. If students are preoccupied with giving responses that they think the teacher wants to hear, the exercise is less likely to generate the openness and active imagining upon which the subsequent phases depend for their effectiveness.

Most of the time these activities will focus on a particular image or set of images. However, from time to time, it is beneficial for learners to give expression to their symbol system as a whole.[17] Doing so can shed additional light on the significance of particular symbols in addition to facilitating the process of integrating one's imagining, which I will address more fully under the heading of Phase Three. At the center of any personal symbol system are the person's God-image, self-image, and world-image (the "master images" identified by Sandra Schneiders). All other symbols somehow relate to and derive their meaning from these master images/symbols. Learners might thus begin this exercise by sketching or labeling these master images (e.g., God as Father, self as middle child and office manager, world as competitive jungle) and then mapping out their relationship to other personally significant symbols (e.g., church/temple, heroes, enemies, objects of desire). It is entirely possible—even likely in postmodern contexts—that some learners will lack a coherent symbol system or way of imagining their life experiences. In such cases, teachers should encourage learners to represent their imagining as is rather than imposing a contrived order. Again, the important thing is to tap into learners' imagining as it spontaneously occurs.

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[17] For example, it would be entirely appropriate for teachers to lead learners in this sort of exercise at the beginning and again at the end of a course or program.

Whether giving expression to one's symbol system as a whole or to particular images within it, expressing one's imagining is the first step in imaginative and psychic conversion. The exercises that precipitate conversion come, for the most part, in Phases Two and Three. However, the critical reflection, judging, and deciding that happens in these later phases presupposes learners having already become aware of the images and symbols that influence their imagining and living. Only when learners are able to move beyond naively thinking *in* symbols to thinking *from* and *about* symbols and how they influence their perceptions (i.e., rendering them "object," as Kegan would say) can they do the work of self-appropriating their imagining.[18]

The activities of Phase One serve to make learners' imagining visible not only to the learners themselves but also to teachers. In so doing, these activities provide teachers with the means of making a preliminary assessment of learners' levels of symbolic consciousness and their personal need for development. In smaller groups, teachers may be able to make such an assessment on the fly during the course of the learning event. For larger groups, teachers will likely need to collect learners' work and review it when time allows.[19] Regardless of the size of the group, the more familiar teachers are with learners' needs and capabilities, the better they are able to plan instruction that will suit those needs and capabilities.

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[18] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "The Symbol: Food for Thought," *Philosophy Today* 4 (1960): 205. When I say "move beyond" thinking in symbols, I do not mean that one ceases to interpret one's experiences through the lens of those symbols. It is impossible to take off these interpretive lenses completely. I merely mean that one becomes capable of objectifying these symbols even as one continues to see the world through them.

[19] See Appendix I for examples of specific criteria for evaluation of learners' levels of symbolic consciousness.

Taking learners' developmental levels into account is particularly important when the aim is not merely dispensing information but rather promoting development and even conversion. Challenging learners who are not cognitively or emotionally capable of coping with the challenge can result in setbacks and obstacles to future growth. Failing to challenge learners who are ready deprives them of opportunities to grow.[20] When assessing learners' developmental levels, teachers do well to remember that advanced development should not be pursued for its own sake. What matters most is that learners are equipped with the cognitive and affective capacities they need to make sense of their experiences, maintain a healthy sense of self, and live as loving, responsible disciples and members of society. Especially when teachers observe these guidelines, regularly reevaluating learners' needs and capabilities can significantly enhance the effectiveness of this pedagogical process.

As a final note to this section, I acknowledge the temptation for teachers to rush through this first phase of the process or to skip it altogether. Confronted with expectations to cover a prescribed amount of material or in their eagerness to "get to the real substance," many educators regard preliminary activities of this sort as added enrichment or "fluff". Such activities are the most likely to be neglected in lesson plans and skipped over in textbooks. However, teachers who neglect to engage learners' imaginations in a meaningful way at the outset will find themselves stymied later in the learning event. They may succeed in cramming more facts and definitions into students'

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[20] These considerations highlight why studies in learner psychology are such a valuable component of teacher training. More specifically, religion teachers who teach older adolescents and adults will improve their effectiveness as instructors by learning about the different levels of symbolic consciousness described in Chapter Three in addition to studying more common aspects of human development like Piaget's stages of cognitive development.

heads, but a predominantly content-focused approach fails to effect real change in the ways people imagine and live their lives. To be sure, engaging learners' imaginations requires a considerable investment of time, but it pays dividends in the long run.

Phase Two: Challenging Learners' Imagining

Goal(s) and Function

Phase Two is the pedagogical moment in which new learning primarily occurs. Many people assume that learning is simply a matter of adding new information to one's mental repertoire. However, no learning is ever a matter of mere addition, and transformative learning in particular (i.e., learning to construct meaning in a different way) often requires challenging—even disrupting—former ways of imagining. Rather than merely building upon an existing foundation, it can demand demolishing the base in order to begin anew. To state the matter more theologically, it requires a conversion of the imagination. Such challenging, disrupting, and inviting to conversion is the function of this second phase. Where Phase One accommodates learners' human need for concreteness and familiarity for the sake of engaging imaginations, Phase Two pushes learners beyond what is comfortable, beyond the world bounded by learners' own narrow interests and desires, in order to open them up to God and reality as God creates it. That is to say it addresses the pedagogical exigency to facilitate learners' transcendence of their egocentric thinking, imagining, and feeling.

In the course of expanding learners' imagining, Phase Two addresses several other pedagogical exigencies in addition to the need to promote learners' self-

transcendence. As is true of Phases One and Three, the activities of Phase Two are intentionally designed to invite learners' active participation in constructing meaning. One aspect of learners' active engagement in this phase of the process is reflecting critically upon the patterns in their imagining that they began to attend to in Phase One. This critical self-examination marks a crucial step forward in the process of self-appropriation that will be consummated in Phase Three. Learners' critical questioning and engagement with disruptive symbols in this phase also contribute to the development of their cognitive flexibility.

Cognitional Underpinnings

If Phase One encourages learners to heed the transcendental imperative to attend to their imagining, Phase Two encourages them to heed the imperative to understand more deeply their imagining and the Christian manner of imagining. Everyone, regardless of their level of development, benefits from expanding their understanding. Critical self-examination yields ever more precise understanding of oneself and the world and heightens one's vigilance against the ever threatening menace of bias. In Chapter Three we noted that post-critical thinkers are less susceptible to bias than pre-critical or even critical thinkers. This is the case precisely because they are more aware of the threat of bias and more intentional about examining themselves for it. Pre-critical thinkers are especially susceptible because they generally lack such awareness and habits of self-examination. As such, it is they who benefit most from the exercises of Phase Two. Teachers who work primarily with pre-critical learners will thus want to place extra

emphasis on this phase of the process and proceed through it with special care. Critical thinkers also benefit from the exercises of Phase Two insofar as their continued development depends upon coming to awareness of the need for symbol in personal integration and the limits of their insistence upon "literal" truth.

In the previous section, I explained that images (versus concepts, definitions, etc.) offer a propitious starting point for learning because they bear the texture of everyday experience and so prove highly stimulating of thought. It is pedagogically advisable to keep instruction rooted in images as the process moves into Phase Two because, beyond attracting learners' attention, images play an essential role in coming to new understanding. Phase Two aims to expand—even transform—learners' thinking. As we have seen in previous chapters, teaching strategies that focus on learners' mental images and employ metaphorical, poetic forms of expression are the most conducive to this sort of radical change. Emphasis on imagery is particularly advantageous in the context of religious education given the nature of the knowledge into which religious educators aspire to lead their students. Religious education aims to give learners access to an engaged participatory knowledge of God, and, as we know from our explorations in Chapter Two, symbols are uniquely suited to mediating this sort of knowledge. A preference for imaginative, image-centered pedagogical strategies is thus most appropriate in this moment of the learning process.

Method and Procedures

Phase Two corresponds to movements 2 and 3 of Groome's shared praxis

approach. In this phase, engagement with symbols of the Christian faith challenges learners to more expansive and adequate ways of imagining. Implicit in this description are two distinct tasks: (1) challenging learners to recognize the inadequacy of their old ways of imagining and (2) inviting them to consider a potentially more adequate way (viz., imagining as Jesus did). Although we can distinguish these two tasks for clarity sake and although they sometimes occur sequentially, they often occur simultaneously during the learning event.[21] In the case of both tasks, teachers can only ever extend an invitation to self-examination. It cannot be forced from the outside but rather must be willed by the learner.

Critical self-examination.[22] Often engagement with the Christian symbol will itself serve to prompt learners to examine their current habits of imagining and the origins of those habits. However, at times it may be more effective to invite self-examination before explicitly introducing Christian content into the discussion. This will especially be the case when teaching learners who have little interest in or active disdain for Christian teaching. Even in the case of learners who are not adamantly opposed, people tend to be more receptive to new ideas—even ideas that they would have previously resisted—when their accustomed ways of thinking prove untenable.

Teachers can proceed by inviting learners to reflect more critically upon the images they gave expression to in Phase One (as Groome prescribes in movement 2 of

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[21] I have organized this section into subsections in order to highlight these distinct tasks, but my comments throughout will emphasize their overlapping nature.

[22] As noted in the previous chapter, I am supplementing Groome's approach to promoting critical consciousness, which emphasizes learners' social context, with a related but distinct approach to promoting self-awareness of the operations of learners' imaginations. While I fully endorse all of the strategies Groome recommends vis-à-vis promoting critical consciousness, imaginative operations rather than social context will be my focus in this section.

SCP). Most basically, this invitation might take the form of questions about learners' manner of imagining: Have you even considered looking at the matter differently? Why do *other* people see the matter differently? How did you come to see things this way? What effect do these images have on your relationships, behavior, and values? What would your life be like if you imagined things otherwise? What are the advantages and disadvantages of imagining in this way? In cases where learners seem to lack a coherent symbol system or way of imagining, teachers can invite them to consider why that is the case: What are the competing visions causing conflict in your imagining? What would it take to unify your vision of life, your self-image, etc.?[23] Learners might discuss these questions in pairs, small groups, or with the whole class or journal about them independently. Because this is the first step in what can be a traumatic experience for learners, teachers do well to support them by employing humor and encouraging learners to empathize with one another.

Teachers working with older learners might lead general discussions about how images influence our thoughts and actions before inviting learners to examine their own habits of thinking and imagining. Crucially, such discussions should touch upon the distinction between the integrative, exploratory functions of symbols in human cognition and the explanatory function of technical language like concepts and definitions. The point should be emphasized by discussing the cognitive and psychic benefits of symbolic expression and the ways in which mistaking symbolic language for explanatory language can lead to error and/or confusion. Because of the exigency for post-critical

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[23] The repertoire of questions will be more limited and their formulation more basic for young learners who do not have as much life experience as do adults.

consciousness in many American contexts, it is imperative that teachers go beyond discussion of particular Christian symbols and, through conversations like this one, raise learners' awareness about how symbols function in general. At this historical moment, such explicit discussions about the symbolic operations should be a standard component of adolescent and adult religious education. Both these meta-level discussions and conversations about particular images facilitate the self-appropriation that has become a practical necessity for faithful living in the postmodern context.

Selecting symbols. Before going any further in our discussion of the activities of Phase Two, we must discuss the process by which teachers select the Christian symbol or symbols that will be the focus of the learning event. Although we take it for granted that Christian themes will constitute the heart of Christian religious education, the dissolution of the Christian social and cosmic imaginary in postmodernity has rendered this assumption problematic. Today Christian educators must grapple with questions that have directly or indirectly challenged the faith of many postmodern Christians. For example, Why do Christians privilege Christian symbols over non-Christian symbols? Even if teachers are themselves convinced of the value of Christian symbols, they must ask themselves why their students would elect to appropriate these symbols rather than others for the personal symbol system that guides their imagining and living. Why should learners place more value on Christian symbols than any of the countless others they encounter on a daily basis?

For Christians, the most obvious answer to these questions is that these particular symbols assume special value because they are revealed by God. Taking the human need

for symbol into account, God has revealed certain symbols as part of the divine solution to the problem of human sin. Since humanity's salvation depends upon these symbols, their importance for religious education is obvious. So the argument goes. The importance of these symbols is obvious if one believes in divine revelation, but today many people do not. Neither are they inclined to accept teaching on anyone else's authority. For them, the proof of a symbol's value lies in its effects—in its capacity to hold their attention, illuminate their experiences, and give coherence to their imagining and living. Therefore, when teaching learners of this persuasion, religious educators do best to present Christian symbols as David Tracy does in the *Analogical Imagination*, namely, as classics. A classic is by definition a symbol, text, etc. that illuminates and gives coherence to experience. As religious classics, the core symbols of the Christian faith have the power to do all of the above. Because they do so, recognizing Christian symbols as classics and centering religious education around them provides a partial solution to the question raised in the previous chapter regarding the possibility of unifying postmodern imaginations.[24]

Still, as I have said, postmodern audiences are not inclined to take it on faith that Christian symbols are classics. They demand to see and experience their power for themselves. Their insistence upon personal verification places the onus on teachers not merely to tell them about Christian symbols but rather to draw learners into an encounter with them. Therefore, when selecting symbols for instruction, teachers must carefully consider which symbols are capable of delivering on this promise.

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[24] Note that making use of revealed symbols is only one part of the solution. I will address the other elements of the solution in my discussion of Phase Three.

Practically speaking, the selection of the Christian symbol or symbols that will serve as the focal point of the learning event is typically the first step in the planning process. Once the teacher has made a selection, he or she can then plan out the Phase One activities that will lead to exploration of those symbols and the Phase Three activities that will follow upon this exploration. Exceptionally gifted teachers may have the ability to spontaneously present a Christian symbol in response to the student questions and reactions generated in Phase One. However, such ability is rare, and even gifted teachers are more likely to achieve their aims when they plan learning events carefully. If the teacher is following a textbook or established curriculum and topics for lessons are predetermined, the teacher's role is to bring into relief the symbols at the heart of those topics. For example, at the heart of a lesson on salvation stands the symbols of the cross and resurrection. At the heart of a lesson on the Church stand the symbols of the Body of Christ and the People of God (among others).

If teachers have the freedom to select topics for exploration, they should be intentional about the criteria guiding their selection. In the previous chapter, I highlighted Groome's criteria for faithfully presenting the Christian Story and Vision. First among these was employing the reign of God as the metacriterion for pedagogical decisions. Other criteria concerned fidelity to the Christian tradition and community. If teachers are to do justice to the tradition, they cannot limit their teaching of Christian symbols to their personal favorites. Rather, teachers should look to incorporate the symbols that the Church has consistently found to be illuminating and revelatory through the ages. The official teachings of the hierarchical magisterium—for example, the *General Directory*

for Catechesis—are helpful resources for identifying these symbols.[25] While drawing upon the wisdom of the universal Church, teachers should also select symbols with a sensitivity to the wisdom, concerns, and customs of the local church community. For example, a teacher working with a Mexican population would be making an egregious error by failing to incorporate the symbol of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the curriculum. Age-appropriateness is another factor to consider when selecting symbols.[26]

Christian disciples' reflection upon the history of God's dealings with human beings has over the millennia yielded a coherent story (albeit with many sub-plots) and a symbol system that provides the (potential) framework for a coherent Christian imaginary. The integrity of a person's or community's interpretation of any particular Christian symbol depends upon interpreting that symbol with reference to the system as a whole. Coherence, therefore, constitutes another key criterion for teachers' selection of symbols.[27] Every symbol system includes a controlling symbol to which all other symbols refer and which norms interpretation of those symbols. In the Christian symbol system, Jesus Christ is that controlling symbol. Whatever the preferred hermeneutic and generative symbols for a particular teacher or community, these must consistently refer back to Jesus and his vision of the reign of God. Without this primary reference point, all other symbols lose their proper meaning and run the risk of becoming idols unto themselves.

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[25] See Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 1998), no. 130.

[26] For example, graphic pictures of Jesus' crucifixion would not be appropriate for young children.

[27] In proposing this criterion, I go beyond what Groome explicitly prescribes in *Sharing Faith*.

Thus far I have been speaking largely in generalities, but the Church does offer some concrete guidance concerning the particular symbols at the heart of the Christian symbol system. The *locus classicus* for this guidance is the Creed (Nicene-Constantinopolitan or Apostles'), also referred to since its inception as the "symbol" of faith.[28] The Creed expands upon the symbols of God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Church, sin, and the resurrection of the dead using biblical and philosophical language. Implicit in the text is a three-phase account of salvation history—creation, redemption, and sanctification—with the saving work of Jesus constituting the center. These are the central symbols that Christians have discerned through lived experience to be revealed by God for our salvation. Therefore, these are the symbols that should form the core of all Christian religious education.

For the sake of developing these core symbols in terms that are more practicable for teachers, I propose the following examples as appropriate symbols for Christian religious education. Concerning creation, teachers might focus instruction around the symbol of God the Father and Creator, the narrative of Genesis 1-2, and the symbols contained therein (e.g., the first man and woman, the garden, the tree of life). Concerning sin, important symbols include those in the narrative of Genesis 3-4 (e.g., the tree of knowledge of good and evil, expulsion from Eden, the first murder), Satan, Israel's idolatry, the sins of Israel's kings, and hell. Concerning redemption, important symbols include those found in the gospels and epistles, particularly Jesus' birth/incarnation,

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[28] To describe the Creed as a "symbol" is to use the term differently than I have employed it in this dissertation. Originally the Greek σύμβολον carried the meaning of a broken seal which, when united with the corresponding piece, verified the bearer's identity. Therefore, to refer to the Creed as a symbol is to indicate its function in confirming a Christian's identity.

parables, miracles, death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension.[29] Key symbols concerning sanctification include the Holy Spirit, the liturgy and sacraments (especially the Eucharist and baptism), the Church, apostles, disciples, saints, heaven, Scripture, and Tradition. Again, all of the above should be taught with reference to the controlling symbol of Jesus and his vision of the reign of God.

Invitation to more adequate imagining. Once the teacher has settled upon the Christian symbol or symbols that will anchor the learning event, she or he can then plan out how to engage learners with the symbol in ways that will expand their imagining. Depending on the disposition of the learners, teachers can take a number of approaches to expanding and converting their imaginations, a few of which I will describe here. Of course, any group of learners will include people occupying very different mental spaces at any given moment, so the most effective teaching will incorporate a combination of these approaches over time.

Teaching Christian symbols. The most basic approach to expanding imaginations is teaching Christian symbols to learners who have little or no prior exposure and no resistance to them. This would be the primary approach taken by teachers working with young children and converts to the Christian faith. Teachers can give learners access to these symbols in a variety of ways. In addition to the typical lectures, demonstrations, and media-enhanced presentations, teachers can lead learners in imaginative exercises (e.g., meditations upon Scripture passages). They can enhance learners' engagement with these symbols further by modifying the learning environment itself (e.g., classroom

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[29] As noted in the previous chapter, Jesus' parables are uniquely suited to converting imaginations to the reign of God and should therefore be featured prominently in Christian religious education.

artwork, art supplies, access to literature and the internet) and creating opportunities for students to use, examine, and modify their imagining capabilities.

In the case of neophyte learners, relatively few obstacles stand in the way of forming their imaginations in a Christian manner. Any engagement with Christian symbols is likely to expand their imagining. Nevertheless, no matter how young, learners are never a *tabula rasa*. From the moment of their birth and even before, they are influenced by their interactions with other human beings and by the media they consume. Some of these interactions and images may be compatible with a Christian imagination. In such circumstances, teachers have a readymade foundation upon which to help learners construct meaning about Christian symbols. For example, many young people today believe strongly in the values of tolerance, service, and social justice. Underlying these beliefs are images like those of a non-Christian friend, homeless people in a soup kitchen, and figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., which are compatible with Christian faith but not rooted in it (at least not in their minds). Because these images are highly compatible with Christian faith, teachers can use them as "pivot" images (more about which below) in order to help learners make meaningful connections with Christian symbols. For example, one might juxtapose an image of MLK leading a civil rights march with one of Jesus tending to the marginalized persons of his day (e.g., women and the poor) and explain the importance of King's Christian faith for his social justice work. By contrast, many of the learners' images will not be compatible with Christian faith. In these cases, teachers have recourse to other approaches described below.

Enriching Christian symbols. Aside from teaching symbols to those with no previous exposure, the most basic approach of those described here is teaching so as to enrich the Christian symbols from which learners are already living their lives. The reality of today is that teachers are less and less in a position to take this approach—at least initially—on account of the diminishing importance of Christian symbols and teachings in the lives of contemporary Catholics. Even if many contemporary students demonstrate some familiarity with Christian symbols, it is a much smaller contingent for whom those symbols exert an appreciable influence upon their imaginations and behaviors. However, that does not mean that this approach has become obsolete. In addition to serving the minority with some significant Catholic formation, this approach becomes highly useful for advanced learners who have already been educated in this pedagogical process for some time and have therefore built up a strong foundation of Christian symbols.[30]

Both novice and advanced learners can benefit from the additional instruction and reflection on Christian symbols that this second approach provides. The more context one has and the more one learns about the ways Christians have understood symbols (like the tree of knowledge or the cross), the better one is able to interpret and appropriate their meaning for oneself. Another universal benefit of this approach is helping learners to develop and maintain a balanced understanding of the Christian symbol system. By further contextualizing and exploring more deeply these Christian symbols, learners acquire a more thorough understanding of their interconnectedness. Fostering this sense

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[30] We will be better able to appreciate this claim at the end of the chapter where I emphasize the importance of the recursive nature of this pedagogical process.

of interconnectedness mitigates the temptation to fixate narrowly on any one symbol or set of symbols and generally promotes learners' openness to receiving God's revelation in a variety of forms.[31] Indeed, an essential task of Phase Two—regardless of the particular approach—is instilling in learners an awareness of the inadequacy of any and all images or descriptions of God that human beings can generate. Any image can harden into an idol if fixated upon exclusively or if one's imagining grows lethargic. Furthermore, in addition to promoting learners' cognitive understanding, this approach supports their affective development. Additional instruction and reflection can help learners to see the same symbols in a different light, infusing those symbols with new feeling tones. In this way, an overly familiar symbol can take on new life and re-energize learners' imagining and living.

Teachers can enrich learners' thinking about Christian symbols in a variety of ways. One strategy that we noted in Jesus' teaching and have already mentioned above is the use of "pivot" images. One reason for Jesus' pedagogical effectiveness was his genius for giving his hearers insights into a mysterious, transcendent reality (viz., the reign of God) through the mediation of familiar, everyday images. For example, pivoting upon the image of the common mustard seed, Jesus helped his hearers come to a new realization about the subtle yet powerful growth of God's reign. Contemporary teachers do not need to possess Jesus' pedagogical genius to do likewise. All that is needed, most basically, is to connect faith symbols to images drawn from learners' everyday experiences. For

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[31] For example, while the image of God as Father is a perfectly appropriate starting point for imagining God, further exploration of images of God as Mother and Creator can prevent the Father image from ossifying into an idol and chauvinistic habits of thought.

instance, by relating the Eucharist to the image of a family meal or baptism to an image of bathing, teachers can help learners discover deeper, more personal meaning in those Christian symbols. No symbol—including Christian symbols—reveal God or cause personal integration automatically, that is to say, independently of the workings of human minds. These symbols must be explored and interpreted. To the extent that teachers give learners a personal context for interpreting Christian symbols and the time to explore them, learners are more likely to find meaning in them and be transformed by them.

A number of other strategies are available to teachers for the purpose of enriching learners' thinking about Christian symbols. Two of these include pairing learners with others who imagine in a more sophisticated way during discussions and learning activities and teachers modeling more sophisticated imagining themselves. As an example of the latter, while reading a passage of Scripture, teachers might employ the "talk aloud" technique, externalizing their thought processes for interpreting the meaning of the story. Engaging with students in this exercise repeatedly over time helps not only to deepen learners' understanding of these stories but also to form them in similar habits of imagining. Teachers can also enrich students' imagining by consistently employing multiple symbols with reference to any given topic (e.g., imagining the Church as Body of Christ, community of believers, and servant of the world). Doing so stretches learners' imaginations and guards against narrowly identifying God, grace, etc. with any particular image.

A different way teachers can enrich the imagining of learners is by gradually introducing postmodern intellectual challenges into class discussion. Modernity and then

postmodernity have brought successive waves of critique to the shores of the traditional Christian imaginary. They have cast aspersions on the credibility of Christian teachings and biblical accounts in light of modern scientific discoveries (e.g., evolution, the Big Bang Theory) and the findings of historical-critical scholarship. They have questioned the legitimacy of Church authority as well as the efficacy of the sacraments and all religious ritual. It is highly likely that Catholics living in the U.S. today will encounter these critiques throughout the course of their lifetimes. If not in the form of direct argumentation, these challenges commonly come in the form of offhand comments and the subtext of pronouncements from public figures, educators, and colleagues.

Given this likelihood, it is far preferable that teachers address these challenges in the classroom context, where they can lead learners in thoughtful reflection upon them and provide learners with theological and mental resources for responding to such critiques. More than arming students with stock apologetic rejoinders to critiques of Christian faith, this preparation should train them in critical thinking skills (e.g., adjudicating truth claims, identifying biases, distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate modes of knowing for a given context) that will enable more versatile responses to these challenges. For example, while reading Genesis 1-2, the teacher might ask students if this account conflicts with scientific theories about the origins of life on Earth, leading into a conversation about literary genres in the Bible and the compatibility of faith and reason. Such activities are one way that Phase Two explicitly promotes a more resilient faith and greater cognitive flexibility, which has become a practical necessity in many postmodern cultures.

Challenging unChristian images. In contrast to enriching the Christian symbols from which learners already live, often teachers will have to challenge images that conflict with and undermine Christian faith. This approach typically requires a more dramatic disruption of learners' current ways of imagining as well as offering more salutary alternatives. To be clear, the intent of this approach is not to coerce learners of different faith traditions into converting to Catholicism. The decision to change religious affiliations may result from this process, but that is not its aim. It is true that this pedagogical process aims to convert learners' imaginations to Jesus' vision of the reign of God. However, in the first place, the reign of God transcends the symbols, concepts, and teachings of any particular religion, including Christianity. People of different faiths can and do seek the reality Jesus symbolized as "God's reign" without ever describing their actions and intent in these Christian terms. In the second place, this process promotes the conversion of imaginations in a manner that invites and requires learners' willing, active participation. Remember, conversion always requires a conscious decision. Therefore, when I speak of images that undermine Christian faith, I think not of the Jewish Law or the prophet Muhammad but rather of the image of piles of cash that serves as a person's symbol of fulfillment or the high-tech weaponry that serves as another's symbol of strength and security.[32] This is the sort of imagining that needs converting most urgently.

In the previous chapter, we explored how Jesus prompted such conversion through his parables. Learning from Jesus' example, we can identify a number of

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[32] In some circumstances, it might even be appropriate to use symbols from other faith traditions as the focal symbols in this pedagogical process.

strategies for disrupting and expanding learners' imaginations. The most direct way to disrupt people's current imagining is to give them a first-hand experience that challenges their way of imagining things. This is what Jesus did when, for example, the scribes doubted his authority to forgive sins and he healed the man's paralysis (see Mk 2:1-12). Today teachers might disrupt learners' stereotypes about homeless people being lazy and drunk by arranging for them to meet actual homeless people. Given the effort and time planning this sort of experience demands, teachers typically are not able to arrange such experiences very frequently and so must find alternatives. One alternative is providing learners with opportunities to converse with people who see things differently than they do. This might involve arranging a video chat via Skype or Google Chat with a person from a different cultural or religious background or, more commonly, allowing time for classmates to talk to one another. No two people see the world exactly the same, and more often than not an earnest conversation with another person can be enough to make us question whether there might be another way of looking at things.

Although personal interactions of this nature tend to be the most powerful when it comes to disrupting imaginations, teachers also have other means at their disposal. The most effective of these show rather than tell learners that their imagining is inadequate. Artwork, movies, music, and literature, because of their symbolic nature, have special potential for breaking through reified mental categories and touching people at the deeper level of their imaginations. In addition to teaching Jesus' parables, which possess a unique power to disrupt and convert imaginations to the reign of God, teachers can also profitably draw upon the work of modern artists and authors. Flannery O'Connor is a

wonderful example of a contemporary author whose stories draw readers into a vicarious experience of the world and then turn that world on its head.

If teachers cannot arrange an experience, a conversation, or an artistic encounter that suits their needs, they can provide learners with vicarious experiences through imaginative exercises of their own devising. For example, so many movies and TV programs glorify the pleasures of premarital sex, thereby forming viewers' imagining about this aspect of life in a decidedly unChristian manner. In order to challenge this formation, teachers might have their students watch a TV episode of this sort in class or at home and then invite them to imagine alternative—perhaps more realistic—endings to the episode: What if, rather than feeling exhilarated by the one-night-stand, the character feels used and cheapened? How might they respond? This exercise could then lead into a fruitful conversation about why the Church teaches what it does about premarital sex.

Another strategy for disrupting imaginations that we saw operative in Jesus' parables was pivoting upon a familiar, comfortable image into a decidedly discomforting vision. I have already twice mentioned pivot images, but the difference between this case and those above is that here the teacher uses the image not to help learners relate to Christian symbols but rather to draw them in before overturning their way of seeing things. For example, a teacher might invite learners into a discussion about why they like Apple products (iPhones, iPads, Apple Watches, etc.) before pivoting upon the image of the apple into a discussion of the fruit Adam and Eve took from the forbidden tree[33]:

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[33] Making use of transition effects on PowerPoint is one way that teachers can effect this transition visually.

What is the allure of this fruit? How does the temptation distract or lead people away from God?

In addition to employing this pivot technique, teachers can employ images in different ways to the same effect. Rather than pivoting upon a particular image, they might directly contrast a less adequate symbol (e.g., sports figure as hero) with a more adequate Christian symbol (e.g., saint as model). They might also employ a "bridging" technique (see Chapter Four) that gradually leads learners from a more familiar but less adequate image though progressively more adequate images until they arrive at a Christian symbol that is most adequate. For example, a teacher might play a popular song from the radio with a message about what constitutes the good life (e.g., "Time Of Our Lives" by Pitbull and Ne-Yo) and discuss the (in)adequacy of that vision. Then the teacher would play and discuss several other songs that evince progressively more adequate visions, culminating in a song with explicitly Christian lyrics.

In all of these strategies for disrupting inadequate imagining, teachers will be better able to achieve their intended goal the more familiar they become with the ways people's imagining deviates into idolatry and error.[34] The likelihood of success will likewise be increased to the extent that teachers attend to learners' emotional needs through the use of humor, peer empathizing, and the other strategies discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

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[34] Other subjects provide analogues for what I mean. The most effective foreign language teachers, for example, know and anticipate the mistakes non-native speakers commonly make. While there is no substitute for experience, religious educators will benefit in this regard from familiarizing themselves with studies of symbolic thinking such as the one we undertook in Chapter Three.

A common culmination. Whether teaching Christian symbols to learners with no prior exposure, enriching learners' imagining, or disrupting it, all of the above strategies should culminate in or include a compelling presentation of a Christian symbol or symbols and the way of imagining they engender. In the context of this three-phase pedagogical process, this presentation constitutes the most crucial invitation to learners to a new, more adequate manner of imagining and possibly to a full conversion of the imagination. At this moment in the process, the teacher invites learners to go beyond what they previously knew and imagined and open themselves to a Christian way of seeing reality.

As I have already said, in some cases the challenge to learners to expand their imaginations will coincide with the teacher's presentation of the Christian symbols. This might be the case, for instance, when teaching with Jesus' parables, which in themselves both pose a challenge to their audience and invite them into an experience of God's reign. In other cases, presentation of the Christian symbols will follow upon the challenge sequentially. This presentation can take myriad forms, many of which I have already mentioned—storytelling, reading Scripture and other Christian literature, viewing art and film, and imaginative exercises, to name a few. Whatever the form, it is at this point that teachers will explore with learners the Christian symbol or symbols they selected to serve as the focal point for the learning event. If learners find that this exploration of the Christian vision illuminates their experience, they are more likely to consummate their conversion by making a decision for the reign of God in Phase Three.

Because this is the moment of the teaching process with which educators are most familiar, I will not go into great depth explaining the various ways in which teachers can give learners access to the imaginative riches of the Christian tradition. It will suffice to offer a couple of guidelines concerning this phase of the process. First of all, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is to keep learners' imaginations active during this second phase of the process. That is to not to say that teachers must refrain entirely from lecture or from using abstract language. Indeed, this is the appropriate moment in the process to introduce doctrinal formulations and technical language, which here can serve the indispensable function of differentiating and refining learners' thinking about the topic at hand. Rather, it is only to say that teachers should strive to strike a balance in their use of symbolic and explanatory language. If teachers over-explain the symbols and inundate learners with definitions and technical qualifications, they will stifle their imaginations, sap them of their interest in the topic, and increase the likelihood that they will cease making meaningful connections with what the teacher says.[35] On the other hand, if teachers limit their teaching to symbolic expressions with no recourse to explanatory language, they deprive learners of the intellectual resources that would enable them to understand their experiences clearly and to judge the reality of what they imagine. Alternating regularly between symbolic and explanatory language and activities, combined with frequent questioning activities, increases the likelihood that learners will remain imaginatively engaged throughout the process.

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[35] The reader will recall that Jesus rarely seemed concerned to clear up his disciples' confusion. More important to him was drawing them deeper into an encounter with God, even if they did not understand perfectly what they were experiencing. Contemporary religious educators, too, must be willing to tolerate a certain amount of confusion in the midst of the learning process.

Secondly, it is important to reiterate yet again that teachers should regularly relate the symbols in focus to Jesus and his vision of the reign of God. This is not to say that teachers must mention Jesus in every sentence or even in every lesson, but relating the various symbols of the Christian symbol system to its controlling symbol (viz., Jesus) should be an ingrained habit for teachers. Only in relation to the person of Jesus do these other symbols convey their full meaning, and only by referring them back to Jesus can teachers be relatively assured that no symbol will become an idol or distraction from the proper focal point of Christian faith. Even if the teacher is confident that students understand intellectually that Jesus is the cornerstone of Christianity, regularly relating other topics to this central symbol makes it more likely that this intellectual understanding will permeate to the level of learners' spontaneous imagining and so transform their very way of seeing and living in the world.

In contexts where assessment of students' learning is required, the end of Phase Two provides the most appropriate occasion for administering a traditional test that evaluates students' mastery of the aspects of Catholic faith highlighted in the learning event. As we will see momentarily, the growth achieved in Phase Three is of a more personal, spiritual nature and therefore not something that can be easily assessed by traditional means or assigned a grade.

Phase Three: Appropriation of Christian Imagining

Goal(s) and Function

Following upon the disruption of Phase Two, Phase Three aims primarily to facilitate learners' reintegration of their imagining in an authentically Christian imaginal synthesis. Of course, this is the goal of the pedagogical process as a whole, but it is only through the activities of this third phase, which builds upon the work of the first two, that an integration of the sort we seek can be achieved. Phase Two may itself initiate this reintegration by engaging learners with revelatory symbols that bear special potential for unifying the human person. However, these symbols also tend to disrupt the average person's imagining, especially upon initial exposure, so it is important to devote time specifically to this work of reintegration.

Since achieving a stable imaginal integration demands not only synthesizing fragmented experiences but also overcoming fragmenting habits of imagining, Phase Three aims at a conversion—rather than a mere modification—of the imagination. Since the most resilient integration comes as a result of learners' deliberate imagining, it aims to facilitate their critical appropriation of the Christian imaginary by inviting them to make judgments about and decisions based on that imaginary. In this regard, two sub-goals contribute significantly to Phase Three's primary goal of integrating imaginations, namely, to promote learners' cognitive flexibility and facilitate their self-appropriation.

Cognitional Underpinnings

Our exploration of human cognition in Chapter Two helped us to appreciate the

astonishing orchestration of sensory and mental functions required to achieve integration in one's imagining (to say nothing of the additional bodily and affective orchestration needed to achieve integration in one's living). Such integration is a remarkable cognitional achievement in any circumstance, but it has become a particularly challenging feat in postmodernity given the fragmenting effect of modern media and advertising. With increasing numbers of people struggling to forge a coherent vision of life, an emphasis on integrating activities has becomes an urgent pedagogical exigency for most American Catholics.

While addressing this general exigency, the activities of Phase Three carry special benefits for critical thinkers, the population with which this dissertation has been primarily concerned. As the label suggests, today's critical thinkers are perfectly capable of high-level, analytical thinking, perhaps more so than any preceding generation. However, for all their perspicacity in seeing through the potential distortions of symbolic consciousness, they typically fail to recognize the importance of symbol for alternative modes of knowing and for personal integration. The growth in self-awareness culminating in post-critical consciousness that Phase Three facilitates helps critical thinkers to overcome this myopia and restore integration to their lives. Not only is integration a need for people at all levels of cognitive development; it is a need that must be addressed every day. Given the ubiquity of this exigency, addressing it must be a standard function of religious education, especially when helping learners to process challenging new images and information.

As we have learned from the research in previous chapters, pedagogical attention to image and symbol is among the most effective strategies for promoting integration in learners' thinking and living. Still, although activating learners' imaginations is necessary for the task of promoting integration, it is not sufficient. Something needs to give order to the barrage of images rushing through the mind. Such is the role of reflective judgment. If one's imaginal integration is to be a differentiated synthesis rather than an unremitting stream of random images, one must be deliberate about judging the adequacy of the images that flow through one's mind. For there is a unity to the imagining of the adolescent boy who spends every spare minute playing Grand Theft Auto and who looks upon the wider world as if it were an extension of that virtual reality. Likewise, there is a unity in his living to the extent that he replicates in his real life the reprehensible actions that earn him points in that video game. However, this unity in his imagining derives from the intensity of the images in the game, not their adequacy to representing reality as it is. His living is integrated insofar as he acts upon what he imagines and his actions are consistent, but it lacks integration in the deeper sense that his actions are at odds with the values toward which his own intelligent questioning orients him and which he would affirm were he to judge them reasonably.[36] Hence, imagination that is not only integrated but also true to reality requires an ingrained habit of judging one's mental images.

Living that is not only integrated but also authentically Christian involves acting upon one's judgments of the worth of what one envisions. Phase Three facilitates such

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[36] Similar observations might be made about the patterns of imagining that led to the dissolution of the Christian cosmic and social imaginary described by Taylor. There was a unity to 18th- and 19th-century Christians' imagining (viz., an image of the world as the work of a Deistic God and, later, as a mechanistic, self-sustaining universe). However, had these Christians been more deliberate about judging the adequacy of these images, they would have found them inconsistent with the Christian tradition.

action in two ways. First, the activities of this phase encourage learners to express their learning from Phase Two in concrete images, which are more readily acted upon than abstractions. Second, they deliberately facilitate the work of self-appropriation, which requires patterned acts of judging and deciding. By encouraging consistent performance of these acts, Phase Three aims at empowering learners for integrated, authentically Christian living.

Method and Procedures

Phase Three corresponds to movements 4 and 5 of Groome's shared praxis. As with Phases One and Two, I presume the procedures Groome describes as a foundation for Phase Three and so will focus on activities that augment what he has prescribed or that are particularly important for the work of converting learners' imaginations. The activities of Phase Three invite learners to make informed judgments about the adequacy and value of their imagining and of Christian symbols, to make responsible decisions in accord with the values expressed in those symbols, to enhance their awareness of and control over their judging and decision-making, and generally to undergo a conversion in their imagining.

As I and other authors have consistently emphasized, it is outside the power of religious educators to compel conversion in their students. Hence, the procedures I describe below are best understood as invitations to learners to abandon old ways of imagining in favor of imagining as Jesus did. In addition to conducting these learning activities in a manner that shows respect for students' agency, teachers guard against

coercion in their teaching by leading learners in exercises that promote their self-appropriation. I have designed the dynamics of Phase Three so as to make these exercises a standard component of the learning process and to provide teachers with clearer guidance for facilitating self-appropriation than is available in existing works on religious education.

Building upon the work of the first two phases, the next step in the process of self-appropriation involves objectifying the role of reflective judgment in authentic cognition and habituating learners in making reasoned judgments upon their imagining. To this end, teachers invite learners through a variety of exercises to make judgments about the adequacy of Christian symbols and their own manner of imagining. Once again, the emphasis here is on "invite". If these faith symbols are to become and remain the orienting images in learners' lives, learners must affirm their value for themselves and appropriate them deliberately. They must be able to render reasoned judgments about the value and adequacy of Christian symbols based on immanently generated norms rather than the say-so of others. Without this sort of deliberate, effortful process of appropriation, these symbols are likely to get lost in the mix with all the others learners absorb from the wider culture.

The most basic step teachers can take to empower learners to make such autonomous judgments is forming them in a habit of constantly asking questions about the images foisted upon them and about their own imagining.[37] Cultivation of this habit

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[37] More sophisticated forms of judging and decision-making exercises are beyond the capacity of young children. Nevertheless, young children can at least begin forming habits of questioning, judging, and deciding, even if the criteria for their judgments are not well considered or especially rigorous.

occurs throughout the pedagogical process, but the third phase is a particularly fruitful time for asking questions like, Do these images illuminate my experiences? Who created them? What were their motivations? What experiences have given rise to my own mental images? What values and potential biases underlie them? Developing a habit for asking questions such as these strengthens one's resistance to bias as well as one's abilities to know reality accurately and to process new experiences and input in a coherent way.[38] On a related note, it is important that teachers encourage learners to articulate their lingering questions at the end of any learning event. Doing so not only promotes the habit of critical questioning but also conveys to learners that formal religious education cannot provide exhaustive answers to every question. There is always more to learn, especially when it comes to God, and religious educators should make that fact abundantly clear to their students

A second way teachers can assist learners in developing their powers of judgment and self-appropriating their imagining is one I mentioned in the previous chapter, namely, suggesting hermeneutical guidelines for assessing the value of images.[39] Intentional appropriation of such guidelines is necessary lest learners base their assessments of images on tacit, less rigorous criteria. I am careful to say that teachers should "suggest" hermeneutical guidelines because they must be deliberately appropriated rather than imposed if learners' judgments are to genuinely be their own. Drawing upon a few of the

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[38] Insofar as these questioning activities raise one's consciousness of the dynamics of and influences on one's imagining, they contribute to the process of psychic conversion, which is a key component of what I mean here by self-appropriation.

[39] In the last chapter, I pointed out that teachers would greatly assist their students by presenting such guidelines to their students as Groome does for educators in *Sharing Faith*.

guidelines Groome proposes for educators that are also appropriate for guiding learners' judging, I recommend that learners should: (a) employ the reign of God as the metacriterion or controlling symbol for their imagining, (b) attend to the distorting and illuminating potential of their own interests and perspectives, and (c) strongly favor continuity with the Christian tradition and union with the Christian community. Furthermore, learners should also (d) place value upon images to the extent that they illuminate their experiences, reveal God, and lead to holy living.

Beyond simply presenting these criteria to learners for their affirmation, teachers can employ several strategies to encourage appropriation. First, they can demonstrate the importance of these particular criteria, perhaps by contrasting them with less helpful criteria that might be operating implicitly in learners' thinking. Teachers can also walk learners through assessing various symbols using these criteria, and then, based on this experience, invite learners to decide whether or not it makes sense to them to adopt these criteria as their standard of judgment. While learners should by no means wait to make judgments until they have been trained in this way, objectifying their personal criteria for judgment provides a more solid basis for judging the adequacy of images.

Once learners have established this basis, they are in better position to make reasoned judgments about the value of the Christian symbols presented by the teacher and about their own mental images. Typically judging activities will follow immediately after learners' engagement with the Christian symbol(s). Since Phase Three also involves learners judging the adequacy of their own mental images, teachers may need to invite learners to recall the observations they made about their own imagining at the beginning

of Phase Two (or whenever they did so). Beyond teachers simply asking questions that elicit learners' judgments (the most common activity in movement 4 of SCP), Groome suggests that teachers can invite learners to express their judgments through speaking, writing and sharing, drawing and explaining, creating a symbol or aesthetic expression, journaling, movement, role playing, panel discussions, debates, and other activities.

As Groome's list of activities suggests, sometimes learners need to feel their way into a judgment or creatively explore the possibilities suggested by the Christian symbols before making a judgment.[40] In addition to the activities Groome describes, this exploration might take the form of learners telling stories or sketching out what a personal symbol system consistent with that of Christianity would look like. Teachers might also encourage learners to try out behaviors and roles consistent with Christian imagining and then provide opportunities for reflection upon those experiments in class. Whatever the means, these activities should culminate in an opportunity for learners to render explicit judgments about the adequacy of the Christian symbols and their own imagining. In so doing, they not only appropriate these Christian symbols in a more meaningful way but also reintegrate their imaginations (at least for the time being).

Once learners have made a judgment concerning the adequacy of Christian symbols and their own imagining, teachers should make explicit and encourage learners to address the existential question that naturally follows: If this way of imagining is really true and worthwhile, what will I do about it? That "what" may involve performing a

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[40] In this regard, Groome's pedagogical guidance supports the work of psychic conversion described by Doran. Like Groome, Doran argues that, more than intellectual understanding, authentically Christian living requires the integration of sensing, feeling, and thinking.

discrete action, like apologizing for wrongdoing, or it might involve something more comprehensive, like submitting oneself to long-term training that will form one's imagining in a more Christian way.[41] In the most extreme case, the question is a question of accepting conversion: Will I reorient my imagining to this vision of the reign of God with all it implies for my life? This is the question and the decision toward which the whole pedagogical process leads. The teacher's efforts in Phases One and Two to engage and challenge learners' imaginations serve primarily to bring them to this moment in which they might make the crucial decision to imagine otherwise, to willingly accept the conversion to which God is calling them.

Even though these questions naturally present themselves to consciousness when one judges something to be true and worthwhile, it is important that teachers make the questions explicit for learners lest they ignore them or defer a response. Indeed, such a (non)response is entirely likely given the resistance typically generated by radical challenges to a person's current ways of constructing meaning. Making these questions explicit is one more way in which teachers play an instrumental role in facilitating the integration of learners' imagining and living that is so integral to psychic conversion.

By way of example, at the end of a learning event centered around the creation stories of Genesis 1-2, the teacher might ask learners to decide how they will concretely show respect for themselves and others, who are created in the *imago Dei*. Or, in a learning event about Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan, learners might decide how to

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[41] Submitting to long-term training might involve, for example, committing oneself more intentionally to the learning process described here or seeking clinical assistance (e.g., the Neuro-Linguistic Programming described by Timothy O'Connell or the sort of psychotherapy prescribed by Doran as part of the process of psychic conversion).

be better neighbors to the people they encounter in their lives. Often the larger question of accepting a conversion of one's imagination will arise spontaneously for different persons at different times. However, teachers can raise the issue explicitly from time to time by asking questions like, Does your new understanding of this symbol demand a change in the way you imagine reality as a whole? Responses to these questions may be written or not, but either way teachers should allow adequate time for learners to reflect in concerted and imaginative ways.

While teachers must be careful to respect the autonomy of learners in making judgments and decisions, it is neither necessary nor possible nor advisable to create a vacuum for learners' decision-making. Depending on the context, it may be more or less appropriate for teachers to persuade learners to decision and action. As noted in Chapter Four, persuasion is not to be confused with coercion or manipulation. Persuasion appeals to learners' emotions and reasoning, encouraging them to make full use of their cognitive abilities to arrive at the best possible decision. Coercion and manipulation obscure alternatives, circumvent learners' reasoning, and/or constrain decision-making. Still, even when it comes to genuine, non-coercive persuasion, the fervor of the teacher's appeal must be appropriate to the setting. Good teachers help their students to see the beauty and value in any subject matter they engage, but the nature of a teacher's appeal to a parish catechesis class will differ significantly from another's appeal to a high school religion class that includes non-Catholics.

The reality of the situation is that we all rely heavily on the testimony of others in various matters. No decision is ever completely free from outside influence. Given the

ubiquity of less salutary influences, it is entirely appropriate in most circumstances that a Christian teacher should encourage his or her students to make what the more experienced and presumably wiser teacher has found to be the best choice. Indeed, as we learned from Doran in Chapter Four, willingly submitting to the persuasion of others is often necessary to bring one's living into alignment with one's imagining. There are many ways teachers can make their presentation of Christian symbols persuasive (e.g., by offering personal testimony, seriously engaging Jesus' parables, or sharing stories of holy people like Dorothy Day and Oscar Romero, who provide an exceptional witness to the Christian way of life). However, it need not be only the teacher who makes a persuasive case for the value of Christian symbols. Learners are much more likely to appropriate a Christian manner of imagining if they see others—especially their peers—doing so and thriving as a result. Whatever the source of this persuasion and encouragement, it can offer the support learners need to make the bold step from imagining to acting.

Once learners have made a decision for faith, teachers should provide them with opportunities to translate their decisions into action and synthesize their new manner of imagining. Creating such opportunities is of the utmost importance, for nothing consolidates new ideas and images more effectively than acting upon them in a consistent fashion. Obviously there are constraints on what teachers typically are able to do within the classroom context or in limited excursions, but teachers can certainly engage learners in activities that help to bridge decision and action. Most basically, learners can develop a plan of action specifying how they will act upon their decisions. This plan might take the form of a month-long prayer schedule or something as simple as a text message reminder

to oneself to say "I love you" upon returning home to one's spouse. For learners who have undergone a full-scale conversion of the imagination, the changes in their behavior are likely to be more drastic and wide-ranging.

Many of the judging activities described above, when employed in the wake of a significant decision, can also facilitate the integration of newly appropriated images into the person's spontaneous level of imagining. Storytelling, for example, weaves new images into the personal narrative that gives coherence to a person's life. Artistic expression similarly helps to integrate one's ideas, images, and feelings in a way that approximates commonsense, everyday patterns of thought. Whatever particular activities are employed, it is crucial that they help learners to synthesize their new imagining in a manner that reaches all the way down to the level of concrete, human-scale images. If the reign of God is really to take hold in people's lives, it must become populated with images of what it looks like to embody God's reign while taking a school exam, shopping for groceries, or arguing with one's spouse. Hence, teachers should dedicate the final moments of this process to allowing learners to imagine the implications of the day's topic in concrete, personal terms and to identify key images that will root God's reign in the ordinariness of their everyday lives.[42] For example, at the end of a learning event about baptism, a learner might resolve to sign herself with the sign of cross before drying off from her morning shower and when washing up at day's end as a daily reminder of her baptismal vows.

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[42] This concrete image might even provide the point of departure for the next iteration of the learning process. See the following section for an explanation of the recursive nature of this process.

For all of these Phase Three activities, time is of the essence. Teachers must allow learners time and mental space to appropriate new patterns of imagining in meaningful ways. If teachers are in too much of a hurry to move on to the next topic, learners may remember the content covered, but the learning event is less likely to lead to self-appropriation and conversion.

As mentioned above, one cannot place a point value on a person's transformation or assign it a grade. Nevertheless, assessing learners' progress in a less formal manner will help teachers in responding to students' learning needs as it will learners in recognizing their personal growth. If the teacher is immediately beginning another cycle of the three-phase process with the same group of learners, the assessment conducted in Phase One (see Appendix I) may suffice for evaluating learners' progress in the previous cycle. If the teacher will not be continuing with the same students or the next cycle will focus on an unrelated topic, the teacher may conduct an assessment at the end of Phase Three using the same set of questions and criteria employed in Phase One.

Repeating the Process—The Key to Effectiveness

Lest we lose sight of the forest for the trees, it will do to synthesize the preceding sections with some comments about how this pedagogical process functions as a whole. The sum effect of the process is truly greater than that of its parts. Although the diverse procedures described within each of the three phases play a significant role in integrating imaginations and promoting self-appropriation, the single most important factor in the

effectiveness of this pedagogical approach is disarmingly simple: The process must be conducted in a recursive manner.

Why is the repetition of this process so crucial for its effectiveness? The reasons are several. First, there are those pertaining to the dynamics at play in the integrative work of the imagination. Imaginal integration requires relative stability in the core of one's symbol system, but postmodern criticism of metanarratives, embrace of plurality, and the explosion of imagery in modern technological cultures all conspire against such stability. Given this state of affairs, lessons about Christian symbols without subsequent reinforcement are bound to be lost in the mix. Even more dynamic educational approaches like Groome's shared praxis and my own, which produce more resilient learning on account of their experiential, engaging methodology, are inadequate to preparing learners for sustaining imaginal integration if they are conducted as merely one-off or occasional learning sessions.[43]

The symbols that exert the greatest influence over people's imagining are those that carry the strongest emotional charge and that are most interconnected with other personally important symbols, invested with the richest meaning, and reinforced most consistently by experience. If Christian symbols are to constitute the core of people's symbol systems, those people must continue to discover ever new levels of beauty and meaning in them through their education, the liturgy, art, and other formative experiences. This is to say that, in today's context, Christian religious education will only

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[43] In *Sharing Faith*, Groome clearly envisions SCP as a process that can be used in an ongoing manner (see, e.g., p.293), but he does not make the case that conducting SCP in an ongoing manner is essential for achieving its aims as I do for my approach.

succeed in forming disciples' imaginations for the reign of God insofar as it continuously revisits the central symbols of Christian faith, building more and more connections with other faith symbols and images from everyday life and giving learners reason to return to those symbols time and again.

Still, even the most thorough religious education constitutes a relatively small portion of the sum of a person's life experiences. The influence of this education is dwarfed by the continuous formation people receive from television, the internet, movies, popular music, and advertising. In order to contend with these competing influences, religious education must train learners to take control of their imagining. This, too, requires more than occasional exercises in Christian imagining; it requires continuous formation. For young learners, whose mental habits are still highly malleable, an extended period of training (perhaps three, five, or ten years) might be adequate to form life-long habits of Christian imagining.[44] For adults, who are more set in their ways of thinking and imagining, a much longer (if not indefinite) period would likely be required.

Most basically, this formation involves training learners to regularly revisit core Christian symbols, seeking new meaning in them, and to reintegrate their imagining in light of new images and experiences. The ideal process for this training is none other than that laid out in three phases in this chapter. Of special importance in the dynamics of those three phases is the manner in which they encourage learners to critically examine not only the symbols of Christian faith and the images in their own minds but also the

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[44] This is not a precise estimate. Further quantitative research would be necessary to gather more precise data. My key point is only that habits that are deeply ingrained in children's formative years often persist throughout their lifetime. However, even in the case of children, an extended period of training is required.

manner in which their imaginations operate upon those images. This critical self-examination—which I have been referring to as a process of self-appropriation of one's imagination—involves deliberately attending to one's imagining (especially in Phase One), understanding one's imagining and the Christian way of imagining (especially in Phase Two), and judging the adequacy of one's imagination and that of Christianity and making existential decisions based on those judgments (especially in Phase Three).[45] While establishing these habits of imagining (which I have identified as characteristic of post-critical consciousness) demands great effort initially, with time many of them become second-nature, requiring less of one's conscious attention.

There is an additional reason why continuous repetition of this process is instrumental for achieving its aims, one that pertains less to the postmodern context than to perennial challenges. In Chapter Two, we noted the paradox of the human relationship to the divine: While our human experiences and images never adequately convey to us the reality of God and the transcendent realm, it is only by such means that we have any access to God at all. This state of affairs confronts us with the dilemma of having to pursue and relate to God through material means that constantly threaten to mislead us and inevitably fall short of a full communication. A recursive approach to Christian religious education helps to ameliorate this situation. By starting from learners' own mental images in Phase One and returning to the same level of familiarity and concreteness in Phase Three, this pedagogical process caters to the limitations of human

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[45] Insofar as this pedagogical approach provides a means of systematically self-appropriating one's imagining (as distinct from achieving critical consciousness of particular images and symbols), it goes beyond those examined in the previous chapter.

cognition. By incorporating critical self-examination in Phase Two, it challenges learners to acknowledge the inadequacy of their images and expand their imagining. By requiring that the process be repeated continuously and that learners be formed in the habit of reexamining their imagining in the same recursive manner, it offers a built-in safeguard against idolatrous and reductionistic imagining, for the imagination that persistently imagines anew is the safest from idolatry. This ever-active, ever-open manner of imagining is what Jesus sought to foster in his teaching and what I intend to foster through this pedagogical process.

Conclusion

I have proposed here a three-phase pedagogical process as a partial remedy for the dis-integrated imaginations at the root of many Americans' current crisis of faith. At the outset of this chapter, I asserted the claim that, in order to meet the challenges of educating for Catholic faith in postmodernity, religious educators must address several pedagogical desiderata. Namely, they must attend to the needs and limits of human cognition; facilitate transcendence of egocentric thinking, imagining, and feeling; recruit the active participation of learners in the transformation of their own imaginations; provide emotional and communal support during the transition; reintegrate fragmented imaginations; promote cognitive flexibility; and facilitate self-appropriation. I argued that, by pursuing these sub-goals, religious educators have the best chance of promoting the conversion of learners' imaginations that is necessary to restore wholeness to their imagining and living.

In an effort to design a pedagogical process that meets these exigencies, I have synthesized contemporary research in cognitive science, transformative learning theory, conceptual change, and religious conversion; the pedagogical guidance of Jesus and leading contemporary Christian educators; and my own constructive contributions. The resulting process both attends to human limits and pushes learners for transcendence by beginning and ending the process at the level of familiar images while challenging personal images in Phase Two. It involves learners actively in every phase of the process, constantly posing questions, incorporating various activities, and explicitly inviting learners' judgments about their learning. It supports learners through difficult cognitive changes by bringing humor into the classroom, inviting learners into conversation with one another, and persuading learners to follow through on their own best judgments. It promotes cognitive flexibility by habituating learners to asking critical questions, forming them in habits of reflective judgment, training them in a controlled setting to respond to postmodern intellectual and imaginal challenges, facilitating their self-appropriation, and generally encouraging their agency in the learning process. One of the most distinctive contributions of the approach I propose here is the manner in which it integrates learners' fragmented imaginations by means of a recursive pedagogical process that trains them in post-critical habits of imagining and self-examination. Another is the manner in which it facilitates learners' self-appropriation of their imagining through imaginative exercises and questioning activities systematically imbedded in the three-phase process.

The path that has led us to this pedagogical approach was full of sophisticated research and careful theological qualifications. In the end, however, my central argument

is simple—faithful Christian living, in this age or any other, requires an imagination that is at once centered and active. Put otherwise, if Christian disciples—especially those living in today's postmodern culture—are to live an integrated, meaningful, God-centered life, they must intentionally engage in ongoing exploration of the symbols that God has revealed for human benefit. All the technical work of this dissertation has been for the sake of making this point, which Jesus clearly grasped two millennia before the first study in cognitive science was ever produced.

When disciples grow lethargic in their imagining or lose sight of the whole, the Christian imaginary dissipates and with it the unity in people's lives. That American Catholics have succumbed to such a fate was apparent in our examination of the sociological data in Chapter One. It is also apparent to many of us in our daily interactions with other Catholics and (increasingly) former Catholics. I personally have witnessed the sense of meaninglessness and disorientation in the lives of people like Michael, whom I introduced at the beginning of this dissertation. Michael undoubtedly possessed an intellectual understanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith. What he lacked was an imaginative grasp of how a Christian imaginary might illuminate and integrate his experience of the world. In the absence of such an imaginative frame, the Catholic faith offered little meaning for his life.

For those who do find profound meaning and fulfillment in the Christian way of life, it is heartbreaking to see fellow disciples floundering in the postmodern melee. They recognize what people like Michael do not (at least not yet)—that a fuller, more joyful life is possible and could be theirs if they could only envision and embrace it. However,

this is precisely the difficulty; they do not see. For this reason Jesus came into the world proclaiming his vision of the reign of God, a vision with the power to restore sight to the blind and liberate those who are bound by the forces warring within them and in the world (Lk 4:18). Those who have the courage to undergo the conversion of the imagination that entering into Jesus' vision requires find that a fuller life does indeed await. And so the task of today's Christian religious educators remains essentially the same as that undertaken by Jesus long ago, namely, to invite conversion of imaginations to the reign of God.

I have aspired in this dissertation to provide guidelines for how Catholic religious educators might go about this work. My focus has been limited primarily to classroom pedagogy, and as such many important questions remain to be explored: For example, how might teachers be best trained in this approach? And what implications might this research carry for the other ministries of the Church, which are likewise instrumental in forming the people of God in a Christian imaginary? Answering these questions will require further research and reflection. My hope is that this dissertation will provide a touchstone for these future investigations. Still, even if important questions remain to be addressed, one thing has become manifestly clear through the present investigation: At the heart of the Church's work of forming disciples is the activation and reorientation of people's imaginations. If the pedagogical approach I have developed here furthers this work, I truly believe that I will have contributed something with the potential to help restore meaning and coherence to the lives of today's Christian disciples.

Appendix I: Model Learning Event

Phase One

For this example, let us assume a teacher is teaching a lesson on the topic of the Eucharist with the goal that her or his college-age students will understand how the sacrament of the Eucharist bonds people together into a community of love. As a focusing activity, the teacher might begin by playing a video clip that illustrates dysfunctional community. Ideally this clip would be from a movie or TV show that the learners know and enjoy (e.g., the sitcoms "New Girl" or "Big Bang Theory") or at least one that learners find entertaining. Using a humorous clip will help to put learners at ease as they enter into conversation, but employing a clip that elicits other strong emotions might also be appropriate.[1] The clip's focus on the theme of community sets up the focus for the lesson.

The teacher might then lead the group in a discussion of the clip, focusing on the source of dysfunction and what might improve the situation in this fictional community. This conversation segues into an opportunity for learners to give expression to their images of perfect community and how this sort of community might be formed. For example, learners might share stories of times when they found themselves in the midst of people who made them feel peaceful, happy, and valued. They might share about a close group of friends, a retreat they attended, their own family, or any number of other experiences and people. After participants have shared stories for a time, the teacher

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[1] I suggest a clip of dysfunctional rather than ideal community because the former is more likely to be humorous.

invites them to further consider how such community is formed. The teacher might ask questions like, What would it take to form a community that resembled the one you described all the time? Is such a community even possible? What gets in the way? Participants might refer back to the video clip as helpful but should focus primarily on their personal experiences. Learners then have an opportunity to express how they imagine such a community forming and/or what prevents the formation of perfect community. Again, the teacher should encourage participants to speak concretely and from personal experience and to avoid abstract platitudes.

This examination of images presented by the teacher and those generated by learners will lead into more critical self-examination in the following phase. However, before beginning Phase Two (or perhaps during the Phase One activities just described) the teacher may make an informal assessment of the adequacy of learners' symbolic consciousness. The descriptions of pre-critical, critical, and post-critical consciousness and the criteria for the adequacy of symbolic consciousness provided in Chapter Three can serve as the basis for this evaluation. In terms of assessing the basic adequacy of learners' manner of imagining, teachers might ask, Do learners exhibit a healthy habit of asking questions and rendering rational judgments about what they see and imagine? How well do they recover emotionally when their way of imagining things is disrupted? Concerning adequacy to Christian faith, teachers might ask, To what extent are learners able to distinguish consistently between symbols and their referents (especially God)? How active and open to revision is their imagining? Regarding adequacy to the postmodern context, teachers might ask, To what extent do learners demonstrate a

dynamic stability in their imagining in the face of the barrage of conflicting images in the popular media? How well have learners understood and assumed control of the dynamics of their imagining? When evaluating learners based on these questions, teachers should do so with an awareness of what can be reasonably expected for each particular age group.[2]

Phase Two

Following the viewing of the video clip and the ensuing conversation, the teacher might invite learners to reflect as a class, in groups, or individually on a series of questions about their imagining about community. These questions might include: Where do your images of community come from? What experiences might have given rise to them? Might different experiences have given you a different image of community? Does everyone envision community in the same way? Does anyone experience perfect community? How do your images of community (healthy and dysfunctional) affect your relationships with others? How do they affect your attitudes toward your faith community? Such questions encourage learners to objectify their mental images and imagining, thereby reactivating the openness in their imagining and preparing the ground for a potential change in the way they imagine.

Exactly how the teacher challenges learners' imagining will depend upon how they respond to the questioning and imaginative exercises in Phase One. Let us assume

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[2] For example, lower elementary students could not be expected to execute rational judgments based on explicit criteria, though they could express their preferences for images and provide some justification for their choices, superficial though their justification might be.

that the undergraduate students with whom the teacher is working evince views on community that conflict with key aspects of the Catholic vision of community.[3] Perhaps that vision, influenced by college culture, is characterized by community that centers around abusive drinking habits and random "hook-ups" (i.e, consensual, often alcohol-facilitated sexual encounters with no subsequent development of a relationship). Given the students' particular views on this topic, the teacher might play a clip from Boston College professor Kerry Cronin's talk on "The Imperfect Art of Dating" or from a movie that highlights the destructiveness of this sort of distorted "community".[4] In the Cronin clip, the speaker relates the story of an undergraduate woman who for years bought into the hook-up-based ideal of community and eventually came to realize its inadequacy in tragic fashion. Because the young woman is highly relatable to other undergraduates, the disruption her story provokes is particularly powerful.

Following this disruptive moment, the teacher might begin inviting learners into a new vision of community through several bridging images. The teacher might begin by affirming the humanness of a vision of community gathered around basic goods and practices like sharing food and drink. Pivoting upon this element of the learners' vision of community, the teacher might suggest (through artwork or reading from Exodus 16) the image of the Israelites being sustained as a community by God's gift of manna in the desert. In this image of community, the good of communal sharing of food remains

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[3] Here I necessarily limit this example to one of the three approaches described in the method section of Phase Two, viz., disrupting unChristian imagining. (The other two approaches were teaching Christian symbols and enriching learners' imagining about Christian symbols.)

[4] An appropriate clip from Cronin's talk can be accessed on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysvbS8vIXIA.

prominent, but here the food serves to focus the community's attention on God's generosity rather than facilitate mutual exploitation. Because it is typically best to employ multiple images, the teacher might then relate this image of the Israelite community sustained by God's gift of manna to the contemporary Catholic community, which is sustained and constituted by God's gift of the Eucharist. Again, the use of artwork or video helps learners to imagine this image more vividly.

After the teacher has devoted some time to presenting a vivid image of the Eucharistic community, he or she can beneficially introduce Catholic doctrine into the discussion, perhaps highlighting the symbolic meaning of the Eucharist as both a meal that unites the community and a sacrifice through which Jesus makes that unity possible. Presented in this way, the discussion of doctrine can help to reinforce and clarify how the Eucharist ritually enacts the Christian community's dependence upon God for sustaining a loving community comprised of sinful members and the community's gratitude to God for this. The teacher might seize upon this opportunity to relate the symbol of the Eucharist to a central symbol of faith by describing the Eucharistic community as an incarnation of the reign of God. Following this discussion, the teacher might lead the group in enacting a stripped down version of the Mass, including only those elements (e.g., act of confession, sign of peace, presentation of gifts, consecration, reception of communion) that emphasize the community's dependence on God for uniting and preserving the unity of the community.

This discussion of the Eucharist provides an opportunity to address directly how symbols function in human cognition, living, and religion. Some learners in the group,

particularly those operating from critical consciousness, may be harboring assumptions that the Eucharist is merely an empty ritual or a display of magical thinking. The teacher can help such learners to see—perhaps especially through the simulation—how the symbols and ritual of the Eucharist hold together the multiple meanings of divine sacrifice and communal meal in a way explanatory language cannot. This sort of experience can also help critical thinkers to appreciate how the ritual not only symbolizes the community's gratitude and unity but also effects that gratitude and unity among those gathered.

Following these activities, the teacher may administer a traditional test to assess students' understanding of Catholic teaching on the Eucharist and community.

Phase Three

Phase Three might begin with a discussion of the Mass simulation. The teacher could ask: What did you think of this ritual? Did any of the parts of the Mass take on new meaning for you? Why do you think you didn't grasp this meaning from your previous experiences of the Mass? What has your experience of Mass been like in the past? What did it mean to you? These questions present an opportunity for learners to learn from one another and garner encouragement as they begin to consider how they might imagine the Eucharist and community differently. Learners should also feel free to tell humorous stories about their experiences in Mass since the humor will likewise ease the transition. After learners have had some time to share their experiences, the teacher might push their reflection deeper by inviting them to discuss what their community would be like if they

intentionally engaged in the sort of ritual they just enacted on a regular basis. This question decisively pushes the conversation forward from recalling past experiences to envisioning something new and challenges learners to consider more actively the community-forming power of the Eucharist.

This question also serves to set up a dialogical probing of learners' imagining about community. The teacher might next invite learners to compare the image of community arising from the Mass simulation with their current image of community (e.g., drinking together, hooking up). For example, teachers might ask, How would your life be different if you participated in this ritual regularly and let it form your approach to your relationships? The next question is, Would this be a change for the better, the worse, or neither? In order to answer this question, learners require some basis for making the judgment. Undoubtedly they will have some (probably tacit) criteria that they bring to the issue, but their judgment will be sounder if they reflect upon their criteria deliberately. Therefore, if not discussed previously, this point in the learning experience presents an opportune moment to discuss the hermeneutical guidelines mentioned in Chapter Six (viz., the reign of God, continuity with the Christian tradition and community, and illuminating potential).

Applying these criteria, learners can make reasonable judgments that go beyond a vague assessment of whether or not this Eucharistic image of community appeals to them. They can ask more robust questions like, Does this Eucharistic image of community cohere with Jesus' vision of life in abundance and the reign of God? Is it consistent with the teaching and way of life embodied over the millennia in the Christian

community? Does it illumine my experience and help me to make sense of life? Can I expect this image to help me strengthen my relationships? Learners may require significant time and support to answer these questions meaningfully. Before feeling comfortable with a judgment, some learners might, for example, find it helpful to create a painting or song that explores the possibilities for this new vision of community or to diagram how the symbol of the Eucharist fits within their personal symbol system. It might help others to attend an actual Mass and experience it through this new lens before rendering a judgment, which the teacher should encourage them to do rather than demanding a premature judgment.

Once learners have made a judgment concerning the value of this Eucharistic image of community relative to their old image, the teacher should invite them to make decisions based on that judgment. Learners might write in a journal, send themselves an email, or simply think to themselves how they will enact this image of community in their lives. Some learners may require persuasion to step from the realm of knowing into the realm of doing. Recognizing this need, the teacher might highlight the benefits that await those who enter more deeply into the mystery of the Eucharist and who work to forge a Eucharistic community. Alternatively, this persuasion might take the form of personal testimony of the teacher's experiences of Christian community or a video clip of a church community that incarnates the Catholic vision of Eucharistic community.

Finally, the teacher should propose concrete ways of putting this vision into action, like referring learners to local churches where they can experience this sort of Christian community. Learners should then have time to develop an action plan (e.g.,

resume Mass attendance, bring a new friend to Mass each month, spend more time with friends who embody a Eucharistic image of community) and form an image that will help to anchor this vision of community in their imaginations. For example, a student might be captivated by the insight that Christians receive the "bread of life" so that they can feed each other and the rest of the world in their daily interactions. Hence, the image of themselves bringing food to a poor person might come to replace the image of drinking with friends as the focal image for their vision of community. When the teacher repeats the pedagogical process with this group in order to deepen their learning further (perhaps at the end of the semester), learners' new focal images might provide the starting point for the exercises of Phase One. The teacher may conduct an assessment of learners' growth either at the end of Phase Three or in Phase One of the next cycle.

Appendix II: Three-Phase Process Overview by Age Level

In the following chart, I provide a suggestive overview of how a learning event focused on the Eucharist and conducted according to my three-phase process might be adapted for three different age groups. The notes in the adult column are a distillation of the model lesson described in Appendix I.

Phase	SCP movement	Lower elementary	Junior high school	Adult
Phase One	Focusing activity	Viewing and discussion of movie clip that illustrates dysfunctional community (e.g., Disney's *Lion King*).	Viewing and discussion of movie clip that illustrates dysfunctional community (e.g., *Remember the Titans*).	Viewing and discussion of clip from TV show that illustrates dysfunctional community (e.g., "New Girl").
	movement 1	Learners share experiences/images of a group of people getting along well and then discuss: How do people learn to treat each other lovingly? Why do people sometimes not treat each other lovingly?	Learners share experiences/images of ideal community and then discuss: What would it take to form a community that's like that all the time? What gets in the way?	Learners share experiences/images of ideal community and then discuss: What would it take to form a community that's like that all the time? What gets in the way?
Phase Two	movement 2	Key questions: Who taught you how to treat others lovingly? Optional diagnostic assessment of learners' form/manner of imagining.	Key questions: Where do your images of community come from? Does everyone envision community in the same way? How do your images of community (healthy and dysfunctional) affect your relationships with others? Optional diagnostic assessment of learners' form/manner of imagining.	Key questions: Where do your images of community come from? Does everyone envision community in the same way? How do your images of community (healthy and dysfunctional) affect your relationships with others? Optional diagnostic assessment of learners' form/manner of imagining.
	movement 3	Viewing of clip from Disney's *Frozen* in which one sister continues to treat the other lovingly despite	Viewing of video clip of L'Arche community (to challenge learners' vision of community as people like them who	Viewing of Kerry Cronin clip (to challenge learners' vision of community as mutual self-

		mistreatment (to challenge learners' vision of community as people who are nice to them). Tell story of Exodus 16. Simplified discussion of Eucharistic community. Mass simulation. Opportunity for traditional assessment.	make them comfortable). Discussion of Exodus 16, Eucharistic community, doctrine of Eucharist (simplified). Mass simulation. Opportunity for traditional assessment.	gratification). Discussion of Exodus 16, Eucharistic community, doctrine on Eucharist. Mass simulation. Discussion of symbols' function in human cognition, living, and religion. Opportunity for traditional assessment.
Phase Three	movement 4	Discussion of Mass simulation: Did you realize that we do basically the same thing every Sunday at Mass? Do you think people would be more loving to each other if they had an experience every week like we just did? Activities for facilitating judgment (e.g., role-playing, artwork).	Discussion of Mass simulation: Did any of the parts of the Mass take on new meaning for you? What has your experience of Mass been like in the past? What would you and your community be like if you intentionally engaged in this sort of ritual on a regular basis? Would this be a change for the better, the worse, or neither? Activities for facilitating judgment (e.g., telling stories, role-playing, artwork).	Discussion of Mass simulation: Did any of the parts of the Mass take on new meaning for you? What has your experience of Mass been like in the past? What would you and your community be like if you intentionally engaged in this sort of ritual on a regular basis? Would this be a change for the better, the worse, or neither? Activities for facilitating judgment (e.g., telling stories, sketching personal symbol system, reflection on experiments in new roles).
	movement 5	Opportunity for decision-making (discussion, artistically expressing decision). Persuasive appeal by teacher (e.g., personal testimony, video of Christian community). Suggest an anchoring image of community for learners. Optional assessment of learners' growth in form/manner of imagining.	Opportunity for decision-making (journaling, discussion, artistically expressing decision). Persuasive appeal by teacher (e.g., personal testimony, video of Christian community). Opportunity to imagine an anchoring image of community. Optional assessment of learners' growth in form/manner of imagining.	Opportunity for decision-making (journaling, discussion, artistically expressing decision). Persuasive appeal by teacher (e.g., personal testimony, video of Christian community). Opportunity to imagine an anchoring image of community. Optional assessment of learners' growth in form/manner of imagining.
Repeat process, pushing for still more adequate imagining.				

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