This meeting's theme is "making and re-making the sacred," and it seemed appropriate to me, in that context, to think about some of the ways in which contemporary religious educators are "making and re-making the sacred" amidst U.S. popular cultures.

Religious education might in one sense be construed as a process that gives people access to a language for articulating their experiences of the sacred, for constructing meaning around them in the context of a community that professes a particular relationship with, and a particular construction of, what is "sacred." That definition in itself raises a number of interesting questions, and makes a number of perhaps provocative assumptions. Among other propositions, it assumes that there is such a thing as "the sacred" and that it is something that a person "constructs" with a community (or communities) on the basis of some kind of experience. It also assumes that it is an experience that can be expressed through language, articulated in some way. Further, it suggests that what is sacred is something that one, either individually or as a member of a community, is in relationship with. Such a definition raises questions about the possible relativity, equivalence, or interchangeability of particular constructions of what is sacred. It also implies that the practice of religious education is one of giving access to a process and set of definitions that are flexible, or at least undergoing steady change.

By now these assumptions are fairly standard within the study of religion(s), although there is by no means consensus on a standard definition of "the sacred." But this language is less familiar within the practice of religious educators, whose professional practice or vocation is often perceived to be one of passing on the Truth about God, and helping people learn the rituals and practices that embody that Truth. The questions raised by this definition are often very problematic for religious educators, and can lead to a closing down of conversation, or a hardening

of definitions.

What happens when this kind of definition is used in conjunction with serious study of U.S. mass-mediated popular cultures? One result is that new avenues are opened for using popular culture texts within religious education, and for bringing the critical faith perspectives of particular religious communities to bear on popular cultures. These possibilities opened up for me when I began to think about how a definition of the sacred that took seriously socially constructed knowledges could be useful to religious educators, particularly in the context of U.S. popular cultures. I began a series of conversations with religious educators that I met through the graduate program in religious education at Boston College. Eventually those discussions led to a more formal research project.

That project, which I will describe at more length shortly, brought together a diverse group of religious educators from the greater Boston area to explore and engage popular, mass-mediated electronic "texts", and to mine them for their use in religious education. In theoretical terms, it was a project based on three disparate academic conversations: the discussion of critical and/or border pedagogies sparked by Henry Giroux and Peter MacLaren;[1] the re-defining of religious education going on amidst educators concerned about "postmodernism"; and the constructive developmental insights of Robert Kegan.

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[1]See, for example, *Between borders: Pedagogy and the politics of cultural studies,* Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (Routledge, 1994); or *Critical literacy: Politics, praxic and the postmodern* by McLaren and Lankshear (SUNY Press, 1993). Lankshear writes that "literacy must help students to 'increase the range, complexity, elegance, self-consciousness and purposefulness of this involvement' in symbolic work. It must provide them with the symbolic resources for creative self and social formation so that they can more critically reenter the broader plains of common culture."

the research design

Given my desire to engage in research that was clearly focused on meeting the needs of contemporary religious educators, it was only logical that religious educators be at the heart of the research. I needed a methodology that respected our own questions and concerns, and was open to learning as it occurred, rather than one designed to test a specific hypothesis or negate a specific, previously articulated proposition.[2] I was also particularly interested in finding a methodology that would, in its very design and process, contribute something useful to the work we are engaged in as religious educators.

Thomas Groome, a senior faculty member at the Boston College Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (which subsequently provided the home to this project), is known world-wide for his work in the practice of critical religious education, and that work, in turn, is greatly indebted to the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.[3] Both use the term "praxis" to describe a process of reflection and action that in many ways encompasses the kind of process we were seeking for this research. Within the framework of social science, that term is perhaps less widely used than it is within theology, but there is one social science methodology that explicitly seeks to engage in a process that could be labelled praxis: participatory action research (PAR).

From the standpoint of research design, using a PAR methodology required that the questions we sought answers to had to grow out of our shared questions, they could not simply be problems to which I (as a doctoral candidate) was seeking

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[2]I am, myself, a religious educator who works primarily in the area of adult religious education. Given the kind of theorizing I'm using, it is perhaps also useful for you, as reader, to know that I am a middle class, white, feminist, Catholic lay person who lives and works in a city neighborhood in Boston.
[3]See, for example, Groome (1991) and Freire (1985).

solutions to by studying, as an outsider, some set of research "subjects." In this respect, PAR as a methodology was very useful. In its emphasis on participation it provided a rationale for ensuring that the "subjects" were intimately involved in the production of whatever knowledge was produced. On a practical level, that meant the "subjects" were interested in engaging popular culture as part of their teaching practices. In structuring the research project around this methodology we essentially created a structure that would make all of us who participated, "researchers," and hold us accountable for whatever processes we would engage, and whatever insights we would ultimately suggest.

As Deshler points out, PAR is committed not just to participatory strategies, but also to action: PAR is a "research process aligned with potential for community action" and reflecting "a commitment by researchers and community participants to individual, social, technical or cultural actions consequent to the learning acquired through research" (Deshler & Ewert, 1995, p. 82). The research process we engaged in promoted action at least to the extent that it promoted transforming individual participant's consciousness with regards to these issues; whether or not it spurred action beyond individual frameworks is one of the questions we are still struggling to answer.

Part of how I, in particular, conceptualized the action component of the project, was to take seriously Kincheloe's description of the requirements of what he terms "critical action research":

> First, it rejects Cartesian-Newtonian notions of rationality, objectivity, and truth. Second, critical action researchers are aware of their own value commitments, the value commitments of others and the values promoted by the dominant culture. In other words, one of the main concerns of critical action research involves the exposure of the relationship between personal values and practice. Third, critical action researchers are aware of the social construction of professional consciousness. Fourth, critical action researchers attempt to uncover those aspects of the dominant social

order which undermine our effort to pursue emancipatory goals. And, fifth, critical action research is always conceived in relation to practice — it exists to improve practice. (Kincheloe, 1995, p. 74)

In attempting to follow these principles, I worked very hard — and the group felt we succeeded — in creating a space wherein these kinds of questions and issues could be addressed. Indeed, by relying upon critical pedagogical principles, we based our project upon an epistemological framework similar to what Kincheloe suggests is necessary. We also took as a "given" a particular definition of media literacy, evident in the curriculum, under review, that also accepts an epistemology that embraces a "social constructionist" paradigm.[4] Finally, the goal the project began with, and to which it still remains faithful, is helping religious educators improve their ability to nurture "loyal, but open" members of faith communities in the midst of U.S. mass-mediated popular culture.[5]

workshop participants

During November and December of 1995, participant recruiting letters were sent out to a wide variety of mailing lists, among them the complete list of Boston secondary school Catholic principals, as well as Boston Theological Institute faculty who taught religious education, or in some related area.[6] The workshop was

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[4]The *Catholic Connections to Media Literacy* curriculum kit defines the goals of media literacy as "to engage the media in our lives, to interrogate and evaluate its messages and techniques, and then to choose, ultimately, whether to accept or reject the values conveyed." It also names four "principles" of media literacy: "media construct reality," "media use identifiable techniques," "media are businesses with commercial interests," and "media present ideologies and value messages" (O'Brien, 1992, p. 6, 18).

[5]The particular designation "loyal, but open" grows out of the work of Michael Rosenak (1987), and suggests, in particular, a commitment to forming religious identity that embraces diversity rather than defending against it.

[6]The Boston Theological Institute consists of the following schools: Andover Newton Theological

advertised as an opportunity to explore issues of media literacy and religious education in the context of dissertation research being done by Mary Hess. Participants were sought who were active religious educators, and who were also interested in constructive ways to use popular culture in religious education. In particular, the workshop was described as focusing on and building out of a specific curriculum developed by the Center for Media and Values (now the Center for Media Literacy) and promulgated by several national Catholic organizations, among them the National Catholic Education Association, and the Catholic Communications Campaign. That curriculum, entitled "Catholic Connections to Media Literacy" would be the initial starting point for the workshop, providing it with a shared language and examples, but the workshop would be geared to participants' questions and interests.

A total of seventeen applications were received, with twelve people (in addition to myself) finally choosing to commit to the research process. That commitment entailed agreeing to participate in the research workshop, scheduled to meet six times for two hours at a time between February and June of 1996, being interviewed individually following the last workshop meeting, and consenting to audio-taping and transcription of all workshop meetings and the final interview. In addition participants were given full access to all transcripts, and invited to participate in additional meetings to discuss the generation of research findings.

Workshop participants were in many ways very diverse, although all named themselves as members of some kind of Christian community. They ranged in age from 28 to 56, and resided in the greater Boston area. Ten of them were Catholic, one was Unitarian, and one was part of an urban, evangelical Protestant community.

School, Boston College Department of Theology, Boston University School of Theology, Episcopal Divinity School, Gordon-Conwall Theological Seminary, Harvard University Divinity School, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Saint John's Seminary and Weston Jesuit School of Theology.

Nine of the participants were white, one was African-American, one was Hispanic-American, and one was a Chinese-German immigrant who has been in the United States for the last decade. Three of the participants were members of vowed religious communities (two were Jesuit scholastics, and one was a member of the Sisters of Charity of Halifax). Eight of the participants were women, and four were men. One of the participants shared with the group that he was a gay man. Eight of the participants were pursuing graduate degrees in an area related to religious education (religious education, theology, theology and the arts), three were professional religious educators, and one was a technical writer who had been teaching confirmation classes for the last nine years. All but four of the group were running religious education classes during the semester the workshop took place. Two of the four who were not, were to be doing so during the following summer; and the other two were working full-time on their graduate degrees. Four of the participants had extensive media production experience (either in video production, radio, or commercial art). There were no ordained participants, although one member of the group was ordained in the month following the final "official" workshop meeting.

Attendance remained high at the workshop, ranging from all twelve participants attending four of the meetings, down to a low of eight at one of the meetings. I believe that this rate of attendance in itself is indicative of the high degree of interest the workshop held for people, since it was running during the height of the worst winter season in several hundred years in Boston. In addition, many members of the group have continued to meet on a regular basis throughout the following summer and on into this fall.

workshop process

The workshop always opened with some moments of reflection. In the first

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meeting we began with a more formal, spoken prayer, but as time went on and the diversity of styles of spiritual practice became clearer, we generally opened with a less structured reflective space that was usually accompanied by listening to a specific piece of popular music that was also played at the end of the workshop.[7] Next workshop participants did a round of "checking-in" that enabled all of us to give each other a sense of our energy entering the workshop, and brief updates on things that had happened during the intervening time. From that point on, each session was loosely structured around the four-part plan that was embedded in the CCML curriculum, and grows out of the work of Henriot and Holland.[8] This "pastoral circle" includes "awareness, analysis, reflection, action."

Session topics were brainstormed at the initial meeting of the group, and then developed into a tentative schedule for the rest of the semester. This schedule was affirmed at the second meeting of the group, although it subsequently underwent modifications based on weather considerations. We agreed that we wanted to explore principles of media literacy by looking at various kinds of popular media, trying to analyze critically how a particular medium worked, as well as what kinds of uses a particular "text"[9] could hold within the context of religious education.

The five topic sessions were as follows: television commercials (we used *Diet Coke* and *Plymouth Breeze* as representative texts), the World Wide Web on the Internet, network television news (we used a Sunday evening broadcast of ABC and CBS as texts), film (*Dead Man Walking* was the text for this session), and MTV videos (in this case we used Madonna's "Like a Prayer" song/video). Although I

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[7]The songs we used were: Joan Osborne's *One of Us,* Nancy Griffith's *Time of Inconvenience,* Mary Chapin Carpenter's *Dead Man Walking,* Tracy Chapman's *All That You Have Is Your Soul,* and Madonna's *Like a Prayer.*

[8]See, for example, Holland and Henriot (1987).

[9]By "text" we meant any piece of popular culture such as a single television commercial, a film, a song, a radio broadcast, a magazine, and so on.

made frequent attempts to have other members of the group plan the sessions, ultimately I planned all but one of them, the session on film.

In doing so, I made use of the general principles of critical adult education,[10] frequently breaking the group into smaller groups (dyads or quartets), and trying to facilitate conversations that grew from participants' own questions and reactions to the media we were considering. In addition to whatever media "text" we were exploring, we also shared printed resources that were connected to the topic. These ranged from articles and book chapters I thought might be provocative, to newspaper clippings, magazine sketches, and other items that participants brought in for consideration. The primary goal was reflection, creating a space within which people could come again and again to a particular "text" and think about it from a multitude of perspectives. We strove to be about "conscientization" in the full sense of that word, which Macedo translates as working to name and understand "the tensions, contradictions, fears, doubts, hopes, and dreams involved in the process of making meaning of one's role and responsibility in the world.... the arduous and complex process of coming to voice, a process ... which always involves pain and hope (Macedo, 1994, p. 4).

learnings/insights

The "data" to be considered in this project is the active process of the research workshop, the six sessions in which the group of us engaged in dialogue and learning around issues of religious education and media literacy, and the subsequent ways in which we, separately and together, tried to enrich and extend that process through returning to it again and again. All of the sessions were

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[10]See, for example, Brookfield (1991), Mezirow (1991), Bruffee (1993), and Vella (1994) in addition to the previously mentioned McLaren and Giroux.

recorded on audiotape, as were the individual interviews I did with each of the workshop participants following the conclusion of the six sessions.[11] I then transcribed those tapes and generated printed transcripts that made it possible to return to the sessions using a somewhat more distanced interpretive stance.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "synthesis" as: "1.a. The combining of separate elements or substances to form a coherent whole." It defines "analysis" as: "1. The separation of an intellectual or substantial whole into its constituent parts for individual study." The research strategy we used is one that "puts together," that "synthesizes," that considers religious education in the context of media culture, and vice versa. The conclusions we as a group are trying to reach are aimed at developing useful tools for actual practice. Rather than taking something apart to understand its parts,[12] we are trying to put together a number of rather disparate discourses in order to create a more coherent understanding of a broad enterprise. Thus the interpretive strategy I've employed in this paper is one of looking for broad, shared themes, for descriptions of processes from one sector that might work in another, for paths that will weave between education and theology and between media culture and religious education.

Kegan and epistemology

One of the most fruitful places I've gone to for help with weaving that path, is the constructive developmental psychology approach that Robert Kegan takes to adult education. In some ways that theorizing might seem at odds with the more

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[11] As the group is still meeting and continues to consider the questions with which we began, this research is only "finished" in the sense that the specific sessions they agreed to as part of my doctoral credentialling process are over.

[12] I'm not intending to disparage this process. I think analytical research is very useful and valid. I'm simply trying to describe a different emphasis in my own work.

activist, critical stance of this project, but he is essentially seeking ways to support adult development in the complex settings that emerge in contemporary culture. He also helps to connect two disparate strains of psychology — developmental theory and object relations theory — that have come together recently in contemporary descriptions of religious experience.

Contemporary religious educators in the Roman Catholic tradition often speak of spirituality as encompassing a process that has to do with one's central integrity, one's relationship with transcendence.

> ... spirituality is understood as the unique and personal response of individuals to all that calls them to integrity and transcendence.... [it] has something to do with the integration of all aspects of human life and experience.... spirituality has to do with becoming a person in the fullest sense.... [It] is that attitude, that frame of mind which breaks the human person out of the isolating self. As it does that , it directs him or her to another relationship in whom one's growth takes root and sustenance.[13]

> Spirituality may be described but is not readily defined, for the boundaries are broad. It is a sense of relatedness to that which is beyond the self yet approachable.[14]

> In its broadest sense, spirituality centers on our awareness and experience of relationality. It *is* the relational component of lived experience. This component includes four distinct though interconnected dimensions: relations with self, others, God, and the natural world.[15]

In many ways these descriptions of spirituality can seem at odds with, or at least clearly dichotomized from the "sacred," particularly when "the sacred" is usually defined in sharp contrast to "the profane" and identified as that which "is dedicated or set apart" for veneration.[16] Yet what is so helpful about the emerging

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[13] Schneiders (1986, pp. 264-265).

[14] Cully (1990, p. 607).

[15] Zappone (1991, p. 12).

descriptions of human being and human experiencing that grow out of Kegan's theorizing is a way of speaking about a dynamic of "sacredness" that resists that kind of dichotomy.

Kegan argues that the process of being "in relation to" and at the same time seeking "differentiation from" is one that is *constitutive* of human personality. He describes in some detail the "dance" that takes place between developing a sense of self with others, and a sense of self in differentiation. He believes that that process cannot be described apart from its relational/ cultural/contextual "embeddedness"; and he describes this "embeddedness" in terms of a "culture" that serves three crucial functions — "confirmation, contradiction, and continuity" (Kegan, 1982, p. 258).

In conjunction with the work of such theorists as McDargh (1983), Rizzuto (1979), and Jones (1991), Kegan's descriptions shed new light on the experience of the sacred. Jones suggests that:

> the experience of the sacred is inevitably the experience of a transforming relationship. The languages of transcendence and immanence meet in the encounter with a transforming object. The experience of the sacred has a transcendental, numinous quality not because the sacred is a wholly other object but because such experiences resonate with the primal originating depths of selfhood (Jones, 1991, p. 125).

In this understanding, then, the experience of the "sacred" is intimately bound up, literally embedded in, the development of self, and that understanding, that development, shifts and transforms over time.

Kegan's work is very helpful because in addition to making clear this

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[16] A brief summary of the main proponents of this definition can easily be accessed in the dictionary entry for "the sacred" found in Smith (1995).

paradoxical connection between relationality and otherness, between connectedness and separateness, he provides a useful heuristic for evaluating and developing learning experiences: when we are "making" and "re-making" the sacred, we are "making" and "re-making" ourselves. This delicate dance is one in which religious educators are very conscious of the impact of mass-mediated popular culture, and hungry for ideas on how to use texts from that culture constructively.

Kegan's heuristic focuses on his definition of epistemology. Rather than being merely a set of philosophical assertions, or simply a structure that defines cognitive abilities, Kegan suggests that an "epistemology" is actually a complex set of principles for how "one constructs experience more generally, including one's thinking, feeling, and social-relating" (Kegan, 1994, pp. 33-34). Epistemologies generally evolve over time, linked in some ways to biological development. Clearly a child's way of making meaning of the world shifts over time. Kegan argues that the same dynamic is present with adults as well. He identifies five different clusters of such principles that he labels "orders of consciousness." Certainly researchers have in the past, and will no doubt continue to, argue over what precisely belongs in each of these clusters, but for the purposes of this research project what I found so useful in Kegan's architecture was his ability to tease out some of the elements of contemporary culture that are posing such difficult dilemmas for adult thriving, and to suggest some possible ways to build curricula over those hurdles.

Of particular interest in this project are his descriptions of the transitions that take place between what he labels an "interpersonal" order of consciousness (3rd), an "institutional" frame (4th), and an "interindividual" order (5th). A "third order" or "interpersonal" frame for meaning-making requires a person to be able to structure meanings across categories. Kegan suggests that this is the frame we most associate with the tasks of adolescence:

> The capacity to subordinate durable categories to the interaction between them makes [adolescents'] thinking abstract, their feelings a matter of inner states and self-reflexive emotion ("self-confident," "guilty," "depressed"), and their social-relating capable of loyalty and devotion to a community of people or ideas larger than the self (Kegan, 1994,pp. 32-33).

Yet while this order of consciousness may make "loyalty and devotion to a community" possible, it does not make it possible to "construct a generalized system regulative of interpersonal relationships and relationships between relationships" (Kegan, 1994, p. 15). Identity in this context is largely defined by the group, and relationality is more important than autonomy. Anyone who is familiar with adolescents knows the strength the peer group asserts in adolescent experience.

Is the inability to construct a system that operates *between* sets of relationships a problem? Perhaps not yet for adolescents, who are expected by dominant U.S. culture to be in the process of establishing identity, and who are still under the explicit guidance of a family system. But what about the adults who are expected to be furnishing such a system? Or the adolescents who are themselves parents? Kegan believes that our "modernist" culture requires what he terms a "fourth order" consciousness.[17]

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[17] For people who are not familiar with Kegan's complex and nuanced theorizing, it is useful at this juncture to note briefly that he describes orders of consciousness as having the following organizing principles. "First order" frames are primarily constructed through sense perceptions, and as such are characteristic of very young children. "Second order" meaning frames are very concrete, lending a sense of "actuality"to the world, and thus making it possible to develop a sense of self in separation from primary caretakers. "Third order" frames permit abstractions, and thus "ideality." While such frames allow for role consciousness and what Kegan terms "mutual reciprocity," there remains a heavy investment in group conformity. "Fourth order" frames recognize the utility of abstract systems, and thus are capable of constructing ideologies. These frames permit movement towards self-authorship and autonomous identity construction. Finally,"fifth order" frames are dialectical, with dynamics that Kegan terms "trans-ideological or post-ideological." As such they recognize how interconnected and interpenetrating myriad realities are, and they perceive paradox and ambiguity as rich resources rather than difficult challenges (Kegan, 1994).

In suggesting that our culture is a modernist one that requires at least a "fourth order" frame, Kegan uses parenting as an example, for in setting limits for a child a parent is actually honoring that child's freedom at a deeper level of relationality:

> Out of this context Alice might refuse to meet certain of her daughter's claims (... to sleep over at a friend's house for a third straight night, to have her mother buy her a whole new wardrobe because her clothes don't have the right designer label, or to take the subway downtown by herself because she "is too" old enough), refusals that may inspire Ann's [the daughter] grief or wrath, refusals that may even cause her to claim that Alice has violated the bonds of the relationship. But the interesting and important thing to note is that neither Alice's refusal nor Ann's claim that Alice has breached the relationship will by themselves constitute an actual breach... In establishing this larger context in which the relationship would go on, in creating a relationship to the relationship, Alice would ... be demonstrating .... a fourth order consciousness (Kegan, 1994, p. 92).

Previously, and perhaps currently in certain more orthodox or traditional communities, it might not have been necessary for individuals to have this order of consciousness because the community itself carried these abilities. Traditional gender roles, rigid class and labor structures provided a framework within which:

> the third order consciousness of individuals [could] be supported to resolve the fourth order tasks of adult life, such as those intrinsic to parenting. This continuous, uninterrupted provision of fourth order support in the Traditional Community is ordinarily less a matter of other people actually telling us how to set limits or preserve boundaries.... More often, such "information" communicates itself in the very fabric or ground of living (Kegan, 1994, p. 104).

Within what Kegan terms a "modern" community, in contrast, we are called upon to author these boundaries, to construct and maintain them, amidst other competing, conflicting, and powerful, alternatives. Thus a religious community in

the late '90's must not only define for its members "what" it knows, but "how" it knows, and it must do so in the context of pluralism, where other religious communities have differing claims and frames.

It is this articulation of the difficulties adults face in "modern" culture, this necessity for people to be able to construct meaning in 4th or 5th order frames, that is so intriguing in the context of this research project. It became apparent in the course of the workshop that there are at least three ways we engaged media texts, traceable in part to the distinctions that Kegan is trying to make.

media literacy and epistemological frames

First, there is the perspective that labels popular culture a dangerous and seductive entity that one needs to approach with caution, and towards which we need to teach young people analytical, interpretive skills.

> "I'm very disgusted with television…. it's addictive. And it's mind-numbing."[18]
> "I think we need to … make the students aware of what they're watching, why they're watching it, how they're being affected by it."[19]

In this framework "our" religious belief system is clearly "right," and "theirs" (that is, whatever is attributed to the media as a whole) is dangerous and highly problematic. People who approached our workshop from this frame spoke of coming because they needed to "learn what to do about media." These participants used strong, blaming language for their own responses to media: "I'm even

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[18]The names of participants in our workshop (with the exception of myself) will remain confidential. The quotes included in this paper will be referenced to transcripts from the workshop, with page number and line number within a specific page. Transcript 1, p. 14, lines #8-12.
[19]Transcript 1, p. 15, lines #5-7

ashamed to say that I've watched [tv talk shows]."[20] People speaking from this perspective were highly critical of "the media," but without much discernment, or an underlying frame from which to construct that criticism. This perspective is an example of one which displays Kegan's "third order" principles.

A second perspective was much less self-flagellating about media use. These participants were not embarrassed to admit that they enjoyed popular culture, and even found it useful as a comfortable backdrop, and a source of connection to younger people:

> "I just like the way people like communicate, they have this rapport, and I just like having them [tv morning news programs] there in the morning joking around. I don't even care what they're saying."[21]

> "Um, I enjoy... sometimes I just watch the news for the weather..... Other times it's, because I'm doing the dishes and I want background noise."[22]

> "I also find the media to be just a wonderful resource in relating to adolescents."[23]

> "But also I need to be able to talk about it, kids, kids get all of these sensationalized images and they bring them to class, they bring them to prayer, it's just almost like the talk shows, too, sometimes there's a steady stream of information that they don't know how to discern what's what."[24]

Media literacy was a tool these participants had already begun to use to deepen their experience of popular culture texts. They came to this workshop eager to find ways to incorporate media literacy into religious education:

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[20]Transcript 1, p. 14, line #22

[21]Transcript 5, p. 6, lines #17-20.

[22]Transcript 5, pp. 13-14, lines #24-25, 1.

[23]Transcript 1, p. 15, lines #20-21.

[24]Transcript 5, p. 7, lines #15-18.

> "Media literacy is, I think, a great way of developing critical thinking skills, being more critical towards the education system here, and how you teach and learn."[25]

This position is characteristic of 4th order meaning frames in its recognition of the utility of abstract systems.

A third perspective, similar in many ways to the second but beginning to reach beyond it, suggests that popular media texts often give useful insights into the hungers people feel, but without providing really nourishing food. These participants tended to enjoy popular culture's pleasures, while at the same time also and always thinking about popular culture in systemic, structural terms.

> "... my interest is looking at how, from a theological point of view, how people's... visual interpretations how they connect with each other to ... enforce people's values, and particularly people's perceptions of people outside their own communities."[26]

> "I still feel like this person that kind of lives in two worlds [about to be ordained, he is also a radio producer and tv critic]... And I don't think that's the way, the way for the church to be. I think it can engage the world. And so I think that's why it's important for the church and religious people to be involve in media literacy."[27]

> "if we believe in the Incarnation... Christ incarnated in humanity, then we could twist that a little bit and say what does our humanity reveal about Christ? ... but my watching of shows is, ok how do people act and then, in their interactions with one another, where would you pinpoint moments of God in this?"[28]

This is a position that I think is closer to the transition Kegan identifies between 4th and 5th order frames: a position in which ambiguity, mystery and paradox can

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[25] Transcript 1, p. 9, lines #6-7.

[26] Transcript 1, p. 11, lines#18-22.

[27] Transcript 1, p. 17, lines #20-26.

[28] Transcript 1, pp. 19-20, lines #24-29, 9-11.

become critical elements of knowing; in which distinctions between "sacred" and "profane," or between "religious" and "secular" have less clarity or force. These were the participants who were most adept at keeping religious themes and images in the forefront of the discussion. They were also the members of the group who tended to have actual media production experience.

religious education and media literacy

At base, most of the reasons we, as religious educators, came to media literacy had something to do with sustaining relationality, although each person might be talking about a different kind of relationship with a different person or group of persons. Again and again our disagreements over interpretations of texts led to fascinating explorations of very pressing contemporary issues: race, class, gender, violence, sexuality — these themes surfaced again and again. The older members of the group were struck by the extent to which in our current context "relationality" — however we defined it — was often constructed and mediated through popular culture, rather than through shared parish experiences, or small neighborhoods, or other contexts, as they remembered it being several decades ago.

Although the workshop was explicitly set up to discuss media literacy and religious education, to speak about ways to use popular culture constructively in religious education, religious concerns, religious imagery, religious questions often got pushed aside, or felt awkward or disjunctive, in the context of the workshop. I don't think this is because we were trying to avoid them, rather — precisely in considering why it was so hard — we begin to touch on some of the deeper dilemmas to which Kegan points.

One of those dilemmas is how to build an environment that is capable of

nurturing the transformation in meaning frame that is necessary for authentic growth and evolution in our current cultural climate. Kegan's theorizing suggests that a major part of what we were engaged in as a research workshop was the creation of a *bridging culture*, what Bruffee terms a "transition community" (1993, p. 105-106), a space in which more complex attitudes and ideas about media use and construction, and religious identity and education, could be tried out and explored with the help of peers who had some empathy and experience gained through walking a similar path earlier.

> "... part of my interest [in media literacy] is trying to help some of those cultures [diverse racial/ethnic communities in the school where she teaches] interface with each other, and help all of us learn that maybe our ground rules are different, but that we can, that we really can... our stance with one another, doesn't need to be defensive or offensive."[29]

> "one of the questions that really came in for me is, you know, this industry, these industries [media] exist to try to meet needs and fuel desires... so what if you could identify some of those desires and those needs and maybe, as religious communities.... perhaps offer a different way of meeting that need that might be deeper and more profound..."[30]

Building these kinds of bridges has effects more broad than in the area of media literacy: once you start doing it in relation to popular culture, it is inevitable that it will also began to occur in relation to religious community. As members of our group said:

> "looking at the curriculum again... there's never anything ... to at all suggest, actually it was almost sort of, I thought it was discouraged, to take this consciousness and apply it to the church.... the church was really defended, I mean, over and

[29]Transcript 1, p. 21, lines #12-16.
[30]Transcript 1, p. 42, lines #6-10.

over...."[31]

"partly why I'm actually very interested in media literacy, not just because I think it's important to deconstruct popular culture, it's also because I think it can give you kind of a critical eye, in general.... which can, of course, in turn apply in church circles."[32]

As a religious educator committed to critical pedagogies, I find this reciprocity exciting. But, as noted early in this paper, it is also problematic for more traditional definitions of religious education. Here, again, is why the newer descriptions of experiencing the sacred, particularly those influenced by object relations theory, can become so helpful. In a third order epistemology perhaps the understanding of "sacred" as "set apart" is a critical aspect of the definition, because when one is naming one's identity in relation to a group, when "self" is described in opposition to "others," than a religious framework that defines sacred as wholly "other" has more coherence and resonance. But in an order of consciousness which is more aware of self-authoring, which embraces a social construction of knowledge epistemology, then what is "sacred" becomes at once more and less complex, more and less "other." Instead the resonance and coherence, the emotional power of encountering the sacred, comes through in perceptions of relationality, of connectedness.

Only recently have mainline religious educators begun to understand the necessity of using social construction of knowledge approaches to religious education. Previous generations of teachers found that more transmissive approaches worked within the context of religious communities who had no need to justify their existence in a pluralistic context. With the advent of global

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[31] Transcript 2, p. 33, lines #9-13.

[32] Transcript 2, p. 24, lines #1-5.

telecommunications, and the rapid mixing of cultures it created an opportunity for, pluralism can no longer be avoided.

Amidst that pluralism, religious educators are increasingly aware of the dangers of building religious identity in literalist and fanatical ways. In a culture such as the United States, religious education is more and more felt to require the nurturing of religious identity that is deeply loyal to a specific community, but is at the same time open to the wide and rich variety of cultures and practices found here. At the most recent meeting of the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education, Hanan Alexander tried to describe what this kind of pedagogy would be like, at least in the training of religious educators. He suggested that

> instead of being strictly analytic, it would be synthetic (building up answers, rather than simply deconstructing); it would be passionately committed; it would be avowedly value-engaged; it would not make claims of objectivity, but rather claims of inter-subjectivity (specifically, of "epistemic humility"); it would be intellectually honest and rigorous; it would strive towards universality, but out of a parochial commitment; it would connect academe to the lives of other people; it would focus on pedagogy and practice; it would focus on the present and the future, not on the past; and its primary question would not be "how" to be from a particular religious community, but "why."[33]

This kind of religious educational practice only makes sense if it functions within an epistemology of at least a 4th order.

One key to this practice is building religious communities that envision identity development as tensgritous,[34] rather than dichotomized or dualistic. In this kind of identity development inter-religious dialogue is not only a "nice"

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[33] Personal notes from Hanan Alexander's keynote presentation at APRRE, November 4, 1995, Chicago.

[34] This adjective is my own, growing out of the word "tensegrity." "Tensegrity" is a word coined by Buckminster Fuller to describe the kind of stability that can be achieved, in architecture, by holding opposing forces together with respect to their integrity. His geodesic domes are one instance of this dynamic.

practice, it's an indispensable one. Similarly, recent moves in theological anthropology and biblical interpretation demand dialogue amongst differing communities.

Religious educators need to begin to practice the kind of border crossing that cultural studies researchers take as part of the ongoing practice of their discipline. We need to take seriously our concerns with praxis, and live into the practice of critical cultural critique. We need to begin to recognize how formed and shaped we are by the hegemonic currents of contemporary culture, but we need to learn to use the epistemological resources of our faith communities to help us ride and channel, and perhaps ultimately subvert, those currents for the purposes and values which we claim as central to our communities. Media literacy work is a very fruitful place in which to begin this kind of border crossing, to begin to develop "border pedagogies" in which the borders crossed are between religious community and popular culture, and between various understandings of religious identity. Over and over again, as we shared with each other and struggled with each other in this workshop, we identified ways in which popular cultural constructions either trivialized or denied the rich resources of religious community. Yet at the same time, we also rejoiced in the ways in which popular culture texts connected us with each other, and with the profound themes and images of our faith communities.

Daloz et. al., in their ground breaking research into what sustains people in maintaining "lives of commitment in a complex world," have called attention to the necessity of developing "a consciousness of connection," in conjunction with "living both within and beyond 'the tribe'" (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996, pp. 214-215). Part of what really *worked* in the experience of this research was using popular culture texts as a way into that kind of consciousness, and that kind of living. Keeping in mind that one key to transformative, critical education is

awareness of epistemological foundation, and support for epistemological shift, media literacy and religious education can come together in rich support of each other by highlighting the epistemological dilemmas we face in the midst of contemporary U.S. culture, and providing enjoyable routes through them.

Ultimately this workshop has taught me, at least, that we need religious literacy as much as we need media literacy. Nether one really should be separated from, or pursued in isolation of, the other. But in the context we now live within, that kind of literacy, or to borrow the New London Group's term, "multiliteracy," pretty much demands a 4th or 5th consciousness to achieve and sustain (1996, p. 60). How we nurture that kind of consciousness might very well start in the kind of context this workshop struggled to create. That is, in a critical, collaborative, environment in which people at different places in the their working understandings can come together and share across frameworks. Rather than spending large amounts of time and money translating religious stories into the new media, or boycotting and protesting the ways in which hegemonic media embody those stories, religious educators, indeed, religious communities, should be spending more time deepening our own media (using liturgy well, using song well, using language and ritual well), and helping our members engage mass-mediated popular culture texts to enrich and broaden their meaning-making.

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