

# PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN CONVERSION TO THE CATHOLIC FAITH

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November, 2017

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This research explored the phenomenon of learning transformation as it arises in the context of conversion to Catholicism. The theory of transformative learning describes a process of learning and reflection, in which an individual's frame of reference or way of making meaning changes to become more justified in interpreting their life experiences.

This research used a phenomenological design to study the essential experience of the transformative learning process in thirteen adults who entered the Roman Catholic Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), the process implemented in Catholic parishes around the globe to guide prospective converts. The participants shared their conversion experiences through a series of one-on-one interviews, which were then coded and analyzed for shared themes and understanding of the learning processes they experienced.

The testimonies of these converts all described a transformative learning experience deeply embedded in their conversion process, showing that the theory is well-suited to describe the general movements of the participants' learning process. The participants' stories evidenced deep, broad, and enduring changes in the way they made meaning in their lives. Learning outcomes were identified across a range of domains including cognitive, experiential, spiritual, and social dimensions. Changes in self-knowing played a seminal role, serving as a cornerstone on which other outcomes were formed. Participants described deep, epistemic transformation in the ways they understood themselves, their place in the world, their moral responsibilities, and their spiritual needs.

The analysis also explored the relationship between the learning transformation and engagement in the formal curriculum of their respective RCIA programs. While knowledge transfer played a role in all cases, its import was generally underemphasized by the testimonies of the participants. The programs were most influential when there was a clear impact on the perspective transformations of the converts. Sense of community, group discussion, opportunity for critical reflection, and the ability to connect the content to their new sense of self all play a fundamental role in deepening the transformative learning outcomes the of the converts, regardless of their current place in the process.

These findings provide a justification for using transformative learning theory as a framework for understanding adult religious education. It also offers a foundation for measuring the efficacy and relationship between formal instruction and learning outcomes in the context of religious conversion.



PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN CONVERSION  
TO THE CATHOLIC FAITH

A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department of Interdisciplinary Professions in the College of  
Education

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education  
in Adult Education

by

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November, 2017

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This research sought to explore the adult learning experiences that accompany a process of religious conversion. The phenomenon was identified and described through this qualitative study of multiple individuals who have converted to Catholicism in the last several years. The study provides a phenomenological analysis of their learning process by employing a data coding heuristic and a comparative analysis of the commonality of experiences across the diversity of subjects. The theory of transformative learning, which involves changing or transforming a frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000), provides a unique lens for understanding belief as a frame of reference and religious conversion as a context for transformation. The Catholic Church provides a framework for the educational process that accompanies conversion of new members through its formal Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). The relative consistency and structure of the program provides an excellent environment for researching the learning process as its own entity and studying the experience within the framework of transformative learning.

### **Motivation**

As a lifelong Catholic, I am an active member of the Church. I participate in my parish's young adult ministry, including participation in faith formation and community programs. Although I have family members and close friends who have been converted to Catholicism, prior to this research I had never been personally involved in the RCIA program in any capacity. However, as a professional in the field of adult education, the overlap of transformation and conversion is an intersection of particular interest to me. This interest also stems, in part, from a desire to help improve educational programs in religious communities, especially the Catholic Church. I hope such research will contribute to a broadened understanding of how people form and adapt their most basic beliefs. I believe that investigating the transformative nature of a

convert's changing frame of reference in a moral and spiritual sphere will bring a better understanding of religious conversion's place in adult education. I hope this insight will help religious educators align and evaluate program goals against the actual learning related outcomes of conversion.

### **Statement of Problem**

To date very little has been done to formally investigate the educational outcomes and processes that accompany adult religious education, such as faith formation (DeMott and Blank, 1998). If educational programs are being designed to assist processes of spiritual formation, what are the outcomes or effects these hope to achieve? Taken to the most extreme, an inability to describe or provide evidence for such effects might even lead to questions of the usefulness of attaching formal instruction to these spiritual transitions at all. The process of designing, evaluating, and improving such instruction should be grounded in a clear understanding of the learning process (Caffarella and Daffron, 2013).

The Catholic Church (1988) describes in its own words the broad learning goals an RCIA program is expected to provide:

“The instruction that catechumens receive during this period should be of a kind that while presents the Catholic teaching in its entirety, also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the Spirit of Christ.” (p. 41)

However, no global standard or baseline is provided to measure the efficacy of this goal or to describe specific educational outcomes. This, along with the execution, is left to subsidiaries to develop at their discretion. Absence of standards can make it difficult for educators to evaluate the effectiveness in designing adult education programs (English,

MacDonald, and Connelly, 2006). Although a national study explored broad trends in RCIA programs across the United States (USCCB, 2000), there is very little evidence of formal evaluation being widely studied or implemented at the parochial or diocesan level.

According to this national study one of the greatest weaknesses of RCIA was “inadequate study and explanation of doctrine” (USCCB, 2000, p. 9), and the bishops surveyed indicated a need for more training of leaders as the greatest challenge. The report highlighted formation of catechists, or teachers, as one of the key areas for further consideration. This especially included the challenge of equipping Catechists to navigate the “needs and issues of adult group/individuals whom they serve” (USCCB, 2000, p. 38).

Meanwhile, integration into a new sense of community was cited by participants as the biggest strength of the conversion process. Meeting these challenges while accompanying the integration into new, communal roles begs for a greater clarity into the educational aspects of spiritual formation. This begins with a firm understanding of the shared experience of the participants, the phenomenon. Transformative learning theory offers a framework to examine the individual and social learning dimensions of the experience.

The official text of the Rite states that converts “are expected particularly to progress in genuine self-knowledge through examine of their lives” (Catholic Church, 1988, p. 78). How do program leaders determine how well specific educational instruction assists the achievement of this goal? Without understanding the changes in the learner’s “ways of knowing” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 58) that underlie the learning process of a religious conversion, educators lack the ability to understand the broader effect the educational elements of the RCIA program have on the convert’s intellectual, behavioral, and social development. Educators would benefit from research which studies and describes the educational processes of the conversion experience.

There remains a gap in exploring the educational process that accompanies such conversion within a modern theoretical framework. In my own conversations with RCIA program directors, I have found that deeper investigation is often obfuscated in spiritual motivations making the process of conversion difficult and even controversial to study objectively.

In short, the educational components of religious conversion as a transformative phenomenon is under-researched and poorly understood. Consequently, educators lack the necessary tools to fully evaluate the efficacy of religious education program and the role such education plays in influencing the transformative process.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively identify and describe the phenomenon of transformative learning when it accompanies the process of conversion to the Catholic faith. Participants were converts to Catholicism within the past three years. The study employed a phenomenological approach to examine the occurrence of transformative learning within the accepted framework of the theory. By describing this phenomenon, the research examined the role of religious belief in creating and changing an individual's epistemic assumptions and ways of making meaning.

Taylor and Cranton (2013) have criticized the glut of research in transformative learning that follows a similar interpretive methodology of interviews and thematic analysis, claiming it is not progressing the field of transformative learning. In response, this research did not simply seek to use a religious experience as another context for re-describing the concept of transformative learning. Instead, the goal was to use established notions of transformative learning to better understand the phenomenon of religious conversion as a learning experience.

Interviews with participants were analyzed to determine common factors in the experiences of converts, the role of critical reflection in the conversion process, and the elements that produce a transformative learning experience. The following research questions provided the guiding inquiries this study explored. These questions will be broadly used to guide and direct the analysis of the qualitative data collected.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does the phenomenon of learning transformation manifest as a lived experience during conversion to Catholicism?
2. What factors and context influence the transformative learning in the process of Catholic conversion?
3. What role does religious conversion play in transforming an individual's frame of reference or ways of knowing?
4. What kind of learning outcomes accompany the conversion process, and how are they influenced by formal instruction?

### **Transformative Learning**

Because the theory of transformative learning is broad, complex, and often divergent (Hoggan, 2016, Taylor and Cranton, 2013), I offer the following definition for this study, which is reiterated, expanded, and justified as appropriate. Transformation happens when an individual engages in a process of learning and critical reflection that leads to a new frame of reference for interpreting their knowledge and experiences (Mezirow, 2000). The individual develops new ways of creating meaning in their lives. Rather than a change in what they know, it is a change in how they know. This change may happen across or within multiple domains of knowing including cognitive, experiential, social, or other dimensions. Finally, transformation is a

markedly significant change characterized by depth, breadth, and stability in their lives (Hoggan 2016).

## **Definitions**

**The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults** is the process that non-Catholic adults are generally required to go through, worldwide, in order to convert to Catholicism (Catholic Church, 1997).

**The Catholic Church** is the institution that consists of all congregations explicitly in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, as headed by the Pope. This does not include other congregations that use the name Catholic, but formally dissent from the Roman Catholic Church.

**A Catholic adult** is an adult member of this Church who has received the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, including any dissenting member who has not formally withdrawn. This term will not be used to distinguish an individual's opinion of any specific doctrine.

**Conversion** will be understood as entrance into the Catholic Church through the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation and, if necessary, Baptism by any adult aged 18 or older. For simplicity, this study will not make a terminological distinction between non-Catholics who were previously baptized and those who were not. A **convert** is any adult who formally enters the Church.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review examines the current theory of transformative learning, how its process has been defined in theory and research, and its relationship with a learner's epistemology. The review then turns to the application of transformation in religious education, specifically in Christian theologies. Next, the process of conversion to the Catholic faith will be examined. Conversion is accompanied by the formal process of RCIA which involves both formal instruction and religious ceremony. Finally, this review will examine the current gaps in research concerning the intersection of transformation and conversion.

### **Transformative Learning**

The theory of transformative learning suggests that the learner transforms the way he or she constructs meaning by reevaluating their frame of reference, the learner's accumulated assumptions and expectations. Mezirow, a pioneer of the concept, describes this process as "transforming a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable" (2000, p. 20) in their life experiences. When a learner's initial assumptions are shaken or proven inadequate to justify their own experiences, a learner may transform the way he or she makes meaning into something more capable guiding their actions, sense of self, or understanding of truth. Mezirow's own research was in the perspective transformation of women who returned to higher education after a number of years.

Mezirow's description of transformation can be understood through specific common elements, beginning with a triggering event or disorienting dilemma. The disorienting dilemma is the event that causes the learning to begin their transformative journey. It is a shift or disturbance in one's perspective, arising from re-examinations of previously held values and beliefs. This is

often a result of obtaining new knowledge or a new perspective that conflicts with existing assumptions and may occur through unfamiliar cultural transactions.

Meaning-making is a central theme in the theory, and the act of critical reflection plays a significant role in this process (Brookfield, 2005; Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (1991) describes critical reflection as the “the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) or our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (p. 104). This is an active and internal interaction with the new knowledge obtained from the educational process. Critical reflection may be self-directed or guided through a formal class or encounter. For example, a struggling student may be guided by an educator in transforming his or her self-perception to become a more secure learner (Mezirow, 2000).

Finally, integration identifies the new state or perspective of the learner and signals the end of the transformative process. Integration is key in measuring the actual incidence of transformative learning. Encountering, reflecting on, and totally rejecting the disruptive knowledge in favor of the previously held world-view would not signify transformative process. However, neither is total and uniform incorporation required.

Mezirow proposes 10 phases of transformation as a general outline of the transformation process. Although there may be different variations, these phases can be used as a baseline for identifying or clarifying transformation in practice:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
8. Provision trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

### **Transformation as an Epistemic Process**

Holistically, transformative learning does not describe a specific change in beliefs or knowledge, but instead a change in the learner's ways of knowing (Mezirow, 2000).

Transformation is not what we know but how we know it. Consider a belief that one should not steal. An individual may hold this belief because of social expectations or fear of punishment. After the disorienting experience of a close friend being robbed, the individual may begin a process of critically reflection and transformation, ultimately deriving a moral aversion to theft on grounds of empathy or a more complex understanding of human rights. Here his specific belief about theft did not change, but his way of knowing it did. Likely, if this is true transformation, other related beliefs also evolved or found new context and meaning.

Thus, transformation is epistemic, concerned with a change in how knowledge is acquired and validated. Mezirow's theory explains this idea in terms of a significant shift in the learner's frame of reference, and he describes transformative learning as necessarily involving a "rational process of critically assessing one's epistemic assumptions" (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 133). Others such as Kegan (2000) have more precisely equated this process to a changing epistemology itself. Kegan specifically associates transformation with a constructive-developmental framework, offering a detailed model of epistemic development in which an individual moves through specific stages. Kegan notes that an epistemic transformation may not

necessarily result in specifically different conclusions, but only how the conclusions are reached, as in the example about stealing.

Bridwell (2012) applied the language of transformation as an epistemological growth in her study of marginalized adults. In her research, Bridwell interviewed “six low-income and homeless women of Color” (p. 129) over a period of time in which they were involved in an adult literacy program. She used two separate interview protocols to measure epistemological growth and transformation over the course of the year in the participants. Bridwell used these instruments growth over time in meaning-making, by comparing the assessing of the participants against the stages of a cognitive-developmental continuum. Results and analysis of the instruments’ scores indicated a “change in the ways of knowing” (p. 136) in several of the women and application of this change to other ways of making meaning in their lives, beyond the subject of adult literacy. Bridwell notes a relationship between purposefully transformative goals of the educator, growth in epistemological complexity, and greater self-agency in other areas of the learner’s experience.

Hoggan’s (2014) research with breast cancer survivors brings similar insight into the transformation of an individual’s epistemology when a disorienting dilemma forces them to renegotiate how meaning is made in a new context. A significant distinction in Hoggan’s research from Bridwell’s is the focus on an uncontrolled, even negative, life event as the disorienting dilemma that triggers the transformative process, rather than a sought, explicitly educational experience. In his research, Hoggan gives attention to the relationship between context and epistemology as a process of learning. He highlights three important roles that context can have in transformation: “instigation of the learning and change process...shape the

epistemology used to negotiate that change... [and it] shapes and forms the eventual learning outcomes” (pp. 201-202).

### **Issues in Transformative Learning**

While there is common agreement on the major components of transformation, different authors offer different specifics on the exact process and outcomes of transformation. Many researchers regard transformation somewhat differently from a process of re-evaluating epistemic assumptions. Notably, Dirkx explains his view of transformative learning as something more subjective, focusing on a holistic sense of self, experience, and identity (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006).

Cranton (2000) argues for a more individualized nuance in describing transformation, considering variations in the way individuals undergo transformation. Differences in an individual’s psychology creates differences in the way they process experiences and react to changing contexts. Cranton states, “Their psychological habits of mind influence the way they reconstruct frames of reference” (p.182).

These, among other varying perspectives, result in a somewhat fractured field of empirical study, often obfuscating the ability to compare results. Although general attempts at empirical measurements of transformative learning have been made, there is still wide disagreement in the field about any single way to measure the phenomenon (Cheney, 2010). Such debate has led to criticisms of a lack of clarity around the theory (Hoggan, 2016; Taylor and Cranton, 2013).

In an effort to congregate the expansive territory of transformative learning and shed clarity, Hoggan (2016) proposes folding the various approaches under a meta-theory of transformative learning. This meta-theory is an umbrella for different approaches, which each offer their own parameters and delimitations of the phenomenon. A typology is proposed to provide a common

language for the meta-theory to extend across various approaches and implementations. In addition to his typology of outcomes, Hoggan argues three criteria for determining which outcomes qualify as transformative: depth, breadth, and relative stability. These are respectively described as “the impact of a change... number of contexts in which a change manifests... [and implications that] a permanent change has occurred” (p. 71).

Finally, along with Taylor, Cranton has brought attention to other issues of transformative learning, which includes progress stagnation, the role of empathy in transformative learning, and questioning assumptions that transformation to a more open perspective is always inherently good (Taylor and Cranton, 2013).

### **Transformation in Religious Education**

In recent decades, there has been increasing focus on pedagogy in Christian education through perspectives other than the traditionally “top-down” doctrine based epistemology (Shields. 2009). The educational experience of the adult learner is more than clarifying a set of doctrines and vocabulary. Shields explains that “religious teaching and learning do not exist in the abstract” (p. 341) and must be “understood in a context of the life experience of the people” (p. 341).

Transformative learning has been offered as a model for engaging Christian education in a personalized, dynamic way (Kang, 2013). Kang describes the chief goal of Christian education as “Christian transformation and spiritual growth, [which needs] a teaching and learning process that fosters transformation” (p. 339). The importance of transformation is shared by Catholic educators, including D’Souza (2009), who points toward the necessity of critical reflection, which is a cornerstone of the theory.

Transformative learning is sometimes discussed in terms of purely cognitive processes. However, the concept can be applied more broadly. Some argue for a more holistic approach to understanding the field including body, emotions, spirit, and practice (Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014). Others have followed suit, and much recent development in transformative learning theory has focused on transcendental experiences and emotional and relational meaning making (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006; Cranton & Wright, 2008). All of these elements are naturally found together in Christian education.

### **Conversion in Catholicism**

In the Catholic Church, formal conversion occurs specifically through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, or RCIA (Catholic Church, 1997). Beginning with a period of inquiry and culminating with a rite of admission, the overwhelming majority of the time is spent in faith formation during which the candidates are taught the tenets, beliefs, and practices of the Church. The United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops provides some structural guidelines of the Rite, while allowing each diocese to govern the individual programs. Most dioceses, in turn, provide a certain level of oversight, leaving the development and delivery of the substance to each unique parish.

Although programs vary between parishes, RCIA tends to be offered yearly, usually lasting between several months to a year, even two years in some churches. The rite of admission includes the reception of several Catholic sacraments: Baptism for the unbaptized, Confirmation, and First Communion. This is typically held at the first Easter Mass.

At its most fundamental level, RCIA is a guided process that adults pursue to autonomously enter the Catholic Church. The ritual, educational, and communal aspects of the

program ultimately exist to help the adult in his or her self-directed decision to accept or decline membership in the Catholic Church.

The educational process begins in the early periods of an RCIA program, and instruction of the candidates for conversion is explicitly described in the rite's period of catechumenate. The catechumenate, which makes up a considerable amount of the RCIA process is "an extended period of time during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life" (Catholic Church, 1988, p. 39). In order to understand the relationship between this instruction and the individual's conversion of faith, it is important to inquire how well a given program or implementation achieves this stated goal, and in what ways.

Some empirical research exists which examines the efficacy of religious education programs for converts. In 2000, the United States Catholic Conference compiled the results of a three year study which documented the implementation, results, and efficacy of RCIA programs across the nation. In their study of mystagogy, the final, post-conversion phase of the RCIA program, Cronin and Gunn (2013) show the utility of empirical research "as a source for evidence-based enhancements to ministry practice" (p. 71). Their research illustrates the link between gathering empirical data (both quantitative and qualitative) and understanding of program efficacy. However, it cannot be overstated that research in this area remains limited.

### **Transformation and Conversion**

Much of the existing research on the subject is focused on education of learners already within the religious framework (Bamber, 2011) or tensions between traditional ways of making meaning and modern contexts (Shields, 2009). However, the central elements of Mezirow's transformative learning process naturally align to the religious conversion specifically.

“Reconstructing dominant narratives” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19) is as central to religious conversion as it is to transformation.

In a similar vein, Regan (2002) and Mongoven (2000) examine transformative process of religious conversion through a somewhat emancipatory lens. Mongoven suggests religious education calls people to personal and social transformation. In connecting the transformative learning to conversion Brancatelli (2004) builds a case for understanding the transformative nature of religious education with an examination of Biblical content through a transformative lens, culminating in advocacy for “transformative catechesis” (p. 4). However, in these cases and others, most of the literature fails to provide empirical evidence for and discernment of transformative learning in such situations, relying only on anecdotal data or even purely theoretical frameworks.

Finally the concept of authenticity must be given consideration when considering actual transformation in religious education (Kang, 2013). Kang specifically connects such authenticity with the integrity of the instructor. However, authenticity also plays a crucial role in identifying transformation in the convert as well. The specific act of converting does not necessarily show learning as transformation. A learner may comprehend the concepts or go through the motions of a conversion, but the dimension of authenticity describes the level that the learner has actually been transformed by the learning experience and the way they personally adopt and interact with the new knowledge.

### **Transformative Goals in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**

In addition to all the language and form of the rituals in the official Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1988), the book describes the purpose, context, and structure of the periods of preparation. The Rite suggests that the instruction should lead the candidate toward a

profound change that prepares them for Christian life. In the vernacular of adult education, the intended outcome of such instruction is transformative. In fact, the language of the Rite aligns very closely with the language of transformative learning in discussing the goals of the instruction and catechesis. It explains that converts “are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action” (p. 63).

In describing the Period of Catechumenate, part of the RCIA process most explicitly connected with formation and guidance, the Catholic Church (1988) describes the transition of the convert in terms that echo learning transformation: “Since this transition brings with it a progressive change of outlook and conduct, it should become manifest by means of its social consequences” (p. 39). This concept suggests an epistemic change resulting in taking on new roles. It seems clear that the Church hopes that the formation causes a transition in the learner that is something akin to transformation described by Mezirow and others.

Further the introduction of the Rite describes a structure of three steps that closely complements the structure of the later phases of Mezirow’s phases of transformation, suggesting a compatible model of progression between conversion and transformation. See Table 1 for a side by side comparison of the language of the Rite and the language of the phases of transformation.

<i>Textual Comparison of RCIA Steps(Catholic Church 1988) and Phases of Transformation (Mezirow, 2000)</i>	
<u>Steps Described in RCIA</u>	<u>Mezirow's Phases</u>
The first step: reaching the point of initial conversion and wishing to become Christians, they are accepted as catechumens by the Church.	5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions 6. Planning a course of action
The second step: having progressed in faith and nearly completed the catechumenate, they are accepted into a more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation	7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan 8. Provision trying of new roles
The third step: having completed their spiritual preparation, they receive the sacraments of Christian initiation.	9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships 10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

*Figure 1. Textual Comparison of RCIA Steps and Phases of Transformation*

Although the Rite was developed outside of the theoretical framework, RCIA as promulgated, expects and hopes that a deep learning transformation accompanies the conversion process and seeks to inform the transformation with the instructive elements of the program.

**Gaps**

There is a lack of research that empirically examines the efficacy of education in religious conversion and retention of converts. Further investigation is needed into the ways in which a potential convert's decision and long-term commitment is affected by the type of instruction they receive.

Among the existing literature, a dotted line exists between the studies of efficacy in formal programs for converts (RCIA) and the study of transformative learning in religious pedagogy. Those who do begin to bridge this gap including Regan (2002), Mongoven (2000) and Brancatelli (2004), do so with almost a purely theoretical approach, stopping short of offering a definitive standard for identifying or measuring instances of transformation in the process.

Ultimately, existing literature draws a logical and compelling connection between the ideas of transformative learning and conversion. There still lacks a formal investigation of the specific relationship between the two as well as the role formal education programs play in assisting the transformation. The existing literature lays foundation for a theory of transformative learning in religious conversion, but it begs for stronger unifying research to support these models and identify the phenomenon in practice.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The goal of this study was to develop an understanding of transformative processes in religious conversion. Because this research examined the changing ways that individuals make meaning in their conversion experience, the descriptive lens of a phenomenological methodology was appropriate. The phenomenological design uncovers the essential phenomenon that underlies a lived experience (Van Manen 1997), in this case religious conversion. This research examines the phenomenon of transformative learning in the Catholic conversion process.

This chapter discusses the research methodology, beginning with a brief explanation and rationale for the use of a phenomenological research methodology as well as my chosen theoretical framework. It then describes my methods of participant selection, data collection, and analysis respectively.

#### **Phenomenological Research**

Phenomenology is a qualitative research design, concerned with a common lived experience of a group of people (Van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology describes the essence of an experience (Creswell, 2013) offering insight into what the phenomena is, but not necessarily how or why. Giorgi (2012) explains phenomenology as a primarily descriptive task, “articulating the intentional objects of experience” (p. 6). The intent is to describe the experience as it exists in the consciousness of the individual, rather than ascribe causal interpretation to the experience. Bracketing personal experiences and expectations is an important part of phenomenological design as the primary way of validating results and minimizing researcher bias (Cresswell, 2013).

The phenomenon of this study’s focus is the advent of transformative learning in Catholic conversion. The conversion process is not itself synonymous with learning transformation, rather

the learning process is a part of journey of conversion. The experiences that accompany conversion are a context for a potential changing frame of reference and individual epistemology. Converting does not explicate an experience of learning transformation. For example, a person who converted for the sake of a spouse could conceivably experience no change in the way they make meaning, yet still become Catholic in the sacramental sense. This research describes the specific phenomenon of individuals who have experienced a changed frame of reference or epistemology in the context of conversion as it corresponds to Mezirow's phases of transformation. The study examines the relationship between the context and the epistemological change in the individual's own experience, here being the conversion process, and the changing belief system respectively.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The scope of transformative learning theory is broad and with a variety of approaches. The approach of this research uses the premise shared by Mezirow and others that transforming a frame of reference necessarily has an epistemic dimension. Here transformative learning is grounded in this understanding, characterized by deep, broad, and lasting changes in the way individuals construct and justify meaning, or their ways of knowing. There were two additional reasons for using this approach to transformation:

1. In order to bind the breadth and scope of the phenomenon in this study
2. To more clearly link the transformations studied with the influences of the educational content offered in RCIA

However, ways of knowing and the idea of epistemic assumptions was not limited to a strictly cognitive definition of knowledge. As much of the literature argues, there are other ways of creating and justifying meaning, especially in the realm of religion and spirituality. This

research uses the typology proposed by Hoggan (2016) to describe the variety of transformative outcomes that may be uncovered in a common, consistent language. Learning outcomes are categorized and considered within the entire range of Hoggan's meta-theory typology.

### **Participant Selection**

After receiving institutional review board approval from ECU to conduct my research, I began a selection process to identify potential participants. Ultimately, thirteen participants were selected and studied to identify the underlying transformative phenomenon. All participants were adults who have converted to Catholicism in the past three years after undergoing the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) process. Ideal candidates had particularly rich information about their experience of transformative learning to better identify the phenomenon and a willingness to discuss their experiences candidly.

Although the Catholic Church makes a distinction between those who have been previously baptized and those who have never been Christian, my research did not discriminate between the two in participant selection. Similarly, I did not select for age, gender, ethnicity, race, background, or other incidental characteristics. Diversity in these areas was ideal, but not a high priority criteria; availability, stability in their conversion, and evidence of transformation, were the chief factors.

Participants were chosen from multiple different parishes with discrete RCIA programs rather than from one single program. This was, in part, to avoid drawing conclusions from any specific RCIA program. Parishes included in the study were limited to those in the Raleigh area (within approximately 50) for convenience. Selection took place in two steps.

I began by reaching out to RCIA program directors and leaders at several parishes in the Raleigh area by phone and email. When I was able to make contact, I communicated the goals of

the research, and described the participants I was hoping to find. I relied on my contact to discern possible and willing participants and to connect me with them. After I identified 6 participants from four parishes, I was unable to find any more participants through this method.

To broaden my pool of potential contacts, I used Facebook to informally request participants or referrals through a local Catholic young adult group. Within an hour, I received several private messages from possible volunteers. Within 36 hours, after identifying 7 more participants, I closed the request.

In both methods, I made private, contact, with each participant where I described the study, confirmed their willingness to participate, included a copy of the consent form, and made an appointment for the interview. I scheduled time with each participant to meet individually at for a one-on-one interview in a conveniently agreed upon location ranging from conference rooms in their church to a local coffee shop. Two interviews were conducted entirely over the phone.

**Limitations and delimitations in participant selection.** Without a practical or prudential way to contact converts directly, I relied heavily on third parties to recommend possible candidates. Because my research relied on volunteers for a one on one interview, my participant selection was naturally bias toward converts who were especially disposed to speaking about their experience. These factors likely led to a sample of people that are more enthusiastic and reflective, and expressive about their conversion experiences than a truly representative sample might have produced. The scope of my research was a phenomenological examination the essence of transformation as it occurs. I did not explore the incidence or magnitude of transformation in the general population of converts.

For the sake of feasibility, I also delimited the geographic range of participants to my local area. Consequently, although my group was somewhat diverse in age, gender, and background, they all came from the same relatively suburban, middle class area. Therefore demographic trends were largely unexplored in this study and converts from significantly different cultural demographics may have different ways of expressing their transformation. The diversity I did capture, such as age and gender, was noted but not analyzed for essential differences.

Finally, the Catholic Church gives significant distinction between a baptized and unbaptized person seeking to enter the Church. However, in practice, members of both groups usually go through the RCIA program together (this was true for all of my participants). Differences or separation occur in certain rituals of the Rite, but rarely in the instructive segments. For this reason, as well as concerns with availability, I did not distinguish between the two groups in my participant select and refer to both as “converts” collectively throughout the research. However, I do note in my analysis where elements of the phenomenon appeared divergent or distinct to each group.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected in the form of conducting a one-on-one interviews with each participant concerning their conversion experience. After obtaining signed consent, I conducted the interviews using an “informal, interactive process and utiliz[ing] open ended comments and questions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). These were used to gather qualitative data that describes the experiences and perspectives of the individuals. The interviews were guided by the protocol attached in Appendix A and continued until no new themes or concepts emerged in the dialogue. The list of questions were organized to follow a general flow of the transformative process, while

remaining as open-ended as possible. Generally, the terminology and language of transformative learning theory was not used in the discussion so that the data would accurately reflect the participant's own language and perceptions.

**The interview process.** The protocol was worked through sequentially, only skipping questions where they had already been substantially answered in a previous part of the interview. Each interview began with an open ended request for the participant to describe their conversion experience. This usually made up a significant part of the interview. I allowed the participant to take me through what they believed to be the essence of their experience, only interrupting to ask for clarity or expansion on certain ideas. While I used my protocol to sequence my own line of questioning, I primarily allowed the rest of the interview to flow according to the participant's own pace. Diversions and tangents were taken where naturally appropriate, allowing the participant to describe what they believed to be important and relevant to the interview in their own words. The interviews lasted anywhere from one half hour to one and a half hours.

**Transcription.** Each interview was recorded with a digital audio-recorder; notes were not taken. Shortly after all the interviews had taken place, the audio was transcribed and the recordings were deleted. The transcriptions were disassociated from the participants by substituting pseudonyms and stripping all identifying information from the transcript. These transcripts were then uploaded to a private account on *Dedoose*, an online qualitative data analysis tool. The *Dedoose* platform was used for coding and analysis of the data.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began after transcription of the interviews and with preliminary exploratory analysis of the data, looking for themes using heuristic coding of the data. Saldaña (2016) describes coding as cyclical, and my analysis employed a multi-cycle coding process. Emergent

patterns across interviews were collected and synthesized into a narrative, capturing the essential process of learning transformation in Catholic conversion. Throughout the coding process, memos were recorded as conclusions, themes, and other insights emerged. My own perspectives and experiences with Catholicism were also identified and bracketed in memos. Creswell (2013) explains bracketing as a reflective process, creating a more open perspective of the phenomenon.

**Coding the data.** Because this study observed the phenomenon through the lens of transformative learning theory, I primarily employed a Provisional Coding methodology (Saldaña 2016) with an *a priori* lists of provisional codes derived from the literature to help identify and validate the elements of transformation in the subjects. Because phenomenology describes the lived, subjective experience of the individuals (Creswell, 2013), it is important to retain the integrity of the experience as related from the perspective of the subject, while surfacing and illuminating the transformative process. I used only codes derived from literature to draw out the essential elements of the participants' transformative learning experiences and map their unique voices to the theoretical framework. There were three cycles of coding used to explore three aspects of the subject's experiences: the transformative learning process, the learning outcomes, and the transformative magnitude of the outcomes. The entire provisional code list is enumerated in Appendix B, divided into each cycle. In order to gain more familiarity with the act of coding, I conducted my coding process twice, in two discrete rounds.

**Stages of transformation.** In each coding round I began with the Stages of Transformation. Coding the transformative learning process was grounded in Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning. As Mezirow (2000) and others note, variations of these phases may appear in actual transformation, and other noteworthy aspects of the transformative learning process may not be captured by these phases alone. Memos were taken where significant

deviations appeared or where, in very few place, the codes didn't exactly capture the parts of the process being described. Deviations in the sequence of the phases were explored in the analysis.

**Learning outcomes.** After coding all transcripts for the Stages of Transformation, I began the second cycle of coding. The learning outcomes were coded from the typography proposed by Hoggan (2016) in order to identify and categorize the types of transformation experienced by the participants in a common language. Based on the structure of Hoggan's typology, the list of Learning Outcomes contained there six major categories (behavior, capacity, epistemology, ontology, self, and worldview), each with multiple associated sub-codes, or children. I coded the learning outcomes that appeared using the child codes for specificity. However, during analysis, I looked at each parent category holistically. The child codes were too many and often overlapping, while the number of participants were too few to draw deep understanding at that level of granularity.

Although I went through the entire transcript during each round of coding, due to the structure of the interview protocol, there was generally little overlap in the text between first two cycles of code. In both cycles large areas were sometimes left entirely without a code when the interview deviated away from the transformative experience, such as when participants discussed their children without a clear tie to their own process of conversion.

**Transformative magnitude.** Finally, the transformative magnitude of the outcomes is derived from Hoggan's three criteria for qualifying transformation. The third cycle of transformative magnitude was a way to uncover evidence that the experiences were justifiably significant. This cycle was also useful in identifying which aspects and outcomes of the process the learners understood to be more or less significant in their perspectives. There was a great deal of overlap between the coded excerpts of this cycle and the second cycle.

**Recoding.** This first, three-cycle round of coding was my inaugural attempt at coding data. It was conducted with more attention to familiarization and building technique than precision. Therefore, after this first round, I re-read the literature from which I derived my codes, then re-coded the entire body of data from the beginning in the same order, using the same codes. The second round was conducted much more comfortably. Although the final result was largely similar, I felt the second round was somewhat more precise and that the learning outcomes more closely matched the categories explicated by Hoggan's typology. At the end of this process, I was much more confident in my coding choices overall. This second round of coding was used for my analysis along with the memos recorded in both rounds.

**Memos.** Research memos are an important aspect of qualitative coding used to document emergent ideas and themes as they are discovered (Saldaña 2016). Throughout the coding process, I recorded notes and memos, often cross referencing transcripts and noting commonalities or essential similarities in the experiences. This began the analysis process by identifying code patterns within and across narratives. The relationship between the transformative learning framework and essential experience of conversion emerged as codes were mapped between cycles. Codes were grouped across narratives to identify and describe the phenomenon, and I began to document emergent themes in the data.

### **Emergent Phenomenology**

Insights were documented as they emerged from the data about the phenomenon within the transformative learning lens. Moustakas (1994) instructs the phenomenological researcher to "construct a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essence of the experience" (p. 121). The themes that emerged in my analysis were used to create a picture of

the participants' experience and the influence of their RCIA classes' programmatic setting. I began to construct a description of the essential experience of learning transformation using Mezirow's phases of transformation as a trellis for exploring the journey. Individual excerpts were selected to illustrate and support shared aspects of the experience or to highlight areas of divergence. This narrative continued by examining the formation and interdependencies of the learning outcomes that appears across interviews. While not all participants experienced growth in each category with equal weight, the narrative constructed a view of the general perspective transformations that the conversion process incited. Organized by learning outcome, I explored the ways the phenomenon manifested into actual transformations to the participants' frame of reference and ways of making meaning.

The discussion that follows will offer the "essential, invariant structure" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82) of the phenomenon and any significant findings such as its relationship with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. Finally, new and unanswered questions were noted as they arose and potential direction for future research was documented.

### **Validity of the Research Process**

Throughout the process, it was important to remember my own Catholic faith and the preconceptions it brings to my perspective. The intent of this research remains one of studying the process of transformation in religious conversion without consideration of the validity of those beliefs. Steps and delimitations were made in the research process to support the integrity of this goal. This involved a process of bracketing my biases and expectations as a way of acknowledging their potential influence on my analysis and minimizing their threat of biasing my results (Creswell, 2013).

**Collecting and analyzing data.** In order to minimize leading or biasing the participants' answered during the interviews, I generally did not volunteer specifics about my own religious perspective, except in broad terms such as confirming I was a Catholic when asked or relating that I had family members who also converted.

The interview protocol did not ask the participants to state or justify their personal position concerning any specific issue or teaching of the church. However, because reflection on changing beliefs was fundamental to the conversion of my participants, such topics were ubiquitously volunteered in the interviews. Participants often gave examples and personal positions while describing their reasons, obstacles, and outcomes of conversion. This data was used in the subsequent parts of the research to explore and elucidate the process of transformation, never to authenticate or evaluate the participant's Catholicism. This study does not explore the Catholicity of the participants' views or their perspectives on the Church's dogma.

In similar regard, the code list was created to code for evidence of learning transformation, not particular beliefs or explicit conclusions. Rather, the a priori lists examined the process of transformation and the transformative outcomes. That is, the codes highlighted shift in the way meaning is made, not the meaning itself.

**Transformative Learning.** There was similar need to bracket and acknowledge the influence of my expectations and understanding of learning transformation. Throughout the coding and analysis process, I reflected on and modified the emphasis I placed on the ideas drawn from my literature review and I revised working approach toward learning transformation to be more true and useful to the description to the phenomenon under study. My expectations and preconceptions initially overly emphasized the epistemological elements of learning

transformation. My analysis process allowed me to bracket these expectations as tentative, and I instead relied on the coding process to explore the process of transformation and its outcomes in the narratives. As a result, my definition of transformation became more open to different domains of knowing in order to more accurately capture the range of learning experienced by the participant. This ultimately resulted in a model of a transformative learning process that held self-knowing at the center rather than epistemology.

Bracketing my understanding of learning processes and my own experiences with Catholicism ultimately synthesized in a need to critically reflect my own experience of learning and growing the relationship between myself and my faith. Early in the data analysis, I drafted a memo, in which I outlined a rough model of my own understanding of the ways my Catholicism developed over my life, and how I grew in my own faith. Because my own Catholic faith developed throughout my childhood, I found it important explore and then set aside my bias towards the way religious education unfolded. My personal experiences showed themselves to be rather incomparable and unhelpful in exploring the way the adult converts in the study approached the faith. Exploring and isolating those expectations helped me minimize their influence on analysis of the participant data.

**Trustworthiness.** Finally, my bracketing process involved noting other questions and considerations about validity that came to my attention during the analysis. These were noted for further exploration during the discussion of my results. For example, it may be argued that my bias as a Catholic exists in the very premise of applying the theory of learning transformation to a doctrinal system of belief or in the presentation of Catholic conversion as a positive form of growth. Alternatively, my experience in adult education has certainly influenced my perspective

on applying an educational model to the study of a spiritual change. Both of these concerns are reflected in the final chapter of this thesis.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This chapter describes the learning transformation process in the context of Catholic conversion as a shared phenomenon among the participants. It contains summation of the insights uncovered during the analysis of the data. After a brief description of the participants' backgrounds, this chapter will describe the essential aspects of the transformative process experienced by the participants using Mezirow's phases as a general structure and noting where significant divergence occurs. I describe the breadth and depth of the conversion with evidence of transformation in multiple contexts in the learner's life. This is followed by an exploration of the common and significant outcomes of learning transformation, organized by the major categories of Hoggan's typology. Finally, this chapter will discuss the intersection between the process of transformation and the formal participation in RCIA.

### **Participant Backgrounds**

Of the 13 participants interviewed, there were six women and seven men. The age of the participants at the time of conversion ranged from early 20s to late 60s. Seven had a Catholic spouse or significant other, one converted alongside her husband, two converted while a spouse remained Protestant, and three made no mention of a significant other.

Six participants came from an actively participating Protestant background. Two came from a Protestantism that they had grown somewhat disengaged from. Three grew up mostly nonreligious. One came from a nonreligious household with Jewish roots. The last came from an actively atheist perspective after previous religious experimentation. For reference, each participant is briefly described in Appendix C using their assigned pseudonyms.

## **The Process of Transformation**

The details of the each participant's conversions were as varied as the participants' own backgrounds. The shortest conversions happened over the course of a year or two, while others related stories that unfolded over decades. However, common themes existed across these stories, including identifiable steps that brought them closer toward conversion and embracing of a new Catholic identity. The shared experiences described in this study detail a process of critical reflection, learning, and change that closely align with Mezirow's phases of transformation. The participants painted a picture of deep perspective transformation, and the outcomes of their experience reflected new ways of making meaning and new lenses for understanding themselves, their beliefs, and their worldview.

Mezirow expected variation to his proposed 10 stages, and the coding process proved this study to be no exception. As should be understood, these phases were not a clean cut series of discrete timeframes, but general movements along a stream of change. The two biggest variances were stages 7 and 8. Mezirow's ordering emphasizes these phases as they occur after a conscious plan has been made to seek change (Phase 6). However, in these interviews acquisition of knowledge and provisioning of roles frequently occurred before a need for change was recognized or accepted. In fact these often played a role in coming to those conclusions. "Acquiring Knowledge" was generally overlaid throughout the entire process, often acting as a catalyst for the progression of other phases. It would be hard to single out a specific period where acquisition of knowledge was commonly concentrated or more significant to the process of transformation.

Of course, the formal instruction given during the RCIA program was a consistent element of the conversion. However, the participants described other significant forms of

knowledge building including reading, research, electronic media, and discussions that sometimes occurred even years before entering RCIA. In addition, the amount of significance the participants placed on the formal instruction as part of their acquisition of knowledge was extremely variable.

In a somewhat similar capacity, sometimes provisioning of roles (Stage 8) was tightly tied with exploring roles, and it often became difficult to distinguish the two. By the time they decided firmly to convert, some had already been provisioning this lifestyle for quite some time, even using the provisioning as a part of critical reflection and recognizing the need for change. On the other hand the provisioning did grow deeper, more pronounced and more self-reflective as the process evolved. For these reasons, these two phases are more difficult to fit into the ordinal narrative of stages. Instead of trying to force such a fit, it proved better to observe these two phases as they occurred throughout the journey and observe where they were more concentrated, meaningful, and lasting as we explore the transformation process.

**Early stages of transformation.** Some of the participants had carried a certain discontent for a significant amount of time before exploring Catholicism, while others' disorienting dilemma began with their first exposures to the Church. For many the disorienting dilemma manifested in a very specific instance. For everyone there were always other people involved, whether it was friends, relatives, or even writers with whom they felt a connection.

Richard described a trip to the Holy Land with a group of 39 Catholics. He explained that through their stories, conversations, and actions over those ten days, "they collectively made an incredible impression on me." He even brought a photograph of the group to our interview to emphasize how important the people, and the closeness he felt with them were in prompting him to convert. His experience with them was so significant that upon returning, he wrote a letter to

them, explaining the impact they had made on him. He said, “I actually saw Jesus in you. I did. It came alive for me...People can see it in you. You don’t have to be talking about it all the time...you don’t have to be pushy about it. They can see it in your life. And I said, I saw it in you guys’ life.”

For some the disorienting dilemma was triggered by the prior conversion of someone close. Fiona’s sister’s sudden decision to become Catholic prompted self-examination about her own religious association. Fiona realized she was “dried up and bored” at her current church. Similarly, Megan described the initial negative impact her brother’s conversion had on her family. This led to a series of conversations with her brother that began confrontational, but ended up as an assessment of her own assumptions:

“It kind of went through that whole process; I was asking him stuff, and then when he was explaining it, I was like oh. Like that makes a lot of sense...And then it kind of got me thinking. And then I started asking him, like more and more questions.”

Both of these experiences prompted self-study and research by the participants. Fiona began exploring Catholic websites, staying up late “night after night...reading through everything just to see what they’re believing”. Megan compared what her brother was telling her with her own independent research, and began listening to Catholic podcasts. Acquiring knowledge played a significant role in their ability to critically reflect on their previous beliefs and in leading them to recognizing a need for change.

For others the disorienting experience was a more internal challenge to their theology. Peter told me, “[Jesus] prays to God the Father that His followers be one. And I definitely didn’t see that in the churches where I was at.” For David, it was exposure to Catholic writing that resonated with him, coupled with growing dissatisfaction in his current denomination. He found

himself increasingly at odd with his previous denomination's approach to sacramental theology and prayer as well as its increasingly political moral framework. He explained that "the Church doesn't take a position on [US political allegiances]. Part of that is Catholic Church being global as opposed to a US centric." Peter and David both related a similar experience of distress when their respective pastors improvised and changed the words of Jesus during a Communion prayer. It challenged their understanding of interpretive authority regarding Scripture.

Hunter was disoriented by discovering the writings of the earliest Christians. He told me, "I started to look at them, and I'm like wow, a lot of stuff they believe is not what I believe. Well, where did my stuff come from?" This caused him to critically explore where his assumptions originated, such as the idea of the Bible being infallible and inerrant. He told me he had never "looked at *how* it became infallible and inerrant." Peter, David, and Hunter all developed deep resonance with Catholic writers, contemporary and historic, as well as Catholics in their lives as they continued to challenge the assumptions of their previous church affiliation.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, often the longer a participant carried this discontent before taking any action on it, the less able they were to identify a specific disorienting dilemma. Luke, who grew up without religion, ambiguously explained, "by the time I was reaching my 20's I started realizing something was missing" without identifying an event that may have prompted this realization.

Jonathan's disorienting dilemma may have been a prior experience of transformation that gave him the tools to intentionally examine his forms of knowing. Having put a friend in the hospital, Jonathan described a "turning point" after "sitting there thinking, 'God, where am I in my life now?'" This led to a deep growth of involvement and agency in his Protestant faith. Jonathan became deeply involved in Campus Crusade for Christ, and continued

involvement in Christian ministry throughout his life, eventually becoming an associate pastor. He also became involved in classical apologetics, exploring the very epistemic assumptions of his faith. He explained:

“You start with the concept of knowledge, how do we know things, and then you move around to theism, ‘what’s the view of God that is true?’ on to ‘Do miracles exist?’, and the historical reliability of the New Testament documents, what do they say about Jesus, His claim to be God, what validates that?”

Jonathan’s subsequent experience involved decades of interacting with and learning from Catholic friends and writers. Because he was so deeply in touch with his beliefs and well exercised in critical reflection on it, this entire time frame could be viewed as a process of constant self-examination and assessment of his assumptions.

Consistently, some element of their life spurred these individuals to look more closely at their beliefs and assumptions and engage in a form of critical reflection. Their currently held religious identity wasn’t meeting their need. Something significant in their spiritual frame of reference no longer rang true for them.

**Middle stages of transformation.** For each of the participants, as they dug into processes of learning, critical reflection, and self-examination, they eventually recognized a clear need for change. Elizabeth explains, “Eventually I kind of started feeling the call... I started to really feel the need, almost, to attend and to hear and to learn and see.”

The nature of the initial dissatisfaction often led to exploration along the same lines. However, the initial focus did not appear to ultimately dictate or limit the eventual transformation. For example, those with doubt about their theology, such as Hunter, began with theological study. Hunter continued researching Church history and Catholic writings, leading

him to provision certain Catholic theological premises such as the Catholic Church's authority for establishing which books belong in the Bible. He explained, "So once I started making a couple of those leaps of faith, it really spiraled my research."

Meanwhile, those who felt they lacked a sense of belonging were more likely to explore and engage with new faith communities. Richard, who credited the people on his Holy Land trip as the inciting incident, dug deeper into these new relationships. Having attended Mass for years with his Catholic wife, the new role he was provisioning was a deeper engagement with the community.

"I think I could have read about Catholicism over and over. That wouldn't have done it for me. It was more the interaction with the people. The human connection with the people that made it possible for me to really jump over this bridge that had been holding me back."

**Protestants.** With a more developed sense of spiritual self-knowledge, the Protestants' paths toward explicitly choosing Catholicism tended to be more unidirectional. Once they recognized a need for change, they jumped quickly from exploring Catholicism into provisioning it as a new lifestyle. Joan decided to convert after a few years of exploration which developed smoothly into provisioning Catholicism, "After going to church for a year or two I decided that I just wanted to—that I was basically Catholic, and I had already kind of accepted the teachings, and I already going to church every week." Megan said that when she first started attending Catholic Mass, "I was like OK, this is literally what I've been missing this whole time."

Fiona explained her exploration as just kind of a slow, wearing down until "I'm like, this makes sense; this is actually what I believe." This led her to begin attending Catholic Church regularly, "all while I was holding the job at the Baptist church because I still needed to make

money.” As she became more decided in her path, exploration bled into provisioning a Catholic identity. This meant making concrete sacrifices for her new direction.

“By the end of that year, I quit my job...That was the steady income I was making. But I was just getting so spiritually dried up by it. It was just sucking the life out of me almost...it was just so much less spiritually fulfilling than I needed.”

*Nonreligious.* For those who came from a non-religious background, their initial dissatisfaction was often less specific. Subsequently, the exploration was often more broad, investigating several religious organizations as they refined their understanding of what they were seeking. Luke related a process of exploration where he “started going to different churches and checking them out. And that went on for a few years, just going to different ones.”

Nancy, who had Jewish heritage, took classes at a local Temple, then a class on Christianity at the YMCA, and later explored contemporary Christian services. As she explored these new roles, she reflected on whether they were meeting her need for change. She explained that Judaism “wasn’t reaching [her] heart” and that often the megachurch she visited “just left [her] cold.” Her introduction to Catholicism came through a new relationship with a Catholic who invited her to attend Mass. She says, “the more that I went and the more I was just listening and letting the words roll over me, the more I just found the words of the Mass so incredibly beautiful.”

Eventually, all of the participants decided to make a formal plan for a deeper commitment to Catholicism by joining the RCIA program. For some it felt like an inevitability. Peter explains, “I knew I had to, uh, in terms of personal and intellectual integrity, I had to become Catholic for a few years before I actually did it.” For others the decision to move forward came in a significant moment of clarity. Gareth described a profound spiritual

experience in an Italian basilica that moved him beyond exploration of options to a solid path toward Catholic conversion.

“I just felt like this breathe of fresh air within me it was like “whoa this is it. I’m here. Like, this is what it’s all about”. And then as soon as I got back from Italy, that’s when I decided to go to the RCIA classes and pursue it further.”

**Late stages of transformation.** Although every participant’s path eventually led him or her to formal involvement in the RCIA program, this did not necessarily coincide with the next steps of Mezirow’s transformation. As previously stated, some participants exercised significant levels of acquiring knowledge and provisioning new roles beforehand. In a similar way, exercising new frames of reference happened at different points in relation to the RCIA process for different individuals. This section continues the discussion of the process of transformation generally. A later section will compare this with the timing of the formal faith formation classes. In this part of the transformation, participants described their provisioning of new roles and a new frame of reference as well as the influence their conversion began to have on the way they were making meaning in their lives.

According to Mezirow, “a mindful transformative learning experience requires that the learner make an informed and reflective decision to act on his or her reflective insights” (2000, pp. 23-24). This was observed in the participants during this part of the transformation with a reflective increase in the provisioning of their actions and roles. Megan, who converted with her husband and three children, explained how her family engaged in Catholic practices like abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent. Fiona, her parents, and two adult siblings all ended up converting together. It became a family affair and a form of bonding. Family discussions

became common as they “spent a lot of nights talking about things” such as Church history and Catholic belief.

It was during this time of learning and engagement that the participants really began to adopt new frames of reference. Gareth explained a revelation that opened up his ability to understand his sense of something missing, “I was approaching religion as a knowledge base, where I needed it as more of a love, faith base.”

Hannah, who had been an atheist, explained that her initial objections to Christianity were based on specific tenets and philosophical disagreements, such as reconciling faith and science. Yet it was a very personal sense of belonging that moved into focus as she explored Catholicism. She explained, “I had never had anyone care to invite me to anything before” and “I was experiencing the community and the love that I had desperately lacked in my life.”

Luke recognized an interplay between both education and socialization shaping his views. “It’s mostly just a lot of the stuff makes sense to me after I learned it; and also I like being a part of the community so that’s kind of inspired me to accept some of the beliefs as well.” Richard described a shift in focus as well as becoming more intentional in the things he gives his time to: “I pay attention to things differently, so therefore I must be different.”

The participants began using their new roles and beliefs to examine themselves and their actions in new ways. Joan explained, “It’s something that happens like every day, every minute, you know, you make choices every day and you are forced to be like, OK, is this the right thing to do, is this the not right thing to do?” Hunter described how the listening to writings of St. Augustine caused him to recognize and challenge a closed mind he had toward the wisdom and instruction of others. He says, “And I just remember listening to that because I was headed home

to Ohio and I was like, wow. Like that's me. That's literally me. I think I'm smarter than all these people, and I can pick and choose who I get to be taught from.”

For several of the converts, approaching the confessional was a significant influence in their transformation, especially of how they understood themselves. Richard related a story of his first confession helping him work out feelings of anger and guilt he had been carrying for years. According to Fiona, “it helps me to just keep things in perspective, and not let everything get bottled up. I think that's the thing that's just changed the way my inner workings go.”

Ubiquitously, the converts I spoke with explained a changed and deepened understanding of their relationship with their beliefs. It was these statements that really evidenced perspective transformation and new ways of making meaning rather than simply accepting new facts, joining a new group, or adopting new commitments. They were all trying out new ways of exploring who they were, who they should be, and how they understand themselves in relation to their beliefs.

**Reintegration.** The final stage of Mezirow's transformation process involves reintegrating the new frame of reference into one's life. Hoggan (2016) identifies breadth, depth, and stability of outcomes as important in signifying real transformation. In itself, completing the RCIA program and entering the Catholic Church should exemplify a commitment to the new perspective. In Catholic teaching, the sacrament of Confirmation received by the converts is an irreversible and unrepeatable change. Still, simply going through the process does not necessarily prove lasting, perspective transformation.

Instead, the lasting effects of the participants' learning transformation were supported in the discussions of their experiences since conversion. All participants indicated continued attendance of Mass. Most of the participants described a changed or renewed prayer life. Richard

explained, “I’m starting to find solace in praying the Rosary...My prayers have changed a lot. And I pray a lot more too”. David described a similar experience. “[I am] more active in my prayer life, because I have a rosary, which is a crutch.” Peter collects prayer requests in an online blog. “I’m much more prayerful,” he says, “There’s this idea of all of creation being sacramental. It’s a pretty Catholic idea, and I find that as I come to accept this, the more things inspire me to pray.”

Several of the participants also became involved with organizations within their parish. Gareth became a small group leader in another adult faith formation program. Elizabeth became a sponsor for other converts, and began making Rosaries for donations and fundraising. Nancy became involved in a women’s prison ministry, and Jonathan joined an evangelization committee.

### **Transformation in Multiple Contexts**

Changed activity and perception of Church life alone would arguably not have had broad enough context to be considered transformative, “regardless of how impactful the learning is for that context” (Hoggan, 2015, p. 71.). On the contrary, every participant in the study was able to describe the effects of their new roles in diverse contexts outside of their religious life. As Joan explains, “I feel like the teachings, if you come to accept them and hold them as true, then they kind of bleed over into all aspects of your life.”

Luke described how it changed his dating life: “I think it helps me function better, and it gives me a healthier relationship to women.” Gareth credited his conversion for reconnection with his father, from whom he had grown distant. He explained that if it weren’t for the experiences he had with the Church, he “probably still wouldn’t really be talking to him... It was almost like a petty thing before. I was like, why do I have to call my dad, why can’t he just call

me? But now I'm like, what does it matter?" Richard described how his conversion equipped him to care for his terminally ill brother. "I am being a much better support system for my brother because all this stuff like praying the Rosary does give me more strength than I would have had."

For Hannah, a transformed perspective of marriage dramatically affected her career path. She said "One of the things that I didn't necessarily consider before my conversion that since became a very important idea to me is the sanctity of marriage... And so now I am pursuing my Master's in marriage and family therapy"

Nancy tried to explained effort to make meaning out of the tragic events of the Holocaust in her Jewish heritage:

"I am trying to understand it through my new lens of Catholicism...That's my go to thing now. I'm trying to like—everything I try to think of, well how would that be through the Church, you know?"

Near the end of her interview, Fiona summed up a lasting and far reaching change in perspective, both internally and externally that every participant echoed in their own words. She said, "It's really just changed everything about who I am. It makes me much more considerate of my actions and who I want to be...I would hope [it] changes the way I live the rest of my life."

### **Learning Outcomes**

Coding with Mezirow's 10 phases shed light on the process of learning transformation in the conversions of my participants. However, it was through the second coding cycle with Hoggan's typology that I examined the nature of the transformative outcomes of this process. Hoggan offers six broad categories for discussing these outcomes across different models of transformative learning. The typology allowed the coding and categorization of transformative

learning outcomes agnostic to any one model. However, the following narrative includes an analysis of the outcomes flavored by the specific definition of transformation described in this study, involving a critical reflection of one's epistemic assumptions which leads to a new frame of reference for making meaning and justifying beliefs.

**Self.** A changing sense, coupled with a deepening spirituality of self, emerged as a central aspect of the learning outcomes. This is not to say that these played the first or even the most significant role in the transformation. But it was clear in the words of the participants that a changing self-understanding was a driving factor in their decision to adopt a new Catholic identity, and the strength of this transformation appeared closely correlated with the depth and breadth of others.

New understandings of purpose, value, responsibility, and self-examination were often among the most fundamental and far reaching transformative outcomes. These gave context to the other outcomes. It was justification for adopting new behaviors and new worldviews, direction and intimacy for developing their spiritual capacity, a key to exploring new ways of being, and a narrative for grounding new epistemologies in their lived experiences. Hannah put it in the starkest terms, "Catholicism gave me the tools that I needed to value myself. I went from planning my suicide at Christmas to genuinely valuing myself and feeling as though I had a reason and a purpose."

The experiences of the converts all reflected an authentic experience of identity. Jonathan told me, "I feel more complete. I really feel like I've entered the flow of the Church history. I feel like I've just stopped wading, and now I'm into the current." Elizabeth described "seeing that this really is the right path for me." Megan described feeling "confident in [her] beliefs" after years of questions for which she didn't have answers.

The conversion process dramatically informed how the participants understood the stories of their lives. Richard spoke of seeing a purpose in the events that led to taking care of his dying brother. He told me, “I was being prepared for this.” Elizabeth explained the role Catholicism played in understanding the ups and downs of her life.

“Things started to fall into place, and I’m like that... that doesn’t happen to people like me. Good things don’t happen. Only bad things happen because that’s kind of the perception you’ve always been given growing up and the way things have always turned out.”

Luke described how deeply his Catholic identity affected his sense of belonging. “I feel like I’m part of things. So it gives me—it helps my self-image. I just feel like I fit in better.” This sense of belonging and identity was a sentiment shared by several of the participants. After explaining the loneliness of being the last living member of her family, Nancy told me, “I’m an orphan no more.”

Much of the transformation of self-knowing was rooted in new practices of critical reflection. Catholic theology or practices such as the sacrament of Reconciliation played a powerful role in fostering introspection and self-examination. For many of the participants this was a wholly new and liberating way of knowing themselves. Fiona explained, “The idea of confession and reconciliation was honestly a huge huge thing that helped ground me and like helped me change as a person... it helps me keep accountable.”

Joan explained that a Catholic framework, “just forces you to just self-examine more.” Peter joked about the power of Catholic guilt, before telling me how it forces introspection. “I feel more acutely the severity of sin and the way that harms people. It definitely affects the way I live my daily life.” David contrasted his new focus with previous models of guidance.

“Different places, curriculum materials, study guides, would basically say look outside of yourself. Where do you see the problems? And I’m thinking that is, for me, unhealthy... And the Catholic Church, if I pay attention, doesn’t let me focus too far beyond, or outside of myself to say there are the problems there.”

Nearly every participant was able to describe some version of a new or deepened habit of critical self-reflection.

**Behaviors.** The process of critical self-reflection helped participants gain agency in living more authentically with beliefs. Fiona described this connection between self and behavior in her conversion: “It makes me much more considerate of my actions and who I want to be.” Beyond church attendance and prayer life, it affected their actions, habits, and responsibilities in all aspects of their life, encouraging a more consistent and intentional model of behavior. Joan explained the gravity and responsibility that accompanies Catholicism, “You’re expected to live by it, not just when it comes to doing Church things. Like at work. You’ve got to take it seriously.” For many, this involved changes to the way they approached their relationships with others. Elizabeth told me:

“I definitely do have a different perspective in regards to how I choose to approach situations. I have a very short fuse. Through this process, I’ve learned to be a little more patient. Stop and think a little bit more about what I should have said or what I need to say.”

Gareth spoke of actively improving his relationship with his community and his family. He told me, “I feel like I am more open to helping others. Since I’ve become Catholic, I’ve volunteered at different organizations way more than I’ve ever volunteered.” Others told similar

stories of becoming involved in new activities or organizations such as Nancy's involvement in prison ministry and Jonathan's participation in his parish's evangelization committee.

**Capacity.** The habits of prayer were another major behavioral change in the participants. Several described praying more often or in new, more complex ways. During coding, these behaviors also fell into the Capacity category, which is focused on greater capabilities in areas including cognitive development, spirituality, and consciousness. Nancy described how deeply a new level of spirituality penetrated her daily life, "just driving around, I just like look at the clouds and I think about God, I look at sunsets and I think about God."

It might seem trite or self-evident to say that converts had a spiritual change. Yet, it was remarkable how the spiritual growth of the participants was intertwined with shaping their broader epistemic assumptions of how they understood the world, themselves and others. Peter explained how his conversion enriched the way he interpreted the world around him. "There's this idea of all of creation being sacramental. It's a pretty Catholic idea, and I find that as I come to accept this, the more things inspire me to pray."

The relationship between prayer and a changing perspective was significant in some of the participants who showed the strongest transformation. Early in the process, Hannah jumped head first into a new way of praying, somewhat experimentally, and noted major growth in her spiritual awareness: "I didn't really feel like I was talking to the ceiling anymore. I didn't feel like I was crazy. I was really getting something out of it." Richard's changing prayer life helped him find strength in accepting and making sense out of difficult life events. He told me, "One of the most significant prayers that I think I know of now is when Jesus was at Gethsemane...He said, 'Thy will' not 'My will' be done."

Jonathan described a revelation he had in the gym about the way he saw others: “It hit me one day: God died for all these people. Every one of them. And He poured himself out for them. You should be poured out for them as well.” Jonathan was not alone in describing spiritual growth which fostered growth in consciousness or expanding sense of awareness beyond oneself (Hoggan, 2015). Hannah told me, “I went from ‘I’m looking out for number one’ to ‘I’m going to do everything that I can to help the people around me.’ It radically changed my life view. I went from the person who will drive past the car wreck to, I’m the first person that pulls over.”

By connecting this shift in consciousness to a shift in behavior, hypothetical or otherwise, Hannah illustrates how tightly married many of these outcomes are when authentically experience reintegrated into one’s life.

**Ontology.** In a similar manner, these changes in spiritual capacity were often closely tied with the ontological outcomes of the transformation. For many, this was a greater self-awareness of the attributes they value or desire to improve in themselves. Like Jonathan, challenges to grow in empathy and compassion for others was a theme for several of the participants. The theology of the late Pope St. John Paul II changed the way Hunter saw the people around him: “So, you’re no longer a person to be used and manipulated, you’re a brother in Christ, you are Christ Himself, not Himself, but a version of that, showing it to us.”

Fiona told me, “I’d like to think [Catholicism] helps me in considering how I treat other people, and just everything about it is just so much more tangible and physical and real.” Many of the participants spoke of feeling complete or whole. Megan stated, “I just feel like I--It sounds cheesy to say like complete, but I do feel like I was missing something all along, and I’m so happy that I figured it out.”

Hannah explained, “I’ve had so many experiences of legitimate profound joy.” Gareth told me that the most significant outcome of his conversion was simply, “I’m happier”. Later he continued, “I want people to be able to share in that same joy...I don’t want to stand on the corner preaching to people, to do it that way. But I think it has changed how I view what my long term relationships with people will be like. “

**Epistemology.** The theoretical framework employed in this research asserts that all transformative learning necessarily involves assessing epistemic assumptions (Dirkx and Mezirow, 2006). In every category, learning outcomes were identified as transformative in that they contributed to new ways of making meaning that prove more true to the learner. However, in respect to the typology this category was used to identify and focus on excerpts that explicitly referred to ways of constructing knowledge and incorporating new ways of drawing conclusions.

This was usually closely related to the changing spiritual capacity of the participant and reflected an increased agency in developing a more consistent epistemology. Fiona explained “I want my spiritual and religious beliefs to influence everything else I believe.” For most, this meant refining their system of morality. When asked about Catholicism’s effect on the way he constructed meaning, Peter explained, “I would just call it having a correctly functioning moral compass.”

More than one described the conversion as challenging them to approach the way they looked at issues of life or human dignity with a more consistent epistemological framework. Several explained changing their opinion on the death penalty, poverty, and service to be more consistent with their other views. Joan’s reconsideration of the death penalty showed a change in the way she evaluates moral actions. She explained, “If you believe in Catholic principles, you

need to believe in the dignity of life in all its stages... Even though they're not innocent, killing somebody at all I guess is wrong."

Hunter and Richard both explained a complex shift they had in understanding how context affects their reading and understanding of the Bible: "You still have your human nature, your worldview, affecting what you're reading, and how you're developing." Jonathan explained a very similar discovery.

"My best teachers from an evangelical perspective, they were going and looking at the Church Fathers, they were digging in the history books, they were trying to understand the context, and that's not Sola Scriptura. And that's where I started to see the tradition of the Church which includes history and tradition has been a major thing that we've all relied on."

For both, this began a dynamic shift in their understanding of teaching authority. They evolved a more nuanced and discriminating view about the way moral and theological knowledge is transmitted, evaluated, interpreted, and lived. Hunter explained, "I came to this realization that through my ideas of Sola Scriptura, I could read the Bible and insert my own relativism into the pages that I read...So, divorcing yourself from that...has really just transformed my heart, my mind in really just ways that I wouldn't have even thought were possible."

This change in epistemology of moral teaching authority was seen in others, though perhaps not as explicitly laid out. Joan, who had spent some years without a strong religious direction, described in several places the difficulty of self-examination without a clear grasp of one's own moral convictions, saying "it's easy for you to do something wrong and justify it away." She later explained, "I always believed in like the morals and the teaching of you know,

being nice, and not judging, and loving God and love thy neighbor and stuff like that. But taking that and interpreting it with an authoritative body—that can kind of fill in the blanks.”

However, this was not a uniformly holistic acceptance of the Church leaders’ opinion on everything. Some who mentioned disagreements with Church teaching, practices, or even just trends, were able to do so with a degree of lucid reflection. For those who showed deep epistemological transformation, there was a deepening of their premise and reasoning rather than a simply reactionary viewpoint. Gareth’s Catholic identity has become deeply integrated into his frame of reference and process for evaluating knowledge, even on issues where he is inclined to disagree with the Church’s conclusions:

“I don’t necessarily agree with everything the Catholic Church says. Some things, I’m like, I shouldn’t say I \*disagree\*. I don’t—maybe I don’t understand it. But it makes me research issues more and come to my own conclusions. Sometimes I will, like if I’m confused about something, I won’t necessarily go, ‘I’m just going to Catholic Church. I’m part of that Church, I’m just going to side with them.’ I’ll meditate on it, I’ll marinate on it.”

On the other hand, Elizabeth was occasionally clear to draw the line between where she believed the Catholicism had the authority to inform her and where it did not. In regards to certain moral perspectives, she explained, “Nothing the Catholic Church has done has really changed me in any of those perspectives.”

At times, this distancing seemed correlated with a distancing of her sense of self as well. While discussing the positive and negative aspects of the Church community, She told me, “Actually I do feel like sometimes group mentality happens... You know there are moments

where I'm like, 'Is this a cult?' There are moments where it kind of feels odd and it's uncomfortable. But that's how they do things, so I'm like OK, you just kind of go along with it."

Elizabeth's reaction to teaching authority stood in stark contrast to that of Hunter and Jonathan's. She said, "Everyone has their own interpretation of how the Scripture is read or what it says or what it means. What you think it means. You know it really is up to the people teaching you and how their perception is, and how they feel you should portray it." For her, insistence on hard distinctions was a threat to unity, "See that's why I'm just like, no. That's where all the denominations came about."

However, it is worth noting that she still used Christianity terms to frame and describe some of the disagreements that she retained from her non-Christian past, evidencing an epistemological shift in the way she interpreted and justified these viewpoints.

"Regardless of what the Catholic Church teaches in respects to the things that I don't agree with, it always comes back to well God and Jesus teaches you to love and care for one another, teaches you to be kind to one another, and doing these things is not kind. So it contradicts everything that the basic fundamentals of Christianity teaches you. So I'm not going to agree."

**Worldview.** As discussed in the early phases of transformation, the participants challenged many of their assumptions about the nature of Catholicism and even religion in general. However, as the conversion continued, the transformation of the participants' worldview widened. The depth of this transformation was predicated by and tightly tied with a deepened change in sense of self. Hunter explained the dynamic relationship between these two factors:

“Since it’s going external to internal, now the internal goes external again. Now I see people differently, I interact with people differently, and I can see my money and time, and all these other things differently.”

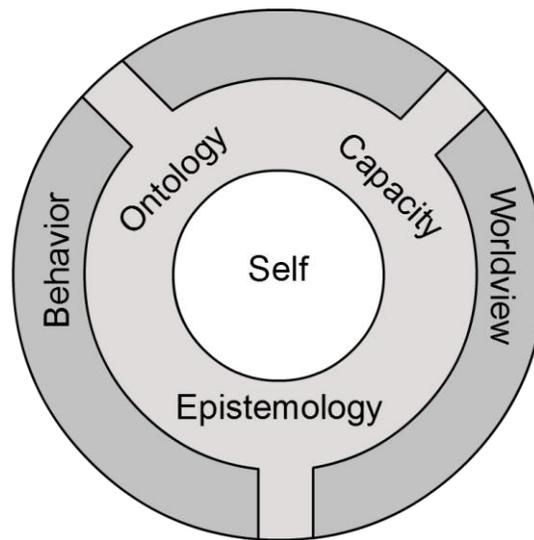
Many participants described becoming more politically open. Some moved toward a more neutral or central perspective, some became less sure of their political convictions, and some saw it as less important or relevant aspect of their lives or force for doing good. For example, Richard admitted, “Since I’ve become more engrossed in Catholicism, I’ve stopped paying attention to a lot of the noise [of politics]. And the reason is, it’s noise...it’s so hard to know what the truth is.”

Commonly, participants moved away from extreme party or ideological alignment and developed a more nuanced or complex view of politics. David said that one reason for leaving his previous church was its increasingly political focus. He explained Catholicism as providing him a new framework for understanding issues. Instead of a traditional conservative or liberal divide, “...there’s Catholic, which isn’t a middle way. It’s a different way.” Hunter echoed a similar sentiment, “As you look more at the Catholic faith, it’s not a party line.”

While the development was driven by a reframing of their beliefs, attention, and priorities, it is unclear how much of the resultant phenomenon was due to the fact that specifically Catholic teaching does not tightly fit into any dominant American political ideology. A different political or social context may have seen a different reaction. However, it was clear that the outcome was an intentional focus on their personal integrity over political ideology. Participants were less willing to compromise their beliefs or responsibility for political identities or convenience.

## Model of Transformative Outcomes

As discussed in the previous section, the transformative outcomes of the participants were substantially interrelated and in many ways, additive. Figure 2 offers a visual model for showing how these transformations developed in relation to one another over the process of transformation.



*Figure 2. Model of Transformative Outcomes.*

This model is not meant to overly imply a discrete series of gates with definitive boundaries, but rather trends and relationships between the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes emerged and matured across the domains of knowing in three general movements: Entry, Immersion, and Maturity.

**Entry.** Transformation began to take shape through the middle ring of Figure 2. Capacity, ontology, and epistemology were the ways of knowing initially challenged or through which the participant first developed new epistemic assumptions. Converts generally had a

dominant initial domain, which acted as a gateway into the deeper engagement with the other domains of knowing.

Converts who had been deeply engaged in previous Christian tradition were more likely to activate the transformation process through epistemology. Their early perspective transformations arose through intellectual or academic inquiries. This included Hunter, Jonathan, Megan, and David.

Converts who came from a nonreligious background were more likely enter through ontology. Their early perspective transformations arose through emotional or affective pursuits. It was not necessarily their identity that was first challenged, but how they existed in the world or a missing sense of belonging. This included Hannah, Luke, Gareth, Nancy, and Elizabeth.

Finally, others were more likely to enter through capacity, especially those who were more passively engaged in their previous religious affiliation. Often there was a challenge to more deeply engage their spirituality or to consider why their previous religious associations were now unfulfilling. Their early transformations arose through spiritual or cognitive exploration. This included Joan, Fiona, Peter, and Richard.

**Immersion.** Regardless of the entry-point, the most significant movements of transformation occurred through the sense of self. Changes in self-knowing became a central transformation as the process deepened. This was generally the point when they began to provisionally understand themselves as a Catholic and explore the implications of that new identity.

**Maturity.** Subsequent learning outcomes took shape around this new self-knowing. Transformation to worldview and behavior emerged with a cumulative nature and generally matured last. Worldviews were transformed by using new epistemologies to re-examine opinions

and conclusions and by applying a broadened spiritual, conscious, or cognitive capacity to the world around them. Behavioral transformations grew out of a desire to put conclusions drawn from new epistemologies and affective inclinations into practice.

### **Applying the Model: Hannah.**

The Model of Transformative Outcomes was developed from the experiences of all the participants. This section briefly examines Hannah as a particularly representative example.

Although Hannah had early periods of knowledge acquisition through conversations with her boyfriend, her real epistemic learning transformation began ontologically. She explained that her “real turning point was my first Mass over there, I got invited to their pre-Lenten retreat.” This was a very affective experience for her. She said, “I had never had anyone care to invite me to anything before.” This surprise expressed a challenge to adjust her frame of reference. She explained, “I was experiencing the community and love that I had desperately lacked in my life.”

This initial inquiry directly led Hannah to exploration of her spiritual capacity. She explained that after the retreat, “I decided that I was going to pray a Rosary every day during Lent to figure out if God was real, right?...At about the third week, it just really took off for me. I didn't really feel like I was talking to the ceiling anymore.”

As Hannah continued her transformation, she described the dramatic effects that Catholicism had on the ways she knew herself.

“Catholicism gave me the tools that I needed to value myself. I went from planning my suicide at Christmas to genuinely valuing myself and feeling as though I had a reason and a purpose...I transitioned from feeling like I was a waste of carbon to believing that I was a child of God and I had legitimate and inherent worth.”

The ideas of having “reason and purpose” became an anchor for other deep transformations to take place. This idea affected her ontology and capacity, especially in understanding how she existed in relation to other people. This manifest in new behaviors and assumptions of responsibility. She explained, “I went from I’m looking out for number one to I’m going to do everything that I can to help the people around me. It radically changed my life view...I went from the person who will drive past the car wreck to, I’m the first person that pulls over.”

As the interview continued, Hannah discussed important changes to her epistemology that went beyond simply learning and debating the teachings of Catholicism. She described how Catholicism changed the ways she understood marriage and family life and provided a new frame of reference for evaluating these concepts and other aspects of her worldview.

“One of the things that...became a very important idea to me is the sanctity of marriage... And it really kind of struck home for me, learning about Church teaching on this that marriage is something extremely important and it needs to be preserved...It influenced my major, essentially in Catholic terms, I discovered my vocation...now I am pursuing my masters in marriage and family therapy with the ultimate goal of working with couples before they get married.”

Holistically, the description of her pursuits as explicitly vocational evidenced how deeply and dramatically these new behaviors, epistemologies, and worldviews were tied to a new identity and sense of self. These new ways of knowing influenced who she understood herself to be beyond simply a Catholic identity. This illuminated the foundational role of the early transformation of her self-understanding, having a “reason and purpose”.

## **Aligning Transformation and RCIA**

As previously discussed, all the participants experienced a journey of learning transformation along a series of similar phases. However, this did not always align with their participation in the formal conversion program the same way for each participant.

**Entering RCIA.** The stage at which participants first engaged with the RCIA program was somewhat variable. Some participants engaged with the program before resolving to enter the Church. To them, the Inquiry stage of RCIA was more aligned with the exploratory phase of transformation (Phase 5). As they engaged in the later parts of the program, it turned into a more provisional element (Phase 8). These individuals were more likely to start and stop the program on multiple years before.

Others engaged with RCIA after firmly deciding to convert. For them, the RCIA program played a more provisional role from the beginning. Peter told me, “I had already decided to become Catholic before I started going or knew what RCIA was quite frankly.” Megan began RCIA with her husband only after they both felt like they were ready to join the Catholic Church.

**Acquiring knowledge.** In both groups, many had done a significant amount of learning ahead of time. How strongly they emphasized the learning in RCIA was related to both how much they knew coming in and the opinion of the instruction of their particular program. Some related how the classes played a significant role in their catechesis. Richard told me, “I thought well geez, I’ve been going [to a Catholic church] for 40 years, I think I’ve heard it all. I think I could teach the thing. I did not understand the depth. I didn’t understand.”

Others felt that the majority of their learning happened before entering RCIA. Joan told me, “I pretty much knew everything. But it was a nice way to kind of discuss and get a couple of

specific questions answered.” The rest falls somewhere in between. Hannah said, “I enjoyed RCIA, I felt like it was comprehensive...But I also got a lot of my formation beforehand.”

All of the participants acknowledged the importance of learning the information, filling in the gaps, and setting a baseline. David explained, ““By the time I get to RCIA, there’s not a whole lot that I’m learning...RCIA helped with some vocabulary...Very useful for that, because talking with other Catholics, it helps to have a common vocabulary. So that’s a good thing.” However none seemed to emphasize the knowledge transfer in itself as the most significant aspect of the program, even those who were most positively disposed to their experience in RCIA.

**Connecting RCIA to learning transformation.** Those who were the most inclined to describe the classes as significantly formative in their conversion always connected it to a deeper aspect of their transformation. This was often manifest in a deeper, and more reflective provisioning of their new community. Jonathan said of his experience, “So I’m sitting there, and what I’m seeing and what I’m experiencing is a microcosm, the Church here. That you have all kinds. People are coming to church for different reasons...I think RCIA was really helpful to me, because what it’s really showed me is, this is what the body is like here.” Hannah described the importance of the connections she made with her fellow converts: “I do not think I would have enjoyed it nearly as much if I were not in the particular situation I was in with the people I was with. There were about 7 of us and we are all still very good friends to this day.”

The participants most influenced by the formal RCIA program tended to be more engaged and proactive in critical reflection through this timeframe. Richard described his efforts to encourage discussion in class. “I would try to get the class to...start to say when have you seen God in your life this week?” Nancy reached out to her priests as she encountered challenges in

integrating her changing frame of reference into her life experiences. "I said, I'm really having a hard time with this and I would really like to understand how the Church sees it."

These participants were ultimately the most able to articulate direct influences their RCIA formation was having on their frame of reference. Gareth credited his instructors with helping him change his perspective of Catholicism from an inert set of rules into something much larger. "Spread love, you know share my faith, that's what it became about."

**Absence of connection.** Other participants did not describe the classes as particularly influential in their conversion process, sometimes outright suggesting otherwise. Joan told me, "I think some things were a little bit more, is cavalier the right word? There's no way of telling if it really resonated with people." For these individuals, there seemed to be greater risk that RCIA would play more of an obligatory rather than transformative part of the process. "I think it was pretty much a formality," explained Fiona "I was decided that whatever it was going to take for me to get in, I was going to do it." Some participants expressed disappointment that they did not have a chance to engage with their classmates until the very end of the program. These individuals were able to describe shortcoming in the program's ability to deliver additive elements to their transformation.

The rest of the participants simply didn't give details that suggested the significance RCIA had on their transformation. They may have stated positive or negative aspects of the program or the level of instruction, but these descriptions did not reference their transformative learning outcomes or perspective changes. These participants did not necessarily display less evidence or depth of transformation as a whole than the others. It was only the alignment with RCIA classes that was less present in the interviews.

## Summary

Although each participant had a unique story following its own timeline, the testimonies of these converts all suggested a transformative learning experience deeply embedded in their conversion process. Mezirow's phases were well-suited to describe the general movements of the participants' transformative experiences. The coding process showed the participants each experienced most if not all of the phases in a progressive series of events culminating in their conversion. However, with respect to sequence, acquisition of knowledge and provisioning of roles were the most variable in the experiences of the participants.

Formal entrance into an RCIA program did not consistently occur at any specific point in the process. Similarly, while all participants identified positive and useful aspects of their RCIA classes, there was a not shared perspective on its impact in aiding the transformative learning process. Some testimonies suggested the class was highly influential, for others it was explicitly not, and the rest didn't evidence impact either way.

Finally, the participants' stories evidenced deep, broad, and enduring changes in the way they made meaning in their lives. Using Hoggan's typology, learning outcomes were identified across a range of domains. However, changes in self-knowing played a seminal role serving as a cornerstone on which other outcomes were formed. Participants also described significant epistemological changes in their framework for understanding moral, spiritual and dogmatic issues. For most, this involved a new frame of reference for evaluating religious teaching authority, although they came to different final conclusions

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter discusses the significance of the findings in the previous chapters, exploring them in the context of real world applications and issues. It offers practical recommendations for executing RCIA programs and suggestions for future research.

### **Who am I?**

Franciscan tradition holds that a fellow brother overheard St. Francis praying: “Who are you, Lord my God, and who am I?”

That short, simple prayer is a powerful summary of the transformative learning process explored in this study. The experience was oriented toward making meaning of who they were and who they aspired to be in response to new faith, new experiences of grace, and new religious beliefs. Regardless of what motivated the participants to begin or continue their conversion, this fundamental dynamic was the heart of their learning and growing process. It seems that a key to understanding a convert’s new frame of reference is questioning how they use the frame to understand themselves. Across the board, the more lucidly a participant was able to describe transformation of their understanding of self, the broader and more significantly they described all other learning outcomes, including complex epistemological changes in the way they engaged with moral and theological knowledge.

Learning or accepting a particular Catholic idea, whether it was a new way of interpreting Scripture, a new perspective on moral authority, an openness to different voices both contemporary and historical, or a new approach to theological concepts, is not, in isolation, transformative. These things are important because they helped shape their perspective and build a better understanding of Catholicism; they were often discoveries that built momentum toward conversion. However, in the participants’ own words, these did not constitute the conversion

process itself. It was when they engendered a need, steered the direction or illuminated the path toward change.

For example, Jonathan described how a particular belief about Mary was not a conclusion he would have ever come to outside of Catholicism. Convincing him of this tenet in isolation likely would not have brought him to Catholicism for the same reason that his journey into the faith helped him articulate that his ability to deduce this belief was relatively insignificant in his understanding of himself as a Christian.

Consider how the stereotypical call of the prophet is “Repent! Repent!” and not “Study! Learn!” This reflects the old and basic truth that real conversion requires a personal response to spiritual enlightenment. In adult educational terms, adopting a new frame of reference is a holistic lived experience, not an intellectual acquiescence.

In other words, a conversion that only adopted new teachings as fact or religious practices would not constitute a transformation. In the educational experience of the converts, theology, catechesis, and practice play a crucial supporting role to the twin process of spiritual and self-exploration. Religious inquiry becomes transformative when it asks in the most fundamental way, “What does this say about who you are?”

### **Recommendations for RCIA**

As explained in the literature review, the language of the Rite (1988) suggests that the instruction given should lead the candidate toward a profound change that prepares them for the Christian life, using terms such as “conversion of mind and action” (p. 63), ‘pass[ing] from the old to a new nature” (p. 39), and “[the] transition brings with it a progressive change of outlook and conduct.” (p. 39). The Rite outlines the journey in three steps of gradual change in understanding and roles. The RCIA program is trying to nurture the learner’s relationship with

the faith and integrate it into their lives. This can be understood in adult educational terms as assisting transformation. Thus the program should use the learning outcomes and magnitude to understand how well they are assisting this transformation.

This research does not offer transformative learning as a new approach to the goals of conversion. Rather it is a way of explaining and understanding the existing goals of the process in ways that can be compared and evaluated for efficacy. Moreover, transformative learning provides the vocabulary and theoretical framework for understanding the role an educational program plays in fostering the adoption of a new role or frame of reference, here the conversion to Catholicism.

The participants in this study painted a picture of conversion driven by self-directed exploration. While personal experience will likely always play the primary role in undergoing these types of transformation, RCIA programs need to be focused on guiding, focusing, coaching, and nurturing the process.

Certainly, teaching Church doctrine and ensuring a baseline of understanding of the teaching of the faith is an important part of this process and a significant goal unto itself. David remarked on the importance of having a “common vocabulary”. However, faith formation classes should not limit themselves to knowledge transfer. The Rite itself demands the catechesis be more than presentation of Church teaching.

The research showed that just as individuals come into the RCIA process with different levels of knowledge of Catholic teaching, they come in with different levels of transformation. For the instruction given in an RCIA program to truly make an impact on its students, it should find a way to engage the process and enrich it for each participant. Those with the most complaints or skepticism about the classes were not those who had the most prior learning. It

was those who had already undergone significant perspective transformation and did not feel the classes were deepening it. Yet no participant suggested that after their Confirmation they were finished learning or growing as a Catholic. It was quite the contrary.

Learning transformation is not a binary outcome, and RCIA provides an opportunity for deepening the outcomes regardless of whether an individual experienced it independent of the formal program. Further, although all of the participants in this study did experience learning transformation within and without the RCIA program, this was an intentional goal of the sampling process. This does not indicate that all converts necessarily experience learning transformation regardless of their RCIA program's influence.

I suggest that negative comments about RCIA in the interviews were not a result of mismatched levels of knowledge and instruction. This is highlighted by the fact that perspective of the class was not dictated by a previous decision to convert or the amount of prior knowledge. These individuals didn't generally express issue with the level of the content. For example, one of these individuals noted, "the fact that it wasn't too in depth was good because it doesn't need to be." Rather the result appeared to be more fundamentally a shortcoming of the program to recognizably enhance transformation.

From the narrative it was apparent that the RCIA process made the most effect on people when it was engaging their process of learning transformation, whether this was helping them come to the decision to convert or deepening the learning outcomes of those who had already made the decision. Sense of community, group discussion, opportunity for critical reflection, and the ability to connect the content to their new sense of self all play a fundamental role in deepening the transformative learning outcomes the of the converts, regardless of their current place in the process.

While this research examined the process of learning and types of areas of outcomes without evaluation, the Catholic Church explains that instruction should lead to “an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts” (1988, p. 39) and “while presenting the Catholic faith in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the Spirit” (1988, p. 40). Therefore an RCIA program has an explicit interest in guiding the transformation within the framework of its own doxy and praxy. This research shows that learning transformation accompanying conversion can and does happen outside of the context of RCIA. However, this does not diminish the purpose of an RCIA program to orient the converts toward its stated goals of appropriate Catholic formation.

### **Evaluating Faith Formation**

One intention of this study is to lay the groundwork for exploring the relationship between the formal instruction and the transformation. Before examining that relationship, I had to validate the transformation as both a goal of the program and as an actual experience.

This phenomenology shows that adult conversion to Catholicism is a strong context for learning transformation. The participants I spoke with painted a picture of deep perspective transformation, their journeys correlated closely with the process outlined by Mezirow, and the outcomes of their experience reflected new ways of making meaning and new lenses for understanding themselves, their beliefs, and their worldview.

These outcomes are closely aligned with the stated goals of the RCIA program, proving learning transformation to be an appropriate model for explaining the goals of adult faith formation and understanding the real learning experience of its participants. This study, however, did not attempt to quantify the learning outcomes in connection with specific activities or

segments of the instruction and cannot, therefore, speak to their efficacy in fostering the transformation. However, this phenomenology does suggest that the use of transformation as a model for evaluating efficacy is worthy of further quantitative research.

### **Reconciling Religious and Educational Lenses**

**Making spirituality formulaic.** Objections may be raised that applying a framework of adult education is overly academic or formulaic in examining deeply spiritual experiences. The intention of this research is not to explain or qualify the experiences. Instead, the intention is to describe the learning process that accompanies them in an effort to assist interest in adult religious education efforts.

Just as a study of cancer recovery as a transformative experience would not claim to explain the pathology, neither is learning transformation a stand in for theology in a conversion experience. Transformative learning does not encompass all the theological elements and processes of spiritual growth, or Catholic conversion specifically. I believe that ideas such as interactions with grace or divine intervention fall quite outside of the capacity for transformative learning theory to analyze or categorize. That is, we cannot map immaterial elements to a specific stage in the process, and these elements must be bracketed to a certain degree. However, when their perception acts as a catalyst in the learning process, we can use learning transformation to examine the responses, behaviors, or motivations of the individuals.

**Transformation and institutional authority.** Mezirow (2000) describes adopting a frame of reference that is, among other things, more open. An objection may be raised that a move toward the traditionalist institution of Catholicism is at odds with the somewhat more modernist applications of transformative learning theory. Concerns may exist that a dogmatic faith is too rigid to be amenable to the self-directed focus of learning transformation. Kegan

(2000) specifically lays the transformative process along a path that moves past a traditionalist framework toward a modernist, and ultimately postmodernist way of authoring epistemologies.

I am wary of using this perspective to categorically preclude putting confidence in didactic institutions or philosophies. In reality, everybody accepts some form of external teaching authority because nobody is capable of deriving all of their understanding independently. Consider a person who, through study and analysis, concludes the scientific method veritable and more broadly, puts trust in the scientific community. This would hardly be considered a move toward a more primitive epistemology. Rather, this change involved the development of agency and discernment over the process of placing trust and incorporating external authority into epistemic assumptions.

Of course, many observers will disagree with the Church's claims of authority, the many positions presented under that authority, or the very philosophy of moral authority implicit in its claims. However, the interviews showed the converts' decisions to accept these beliefs were part of a self-directed process of evaluation, changing the way they gave meaning to the concept and justification of moral authority itself. In these instances, the converts became more discriminating, more reflective, and more active in the ways they acknowledged teaching authority. To discount this as transformation because it is believed an incorrect or inferior epistemic process, would undermine the very argument against a traditionalist framework being made. This research shows that the individuals believe their new framework to be truer and more justified for themselves.

Further, the testimonies of the participants described this aspect of their transformation as strengthening the outcomes rather than limiting them. It often led to a deeper understanding of themselves and the development of their actions, beliefs, and behaviors. Joan, who had spent

some years without a strong religious direction, described in several places the difficulty of self-examination without a clear grasp of one's own moral convictions.

### **Future Research**

This research lays the groundwork for understanding the process a convert goes through in educational terms. Broadly, future research should continue to investigate the measurement of perspective transformation in the context of religious conversion. Future research could focus on creating measures for transformative learning outcomes and connect them to elements of an RCIA program to understand correlation and efficacy of instruction. By describing the phenomenon of transformation in Catholic conversion, this research raises several questions.

- What is the incidence of strong learning transformation in a representative, random sample of converts?
- How do we measure the strength of transformative learning outcomes in the Catholic conversion process?
- What correlation exists between the programmatic elements of RCIA and the strength and direction of perspective transformation?
- In what quantitative ways does RCIA affect or inform the perspective transformation?
- Can elements of the RCIA program be measured for efficacy in assisting the transformation?

Unfortunately, the answers to these questions lie beyond the scope of a qualitative, phenomenological design. Future research should attempt a quantitative measure of learning transformation within a religious education program like RCIA. Such research would help elucidate what factors, techniques, and contexts affect efficacy of a program's goals, such as of

facilitating a spiritual growth during conversion. Other research might focus specifically on the role transformation plays in the way individuals change, defend, or justify individual conclusions in the face of a new body of belief. While this research explored at the holistic process of transformation, the mechanics of challenging particular beliefs is a rich field for further exploration both within and without a religious context.

### **Final Thoughts**

Quite recently, after finishing the interview and analysis processes, I became involved in the RCIA program at my own Catholic parish as a volunteer. In the first meeting, each inquiring attendant briefly introduced themselves, explaining why they were here and what had brought them to this point. As I listened casually, I silently compared their brief stories to the phenomenon I have been describing in this research. I was encouraged to hear what sounded like individual after individual in the midst of a transformative learning experience.

I am strongly persuaded that when adult religious educators familiarize themselves with the language and framework of transformative learning, it will provide them with an indispensable opportunity to better understand and cater to the learning needs of almost any individuals on a journey toward religious conversion. I do not offer any of these findings as a substitute for spiritual encounter, but as a deeply complementary force.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

**Project:** Phenomenological Study of the Transformative Learning in Conversion to the Catholic Faith

**Institution:** East Carolina University

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Release Form Signed (Y/N):** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Format of Interview:**

1. Introductions with participant.
2. Describe format of interview, use of audio recording, and the intended use of the data to participant. Obtain verbal consent, explain release form, and ask participant for signature.
3. Explain research to participant in general terms and why they have been asked for their participation.
4. Begin discussion of Catholic conversion experience. It is recommended that phenomenological research interviews be open-ended and guided by the subject's relation of their experience (Moustakas, 1994), (Creswell (2013). Therefore the following

questions will act as only a guide for the interview. Additional questions may be asked in areas of interest or to obtain additional details.

## **Questions:**

### **Overview**

- Describe your conversion experience and how it unfolded.

### **Initial Assumptions/Frame-of-Reference (before transformation)**

- What was your first encounter with Catholicism? What were your initial feelings toward it?

### **Disorienting Dilemma, Self-Examination, Critical Assessment (Phases 1-4)**

- When did you decide to explore Catholicism or the idea of conversion? What factors influenced that decision? *Or* Why did you decide to explore it?
- When were you sure that you wanted to convert? How did you come to that decision?
- What reservations did you have? How did you overcome those?

### **Taking steps toward conversion (Phases 5-7)**

- What kind of learning and exploration did you do before joining RCIA?
- Describe your experiences with RCIA? How did you feel about it? What were the positive and negatives?
- Did any new obstacles arise as you went through the process? Did any factors deter you?
- How would you describe your learning process, both inside of and outside of RCIA.  
What interested you? What drew you?

### **Trying new Roles (Phase 8)**

- Did your perspective change? If so how? Do you think the process changed your perspective on any other part of your life or opinions you held?

**New Roles and Reintegration (Phases 9-10)**

- How did the conversion affect your perception of yourself?
- What do you think are the most significant outcomes of the conversion?
- What has your experience been since your conversion? Have there been any new developments in your perspective?

## Appendix B: Provisional Code List

This provisional list of codes is to be used in first cycle coding for the purpose of identifying transformative learning experiences in the participants' interviews. The list is divided into three parts: the transformative learning process, the learning outcomes, and the transformative magnitude of the outcomes.

### Transformative Learning Process

Mezirow (2000) identifies 10 generalized phases that often form the basis of transformative learning. One or more specific codes, in *“quoted italics”* is derived from each phase, in **bold**:

1. **A disorienting dilemma:** *“Disorienting Dilemma”*
2. **A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame:** *“Self-Examination”, “Feeling Guilt”, “Feeling Shame”*
3. **A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions:** *“Assessment of Assumptions”*
4. **Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared:**  
*“Recognize of Discontent”, “Recognize Need for Change”*
5. **Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions:** *“Explore New Roles”, “Explore New Relationships”, “Explore New Actions”*
6. **Planning a course of action:** *“Plan Course of Action”*
7. **Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan:** *“Acquire Knowledge”, “Acquire Skills”*

8. **Provision trying of new roles:** *“Provision new Role”*

9. **Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships:** *“Build Competence”, “Build Self-Confidence”*

10. **A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective:**  
*“Reintegrate”*

### **Learning Outcomes**

Hoggan’s typology (2016) will be used to label and categorize learning outcome, while the three evidence types will be used to label transformative magnitude.

**Worldview:** *“Assumptions, Beliefs, Attitudes, Expectations”, “Ways of Interpreting Experience”, “More Comprehensive or Complex Worldview”, “New Awareness / New Understanding”*

**Self:** *“Self-in-Relations”, “Empowerment / Responsibility”, “Identity / View of Self, Self-Knowledge”, “Personal Narratives”, “Meaning / Purpose, Personality Change”*

**Epistemology:** *“More Discerning”, “Utilizing Extra-Rational Ways of Knowing”, “More Open”*

**Ontology:** *“Affective Experience of Life”, “Social Action”, Professional Practices”, “Skill”*

**Behavior:** *“Actions Consistent with New Perspective”, “Social Action”, “Professional Skills, Attributes”*

**Capacity:** *“Cognitive Development”, “Consciousness, Spirituality”*

### **Transformative Magnitude**

*“Evidence of Depth”, “Evidence of Breadth”, “Evidence of Relative Stability”*

## Appendix C: Participant Background

The following cards or tables provide a short, identifying overview of each participant and the circumstances of their conversion, using the pseudonyms assigned in this research.

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Jonathan</b>	Male	50-60	Protestant	Married with grown children
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had a significant experience of religious commitment in college after getting in a fight</li> <li>- Associate pastor of Protestant church, very involved in apologetics</li> <li>- Friends and teachers slowly turned him on to Catholic writing</li> <li>- Wife did not convert</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Elizabeth</b>	Female	30-40	Nonreligious	Engaged to a Catholic, child from previous relationship
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discovered Catholicism through fiancée</li> <li>- Felt a call or a “nagging sensation”</li> <li>- Sensitive about not pushing religion onto her daughter</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Hunter</b>	Male	20-30	Protestant	Dating/engaged to a Catholic
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Went to a Baptist college, away from his Catholic girlfriend</li> <li>- Began exploring early Church history, leading to reexamination of his beliefs</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Megan</b>	Female	30-40	Protestant	Married with three children
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explored Catholicism after brother converted.</li> <li>- Husband initially discouraged the idea</li> <li>- Eventually converted with husband and three children</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Richard</b>	Male	60-70	Protestant, attending Catholic Church	Married to a Catholic, raised children in the Catholic Church
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decided to convert after a trip to the Holy Land with a Catholic pilgrimage group</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Joan</b>	Female	20-30	Protestant (inactive)	Dating a Catholic
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Began exploring Catholicism through Catholic boyfriend</li> <li>- Decided to convert after long period of provisioning</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Fiona</b>	Female	20-30	Protestant	Single
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pianist at a Baptist church, felt spiritually unfulfilled</li> <li>- Sister began attending a Catholic church</li> <li>- Ultimately converted alongside two sisters and both parents</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>David</b>	Male	50-60	Protestant	Married with grown children
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Began exploring contemporary Catholic writers</li> <li>- Became disillusioned with politics and theology of previous church</li> <li>- Wife did not convert</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Nancy</b>	Female	40-50	Nonreligious Jewish Heritage	Dating a Catholic
<b>Conversion circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grew up without religion</li> <li>- Explored Judaism and Christianity in adulthood</li> <li>- Introduced to Catholicism through Catholic boyfriend</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Hannah</b>	Female	20-30	atheist	Dating a Catholic
Conversion circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attended Mass as a condition of a date</li> <li>- Became involved in a Catholic campus group</li> <li>- Began praying daily after invitation to a Lenten retreat</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Luke</b>	Male	30-40	Nonreligious	Single
Conversion circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grew up without religion, felt a longing in adulthood</li> <li>- Began exploring religious options, settling on Catholicism as best fit</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Gareth</b>	Male	20-30	Nonreligious	Engaged to a Catholic
Conversion circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grew up without religion, felt a longing in adulthood</li> <li>- Explored several options including Judaism and Mormonism</li> <li>- Transcendental experience in Italian church</li> </ul>			

Identity	Gender	Age Range	Previous Affiliation	Family/Relationship (during conversion)
<b>Peter</b>	Male	30-40	Protestant	Single
Conversion circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Became dissatisfied with theology and community of previous church</li> <li>- Engaged Catholicism through favorite authors</li> </ul>			

