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Education, Religious Experience, and Conversion : on Pedagogy and the Possibility of Critical Communities of Religious Praxis

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EDUCATION, RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, AND CONVERSION: ON PEDAGOGY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CRITICAL COMMUNITIES OF RELIGIOUS PRAXIS

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ABSTRACT

Religious experience and conversion, terms associated more with religion than with education, have the potential to transform the way we approach teaching and learning, bringing the transcendental reality of our lives to the fore as we seek to understand the world and ourselves. This thesis will argue for the significance, relevance and use of religious experience as pedagogical category and will suggest that the formation of what I term Critical Communities of Religious Praxis as means of fostering conversion towards religious experience can be an effective means of incorporating both into classroom processes. Critical Communities of Religious Praxis are learning spaces where learners are formed to be critically conscious of their realities so as to be open and aware to more than just the immanent and material. These spaces build upon learners' communal and familial contexts while encouraging them to reflect and act on the new experiences and perspectives gained.

The first chapter introduces religious experience as a philosophical and theological reality, demonstrating that such experiences have a knowledge component while also opening individuals to the possibility of the transcendent and the divine. This is followed in the second chapter with an exposition on conversion and how it can apply to more than just religious contexts. In particular, the attributes of openness and awareness in converted persons and how these are fostered by relationality and action will be looked at. The third chapter describes the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis as a pedagogical system and demonstrates how teaching and learning would take place there. The fourth and final chapter integrates the approaches to describe, with examples, how such learning spaces can be fostered while discussing the religious implications and challenges that one might face in this approach to religious experience and conversion.

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INTRODUCTION

Our experiences are crucial to learning just as religious experience is important to our lives of faith. I might also add that understatement can be an especially good means of emphasis as the educator in me values learning through experience above most other classroom approaches and the religious person in me sees religious experience as foundational to my faith. What follows is an attempt to bring these two distinct yet related senses of experience together in a systematic and practical study of how religious experience can be brought effectively into learning processes.

Even though religious experience is usually specific to the religious tradition within which it is experienced, and some might suggest that such experiences lead only to learning about the religion itself, I want to propose a broader view of how religious experience works. The Bible is filled with descriptions of people having religious experiences which lead them to God and the process by which this happens is also noteworthy from a pedagogical perspective. Take the initial verses from John's first letter for example:

> We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.[1]

The declaration of the author is that the truth of Jesus Christ and God the Father was accessed through what was seen and heard, real experiences in the world that pointed to the existence and reality of God. Implicit in this declaration is that the trustworthiness of what was said comes because the experiences were shared and that the recipients of this message can have

[1] 1 Jn 1:1-3. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the New Revised Standard Version. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993.)

access to this truth if they too open themselves to these experiences. This makes sense because telling someone who may not fully believe in God's existence about abstract religious experience may not lead them to conversion but the invitation to share in the fellowship and experiences that come with it can be a start of a longer but more deeply felt process of conversion.

This approach is indicative of how I proceed here, prizing experience as a means of learning while inviting and supporting learners in their approach and analysis of these experiences. This thesis will argue for the significance, relevance and use of religious experience as pedagogical category and will suggest that the formation of Critical Communities of Religious Praxis as means of fostering conversion towards religious experience can be an effective means of incorporating both into classroom processes.[2]

Significance and Methods

Coming from a teaching background in which experiential learning has played a significant role, my interest in experiential learning pedagogies comes from how I have been a witness to their efficacy in leading students to learn well. This thesis thus affords me the opportunity to connect these two related approaches to experience in a systematic and practical study of how religious experience can be brought into learning processes. Given also that change and development are integral to learning processes, the dynamic relationship between experiences of God, conversion, and learning will also be explored in the light of these interests.

[2] I propose the name "Critical Communities of Religious Praxis" to describe the environment in which religious experience and conversion can be fostered. Such environments take the communal and familial aspect of the individual into account, form learners to be critical of their contexts and knowledge, involves an acknowledgement of the religious or transcendent, and provides the space for learners to reflect and act on their experiences.

My methodological approach here is both analytic and phenomenological, and reflects this background. The analytical portion will focus on varied descriptions and approaches to religious experience, where I seek similarities and consonances so as to arrive at a broader sense of what religious experience could be. This will be placed in dialogue with the more phenomenological theories of experiential learning that come from both Christian and more secular contexts. The synthesis of this dialogue between the analytic and phenomenological will drive the latter part of the thesis where a model for how experience and conversion can be used as pedagogical categories will be put forth and its practical possibilities described.

The significance of this approach comes from an observation that in general, experiential learning is often seen as not sufficiently taking religious experience or the transcendental reality into account.[3] The practical element of this thesis would have immediate relevance for Christian educators and administrators but would also be of significance to those of other faiths and even those who are unaffiliated to any religion. It is hoped that this attempt to parse the varied descriptions and explanations of religious experience into an approach to the broader transcendental reality will allow it to be used as an educational goal, not just for Christians but for all people, even the non-religious. This last point is important in my own context of Singapore and Malaysia, where teaching and learning occurs within a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society.[4] It is also worthwhile to

[3] This observation is made based on personal and anecdotal evidence of how experiential education is framed in general and how it is implemented in both religious and secular contexts. As will be noted later in this work, experiential learning is often couched in very procedural or mechanistic terms which prize a person's ability to act and reflect on immanent experiences. Even in Christian educational contexts, the connection with the transcendent and with God can be played down in favour of ensuring that more "practical" learning objectives be met.

[4] My immediate context is that of Singapore (population 5.6 million, 2018), which is decidedly multi-ethnic and multi religious. The ethnic breakdown of residents in Singapore as recorded during a census done in 2015 was: 74.3% Chinese, 13.3% Malay, 9.1% Indian, and 3.2% other ethnicities. The religious breakdown was: 43.2% Buddhist-Taoist, 18.8% Christian, 14% Muslim, 5% Hindu, 18.5% Unaffiliated, 0.6% Other religions. (Department of Statistics Singapore, "General Household Survey 2015," *Singapore*

note that although both countries are in Southeast Asia, the British colonial tradition and legacy means that the approach to both education and faith retain much of the Western roots,[5] thus making the methods and approaches here relevant and intelligible to most with whom I may eventually work. Despite the multi-religious nature of the context this study may be aimed at, this attempt to link religious experience with education will acknowledge other religious routes to the transcendental reality but will not look at them in detail as that lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

There is a personal significance to this project too as it represents a meeting of my theological approach with my educational and pedagogical preferences. In my years as an educator, I have found that learning occurs most effectively through experience and that good pedagogical or curriculum planning is about the creation of experiential spaces for learners. This dovetails with my conviction that experience also plays a major role in theology as our contact with concrete reality is the privileged means by which we approach the transcendence that is God. That this confluence is expressed in very similar ways across the varied cultures that I have taught in convinces me of the possibility to extend the focus on experiential learning to the exploration of learning through religious experience.

Brief Outline

The first chapter examines religious experience in a broad sense by considering how theologians have approached this very human way of apprehending the transcendent and God. This exploration of religious experience can seem rather philosophical but I found this

Statistics, last modified 2015, accessed August 4, 2020, http://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/ghs/ghs2015content.)

[5] Christianity came to Southeast Asia with the colonial push of the 19th Century and the local traditions that emerged from the initial push to the urban centres, Singapore being one of them, were decidedly Western leaning and less partial to inculturation. (Eugene Wijeysingha, *Going Forth, The Catholic Church in Singapore 1819–2004* (Singapore: The Office of the Archbishop of Singapore, 2006).)

approach useful and necessary to tease out the fundamental aspects of religious experience, upon which further propositions can be made. By beginning with a look at the more psychological bases of religious experience as described by William James, I make the case that what he described as religious experience can also be seen as "experiences of the transcendent," personal connections with the unseen reality that lies beyond one's immediate perception. This mode of encountering the transcendent can be a means by which one who is non-religious can apprehend and begin to understand the transcendental reality. This conception of religious experience is deepened when one considers experiences which include a connection with the divine but may not be tied to any specific religious tradition. I echo theologians David Bentley Hart and Denis Edwards by calling these "experiences of God." The third and final conception of religious experience is properly named so, because they are experiences that are appropriately and adequately defined by a religious tradition and are consonant with the religious beliefs of the individual. Dermot Lane and David Tracy give the specifically Christian approach to religious experience and also provide criteria to assess the veracity and coherence of such experiences. From these three senses of religious experience, several key experiential aspects are gleaned, providing the basis for the pedagogical approaches later.

This examination on the broad sense of religious experience is followed in the second chapter by an equally broad look at the concept of conversion. Although normally religious in provenance, I propose a look at conversion as a transformational process in an individual which leads one to greater openness and awareness of one's consciousness and context. Conversion, seen in this way, can have direct effects on how learners can approach religious experience. Two senses of conversion are described: Conversion I, which is the opening of individuals to a more critical consciousness of their reality that in turn leads them to be more receptive to religious experiences; and Conversion II, which is the awareness of one's

contexts that makes one more attentive to the people and spaces which can bring one to religious experience while also building capacity to reflect and act on these experiences. These two senses of conversion come together in what I call Critical Communities of Religious Praxis, spaces in which learners can be formed to approach and apprehend religious experiences.

The Critical Communities of Religious Praxis are examined in greater detail in the third chapter, with a focus on describing how these communities are both experiential and reflective by nature. Some comparisons with other experiential learning models are made to demonstrate how these communities are consonant with them but remain distinct in their ends. More specific details about the learning processes as well as the pedagogical ends of the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis are described, demonstrating how such communities lead learners towards the possibility of religious experience through the opening of spaces and heightened awareness.

The final chapter synthesises the previous ones by first presenting a model of how the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis can foster a learner's approach to religious experience while discussing some practical aspects of how religious experience can be accounted for in the classroom. The discussion will refer to several lesson plans, included in the Appendix, which provide the concrete grounding for what such learning spaces can look like. Some reflection on how such communities can operate within specifically religious situations, with connections to Catholic Christian education, will also be made. The chapter ends with a discussion on potential challenges to this model and how educators and learners may face them.

CHAPTER 1

Religious Experience and its Specificity:
Drawing a Map of Experiences of God and the Transcendent

On the Itinerary

In many modern works in philosophy and theology, one of the first things that the author does is to define a set of key terms so as to clarify the grounds upon which the argument can be developed. Definitions are important not just for clarity but also to show how and where the author is connected to the larger world of scholarship and to the contexts in which the study is placed. It seems imperative to include clear definitions to guide and place the reader in the context necessary to understand the study. This whole point of view presents a slight problem to this study because I contend that seeking to define religious experience may hinder more than help the attempt to clarify and contextualise it. Therefore, my own approach to religious experience is less definitional and more descriptive, with the look at religious experience reading more like an itinerary and less of an entry in a dictionary or encyclopaedia. This is more in line with the experiential nature of the subject that is to be presented and the journey through the various senses of religious experience will be connected with some anecdotal accounts of how I have encountered these forms of experiences in educational contexts.

The itinerary will begin with a short excursion into the current context of religion and non-religion in contemporary society. This slight detour at the start is important because it gives context for the later itinerary and why a broader look at religious experience is necessary for it to be relevant to the learners of today. From here, the itinerary will take us through three senses of religious experience, with stops to consider how these experiences can play out concretely. The first is a phenomenological account of religious experience that

concentrates on the human psychological experience of what can be described as the transcendent. This is the sense of religious experience put forth by William James and deepened by Wayne Proudfoot. Their description of experience focused only on the individual's apprehension of what is "beyond" without reference to religion, thus I will refer to this as "experiences of the transcendent." The second sense is one that is described by theologians David Bentley Hart and Denis Edwards and points to religious experience that is characterised by connection with the divine and the recognition that this transcendental connection is a good that lies beyond human flourishing. This approach shies away from making explicit connections with religious traditions, preferring to describe it as "experiences of God," a name that I will use. The third and final stop is that of religious experience in what I would call the fullest sense – an experience of the divinity of God that is understood and interpreted within the context of a religious tradition. Specifically, theologians Dermot Lane and David Tracy not only describe religious experience but provide criteria for their understanding in both ecclesial and non-religious contexts, giving rise to the possibility of the connection with pedagogy. It is from this vantage point, at the end of the journey, that a fuller sense of the contours of religious experience can be seen. It is from this that a map of religious can be drawn so as to provide a guide for how it can be used as an educational or pedagogical category.

The State of Religion and Experience

Recent studies on the state of religion in the modern Western world have focused first on the rise of secularity, a spectacularly ill-defined term, and second, on the increase in the number of people who identify as non-religious. In his weighty tome *A Secular Age*, philosopher Charles Taylor described secularity less as a decline in religious belief but a

change in the conditions of belief where there is a move from a society in which belief in God or a divine being is unchallenged and unproblematic to one where it is seen as one option among many, and is often not the easiest one to embrace.[6] The strength of this definition of secularity is that it is not confined to what Taylor calls a "subtraction story" where religion fades from the consciousness of modern people, but rather, prompts one to consider how the conditions of belief have changed. One interesting trend in recent years has been the marked increase of people who claim to be non-religious, a trend that religious scholar Elizabeth Drescher described as being a fairly explicit refusal to "participate in the normative system of religious identification," where labels tend to suggest agreement with particular beliefs, values and practices of a religious group.[7] Furthermore, in line with Taylor's argument about the change in religious belief, the non-religious label does not merely describe the absence of religion but the presence of something else,[8] indicating that this position is a substantive phenomenon that is understood in relation to religion but is not religious in itself.

Sometimes referred to as the "Nones", the non-religiously affiliated reject institutional religion but often admit to being spiritual, leading to the much-used moniker "Spiritual-But-Not-Religious" that is self-referential for some but also used as a label for those who study this phenomenon.[9] The problem with the term "spirituality" is that it has been used to refer to the intermediate space between the religious and the secular, leading to an indeterminacy in its use as it has strong religious roots, especially in the Western Christian tradition, yet points to an acknowledgement of that which is beyond or transcendent. It is this

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[6] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

[7] Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30.

[8] Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 32.

[9] Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones*, 4.

sense of indeterminacy that drives my initial approach to the definition of religious experience, considering such experiences in their possible "variety," to use William James's term, so that the broader concept of what religious experience represents can be made acceptable to a wider range of people.

"Religion" is a notoriously slippery term that resists and defies most attempts at clear definition though the non-religious may lean on a description that is more institutional and based on fixed sets of beliefs and practices. Taylor acknowledged this as an operative approach that comes from the Christian West though went further to suggest that a more useful means of understanding religion may be through a consideration on the distinction between the immanent and the transcendent.[10] Taylor contrasted the immanent, which refers to the natural order where instrumental rationality is prized,[11] with that of the transcendent or that which lies "beyond." One who is non-religious may tend towards a world-view that prizes the immanent but Taylor pointed to ways in which the transcendent can break into this immanent frame. This happens because transcendence is "multidimensional" and one connects with that which is "beyond" in varied ways. One dimension of the transcendent is the sense that there is some good that is higher and beyond human flourishing. Embedded in this sense is the possibility of transformation or conversion that takes one beyond just human perfection. A related dimension flows from this sense of something that is higher and beyond but which also takes into account the presence of a higher (or divine) power, the transcendent God which most religions are focused on.[12]

[10] My approach to religion and the transcendent comes from the Roman Catholic Christian tradition which has its provenance in Greek and Latin philosophical constructs, where the immanent and transcendent are clearly delineated. This is not the case in many non-Western traditions. For instance, many Chinese or East-Asian religious traditions do not make a dichotomy between the immanent and transcendent as the spiritual world and the sensible world coexist and cannot be seen separately.

[11] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

[12] Ibid., 20. Again, while non-Western religious traditions may acknowledge a higher power in the form of a deity or god, these are often not considered transcendent and can exist in the same immanent frame that humans live in.

It is not only the non-religious who choose to live within the immanent frame, where the natural order is emphasised over the supernatural one. Even those who profess belief in a religion may operate largely in the same immanent frame, appealing to the tenets of their faith only when they come to limit situations in life, struggling to deal with the limits of life and death. There are times when "the attention to natural forms can uncover a deeper reality to which we are more and more blinded in this civilisation,"[13] and there are other times when natural explanations fail to satisfy even those within the immanent frame and leaves one yearning for more. It is this yearning for that which is deeper and quite possibly outside of the immanent that provides the basis for the following discussion on religious experience and conversion, definitions that can take the non-religious and those who thrive in the immanent frame into account.

The approach to religious experience, a concept that's as difficult to define as "religion" itself, follows the path that connects the immanent and transcendent, the noumenal and phenomenal. It may be useful to see religious experience less as a single unified category and more as a continuum of experiences that help people make the connection between the immanent and transcendent. By traversing the terrain that lies between the immanent and transcendent, while appreciating the complexity of the paths that one would take between them, I hope that a map which traces this itinerary can potentially present experiences of the transcendent and the divine which are intelligible and acceptable by the non-religious among us.

[13] Ibid., 761.

Experience of the Transcendent: Psychological and Phenomenological

The initial approach to the senses of religious experience is necessarily philosophical – to flesh out a basic definition of what experience could be, before entering into the psychological and phenomenological description of what an experience of the transcendent can look like. Theologian Dermot Lane offered a succinct and balanced description of experience. He began with a negative definition of experience, that it is not subjective emotionalism nor passive reception of sense data or determined by language. This points to experience as being something greater than the purely subjective experiences of a person which in turn points to the necessity for the recognition of the reality that is external to the individual in defining experience. Lane went on to state that "experience is the outcome of the interaction that takes place between subject and reality," indicating the dynamic nature of experience in the life of an individual.[14] People first encounter the reality that is external to them and in this initial contact, they recognise that there is indeed a reality that is beyond and prior to the self. The interaction that occurs between the subject and reality allows the experience to have an effect on the subject and begs a response from the subject to the reality.

The encounter of this reality that is beyond and prior to the self comes often in one's normal experience, or in the case of educational contexts, through real experiences that the educators lead the learners into. In my work in campus ministry, I had the opportunity to facilitate activities that made use of real experiences that led learners to reflect on their lives and relationships.[15] On one occasion, a group of students were camped at the foot of a

[14] Dermot A. Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2003), 20.

[15] I was on the campus ministry team of a Catholic high school in Malaysia. I had a role in conceptualising and facilitating annual "retreat-camps" which took students in the various classes out to locations away from the city so as to have space for reflection. These activities were firmly based in the Ignatian tradition, flowing from the tenets and movements of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Reflection and self-awareness which lead to discerned action characterise this tradition.

mountain that was considered holy by the indigenous people of the region, and continued to be so even after most of them were converted to Christianity. Before a fairly arduous hike to the summit of the mountain, Alice, one of the students who also happened to identify as non-religious, asked why the mountain was considered holy.[16] It seemed odd to her that an inanimate object like a mountain could be considered holy as it was just another part of the land. My response then was for her to go through the programme before trying to answer that question. I caught up with her when the group arrived at the summit of the mountain, which was wreathed in clouds at the time. Alice reflected that the difficulty in getting up to the summit made the space special because of the personal sense of achievement but even though the views were not spectacular on account of the clouds, she was quite awestruck by the whole scene, stating that she could not explain why she felt this awe but could begin to understand why the mountain could be considered holy. I noted that this could be seen as the start to her considering the possibility of the transcendent.

Alice's experience of the mountain was one that was subjective and personal which led to insights about the possibility of the transcendent. In his classic book, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James took a decidedly humanistic approach to both experience and religion, defining the latter as "feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."[17] Religion so described becomes a very personal matter, based on feelings and experiences which people apprehend as individuals and where the divine or transcendent is more of a personal consideration rather than something that is appropriated from a tradition or institution. Wayne Proudfoot continued this theme of locating religion

[16] Pseudonyms have been used not just for anonymity but to reflect the fact that the accounts given here are an amalgamation of conversations and encounters with students.

[17] William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 29.

within the human person by stating that it has always been an experiential matter and should not be reduced to credal statements, and that it is made up of beliefs and practices that "cohere in a pattern that expresses a character or way of life that seems more deeply entrenched in the life of that person or community than any of the beliefs and practices."[18] The experience of the mountain, while not specifically religious, opened the possibility for Alice to be more empathetic to how others may approach religion or the transcendent, reflecting how the experience helped connect her to the broader community that she belonged to.

The relevance of the study of religious experience was, according to Proudfoot, "motivated in large measure by an interest in freeing religious doctrine and practice from dependence on metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical institutions and grounding it on human experience."[19] This so-called "turn to the subject" in philosophy and theology that began with Immanuel Kant and brought firmly into theology by Friedrich Schleiermacher was the foundation of James's foray into religious experience as such experiences were emphasised to be eminently personal. He stated that "the essence of religious experiences, the thing by which we finally must judge them, must be that element or quality in which we can meet nowhere else."[20] These elements must be "absolute additions" that people are unable to manufacture completely by themselves but can be ascribed to divine other or what James called a "primal reality" to which we are compelled to respond to.[21] Through these, it can be noted that James acknowledges the presence of a reality that is "beyond" or primal – the

[18] Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), xi.
[19] Ibid., xiv.
[20] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 40.
[21] Ibid., 35, 42.

transcendental. The difficulty in explaining what this is led to his foray into the psychological.[22]

James was uninterested in looking at religion in the form of doctrines and rituals but focused instead on the examination of "first hand" religious experiences and the psychological and physical effects they had on people. This came from his view that "feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue," adding that without feelings grounding them, there would be no philosophical or theological discussion.[23] Furthermore, James also argued that one would discover a great variety concepts and beliefs across the various religious traditions but the feelings that underlie this diversity would remain constant.[24] This emphasis on the subjective feelings of the individual may go against Lane's rejection of subjective emotionalism in the approach to experience but the strongly phenomenological approach that James brought to the discussion helps to make his conception of religious experience more broadly applicable not just to a wide variety of religions but to diverse cultures as well. It was this feeling that lay at the heart of what Alice experienced, not emotionalism but the experience of something that was real yet greater that could be described, transcending the categories that she had at the time.

James referred to the transcendent as the "reality of the unseen," and stated that the broadest sense of religion consists of belief in the possibility of this unseen order, with the

[22] The focus that James brings into the discussion on religious experience lies more on the emotive realm of the psychological. I acknowledge that one could go deeper into the neurological side of things, to examine the role that brain function has in our apprehension of the transcendent. This, along with a deeper examination of the psychological aspect, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study. However, I would refer to works by Anne Runehov and Kevin Seybold for connection between religious experience and neuroscience. (Anne L. C. Runehov, *Sacred or Neural? The Potential of Neuroscience to Explain Religious Experience* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Kevin S Seybold, *Explorations in Neuroscience, Psychology and Religion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).)

[23] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 333–334.

[24] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 159.

acknowledgement that "the supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto."[25] This subjective recognition of what James called "a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call 'something there'" was also referred to as being deeper than what one normally perceives with one's senses, pointing not just to how people apprehend the transcendent but that the entry into belief of this unseen reality is the start to religious belief. The description of the transcendent as a deep insight into reality is quite similar to Lane's approach to experience as contact with reality, though James does seem to emphasise the subjectivity of such experiences more than the connection with broader religious doctrines and institutions.

Religious experiences, therefore, must be characterised from the point of view of the one who has the experience in the first place, and is religious because the subject apprehends it as so.[26] Religion, then, is that which is founded on the feelings and experiences of the individual subject, and religious experience as personal and flowing from what James called the "mystical states of consciousness" which allows one contact with the transcendent unseen reality.[27] Rejecting the more pejorative sense of "mystical" as being vague and sentimental, James employed the term as a label for a group of criteria to determine whether an experience has a religious element to it. He gave two primary marks of mysticism, ineffability and a noetic quality, and gave two secondary marks, transiency and passivity. The primary marks were described as being key characteristics of how one can know that an experience points to the transcendent, unseen reality and how one can gain knowledge of that reality. The

[25] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 46.
[26] Ibid., 31; Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 181.
[27] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 294.

secondary marks, on the other hand, are commonly found characteristics that are not key indicators of whether an experience has a mystical element to it or not.[28]

A closer look at the marks of mysticism reveal how James saw the contours of religious experience.[29] In describing the ineffability of the mystical state, he focused on the difficulty in expressing the mystical or religious experiences that one has, and the fact that this quality has to be experienced directly. Second-hand accounts do not do justice to this mark which I would interpret as James's way of describing one's experience of the transcendent. Alice's lack of words to describe her experience on the summit of the mountain speaks of the ineffability of the experience that she had. It would be hard for anyone else to try to explain this as the experience was very subjective and quite unique to her apprehension of the reality at the time. The noetic quality of the mystical state also indicates how James sought to demonstrate the epistemological bases of the religious experience. These are "states of insight" which are connected with our discursive intellect but also plumb depths of truth that were hitherto unexplored. While this can seem overly intellectual and possibly exclude those whose worldviews are less based in the more rational approaches, I would go down a simpler route to propose that the noetic quality of the mystical state allows one to learn from the experience of the transcendent, provided one is prepared to acknowledge and appropriate the experience. There was learning involved in Alice's experience on the mountain, learning that came in the form of the personal insight into what others may consider holy. This

[28] Given that the secondary marks were not seen to be crucial in James's arguments, I provide a brief description here for the sake of completeness. These secondary marks, transiency and passivity, aid in nuancing James's description, demonstrating that such states are neither permanent nor completely a result of one's activity. The apprehension of the unseen order was likened to being "grasped and held by a superior power," a passive state that further emphasises the ineffability of the transcendent that one encounters and which gives rise to the possibility of knowing something of this unseen order.

[29] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 295–296.

knowledge, though personal and subjective, constitutes further means for her to approach and understand the world and the transcendent reality beyond it.

The mystical state represents a privileged means of encountering the transcendent or unseen reality and also provides a key to accessing the main features of James's conception of religious experience. Given his rejection of the institutional or credal sense of religion and his emphasis on the subjective feelings of the individual in the experience of the unseen reality, what James calls religious experience seems closer to what I would name "experience of the transcendent." I choose to substitute "transcendent" for "religious" because the kinds of experience described fall more in the range of what I would consider the transcendent, without an ostensible religious content. For James, religion consists of feelings which people ascribe to their apprehension of the divine or transcendent, so religious experiences would tend to contain feelings that are generally subjective and may not necessarily have connections with a religious community.[30] This subjectivity makes me hesitant to ascribe "religion" to such experiences but rather focus on his conception that they point to the unseen reality or the transcendent.

The experience of the transcendent can thus be defined as a subjective apprehension of what the individual takes to be the transcendent, unseen reality which in turn can lead to knowledge, both of the self and of the world around. It is subjective because these experiences do not rely on hermeneutic principles that come from religious traditions but are focused on the affective reactions of the individuals to their immediate realities. It is transcendent because such experiences take the "beyond" or unseen reality into account, acknowledging that there are realities beyond the material world which can play significant

[30] Religion continues to be difficult to define but as will be seen in a later section, the connection with a religious community that provides some hermeneutic tools to interpret experiences is important to consider an experience as "religious."

roles in our lives and learning. The final aspect of the experience of the transcendent is the knowledge component that James called "noetic," which is important because this gives the conditions for the possibility of learning from such experiences. The emphasis on the psychological and phenomenological approaches to experience that do not rely on traditional religious categories would help to give the non-religious, like Alice, initial insights into the transcendent with the hope that these insights will awaken a hunger for more of that which lies "beyond."

Experience of God: Mediated Immediacy of God who is Beyond

While the experience of the transcendent can give someone who is non-religious like Alice a starting point to consider and apprehend what James calls the "unseen order," those who yearn for a deeper sense of the transcendent may feel that there is something missing. That missing element is the reference to the divine, a concept that atheists may not acknowledge but may be an aspect of the transcendent that even some non-religious people may recognise, albeit in a less significant sense. A movement deeper into the transcendent would thus require an examination of how God or the divine can enter into the discussion on religious experience and how this inclusion of God can change one's apprehension of experiences of the transcendent. This movement towards God or the possibility of the divine will lean on the writings of theologians David Bentley Hart and Denis Edwards, both writing from Christian perspectives but from different traditions – Hart being Orthodox and Edwards Catholic. What they have in common is the description of how people can have experiences of God but stop short at connecting such experiences to organised religion. In fact, Hart even goes so far as to state that the experiences of God should be shorn of doctrinal or traditional

undertones because that would detract from truly experience God who is always beyond our understanding yet deeper within us than our inmost depths.[31]

Hart's polemical and acerbic writing took aim at both atheists and those who claim to be spiritual on his way to describing what he saw as experiences of God. The modern movements towards the spiritual were referred to as "vague, syncretistic, doctrinally vacuous,"[32] and he also went as far as to say that atheists are unable to understand the true reality of the world that is drenched with the presence of God because they have a completely different experience of existence, leading to a lack of the conceptual means of approaching this reality.[33] Hart makes these points to emphasise his own stand about the inescapability of God in all experiences and the rejection of a naturalistic or materialistic understanding of the world. In this view of the world, nothing is untouched by the presence of God and the experience of God is not just one privileged way of viewing the world but the only way of truly apprehending the reality of the world. This moves quite decisively away from James's more subjective view of religion and how people may conceive as divine whatever they conceive of as divine as Hart would say that people who truly experience would experience God.

The world would then be, as Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "charged with the grandeur of God,"[34] a presence that is not just phenomenological but metaphysical and ontological. Hart argued that one does not experience God in the same way that one experiences a tree or a beautiful day because God is not a "being" as God is neither discrete nor finite. Instead, God is "being itself", or the "inexhaustible source of all reality, the

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[31] David B. Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 10.

[32] Ibid., 3.

[33] Ibid., 23.

[34] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," text/html, *Poetry Foundation*, last modified October 11, 2019, accessed October 11, 2019, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44395/gods-grandeur.

absolute upon which the contingent is always utterly dependent, the unity and simplicity that underlies and sustains the diversity of finite and composite things."[35] One cannot experience the transcendent without experiencing God because we are completely contingent upon God for our existence. While this might lead one to conclude that all experiences are experiences of God and to argue that delineating what is or is not an experience of Good becomes a moot point, human finitude gets in the way of that argument. Hart stated that God is "somehow present in even our simplest experience of the world, and is approachable by way of a contemplative and moral refinement of that experience."[36] While the ontological aspect of God being much more than just a being among others is the ground upon which all experiences flow from, the phenomenological experience of God by the subject is still important. We have to approach God with the faculties that we have, limited as they are to apprehend the fullness of God, and it is thus important to consider how this approach occurs.

The consideration of the ubiquity of God or the divine in our human reality can seem rather abstract without a look at how God actually is present in all our simplest experiences and this leads us to the feeling that the world is indeed charged with the grandeur of God. Returning to my experiences in campus ministry, I recall a moment during a retreat for the high school seniors when I played some contemporary music during a period of prayer and reflection. They had spent the day sharing experiences of their time together in the school and it came as no surprise that many were very emotional during the time for reflection. In a conversation that I had with Bernard, a Christian, after the session, he noted that he was surprised at how the music, and one song in particular, made him feel that God was present with them during the reflection session. I asked him what that feeling was like and he described it as God being there in the room with them, like one of his other classmates,

[35] Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 30.
[36] Ibid., 44.

accompanying them with God's silent presence. He was clear that it was the song that catalysed this feeling of God's presence and upon further reflection, felt that this sense of relationality with God made him want to connect better with his peers. He added that the experience was "strange" but "deep," not something he had felt before in church and something that he hoped to experience again.

While Bernard's experience may not reflect Hart's highly metaphysical description of how one may have an experience of God, it was clear that the experience of God occurred through his experience of the world through his encounter with the music and with his peers. This concrete nature of the experience is explained by what Denis Edwards calls "encounters," where the experience of God becomes "available to consciousness through reflective awareness."[37] There is no real experience unless one is aware of the encounter and this awareness comes through a process of reflection that occurs on several levels. The awareness of the encounter and the subsequent are brought to one's consciousness through the senses and intellect, showing how the immediate sensory encounter is mediated and interpreted through one's context and knowledge. However, this conceptual mediation is not the only way the encounter reaches one's consciousness as Edwards introduced what he called pre-conceptual mediation. Like Hart, he argued that God always transcends our senses and intellects as we cannot have access to the being of God but there is a pre-conceptual or tacit level at which we can gain a sense of the transcendent. Bernard had the encounter with God which came through his senses and intellect as he heard the song and reflected upon what it meant to him. There was a sense of relationality in the experience which points to how the experiences of God are closely connected with one's concrete reality. The description of the experience as "strange" and "deep" hints at the pre-conceptual level, which

[37] Denis Edwards, *Human Experience of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 7.

Edwards states “allows us to speak of the real human awareness of God who yet remains always incomprehensible to our intellects.”[38] This awareness of the incomprehensible through the pre-conceptual is the awareness of what Edwards refers to as the “mystery dimension in our lives,” an awareness that there is a horizon that we can sense but is always beyond as we approach it, and which has a range that always escapes our attempts to take in.[39]

The pre-conceptual awareness of mystery and the transcendence is how one is able to be conscious of God who is “being without limit”, a description of God which echoes that of Hart’s of God as “being itself.” The experience of God conceived of as such would always seem tantalisingly close yet incredibly far, clearly felt yet full of mystery, much like how both Alice and Bernard were able to approach the ineffability and depth of God but not fully express it. Edwards’s elucidation of the aspects of the human experience of God flows from the pre-conceptual awareness of the mystery of God who is without limit as he described them as being experiences of gift, mystery and mediated immediacy. Experiences of God come from the pre-conceptual awareness of that which is sensed and thought about, an awareness that is often not something that is explainable or that one can bring about from one’s own effort. Experiencing God in this way, according to Edwards, is always an experience of grace of God who makes this possible.[40] Furthermore, when one experiences such grace, one often finds it difficult to express this as it escapes our ability to conceptualise it, our struggles within our immanence as we seek to speak of the transcendent. That struggle, Edwards called the experience of mystery.[41] The final and quite possibly most important

[38] Ibid., 13.
[39] Ibid., 20.
[40] Ibid., 64.
[41] Edwards leans quite heavily on Karl Rahner in this respect, because implicit in this is a person’s transcendental orientation towards mystery. The transcendental knowledge of God is an experience of mystery, an experience that is rooted in one’s subjectivity and which in turn draws one into the desire to

aspect of experience that Edwards described was that of "mediated immediacy". Experiences are both immediate because they occur directly between the individual and God yet are also mediated because they occur within our normal, everyday experiences. This mediation can also occur in one's growing awareness of the encounter, as one grows more conscious of the presence of both grace and mystery.[42] The seemingly impossible task of us as immanent beings trying to grasp the transcendent other who is God is made less absurd when one recognises that the very awareness of this mediated immediacy can give rise to experiences of God as transcendent mystery.[43] Bernard's sense of God as being both strange and deep speaks of the mediated immediacy where his awareness of God's presence allowed him also to recognise how it remains mysterious and difficult to describe.

The idea of mediated immediacy connects directly with Hart's conception of the experience of God as "being, consciousness, and bliss," three concepts that also reflect Bernard's concrete experience of God.[44] The discussion on being was focused on contingency and how God is an "unconditioned and eternally sustaining source of being," which is the sole source and explanation for all things in the world.[45] By using the strength of arguments from the Church Fathers, Hart made a strong case for God being the ultimate explanation for all dependent things, against modern materialist or naturalistic arguments that posit explanations that occur solely within nature. This strengthens Edwards's point about

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delve deeper into it. (Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 53–58.)

[42] Edwards, *Human Experience of God*, 65–66.

[43] Again, the influence of Rahner can be seen, especially in the use of the term "mediated immediacy." Rahner explains that "the individual existent in its categorical individuality and limitations can mediate God to the extent that in the experience of it, the transcendental experience of God takes place." (Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 84.) The mediation of the immediacy of God takes does not take place separate from the experience but is integral to how one experiences the transcendent God.

[44] Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 42. In the book, Hart also used the Sanskrit terms *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda* in his explanations, a nod to his intention to show how these ancient metaphysical definitions are common in a number of religious traditions.

[45] Ibid., 106.

how experiences of God should be seen as gifts which come from the sole source of all things in the world. In arguing for God as the infinite or transcendent consciousness, Hart also stated that God is the "logical order of all reality, the ground both of the subjective rationality of mind and the objective rationality of being, the transcendent and indwelling Reason or Wisdom by which mind and matter are both informed and in which both participate."[46] Bernard's sense of God's presence among his classmates points to how the transcendent nature of God can be experienced in reality. Being must necessarily include consciousness, indicating how God is conscious of how God participates in being, knowledge, and rationality. Again, this connects quite seamlessly with how Edwards used Karl Rahner's concept of mediated immediacy, not just in the encounter between the immanent self and the transcendent God but also how the self-reflexive nature of God who is fully aware of God's own being would reflect on the metacognitive ability of people to reflect on their own connection with the transcendent. This reflective consciousness of God was shown also in Bernard's ability to speak about the experience, recognising how it became part of his own consciousness. The final mode of how one experiences God was referred to as bliss by Hart, a mode that is experienced as desire or a longing for the transcendent God. Hart describe it as a "longing for the ideal comprehensibility of things, and a natural orientation of the mind toward that infinite horizon that is being itself," a movement that is not only similar to Edwards's description of the pre-conceptual but also accounts for the transcendental orientation in people that pushes them to want such experiences in the first place.[47] The desire to connect with his peers and with God can be seen as part of Bernard's longing for the infinite, a longing that came not just from the experience but from his own orientation towards God.

[46] Ibid., 234–235.
[47] Ibid., 239.

In their discussion on how we experience God, both Hart and Edwards reject calling them religious experiences because that term detracts from the universality and specificity of the experiences. Hart argued that experiences of God in the way that he described them form part of the "universal grammar of human nature, which makes it possible to overcome any cultural or conceptual misunderstanding", making all other experiences possible.[48] He specified that such experiences should not be conflated with religious language as that would place them into partisan contexts that may have the tendency to distract a person from the experience in and of itself. Edwards came to a similar conclusion from a very different direction as he claimed that ascribing religious associations to experiences of God would create a multiplicity of approaches and contexts which would end up distracting the individuals from their subjective pre-conceptual experience of the divine.[49] These arguments point to a very specific experience, that of the reality of God as the grounds for our being, which is apprehended subjectively by the individual and which is something that all people are able to access. This specific universality echoes how James and Proudfoot described the experiences of the "beyond" and "unseen order" as being common among the various religious traditions. While they wrote of the experiences being common epistemologically, Hart and Edwards make a deeper ontological argument for how all experiences of God are similar because God is the ground and possibility of all being. It is this ontological commonality that led Hart and Edwards to give the label "experience of God" to such experiences and it is this label that I too follow in considering how experiences of the divine are indeed experiences of God.

Experiences of God actually are very much experiences of the transcendent. The subjectivity and the presence of the transcendent in these experiences were quite explicitly

[48] Ibid., 15.
[49] Edwards, *Human Experience of God*, 13–14.

described and I would go further to argue that the experience of God is a very specific form of a transcendent experience. Though it was not specifically mentioned, I would also suggest that there is a noetic component to the experience of God. The knowledge that emerges from the experience is not knowledge of the particulars of God as that, in Hart's estimation at least, is impossible. What does emerge is the knowledge of how one can approach God, a metacognitive awareness of the processes that one may go through in the encounter with the divine. In addition to these aspects, I would suggest two others which would distinguish the experience of a personal God from the experience of the transcendent. The first is the concept of mediated immediacy to define how the encounter with God occurs. It is immediate because it is an encounter with the reality of the divine, God who is both present and beyond being at the same time. This encounter is always mediated through our senses and intellect as one always struggles to apprehend God who is ineffable. It is always mediated because our finitude does not allow us to fully appreciate the fullness of God who is, according to Rudolph Otto, numinous and therefore *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.[50] God is completely other to the human person and is thus overpoweringly awe-inspiring yet evokes a fascination and desire that draws people to God. It is this sense of the numinous that informs the second characteristic of the experience of God. It was telling that Hart's exposition on the experience of God concentrated on the attributes of God, indicating the importance of the subjective recognition of who God is. As mentioned previously, one does not know God but grows in the subjective awareness of one's finitude in relation to God and experiences of God should thus be seen as a process of encounters that allows one to grow in greater awareness of the otherness of God. Experiences of God are thus deepened experiences of the transcendent, a deepening that takes a relational turn as seen in how Bernard's experience

[50] Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 25–31.

differs from that of Alice. Bernard experienced God as a presence which could be related to whereas Alice felt a much vaguer sense of the transcendent at the mountain, pointing to the commonality of both while highlighting how experiences of God are more specific experiences of the presence of God, one who is numinous and always "strange" or a mystery.

Religious Experience: Adequate and Appropriate

The move towards God that Edwards and Hart began, focuses on the mediated nature of the subjective experience of God who is numinous and difficult to know completely, and is compelling in how it allows one to have the possibility of apprehending God through one's experiences. In theirs and in James's descriptions of religious experience, the connection between rites and doctrines were passed over in favour of experiences that are more cognitive and subjective. While these approaches can be useful in bringing the sense of the transcendent and of God to those who are not affiliated with any religious traditions, the problem with such cognitive and subjective definitions lies in the inability to make any judgements about the veracity and content of the experiences. It is almost impossible for anyone to say that their experience of God or the transcendent is completely subjective and free from contextual, cultural, or other influence as the encounter with God or the transcendent occurs within the context of one's lived reality. Every experience of God is influenced not just by one's lived experience but also by some elements of religious knowledge and background, whether the individual is overtly religious or not.[51] In many ways, the religious background provides the basic horizon for understanding experiences and the converse is also true. Religious doctrines and traditions are often based upon prior experiences of God that were somehow agreed upon and codified. The path towards a fuller

[51] Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, 33.

definition of what religious experience actually is would thus necessitate a reflection on religion and doctrine as well as how these can help in the mediation of the immediacy of God.

It is key to acknowledge that religious experiences are no less real than the experiences of the transcendent and the experience of God but they would take on perspectives that would be particular the them. A broader sense of what religion is may be useful and one take on this comes from David Tracy who defined religion as "a perspective which expresses a dominating interest in certain universal and elemental features of human existence as those features bear on the human desire for liberation and authentic existence."[52] Such a definition coming from a Catholic theologian is surprising in that religious rites and doctrines seem to be passed over in favour of a much more subjective and humanistic vision of what religion could be. It meets the challenge of James and Hart about the "problems" of religion head on and comes from Tracy's argument against secular critics who would denigrate serious inquiry into religion as dishonest and a waste of time, showing that Christian theologians can "render intellectually coherent and symbolically powerful" the tenets of their beliefs to those both inside and outside their faith.[53] This is connected with Tracy's general theological approach where he identified three "publics" that a theologian addresses – the general society, the academy, and the church.[54] Conceiving of theology in this way, as not addressed solely to the church, allows one to conceive of the broader application of the religious discourse as well, possibly bringing the coherent and symbolically powerful discussion of religious experience to bear on society in general and for learners in particular.

[52] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 93.
[53] Ibid., 9.
[54] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986), 5–6.

From this perspective, the definition of religious experience has to be sufficiently broad to be coherent even to those who may not necessarily subscribe to one's own religion while still remaining faithful to the tradition. Lane approached this by first distinguishing sense experiences from those that allow one to experience a deeper dimension in life, where one discovers "such diverse realities as meaning, value, goodness, beauty, and truth."[55] This follows Lonergan's distinction between the world of immediate experience and the world that is mediated by meaning, with the latter leading the person to recognise that there is as reality beyond the senses that discloses not just the possibility of the transcendental but also the possibility of God.[56] A religious experience, Lane explained, is a particular type of depth experience which as a religious dimension, distinguished by the sense of being drawn into a relationship with God, the transcendent other.[57] Thus, religious experiences are not different from other experiences in general form or substance but are characterised by a "religious intensification of the common experience" where one senses the "self-manifestation of an undeniable power not one's own."[58] A crucial difference in this approach to religious experience and those described previously is that it is not as broadly subjective as that which was described by James and is also not as focused on the ineffability of God as transcendent other as was emphasised by Hart and Edwards. Religious experience here focuses on the actual encounter between the self-communicating God and the human person that occurs within the concrete reality of everyday existence. Returning to the experiences of Alice and Bernard in the light of Lane's description of religious experience, one would notice that there are traces of religious experiences in both. They were both experiences of depth which

[55] Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, 24. In defining depth experiences, Lane mentioned the traditional transcendental categories of goodness, beauty, and truth as examples of how one experiences the world at depth.

[56] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 28–31.

[57] Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, 26.

[58] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 173.

recognised a transcendent reality beyond themselves and in Bernard's case, even included a relational element. I would not label them as religious experiences from the outset because they were not specifically connected with any religious tradition in particular but the similarities prompt a consideration of the fact that all the experiences described thus far are not distinct categories but points on continuum or waypoints on a longer journey.

The experiences that Lane and Tracy described can thus be seen to be connected with the previous two. The subjectivity of experience and the importance of the phenomenological contact with reality remains important but the focus shifting to the encounter between the individual and God who is the transcendent other, opens up the possibility of examining the nature of the experience more closely. In particular, one would encounter difficulty in ascertaining the veracity of experiences that are completely within the realm of the emotive or subjective experiences of the individual as no external standards can be applied fairly to make such a judgement. Similarly, attempting to do the same with experiences of an ineffable God who is the transcendent other would seem quite futile. This shift away from examining religious experience as derivative of either subject or object, the individual or God, points to how it could be seen more as a process and thus something that can be assessed with a set of criteria. Lane stated that this allows one to make a religious interpretation of an everyday, secular experience, revealing the religious dimension that is implicit to human experience.[59] This move towards the religious interpretation of human experience requires a grounding in a specific religious tradition, which is Roman Catholic Christianity in my case. In exploring how the reality of human existence is decisively qualified by Christian life and witness, a set of criteria to help one assess how well one's experience correlates with the religious

[59] Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, 37.

dimension of life can help give further insights into the possibility of connecting religious experience with the life and learning of people.[60]

Both Lane and Tracy propose two sets of criteria to evaluate the religious dimension of human experience on two different levels – the criteria of adequacy and of appropriateness. The criteria of adequacy points to the meaningfulness and coherence of the experiences and how they are consistent with the secular understanding of life.[61] This connects the experience with both the concrete experience as well as the epistemological and other contexts of one's everyday existence with others. The other set of criteria, the criteria of appropriateness are more specific to the religious tradition and help to distinguish religious experience from that of other experiences.[62] Given the reality of the plurality of religious tradition, Lane suggested that in looking at the criteria of appropriateness, there should be some criteria that is aimed at a broader religious sense and some that are more specific to the Christian context.[63] Both these sets of criteria are crucial in connecting lived experience with its religious dimension while providing the much needed connection to make such experiences coherent to the non-religious or to those who share different religious affiliations. I would add that the use of these criteria would be the key way of distinguishing religious experiences from experiences of God or the transcendent, giving one a good way of placing particular experiences like those of Alice and Bernard on a map which shows the varieties of experiences that one can have.

The three criteria for adequacy that Tracy suggested and Lane developed are aimed at having religious interpretation of experience that is consistent with the secular understanding

[60] Schubert M. Ogden, "What Is Theology?," *The Journal of Religion* 52, no. 1 (1972): 3.
[61] Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, 38; Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, 71.
[62] Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, 72–73.
[63] Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, 40.

of life, allowing for those who are steeped in the latter to begin to understand these religious categories but also to purify the religious explanations to lead to a more personal and active faith.[64] The first criterion of meaningfulness requires that the religious dimension of life is related to the lived experience of the individual, connecting the religious understanding with what one experiences concretely in life. Common human experience thus becomes the "new empirical anchor" for meaningfulness of religious experience. The second criterion of coherence is aimed at how the experiences are expressed and if these claims are sufficiently coherent to be understood by those outside of one's religious tradition. This means that descriptions of religious experience should stand up to inquiry from secular interlocutors and should not contradict what is established as the understanding of contemporary life. The third criterion of truth focuses on whether the religious understanding of experience can speak with a secular person's fundamental understanding of truth and life. This not only allows for coexistence and greater understanding between the religious and the secular but sets the conditions for the possibility of dialogue between these two different ways of knowing. In many ways, these criteria help to clarify the often-vague language of experiences of the transcendent or of God, allowing one to express it in ways that are more generally understood. Alice's description of the transcendent was understandably sparse given her inability to fully express her sense of awe at the apprehension of what the mountain could mean but further reflection and learning of how a sense of wonder can be expressed in ways that are intelligible to a broader audience can connect this experience to more people. Her experience, while still not ostensibly religious, can become the basis for further reflection for other similarly non-religious people.

[64] Ibid., 38–39; Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, 64–71.

The three criteria for appropriateness begin with a focus on general religious interpretation of experience which look at experiences that are specifically religious and may not have counterparts in the secular understanding.[65] The first criterion looks at the connection between the individual and the presence of the transcendent reality. It is concerned with the encounter and whether the true nature of the transcendent reality is disclosed to the individual and whether the individual is able to participate in some way in this encounter. The second criterion has to do with conversion and whether the religious experience effected a change in both the outlook and behaviour of the individual. This should be expressed in the form of right action or *orthopraxis* and adherence to beliefs. The third criterion is for the religious experience to be in line with the experiences of the religious community. This is coherence of a different sort, that the individual is able to articulate the experience in terms that do not contradict their own community. Lane went further to specify points to qualify the criteria in way that are specifically Christian.[66] Connected with the first criterion are points about how the experience of the transcendent reality of God has to be consistent with the Christian one and how this brings about a personal commitment to Christ. This in turn connects with the second criterion as the commitment brings about conversion that leads to decisions that are inspired by Christ with the intention to bring about real transformation in the world for the sake of the kingdom. And the connection with the third criterion means that the experiences should be in continuity with those of the Christian community and coherent with the long tradition that grounds the community. Bernard's experience seems to connect with these criteria on a number of levels. There was the acknowledgment of the transcendent reality in the form of the relational God and the move to

[65] Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, 40–42; Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, 72–79.

[66] Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, 41–42.

want to connect with his classmates shows a conversion towards action as well. While he did not describe the experience in specifically Christian terms, there were implicit references which, with further clarification, can place his experience closer to that of religious experience that is specifically Christian.

In describing the criteria, Lane emphasised the need for them to be used in the light of a living religious faith, one that acknowledges the real presence of God in human experience and which is expressed in conversion and action.[67] They should not be seen as mere categories to restrict how one sees the activity of the infinite God on earth but as an means of understanding how we as finite humans can respond to this presence that can be difficult to fathom. I found these criteria among the most compelling means of connecting what can be a rather distant sense of an ineffable God with the concrete reality of life while providing a means of acknowledging the subjective nature of experience without being relativistic. Furthermore, the criteria help flesh out a very realistic picture of religious experience that could potentially bridge the gap between the secular and the religious, the immanent and transcendent. The move away from a purely personalised description of religious experience, be it psychological or mediated, to one where the experiences are subject to evaluation that is both adequate and appropriate for secular as well as religious communities. That is not to say that the descriptions of the experiences of the transcendent and the experiences of God are no longer relevant. These provide a foundation upon which a fuller sense of religious experience can be built, a foundation that, with the criteria, can provide a basis upon which an educational strategy can be developed.

[67] Ibid., 42.

Towards the Map

In specifying religious experience, it seems apposite to try to look for the commonalities in the three types of experiences more than seeking to distinguish them. Given the initial description of this as an itinerary more than an exercise in categorisation and making clear distinctions, I would argue that the fact that these descriptions are on the same map points to their general usefulness in helping one to understand the role that such experiences have in our lives and more specifically, in the educational process. The possibility that there is a common core that all religious experiences (along with the experiences of God and the transcendent) touch upon is compelling and the commonalities that exist can help in the creation of means to help learners to recognise and reflect upon religious experiences.[68] What seems interesting is how the relationship between the three types of experiences and the commonalities that exist between them are dynamic and can vary in their importance to the experiences depending on the situation. As a reminder, the five key aspects of religious experience are subjectivity, the noetic or knowledge component, how experiences are mediated immediacy, adequacy, and appropriateness. Some may apply more to particular experiences than others. (See Fig. 1.) For instance, appropriateness or the connection with religious traditions would apply more to religious experience than for the more subjective and emotive experiences of the transcendent. Similarly, even though mediated immediacy can have applications beyond the concepts of God and religion,[69] experiences that have that particular aspect would tend towards the religious. It is this dynamic relationship that exists between the types of experience that can form the basis of the pedagogical approaches to religious experience and its potential to engender learning.

[68] Michael Peterson et al., *Reason and Religious Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 23–24.

[69] Amber L. Griffioen, "'Signs for a People Who Reason': Religious Experience and Natural Theology," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 2 (2017): 139–163.

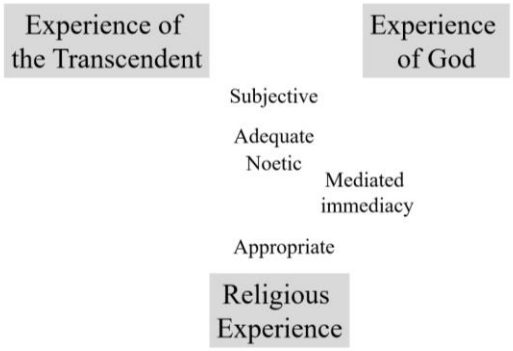

Fig. 1. Three Types of Experience and the Relationship with their Commonalities.

The fairly long and circuitous journey that took us through experiences of the transcendent and experiences of God before ending up with the religious experience allows one to draw a map which connects the experiences through their commonalities and dynamism. The distinctions that were drawn between them may seem less important given the focus on the dynamic relationship but I feel that being specific on the ways in which people connect with the transcendent and with God can give useful anchors from which reflection about such experiences can begin. The three waypoints on the map of religious experience helped to make sense of the how Alice and Bernard experienced the transcendent and God. I see this broad approach to religious experience as being inclusive which takes both the religious as well as non-religious views into account. The inclusivity is important in this effort to bring religious experience into pedagogy as the experiences have to be relevant and relatable to learners of all creeds and affiliation.

CHAPTER 2

Conversion in its Myriad Forms:
Openness and Awareness in Community and Praxis

Conversion and Transformation

The connection that is made between the various forms of experience and the map that can be drawn from these connections makes it clear that three broad descriptions of how one can experience the transcendent or the divine are not clear types or stages that one needs to progress through but are spaces where one gradually experiences their commonalities and dynamism. A map, as many navigators would claim, is only as valuable as how it is used and it is this thought that animates the discussion in this chapter. I find this cartographic image useful because the move from drawing the map to the discussion on how it can be used also reveals a practical truth that most who has tried to navigate with a map would have experienced. Having a good map and the skills to make use of it do not guarantee the travellers' timely arrival to their destination because the vagaries of the terrain and conditions can often complicate even the simplest of journeys. Similarly, the complexities of our apprehension of the transcendent and the divine through our daily, concrete reality can sometimes make it difficult to neatly place one's experiences on the map. Furthermore, navigation requires much more than a set of easy instructions and but requires a spatial frame of mind that would enable one to translate the symbols on the map to the features on the land. It is with this in mind that I begin to focus on the contexts and frames of mind that can help one to better apprehend experiences of God and the transcendent.

The shift towards a slightly more cognitive and pedagogical frame in this chapter does not imply that it is the task of an educator to create religious experiences in the learners, nor is it the case that religious experiences are things that are to be learned. The turn to

pedagogy lies more in how educators can help to open spaces for learners to encounter reality in such a way that they would be more likely to have experiences of the transcendent or religious experiences. In particular, given the mediated immediacy of such experiences, aiding learners in recognising how experiences mediate their apprehension of reality can be a good way of opening them to the possibility of religious experience. These two points on pedagogy rest on two orientations of the human person which point us towards God and the possibility of the transcendent. Rahner wrote at length about the fundamental orientation of a person towards the mystery of God, indicating that "the transcendentality inherent in human life is such that man[1] would still reach out towards that mystery which lies outside his control," showing how this movement towards mystery, even if it appears to transcend one's current capacity, is an essential element to our being.[2] Lonergan echoed this when he described the openness to religious experience as an "intrinsic component in man's makeup" which is connected with a person's general desire to know, thus emphasising the noetic component to experiences of the transcendent while strengthening Rahner's point about a person's inherent attraction towards God and the transcendent.[3]

Moving from this conception of the human person as inherently oriented towards the transcendent, I propose two aspects of the individual, related with the points of pedagogy mentioned previously, which would dispose one towards having experiences of the transcendent or divine, providing the grounds for the reading the map of these experiences and finding one's way through the complexities of such encounters with reality. The first

[1] A note on inclusive language. When quoting from texts which predate the current move towards inclusive language, I have chosen to keep to the often-male pronouns and references used in the original, recognising that it was normal practice to use "men" to refer to all genders. I feel that this better reflects the mood and context of the author while recognising the dynamism of our use of language.

[2] Karl Rahner, "The Experience of God Today," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. David Bourke, vol. XI, Theological Investigations (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 160.

[3] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Collection*, vol. 4, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 186.

aspect is openness to the transcendent, which is inherent in a person's thinking yet not always apparent and successfully applied to in one's approach to the world.[4] This openness to the encounter with the transcendent also implies the movement into depth that Lane described, indicating that the openness can possibly bring a person to a deeper awareness of the significance of the encounter or experience. The second aspect flows from openness and depth, and is based on the awareness of the mediation that occurs when one has an experience of the transcendent. This awareness allows one not just to know of the mediated nature of experience but brings one to the realisation that all experiences of God are experiences of God's communication which come through the immediacy of the world but which also leads one to the ineffability of God.[5] This is awareness not just of the experiences in themselves but that one's knowing and being are intimately connected with the experiences in themselves.

Returning to experiences described in the previous chapter, one would note that it was her presence on the mountain that brought Alice to a greater openness to the possibility of the transcendent. The same could be said for Bernard's openness to the relationality of God which was precipitated by his hearing a particular song. The openness can be caused by external stimuli or through reflection by the individual, but what is significant in both cases is the fact that there was a change in both Alice and Bernard which brought forth this openness. Additionally, with this openness also came an awareness of how the transcendent is very much part of the concrete reality that one apprehends with one's senses and gave them the possibility to notice the process of mediation that occurs when one has such an encounter. The openness and awareness that both Alice and Bernard experienced can be seen to be part

[4] Ibid., 4:187. It is significant that Lonergan also described how openness to the transcendent and to religious experience is a gift and flows directly from God's grace.

[5] Rahner, "The Experience of God Today," 164.

of a transformative process which allowed them to see the experiences as transcendent or of God and which in turn would allow them further access to such experiences.

This subtle transformation that allows one to be open to transcendent experiences and aware of how they are mediated can best be described as a process of conversion that transforms people and their worlds. Lonergan also described it as transformation and went on in greater detail:

> Normally it is a prolonged process though its explicit acknowledgement may be concentrated in a few momentous judgments and decisions. Still it is not just a development or even a series of developments. Rather it is a resultant change of course and direction. It is as if one's eyes were opened and one's former world faded and fell away. There emerges something new that fructifies an inter-locking, cumulative sequences of developments on all levels and in all departments of human living.[6]

Although conversion is a concept more commonly used in religious contexts, the idea of conversion can also be seen as a process of change and development which has a profound effect on one's way of seeing the world. One who is converted changes their course and direction and Lonergan also specified later that this affects all of one's conscious and intentional operations, which would include openness and awareness of the transcendent and of God.[7] These changes in course and direction in favour of the transcendent can make conversion an important element in the connection between religious experience and pedagogy, providing a much needed link that can take the dynamic nature as well as the ineffability and mediated immediacy of religious experience and the transcendent into account.

I lean towards Lonergan's conception of conversion as a means of understanding the transformation that has to occur for one to be open to and aware of religious experience

[6] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 130.
[7] Ibid., 131.

because it touches on the cognitive, moral as well as religious aspects of conversion.[8] This approach to conversion differs from more traditional definitions that come from theologians like Lewis Rambo who defined it as a dynamic process of religious change that takes place in multifaceted contexts of people and environments.[9] He, like Lonergan, emphasised the point about conversion as a process, going as far as to say that the word "converting" better conveys the phenomenology of the process which is actively constructed by both the religious community as well as the person who experiences conversion.[10] The process of conversion can also be seen as a "reorientation of the soul," which leads to a great change in one's consciousness, a process that opens a person to the awareness of the transcendent.[11] Despite conversion being a process that occurs largely in the individual, it is also important to acknowledge the external factors which can affect how and sometimes where the conversion occurs. The complexity of one's motivations and how one's immediate as well as larger community[12] can play a role in conversion shows how one's conversion is affected by one's interaction with others. Conversion also occurs within history and one should acknowledge

[8] Ibid., 238–243. Lonergan identified three forms of conversion: intellectual, moral, and religious. They are distinct but interrelated, indicating that they can be analysed separately but manifest themselves in interconnected ways. I prefer such broad conceptions of conversion over other similar yet more general words like "transformation" or "change" as conversion retains the element of connection with the transcendental which is crucial for my approach.

[9] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 5.

[10] Ibid., 7.

[11] Arthur D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 7.

[12] It is with this reference to conversion as connected to the community that I acknowledge that locus of religious conversion in the Western sense lies largely in the individual subject whereas this locus shifts to the community when looking at East Asian religious like Taoism or Confucianism. In the latter, practice of a religious form of Confucianism is closely connected with social rituals like proper veneration of elders as well as ritual offerings at meals and festivals which are learned through interaction with one's immediate family and community. The connection between religion and one's community is very strong in such cultures and this would also mean that the community can have a significant role in how conversion can connect with religious experience. (Anna Sun, "Conversion and Confucianism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 548–549.)

that one always converts within a particular historical context. [13] All these point to a conception of conversion that is broader than just a change in personal religious beliefs but a process of opening to the transcendent that one encounters personally through one's environment, community, and even history.

Given the broad conception of conversion that has been described, tying it down to a single definition would be too limiting and possibly detract from the view of conversion as a process and not a singular event. I thus propose to look at conversion from two different but very much related points of view, while also considering the state from which one converts from and what being in the process of conversion may look like. I call the two kinds of conversion, for want of better names, Conversion I and Conversion II. Conversion I is a process of *conversion from* a state of uncritical apprehension of the world as unmediated and wholly immanent which can prevent an individual from recognising the possibility of the transcendent and God in the world. While this may not characterise nor describe all individuals prior to their conversion, it provides a useful insight into how one may move from a focus on the immanent to that of the transcendent, showing how conversion can be the process of greater openness to the mediated world. Conversion II describes the on-going process of *conversion to* the transformative state of self-reflexive awareness where one is able to see the nuances in one's experiences more clearly while navigating one's own responses to these experiences. Conversion I can be described as one getting the map of religious experiences and learning how to use it whereas Conversion II is the process of growing in one's ability to navigate with the map.

[13] Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7–8; Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion,* 102.

This dynamic view of conversion[14] matches the dynamic of religious experience and provides a possible framework upon which the pedagogical strategies for forming learners who are open and aware of the transcendent and the divine. In particular, by looking at how one's context connects with learning processes, both religious experience and conversion become pedagogical categories which can stand as learning objectives in themselves, even outside of overtly religious contexts and schools.[15] The rest of this chapter will thus be devoted to the consideration of how conversion and religious experience can be approached from pedagogical standpoints. First, a brief portrait of an individual before conversion will be painted so as to provide a fuller picture of where the pedagogical interventions may begin from. This will be complemented by a description of what Conversion I can look like in the individual, focusing on how a critical view of reality can lead to greater openness and awareness of the transcendental and of God. The next section will look at Conversion II and consider how the process of conversion can be sustained – through the community and through action. By leaning on the Funds of Knowledge approach to learning proposed by Luis Moll and Norma González, communal sources of knowledge and conversion will be examined. This will be complemented by Paulo Freire's praxis-based views on learning and will propose an active view of conversion which can lead to religious experience. The third and final section of this chapter will synthesise these approaches to consider how the process

[14] The dynamism between Conversion I and II extends also to the order in which they can occur. While the sequential nature of their numbering can give the impression that I comes before II, they do not necessarily have to occur in that order. It is quite possible that some elements of Conversion II can occur before Conversion I and that one can grow in one's apprehension of the transcendent and of God through both conversion occurring in tandem.

[15] In particular, this dynamic which links a learner's prior knowledge or situation (what one converts from) to the learning activities and objectives (the process) is of interest when one plans for pedagogical interventions in the classroom. (Telle Hailikari, Nina Katajavuori, and Sari Lindblom-Ylanne, "The Relevance of Prior Knowledge in Learning and Instructional Design," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 72, no. 5 (2008): 113; Julian Roelle et al., "The Role of Specificity, Targeted Learning Activities, and Prior Knowledge for the Effects of Relevance Instructions," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 107, no. 3 (2015): 705–723.)

of conversion towards the transcendent and to God is best supported by what I call critical communities of religious praxis, spaces in which conversion is supported and where discourse and reflection on God and the transcendent are encouraged.

Conversion I: Critical Consciousness and Openness to the Transcendent

The move towards openness is predicated upon a fairly optimistic anthropology which focuses, at least for a start, on the epistemic and relational realities of the human person. Lonergan described the "pure desire to know" in all human persons as part of the "inquiring and critical spirit of man" which "prevents him from being content with the mere flow of outer and inner experience."[16] By stating that all human persons have this pure desire to know and that it is an integral part of what makes a person a person, Lonergan latches onto the natural sense of curiosity that everyone felt, especially as children, and shows how this spirit does not leave us even as we grow older. In fact, there is a certain restlessness that continues throughout our lives, that makes us less content with just sense or outer experiences and the mental processes that accompany them (which he calls inner experiences). This restlessness to go beyond the experience of the immanent is very much connected to the natural desire to see God, a point that comes from St Thomas Aquinas[17] and nuanced by both Rahner and Lonergan. The latter rejected a static and essentialist view of a person's relationship with God for a more open, intellectual, and relational stance where an individual grows to know God and thus seeks to enter into a personal relationship with God.[18] While this view of the human person can seem quite cognitive and focused on the intellect,

[16] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 372.

[17] Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologiae," trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *New Advent*, I,12,1, accessed December 29, 2017, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2055.htm.

[18] Lonergan, *Collection*, 4:86,187.

the space that Lonergan leaves for relationality makes this sense of the human person more broadly applicable and acceptable, not just within the Western intellectual tradition from which he writes from but also in cultures that emphasise more communal values.

This openness to the mystery of God and to the possibility of the transcendent that lies at the heart of the human person is not immune to the influence and distraction of the immanent world. The prizing of instrumental rationality and the focus on the immanent frame are part of how Taylor explained the change in the conditions of belief, leading to the turn away from the transcendent in many parts of the industrialised world. This led to a change in what Taylor called the "social imaginary" which is the common understanding which makes possible and legitimises common practices, a shift which tamped down the openness to mystery and the desire to know God in favour of economic lenses which prize production and consumption over knowledge and being.[19] This focus on the immediate and material without recognising how reality is mediated is akin to what Lonergan referred to as the mistaken supposition that "knowing consists in taking a look," keeping one's apprehension of the world solely on the empirical and material.[20] All these paint a sobering picture of what unconverted persons, living in their immanence without seeing the value and possibility of the transcendent in their lives, look like. God becomes a choice among many. What can be seen, heard, produced, and consumed become the standard for reality, and individuals risk becoming realities unto themselves, believing and thinking that they know only what they can sense and consume.

[19] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 172,181.
[20] Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 658.

Bleak as this picture of the modern immanent individual can seem, I do not feel that it is a huge exaggeration of the reality of most late-modern, industrialised societies.[21] The gap between the intrinsic desire for God and the transcendent and the actual moves, or lack of them, that people make towards this transcendent reality can be understood and possibly narrowed through a process of conversion. While some may see it as overly cognitive or intellectual, Lonergan's conception of conversion can be useful as a means of appreciating how the current milieu influences many to stay in the immanent frame while having the preconceived notion that the transcendent is somehow less important than what can be apprehended immediately.[22] Lonergan would respond that the pure desire to know, if unfettered by wayward ideas about reality, would lead one to see the very process of knowing as an object to be apprehended and understood. This movement towards more critical awareness of knowledge is essential in opening an individual to the possibility of the transcendent as one grows to see how the world is mediated by one's apprehension of it and that there is more to it than just what one senses in the immanent and material.

This critical sense of reality which takes the mediated immediacy of our experiences into account does not come automatically and the passage from the uncritical state of seeing only the immanent and material to one that is more critical comes through the process of conversion. Lonergan detailed three senses of conversion – intellectual, moral, and religious – which are closely connected but are distinct in how they occur within the individual. Intellectual conversion refers to the "radical clarification" of one's approach to knowing which would subsequently lead to the gradual elimination of misleading myths concerning

[21] Having lived for most of my life in cities which are part of modern industrialised countries (in Singapore, Malaysia, and various parts of Western Europe and the USA), my own experiences of these forms of immanent and material approaches to life inform this view.

[22] William C. Smith, "Thoughts on Transcendence," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 42, no. 1 (1990): 34.

reality and human knowledge.[23] This entails a critical recognition of the mediated nature[24] of our knowing and comes in line with the noetic nature of religious experience. Moral conversion is the reorientation of one's choices towards deeply held values and away from mere satisfactions, indicating a movement towards what Lonergan terms "self-appropriation" where an individual as one who actively knows and chooses can grow to discover and create oneself within the framework of a mediated, transcendental world.[25] Religious conversion in a person "is being grasped by ultimate concern" and can be described as a process of falling in love with God, which indicates a growing personal connection with the transcendent reality of God.[26] It is the conjunction of these three senses of conversion that makes up the process of conversion, and like the various forms of religious experience, each process of conversion within an individual would be made up of some or all of these senses of conversion as they encounter and engage with the world on different terms.

By way of illustrating how these senses of conversion can play out in those encountering the transcendent, we return to the experiences of Alice and Bernard. Alice's experience of the transcendent was accompanied by evidence of intellectual conversion as she moved from a stance where objects like the mountain were just things in themselves that are apprehended only by the senses to recognise the possibility of the world beyond the immanent. This movement seeing just the myth of the immediate to recognising the world of mediated meaning is part of the radical clarification that Lonergan described and shows how a cognitive or intellectual shift can play a part in recognising the transcendent. I would

[23] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238.

[24] Specifically, Lonergan made the point that the main myth that has to be overcome is that of the world of immediacy, where reality is only that which sensed, being the only reality. The breaking of this myth brings one to recognise the world that is mediated by meaning, where the internal and external experience of the cultural community can aid an individual in building meaning from sources beyond one's own senses and thoughts. (Ibid.)

[25] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240; James T. Marsh, *Lonergan in the World: Self-Appropriation, Otherness, and Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 5.

[26] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241.

describe Bernard's conversion as intellectual as well but with clear moral elements which lead also to a tacit sense of religious conversion. It was moral because it showed a clear change in values and the way that he sought to approach relations with others and with God and it showed traces of religious conversion in how there was evidence of a growing relationship with God who is real and transcendent. In both cases, the cognitive shift that occurred with intellectual conversion formed the basis for their openness to the transcendent, allowing them to acknowledge those experiences as being connected with the "beyond" and with God.

Being clear of where one converts from reveals the initial, slightly more cognitive process of conversion which transforms an individual to become more open to the transcendent and to God. The conversion that brings about this openness lies at the heart of Conversion I and is characterised by the radical clarification of one's ways of knowing which brings about a critical openness to the transcendent world that mediates our meaning; brings one to an openness to making choices based on the new values that the recognition of the transcendent brings; and forms the grounds for the possibility to truly encounter and be in relationship with God. Conversion, seen in this way, becomes part of personal response to one's encounter with a world that is broader than just the immanent and material, and this could lead persons who would not feel responsible for their thoughts and actions but would also seek to make decisions and act in ways that would lead to further contact with the transcendent or with God.[27] This responsibility and desire for learning and contact with the transcendent reality can form the basis for pedagogical interventions which involve Conversion I that would open learners to the experiences of the transcendent and of God. The description of Conversion I thus far makes it seem to be more personal process which

[27] Yu-Ming Stanley Goh, "Not Just Falling off a Horse: Conversion and Insight in Pedagogy and Classroom Practice," *Policy Futures in Education* 16, no. 8 (July 18, 2018): 1005.

provides the impetus for religious experience. Important as the personal nature of conversion can be, a broader sense of conversion that takes one's interaction with one's community also needs to be taken into account.

Conversion II: Awareness and Transformation Through Community and Praxis

Awareness from Action and Interaction

It is clear to me that a sense of conversion that can fully take all the aspects of religious experience should take the cognitive into account as is the case with Conversion I, but that alone is insufficient to explain the changes and responses that occur in a person when encountering the transcendent or God. Just as the look at religious experience did not just begin and end with the psychological so should the sense of conversion that is connected with religious experience not just begin and end with the cognitive. It is with this in mind that a broader sense of conversion will be examined, noting the importance of the context in which conversion takes place. In describing a model for how the process of conversion can be analysed, Rambo noted the importance of recognising the context of conversion:

> Conversion takes place within a dynamic context. This context encompasses a vast panorama of conflicting, confluent, and dialectical factors that both facilitate and repress the process of conversion. When seen from a broad perspective, conversion is part of a human drama that spans historical eras and both shapes and is shaped by geographical expansion and contraction. cannot begin and end with the cognitive, just as religious experience does not just begin and end with the psychological.[28]

The dynamism of conversion also means that the context not only influences the conversion but the latter may also have an influence on the discrete contexts of individuals. This interplay between persons and their environment shows that the cognitively-focused Conversion I can be a good start for how one would be open to the possibility of conversion

[28] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 20.

happening within oneself but that this opening is necessarily outward-looking, towards how one's conversion should be seen within one's communal and historical contexts.

Moving from the openness of Conversion I to this outward-looking awareness provides the grounds for the examination of Conversion II in more contextual, interactive and active terms. Just as Conversion I focused on how the cognitive processes of the individual can change to make one more open to the possibility of the transcendent and of God, Conversion II shows how this openness can lead one to an awareness of the specific ways in which one's context can help or hinder one's ability to have an experience of the transcendent or of God. The dynamism of one's context also led Rambo to consider how encounters and interaction with people with one's community and beyond can support and intensify the conversion that occurs. Again, although the scope of his work on conversion was that of how people change beliefs and move between distinct religious communities, it is worthwhile to note how the structure of conversion between religions can provide useful clues as to how an individual can grow in awareness of the transcendent and of God through active interaction with one's community.[29] Just as a religious convert grows into the rites and beliefs of the new religion through both active and passive interaction with the new religious community, one who becomes open to the possibility of religious experience would benefit from interaction with the others who may be similarly open to such experiences.[30]

The consideration of the communal element of conversion provides an apt connection with the pedagogical nature of this project. The basis of the connection that I see between conversion and pedagogy which in turn can lead one to the possibility of religious experience comes from the concept of learning by discovery and experience and how these can be supported by learning communities. Descriptions of learning by discovery show similarities

[29] Ibid., 92,102.
[30] Ibid., 105.

to the openness of Conversion I in how learners become motivated by the greater perceived "reality" of things learned on their own, which in turn leads to further strategies to put themselves into contact with experiences or realities that lead to such learning.[31] While the motivation and responsibility that comes with such approaches can create instances of deep learning, the support that learners can receive from peers as well as those who are more experienced in the form of teachers, instructors, or facilitators can enhance this process.[32] The growing awareness of how a learning community or even the broader one which the learner belongs to can build upon the openness and thus lead to further transformation and action in the form of Conversion II. It is with this in mind that the rest of this section will turn towards educational theories, of community and action, which describe the transformation in Conversion II while making the connection between conversion and the apprehension of religious experience.

From Funds of Knowledge to Communities of Religious Experience

The experiences of the transcendent and of God occur in the concrete reality of one's life and this makes it important for pedagogical approaches to take this concrete reality into account. The process of education should reflect the realities from which the learners come from and two important parts of these realities are the communities to which they belong and the broader reality of mystery and transcendence that they are part of. One observation about the nature of education in modern, secular societies is that there is a tendency towards one-size-fits-all approaches to learning, often glossing over diversity and difference with a

[31] R. F. Dearden, "Instruction and Learning by Discovery," in *The Philosophy of Education*, ed. P. H. Hirst and P. White, vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 1998), 268–283; David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2015).

[32] Ann L. Brown and Joseph C. Campione, "Guided Discovery in a Community of Learners," in *Classroom Lessons: Integrating Cognitive Theory and Classroom Practice*, ed. Kate McGilly (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 229–252.

narrative about fairness that comes with standardised curricula and meritocracy.[33] Furthermore, even when educators recognise the importance of cultural diversity in schools, many responses to the need to recognise and incorporate this into the curriculum have been met with narrow practices and reactionary policies.[34] This can often lead to practices that essentialise students, portraying particular groups or approaches to learning as homogenous or possessing particular recognisable cultural or epistemological traits.[35] Although this essentialising tends to happen more in cultural or ethnic contexts, the same can occur when dominant secular discourses call into question the necessity for approaches to the transcendent or when religious epistemologies are seen as uncritical and flow only from tradition or authority.[36] What this points to is the need to consider communal sources of knowledge and how these can provide a sense of reality that not only resists essentialising through a firm grounding in the reality of the learners but also provides a firm basis for building in openness and awareness into approaches to the transcendent.

In looking at pedagogical approaches which take the community into account, I lean on the work of Luis Moll and Norma González who wrote of how a "process of engagement with the everyday conditions of life" through what they call the "funds of knowledge" can provide insights into how communities can be useful resources for learners to gain

[33] My frame of reference in making this comment is Singapore, where a Western-based, scientific-empirical model of education, that was inherited from its British colonial past, remains the dominant paradigm for learning in the country. This scientific-empirical approach has strongly influenced the educational landscape in Singapore until recent years where more culturally relevant perspectives have been brought to the fore. (Christina Lim-Ratnam, "Curriculum Leadership," in *School Leadership and Educational Change in Singapore*, ed. Benjamin Wong, Salleh Hairon, and Pak Tee Ng (Cham: Springer, 2019), 31–49.)

[34] Luis C. Moll and Norma González, "Engaging Life: A Funds-of-Knowledge Approach to Multicultural Education," in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, ed. James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 699–715; Sarah T. Lubienski, "Celebrating Diversity and Denying Disparities: A Critical Assessment," *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 8 (2003): 30–37.

[35] Norma González, "What Will We Do When Culture Does Not Exist Anymore?," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1999).

[36] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 6–7.

knowledge from their encounter with reality.[37] For Moll and González, the interaction that occurs between the learner and their "ordinary lives" should never be discounted as sources of knowledge as they found, through their ethnographic research, that households were important "strategizing units" which were connected with other households and institutions through complex social networks.[38] They went on to describe that these social networks and interactions were key in aiding learners in their practical knowledge but that this knowledge was sometimes devalued or unrecognised in formal learning settings. The suggestion to bring such sources of knowledge to the fore in order to transcend classroom walls and to recognise the local community as intellectual resources would push learners to turn to the everyday reality in the search for knowledge while also acknowledging Lev Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development and the social nature of learning, demonstrating how one's learning can be positively affected by one's environment and the people around.[39] This turn to the communal and familial does not just provide a space within which learning can occur but brings into view how this pedagogical stance can also play a role in the conversion of learners, bringing them towards the transcendental reality.

Although they use terms like "funds" and "strategizing" that bring with them mercantile associations that may have been relevant to the original contexts of economic and technical knowledge that come from communal sources, Moll and González were able to elucidate upon important pedagogical implications that the turn to the community or the

[37] Moll and González, "Engaging Life: A Funds-of-Knowledge Approach to Multicultural Education," 700.

[38] Ibid., 702–703; Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti, "Introduction: Theorizing Practices," in *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*, ed. Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti (Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 1–28.

[39] Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 86, 90. The zone of proximal development was defined by Vygotsky as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." This points to the social nature of learning and the importance of placing of learners into situations where they can learn best with others.

family can bring forth. The first has to do with the transformation of lesson that challenge the boundaries that exist between the classroom and the "outside world", recognising how parents and members of the immediate community become intellectual resources in the lives of the learners through their inclusion in the learning process.[40] Taken in the context of conversion and religious experience, the familial networks and immediate religious community are the primary sources of religious knowledge and practice, meaning that they can provide the formative means by which individuals can begin to approach God and the transcendent.[41] The familial and communal connections also provide a mediative function as one picks up tools and signs from those around and these form the basis of how one approaches the world.[42] Being aware of how the community aids in the mediation of one's reality can not only help in one's awareness of how one gains knowledge but can be an important part of the process of conversion as one can grow in the ability to notice the mediated immediacy of the transcendent through how the others in one's community do.

Just as it was noted in the previous section that conversion is always contextual and also occurs with interaction with others, I would note that experiences of the transcendent and religious experiences are also highly contextual and connected with the processes of conversion. Conversion I allows one to notice the individual role that one plays in the

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[40] Luis C. Moll et al., "Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms," in *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*, ed. Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti (Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 71–87.

[41] Ryan N. S. Topping, *The Case for Catholic Education* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015), 54–55; See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), 2201–2233, accessed December 30, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a7.htm. It is also significant that in the Confucian tradition, familial sources of religious knowledge are key to the equivalent conversion process. (Sun, "Conversion and Confucianism.")

[42] In Vygotsky's view of human cognition, the world is mediated to the individual through the use of psychological tools and signs as one does not apprehend the world directly but through signs which are learned through contact with others. One's mental processes do not emerge out of thin air but are connected with the broader social historical processes occurring around, which in turn affect one's community and thus how one apprehends the world. (James V. Wertsch, "Mediation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*, ed. Harry Daniels, Michael Cole, and James V. Wertsch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 178–192.)

apprehension of the transcendent reality, reflecting on the cognitive processes that can lead to openness to religious experience. Conversion II brings one to recognise that one is not alone in that process and opens one to the awareness that one is conditioned by one's community and thus would need to turn to that community to be able to access the transcendent in the way that one is familiar with. Being able to be aware of how the transcendent is mediated and being formed in the tools that the community uses to access the transcendent can represent a major part of the process of conversion that leads one to truly experience the transcendent and God.

Being aware of how one's familial and communal connections can affect the apprehension of the transcendent is an important part of the process of conversion. By way of illustrating this point, I return to my experiences in campus ministry and to a conversation that I had with Charles, a Christian student who also belonged to one of the major indigenous tribes in the area that we were in. This occurred after some end-of-term reflections which were held toward the end of the academic year. The conversation revolved around how we celebrated the end of the year at home and the kinds of traditions and prayers that came along with that celebration. Charles described the big celebrations that invariably occurred in his home village, a place that they returned to only for large occasions as his immediate family lived in the city at the time. The celebrations were lengthy and involved much food and drink, as all celebrations would but he noted the importance of the gathering of the large extended family and the raucous conversations and laughter that accompanied it. There was a certain egalitarian structure to the celebration where everyone, from young to old, had opportunities to speak, sing or dance. He noted that these always involved some form of prayer and that he felt that the prayer fit in with the revelry, leading him to recognise how

God was always present in the community, through everyone in it.[43] My response in sharing my own Chinese Singaporean experience of such celebrations was that it was much less lively and much more hierarchical. The elders tended to be the ones "presiding" and giving blessings to the younger ones and this seemed very much the norm for me while growing up. There was an experience of God in that situation for me as well but I realised that the emotive content would have been quite different. This conversation allowed the both of us, and me in particular, to realise how similar celebratory situations can lead to very different religious experiences, depending on the communal or cultural context. Having attended some celebrations in other communities of Charles's tribe, I also realised that while these were enjoyable, my own experience of communal religious practice did not prepare me to appreciate them as means of having religious experiences.

The conjunction of this example and what Moll and González described in their work on the funds of knowledge demonstrates how Conversion II can be a means to bring one closer to the possibility of religious experience. The connection with a community places the individual within a context, meaning that the subjectivity of the experiences and the personal knowledge that emerges would not be abstract or alienating but instead grounded in the contextual experience of being within a community. Being converted in this way also means acknowledging how much of our experience is mediated through the community, a fact seen in how both Charles and I apprehend the transcendent in ways were grounded in our own communal and familial experiences. The awareness of the mediation that occurs through the community would also play a part in how one moves to assess the experiences that result

[43] It should be noted that this took place in Malaysian Borneo, where the majority of the indigenous population are Christian but retained much of their traditions even after conversion to Christianity. Being Christian did not mean lessening their culture or practices but just weeding out the practices (like headhunting) that were not commensurate with Christianity. This led to a vibrant and thoroughly inculturated Christianity. (Liana Chua, *The Christianity of Culture: Conversion, Ethnic Citizenship, and the Matter of Religion in Malaysian Borneo* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).)

from the encounter with reality. Religious experiences can be looked at for adequacy and appropriateness in the light of communal norms, with the latter giving the relevant perspectives to consider how connected particular experiences are with the community's understanding of reality. The connection with religious truths through the assessment of the appropriateness of an experience would also reflect the inculturated nature of religious experience that is mediated by one's connection with community. The turn to the community, which comes with the recognition of the role that it plays in one's approach to the world and to one's experience, can be recognised as part of the awareness that comes with Conversion II. This awareness of one's communal connections can thus play a role in the pedagogical approaches to conversion and religious experience.

There can be two ways of supporting and harnessing the process of conversion towards the community as a means of opening spaces for learners to have and reflect upon religious experiences. The first would be the creation of opportunities for learners to know their own communities better and to examine how these communal and familial spaces formed their ways of seeing and knowing the world. This has the advantage of allowing learners to be more connected with their own communities and to reflect upon experiences that are authentically theirs, which flow from spaces which formed their own identities. The second, which builds on the first, would see the creation of communities of religious experience, spaces where individuals can bring their own contexts and experiences into contact with others, giving opportunities to learn more about other communities while using that to better understand one's own.[44] The creation of such spaces can go a long way in promoting the awareness of one's communal connectivity while at the same time providing

[44] James E. Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures: Contextualizing Education for Global Mission* (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2018).

supportive means of reflecting on how this communal connectivity aids in the approach to religious experience.

Praxis and Religious Experience as Action

The turn to reflection about one's cognitive contact with reality leads one to the openness of Conversion I while the similar move towards one's community and the relationship that one has with it provides part of the basis for the awareness in Conversion II. The awareness of the mediation that occurs as one encounters the reality of the world found an important place in Paulo Freire's work in education where he used the concept of dialogue to describe this mediation. "Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world," where it is part of the process where people name or describe the world so as to change it.[45] The change that one seeks in the world occurs through knowing and encountering it in all its reality while also having a sense of hope in the possibility of improvement, not just denouncing what is wrong but announcing the opportunities of something better.[46] Freire added that this sense of hope can overcome a passive resignation to determinism and the myths that uncritical approaches to teaching have allowed to become entrenched in contemporary schools.[47] I see this sense of hope as an acknowledgement and an opening to the possibility of the transcendent and how the reality that is "beyond" can indeed play a role in one's apprehension and actions in the present reality. Furthermore, the encounter or dialogue exists in the presence of "profound love for the world and for people," showing how the encounter is grounded in human relationality while giving space for

[45] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra B. Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1993), 69.
[46] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Continuum, 2004), 77.
[47] One myth that Freire highlighted in his works, especially in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is the utility of what he identified as the "banking concept of education" where learners are seen as mere receptacles for knowledge, who are supposed to passively accept the content that is decided for them by the often oppressive powers-that-be.(Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 52–55.)

theological expression.[48] With faith, hope, and love forming the basis of the dialogue, it does stand to reason that the reality that mediates people which Freire mentions frequently in his writings refers not just to the present, immanent reality but to the transcendent one as well.[49]

The dialogue that one has with others and with the reality that one lives in "names" the world, describing that which contains the immanent and transcendent. The process of naming is quite multifaceted in that it involves not just describing the reality but an internalisation of what that reality means, leading to an impetus to want to transform it. This dialogical process is what Freire considers praxis and consists of both reflection and action. An educator who recognises this should aid learners in discovering the living, powerful, and dynamic relations between word, action and reflection, directing them to make use of their own experiences to seek out spaces that that may be in need of transformation.[50] While his original writing was aimed at educating people to recognise and transform structures that oppress them, the methodology that Freire suggested, which took everyday experiences as well as the action and reflection of the individual very seriously, makes it ideal for the apprehension of religious experiences in the concrete reality of one's life.

There are at least two ways in which Freire's approach to learning and to the world can be used with respect to religious experience. The first comes in conjunction with Moll and González and the use of the everyday as a means of encountering reality. Just as one's immediate familial and communal networks aid in the mediation of reality, the same would happen with one's response, in the form of praxis, to this reality. Questioning and reflection

[48] Ibid., 70.

[49] Faith in humankind was suggested as being one of the factors in dialogue (Ibid., 61). I found it noteworthy that Freire referred to the theological virtues quite freely in his work, naming two of his books (*Pedagogy of Hope* and *Pedagogy of the Heart*) after them. Although these theological leanings are not overt, they do reflect how he sees interactions between a person and the world as having a religious element, whether one admits to it or not. (Irwin Leopando, *A Pedagogy of Faith: The Theological Vision of Paulo Freire* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).)

[50] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

that begins the process of dialogue or praxis would lead on to action, gradually closing the space between the dialogue and practice, allowing the learner not just to see the possibility the transcendent, but learn from it through reflection and action.[51] The second comes from conscientisation (*conscientização*), which is the "deepening of the attitude of awareness" not just of the world but of one's internal learning or cognitive processes.[52] This critical consciousness makes one more aware of how one conceives of the world, of the cognitive processes that one uses and the external influences that affect them, bringing about a transformation in attitude of learners as cognising subjects and not merely passive receptive objects.[53] The move towards this critical consciousness and praxis has elements of both Conversion I and II those who are critically conscious of the possibility of the transcendent become aware of how they can gain knowledge through encounters with the transcendent reality and would also be practically engaged with the processes of mediation through their communal and social networks so as to effect learning through such experiences.

The emphasis on praxis and the dialogue that occurs when one reflects and acts upon things that matter, comes from Freire's conviction in the relational nature of human beings that is grounded in the Catholic Christian anthropology.[54] This conviction, along with a decidedly theological basis for his work, was made obvious as he wrote that "existence is a dynamic concept, implying eternal dialogue between person and person, between a person and the world, between a person and Creator."[55] This relationality and the stance that learners are inherently integral human beings who are morally and socially conscious, animates Freire's approach to a pedagogy that places an emphasis on how an individual relates with

[51] Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, trans. Donaldo Macedo, Dale Koike, and Alexandre Oliveira (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 75.
[52] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 90.
[53] Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 37.
[54] Leopando, *A Pedagogy of Faith: The Theological Vision of Paulo Freire*, 131.
[55] Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 14.

the world, both immanent and transcendent.[56] One learns from others and the world by being in contact with it, learning not just about the things that one relates with but about one's own reactions and reflections about this process. The dynamism of the dialogic relationship also implies that the more one comes into contact with the reality of the world, the more one learns about the reality of our place within creation and the transcendental order, providing further movement towards Conversion II and the growing awareness of the transcendent.

The dynamic of action and reflection which lies at the heart of Freire's praxis-based pedagogy can have the effect of awakening awareness into one's relationship with the transcendent and with God. A further example from my interactions with students can illustrate this point. In my capacity as a teacher working with a school's drama club, we staged a play that explored how divisions and the building of walls, both figuratively and literally can affect us, even when everything begins with the best of intentions. Some parts of the play were workshopped with the students, eliciting and incorporating their ideas into the final production. One student, Diana, was particularly involved in this process and shared how the discussions and rehearsals affected the way she viewed the world. The lines that she recited and actions performed during the play took on greater impact as she saw how the words and actions played out in her life, among her peers and in her family. During a post-production sharing, she spoke of how the play made her reflect about her relationships with others and how she may have unconsciously bought into certain prejudices and divisions in the past which affected her relationships with others. Her being able to speak about this, first in an abstract way on stage and later during the sharing, made her realise the need to pay attention to these matters. It also gave an insight into what she learned about "loving one's neighbour" as a Catholic, stating that she had never really given much thought into what that

[56] Antonia Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 98; Leopando, *A Pedagogy of Faith: The Theological Vision of Paulo Freire*, 203.

really meant. The action and reflection that occurred during the learning activities that Diana experienced gave rise to a recognition of the connection between action and the faith, bringing a relational and experiential element to the otherwise solely doctrinal understanding of her faith.

The movement towards relationality and praxis, with the associated importance of reflection and action, brings the pedagogical connections with Conversion II to the fore. A large part of the process of conversion where one comes to the awareness of one's relationship with others and with the transcendent comes through the process of conscientisation to one's place in the world and in one's community as well as how one comes to know this. While most learners may have a natural inclination to be reflective, the process of deep reflection that is necessary for the conversion does not occur automatically and often requires some facilitation by one more well-versed in such processes.[57] Seen in Vygotskian terms, this can come in the form of scaffolding by educators or facilitators who would aid the learners to recognise their contexts and to build up skills to be able to reflect on their learning and experiences.[58] This would create what can be called a zone of proximal reflective development which awakens learners to the deeper reflection which would in turn open the space for them to notice their relationality with the transcendent. The role of the educator as one who helps to facilitate or even shepherd this process must be acknowledged as they are not mere bystanders in this process of conversion in the learners. Freire often referred to teaching as an act of love, and educators should be "motivated by their passion for learning and teaching and their love for others."[59] Thus, while the process of conversion and encounter with the reality of the transcendent is very much based in the cognition, action and

[57] Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, 52.

[58] Debra Coulson and Marina Harvey, "Scaffolding Student Reflection for Experience-Based Learning: A Framework," *Teaching in Higher Education* 18, no. 4 (2013): 406.

[59] Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love*, 92.

reflection of the individual, there is an important role that facilitators and educators play in supporting this process as well.

Critical Communities of Religious Praxis

The aim of the pedagogical interventions that would support the conversions and the encounters with the transcendent are relatively broad but as mentioned at the start of this chapter, the most important outcomes of such interventions would be the opening of spaces for individuals to encounter the transcendent along with the provision of tools and practice for reflection. The dynamic nature of one's encounter with the transcendent and with God means that normal pedagogical approaches with fixed learning outcomes and interventions may be too structured to provide the space necessary for the learners to have the encounters and reflect on them. However, the need to scaffold the reflections in the zone of proximal reflective development remains as learners should be supported in their approach to reflecting on such encounter. It is with these considerations that I suggest that pedagogical interventions should take the form of critical communities of religious praxis, groups that take learners' religious and communal contexts into account while supporting their growth in critical awareness of their experience and reflection.

This suggestion comes from the description of both senses of conversion discussed in this chapter, on how the transformative nature of conversion opens individuals to the transcendent and makes them aware of their relationship with this reality. The formation of these Critical Communities of Religious Praxis would thus shape not just the classroom processes and curriculum but would also touch on the roles of the educators and learners who interact in these spaces. Pedagogies which can support such transformative movements have to take the communal and familial contexts into account as these forms the basis of most

relationships and conceptions of the divine. I would take this one step further in suggesting that the classrooms themselves should be conceived of as communal spaces which can support the relationality and reflection that would occur there. While it is admittedly difficult to form communities which can adequately take into account all aspects of multicultural classrooms, an effort to give voice to the varied forms of communal life can be a good start. The curriculum that goes along with these critical communities of religious praxis should provide the tools for reflection on two broad levels – the cognitive or critical level where learners would look at their own learning and thought processes and how these affect their encounters with the transcendental reality; and the religious level where reflection on religion, faith, and belief can occur, allowing all to explore their religious traditions while reflecting on how that relates with the transcendental reality.

The relational and active elements in the Critical Community of Religious Praxis means that a focus on classroom processes and curriculum is insufficient. The roles of the educators and learners in such learning spaces are also important as they are both the subjects and ends of the processes. Educators should be seen less as subject-matter experts or instructors who direct how learning occurs but should rather facilitate the processes of learning, opening spaces for reflection while at the same time supporting these efforts by gently providing tools for action and reflection with regards to the transcendent. Likewise, learners should not be seen as receptacles for knowledge but individuals who actively construct their understanding of the world and who recognise how they have a role in being critical and being active in both apprehending the transcendent reality but also in responding actively to this. These aspects of pedagogy which can play a key role in conversion and the subsequent apprehension of the transcendent or religious reality will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Pedagogical Ends and Learning Spaces

On Educational Ends, Experience, and the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis

Critical Communities of Religious Praxis in Context

Having the description of the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis (hereinafter CCRP) helps to give shape to the possible pedagogical interventions that can aid in conversion and the approach to experiences of the transcendent and of God. These communities can be the privileged spaces where an individual can grow in openness to the possibility of the transcendent and of God and learn tools to reflect on how these experiences can affect or transform one's life. The shift to a more pedagogical focus requires an observation which I feel is important to acknowledge as the exploration continues into how experiences of the transcendent and religious experiences can be brought into educational contexts. The CCRP should not be seen as classroom communities or groupings which confine the learners and the pedagogical interventions to particular associations or educational spaces. I see the CCRP as much more than just a classroom as it should be seen as a space from which an individual can break out seeing just the finitude of the immanent but begin to apprehend the possibility of the transcendent.

The CCRP can be such a broad space for learning and experiencing because it is connected to the communities from which the learners and educators come from and also brings with it connections with the broader history and context of the pedagogical interventions that are used. Such spaces place the learners and educators into this broader context while allowing them the connections with their own, leaving room for all involved to have experiences on their own terms, through their own ways of knowing. The space that is thus opened does not foist or push particular experiences on the learners but instead, gives

room for them to grow into the conversion which opens them up to the awareness of the experiences of the transcendent and of God. One would note that religious experiences and conversion will occur in the daily lives of all, at home, at work, or in the case of learners, while they engage in sports and other extra-curricular activities. Classrooms or more formal learning spaces are the locations where pedagogical interventions may be used in a more focused manner, and they are not the only spaces where learning can occur alongside conversion and religious experience.

It is with this observation that puts the discussion of the CCRP as a pedagogical space in context and which also allows for a more accurate description of how the pedagogical interventions are related with both conversion and experience. This chapter will continue by examining the CCRP in the light of other experiential learning approaches, given that one of its purported ends is the facilitation of particular kinds of experiences in learners. This will show how this approach to religious experience[1] can considered to be a form of experiential learning but is distinct in both its aims and practice. These connections will lead on to a look at the educational and pedagogical ends[2] of the CCRP and how these are related with conversion in the learners and the experience of the transcendent and of God. These ends will ground a more thorough description of what learning within the CCRP would look like, with details about the shape of the learning space along with the roles of the individuals within it. And as with the map of the various forms of experience, a map of how the pedagogical interventions and spaces within the CCRP will be drawn to demonstrate how this can take place in practice.

[1] For the purposes of my argument and for the sake of simplicity, the phrase "religious experience" will be used hereinafter to stand for all three aspects discussed previously – experience of the transcendent, experience of God, and religious experience.

[2] I use the term "pedagogical ends" as a broader term which includes more classroom and curriculum focused labels like learning objectives or learning goals. These will be used interchangeably for the purposes of my argument.

Critical Communities of Religious Praxis and Experiential Learning

The look at the pedagogical possibilities of the CCRP and its connections with religious experience would inevitably point one towards a group of learning strategies that have been classified as "experiential learning." The idea of experiential learning has its roots in the Socratic method of dialogue which brings about learning in people but entered the educational discourse quite firmly when pragmatists John Dewey and William James argued for learning through actual real-life experiences over the acquisition of isolated skills and knowledge through drill and memory. The problem with such a definition of experiential learning as "a naturalistic ongoing process of direct learning from life experiences contrasted with the systematic learning of formal science and education" is that "the picture that emerges is that experiential learning is haphazard, unreliable, and misleading, and it must be corrected by academic knowledge."[3] Experiential learning theorists like David Kolb suggested that one way of getting around the apparent unreliability and unpredictability of learning solely from discrete experiences is through structured reflection where learners can be guided to consider both what they learned and how they did it. This combination of experience and reflection forms the basis of the wide variety of approaches that experiential learning takes in the modern educational landscape.[4]

The learning that occurs during experiential learning is most commonly expressed as a connection between experience and reflection, a connection that is often articulated as well-

[3] Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, xx, 5.

[4] Experiential learning can be seen to be an umbrella term that describes a variety of ways in which learning from experience can be manifested. Learning by discovery is a simple way in which experiential learning can occur. (Dearden, "Instruction and Learning by Discovery.") Other, more complex systems of experiential learning include service-learning where students learn through the experience of and reflection on service to a community (Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles Jr., *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).), or problem-based learning where instruction is couched in terms of problems to be solved and where reflection on the learning processes is seen to be very important (Maggi Savin-Baden and Claire Howell Major, *Foundations of Problem-Based Learning* (Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2004).). These are but some examples of experiential learning but serve to demonstrate its diversity in practice.

structured systems which demonstrate the relationship between learning, experience, and reflection. Kolb's experiential learning cycle is one example of a system that has been used as the basis for a variety of approaches to experiential learning, and which reflects the important dynamics of such a style of learning. Experiential learning is thus seen as "a dynamic view of learning based on a learning cycle driven by the resolution of the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction. Learning is defined as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.'"[5] This transformation of experience takes place through what Kolb describes as a resolution of creative tension among four modes of learning: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. These are expressed in a learning cycle (Fig. 2) which demonstrates how knowledge is gained as a learner passes through the four parts. It is a process that makes learners sensitive to the learning situation as they reflect on concrete experiences which are then distilled into abstract concepts from which new means of action are devised.[6] There is transformation that occurs in learners as they go through multiple iterations of this cycle, learning to reflect and act on their experiences and recognising how this process itself aids in learning.

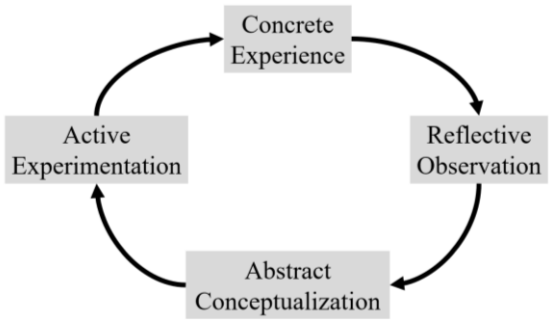


Fig. 2. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle[7]

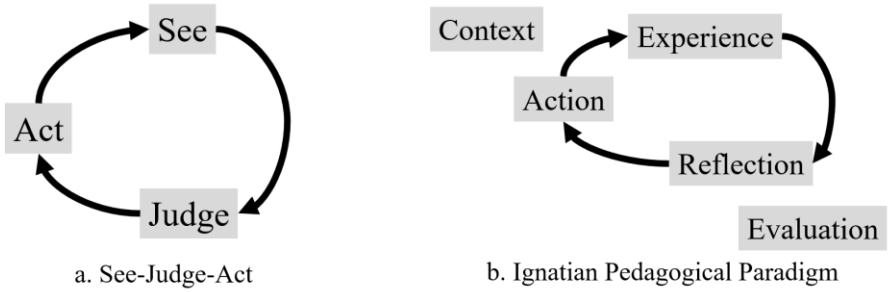
[5] Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 50–51.
[6] Ibid., 51–52.
[7] Ibid., 51.

Kolb also noted how this experiential learning cycle has been used and adapted in varied applications since it was first described in 1984. I would go further to state that this generalised view of how one can learn from experience and reflection has been part of the educational discourse long before it was popularised by Kolb and later experiential learning theorists. In the Catholic context, Cardinal Joseph Cardijn's See-Judge-Act model (Fig. 3a), which was first introduced to young Catholic workers and students in the 1920s, has been very influential in the formation of youths as well as on the church's social doctrines.[8] In more recent years, the Society of Jesus, a religious order which has had a long history in education, described their systematic approach to teaching and learning which was based on the spiritual principles of their founder St Ignatius of Loyola, in what was termed the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) (Fig. 3b). Both these approaches are based firmly in the conception of the human person as an active participant in God's creation and whose intellect and will can be formed through this active engagement with the environment.[9] While the IPP does nuance this by adding that outside of the cycle, recognition of the learner's context and evaluation of the processes of learning have to occur, the primacy of how one learns through experience, reflection and action remains. The similarity of all these models of experiential learning demonstrate the importance of reflection in grounding experience in action, an

[8] Cardijn's model was originally intended as a means for reflective action among students and young workers but has since been used as a basis for theological reflection (Justin Sands, "Introducing Cardinal Cardijn's See–Judge–Act as an Interdisciplinary Method to Move Theory into Practice," *Religions* 9, no. 4 (2018): 1–10.), as a means of understanding the church's social doctrine (Erin M. Brigham, *See, Judge, Act: Catholic Social Teaching and Service Learning* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2018).), and is also the major framework upon which Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment was based (Francis, "Laudato Si'," 2015, §15, accessed July 7, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.).

[9] I would add here that these cycles are very closely related to Lonergan's understanding of human cognition as experience-insight-judgement-decision. The conception of the human person as being able to experience and thus act on the world is now very firmly entrenched in Catholic epistemology.

observation that Freire also noted very emphatically in all his work and which I have also identified as important in the process of conversion.



a. See-Judge-Act b. Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm

Fig.3. Cardijn's See-Judge-Act Model and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm[10]

This short excursus into the modern approaches to experiential learning helps put its connections with the CCRP into perspective. The transformational aspect of experiential learning can be expressed in the form of conversion and the emphasis on reflection and action is very much linked to the need for praxis in Conversion II. These connections, including that of the use of experiential learning in Catholic pedagogical approaches, are insufficient to overcome what I see to be inherent problems in making use of them as frameworks for conversion and religious experience. Firstly, experiential learning that is expressed in the form of a cycle implies a certain mechanistic order in which the learning would occur. Experience is thus seen as being part of structured system where, if reflected and acted upon, would lead to learning and more experience. Secondly, the experiences that are part of this system are necessarily instrumental and immanent. These are experiences that exist as part of the immanent frame of the individual who experiences it and are, by virtue of them being within a system, instrumental means to a broader end of learning through reflection and action.[11] Thirdly, proposing such cyclical systems as means of understanding

[10] Society of Jesus, "Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach," 1993, accessed July 7, 2020, http://jesuitinstitute.org/Pages/IgnatianPedagogy.htm.

[11] That is not to say that experiential models like Cardijn's See-Judge-Act approach and the IPP are completely immanent and do not have connections with religion or the transcendent. The "Judge" stage of

how experiential learning occurs comes with a tacit assumption that the process is controllable and that educators have a role in facilitating such processes with the learners.

The consideration of the limits of these descriptions of experiential learning is not a criticism of the approaches but comes as means of distinguishing them from the CCRP. Experiential learning methods are aimed primarily at creating experiences which lead to learning whereas the learning spaces of the CCRP leave the apprehension of experience to the learners while supporting their reflection and action on these experiences. The CCRP is a space where conversion occurs, which leads to greater openness and awareness of the transcendent and of God, but this does not in any way guarantee any form of religious experience. The pedagogical interventions which can aid a learner in the process of conversion do not automatically or mechanically lead to a religious experience. Furthermore, religious experiences relate with the transcendental and cannot be "created" through pedagogical or systemic means. They are often ends in themselves and are not seen as means to further learning ends. Finally, the process of conversion and the apprehension of religious experience are out of the direct control of the educator though interventions can be made to create the conditions for the possibility for both to occur and for the learner to recognise that is had.

These considerations show how extant models of experiential learning do not sufficiently account for what occurs in the CCRP with regards to conversion and religious experience. While I would consider the movement towards religious experience and the pedagogical interventions that can help create the conditions for that to occur as experiential

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Cardijn's approach makes connections with theology and the "beyond" as one's judgement is conditioned not just by that but by one's context as well. The same goes for the IPP where one's context, which includes one's religion or connection with the transcendent, plays an integral role how one learns. (Sands, "Introducing Cardinal Cardijn's See–Judge–Act as an Interdisciplinary Method to Move Theory into Practice," 7; Society of Jesus, "Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach.")

learning in some form, the uniqueness of these categories and processes require different ways of framing their relationship. Pedagogy that connects with religious experience has to acknowledge the transcendent and the divine while at the same time recognise that we as human beings have little or no control over how we can apprehend or understand it. The same approaches to pedagogy should also be able to account for the mediated immediacy of religious experience and how such encounters with reality can connect one to the deepest sense of one's being. Finally, pedagogical interventions should provide the individual with sufficient tools to be able to reflect upon one's own process of conversion and the experiences that this conversion allows one to have. While this seems somewhat difficult to say the least, a look at some pedagogical ends or learning objectives of the CCRP may help give some initial insights.

Towards the Pedagogical Ends of the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis

Religious Experience as a Good and an End

The place of religious experience as the ultimate objective within the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis needs to be briefly examined. The construction of the pedagogical ends of the CCRP are predicated upon the assumption that religious experiences are of sufficient value to the learners that educators would want not just to craft educational ends to achieve them but to take the effort to open pedagogical spaces for their exploration and analysis. A quick look at the educational import of religious experience will not only help clarify how the pedagogical ends and objectives help in the development of learners but would provide a firm grounding in the processes involved in the CCRP. Religious experience is important to education in two ways: as a good in itself and also in how it can be an objective which promotes learning and development in learners.

Religious experience can be considered a good in itself because it represents an individual's connection with the transcendental reality, allowing one to encounter and apprehend that which is beyond the immanent frame. This awareness of the transcendent and the willingness to encounter it benefits a learner mainly because of the noetic nature of religious experience as mediated immediacy. Religious experience is noetic and has a knowledge component that not only provides insights to the transcendental reality for individuals but can be the grounds upon which further learning can be built upon. The acknowledgment of the transcendental reality as a source of knowledge broadens the possibilities of learning while at the same time bringing depth to a person's approach to the world. Individuals who have religious experiences also experience the mediated immediacy of the transcendental reality, recognising that the immediate insights that one has are always mediated by what one knows and the contexts that one exists within. I am of the opinion that the more one is open to religious experience, the more aware one becomes of the possible breadth of knowledge, recognising how one can learn not just through books and experiences but through deeper reflection on the transcendental reality.[12]

Although one may not be able to induce religious experiences in oneself and in others, they can be seen as worthy ends that one may aim at, albeit indirectly. It is through the process of seeking religious experiences that learning and development can take place in individuals – the means to religious experiences can be ends in themselves, forming learners

[12] The learning from the transcendental reality (and by proxy, religious experience) does not occur solely in the religious sphere. Educational psychologist Howard Gardner wrote of how a recourse to the philosophical transcendentals of beauty, truth, and goodness can have a salutary effect on contemporary learners. With reference to the case of Diana as described in the previous chapter, the link between drama, and the transcendent made her experiences during the play all the deeper. The connection between beauty in the arts can, with suitable reflection, be made with the beauty of creation and the work of God in the world. Her realisation of what it means to "love one's neighbour" came from her own experiences of the transcendental reality during the play, prompting her desire to deepen this in her concrete reality. (Howard Gardner, *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed: Educating for the Virtues in the Age of Truthiness and Twitter* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).)

and engendering learning in themselves. The CCRP can be used as an example of how this can occur. The forming of the critical consciousness for openness to religious experience can benefit learners as it makes them aware of their own cognitive processes, learning how to learn just as they grow in knowledge. The communal and familial aspect of the CCRP brings learners in contact with their own contexts, deepening their critical consciousness of reality while giving weight to the concrete reality of their lives. These connections can in turn be the basis of reflection and action in learners, allowing them to make use of what is learned in concrete ways, practicing and developing as they grow in awareness and appreciation of both what has been learned as well as the experiences of the transcendent.

The Need to Begin from the (Pedagogic) End

The path towards the pedagogical interventions and practices requires a clear look at the ends and objectives that the educators and learners would work towards. Continuing the image of map and navigator, we remember that knowing the specifics of religious experience and all its attributes provides a good map to the territory, and being converted and having the openness and awareness of what religious experience could be provides the ability to read the map. Actually using the map to get to a particular place requires not just the ability to use the map but an idea of where one is going. Knowing one's destination would not only provide an objective towards which the journey can be planned but would also allow one to know when one has arrived at one's destination. This thought quite similar to an approach to curriculum that Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe called Understanding by Design. They wrote:

> Our lessons, units, and courses should be logically inferred from the results sought, not derived from the methods, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable. Curriculum should lay out the most effective ways of achieving specific results. It is analogous to travel planning. Our frameworks should provide a set of itineraries deliberately designed to meet cultural goals rather than a purposeless tour

> of all the major sites in a foreign country. In short, the best designs derive backward from the learnings sought.[13]

The ends-based approach that Wiggins and McTighe suggested focuses more on the learners than the educators, reversing the mistaken conflation of learning with activity when in fact learning comes from understanding of the meaning of learning activities or interactions between learners and educators.[14] The process of designing curriculum, according to them, begins with the identification of results or objectives which is followed by the determination of how evidence that these objectives would be demonstrate and only after these two are decided would the instructional activities be planned.[15] This ends-first approach to the design of curriculum is especially important to the present discussion, given the nature of religious experience and conversion. The subjective nature of religious experience and the connection with the transcendent means that it would be very difficult for an educator to plan particular lessons or interventions that would reliably allow learners to have such experiences. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that experiences that are directly created by the lessons or interventions would not be considered religious experiences because of their immanent provenance. Instead, designing curriculum which would help learners to be aware of their experiences and to identify or even evaluate them would better serve the process of conversion and approach to religious experience. It is with this in mind that the four interrelated ends of the CCRP that pertain to conversion and religious experience will be described and discussed.

[13] Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005), 14.

[14] Ibid., 48.

[15] Ibid., 18, 257–258.

The Ends of the Critical Community of Religious Praxis

1. Have a religious experience. The first end which relates with religious experience and conversion is distinct from the rest because it is outside the purview of any pedagogical intervention or plan. This fundamental end, to have a religious experience, is important because it provides the basic matter for reflection and evaluation which would in turn aid in the further growth and transformation in the learner. However, unlike the rest of the ends to be discussed subsequently, the goal of having a religious experience is not one that can be attributed directly to pedagogical interventions or through classroom processes. Given that religious experiences are subjective, mediated encounters of the immediate reality, it would follow that these experiences are personal and come about as the individuals have encounters with reality. External interventions can aid in the process of conversion or make the individuals more disposed to have religious experiences and to recognise them as such but the experiences themselves are completely dependent on the one who is experiencing reality. It should be noted that while conversion can dispose an individual to religious experience, that alone does not guarantee it. While it might seem odd to have an objective that cannot be directly brought about by the pedagogical interventions that will be described, this end is important to be recognised as both the object of the interventions but also the grounds and objective of the conversion that the interventions help to engender.

2. Awareness of experience ("I'm aware that I've had a religious experience"). The second end may be considered the first and most basic objective of the CCRP and one that can be achieved through pedagogical means. While this end can seem very similar to the previous, the difference lies in its reflexive nature. Its importance lies in the individuals recognising that they have had a religious experience, being able to say "I'm aware that I've had a religious experience," coming to a realisation that may not be as easy or intuitive as

other more immanent experiences. The route towards this recognition comes by way of Conversion I, where individuals become more aware of their cognitive processes while at the same time developing an openness to the possibility of the transcendent. Although conversion can help with the recognition of one's religious experience, being converted does not automatically lead to the awareness of one's religious experience when one has it, and neither is conversion a prerequisite for one to know that one has had a religious experience. Rather, this objective of the CCRP is for individuals to be sufficiently open to the possibility of the transcendent to be able to notice that a particular experience is different from the other, more immanent ones. Returning to Alice's account of her experience on the mountain, she was able to notice and recognise the feeling of the transcendent in that experience, demonstrating her awareness of the possibility of the transcendent and that the experience was indeed different from previous ones. Interventions that can support such openness while broadening the general awareness of individuals can help learners like Alice to identify and articulate their experiences of the transcendent.

3. Analysis of experience ("I know what kind of religious experience I've had"). The third end which relates with religious experience and conversion flows from the previous and comes with deep reflection and growing awareness of the nature of religious experience itself. By delving deeper into the experiences themselves, this objective would see learners examining and analysing the quality of their religious experiences and evaluating the immediate significance. It goes beyond recognition as they move towards being able to say, "I know what kind of religious experience I've had," pointing to some analysis and the differentiation of experiences. This process has connections with Conversion II and the growing awareness of how one's religious experience flows from one's contexts and that those very contexts can aid in helping one to understand what the religious experience could be. One expression of this objective could be the ability to recognise the kind of experience

that one has had, possibly distinguishing an experience of the transcendent from a religious experience that has connections with religious tradition. Another expression could be an appeal to one's religious tradition to assess the adequacy and appropriateness of a religious experience, growing to understand it within a broader framework. The accounts of Bernard and Charles, which were described in previous chapters, are examples of how this end can be expressed in different situation. Bernard was quite certain that he had an experience of God and was able to name it as such, recognising its provenance and even describing its appropriateness as an experience that was related with his own Christian faith. Similarly, Charles's ability to connect his experiences to his community and how they viewed their relationship with God showed his own awareness of the provenance of his connection with the transcendent and with God. In both cases, they demonstrated not just the awareness of the experiences but were able to reflect on the quality and nature of what they had experienced.

4. Evaluation of experience in relation to self ("I know how the religious experience has changed or affected me"). The fourth and final end of the CCRP builds on the previous objectives and has as its final aim the awareness of how the religious experiences affect and change the individual. This can occur only with the openness and awareness that comes from the previous two ends where the individual becomes cognisant of both the presence of the experiences as encounters with reality as well as the nature and specificity of the experiences themselves. This leads to an individual being able to say, "I know how the religious experience has changed or affected me," internalising the effects of the experience and using it as an impetus to act. The interventions that can bring a learner towards this end would be both reflective and evaluative, focusing not just on the apprehension of the experiences but on the effects of these experiences, both internal and external, on the learner. In doing so, the evaluation would aid learners in examining the role that their own processes of conversion played in their religious experiences, allowing them to be more aware of the connection

between conversion and religious experience and how that dynamic can aid in their learning. The account of Diana's reflection in the previous chapter, about how she saw some of her experiences in theatre as religious experiences that allowed her to notice how she related with others, is an example of how evaluation can occur. Her ability to note the connection between the experiences and her own actions is a demonstration of how this end can play out and points also to the need for interventions that can aid learners in developing good habits for reflection and evaluation to further ground this in their approaches to reality.

The aspects of religious experience and conversion, as mentioned in the previous chapters, are not hierarchical in that there is no fixed order in which they occur in an individual. The ends of the CCRP, however, are incremental and built upon each other. It is necessary for one to have a religious experience before being able to know that one has had one and similarly, the awareness of the nature of the religious experience would precede the evaluation of its effects on the self. The hierarchical nature of these ends can be seen in the light of how Benjamin Bloom and his collaborators described a taxonomy of educational objectives, indicating how learners know and understand before analysing and evaluating on the cognitive realm just as they receive and respond to phenomena before internalising them on the affective realm.[16] It is useful to look at the ends of the CCRP in terms of such a taxonomy because that provides a structured look at how learners can progress from the more fundamental cognitive and affective encounters with reality to objectives which may require a deeper level of cognitive or affective awareness that can be developed through pedagogical

[16] For the cognitive domain, I refer to the revised version of the taxonomy which restated and slightly reordered Bloom's original objectives and phrased them as verbs instead of fixed nouns. The taxonomy for the affective domain comes from the original taxonomy by Krathwohl and collaborators. (Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001); David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom, and Bertram B. Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook II: Affective Domain.* (New York: David McKay Co., 1973).)

intervention. This also enables educators to notice development and transformation in learners as they demonstrate thoughts and actions which correspond to the varied ends, leading to better use of interventions to aid students at the levels that they are at. Furthermore, the specification of the levels of the taxonomy as verbs emphasises the active nature of the encounters, recognising that the ends of the CCRP are equally dynamic and come directly from the actions of the learners. The cognitive and affective taxonomies in relation with the ends of the CCRP are shown in Fig. 4. below.

Pedagogical ends	Cognitive level (Anderson and Krathwohl)[17]	Affective level (Krathwohl et. al.)[18]	Transcendental level (CCRP)[19]
1. Have a religious experience	Remembering	Receiving	Opening
2. Awareness of experience	Understanding	Responding	Noticing
3. Analysis of experience	Applying Analysing	Valuing Organising	Discerning
4. Evaluation of experiences	Evaluating Creating	Internalising	Practicing

Fig. 4. Pedagogical Ends of the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis in Comparison with the Cognitive and Affective Taxonomies of Educational Objectives

The connection of the taxonomies of educational objectives with the pedagogical ends described here helps emphasise how the pedagogical ends are not solely cognitive as they have an affective component as well. These objectives also follow the incremental nature of the original taxonomies while providing observable actions which educators can see occurring in learners. This same connection also provides the basis for my proposal of a

[17] Anderson and Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 66.

[18] Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook II: Affective Domain.*

[19] The four objectives here correspond loosely with Lonergan's description of how a critically conscious individual would act with regards to knowledge and reality according to his transcendental method. He stated that such a person would "be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible," actions that can provide a useful complement to the transcendental objectives in this column. (Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 20.)

taxonomy of educational objectives that relates with religious experience. Like Anderson and Krathwohl, I use a set of verbs to describe each of the educational objectives on the transcendental level, shown in the rightmost column in Fig. 4. Like the other taxonomies, these objectives on the transcendental level are incremental and observable, allowing educators a means of forming learners to approach, analyse and act upon their religious experiences.

The opening of oneself to the transcendental is the most basic objective and corresponds with the act of remembering and receiving on the other two scales. It is apposite at this time to reiterate the assertion that having a religious experience depends less an individual's agency or actions but more on their openness to the transcendent. Openness is not usually observed directly in the individual but instead comes alongside their actions and ability to describe their religious experiences. This points to the close connection between the first two ends or objectives of the CCRP (expressed by the dotted lines in Fig. 4.), indicating how noticing one's religious experience often comes alongside the openness to the transcendent. The act of noticing represents a deepening of the openness, seeking to understand and respond to the experience, an involvement that comes alongside Conversion I and how one notices the possibility of the transcendent.

The third and fourth ends are where reflection gets deeper and more involved, a characteristic of Conversion II, as one begins to discern with the traces of transcendent in one's immediate reality and moves towards acting in line with one's relationship with God. When a learner discerns with the experiences, they are analysed and organised in the light of prior knowledge and other experiences alongside the values that the learner would have, this allows one to make reasoned decisions for action based on the nuancing and differentiation of the experiences. This reasoned and responsible action, which becomes more natural to an individual through practice, comes as individuals evaluate their experiences and acknowledge

how these have had an effect on them. These acts of being open, noticing, discerning and practicing[20] can be seen as evidence of learning and can aid as objectives in the move towards creating learning spaces and interventions for the CCRP.

Learning in the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis

The move from the consideration of ends to the creation of the means to achieve the ends requires a look at the relationship between person and experience. The movement towards these ends is experiential by nature but is not one that is characterised by a fixed path or cyclical process. In line with the general dynamic of Conversion I and II which brings about openness and awareness in those who experience such processes, the pedagogical interventions that can occur within the CCRP which aid in the encounters with the transcendent should focus on the creation of open spaces for the encounter and the gaining of tools to aid in one's awareness. I see the creation of open spaces for the encounter with the transcendent as having pedagogical interventions which pertain to the setting or environment for learning. These interventions have to do with first with the shape of the classroom or how the immediate learning spaces aid learners in their approach to reality, and second with the shape of curriculum or how lessons can be oriented to take the transcendent into account. With regards to the gaining of tools to aid in one's awareness of the relationship with the transcendent, the focus would turn to the roles of the individuals who operate within these spaces – the educators and the learners themselves. By examining the roles that both educators and learners play within the CCRP, a set actions, attributes, and dispositions which can aid in the awareness and evaluation of religious experience will be proposed.

[20] The word "practicing" was selected over closer cognates to praxis like "acting" to demonstrate the habitual aspect that is important to evaluation of experience. One not only acts but makes the practice of evaluation something habitual, incorporating the presence and transformative effects of religious experience and conversion into one's concrete reality.

Opening Spaces: The Shape of the Classroom and the Curriculum

In considering how one is to open a space, through pedagogical interventions, for the encounter with the reality of the transcendent, the classroom seems to be the most obvious place to start. I use the term "classroom" here for any pedagogical space where learning can occur as the encounter with the transcendent need not occur in a formal learning space. Furthermore, it is also important to recognise that what I describe here as interventions are the actions that are aimed at opening the space for encountering reality and need not lead to any experiences at all, religious or otherwise. The best description of what a classroom like this would look like would be that the exit is always larger than the entrance, that learners enter with a particular sense of the world but leave it with their minds expanded to the possibility of a broader reality. Space that is given for discovery and exploration would help, as would the inculcation of a questioning environment which encourages learners to question and engage more deeply with the world around them. This space for openness and exploration runs parallel with Conversion I as these actions would allow learners to develop their critical consciousness of the world and begin to consider their own responses to it. Seeing the classroom as a community of learners, connected with their own wider familial and communal attachments, but also existing as a space where common approaches to knowledge and reality can be shared and reflected upon. This connection with the community brings about the awareness of relationality that brings Conversion II into this space, possibly deepening the experiences.

The opening of spaces, as mentioned previously, is more than the opening of physical or even mental spaces in the learners. I include an examination of the shape of the curriculum that can lead to the openness to the transcendent because there should be an intentionality in the way that lessons are structured so as to create the conditions for the possibility for a

learner to approach and apprehend the fullness of reality. I am of the opinion that such conditions can be created in all disciplines, though it would take an educator or curriculum planner who is converted and who recognises the need for such openness to be able to make such elements explicit in the curriculum and lesson plans.[21] The objectives of open curricula are similar to those of the open classrooms, to have learners leave with broader perspectives and the possibility of the transcendent firmly in their consciousness. To do this, curricula should not be confined to particular disciplines as the interactions that can occur as learners engage with different disciplines can afford them a much broader perspective of the world. Reflection that occurs in such settings can make the learners more reflexive not just to unfamiliar learning situations but to their own approaches to knowledge and the world.[22] This, which aids in the critical consciousness of Conversion I, can be the basis for another way that curriculum can aid in openness. Incorporating the learning of reflective, analytical, and evaluative approaches would aid in the process of conversion as the learners would pick up the requisite tools to examine how their experiences change and affect them in concrete ways.

Towards Awareness: The Role of the Educator and the Attitude of the Learner

The shape of the classroom and curriculum show the broader structural aspects that can create the conditions for religious experience. Just as maps are useless without good navigators, so would good curricula stay as well-written hopes for education without educators to put them into practice. The role of educators in the CCRP is akin to what Kolb

[21] The reasoning for this is that it takes one who is conscious of one's approach to knowledge (Conversion I) and who is also aware of the immediate contexts that one operates in (Conversion II) to be able to write curriculum and craft interventions which would create good conditions for learners to apprehend and appreciate the reality of the transcendent.

[22] Åsa Andersson and Hildur Kalman, "Reflections on Learning in Interdisciplinary Settings," *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 22, no. 2 (2010): 205.

described as their role in experiential learning situations in that they are not there just to impart knowledge or implement sets of techniques but rather accompany learners " in the context of meaningful relationships and shared experiences" so as to aid in their development as whole persons.[23] Kolb went on point out the importance of educators playing different roles as responses to the learning environment and the needs of the learners, engaging students in unique ways so as to transform experience.[24] In the CCRP, I see educators taking on three interrelated roles that can aid learners towards the specific pedagogical ends. The first role is that of a facilitator who guides the reflection of the learners, demonstrating how reflection could occur through their own actions while at the same time teaching skills and processes which the learners may not be familiar with.[25] This role in facilitation aids in the first two pedagogical ends, to lead the learners to an awareness of their own experiences while creating space for them to apprehend the transcendent reality, creating the possibility also for Conversion I. The second role that of what I call a "connector", as the educator helps learners to connect with their prior knowledge, communal contexts, and religious traditions. To do this, the educator has to be both sensitive and knowledgeable about these contexts and traditions, drawing on them as both tools and bases for the leaners to analyse and organise their experiences. In doing so, they also open the learners to the possibility of Conversion II as they become more aware of where and how they understand the experiences. The third role is less focused on what the educator does than who the educator is in relation with the

[23] Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 300.

[24] Specifically, Kolb described educators as being facilitators who aid learners in reflecting on experience; subject matter experts who help learners connect experience with the knowledge base of the subject; evaluators who help learners to monitor the quality of their performance; and coaches who help learners take action on their personal goals. (Ibid., 303–304.)

[25] A facilitator who aids in the reflection of learners should do more than just tell them what has to be done, especially for those who are initially unused to such processes. Reflection, according to Jenny Moon, is less learned than practices and thus emphasised the need for demonstration and modelling reflection processes. (Jenny Moon, *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004).

learner. The educator's role as a model for the learners, modelling what critical consciousness can look like and demonstrating the path between reflection and action, is very important to keep the space for exploration and discovery open for learners while giving them a good example of what learning could look like in such a space.[26] This modelling can also take the form of accompaniment of learners to show them how they can act upon their experiences, catalysing and supporting the dialogical relationship that they would have in the world. The varied roles of the educator thus described are those which primarily facilitate conversion in learners.

Learners themselves have an important role to play in their own learning, mainly through their attitudes and orientations to learning and religious experience. An important point that Kolb brought up is that for the connection between experience and learning to occur, there has to be a belief in the individual that "one can learn and develop from one's life experiences."[27] Related to this would be the belief that there is something to be gained from the contact with the transcendent and that one can learn from religious experience. A learner who is thus inclined would have a greater predilection towards experiences that have to do with the transcendent. This attitude of openness towards experience and the transcendent is the first characteristic of learners that can contribute to their benefitting from their presence within the CCRP. While such an attitude may not lead directly religious experience or learning from it, the orientation towards the possibility of the transcendent is an important component to the openness of Conversion I. A further aspect that can help in their learning from experiences of the transcendent or religious experiences is the feeling of

[26] This flows from the traditional view of the teacher in Christian education a model of virtue for the students. While this can seem to be an overly idealised vision of who the educator is, there is room to conceive of the educator as one who, with the benefit of slightly more experience and learning, can demonstrate one way of approaching knowledge and learning. (Topping, *The Case for Catholic Education*, 61–63.)

[27] Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 342.

connection with one's immediate community, learning community, or both. The willingness to learn from and with the community would allow learners to benefit from being in the CCRP, where knowledge can be gained not just through one's own experiences but from those of other members of the community. This, along with the willingness to act on one's knowledge and experience, would aid a learner along the process of Conversion II. The third and final attitude that aid a learner in the CCRP is that of flexibility. Being open and aware places the learner in a position to have religious experiences and to learn from them but the latter may not always flow from the former. Being flexible means that the learners would not be fixated on learning on any single mode and would be aware not just of their learning preferences but also have the agility to shift approaches where they see fit in order to learn better. This flexibility is evidence of the critical consciousness of Conversion I while also displaying the awareness of the relationality needed for learning in Conversion II.

Critical Communities of Religious Practice as Learning Spaces

According to Wiggins and McTighe, the design and planning of learning experiences and instruction should take place only after the educational ends and assessment goals are identified.[28] The pedagogical ends of the CCRP dovetail quite naturally with how one can assess whether the ends are attained or not. Having learners articulate the *whats* and *hows* of their religious experiences would provide evidence of them reaching particular educational ends. Additionally, the four educational objectives on the transcendental level provide further means of assessing the learners' apprehension and internalisation of their religious experiences, allowing the educators an insight into how to adjust the learning spaces to further the process. Even though it does not show structural similarity with other extant

[28] Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 18.

descriptions of experiential learning, I would maintain that all that has been described thus far is a form of experiential learning by virtue of it having experience at its centre. The CCRP provides the conditions for the possibility of conversion which in turn forms a learner's capacity for noticing, discerning, and acting with religious experience. The learning that takes place in the CCRP is structured but not cyclical, an open space where learners develop in their ability to use the map of religious experience to learn.

The ability to use this map requires the structuring of learning and orienting of individuals towards the process of conversion and how that could lead to religious experience. This entails the setting up of both learning spaces as well as learning plans or curricula which not only take religious experience and conversion into account but actively create the conditions for the possibility of both to occur in learners and, to a lesser extent, educators as well. All this occurs within the context of the CCRP, where particular attributes of learners can dispose them more to both forms of conversion and where educators would have to take on different roles to support the conversion and the reflection on experience that is crucial to this process. While there are no neat structures or cyclical processes that can connect the ends with the pedagogical interventions, these ends and considerations provide the basis upon which the practical strategies for learning can take place in the CCRP through conversion and religious experience.

CHAPTER 4

Practicalities and Challenges:
Putting the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis Through its Paces

Putting Things Together: Critical Communities of Religious Praxis in Practice

The descriptions and discussions on religious experience, conversion, and pedagogy thus far have been largely theoretical, though the objectives for learners are very practical by nature. The task of this chapter will be to elaborate on the practical nature of the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis and demonstrate how the three elements of religious experience, conversion, and pedagogy connect to bring about real learning and transformation in learners. This will be done in four stages. It will start with a broad description of how pedagogical intervention can lead learners to the ends and objectives of the CCRP, allowing them better access and apprehension of the transcendent reality and religious experience. Following this, connections between the CCRP and Catholic Education will be examined, demonstrating how the fairly generalised description of conversion and religious experience can be made more specific within a religious context. The third stage will give details of some concrete examples of lessons that would take place within the framework of the CCRP. The chapter will end with the acknowledgement of some challenges that this scheme of education would face and suggest the means by which some of these challenges can be met.

The task of bringing the sometimes-disparate elements together would be more difficult if not for the one unifying factor that brings religious experience, conversion, and pedagogy together – the transcendent reality that we have access to as religious experience. This is the reality that underlies the immediacy that one encounters on a daily basis, the reality that would be difficult to access if one's attention is focused solely on the immanent

frame. Religious experiences are, at their heart, experiences of the transcendent reality and though they are by no means the only way that one can apprehend this reality, I would suggest that they are the most direct and accessible means to do so. The converse can also be true in that individuals who recognise and accept the possibility of the transcendent reality would be more likely to have religious experiences, or at least elements thereof. As is shown in Fig. 5. the transcendent reality is that which provides the background or environment within which everything else operates and religious experience forms an integral part of this reality.

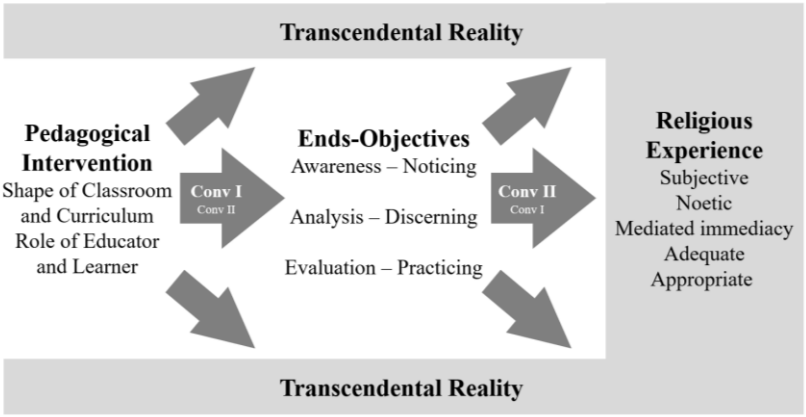

Fig. 5. Pedagogy and Religious Experience in Practice

Religious experiences or one's access to the transcendent reality stands as a key end to the pedagogical process, an objective that drives the movement towards the other ends as well as the pedagogical interventions that lead up to them. The three pedagogical ends of being aware of religious experiences, of knowing what kind of experiences one has had, and the evaluation of how these experiences have affected or changed one are partly reliant on one first having a religious experience. This can take many forms, as was detailed in the first chapter and can also be the experience of the transcendent reality through one or more of the aspects of religious experience. The ends and objectives which help learners to process their religious experiences are reached largely through the pedagogical interventions which come

in the form of classroom and curriculum spaces as well as actions by both educators and learners.

What is most significant in this process are the arrows that link the pedagogical interventions, the ends, and religious experience. These arrows represent the dynamic role that conversion plays in the CCRP, which not only connects learners with religious experience but also opens their awareness to the greater possibilities that the transcendent reality holds. The movement from pedagogical intervention to the ends or objectives can be more cognitive as learners grow in critical consciousness and thus Conversion I would tend to play a larger role in this process, even though Conversion II can be present in this movement of opening. The conversion that takes place as learners actively encounter religious experiences would show more evidence of the awareness and engagement that is characteristic of Conversion II, though again, Conversion I would play a crucial but smaller role. This conversion, which comes alongside the recognition of one's connectedness with others and the need for action, would ultimately aid the learners not just in differentiating the kinds of experiences they have had but in acting on these experiences in real and concrete ways.

The Religious Turn: Critical Communities of Religious Praxis as Catholic Education

The turn towards the specifically religious in discussing religious experience seems to be a long time coming but I felt it necessary to elaborate upon that and on conversion in general terms so as to take into account a broader range of religious traditions that people may be affiliated with as well as those who remain unaffiliated to any religious tradition. It is apt to note that the turn towards connecting the CCRP directly with Catholic education

represents a homecoming of sorts, given that many of the categories from the CCRP come from or are related to Catholic theological concepts. The connections between the CCRP and Catholic education here will focus on several elements of Catholic education as described by Catholic educators and theorists and how the CCRP can contribute to and enhance these elements. In particular, I will focus on how Catholic education is connected with the virtues, the importance of sacramentality, the role of tradition, community, and relationality as an aspect of love. These elements will help re-contextualise the CCRP while demonstrating its practicability in a specifically Catholic context.

One of the oft-stated aims of Catholic Christian education is the formation of the human person and in particular, the virtues which enable one to live well for one's own good and the good of society at large.[1] Teaching with the virtues in mind means leading an individual to build "habits of being," recognising what our ends are as human persons and cultivating the requisite virtues in our daily lives to move towards these ends.[2] "To teach is to shape," drawing learners from potential to real and helping them to recognise that the ends cannot be purely immanent and that at the heart of Christian education lies Christ, God who was incarnated because of love and who provides the one lasting goal and model for our living.[3] This movement towards virtue in real life and the working towards ends that are not just transcendental but aimed at God, is very much akin to the general movement of conversion discussed earlier. It would not be inappropriate to consider the objectives on a transcendental level: noticing, discerning, and practicing as possible virtues of learners who

[1] In the document from the Second Vatican Council on Christian education, it was stated: "For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share." Vatican II, "Gravissimum Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education)," 1, last modified 1965, accessed July 22, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html.

[2] James F. Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1996), 12–13.

[3] Topping, *The Case for Catholic Education*, 47.

are open to religious experience and its developmental effects. Virtue is developed with practice and it is thus possible to consider the whole process of teaching, conversion, and the reaching of the pedagogical ends as part of how learners practice the virtues of encountering God and the transcendent reality. Seen in the religious light, the whole process also becomes less intellectual and much more relational, with the ultimate end of learners building real and substantive relationships with God.

The relationality that one can feel needs to be grounded in the transcendent reality. One unique aspect of Catholic education is that of sacramentality, the "conviction that God mediates Godself to us and we encounter God's presence and grace coming to meet us through the ordinary of life."[4] This points to a person being aware of the presence of God as the both the backdrop as well as foreground of life, acknowledging the mediated immediacy of all experiences as pointing to God. Education that forms this "sacramental consciousness," according to Thomas Groome, means encouraging learners to employ the critical and creative powers of their mind "to look '*at*' life so intensely and rigorously that they begin to look '*through*' it."[5] Not only does this sacramental approach lend support to the methods detailed here, where the development of the cognitive side aids in the apprehension of the transcendental, it helps to deepen the sense of conversion that comes with the learning as there is a clear sense of the presence of God underlying the transcendental reality. This places the learners into an appropriate sacramental space where learning can occur, allowing them to see the connections that are present among the experiences of the transcendent and of God and how these ultimately bring us to have true, authentic religious experiences.

[4] Thomas H. Groome, "What Makes a School Catholic?," in *The Contemporary Catholic School: Context, Identity and Diversity*, ed. Terence H. McLaughlin, Joseph O'Keefe SJ, and Bernadette O'Keeffe (London: The Falmer Press, 1996), 111.

[5] Ibid., 112.

Catholic education is sacramental in that it looks outward to the reality of the world but this ability to look outwards with the eyes of faith is based on the firm foundation of the salvation that comes from the person of Christ and how that message has been mediated to us through tradition.[6] Groome wrote of how tradition comes to us through the "Story" of Christian faith, that includes Scripture, the rituals and symbols, doctrines and creeds, as well as religious language, which in turn helps us to recognise how the truths of the faith have been consistently passed on to us through the ages.[7] The connection with tradition helps to ground the learning in the CCRP in two ways. The first is that it provides a firm foundation upon which the evaluation of religious experience through the criteria of appropriateness can occur as learners can make use of the wealth of knowledge that comes from tradition to assess the appropriateness of their religious experiences. The second is how tradition can become a point of dialogue in the movement towards praxis and conscientisation as learners reflect on the role that tradition plays in their understanding of the world and seek to make use of this in their actions that flow from their reflection. In both cases, the connection with tradition provides a grounding for the conversion as learners see the end, God, who is beyond the religious experiences and are able to make use of resources and knowledge from tradition to access and grow into this end.

One of the clearest connections between the CCRP and Catholic education comes through the emphasis on the communal nature of human existence and how the Church sees itself as working towards being a community of deep love, inclusion and of "right

[6] This approach that is based firmly on tradition and salvation history echoes what was written at the start of *Lumen Gentium*, which proclaimed that Christ is the light of all nations and that this light is visible through the Church. The document goes on: "Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission." (Vatican II, "Lumen Gentium," last modified 1964, accessed July 22, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.)

[7] Groome, "What Makes a School Catholic?," 117.

relationship" with each other and with the world.[8] To achieve this, educators should be committed to building this community with pedagogy that is grounded in relationship, marked by dialogue and cooperation amongst all involved.[9] The emphasis on community and relationality demonstrates the parallels between Catholic education and Conversion II. The ultimate ends of both are different in that the former has the formation of the Christian faith community as its main goal whereas the latter has a more individual end of learners being aware of the transcendental reality and responding appropriately to it. Despite this seemingly big difference in ends, the turn towards the community and the recognition of its importance in the lives of learners can bring about a symbiotic relationship between Catholic education and Conversion II when taken together, with one helping to build and focus on the community and the other helping learners to connect the community with the transcendent reality.

Experience and back again: Critical Communities of Religious Praxis in Practice

On Orientation and the Opening of Space

Thus far, the description of the CCRP and its direct connection with pedagogy has been fairly abstract, detailing the possibility of a community of learners aimed at conversion and religious experience. Bringing this theory into practice while ensuring that all the elements discussed previously are taken into account can feel like an elaborate juggling act but I contend that having the right basic orientation and sense of space can make this process both reasonable and concrete. The basic orientation needed in this case is one that points firmly towards the transcendental reality, an orientation that begins necessarily with the

[8] Ibid., 114.
[9] Ibid., 115; Topping, *The Case for Catholic Education*, 65.

educators and those involved with the crafting of curriculum. Without this orientation, the interdisciplinary focus and the importance of reflection in the curricula that flow from the CCRP would be indistinguishable from many other well-intentioned and well-thought out course of study. By acknowledging the existence of the transcendental reality and trusting in its truth, educators and curriculum planners would work from the mindset that all things flow from and point towards that reality, bringing about the dynamic illustrated in the preceding section (Fig. 5.) where the movements of conversion and religious experience move a learner towards the transcendental reality. Furthermore, such an orientation would help in the connection of religious experience and conversion with other parts of the curriculum, ensuring that the efforts at openness and awareness do not exist only in particular situations or lessons but become more diffused through the rest of the learning spaces that learners would find themselves.

Moving from the broader orientation to the actual spaces where learning occurs, the point about the exit being larger than the entrance is a key consideration. Even though religious experience and the move towards the transcendental reality lies at the heart of the CCRP, these represent the larger exit at which the pedagogical interventions are squarely aimed. At the opposite end of these exits are the entrances that educators create and facilitate: lessons and activities which learners experience and which are the immanent counterparts to religious experience. These are the experiences that educators can create for learners, the entry points and basic units for lessons which open spaces where learners can be converted and have religious experiences. It bears repeating here that educators can, with some reliability, directly create learning experiences in the form of lessons and activities, but these experiences are largely immanent in that they do not necessarily point to the transcendental reality. However, if properly oriented and accompanied by sufficient formation for both educators and learners, such immanent experiences can either lead to religious experience or

open a space to provide the conditions for the possibility for it to occur in an individual. These two considerations on orientation and the opening of space will ground the subsequent discussion on what the practical applications of the CCRP would look like.

On Lessons and Structure

Lessons and pedagogical interventions that are aimed at religious experience and conversion have to be intentional about the orientation to the transcendental reality and the opening of the space for learners to have experiences of that reality. This intentionality can be built into lessons which are not only aimed at leading learners to the ends of the CCRP, but can also be the basis for broader transformation in learners as they develop the openness and awareness of conversion. This section will describe a general structure for what lessons could look like within the CCRP and will reference some concrete lesson plans that can be found in the Appendix.

Lesson plans follow a four-part structure: Ends, Evidence, Engagement, and Evaluation. The Ends of the lessons describe both the specific and broader learning objectives, the former being the particular ends and objectives that the lesson proper is aimed at and the latter being the connection of this lesson to the broader objectives of the curriculum. These ends are also linked to the specific ends of the CCRP, on how leaners are able to identify, discern, and evaluate their encounters with the transcendental reality through religious experience. The Evidence portion of the lesson plans refers to the assessment of learning and given the personal nature of the ends, is focused more on formative rather than summative assessment.[10] Assessment, taken in this light, is less about making a list of

[10] The distinction between summative and formative assessment is commonly made between assessment that is a final judgement on all evidence up to a particular point (summative) and assessment that provides feedback to learners on how they can reach a particular standard or achieve goals (formative). There is a close connection between the two because summative assessment can provide explicit evidence

standards or competencies and more of aiding learners in reflecting on their responses to religious experiences and supporting the ongoing process of conversion. The Engagement segment of the lessons detail the specific interventions and actions that the educators would take, describing also how the class would look like and the shape of activities and possible actions of the learners. This would also include how the interventions are connected with the broader communities the learners come from and provide formation or scaffolds to aid in reflection. The final section of the lesson plans describes Evaluation, which harnesses the reflective component of the previous segment. This can come in the form of evaluation of the lessons themselves on the part of the educators and deeper personal evaluative reflection on the part of the learners which can feed back into the whole process of learning and development.

The three lesson plans described in the Appendix demonstrate how the ends of the CCRP which are aimed at bringing about religious experience and conversion can be achieved through means which can only be described as wholly immanent. The lessons, which were written for classes unrelated with religion or theology, have experiential and reflective elements which make them suitable for connections with conversion and religious experience. Through the description and brief analysis of the lesson plans, I hope to demonstrate that the CCRP does not have to occur as a unit or class in itself but can be incorporated into a variety of lessons and disciplines, emphasising how the transcendental reality can be accessed through myriad means, as long as one is oriented and open to it.

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or goals at which the formative assessment can be aimed. Compelling as this connection is, my view of formative assessment is less connected with particular goals but more on the building of capacity of the individual to apprehend the transcendental reality. (Maddalena Taras, "Assessment: Summative and Formative: Some Theoretical Reflections," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 53, no. 4 (2005): 469, 471.)

The movement towards conversion, and in particular Conversion I, comes through the development of a critical consciousness of reality and of one's own process of apprehending it. The first lesson detailed (1. The Writing Gallery in the Appendix) demonstrates how allowing learners to identify and reflect on their literary and artistic preferences can be a way of having a smaller entrance that could lead them to the larger goal of encountering the broader transcendental reality. This lesson, like the others, also scaffolds the learning by bringing learners first to awareness of their experiences before leading them to analyse and evaluate them, following the progression of ends in the CCRP. Furthermore, the communal nature of the activities allows the learners to build on the insights and reflection of each other, creating a learning community upon which further conversion can occur.

The communal and social nature of the other two lesson plans (2. Ways of Knowing and 3. Reciprocity and Value) should also be noted as discussion and interaction among the learners play a major role in the learning process. Not only would there be the social learning of the kind that Vygotsky described occurring within such spaces, the interaction among the learners, where their critical approaches to knowledge and their own contexts are discussed, can provide the basis for deeper conversations about their experiences, opening the space for conversion and encounters with the transcendental reality. Both the lessons also lead learners towards Conversion II, with one leading learners to reflect on how their ways of knowing are influenced by their communal and familial connections and the other challenging learners to consider the role of reciprocity and value in how they act with others. A cursory look at all three lesson plans lead one to question how these lessons, which seem to be based firmly in the immanent frame, can lead learners to the possibility of religious experience and conversion. My response would be that these lessons provide much of the necessary groundwork necessary for a learner to begin the process of conversion, with immanent

experiences which allow learners to engage with their preferences and perceptions of reality, with the possibility of the encounter with the transcendental reality always in the background.

The lesson plans described here demonstrate one possible relationship between the immanent frame and the transcendental reality. I see the lessons, which focus mainly on real albeit immanent experiences which form the basis of what is learned, as the smaller entrances through which learners can enter to encounter the reality of themselves and the world. These entrances are necessarily smaller because they deal directly with what the learners can sense and feel but can also lead to the necessary openness and awareness of conversion. While there is no specific mention of the connection between the immanent and transcendent, the reflection and action on the experiences of the lessons can, as the ends-objectives sections of the plans show, lead learners on the path towards both Conversion I and II as well as opening them up to the reflection and evaluation of their possible experiences of the transcendent. Naturally, such openness and awareness should be present in the educators as well as they facilitate, connect, and model this conversion and apprehension of religious experience for the learners. It is thus that small immanent entrances into encounters of reality that can occur through pedagogical intervention can, with intentionality and purpose on the part of educators, lead learners into fuller encounters with the transcendental reality.

Challenges and Responses

I end this section on the practicalities of the CCRP and the possibility of conversion and religious experience by acknowledging some challenges and suggesting how they can be responded to. The first challenge is that the CCRP can be seen to be putting the cart before the horse, basing an entire approach to pedagogy on the hope that religious experience can occur in learners while acknowledging that the interventions and lessons themselves cannot

reliably bring about religious experience in the learner. Furthermore, all the interventions detailed here would come to naught if a learner does not have a religious experience to reflect upon. My response to the latter objection is that the interventions are primarily aimed at engendering learning experiences that need not point to the transcendental reality and that the learning that takes place through the reflection on preferences, approaches to knowledge, and one's own contexts can be valuable in themselves, even without a connection to religious experience. The former objection prompts a deeper response because the nature of religious experience described in previous sections is such that one cannot force it to occur or even guide a learner to have such experiences through structured pedagogical interventions. The encounter with the transcendental reality occurs on the part of the individual and is both subjective and mediated. I maintain that the transcendental reality is always accessible to all but a lack of openness and awareness of its ubiquity and all-encompassing presence would render one oblivious to it. It is thus the function of the CCRP to open the space for the encounter with the transcendent to occur, providing interventions which lead learners towards openness and awareness of their own encounters with reality, providing experiences which build their capacity for recognising the mediated immediacy of religious experience and tools to analyse and evaluate the adequacy and appropriateness of these experiences.

Another difficulty or challenge that one might face in making the connection between religious experience and pedagogy is the difficulty in pinning religious experience down to single, stable definition. The subjective nature of religious experience adds a further layer of difficulty in that seeking to describe one's religious experience to another will always be mitigated by one's language and contexts, further complicating attempts at defining religious experience. Without this definition, the efforts at constructing lessons with clear ends and objectives may seem to come to naught as they point towards experiences that are both subjective and difficult to pin down. The first chapter had the aim of addressing this

challenge and did so by broadening the approach to religious experience to acknowledge how even those who are not specifically religious can have experiences of the transcendent and experiences of God. Instead of describing what religious experience is, I contend that the acknowledgement of the similarity in structure of all such experiences can provide us a useful map with which we can recognise the traces of the transcendental reality in our lives. This map, guided by the conversion towards openness and awareness that the CCRP can foster, would open the requisite space for learners to hone their critical consciousness to reality, recognising how their own contexts and actions mediate their perceptions of the world. This forming of the consciousness and provision of the conditions for the possibility of recognising religious experience would lead learners to the reflection and action that would in turn allow them to make use of it for their own development.

The final challenge comes from the religious part of religious experience. The means of describing and analysing religious experience as well as the pedagogical approaches that lead to it are firmly based in the Christian tradition, even though it was also acknowledged that religious experience and conversion do take very different forms in other religions. My attempts at describing the most general aspects of religious experience as being connected with experiences of the transcendent can go some way in lessening the gap that can exist in the approaches to religious experience and to have who affiliate with non-Western religious traditions recognise the value in learning with and from religious experiences. I would add that despite the differences which are present among religions, there exist sufficient similarities in how one encounters the transcendental reality to make the case that a generalised approach to religious experience and conversion can benefit leaners,

notwithstanding the Christian provenance and methods.[11] Furthermore, I would argue that the pedagogical processes within the CCRP, especially the turn to the contexts and communal knowledge of the learners can help to nuance the generalities with their lived experience of the transcendent, making the learning and experiences more personal and deeply felt.

[11] Phra Nicholas Thanissaro, "The Spirituality of Buddhist Teens: Religious/Spiritual Experiences and Their Associated Triggers, Attributes and Attitudes.," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 20, no. 3/4 (2015): 218–232; Sun, "Conversion and Confucianism."

CONCLUSION

Lest anyone accuse me of being overly optimistic in my views about education or religious experience, I begin this conclusion with an interesting suggestion from educational theorist Gert Biesta. He argued that we have to recognise the "impossibility of education, the fact that it cannot be conceived as a technique, that its outcome cannot be predicted," and to acknowledge that education should not be seen to be a "technique with a predictable, positive outcome."[1] In arguing for the unpredictable nature of education, he leaned on Hannah Arendt's conception of human action and interaction, stating how learners do not passively use what is received from their teachers but rather act on this in unpredictable and transformative ways. It is through these actions that people, learners, reveal their identities and become true subjects in the world, performing actions while at the same time having to live with consequences.[2] This view puts the locus of education firmly in the hands of the learners, acknowledging that no matter how well-planned or good-intentioned curricula are, it is ultimately they not their educators who will engage with the classes and learn something. To claim that education is something that must have a positive outcome would be utopian and unrealistic.

I am in partial agreement with this because education is indeed about *educare* or "leading out" of individuals toward learning, where educators have the role of helping learners to learn, forming them in their encounters with reality. There is definitely an unpredictability in this process, and an acknowledgement that despite all of one's best efforts, learning may not always occur. This was reflected in my recognition that even with all the structures and efforts made to form learners to be open and aware about the possibility of

[1] Gert J. J. Biesta, "Say You Want a Revolution... Suggestions for the Impossible Future of Critical Pedagogy," *Educational Theory* 48, no. 4 (1998): 503.

[2] Ibid., 504; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 184.

religious experiences, they may not end up having them and in some cases, may choose to reject or ignore this possibility. In spite of this, I still part company with those like Biesta who view the world as completely immanent, basing their analysis solely on the material and empirical. My view is that the appeal to the transcendental reality and the possibility of God helps to get around the unpredictability of education, providing a focus and source of hope which can mitigate the said unpredictability. Education is impossible if one stays solely on the immanent level but bringing the transcendent and even the possibility of God into view opens one up to a broader and more hopeful reality that one can work towards encountering.

It is this reality that lies at the heart of the pedagogical interventions and classroom processes described in this thesis, and which also animates my hopes in describing them. The chief of these hopes is that through connecting religious experience and conversion with education in a systematic manner while taking pedagogical considerations into account, religious experience and the possibility of the transcendental reality can be brought definitively into the classroom. The decision to make the description of both religious experience and conversion as general as they were, flowing from but not completely representative of their Christian provenance, was also related to such hope to slowly bring these into "mainstream" classrooms. The introduction of both religious experience and conversion into pedagogical spaces where learners are predominantly non-Christian or non-religious learners can result in various forms of resistance[3] if couched solely in Christian terms, hence the sometimes-convoluted attempts to draw out what I took to be the essence of both which can be of benefit of the learning and development of individuals.

[3] Anecdotal evidence of this comes from my initial attempts at introducing such elements in some classes I taught in the past. Responses vary from disinterest to taking such lessons as purely academic or politely voicing their doubts about the usefulness of such approaches in general.

Although many details about the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis have already been described in the preceding chapters, a deeper understanding of how these communities can play out in varied contexts and situations through their implementation and practice could be a next step in refining this route to religious experience. In particular, specific details on how the communal, familial, and cultural approaches to religion and religious experience can be shared, reflected, and acted upon in the classroom would further ground this aspect as a means of conversion. These specifics can help clarify the movements and processes detailed in the learning structures, giving curriculum developers and educators further insights on the actual means by which both religious experience and conversion can be incorporated into learning. Finally, more specific links to the Christian conception of religious experience and conversion were described, with the view of the use of such pedagogical interventions in Christian teaching and learning environments. While this appeal to the Christian tradition might seem like a reversal, moving back from the general to the specific religious traditions, the process of seeking the generalities of religious experience has helped greatly in fleshing out the more detailed connections within the Critical Communities of Religious Praxis. The creation of such communities and learning spaces is a fascinating prospect for me, no matter the tradition or context these communities are based in.

As mentioned at the start of this thesis, the study of the connection between education and theology has given voice to a deeply felt belief about how learning can and should occur. The study of theology benefits not just the church and the people of faith but has, as David Tracy mentioned, a public role which can be of great interest even those who are non-religious.[4] This is very much in line with how I see theology, a discipline that begins in the

[4] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 6–14.

service of the people of God but has ends that can touch the lives of a great many other people of good will, sparking in them a turn to the transcendental reality and the possibility of God.[5] This is particularly important in our contemporary society where the immanent, material reality seems to take precedence over all other possibilities. Artfully sliding the possibility of the transcendent back into lessons, bringing learners to openness and awareness of this reality so that their encounters with it can be deeper and more reflective, is part of the gift that theology can bring to education and society beyond. This allows both learners and educators to recognise the reality of what St. Paul wrote to the Romans, that God's "eternal power and divine nature, invisible as they are, have been understood and seen through the things that he made."[6] As the connections between the immanent and transcendent become more apparent, it is my hope more will lean towards the transcendental reality that is all around us, embracing it and the experiences that flow from it. All these processes are important and I believe that connections like the ones made here are steps in ensuring that theology does not remain in the churches but reaches, as the Lord said, the ends of the earth.

[5] A brief note on my own context and the Church in Asia in general. Despite the fact that Christians are a small minority in most Asian countries, they do have an outside impact in most societies there as they have played a significant public role in the development of education and social services. Christianity has long been perceived as a foreign religion in Asia, brought in with the missionaries on the backs of the colonial powers. A balance between the good work that the Church continues to do in Asia and the recognition that much effort at inculturation is still required comes in the form of dialogue, among cultures, ideas, and people. This dialogue can occur through education, as discussed in this thesis, leading to ways of being Church in Asia. (James H. Kroeger, "Exploring Primary and New Evangelization: Perspectives from Asia's Multicultural Context," in *Intercultural Living: Explorations in Missiology*, ed. Lazar T. Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing (New York: Orbis Books, 2018), 190–192.)

[6] Rom 1:20.

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APPENDIX

Lesson Plans

These lesson plans are modified versions of actual classes that planned and taught in a variety of institutions. These lessons were selected for their interdisciplinary nature and the fact that they are not overtly connected to religion. This is to demonstrate the universal applicability of education that takes religious experience and conversion into account.

1. The Writing Gallery

This lesson plan is aimed at middle school or lower high school learners (Grades 7-9) for Language arts or English language classes. While there are no specific references to religious experience in this lesson, the focus on one's preferences and the connection with one's idea of beauty sets learners squarely on the path of Conversion I. Space for reflection on religious experiences themselves can come in the creative aspect of the lessons, allowing learners to demonstrate their awareness of context and praxis.

Ends-Objectives

• Awareness and appreciation of different writing genres and art media.	Awareness of Exp.	
• Understanding and application of simple practical criticism[1] of texts.	Analysis of Exp.	Conversion I
• Appreciation and evaluation of one's own preferences, along with reflection on the sources of these preferences.	Awareness of Exp.	Conversion I
• Reflection on beauty and the connection with one's preferences.	Evaluation of Exp.	Conversion II

Evidence-Assessment

- Verbal description of elements of texts or media, with clear references to elements of practical criticism learned previously.
- Verbal explanation or sharing of preferences, with reference to one or two particular texts.
- Written or verbal reflection on the connection between preferences and beauty. Possible reflection questions: What makes me like a piece of art or writing? What makes something "beautiful?"
- Creative writing assignment where the aspects of the reflection can be shown.

Engagement-Activities

- Selections of literary works from a variety of genres should be placed as if in an art gallery. Other visual or audio "exhibits" can be used but should not overshadow the literary works. Care should be taken in selecting these artworks to ensure that they reflect

[1] "Practical criticism" here refers to a methodology used in literary studies which is a method of reading that focuses mainly on the text, leaving the historical and social contexts out of the initial encounter.

the prior knowledge and culture of the learners. Work that reflects the culture and immediate community of the learners should be prioritised.

- Learners should be given time to wander through the spaces, taking notes and eventually selecting their favourite pieces. Time for discussion about what makes these their favourites and a poll to consider the most popular pieces can be used to increase interest in the works and give more matter for reflection.
- Further writing activities with regards to the preferences as well as the creative writing assignments can be done in subsequent sessions. These can be discussed and shared among learners should they be comfortable with that process.

Evaluation

- Further discussion and reflection on these activities can follow as a means of deepening the experience. The emphasis on these can be on teasing out the connection between criticism or analysis and the sense of beauty.
- Evaluation of the sessions and connections with other lessons on literature and religion can be made.

2. Ways of Knowing

This lesson plan is aimed at upper-level high school learners (Grades 11-12) and is multi-disciplinary, suitable for classes for Theory of Knowledge (in the IB system), philosophy, and religion. This lesson can seem like an introduction to epistemology and can be treated as such. However, it gives the opportunity for deeper reflection on how one's contexts and knowledge lead one to Conversion II. Allowing reflection to move in that direction and encouraging learners to speak of their own experiences, transcendental or otherwise, can provide the deepening necessary for the evaluation of their conversion and possible religious experience.

Ends-Objectives

• Recognise that "knowledge" is not monolithic and dependent on one's context and critical appreciation of the world.	Awareness of Exp.	Conversion I
• Demonstrate understanding of the contextual and communal bases of knowledge and how these affect one's view of the world.	Analysis of Exp.	Conversion II
• Analyse and evaluate the knowledge bases of others in the process of negotiating consensus and common understandings.	Analysis of Exp.	Conversion II
• Analyse and evaluate different "world views" while considering how these views have affected one's knowledge of the world.	Evaluation of Exp.	Conversion II

Evidence-Assessment

- Verbal explanation of one's choices and categorisation of items, with reference to how these choices came about and the thought processes that led there.
- Evidence of some understanding of one's contextual and communal bases of knowledge along with the ability to engage with and understand the views of others.

- Written reflection on how one "knows" something – based on societal, academic, contextual, and communal factors.

Engagement-Activities

- Learners should be split into groups and given a number of small items and two containers. The instructions are for the groups to split the items into the two containers and give a rationale for the categorisation. The items should be small but indicative of a broader context (e.g. pencil, picture of a Bible, wind-up toy). The choice of items can be left up to the instructor though there should be sufficient ambiguity in the "meanings" of the items to spark discussion. Dichotomous sets of items (e.g. Bible vs dinosaur bones) should be avoided.
- Groups should present their categories and space should be given for discussion and for questioning of the roots of the categorisation. Learners can, through the discussion and facilitation by instructors, be brought to the awareness and understanding of how their own contexts have shaped these views.
- Reflection on the activity can come in the form of written responses to the experiences from the classroom, with prompts to allow them to more critically analyse their own knowledge bases and connection with others.
- Should this take place in conjunction with a religion class, more specific images or items which pertain to religion can be used and reflection pointed in that direction. Items and reflections which point directly to religious experiences

Evaluation

- Evaluation of these lessons would best be done in conjunction with other classes. Looking at how learners make use of their critical consciousness in other contexts and disciplines can give some feedback as to the utility of what is learned here.

3. Reciprocity and Value

This lesson plan is aimed at university students and can be incorporated into service-learning, religion, or ethics curricula. There is a fair amount of roleplay in this activity which necessitates the learners being comfortable with each other. While the roleplay is important in creating learning experiences in the class, reflection on the experiences there and connecting them with real experiences that learners may have are even more important. The emphasis on evaluation in this activity can be a good opportunity to allow learners to make connections with their own appropriation of their religious traditions, considering the adequacy and appropriateness of their experiences in the process.

Ends-Objectives

• Recognise how one's actions depend on knowledge of one's own context as well as the contexts of others.	Awareness of Exp.	Conversion I
• Understand and analysis needs and values in the light of the context and make decisions based on needs and values.	Analysis of Exp.	Conversion I Conversion II

• Analyse and respond to changing needs and values through the understanding of reciprocal relationships.	Evaluation of Exp.	Conversion II
• Evaluate one's actions in the light of value and reciprocity.	Evaluation of Exp.	Conversion II
• Connect with own experiences of justice and reciprocity and evaluate one's values.	Evaluation of Exp.	Conversion II

Evidence-Assessment

- Active engagement in discussions on contexts and value with the ability to verbalise some aspects of personal value and its connection with one's own contexts.
- Verbal analysis and engagement with changing situations and the ability to come to a reasoned decision based on the information and negotiation available.
- Written reflection and evaluation of experience with an emphasis on personal development of value and how reciprocity was developed.

Engagement-Activities

- Learners should be split into three groups: A, B, and observers. Groups A and B will be given briefs on their situations (A representing a group from a developed area that is fast depleting its natural resources, B representing a group from a less developed area that is rich in natural resources). Neither group knows the situation of the other. Observers will receive both briefs and will take notes.
- Groups will select representatives or "ambassadors" for a series of meetings. Representatives from A and B cannot speak or write to each other but may communicate through other means. Observers may help to "translate" where necessary.
- The activity ends when an agreement between A and B is reached or when a fixed number of meetings have been conducted, depending on the rules set by the instructor. A discussion on the process, the reactions of those in both groups as well as the comments by observers should follow.
- Written reflection and evaluation based on this or on selected texts from philosophical or theological sources can follow.[2]

Evaluation

- As with the other lesson plans, the evaluation of this lesson should be done in the light of how the experiences help learners in other situations. The focus on reciprocity and value can have broader implications on the social development of learners while the stark nature of the differences between A and B can be the source of greater desire for action.
- There is great potential for the sparking of conversion in the learners if the session is sensitively facilitated and this can be a good focus for how instructors can evaluate their approaches to consider how the sessions can be of greater impact for the learners.

[2] Some possibilities for texts to accompany the reflection can include John Rawls on justice as fairness and Michael Walzer on communal sources of justice if the focus is philosophical or a reflection on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), selections from the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, or on the possibility of dialogue if the focus is theological. (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999); Michael Walzer, *Spheres Of Justice: A Defense Of Pluralism And Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Stephen B. Bevans, "Prophetic Dialogue and Intercultural Mission," in *Intercultural Living: Explorations in Missiology*, ed. Lazar T. Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing (New York: Orbis Books, 2018), 201–212.)