

CHAPTER FIVE

ACTIVE RESPONSES TO MEDIA CULTURE WITHIN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: TRANSFORMING, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL, COMMUNITIES

As I noted at the beginning of the last chapter, one way in which I sought to extend and deepen my analysis of this research experience was to consider the ways in which it did not conform to my initial expectations. I noted in that chapter that my understanding of religious knowing and experience had to shift to make room for the insights emerging from our workshop process. In this chapter I'd like to consider the ways in which my understanding of "action" also shifted in response to this research process.

When I began this project I had some clear personal goals that included helping people begin to find a way out of a particular kind of powerlessness, and a way into a new definition of empowerment. Coming from past experience in feminist nonprofit and state government venues, I primarily defined "action" in a group-oriented, politically informed context. I thought that perhaps the workshop might result in the group of us taking some kind of "action" in a more public context. The media literacy curriculum kit that we used also carried a similar intent, as each session it outlined included specific action steps in that context. But as I noted when I described the workshop itself, we never found ourselves engaged in such action, while at the same time participants continued to assert that we had, in fact, engaged in "action." Just what kind of "action" was this? The answer to that question is important to me, for it also helps

me clarify one meaning of participatory action research, even if the “action” component was not what I anticipated.¹⁵²

Media culture and religious communities

Religious communities across the U.S. have seized on media culture as an overarching explanation for much that is awry within our communities. Their suggestions for how to go about “fixing” this problem, however, are generally not informed by the understanding of religious experience found within this research project, particularly its emphasis on the utility of “social constructionist” perspectives.¹⁵³

Using the theological and psychological descriptions outlined in the previous chapter, however, I can begin to suggest some possible solutions. Nothing I suggest here was conclusively “proved” or even necessarily demonstrated by this project, but there were a number of ideas that arose, particularly around the use of Kegan’s theorizing, that begin to help me understand how I use the word “action” in the midst of religious education. At a minimum, these ideas suggest avenues for future research and point to some constructive pathways for religious educators to take.

¹⁵² Part of my need to define action differently stems from the general practice within PAR of using language such as “transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships” to define “action” (Maguire, 1987, p. 196).

¹⁵³ See Clark & Hoover (1997) for a bibliographic essay that provides a summary overview of various contemporary constructions of the convergence of religion, media, and culture.

Kegan's theorizing as a catalyst

Combine a theological anthropology such as that exemplified in Johnson and LaCugna with the developmental psychology of Kegan, and then explore the resulting picture of what it is to be human in relation to media culture in the U.S. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that our meaning-making is embedded to such an extent in mass-mediated popular culture that, if we are to live a Christian commitment, we must make a conscious choice to move in opposition to hegemonic culture, while yet remaining integrally a part of it. Such a movement is neither easy to initiate nor to sustain, particularly in isolation, Kegan's theorizing makes clear.

My primary conclusion is that building the kinds of pedagogical and metaphorical bridges we sought in this workshop — bridges that could lead to clear and free movement back and forth between mass-mediated popular culture and religious education — is an integral component to supporting authentic religious growth. Our workshop supported this kind of bridge-building, and I believe such support needs to become an integral part of Christian religious education in the late 1990's in the United States. Constructing these translational/transitional bridges is also a crucial component of transformative activity, of the kind of "cultural action" I believe religious educators need to foster. To explain this conclusion requires understanding Kegan's description of third and fourth order meaning frames, and then considering them in the context of mass-mediated popular culture and religious education.

Kegan's "orders of consciousness" are generally identified in terms of the principles used to negotiate meaning-making. Kegan argues, in

agreement with Fowler and the other developmentalists, that the shifts from stage to stage involved in the evolutionary unfolding of human personality require “successively more complex principles for organizing experience” (1994, p. 29). Indeed, it is this “successively more complex” dynamic that is his primary reason for labelling this description of human development as evolutionary. But while these principles may take different shapes at each order of consciousness, they can be identified as principles because they share five fundamental aspects in common.

First, “they are not merely principles for how one thinks but for how one constructs experience more generally, including one’s thinking, feeling, and social-relating” (1994, p. 32). These meaning-making principles, through which Kegan identifies his “orders of consciousness,” permeate our way of being in the world. Consequently they are not simply elements of how we make cognitive sense of the world, but how we make sense of our relationships, how we interact with television, how we make choices about our relationship with transcendence, how we choose to hold our body in various physical postures,¹⁵⁴ and so on. Whether we are even conscious that we can and do make choices, whether “choices” are even available to us in certain circumstances, will likely depend upon what kinds of principles we are using for meaning making. Our epistemology, in Kegan’s framework, thoroughly suffuses who we are and how we live.

“Second, they are principles for the organization (the form or complexity) of one’s thinking, feeling and social-relating, not the content of one’s thinking, feeling or social-relating...” (1994, p. 32). These principles structure the “how” and the “why” of our “be-ing” in the world. One person might believe that the Bible is literal truth, and another

¹⁵⁴ Here I am specifically thinking of what is usually called “body language.”

that the Bible is nothing but a collection of texts that have withstood time, and both could have reached these substantively different conclusions using similar meaning-making principles. Obviously the content of these divergent beliefs has important consequences within particular religious communities, but it is possible that the same “meaning-making principles” could have been used to arrive at each. The issue, in terms of defining a particular way of “knowing,” is not so much *what* conclusion is reached, but *how* it is reached. Indeed, two people could both agree that the Bible is a collection of texts that have importance for their ability to withstand time, and yet have come at that conclusion using very different “orders of consciousness” and thus believing they are called to radically different kinds of actions on behalf of that belief.

“Third, a principle of mental organization has an inner logic or, more properly speaking, an “epistemologic.” This is a rather less obvious statement, and Kegan has to define this “epistemologic” in terms of a relationship between what he calls a “subject” and an “object.” In his framework, an “object” is something that we “can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, otherwise operate upon” (1994, p. 32). A “subject,” by way of contrast, is that which we are “identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in.” The “epistemologic” suggests that the “what” of the subject and object differs within each order of consciousness, but the “is” of it, the reality that there are some ways of making meaning that can be reflected upon, and some which are so fused as to be invisible, is present in each order. This dynamic, of moving between being conscious of meaning-making and being fused with it, helps to define each order through recognition of the specific characteristics of the subject/object

relationship that are present. This is a rather obscure distinction, one that perhaps requires a lengthier explanation. Kegan uses the example of self development to point out that (1994, p. 133):

... being 'aware of my issues' presumes a self that is not only the experiencer of a reportable internal psychological life but also the maker of an internal psychological life. The demand for this construction of the self—as author, maker, critiquer, and remaker of its experience, the self as a system or complex, regulative of its parts—is again a demand for fourth order consciousness. The demand that we be in control of our issues rather than having them be in control of us is a demand for fourth order consciousness.

The “epistemologic” in this example would suggest that while “having a self” is a concern that can be identified in different ways across the life span, the specific understanding of “self” differs greatly. In this example, a person operating at a fourth order of consciousness can see the process of “self-making” as an “object” of their thought. It is something they can think about, make choices about, and perhaps even change their feelings about. Whereas a person functioning within a third order of consciousness would be so fused with their understanding of “self” that they could identify that they have an “internal psychological life” but not live deeply into the experience of having any control within it. Again, it is not the “what” of self that is at issue but the “why” and “how” of making sense of it.

“Fourth, the different principles of mental organization are intimately related to each other.... [their] relation is transformative, qualitative, and incorporative. Each successive principle subsumes or encompasses the prior principle....” (1994, p. 33). This aspect of Kegan’s description of the various aspects of meaning-making principles is a particularly important one, for it differentiates Kegan’s work from many other theorists. For one thing, it assumes a factor of empathy that is structural. Movement from

one order to another is not a linear, hierarchical move, but rather an integral wholistic evolution. Thus those at an order of consciousness that has evolved from another should (at least in theory) have a degree of empathy and understanding for those others who are making meaning in the frame from which they have come. Since this evolution is related to the normal course of human development (both physical and intellectual), it may be most obvious to detect this empathy on the part of a parent watching a child struggle to grow. But as life continues it is entirely possible that at some point in time that same child may find herself evolving her meaning-making beyond her parent, with a concomitant empathy for the kind of meaning-making her parent is still engaged in.

This dimensional, rather than hierarchical, movement is nonetheless similar to linear or hierarchical descriptions in that it clearly contains a normative component to it which assumes that that which comes next is always more complex than that which came before, and in being so, is better. I am not yet convinced that we need to agree with this normative assumption, but I *am* convinced that it is at least a helpful checkpoint in our own ability as teachers to support our students' development. When we find ourselves enjoying our students' growth and feeling great compassion for the struggles they engage in, I think we are moving from within this kind of empathy. When we find ourselves fighting our students, on the other hand, or seeking to belittle or trivialize their ways of making sense of the world, we should be brought up short by the recognition that our lack of empathy may say more about our own lack of understanding and growth than about our students' ways of making meaning.

Indeed, one of the emerging conflicts in contemporary education arises over the tension between more visually and aurally related modes of meaning making that are once again becoming prevalent due to our increasingly electronic forms of communication, and those modes of making and communicating meaning that are embedded in what Ong terms a “literate” culture (1982). Does this tension suggest that we are evolving new forms of meaning-making, new principles for exploring and understanding this world? Or are we instead failing to evolve into more complex frames of mind? Kegan does not address the question of the shift from literate to “secondarily oral” culture directly, but it is certainly an interesting one in light of his analysis and no doubt plays some kind of role in the specific question we are considering here of the ways in which mass-mediated popular culture could and should be integrated into religious education.

“Fifth and finally, the suggestion that a given individual may over time come to organize her experience according to a higher order principle suggests that what we take as subject and object are not necessarily fixed for us...” (Kegan, 1994, p. 34).¹⁵⁵ This aspect of Kegan’s description of meaning-making principles is in itself a measure of great hope for the ability of educators to have an impact on the process of transformation. Within a religious context, when we understand conversion as a process

¹⁵⁵ It’s important to remember that when Kegan talks of “higher orders” of consciousness he is speaking not about a linear sequence, a developmental progression that plays itself out in two dimensions, but rather a three or four dimensional construct in which “each successive principle ‘goes meta’ on the last.” Each order is a deepening and widening, and at the same time a clarifying and complexifying move.

of growing ever more self transcending (after having first attained a self), this principle of meaning-making affirms that process.¹⁵⁶

These five aspects, then, define what Kegan terms “principles of meaning-making” and within his theory they function in each order of consciousness. The specific content that attends specific clusters of meaning-making principles then forms the basis of labelling what Kegan calls an “order of consciousness.” He identifies five such orders roughly associated with the generally accepted five stages,¹⁵⁷ and names these underlying structures of meaning-making as “single point,” “durable category,” “cross-categorical or trans-categorical,” “system/complex,” and “trans-system/trans-complex.”¹⁵⁸

The first two “orders of consciousness” in relation to media culture are dealt with at length in other contexts.¹⁵⁹ It is the third and fourth orders that are central to my synthesis of what we learned during the media literacy workshop. The “third order” or “interpersonal” frame meaning-making uses what Kegan labels “cross-categorical or trans-categorical” principles, and the “fourth” or “institutional” order uses what he labels “system/complex” principles.

A third order frame begins to emerge only in later adolescence, and is generally characterized by an ability to think in more abstract terms. As Kegan points out about adolescents (1994, pp. 31-32):

¹⁵⁶ See Conn (1986), in particular, for a lucid application of Kegan’s principles to an understanding of conversion.

¹⁵⁷ Kegan (1982, pp. 86-87) draws a relationship between his description of orders of consciousness and previous descriptions of developmental stages that includes the work of Piaget, Kohlberg, Loevinger, Maslow, McClelland/Murray and Erickson.

¹⁵⁸ See especially Figure 9.1 in Kegan (1994, pp. 314-315) for a more complete description of these structures.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Seiter (1993) and Garanzini (1994).

The capacity to subordinate durable categories to the interaction between them makes their 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. [my emphasis]

In moving to this dimension of making meaning it becomes possible to recognize that even though I want something — the latest compact disk, jeans like my friends, and so on — I might also be able to delay my gratification of this desire in greater fulfillment of a deeper. This ability to recognize other people's needs and desires makes it possible for young people to begin to form community, to move beyond egocentric boundaries into peer defined boundaries. We can understand this development in a positive light — as evidence of the development of empathy and caring for others beyond oneself — and at the same time also perceive the ways in which we will require young people to move and grow beyond this framework. Conformity to peer group can have beneficial effects, but there are tragic examples of such conformity — drug abuse and devaluation of education among them — as well.

This same principle, the ability to “subordinate durable categories to the relationships among them,” also underlies our attempts as religious educators to help young people grasp the principles of biblical interpretation, where Catholics teach, for example, that the Bible is God's word, and yet we need to understand that it comes to us through the mechanism of human hearing and telling (Brown, 1985).

It should be obvious that such interpretive and subordinative abilities are crucial when encountering media culture, particularly given the frequently intense nature of the conflict between what the culture “sells” to us, and what religious community demands of us. As Kegan notes (1994, p. 275):

When the adult education experts tell us they want students to ‘understand how to separate what they feel from what they should feel, what they value from what they should value, and what they want from what they should want,’ they may not be taking seriously enough the possibility that when the third order dominates our meaning-making, what we should feel is what we do feel, what we should value is what we do value, and what we should want is what we do want. Their goal therefore may not be a matter of getting students merely to identify and value a distinction between two parts that already exist, but a matter of fostering a qualitative evolution of mind that actually creates the distinction...We acquire ‘personal authority,’ after all, only by relativizing — that is, only by fundamentally altering — our relationship to public authority.

This is an important distinction, and one that might not be wholly clear in Kegan’s prose. Part of his argument is that people who are not yet making meaning using a “system/complex” set of principles rely on categories to make sense of the world, without being able to subordinate all of the categories they use to a larger system that relativizes them in relation to each other. Hence if my peers suggest that the best way for me to look as a young woman is to fit into size six clothing, and yet be five feet five inches tall — an impossibility for all but the ectomorphic in build — it is not just that I “want” to look like that, but that that desire, coming to me from the group *with which* I most closely identify and *to whom* I look for identity, is also an expression of normative value, of what I “should” want, of what “makes me up.” It is a difficult challenge — but an important one for authentic growth — to recognize not only when my desires are not what the group wants, but to be able to distinguish those times when the group’s desires *should* not be mine.

As religious educators we can speak *ad infinitum* about the ways in which God loves us all in our uniqueness and diversity. Yet in hegemonic culture, in which such a belief is persistently denied and people may find themselves dependent upon groups who construct “ultimate value” very

differently, we have very little chance of being anything other than irrelevant.¹⁶⁰ To move beyond irrelevance we need to challenge and support people into a more complex frame of meaning-making. One way to begin to do that is through the development of an alternative “group,” a culture that can both confirm the importance of group belonging, and then begin to challenge its more destructive aspects. The key here is not, however, to simply create an alternative group of “good values” that replaces a group that incorporates more destructive values. The goal is to help people move beyond the need to have any single group dictate values to them.

I suspect that this goal is *not* always shared by many religious educators, particularly those for whom popular culture is an unmitigated disaster that must be avoided at all costs. This group of educators can feel threatened by an attempt to create a critical stance that is useful not only in relation to popular culture, but also, inevitably, turns its lens onto the religious community.

Given the complexity of Kegan’s theorizing it may be most useful at this point, as we move to a description of fourth order meaning-making, to engage in a comparison study. All of the “texts” we viewed within the workshop lent themselves to interpretations that “worked” at both the third and fourth order of consciousness. This is perhaps one reason why everybody involved found the workshop enjoyable (and perhaps one reason why “mass” popular culture is so popular). But even during our sessions, people often commented on the ways in which other members of their religious communities — often people with specific kinds of power

¹⁶⁰ I have in mind here particularly the ways in which Postman (1992) and (1988) describes “technopoly” and other aspects of a culture of commodification.

over curriculum decisions — refused to consider pop culture in the light in which we chose to view it. One example of this kind of refusal was incorporated in late 1996 into a video released by the Chatham Hill Foundation. Because this video so clearly encapsulates a predominant religious view of pop culture, it is a useful example to use in this context. The video was distributed widely, at no charge, to many Catholic religious organizations.¹⁶¹ Entitled *Hollywood vs. Catholicism* it included a video introduction by Archbishop John Foley, the president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications at the Vatican. The video was produced with a slick format, representing itself as a “documentary”¹⁶² on the ways in which Catholicism and Catholics are generally deliberately misrepresented in popular film.

How one “reads” this documentary and the opinions represented within it, particularly whether or not one finds its argument at face value to be compelling, is a good example of the difference between a third and a fourth order frame of meaning-making. The video also provides a clear contrast to the process our workshop used to consider popular culture texts within religious education.

The basic argument of the video is that the contemporary Hollywood film industry is thoroughly ruled by “secularists” who insist on treating religion and religious people, particularly Catholics, in one of three ways: as “corrupt,” “in turmoil,” or as “silly and inept.” The narrator suggests that in previous years Hollywood may have been more respectful — he

¹⁶¹ I received my copy through the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry at Boston College, to which it had initially been addressed.

¹⁶² I will continue to refer to it as “documentary” that is, in quotes, because my understanding of documentary includes appropriate referencing of video clips and other materials taken from previous productions, and this film had no such referencing.

cites *On the Waterfront* as an example — but in general and certainly in very recent times, there are deliberate attempts being made to ridicule and demean religious practice. In opposition to characterization the video presents the Catholic church as a much maligned entity that is the sole defender of the true faith in the world.¹⁶³

Throughout the “documentary” short cuts from a variety of commercially successful — as well as obscure — films are used to buttress the main arguments.¹⁶⁴ On one level the narrator makes some important points about the construction of films, such as the reality that camera angles, props, lighting, and so on are all carefully considered and used to produce specific effects: “using symbols and images movies convey a sense of being real when in fact every element is artificial and crafted.”¹⁶⁵ This message is similar to that found within media literacy frameworks. Approaching this video from a third order framework requires making a decision between accepting the authority of the narrator — and hence the authority of the Church so clearly behind that narration, as evidenced by the presence of Foley in his clerical collar, as well as the set props (which include a large crucifix) — or the authority of the films themselves. A third order frame makes possible distinctions between various categories of authority, but not subordination of all such categories to individually constructed authority. Any attempt to subordinate such institutional

¹⁶³ Among other statements, the narrator notes that the Catholic Church is “the only one to stand by its ancient claim to be the successor to the apostles.”

¹⁶⁴ The films are not referenced other than by name as they are quoted, and there is no evidence of copyright permission having been granted. The films used include commercially successful recent films such as *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*; and rather more obscure films (which are, interestingly enough, quoted more frequently in the “documentary”) such as *The Devil’s Playground*, *The Pope Must Diet*, and *Nasty Habits*.

¹⁶⁵ Statements in quotes are from my transcription of the film.

authority to a personal framework would probably strike someone moving from within a third order framework as dangerous in some way, as akin to what the popular press has labelled “cafeteria Catholicism.” The choice in this framework would be perceived as being between rampant and malicious secularism or between the holy goodness of Mother church. As the narrator says: “Some films seem obsessed with a desire to redefine Catholicism to agree with popular culture, where absolute truths are out and so-called tolerance is the only virtue. But as we know, Catholicism cannot be redefined just as truth cannot be redefined.” Few, if any, alternatives would be available in this framework.

Having to make this kind of choice is indicative of the ways in which third order epistemologies create deep and divisive problems for religious communities. On the surface they are very useful. “Identity” can be premised upon a universal foundation — “holy mother church,” for example. “Who we are” can be built upon distinctions between “us” and “them,” with great clarity and very little nuance. “Who we are” and thus “who I am,” promotes unity and loyalty, but all too often at the expense of all those who are thereby excluded from belonging.

When a third order epistemology is combined with mass-mediated popular cultures’ overriding concerns and representations, I believe that religious communities find themselves falling primarily into one of two patterns in the contemporary U.S. — either religious fundamentalism,¹⁶⁶ or a vague religious relativism that is essentially spiritualized

¹⁶⁶ “Religious fundamentalism” carries many possible definitions. In this case I am primarily referring to religious communities that set themselves in sharp distinction to “secular” culture, and in doing so “steadfastly oppose hermeneutical methods developed by secularized philosophers or critics;” enforce “elaborate behavioral requirements [that] create a powerful affective dimension;” and have an “authoritarian organization” (Almond, Sivan, & Appleby, 1995, p. 408).

consumerism.¹⁶⁷ Either choice provides identity through a pattern of conformity to a larger group, and is clearly the choice being presented in this video. As I noted earlier, the goal is to provide a “better” kind of group to belong to, rather than a way to move beyond having to make the choice to belong to only one group.

The fundamentalist option provides a rich sense of community, a recognition that religious experience can have profound impact, and a belief that religious community and belief matters above all else.¹⁶⁸ It offers a set of beliefs and practices in which the religious group—and its specific beliefs, practices and ethos—are more important than any one individual’s. In the case of the *Hollywood vs. Catholicism* video, what is being represented as “good” is actually a very pleasant image in many ways, a church community made up of holy and selfless people serving God throughout the world in the pursuit of the reign of God. In such a community an individual refuses the critical skepticism of our scientifically-oriented society, and in return is handed a rigidly defined community that creates sharp barriers of right and wrong that delineate identity. There is no questioning allowed of the authority of the church. Indeed, in the video it is precisely films that portray the questioning, the

¹⁶⁷ Peck (1997, p. 238) writes that “to maintain legitimacy in a globalizing world, modern religion must respond to the relativization of belief. One response is to assert the primacy of a particular belief system — the ‘conservative option’ adopted by various forms of fundamentalism that have experienced resurgence across the globe. The ‘liberal option,’ in contrast accommodates globalization by embracing religious pluralism.... This accommodation to globalization creates a contradiction for the liberal option: abandoning particularist claims to truth and connection to a specific cultural tradition and geographical space makes liberal religion especially vulnerable to relativization.”

¹⁶⁸ Murdock (1997, p. 96) notes that “fundamentalism speaks to a popular ‘desire for impregnable certainty’ and simplification in the face of the social dislocations and moral ambiguities of late modernity.”

doubting, the concern about how one sees the church, or how one is to take biblical messages into practice, that are condemned as blasphemous.

On the other end of the spectrum, that which is opposite fundamentalism while still remaining within a third order framework, the alternative is “relativism” or what the video defines as “secularism.” Within this framework an individual is given full “right” to his or her individual opinion. Indeed the narrator and the priest who offers a postscript to the video both affirm the “absolute” quality of the right to free speech in the United States; as the narrator says: “I’m not here to argue the constitutional right to free speech. I support it absolutely.”¹⁶⁹ Yet individualism is understood as so sacred that it denies community. Indeed, the underlying fear that this video tries to appeal to is that of isolation, of being alone amidst a “wicked mass of heathens.” Several times the video points out how sensitive the Hollywood film establishment is to the “rights” of marginalized people — Native Americans, gays, and witches are the examples used — while thoroughly ignoring the extent to which Catholics are maligned. An easy implication to draw from this narration is that you’re either “with us” — that is, with the holy people of God — or “with them” — all those “others” who are not part of the Catholic community.¹⁷⁰

Yet one could engage this video instead from a fourth order perspective. A “fourth order of consciousness” requires something Kegan labels “system/complex” meaning-making principles (1994, pp. 90-91):

¹⁶⁹ One wonders what happens to such “absolute” support when it conflicts with the narrator’s sense of “absolute truths.”

¹⁷⁰ The video does not, of course, deal with the obvious denial of Christian solidarity with the marginalized such a stance entails.

... notice that these bigger ‘visions’ are not just values. They are ‘values about values.’ They are systems by which we can choose among our values when they conflict. ‘Truthfulness’ is a value, a generalization across concrete particulars, a cross-categorical structure, an expression of the third order of mind. ‘A child’s right to a childhood,’ or ‘a parent’s duty to protect that right’ can amount to something significantly more than a generalization across concrete particulars. It may be more like a generalization across abstractions, across values, including the value ‘truthfulness’ but also including a myriad of others.

The ability thus to subordinate, regulate, and indeed create (rather than be created by) our values and ideals — the ability to take values and ideals as the object rather than the subject of our knowing — must necessarily be an expression of a fourth order of consciousness, evidenced here in the creation of an ideology or explicit system of belief. A fourth order consciousness takes the “figure” or “subject” of mutuality or interpersonalism and makes it the “ground” or “object” of an “institutional” form of relating that is capable both of empathy *and* of submitting that empathy — even of oneself — to a larger structure. As an example, Kegan describes the paradoxical reality that in setting boundaries for a child one is actually honoring that child’s freedom at a deeper level of relationality (1994, p. 92):

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.

It is reasonable to expect in our culture that one's child might make such claims. The additional presumption that there is no single appropriate way to respond to them is evidence of the fourth order demands currently made of parents in our culture. Kegan suggests that previously, and perhaps currently in certain more orthodox or traditional communities, it was not necessary for individuals to have this order of consciousness because the community itself carried these abilities (1994, p. 104):

The Traditional Community represents one way in which the third order consciousness of individuals can 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.

It is this kind of communication "through the fabric of living" that is often assumed to exist within many Catholic communities, and was implied by the *Hollywood vs. Catholicism* video. Yet if the cultural context is such that it is important actively to construct this fabric — which is part of Kegan's argument about "modern" versus "traditional" cultures — then accepting the authority of the church without question does not promote authentic growth.

Using a "system/complex" set of principles for meaning-making, on the other hand, a so-called "fourth order" consciousness, to engage this film would raise interesting questions about what it means to explore the construction of filmic representation through another filmic representation. Indeed, the kinds of questions raised by the parodies excerpted in this video, or the difficult tensions portrayed as blasphemous by the video's narrator, instead become interesting explorations of alternative ways to understand authority and religious experience. For

persons watching this video through a fourth order lens the film excerpts shown may actually function more as advertisements *for* the movies identified, rather than as reasons not to see them.

Indeed, the action steps presented by the priest who gives the postscript to the video suggest some limited awareness that exploring these issues through film could be dangerous to this priest's vision of the church, because his primary suggestion is not to watch them at all, and to actively advocate for boycotting not only the films themselves, but the production companies that made them.¹⁷¹ Rather than supporting the development of critical engagement (the ostensible purpose of the video "documentary"), the priest's call to action is supportive of the development of an alternative community with a specifically bounded set of values that are not open to criticism or change.

Such a call also suggests that on some level there is a recognition, or perhaps just an intuition, that the development of this more complex frame of mind requires some social support. It cannot be done in isolation; hence one way to protect against such development is to close off access to alternative communities that could provide such support. As Kegan notes, a fourth order frame (1982, p. 102):

probably requires the recognition of a group (or persons as representatives of groups) to come into being; either the tacit ideological support of American institutional life, which is most supportive to the institutional evolution of white males, or the more explicit ideologies in support of a disenfranchised social class, gender, or race.

¹⁷¹ His action steps are as follows: 1) pray, 2) don't go to see the movies, don't rent the videos, and don't buy the cable channels that show them, and 3) let your local theater know that you won't patronize it if it continues to show films that are blasphemous.

This is a critical point, for what happens when the “tacit ideological support” of American life is in itself supportive, primarily, of consumer commodification, not to mention a denial of complex and sophisticated religious engagement? Critics of the consumer tendencies of this culture have pointed out repeatedly the extent to which politics, news, public policy, and so on, are more and more often described and implemented as responses to particular “target markets.”¹⁷² There is a similarly broad and growing literature describing the ways in which this consumer commodification has spread roots into religious consciousness, forcing religious communities into one of the two stances described earlier, either fundamentalist rejection of mass consumer culture, or relativist absorption into it.¹⁷³

Kegan’s suggestion that a fourth order consciousness “probably requires... the more explicit ideologies in support of a disenfranchised social class, gender or race” also begins to make sense of the kinds of transformation this culture *has* experienced in the last several decades through the consciousness-raising efforts (a peculiarly apt expression in this context) of the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, the gay rights movement, and so on.

A crucial additional benefit to this frame of meaning-making is that it provides a viable alternative to the more traditional, triumphal posture of the Catholic community (and perhaps other Christian communities) by fostering a respect for other communities. As Kegan (1982, p. 65) notes:

¹⁷² There is a rapidly growing literature describing the “commodification” of American culture. Three books that trace this evolution, and that work especially well in adult education contexts are Savan (1994), Jacobson & Mazur (1995), and for religious communities in particular, Kavanaugh (1991).

¹⁷³ Here again there is much that has been written in recent years. In particular, see Moore (1994) and McDannell (1995).

It is this kind of absolutism, practically excluding from the human community those who fall outside the ideological or social group, which can come to an end when the evolution of meaning transcends its embeddedness in the societal. One begins to differentiate from the societal; it begins to 'move' from subject to object; it is no longer ultimate..... The differentiation from the societal invents a kind of tolerance which could not have been present before.

Kegan's research has identified a wide array of contexts in which there is a consistent range of demands upon fourth order consciousness¹⁷⁴ ranging from marriage, to contemporary management literature, from adult education literature to therapeutic contexts, and so on. These fourth order demands grow out of a culture Kegan characterizes as a "Modern" one, in contrast to his earlier comments about "Traditional" communities.

Regardless of whether one finds Kegan's nomenclature of "traditional" and "modern" appealing or accurate, his broader point has crucial implications for educators, many of which he himself notes. We would not, for example, design a curriculum for high school students that consistently makes expectations of them that are "over their heads," that is, "above" their order of consciousness without at least attempting to develop some materials and processes to help them move to that consciousness as part of our educational efforts. As Kegan notes (1994, p. 43):

... it is not necessarily a bad thing that adolescents are in over their heads. In fact, it may be just what is called for provided they also experience effective support. Such supports constitute a holding environment that provides both welcoming acknowledgement to exactly who the person is right now as he or she is, and fosters the person's psychological evolution.

¹⁷⁴ See in particular the table on pp. 302-303 in Kegan (1994).

If the dichotomy between religious fundamentalism and liberal relativization or “secularism” were simply a matter for this specific video “documentary,” it would not be an issue that ought to take up much time within religious education. But the reality is that in certain ways mass-mediated popular culture does indeed portray religious experience in U.S. hegemonic culture as a commodity that can be purchased, a “style” that can be worn, a choice that is made but must not be seen as condemning other such styles, choices, or commodities.

In a mass-mediated popular cultural environment which “supports” third order frames,¹⁷⁵ fundamentalism and relativism become the two primary ways in which to understand religious commitment, while at the same time they are also represented as opposite ends of a dichotomy between abstract reason and embodied emotionality. Critical skepticism, or the use of abstract reason, is represented within many religious communities as leading to individualism and relativism, and thus denies the emotional and faith-based elements of religious experience. Yet an embodied emotionality, absent the use of critical reason, is equally marginalized and easily trivialized within popular culture as extremist fanaticism, once again rendering religious experience socially and politically irrelevant.

How, then, can we move — young people and maturing adults alike — into the frames of mind that could transcend this dichotomy? It is at this juncture, in trying to answer this question, that Kegan’s broader, underlying claim that epistemologies are bound up in much more than

¹⁷⁵ That is to say, one which provides cultural encouragement for and recognition of third order frames, even at the same time as it is a culture that requires a fourth order frame for positive, authentic adult growth (this is the main argument of Kegan (1994)).

cognitive processes becomes particularly important. The principles he calls “cross-categorical” (third order) or “system/complex” (fourth order) are integrally woven into our emotional processes and our physical processes, as well as into our cognitive dynamics. Providing effective challenges and effective support for people must of necessity entail more than helping them “think through” the effects of their decision-making. We must also help them act through, feel through, imagine through, live through, and essentially *embody* a more complex approach to life.

Moving into action

One of the early recognitions coming out of our workshop group — that engaging popular culture is enjoyable, and leads to discussions of fundamental issues — is an interesting example of this process. Everyone easily has opinions about television, for example, and is generally not shy about expressing them. Giving people time and space in which to look at a specific television “text” in close detail allows them the opportunity to deepen their enjoyment of the show at the same time as it complicates the pleasure involved. An understanding that “complicating pleasure” can in fact deepen it, is empowering, even liberating. This point should become clearer with the next example.

One of the exercises that white members of the group repeatedly turned to as an example of a transformation in their consciousness was that of the close study of television commercials. In each case the text the group considered was a commercial that was “painted” in bright tones and cheerful colors, and that carried what was perceived as an explicitly inclusive message — whether the *Diet Coke* anthem to inclusivity, or the

Plymouth Breeze evocation of warm, cozy kindergarten rules.¹⁷⁶ Both commercials, seen in the manner in which most commercials are seen — that is, rapidly flashed through in 30 seconds, and then on to the next — evoked warm and cheerful feelings. Examined closely at length, however, both commercials also led to sharp criticism of the racism within them. The commercials struck our participants of color very forcefully with these more destructive themes, whereas the other, white, members of the group needed the dialogue of the process to help them “catch onto” the racism present in these texts. Yet that recognition, rather than being disabling, was actually very helpful to the white members of the group, one of whom expressed her learning in this way:

Melanie: I guess what I liked best was the group, it was so diverse. I mean it really made me sit up and wake up on some things. Some of the Hispanic and Black women would come off with a totally disgusted evaluation of some of those commercials, for example, and I hadn't even thought about that aspect of it. So that was a really rich part of the process.¹⁷⁷

Learning the ways in which the culture leads us, through our enjoyment, into accepting values we abhor, can be liberating because the very recognition that our desires have been “constructed” in this way suggests that they can be constructed in other, very different, ways as well.¹⁷⁸ This process, aptly termed “consciousness-raising,” is at the heart of my definition of action. Warren puts it somewhat differently, but his

¹⁷⁶ This commercial played, additionally, on the Robert Fulghum “all I ever needed to know I learned in kindergarten” success.

¹⁷⁷ Transcript #14, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ This is the central dynamic at the heart of Freire's notion of “conscientization” (1985), and the concern within PAR methodologies with “critical consciousness.” See in particular Fals-Borda & Rahman (1991), Maguire (1987), and Torres (1992).

definition has much in common with mine when he suggests that (1992, p. 9):

full cultural agency... has two aspects. It is an active way of looking at and making decisions about the meanings and values created for us in our society, but it is also an active way of examining and judging the *channels* by which these meanings and values are communicated to us.

In both of these definitions, it is not simply the “activity” that defines action, the “doing” of something, but at the same time a way of *knowing* about that doing, a consciousness, that is definitive of “action” (or in Warren’s terms, “agency”).

Yet consider what kind of meaning frame is required to move from discernment of one’s pleasure to its problematization, and then beyond that to a systemic analysis, for example, that identifies institutionalized racism at work. At a minimum such a stance requires Kegan’s “institutional” outlook. Clearly there are cognitive processes embedded in this learning, but the emotional, visceral, response is an important place to begin from; and ultimately, to end, since knowing something “intellectually” or “cognitively” is never enough to change one’s behavior, one’s loves, one’s commitments. As Melanie said, “it really made me sit up and wake up on some things.” White people can be intellectually committed to fighting racism, for example, but until we can begin to recognize and shift the ways in which we have internalized the dominant culture’s mores, we will not be able to adequately resist them and live into our Christian conceptions of justice.

Definitions of action

How, then, does this extended exploration of Kegan's framework, particularly as it describes third and fourth orders of consciousness help us to define "action"? As I just suggested — learning the ways in which the culture leads us, through our enjoyment, into accepting values we abhor, can be liberating because the very recognition that our desires have been "constructed" in this way suggests that they can be constructed in other, very different, ways as well.¹⁷⁹ This process, at least as described using Kegan, requires a movement into a fourth order frame of meaning-making. Teaching into that movement, then, is a powerful method of supporting transformation.

In this context I define "action" as the process of nurturing transformation of meaning-making, of helping people grow into more complex frames of consciousness. There are several advantages to defining action in this way for educators. First, such a definition provides a rationale for progress within an educational context that is familiar and not immediately threatening. It is highly problematic to define "action" as support of radical principles (whether revolutionary or conservative), for instance, when educational systems in this country are enmeshed within mainstream economic and political structures. Yet there is widespread support for the development of "critical thinking," even if there is not general consensus about what such thinking entails.

¹⁷⁹ Lather (1986, p. 259) suggests that "emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions hidden or distorted by everyday understandings, and in doing so it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social process."

Second, this definition provides a benchmark for progress. As an activist I have grown tired of definitions of “transformation” and “action” that seem to be little more than rhetoric supporting a particular ideology. Defining “action” as a process of supporting the transformation of meaning-making, particularly given Kegan’s development of a process for determining people’s orders of consciousness at any given point in time, allows teachers to have some sense of whether or not they are succeeding. Defining action in this way also prevents it from being attached to only one ideological framework, because a shift to a fourth (and later, a fifth) order of consciousness by definition relativizes ideologies.

Third, defining “action” in this way provides space for those of us who believe that transformation can happen in and through cultural contexts and cultural activities. Teaching people how to engage popular culture critically as one element of growing their religious faith in community may never create the kind of revolution that would obviously overthrow the institutional and economic structures of the global media empires, but it may well undermine the cultural authority of these empires to such an extent that they are forced to transform themselves. Fourth, and finally, defining action in this way dovetails very nicely with the language of conversion that Conn (1986) and others uses, and the description of action that Palmer uses. This similarity provides an important resonance for religious educators. As Palmer notes, for instance (1991, p. 17):

Action, like a sacrament, is the visible form of an invisible spirit, an outward manifestation of an inward power. But as we act, we not only express what is in us and help give shape to the world; we also receive what is outside us, and we reshape our inner selves. When we act, the world acts back, and we and the world are co-created.

It is important to note, however, that I am suggesting this definition from from the perspective of teachers. Students may well experience a transformation of the sort described here, without themselves identifying it as “action.” What “praxis” entails for students in these contexts is yet to be defined.

Supporting action

When we draw together the conclusions of this workshop process, the ways in which media literacy tools proved useful within a religious education context, Kegan’s theorizing is particularly helpful. How do we support this kind of transformational action? Kegan’s work suggests that fostering such transformation involves providing adequate amounts of the three dynamic elements he describes: confirmation, contradiction, continuity. His work also emphasizes an element of the workshop that became clear to us all early on in the process — learning in this way requires dialogue, and dialogue amidst difference, not just polite conversation amongst similarity. Such learning requires the building of what other educators, such as Freire and Giroux, have labelled a “border community,”¹⁸⁰ a process that nurtures the engagement of difference in such a way as to help “human beings... become self-reflexive agents of change...” (Kelly & Liu, 1993, p. 26).

¹⁸⁰ The notion of a “border community” is particularly present in Giroux & McLaren (1994), but the notion of such a community is evident in Freire (1985) and even has some resonance with Bruffee’s (1993) idea of a “transitional community.” It may well be that it is also present in the notion of an “interpretive community,” a concept which is prevalent in recent work in cultural studies that takes as its focus popular culture texts. See in particular Jensen’s (1991, p. 42) description of the convergence of literary, communication and cultural studies scholarship.

It was clearly beyond the scope of this research project to systematically identify and trace the orders of consciousness sustained by various participants, let alone demonstrate how the process itself helped them evolve further. But this kind of research ought to be undertaken, and should be manageable given Kegan's development of a process for systematically identifying orders of consciousness. Even without such a research project, however, it is possible to suggest that the workshop provided a space within which participants could explore growing into more complex understandings of media culture. Certainly, in Bruffee's (1993) sense of "transitional community," the workshop provided such a space, because diverse participants created a diverse dialogue, which enabled people moving from a more dichotomized frame to stretch into a more complex frame.

Within the context of media culture, religious educators need to build a border community that can engage both media culture and religious culture in such a way as to reciprocally and mutually challenge both.¹⁸¹ How does this work? Perhaps the primary suggestion coming out of the workshop process involves finding ways to re-interpret media culture so as to support religious experience that is complexly understood, and to use religious experience (understood in this more complex way) to critique and explore media culture. As one participant put it:

Holly: ... that's got to be part of the message to religious educators. ...people are steeped in this culture, and if they're going to survive well in it, need to be able to grow into very complex frames of consciousness. If we're serious about educating and forming people in faith, then we need to take seriously the task of helping

¹⁸¹ It may also be helpful to consider the ways in which educators have sought to do this in non-religious contexts. See in particular Buckingham (1990), Sefton-Green & Buckingham (1994), Lankshear & McLaren (1993), Brown (1991), Grunfeld (1995) and Giroux (1994).

people move into those more sophisticated frames of seeing the world. ... one of the ways to do that, is to get people to confront popular culture, because it's ... relatively easy to show people that news, for instance, is very simplistically presented.... it's hard to grasp complex issues that way. I think the reality is that if people are steeped in that and require that frame of knowing to live their daily lives, then religious educators, particularly of adults, can't give out simplistic garbage to people, because it won't have any meaning to people, it won't help them in their own faith journey.¹⁸²

One clear way in which religious communities can support this process begins to emerge from the theological descriptions noted in Chapter Three. A theological anthropology of the kind described in that chapter can provide a sharp contrast to the representations of religious experience most often found within media culture. If embedded sufficiently in religious communities, it ought to be able to provide a powerful and supportive alternative for people working out of a third order framework, an alternative that can deepen and strengthen their transition to a more complex way of understanding themselves, their religion, their world.

At the same time, such a description also has a very complex and historically grounded foundation in which it is embedded. One reason I chose to explore LaCugna's work as well as Johnson's, is that it draws its justification for its theological anthropology from a strand of Christian tradition that is less often respected within "secular" culture, and yet at one time, and still in certain theological circles, was the primary language in which human experience was described. Being able to assert that such a language holds elements that sustain and embrace the kind of relational anthropology LaCugna describes provides a rich challenge to contemporary attempts to reject such a tradition out of hand. It also

¹⁸² Transcript #9, p. 7.

provides nourishing ground in which to grow more complex orders of consciousness, particularly as such meaning-making frames seek to incorporate both an internal, or personal experience of religion with a more external, or communal/social history of religious experience and meaning-making.

Using this kind of approach, however, is not without its risks. As members of our workshop pointed out repeatedly, and as the Chatham Hill video demonstrates, there exists, at least within the contemporary Catholic Christian community in the United States, a strong tension between dogmatic, hierarchical authority, and a recognition of the socially constructed nature of any kind of knowledge. That tension can be creative — a “tensegrity” of sorts — but to ignore it is to fail adequately to be present to and nurturing of adult religious development. Given the way in which formation of “self” in Christian understanding is integrally bound up with religious faith, religious educators have to be continually and consistently sensitive to the huge intrapsychic and interpersonal risks involved for any person seeking to grow in religious faith. We are seeking to educate — to draw out, *edu care* — in a context of very real vulnerability. In an adult framework it is very appropriate to speak in the language of spiritual formation/direction in a personal context, and base community (or other such small group work), in a social context.

One element of this “drawing out” that was particularly interesting in our workshop had to do with dialogue across/through/and within “difference.” Daloz, et.al. (1996) suggest that this kind of dialogue, indeed, any such experience with “difference,” is an essential component of sustaining commitment to the common good. Such a dialogue needs to take place in a variety of ways. Walker suggests various elements that

need to be present for such a dialogue to work (1996). Boys and Lee (1996) argue persuasively for Christians that a primary context has to be that of Jewish - Christian dialogue. I have argued elsewhere (Hess, in press) that equally important in the United States is dialogue between white people and people of color. The underlying point is that it is difficult if not impossible to nurture the necessary contradictions as well as provide the requisite continuity Kegan outlines, without such dialogue. As part of that dialogue, critical cultural analysis is an important mechanism that can provide a solid foundation, and empower new appropriation and interpretation of religious experience.

Implications for media literacy within religious education

Much of media literacy education can qualify as “critical, cultural analysis,” even when it is not labelled as such. It is a valuable tool for religious educators to pick up and use, particularly in the ways in which it supports Kegan’s “confirmation, contradiction, continuity.” At a minimum, engaging popular culture is, by all accounts from our workshop, an enjoyable process that helps to confirm the pleasure people feel in consuming such culture, while at the same time its exploration of the “socially constructed” nature of mass-mediated representations provides abundant “contradiction.” The final piece of that dynamic, “continuity,” is the element that is most often lacking in media literacy curricula, because providing such continuity requires a clear articulation of alternative values. Most media literacy work is done within the public school system, and most public school systems at this point in our history are highly cautious about asserting normative value frameworks with any

substance outside of the basic “golden rule;”¹⁸³ hence there is little basis for providing this kind of continuity.

Kegan’s description of what is involved with continuity is perhaps the most problematic and yet the richest aspect of the ways in which encountering media culture can enhance Christian religious experience. One aspect of our workshop’s exploration that continues to interest people is the search for practical ways to interpret contemporary mass-mediated texts in support of traditional religious narratives. A similar concern is present in the hunt for practices that can complement such narratives by providing powerful alternatives to the often superficial and commodified narratives of contemporary mass-mediated popular culture.

Some places to start

What, specifically, does “action” look like in the context of our workshop and this research project when we define it in these terms? At this juncture I can point to some of the initial ways in which we identified “action,” particularly in a set of suggestions that grew out of the workshop as reminders and practical “helps” for religious educators. These suggestions were not meant as definitive “rules” so much as evocative ideas that people found helpful to list.

On a general level:

- remember that your goal is to nurture movement into more complex frames of knowing as one route to knowing God and religious community more fully: doubt, conflict, questioning, and other difficult

¹⁸³ See in particular Postman (1995).

emotions are part of that process: expect them, respect them, and have empathy for them;

- remember that dialogue across difference can be transformative — search out contexts where you can talk with people who are quite different from you;
- remember that building bridges, creating border communities, is a central and essential part of that process: use Kegan — confirm, contradict, provide continuity;
- remember that Christian faith, speaking specifically from the experience of this workshop, is primarily counter-cultural and thus requires an active development of alternatives to dominant narratives and images; and,
- remember that this work is a daily, continual, and persistent discipline.

On a specific level:

- remember and use the core media literacy questions: who's in, who's out? and who wins, who loses? — in both pop culture and religious contexts;
- tune into popular culture (watch television, listen to talk radio, read mass market magazines, go to commercially successful films) as a way to find out what the core concerns of the moment are;
- find out what your students are watching, listening to, playing with (especially in terms of video games), and be empathetic towards these interests (that is, don't reject them out of hand, look for those elements within them that you can “confirm,” before “contradicting” underlying messages; and then be sure to provide “continuity” for your students);

- don't be afraid to look for religious themes in "secular" programming; and don't be afraid to reject explicitly religious programming if it fails to support complex frames of mind;
- develop a network of support amongst other educators that attempt to teach in these ways (the national media literacy movement is one place to start, the Internet can be helpful, as can explicitly feminist and anti-racist educators and others who have experience working in counter cultural forms) — you will need border communities of your own, as you attempt to build them within your teaching contexts with your students;
- keep your eyes open for reviews of popular culture written by people who approach it in this complex way,¹⁸⁴ and support your students in developing such reviews;
- give yourself permission to enjoy pop culture — and then look for conversation partners with whom you can problematize that pleasure;
- when you decide to bring a film or television program into a specific religious context, be clear about how you intend to use it — is there a specific emotional note you're trying to attain? is there a sharp contrast you want to make? how else might this text be interpreted? The same dynamic exists in reverse: when you decide to speak in explicitly religious language in a secular context, be clear and humble about how and why you choose to use that language, and be conscious of how many different ways it may be heard and interpreted;
- be clear about the core values of your religious community and your commitment to it, and be clear about the dominant values implicit in

¹⁸⁴ A recent (1997) and very interesting example is a new column on popular culture that is being initiated in the *National Catholic Reporter*.

- popular culture programming — and then allow each to provoke questions of the other (for example: continually question the social construction of race, whether in popular culture programming, or in liturgical/theological frames); and,
- support the implementation of visually and musically rich liturgy, not necessarily by incorporating popular culture texts into a liturgical context (although sometimes that is appropriate), but more often by digging deeply into the tradition and showcasing its jewels; in a culture as visually and aurally oriented as this one is becoming it is crucial to provide compelling alternatives *within* a religious tradition, thus providing the necessary continuity earlier described.

This list is only a beginning, and it grows out the work of only a small group of religious educators in a specific tradition. What would this kind of cultural action look like in another tradition, or in another community? How might the differences evoke other possibilities? What kinds of conflict would inevitably emerge? What resources within a specific religious tradition are most helpful for providing continuity? What kinds of generational differences provoke constructive dialogue? What is “best practice” for religious educators in this context? There are myriad questions that grow out of this research project, which is really only a preliminary intervention, a beginning step in engaging popular culture to enhance religious experience.

Finally, remember that learning involves the self, and the self is always in relation. Kegan’s constructive developmental perspective provides support for humility and love on the part of the educator, for “if one position is actually more complex than the other, it should be able to

understand the other's position *on the other's terms*, to extend empathy for the costs involved in altering that position, and to provide support for, rather than dismissal of, the prior position" (1994, p. 34). If we can find God in each other, and in all things, then we must be able to discern God actively present in popular culture, if only we are brave enough to look.