

Training for Consumerism: Education as Enrichment

© Russell Haitch, Ph.D.
Bethany Theological Seminary

Summary: Through the theme of “enrichment,” modern Deweyan views of human experience are integrated with those suggested by Eastern Orthodox theology. Educational guidelines are given for how Christian experience (starting with the experience of death) can be apprehended less as a commodity and more as a communion.

As a contribution to assessing the current state of the field of religious education, this paper studies one value now prominent in the literature—that of richness or enrichment. The word “enrichment” is used often to describe good education, the word “rich” to praise a religious tradition or experience. Tracing the emergence of this value, in writings of John Dewey and others, I try to say why goals like enrichment, as typically used in religious education today, may have unintended and unwanted repercussions, by feeding an ethos of consumerism, or a “spiritual tourism” approach to religion. Christian religious educators can counterbalance the current emphasis on “richness” and “enrichment” with teaching that, in its language and intent, upholds other features of a sanctified life, such as “poverty,” “purity” and “constancy.” Yet my purpose is not to depict these latter concepts in romantic terms, or simply to expand the menu of educational objectives, but rather to show how the language we use reflects (and shapes) attitudes toward basic categories of religion and education. Here the salient category is “experience.” Overall I hope to show how “Christian experience” can and should be portrayed less as a commodity and more as a communion.

1. The Problem Stated

Readers of a recent *Forbes* magazine were enticed to visit the North African country of Mauritania, which “offers many treasures to the tourist.” In the advertisement, a close-up shot of henna-tattooed hands, palms spread out, invites the visitor to experience a culture that has been “enriched by constant inputs” of “varied peoples and customs through the ages.” Indeed, “the visitor to Mauritania walks in the footprints of this *rich* cultural heritage.”¹

In the previous month, readers of a research journal could find advertised a book by Stephen Jay Gould that is said to “illustrate each human’s need for both a rational worldview and a *rich* spiritual belief.”²

What do “enriched” and “rich” mean in such instances?

¹ *Forbes*, Dec. 9, 2002, italics added.

² *Research News & Opportunities in Science and Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 3, November 2002, italics added.

I read these ads as someone who worked in the advertising business for a decade, and write this essay partly to satisfy a personal grouse. On Madison Avenue, the goal was to help companies and their people become richer. I left that career to pursue a calling in ministry, which led to my doing graduate work in religious education. Imagine my dismay to discover that once again the aim is to help people become richer. Right away it could be argued that the concepts of “rich” and “enrichment” in religious education bear no relation to the business world of money. To be sure, the word *rich* has more than one definition. Coming from Celtic words for “king” (*rig*), it once meant kingly or royal; today, *Webster’s* says *rich* can mean *having abundant possessions and esp. material wealth*, or it can mean *significant, meaningful*. But these latter definitions beg further questions—meaningful or significant in what way? When these referents are nebulous, the terms may become empty containers, waiting to be filled by whatever contents of culture are most powerfully attractive.

Several factors thus prompt hermeneutical inquiry. First, in the lived world the spheres of business, education and religion intersect continually. Second, “rich” and “enrichment” are used by those who seek to connect the spiritual life and physical world, so it may not be as easy as it sounds to divide material from spiritual enrichment. Third, the words “rich” and “enrichment” are used by those who tend to agree that words, even in their unconscious associations, shape our sense of reality. And fourth, the last century saw an unparalleled amassing of wealth in the West, at the same time the concept of enrichment gained popularity in secular and religious education. Has there been some kind of mutual reinforcement?

Notably academics who use the concepts “rich” and “enrichment” may be among the first to criticize the goals of business, even critique the tenets of capitalism. Nobody would suggest that teachers who view education as enrichment have intended to instill greed in their students. Still it good to ask how “rich” and “enrichment” are being used today, and what view of religion and education they manifest. To proceed with this inquiry, I would first acknowledge the concept’s utility.

2. The Utility of “Enrichment”

Does the educational value of “enrichment” reflect a culture preoccupied with wealth? It may. It may also be viewed as a special example of a more general problem: how, given a commitment to some kind of empirical approach, can one make a positive valuation without recourse to overtly moral or metaphysical categories? The concept of enrichment has been one way to answer this question. Further, enrichment has particular utility for those who seek to avoid conflicts between different religions, or between religion and science.

Through history, much violence has been propagated by religious motives or justified by religious rationales. The desire to reduce conflict, coupled with the belief that no one religion has a corner on “truth,” makes many scholars disinclined to call a particular religious tradition “good” or “bad.” Then the question becomes what terms to use, if not moral or metaphysical ones. One can speak in aesthetic terms, saying a religious tradition is beautiful; in pragmatic terms, saying it is effective; or in quantitative terms—saying it is old, having many years, or fecund, having many practices or practitioners. Perhaps the term “rich faith tradition” has been a

way vaguely to combine all of the above. For example, the epithet “rich faith tradition” is especially applied to the Orthodox Church, though the same words are used to describe other denominations, and seldom if ever is a tradition labeled “poor.”

The concept of richness also crops up in interfaith dialogue. After such dialogue, a person usually would not say, “now my faith is more true”; but rather, “now my faith has been enriched.” Here richness may convey the idea that cross-fertilization or multiplication of symbols has resulted in a faith that is more sumptuous, more connected outwardly, or more intense in experience.

The concept of richness is employed in interdisciplinary dialogue as well. Given a modernist split between reason and values, or between reason and faith, the concept of richness can refer to values and faith. Even if values and faith are seen as nonrational, still they are said to make life better: they “enrich” life by helping people to cope with hardship or death, or even by giving people a reason to be rational in the first place. In the ad just mentioned, Prof. Gould’s book was said to illustrate how people need both a “rational worldview” and a “rich spiritual belief.” The author himself starts from the premise that people of goodwill wish to see science and religion “working together to enrich our practical and ethical lives.”³ Science and religion need not be at war, so long as science remains responsible for objective “facts,” religion for subjective “meanings and values.”⁴ Gould, a scientist, actually speaks more about religion than science in this book, but conceptually he holds to a modern division between the two. Though separate domains, science and religion both “enrich” daily life.

When interdisciplinary discussion takes a postmodern turn, the concept of richness may appear in another way. One leading scholar in this discussion, Wentzel van Huyssteen, seeks to bring science and theology together on the common ground of evolutionary biology and common value of species survival. He says that science and theology are both “rational” in their own way. Though they may employ different reasoning strategies, both “share the rich resources of human rationality.”⁵ This idea that rationality is a “rich resource” becomes his book’s recurring refrain:

The main theme running throughout the entire book centers, therefore, on the broader, richer notion of human rationality which is revealed in the quest for the values that shape rationality in theology and the sciences.⁶

This sentence yields insight into how “richness” is used by many scholars today. We note that “richer” and “broader” go together. Richness comes from making outward, exocentric connections, and from moving past customary margins or horizons. As the opposite of richness,

³ Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1999).

⁴ Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, 4.

⁵ J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 108; cf., 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 58, 104, 109, 135, 143, 151, 155, 174, 175, 176, 181, 232, 258, 263, 267, 269, 275, 276, 277.

⁶ van Huyssteen, 15.

impoverishment is to become narrow-minded, insular, and impervious to outside influence. For instance, van Huyssteen thinks “fideism” is an enemy of rich rationality, because then theology is closed off from external critique.

In all of the foregoing examples, it seems to me, *the concept of richness couples the notion of expansive connection with the category of experience*. The goal of enrichment often signals some kind of empirical or pragmatic philosophy. Thus enrichment may be said to come from making multiple, outward connections, not only in the world of ideas, but even more in the world of experience. Further, enrichment comes through connecting to various peoples who experience the world. Here the idea of “margins” comes into play: we are said to be enriched when we strive to connect with the experience of people beyond the circle of our customary interactions. Though the postmodern world may be irretrievably fragmented, in the global village the aim is to shore together as many fragments as possible in peaceable fashion.

The striving for enrichment may thus evince a good impulse toward exocentricity and expansion of experience. *However*, I think *the concept of enrichment has itself become impoverished*. To show why, it is helpful first to reexamine more closely the heritage of “enrichment” and “experience” in education.

3. Review of Dewey

The writings of John Dewey cast more light on what has just been said. Dewey has influenced education in America perhaps more than anyone. In his more than forty books and seven hundred articles, he often focuses on “experience,” sometimes describing it in terms of richness and enrichment. Generally speaking, enrichment for Dewey denotes continuity and connectedness. In both philosophy and education, Dewey advocates connectedness—between learners and life-experience ... between past experience and future experience ... between methods of learning and ordinary experience... between philosophical theories and primary experience. In each of these enriching connections, experience is central, thus one understands “enrichment” better with a few reminders about what Dewey means by “experience.” If we tug on the thread of “enrichment,” we find it is tightly woven into the fabric of “experience.”

One reason Dewey likes the category of experience so much is that it helps him to heal the philosophical rift between subject and object. “Experience” denotes at once the person (subject) who is learning and the object being learned. Because of this dual reference, William James calls experience a “double-barreled” word. While “thing” or “thought” is single-barreled, “experience” brings those two together, referring to both subject and object, and to both mental and physical dimensions.⁷

Further, Dewey uses experience to obviate the philosophical rift between noumenal and phenomenal worlds. He thinks idealist philosophers bifurcate those two worlds, then devalue sense perceptions and emotions, by viewing them as inferior to cognition, or as impediments to pure cognition. By making experience his baseline, Dewey combats this kind of idealism, saying “esthetic and moral experience reveal traits of real things as truly as does intellectual

⁷ John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 8.

experience.”⁸ Esthetic and moral experience for Dewey involves sense perceptions and emotions as well as reason.

Dewey thus claims reality for phenomenal things that some idealist philosophy might dismiss as illusions. He notes: “illusions are illusions, but the occurrence of illusions is not an illusion, but a genuine reality.”⁹ He means that things become “real” in the world of experience, where people actually live. The job of empirical philosophy is to study this “life-experience.” The most damning charge against nonempirical philosophies is that they have simply dismissed “the things of ordinary experience.”¹⁰ Dewey seeks to engage these things—and here is where the notion of enrichment comes into play.

In *Experience and Education*, Dewey writes, “all genuine education comes about through experience.”¹¹ However, not all experience is educative. An experience is “mis-educative” if it “has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.” Growth here refers to quality as well as quantity. A mis-educative experience causes one to become callous, insensitive or unresponsive: “then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted.”¹² This “richer experience,” by contrast, means a person grows more open, sensitive and responsive. Dewey is speaking about improvement, but not in moral or metaphysical terms; rather he evaluates experience by referring back to experience. He strives for an internal definition!

In discussing curriculum, Dewey says that the “objective conditions” of education should be judged by “their function in promoting or failing to promote the enriched growth of further experience.”¹³ Good curriculum fosters this enrichment. Formerly education started with “facts and truths” that fell beyond the learners’ range of experience, but the “newer education” chooses “materials which at the outset fall within the scope of ordinary life-experience.”¹⁴ This choice of materials is the first step. “The next step is the progressive development of what is already experienced into a fuller and richer and more organized form...”¹⁵ The concept of richness here refers to the way materials are chosen and then developed in the classroom. The teacher can take cues from what occurs for an infant in the less structured and more “organic” atmosphere of the home. Growing up “the infant learns to reach, creep, walk, and talk” by starting with objects at hand. New objects and events are discovered, calling forth the development of new powers within the infant; the exercise of these powers in turn “refines and enlarges the content of the infant’s experience.”¹⁶ Through this interactive expansion, the “environment, the world of experience, constantly grows larger and, so to speak, thicker.”¹⁷

⁸ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 19.

⁹ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 20.

¹⁰ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 38.

¹¹ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1938), 13.

¹² Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 13.

¹³ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 86.

¹⁴ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 87.

¹⁵ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 87.

¹⁶ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 88.

¹⁷ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 88.

These complementary adjectives—richer, thicker and larger—are meant to describe the process of refinement and the aforementioned principles of continuity and connectedness that guide this process. Dewey advises progressive educators not to jettison the past, saying they should teach in such a way that present experience becomes “stretched, as it were, backward” to take in the past. Present experience is “enlarged to take in the past,” so that it “can expand into the future.”¹⁸ To bring about this growth and expansion of experience, Dewey finds scientific methods are superior, because they are intrinsically connected to experience. He says that in nonempirical methods, theoretical thinking is not so well connected to “primary experience,” and hence “the things of ordinary experience do not get enlargement and enrichment of meaning as they do when approached through the medium of scientific principles and reasonings.”¹⁹

The scientific method is enriching because it is directly connected to the world of experience—and also because it critiques and refines this world. Dewey says, “knowledge has a function and office in bettering and enriching the subject-matters of crude experience.”²⁰ Like oil, experience is worth more when refined. Enrichment and refinement go together. A given body of knowledge has value, but needs the refinement that results from a steady critique of past prejudices. The critical process turns the “crude material”²¹ of primary experiences into “refined, derived objects of reflection.”²² This refinement leads to the “enlarged use and enjoyment of ordinary things.”²³ Empirical methods best accomplish this refinement, producing “fruit in new and enriched experiences.”²⁴ By contrast, daily life grows less fruitful when intellectual thinking becomes preoccupied with metaphysical speculation over whether or why ordinary things even exist. Educators and philosophers should rather learn from scientists, and ask of their method: “does it yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things which the results of physical science afford when applied in everyday affairs?”²⁵

Since enrichment is linked to power, one might ask how this “enrichment and increase of power” are to be measured. One measure of enrichment that may apply to both science and Dewey’s educational theory is increasing control over the environment. The process can be explained this way. Empirically pursued, philosophy and education both study life experience. This experience is already “overlaid” with past interpretations—as scholars say today, it is “theory-laden.” Philosophy and education critique these past prejudices with scientific rigor; for if prejudices are detected, then “results of past reflection” can properly become “organs of enrichment” suitable for being “welded into the genuine materials of firsthand experience.”²⁶ Dewey interfuses the language of science, technology and industry—implicitly contrasting their progressive methods with those of religion. He thinks science is creative, whereas religion is

¹⁸ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 93.

¹⁹ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 6.

²⁰ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 22.

²¹ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 7.

²² Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 3-4.

²³ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 7.

²⁴ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 7.

²⁵ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 7.

²⁶ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 37.

conservative. He writes: "There is not, I think, an instance of any large idea about the world being independently generated by religion."²⁷ Perhaps this assertion itself evinces an uncritical prejudice, lacking scientific rigor. But at any rate Dewey believes metaphysical speculation and talk of Godly mystery may only divert people from their proper pursuit of human mastery:

To idealize and rationalize the universe at large is after all a confession of inability to master the course of things that specifically concern us. As long as mankind suffered from this impotency, it naturally shifted a burden of responsibility that it could not carry over to the more competent shoulders of the transcendent cause.²⁸

Science by contrast is "an instrument of human liberation and enrichment."²⁹ To summarize: *enrichment* entails a *greater degree of connection between learner and environment*, and through the process of refinement, a *greater degree of control over the environment*.

4. Reassessing Experience and Enrichment

How might the religious educator assess Dewey's thinking about experience and its enrichment? To start, one should note that Dewey himself, true to his method, undertakes reevaluation in light of further evidence. In *The Problems of Men* (1946), he considers how the nineteenth-century quest for progress led to progressive materialism rather than the fulfillment of social ideals. He lists "articles of that old faith which, from the standpoint of today, have been tragically frustrated."³⁰ It was thought, for example, that war would be abolished and that industrial productivity would wipe out extreme poverty. Dewey remarks:

The course of events culminating in the present situation suffices to show without any elaborate argument how grievously these generous expectations have been disappointed.... Externally it looks as if the pessimists had the best of the case.³¹

When Dewey, a progenitor of the former optimism, calls it the "old faith," he indirectly acknowledges that his view of science contained an element of religion. There was faith in progress, and in humanity's willingness to use scientific methods for the common good rather than to exploit the poor or make instruments of war. When Dewey said that education should enrich experience, he was concerned with alleviating the same social ills that caused Marx and Lenin to propose more radical measures. While he depicted education in empirical more than moral or metaphysical terms, still he assumed a certain moral sensibility, arguably even a "Judeo-Christian" metaphysic.

²⁷ John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1910), 3.

²⁸ Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought*, 17.

²⁹ James Gouinlock, *The Moral Writings of John Dewey* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), xxxi.

³⁰ John Dewey, *Problems of Men* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 23.

³¹ Dewey, *Problems of Men*, 24-5.

Outside such a context, the idea of an enriching educational experience can mean any number of things. It can mean rich kids taking field trips to Paris; or church youth groups going on summer mission trips, enriched because they return more grateful to live in America and eat American food. Lacking a specific moral and metaphysical context, the pursuit of enrichment may have the opposite effect of what Dewey and others intended.

Central to this problem are the category of experience and the tendency to view experience as a commodity. In advertising, it was recognized that often our goal was to associate the product with an experience, then sell the experience. A particular brand of ice cream would be marketed to women as being a secret pleasure, sinfully delicious; we were treating the commodity as a kind of erotic experience, and perhaps treating the woman as a gullible Eve who could be enticed to eat a bowlful when she was at home alone. However, any conscious manipulation was built upon the unconscious associations between experience and commodity that already had been formed in the minds of women and men creating these ads. Schools and places of worship no less than the advertising industry may portray experiences and commodities as being akin to each other. In fact, advertisers may more easily persuade people that their commodity will become an experience, because educators inculcate them to think of their experience as being like a commodity.

Dewey's writings contain rudiments of this view of experience as commodity. As was said before, he speaks of experience as uniting subject and object, thing and thought. This is a structural definition; it does not prescribe, but neither does it inhibit, a self-centered, ego-possessive approach to experiencing the world. In education, he advocates "adaptation of material to needs and capacities of individuals."³² Here he intends to liberate individuals from conformity to the confines of a preset educational program. But given a particular view of experience, a "needs-based" curriculum may feed a consumerist ethos. Dewey says that education should prepare people for the future, which means a person "gets out of his present experience all that there is in it for him at the time in which he has it."³³ It entails "extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience."³⁴ In the refinement process, the problems posed by primary experience become "means of control, of enlarged use and enjoyment of ordinary things."³⁵ But if experiences are approached too much from the standpoint of what can be gotten or extracted from them, then the world of experience becomes commodified, especially when extraction and refinement are already, in the physical world, associated with amassing personal wealth. All the world's a bazaar, or shopping mall. People may enter the classroom or place of worship as consumers, hoping to "get a lot out of the experience."

Clearly a consumerist attitude is not what Dewey had in mind. He might say that those who are self-centered in approaching experience will not become more enriched, but more callous and insensitive. Such an approach violates his criterion of connectedness. One problem,

³² Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 46.

³³ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 50.

³⁴ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 51.

³⁵ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 7.

however, is that his goal is twofold: not only increasing connection with the environment, but greater control over it. Enrichment refers to both aspects. In harmonizing the two, Dewey's continual reference point is experience. He welcomes the decline of moral absolutes that maintain unexamined biases—for now morality can become a matter of social utility.³⁶ He is glad his empirical philosophy has “no Mosaic nor Pauline authority of revelation entrusted to it”³⁷—for now instead of seeking “*the* good,” thinkers can direct their intelligence toward “the goods that are diffused in human experience.”³⁸ This goodness is intrinsic to experience and to be discovered internally, through experience.

However, there are many ways this discovery process can go, and go awry. A society can reflect on experience and decide somewhat democratically that the best goods are the goods and services that can be purchased. A psychologist can examine experience and decide that the only internal guide to behavior is the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain.³⁹ Political leaders may point to experience and persuade followers that sensitivity is cowardice, while callousness is actually the courage to pursue a social experiment through to its logical conclusion. The problem in each case is not simply a lapse of morality, for morally such positions may be consistent with a worldview that takes experience as its baseline. The problem may reside rather in this worldview and its understanding of experience.

Education for enrichment may therefore inadvertently become training for a self-centered version of capitalism and consumerism, when enrichment is portrayed in terms of experience, and experience in terms of commodity. The admonition, “go to a good school—so you can make more money when you get out,” may actually if crassly express what has been implicitly taught in school: people who have more money presumably have more control over the quantity and quality of their experiences.

The resulting loopholes to social responsibility are numerous. For example, education may have the stated goal of liberation, but freedom is ill-defined when experience is the singular baseline. What if I believe that I “experience” more freedom when I am not only free from poverty, but free from worrying about poor people? It will be difficult at this point to raise moral or metaphysical objections, to say I will damage my soul or incur divine judgment. Morality and metaphysics are already suspect in education because not empirical, and in religion because not peaceable—better to speak phenomenologically of religious experience as what we have in common, despite the diversity of our rich faith traditions. In this situation, morality and metaphysics have not been overtly banished from the discussion so much as rendered obscure by the confluence of factors just depicted: the emphasis on experience, a scientific methodology, the goal of control over the environment.

If education that aims for enrichment inculcates a consumerist ethos, then what is the solution? Obviously it is not a simple change of vocabulary. The word “enriching” is used to

³⁶ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1930), 326-32.

³⁷ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 408.

³⁸ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 408.

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 27: “As we see, it is simply the pleasure-principle which draws up the programme of life's purpose.”

depict improvement without recourse to moral or metaphysical terms such as goodness and truth; but other words—such as *enlarging*, *rewarding*, *growing*, *fulfilling*, *powerful* and *robust*—are also used and equally manifest the same problem. The problem is not the words per se, but their performance.

Nor would I say the solution is a simple reassertion of moral absolutes. Given either modern views of absolutes as abstract propositions or postmodern views of morality as contextual, moral absolutes will likely be experienced as untenable, or seen as facades disguising power relations. Nor again would I say the solution to this problem is a simple resurgence of Christian apologetics, for the task it presents is not a devaluation of Muslim, Buddhist or Jewish experience, but a purification of *Christian experience*. And here the problem is not with the category of experience per se, but with the way that “experience” is understood and experienced.

Propaedeutic to any solution is seeing how a human-centered approach to experience fails in two crucial ways. I say this without meaning to overlook the remarkable discoveries of empirical methods, or the importance of honoring people whose experiences differ from my own. It is precisely these methods and experiences that can teach us about the power of unseen forces to co-opt concepts such as enrichment and experience. A human-centered understanding of experience fails because it cannot do what it sets out to do. To take Dewey’s principles, it strives for connection and control. However, a human-centered focus on human experience has yielded a sobering (therefore helpful) appraisal of how entrenched is disconnection. The division of human experience along lines of ethnic, economic, gender or sexual difference is but the beginning of a process whereby people come to consider that everyone’s experience is ineluctably unique. If there were world enough and time, each person could tell his or her own story, and for each point of convergence would be two or three more of difference. The quest for universals is abandoned in the desire to honor the particularity of experience, though conversely a muted desire for universals returns with the quest for justice. In short, instead of engendering connection—between subject and object, between various subjects or various objects—human-centered approaches to experience appear to heighten the experience of alienation between them.

The second and more serious failure concerns control. As Dewey and other pragmatists propose, a human-centered approach to experience aims at increasing control over the lived world, whether for the good of the individual or humanity as a whole. However, human control consistently vaporizes at the decisive point of life’s most life-changing experience: namely, the experience of death, particularly one’s own death. Nor is control regained through medical or existential talk of terminating life, since the point of embarkation is one thing, launching into the abyss quite another, and possessing control to return something else entirely. While the goal of empirical education may be increasing connection with and control over the environment, poets have long taught that the atmosphere of death mocks human control and makes disconnection complete: “At death you break up.”⁴⁰ The twin failures of connection and control testify to an underlying poverty of human-centered approaches to experience, despite herculean efforts at enrichment.

⁴⁰ Philip Larkin, *High Windows* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), 19.

5. A “Christian View” of Experience and Enrichment

To arrive at a “Christian view” of experience and enrichment, one might begin here, with the experience of death and religious education on death. What have been the Christian voices in a culture that may be simultaneously death-denying and necrophilic? The gospel announces Christ’s victory over death, but the meaning of this message may be missed, because Christian teaching on death has adapted to culture instead of challenging it. I think Alexander Schmemmann gives a good if acerbic description. On the one hand, amid “hectic and life-centered activity,” the Christian minister, when called to dedicate “new skyscrapers and world’s fairs,”⁴¹ affirms this world as if death were nonexistent or irrelevant. On the other hand, when called to speak at a funeral, the minister finds it equally easy “to present life as a valley of suffering and vanity, and to present death as liberation.”⁴² Schmemmann says both depictions falsify the Christian message: the former denies death, the latter the world. The Orthodox Christian view, he says, holds both that death is “the very reality of this world,” and that “Christ died for the life of the world,” not for an escape from it.⁴³

In terms of Dewey’s educational criteria, one could say that empirical accuracy requires acknowledging how there is no full experience of the natural world without the spectre of death, whether aware or unconscious; but also no honest experience of human death without the sense that it is wrong, “unnatural,” not meant to be. More needs to be said about this tension, and about Schmemmann’s construal of the Christian view; specifically, I want to connect this discussion of death with the foregoing discussion of enrichment.

Schmemmann couches his critique in an historical narrative, though the force of the former does not fully rest on the accuracy of the latter. His history juxtaposes “old religion” with new “secularism”—and distinguishes Christianity from both. In the old religion of the ancient world, religion sought to help people, especially help them to die, by reconciling them to the fact of death:

What pains Plato took in his *Phaedo* to make death desirable and even good, and how often he has since been echoed.... [People] have consoled themselves with the rationalization that God made death and that it is therefore right, or with the fact that death belongs to the pattern of life; they have found various meanings in death...; they have formulated doctrines of the immortality of the soul—that if a man dies, at least a part of him survives. All this has been one long attempt to take the awful uniqueness out of the experience of death.⁴⁴

Schmemmann’s critique of Plato has some consonance with Dewey’s critique of idealist philosophy in general. The doctrine of the soul’s immortality is an idea divorced from

⁴¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1965), 96.

⁴² Schmemmann *For the Life of the World*, 96.

⁴³ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 96.

⁴⁴ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 97.

experience, and it is not, says Schmemmann, a Christian doctrine, for it is “based on opposition between the spiritual and the material.”⁴⁵ This idea, as well as ideas that death is liberation or punishment, are no longer tenable; “they ‘worked’ as long as Christianity lived in a ‘religious’ (i.e., death-centered) world. But they ceased to work as soon as the world outgrew this old death-centered religion and became ‘secular.’”⁴⁶

The triumph of secularism (in the West) Schmemmann attributes directly to the success of Christianity; its message “offering fullness of life” liberated people “from the fears and pessimism of religion.”⁴⁷ He thus calls secularism “a phenomenon within the Christian world.”⁴⁸ Secularism rightly rejects Christianity insofar as Christianity has wrongly identified itself with ancient pagan doctrines of death and life. But secularism is also a religion, not the absence of religion and not Christianity. “It is the religion of those who are tired of having the world explained to them in term of an ‘other world’ of which no one knows anything...; tired of having, in other words, life given ‘value’ in terms of death.”⁴⁹ There is some consonance here with Dewey’s experiential philosophy of education, for Dewey also is tired of having this world explained in terms of another world of ideas into which one supposedly gains full access only at death.

If “old religion” sought to explain death and in the process devalued ordinary experiential life, then new secularism seeks rather to explain life by tabling the question of death indefinitely:

The only world we know is this world, the only life given to us is this life—so thinks a secularist—and it is up to us...to make it as meaningful, as rich, as happy as possible. Life ends with death. This is unpleasant, but since it is natural, ...[people] should live as though death did not exist. The best way to forget about death is to be busy, to be useful, to be dedicated to great and noble things, to build always a better world.⁵⁰

Schmemmann notes that secularism does indeed help to make life as rich as possible. In fact, if “help” and “rich” are the criteria, then secularism is better than any other religion. Christianity has even tried to compete with secularism on its own terms, by also claiming also to help people: “To compete with it, religion has to present itself as ‘adjustment to life,’ ‘counseling,’ ‘enrichment’ ...”⁵¹ To extrapolate from Schmemmann: in the competition with secularism, religion becomes portrayed as a kind of commodity, a good or service—to help people cope with life’s difficulties, to make life more enriching.

Schmemmann opposes this version of Christianity, for he says the criterion is “truth,” not “help.” In truth, he says, death is not normal. Old religion and new secularism both normalize

⁴⁵ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 97.

⁴⁶ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 97.

⁴⁷ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 97.

⁴⁸ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 97.

⁴⁹ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 98.

⁵⁰ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 98.

⁵¹ Schmemmann., *For the Life of the World*, 99.

death, attempting to reconcile people to it, whereas Christianity “proclaims it to be abnormal and...truly horrible. At the grave of Lazarus Christ wept.”⁵² Human experience seems to validate this point, and most people would not debate it at the hour when someone they love has just died. Schmemmann’s critique is mordant:

To live in a cosmic cemetery and to “dispose” every day of thousands of corpses and to get excited about a “just society” and to be happy!—this is the fall of man. It is not the immorality or the crimes of man that reveal him as a fallen being; it is his “positive ideal”—religious or secular—and his satisfaction with this ideal.⁵³

What saves Schmemmann from being a pessimist or nihilist is his Orthodox teaching that the world is a sacrament of the divine presence and that Christ died to defeat death for the life of the world. This teaching can be explicated briefly, by drawing on Schmemmann and several other sources.

The world, created good, is given to humanity—not as a commodity but as a means of communion with God. The whole world is sacramental in this sense. The world is not physical or spiritual but both, and its life is in God. In taking and eating of the world apart from obedience to God, the woman and man approach the world as commodity rather than sacrament. They desire to be like God (Genesis 3:5)—but to be like God, apart from God. This is the root sin, and in this separation from God, humanity dies, since life is in God. To be like God is indeed humanity’s ontological vocation (Gen. 1:27), but to attempt it apart from divine communion spells sin and death to humanity and the world. However, Christ the God-man is born into the world to defeat sin and death.

To see how Christ does so, it is necessary to say that spiritual death and physical death are distinct but connected. In both cases the reality of death is opposed to life; and what is life? When the fourth Gospel says of Jesus, “in him was life” (John 1:4), this “life” refers not to a commodity but to communion with God and thence with people and the world; a communion of love, joy, peace, goodness—all these betoken life. Because physical death is experienced as precipitating separation from *this* life, it is greatly feared. In fact the experience is somewhat deceiving, for spiritual death or separation from God is the prior reality. One may be subject to the reality of death while walking down the street, even as one may be free from it while lying in the grave. This death Jesus abolishes. From the start, his earthly existence is the apotheosis of life. It consists purely in love of God and thus love for the world; in obedience to God and thus in the desire to save people. Nor in this respect did his death differ from his life. His desire to “drink this cup” and to be plunged into the “baptism” of crucifixion (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50) was an extension of his life, the final expression of its love and obedience. But—here is the crucial juncture—if death is the absence of this love and obedience, then this death, *his* death, is “deathless.” As Schmemmann says: “because His death is nothing but love, nothing but the desire to destroy the solitude, the separation from life, the darkness and despair of death, nothing but

⁵² Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 100.

⁵³ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 100.

love for those who are dead —*there is no 'death' in His death.*"⁵⁴ Another way of putting it is to say that Christ's death destroys death; in the words of the Orthodox paschal liturgy, "Christ has risen from the dead, trampling down death by death."

Since death as a spiritual reality has been destroyed, and the spiritual is intimately conjoined to the physical, therefore it is not impossible that Christ should rise from the grave; rather, as Peter preaches in Acts, "it was impossible for him to be held in death's power" (Acts 2:24). Physical death as a general phenomenon has not yet been destroyed, because God has not yet destroyed this world in which physical death is an aspect, and even a principle of life and growth. But Christ makes the world once more a means of communion with God, and even transforms death into a passage or "passover" to fuller communion.⁵⁵

Therefore, pertinent to the previous discussion, death is experienced as being both physical and spiritual, as well as both natural and unnatural. What then does it mean to be "true to experience"? It is not to be corseted by an empirical ideology, for that ironically would turn empiricism into another kind of idealism; but rather it may mean admitting factors that for some time appear "nonempirical" or "unscientific." Specifically, as the case of death demonstrates, for the Christian to be true to his or her experience, it is necessary to refer not just to the world or the world of experience, but to God. To the modern mind, however, the ancient Jewish and Christian practice of referring *all* experience to God seems quaint, a manifestation of superstitious thinking and, as Dewey says, human impotence. To be sure, the practice may be obscured by a tendency to construe this reference to God in terms of mechanical causality, rather than first in terms of coinherence and indwelling. Or the practice may be derided because one can find examples where attributing causality to divine or demonic powers manifests psychic imbalance. But as a basic orientation, to refer experience to God expresses a truth, despite obscurity or misuse. The truth it expresses may in fact be what prevents the Christian from misusing the world and other people—misusing them by obscuring the relational nature of experience. When experience is seen as communion with God and through God with other people and the world; when experience is glimpsed that way rather than being viewed as a commodity to be grasped for personal satisfaction or squeezed for meaning apart from God, then (only then) can meaning and satisfaction be received as gifts within this communion. Nor is there less work or learning in this orientation to experience, though the work and learning are by nature communal, at the same time they summon personal effort.

6. Implications for Christian Teaching

I will try to say how the Christian educator may teach toward this theocentric understanding of experience, with a view to connecting it to scripture. Thus far, I have proposed that the concept of enrichment emanates from experiential approaches; also that use of this and related concepts unwittingly feeds a consumerist ethos, because experience is construed as being like a commodity, instead of being apprehended as communion with God (and through God, with creation). The reader familiar with the history of religious education of the last century may

⁵⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 64.

⁵⁵ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 64.

have identified my position as being “neoorthodox.” If neoorthodoxy is said to critique surrounding culture, then perhaps this essay fits that description; if however neoorthodoxy is said to focus single-mindedly on human sin and reject the world of experience, then it does not. As an example of a neoorthodox position, H. Shelton Smith wrote in 1940 that Christian faith

envisages human society within a framework that is theocentric. It sees [humanity] from a perspective that includes the empirical natural order, but also transcends it. It expressly denies that human values can be adequately understood...within the framework of a purely empirical democracy. With equal conviction it rejects the idea that the source of deliverance from sin, meaninglessness, and frustration had its center in humanity.⁵⁶

While I could agree fully, by focusing on death more than sin I have tried to be more accountable to the empirical natural order instead of bifurcating the empirical from what Smith calls a “theocentric framework.” If an empirical approach strives for greater connection and control, then death demonstrates empirically disconnection and loss of control, and this fact constitutes the empirical critique of empirical approaches. American culture may try to deny or repress death. While what is repressed becomes manifest in art, fashion and entertainment, here even death is turned into a kind of commodity. Meanwhile religion, education and entertainment alike produce goods and services to make life more enriching; but the bottom line for enrichment is something material, even monetary, when matter is disconnected from its divine origin. The proper aim of Christian education is not to offer some “spiritual commodity” in addition to all the material ones, but to see the spiritual and material conjoined in terms of communion, rather than commodity. This is holy materialism. In speaking of divine communion one exceeds empirical bounds, but this trajectory can be prompted empirically—when one observes the inability of secular society to defeat the reality of death or to avoid abusing people and the world. Of course there must be empirical evidence that the community of Christ does otherwise, else God’s name will be blasphemed among the secularists and empiricists; and herein lays a challenge facing the whole church, including its educators.

Looking for scriptural insight to meet this challenge, one finds Paul speaks of enrichment when writing to Corinth:

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

The city of Corinth has financial wealth, and Paul entreats the church in Corinth to give money to the Jerusalem church, which is spiritually rich but financially poor. In so doing, he says, “you will be enriched in every way for your great generosity” (9:11). To inspire them, Paul recalls the generosity of Jesus, who was rich and became poor—so that you, the Corinthians, could be enriched.

⁵⁶ H. Shelton Smith, *Faith and Nurture* (New York: Scribner, 1940), 201.

The tension here between physical and spiritual richness is unresolved and calls for a larger framework of interpretation. In what does the poverty of Jesus consist? In the descent from eternity to human finitude, one could say, he went from his “Father’s house” to being born in a stable and then to living as a homeless person. While this path of downward mobility is important in its concrete details (for example, as a commentary on the myth of upward mobility), the details themselves are illumined by the truth expressed in a hymn Paul quotes elsewhere: this hymn says that Jesus was in the form of God yet took the form of a servant and “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). Jesus becomes most poor when he dies. Even his traditional descent to Hades can add nothing to his poverty, for this poverty is complete in his death on the cross; the descent already entails a communion with spirits in prison, whereas the death itself is solitary, lonely, godforsaken.

“So that you by his poverty might become rich”—likewise this richness is best manifest by the fact that his death tramples down death. His poverty enriches humanity, because his death destroys death and the power of the devil to enslave people through their fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15). Because of death and fear of death, life is experienced as scarcity rather than abundance, which leads to all manner of sinful exploitation. Death is the result of sin, theologically speaking; but sin is also the result of death, empirically speaking. “You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want” (James 4:2). The experience of life as scarcity, of life as a limited commodity, fuels greed and coveting—the desire to grab for the gusto, to profit wrongly or rob others, for fear that one will never have enough of the good experiences this limited life has to offer. This sin-ridden effort proves futile, for the attainment of each desired experience moves the covetous person one step closer to the undesired experience of death. To be freed from the power of death is thus primal enrichment. At the same time, to be aware of death—of one’s primal poverty when standing alone in the face of death—is the first step of repentance. In the context of ancient knowledge, Socrates is wiser because he knows he possesses no knowledge; so too in the context of Christian faith, the poor have a hermeneutical advantage in receiving the Gospel (Lk. 6:20; Mt. 5:3).

In practice, Christian faith happens not in one context but many. Just as the apostle gave different instructions to churches in Corinth and Jerusalem because they differed economically, so today Christian education on poverty and enrichment calls for different tacks. In each case, however, poverty and enrichment are both simultaneously physical and spiritual concepts, as referring them to God reveals; that they are distinct yet related is perhaps suggested by parallel passages in Luke and Matthew, where Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor” (Lk. 6:20) and “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Mt. 5:3). Lacking such reference to God, however, the concepts of poverty and enrichment are easily co-opted by a materialistic mindset and thus impoverished.

Therefore, how can Christian education become enriching in the way that Christ’s poverty enriches the churches? Working from an empirical basis, one could contrast economic poverty and wealth. In situations of poverty, education into the Gospel will be closely tied to such provisions as good food, clean water, and healing from disease. For people in poverty, death is daily a close reality and recognized as the enemy to be destroyed. Poverty and even death have pedagogical value. I do not mean this in any romantic way, but in the way that liberationists intend when they say that the poor have a hermeneutical advantage in

understanding the Gospel; or that the poor are in a better position than the rich to liberate both themselves and their oppressors. The poor may be in a better position to see some things more clearly. Poverty itself is a great evil, but in the divine economy an evil God can turn for good: “blessed are the poor.” However, it must be quickly added that poverty and death of themselves, being evil, teach nothing but despair; this teaching and this despair are pedagogical only insofar as they are propaedeutic to entry into communion with God, to receiving God’s Spirit and commencing God’s reign. Food, water, clothing and healing are tangible manifestations of this Spirit and reign, and education through which these things become provided is enriching insofar as it teaches Christ’s victory over death and restoration of creation as communion with God.

If the basic teaching of Jesus is to repent and believe the good news (Mk. 1:15), then for the poor repentance may consist precisely in believing that there is good news—that the forces of death can be defeated. The economically poor may be in the situation of the “old religion” in Schmemmann’s narrative, trying to become reconciled to the power of death, whereas Christ comes to destroy it. By contrast, the economically rich are more likely to resemble Schmemmann’s secularists, in denial about death; and so educationally they are at a disadvantage. In therapeutic terms, the problem must first be recognized before it can be addressed. Thus the instruction is given to the church in Laodicea:

You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.... So be earnest, and repent. (Revelation 3:17-19)

For them repentance entails seeing themselves through Christ’s eyes, and so recognizing their primal poverty. While Christ desires everyone to be enriched, for the economically self-sufficient it may be harder to take the first step of recognizing one’s nakedness and poverty before God.

Hence Jesus says, “how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (Luke 18:24). The example at hand is the rich ruler, and Jesus’ word to him is instructive: “You still lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (v.22). The teacher who fed the poor multitudes now tells the rich man to sell all his possessions—in order that he may be enriched and have “treasure in heaven.” The aim here is not to bifurcate the physical and spiritual, to say that earthly wealth is nothing, heavenly treasure all; for by healing diseases, by eating physical food even after the resurrection, he is redeeming the empirical world, not jettisoning it. Rather the teacher offers the rich ruler the opportunity to reorient his life so that it “does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Lk. 12:15). Otherwise he may become like the rich man in the parable who thinks his biggest problem is how to build bigger barns, only to die that night and find “this is how it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich in relation to God” (Lk. 12:21). Enrichment solely in relation to the empirical world leads to possessiveness and ends in the poverty of death, whereas enrichment in relation to God means one “may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

In this abundant life Jesus offers, death is overcome and the empirical world as commodity is redeemed, becoming a means of communion with God that includes communion with other people and creation.

Therefore, because of this need for repentance, in situations where people are self-sufficiently wealthy Christian education ought, paradoxically, to help them see and experience their primal poverty before God, in order that they may be enriched indeed. Of course in practice situations of poverty and wealth may not be easily distinguished; the financially rich can be “poor in spirit” and ready to repent, just as the poor may think life consists in the abundance of possessions. The teacher needs simultaneously to teach poverty to the rich and good news to the poor, to teach with understanding that one cannot always tell by appearances who is who; though I would emphasize that obvious and numerous situations of cruel poverty in nations today cry out for teaching in terms of food, water, clothing and healing from diseases—teaching that supplies these things, and also equips people to attain them for their communities.

A word may be added about renewed interest in ascetic practices within wealthier nations. These practices, which may represent a reaction to consumer glut, can have educative worth; for example, the cycle of fasting and feasting demarcated by some church calendars may be a good way to teach both poverty and richness. However, if the cycle is not engaged with an awareness of God’s presence, it may inadvertently teach a kind of delayed gratification that focuses solely on the physical, or teach cleverness in finding loopholes to avoid the experience of poverty. Further, experiences of poverty are not valuable unless they touch the core of a person’s orientation to life and death—unless, that is, they illuminate how before God one *is* poor and can be made rich. In recalling this category of experience I return to the problem with which this essay began. To the mind that seeks a human-centered orientation to the empirical world, experiences are too easily construed as commodities, and enrichment in terms of possession. This same dynamic applies to experiences of poverty, or to multicultural experiences. The religious person, who adopts what Schmemmann depicts as the “secular” mindset, may take a tour of diverse cultures and religions, or undertake fasting and an array of “spiritual practices.” But these engagements may simply affirm the view that life is a personal journey through the world’s bazaar or shopping mall of experiences. Engagement with each experience lingers so long as one is getting something out of it, or finding oneself in it. But the process assumes the goal is to be enriched through possession of experience, whereas it is proposed here that Christian education unto repentance means recognizing one’s primal poverty and so becoming dispossessed—in order to be “enriched in every way” (1 Cor. 1:5; 2 Cor. 9:11) in relation to Christ.

It seems clear now that the overall pattern is death and resurrection. This pattern is more encompassing than the terms of poverty and enrichment. I have focused on these latter terms because I think they demonstrate how experiential approaches to education can fall prey to the culture they intend to critique. However, an exclusive focus on these terms may only distort the Gospel, especially if it is not steadily recognized that to be “enriched in every way” must include the eternal, without excluding the empirical. As a potential example of such distortion, one may think of the so-called health-and-wealth gospel, still a popular religious export item to places where Christianity is a missionary movement. Unless healing and enrichment are seen in

ultimate as well as immediate terms, this teaching plays into the mentality of consumer capitalism—though it may also represent an understandable reaction against platonic spiritualizing that bifurcates the physical and spiritual, and against a pie-in-the-sky gospel that bifurcates this world and the next.

7. Conclusion

To summarize what Christian education can mean by enrichment, I would return to Dewey's indices and reassess them in light of the foregoing discussion. It was said that Dewey construed enrichment in terms of *connection*, *control* and *refinement*. Properly oriented, these are all laudable goals. "Connection" here has been reconstituted as "communion." Christian education can acknowledge the value of making scientific connections within the empirical world and educational connections between experiences, while at the same time being obedient to the vision that this world and these experiences are not commodities for possession but means of communion with God. This communion is the ultimate connection through which other connections become life-giving and enriching in every way. This communion abolishes the humanly insuperable connection between this world and death, between these experiences and death. Death rather becomes connected to the concept of passover. Death can serve as the definitive empirical and educational example of how God transforms disconnection, freeing people for this all-inclusive communion.

Turning to the second Deweyan educational goal, that of control: certainly a degree of creative control over the environment is warranted, for purposes of sustenance and beyond that, of enjoyment. At the same time, not all control that is scientifically or empirically possible is also beneficial and enriching to divine and human communion. Especially when control is motivated by the fear of death it may promise liberation but lead to enslavement. The remarkable scientific ability to control nuclear or genetic processes exemplifies how the desire to control the environment and other people needs to be balanced with self-control. The Scriptures speak of this latter control in terms of being steadfast, persevering, disciplined, constant.

Christian education can stress this quality of constancy, which is the very opposite of stagnation. If cultural trends teach people to zip from one experience to the next in an effort to keep life easy or interesting, Christian education can teach that enrichment may come not from perseverance through rather than escape from difficulty or boredom. One may learn more about love through steadfastness of relationship, rather than skirting between emotional and spiritual experiences; for in constancy of communion one may experience better the inner life of the relationship. Variety and interest are not eschewed, but one's attunement to variety and capacity for interest can actually expand through this steadfastness. Then too when one has learned constancy and self-control, control of the external world may less likely be a projection of inner "control issues"; and more likely spring from a desire for intimacy and self-discovery, not escape from them. Of course self-control can also become a repressive, defensive posture, which is why the virtue of constancy presupposes a communion with God that frees one from the fear of death in its various forms, including the fear of losing oneself by being changed. Constancy and

steadfastness are not therefore rigidity, but rather a fidelity to relationship that allows for external and internal change, external and internal control, guided by the constancy of this communion.

If Deweyan “connection” (as an empirical attribute of enrichment) is reconstituted as “communion,” and “control” is integrated with “constancy,” then third, it could be said that the meaning of “refinement” can be illumined by the scriptural idea of being “pure in heart.” For Dewey enrichment and refinement go together, due to the distinction he makes between “primary experience” and “refined, derived objects of reflection.”⁵⁷ Primary experience occurs with “a minimum of incidental reflection,” refined experience with “continued and regulated reflective inquiry.”⁵⁸ This inquiry yields enrichment: “what is experienced gains an enriched and expanded force,”⁵⁹ because it is systematically connected to the rest of the world of experience. As noted Dewey favors the methods of science because they are accountable to the empirical world; “the natural sciences not only draw their material from primary experience, but they refer it back again for test.”⁶⁰ The writings of Michael Polanyi and other post-critical scientists emphasize that scientific reflection is also personally involving. Among other things this insight tells us that the motives or heart-disposition of the scientist does matter. People commonly intuit this idea when they read scientific reports skeptically, checking to see who has funded a particular study, with suspicion that the results may be influenced by financial motives. It could be said, then, that true enrichment entails refinement not only of the world of experience, but also refinement of the heart, of the motives of those who engage the world of experience.

If this principle of the heart’s need for refinement is true for scientific knowledge, it holds *a fortiori* in learning “the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). Jesus says, “blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mt. 5:8). In Kierkegaard’s interpretation, purity of heart is to desire one thing. Jesus himself in Matthew’s Gospel goes on to talk about the difference between having a “single” versus an “evil” eye, and single-minded versus double-minded devotion. He says: “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Mt. 6:22-24). Purity of heart as a desire to see and to serve God is elsewhere in the New Testament contrasted with the desire to get rich: “those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9). Inner refinement or purity of heart means desiring God as opposed to material wealth. Communion with God reconstitutes the material world, such that material wealth is received as a gift from God; and what is freely received can be freely shared with others.

Those who have financial wealth are commanded not to be arrogant, *or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that is really life* (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

⁵⁷ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 3-4.

⁵⁸ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 4.

⁵⁹ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 5.

⁶⁰ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 4.

Embedded in these verses are most of the themes discussed in this essay. First, counter-cultural Christian education can teach people not to “set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (v.17). Here is *the theme of commodity versus communion*. To set one’s hopes is to orient one’s future life; the Christian life is not oriented toward the world and other people as commodities or objects of possession, but rather toward God, in communion with whom relationships to the world and people are characterized by non-possessive enjoyment.

Second, counter-cultural Christian education can teach people “to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share” (v.18). This verse points to *the theme of refinement and purity of heart*. Experience can be scientifically tested, thus refined, and the results of technology made profitable. But when wealth and human life itself are tested by death, the result is that one stands before God in a position of primal poverty. One cannot buy out death, but death can be redeemed by Christ, whose death destroys death’s power to enslave people in the kind of fear that gives rise to greed. To be united with Christ in “a death like his” (Romans 6:5), and joined to Christ in a poverty like his, is to receive abundant life and power “to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share” (v.18). In this economy, as Francis of Assisi observed, it is in giving that we receive. It has been well said that generosity is measured not by how much you give, but how much you have left. Thus to be totally generous is to be completely poor, but poor in order to be made rich, in order to be more generous. To be pure in heart and poor in spirit is to be inwardly refined, so that not only is the person enriched in experiencing the world, but the world is enriched by its experience of her or him: this one is like Christ, who became poor that others might be made rich.

Third, counter-cultural Christian education can teach people that by this way of life they are “thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that is really life” (v.19). This verse points to *the theme of control and self-control*. We are born with a certain desire to “take hold of life.” The instinct for survival and satisfaction is undeniably strong, though it is weaker than the power of death. The one who takes hold of the world and its people by treating them as objects of selfish possession may be fighting the fear of death and so fighting a losing battle. Victory comes through surrender of this self-control, this attempt to control one’s destiny by controlling the world and other people. The Christian call to “deny oneself” is not therefore a personality trait assigned to a particular gender or socio-economic group of people, though that wrong teaching has been propagated, and by it some have wrongly sought to control others; but instead, Christian self-denial is liberating in the sense that it entails throwing off false, fear-ridden autonomy, including ego centered self-denial. One gives up one’s life in order to receive the life of Christ, and so “take hold of the life that is really life” (v.19). Because this union in life is based on the prior union with Christ in death, the power of death has been put in the past; the resulting good works and generosity are the “treasure of a good foundation for the future”—a future that ends in life, not death. External control is governed by the desire to be “generous and ready to share.” Self-control is guided by constancy and steadfastness within the communion that gives the “life that is really life.” In this way, one is “enriched in every way.”

