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The Lessons of Experience and the Theology of William Porcher DuBose

ROBERT B. SLOCUM*

I. DUBOSE'S LIFE AND WORK

William Porcher DuBose (April 11, 1836–August 18, 1918) is recognized and appreciated by many as “probably the most original and creative thinker” to appear in the more than 200-year history of the Episcopal Church in the United States.¹ He was described by a commentator in 1908 as “one of the foremost philosophical theologians of our time.”² A reviewer characterized him in 1912 as “a writer of striking originality and fine insight, who has set himself the task of reconciling historic theology with modern ideas.”³ Certainly he was one who “ventured to think for himself.”⁴ DuBose published seven books of theological importance, and other writings.⁵ He was

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¹ “William Porcher DuBose,” *The Proper for the Lesser Feasts and Fasts—1994, together with The Fixed Holy Days, Conforming to the General Convention 1994* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1995), 330.

² W. H. Moberly, “The Theology of Dr. DuBose,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (January, 1908), 161.

³ John Spence Johnston, “Review of *Turning Points in My Life*,” *Church Quarterly Review* (October, 1912), 71.

⁴ Greenough White, “A Discussion of Historical Christology [Review of *The Ecumenical Councils*],” *Sewanee Review* 5 (January, 1897), 34.

⁵ Listed chronologically by publication date, DuBose's books are *The Soteriology of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1892) (New Edition, with a new “Preface,” New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899); *The Ecumenical Councils, Vol. III of Ten Epochs of Church History*, John Fulton, ed. (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1896); *The Gospel in the Gospels* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906) (many reprintings until 1923); *The Gospel According to Saint Paul* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907); *High Priesthood and Sacrifice: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1908) (The Bishop Paddock Lectures at the General Theological Seminary, New

described in 1985 as "one of the very few truly *systematic* theologians Anglicanism has produced anywhere, and certainly one of the best."⁶ His life is commemorated as a "lesser feast" in the Episcopal Calendar of the Church Year on August 18.

In this study, I will draw out parallels and connections between DuBose's life experience and his theology. There is more to this than biographical background information. "Doctrine and life were always in close relationship for DuBose."⁷ DuBose's theology was deeply rooted in his personal religious experience, which was followed by theological reflection. It was likewise intended to be tested in light of the experience of others. True theology would "ring true" to the experiences of real life, making sense of experience and proving itself sensible in light of experience.

In 1871 DuBose was called to the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee, as Chaplain of the University and Professor of Moral Science. He began his "life task" at Sewanee.⁸ At Sewanee, DuBose served as Chaplain from July 17, 1871, until July 30, 1883. While at Sewanee he taught a variety of courses to both undergraduates and theological students, including Hebrew, Exegesis, New Testament Language and Interpretation, Old Testament Language and Interpretation, Homiletics, and Systematic Divinity.⁹ DuBose was charged with organizing the first Theological Department at Sewa-

York, 1907–1908); *The Reason of Life* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911); *Turning Points in My Life* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912). DuBose also published various theological articles and essays. Eleven of these articles, published in the ecumenical journal *The Constructive Quarterly*, and the article, "Christian Defense," originally published in *The Sunday School Teacher's Manual*, were compiled and edited by W. Norman Pittenger in *Unity in the Faith* (Greenwich, CT: The Seabury Press, 1957). The collection of DuBose's works also includes "The Reminiscences of William Porcher DuBose, D.D., S.T.D.," unpublished autobiographical reflections compiled by his son, William Haskell DuBose. The manuscript of "Reminiscences" is available at the School of Theology Library, The University of the South, Sewanee, TN.

⁶ Charles Winters, "Review of *A DuBose Reader*," *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 29:1 (December, 1985), 61. Winters notes that Armentrout's *Reader* provides "the framework of a book on systematic theology, with a chapter on each of the cardinal loci such a book should contain." See Donald S. Armentrout, ed., *A DuBose Reader, Selections from the Writings of William Porcher DuBose* (Sewanee, TN: The University of the South, 1984).

⁷ *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*—1994, 330.

⁸ Theodore DuBose Bratton, *An Apostle of Reality, The Life and Thought of the Reverend William Porcher DuBose* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), 78.

⁹ Armentrout, "William Porcher DuBose, An Introduction to the Man," viii–xx.

nee. In 1877 the Theological Department was listed as a distinct school of the University of the South, and it was later called the School of Theology. The Theological Department was formally established in 1878. DuBose served as Acting Dean of the School of Theology after the death of his predecessor on September 11, 1893. DuBose was the second Dean of the School of Theology from July 31, 1894, until his retirement on June 24, 1908.¹⁰ He was Dean Emeritus until his death on August 18, 1918.¹¹

In 1911, the fortieth anniversary of DuBose's coming to Sewanee, there was a Reunion of DuBose's former students at the University of the South. It was held on August 2-6. He read autobiographical papers to his former students at the morning sessions of the Reunion.¹² The autobiographical papers from the Reunion, along with other materials, were published as DuBose's *Turning Points in My Life*.

The Churchman noted the variety of perspectives represented by DuBose's students at the Reunion, and observed that "In miniature, the DuBose reunion illustrated Dr. DuBose's philosophy."¹³ It is my position that *Turning Points* was a major theological publication by DuBose. As a work of spiritual autobiography with theological significance, it can be likened to Augustine's *Confessions* and other significant works of spiritual autobiography or biography. As a work of spiritual autobiography, *Turning Points* is certainly a work of major significance for understanding DuBose's theology and "the presence and vitality of the Word of God" in his life. DuBose's emphasis on the role of experience in the process of salvation underscores the theological significance of *Turning Points*. Indeed, DuBose's spiritual autobiography was *the* major theological publication that revealed and developed his theological method in terms of the central role of human experience. This position is not shared by Donald S. Armentrout, who acknowledges only six works "of major theological importance" by DuBose.¹⁴ In a review of Alexander's collection of

¹⁰ Armentrout, *The Quest for the Informed Priest*, 121.

¹¹ Armentrout, "William Porcher DuBose, An Introduction to the Man," xxi-xxii.

¹² *Turning Points*, 1. See Armentrout, "William Porcher DuBose, An Introduction to the Man," xxi-xxii.

¹³ "Dr. DuBose and His Students," *The Churchman* 104 (August 19, 1911), 255.

¹⁴ Armentrout, *The Quest for the Informed Priest*, 111. He takes the same position in an introduction to *A DuBose Reader*, in which he refers to DuBose's "six major writings." Armentrout, "DuBose's Theology, An Introduction to the Work," in *A DuBose Reader*, xxv. He refers to DuBose's "six major books" in an article on DuBose

DuBose's writings, Armentrout even refers to "DuBose's six published books."¹⁵

I disagree with Armentrout's position that *Turning Points* "was not a substantial theological work but was much more autobiographical and personal."¹⁶ It *was* autobiographical and personal. It tells the story of DuBose's life of faith relative to his experiences of conversion, suffering, discovery, and transformation. DuBose's theological development of autobiographical and personal details in *Turning Points* provides the key to understanding the experiential basis of his theological method.

J. O. F. Murray begins his discussion of DuBose in terms of *Turning Points* and "The Background of Spiritual Experience," followed shortly by consideration of "His Method—Spiritual Psychology."¹⁷ Murray acknowledges that DuBose's thought was embodied in "seven volumes published between 1892 and 1911," along with his *Constructive Quarterly* articles.¹⁸ It is no coincidence that Murray recognizes the importance of experience in DuBose's theological method, and counts *Turning Points* among DuBose's seven volumes of theology.

for the *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology*. Donald S. Armentrout, "William Porcher DuBose and the Quest for the Informed Priest," *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 31:4 (September, 1988), 258–261.

¹⁵ Donald S. Armentrout, "Review of William Porcher DuBose: *Selected Writings*," *The Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 32:4 (September, 1989), 295. Armentrout also takes the position that *Turning Points* was "autobiographical and personal" and not a "major book" in a signed entry on DuBose for the *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. D. S. Armentrout, "DuBose, William Porcher (1836–1918)," *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, Daniel G. Reid, coordinating ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 367. Armentrout's position is shared by other Church historians. David L. Holmes also takes the position that DuBose "published six theological works." David L. Holmes, *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 123. Ralph E. Luker refers to DuBose's "half-dozen theological works" in a signed entry on DuBose for the *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*. Ralph E. Luker, "DuBose, William Porcher (1836–1918)," *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, Samuel S. Hill, ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 211.

¹⁶ Armentrout, *The Quest for the Informed Priest*, 112.

¹⁷ J. O. F. Murray, *Du Bosc as a Prophet of Unity, A Series of Lectures on the Du Bosc Foundation delivered at the University of the South* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1924), 23 [Lecture I], 46 [Lecture III]. Murray was the Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge. This book was based on his lectures to the students of theology for the DuBose Memorial Foundation on November 7–10, 1922, at the University of the South, Sewanee, TN. This was the inaugural Series of Lectures of the DuBose Foundation.

¹⁸ Murray, *DuBosc as a Prophet of Unity*, 5 (emphasis added).

The Reunion was the high point of public recognition for DuBose in his lifetime. It was a time of tribute by his former students and many others for the personal and theological contribution of his life. The Reunion was also for DuBose the first time of his public telling of his conversion experience as a cadet.¹⁹ His sharing of this and other significant experiences and "turning points" was a unique occasion for one who admitted, "I have always spoken from myself, but I have never spoken of myself."²⁰ Certainly the Reunion was itself a "turning point" for him.

II. FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES FOR DUBOSE'S THEOLOGY

Formative experiences for DuBose's faith and theology may be identified and categorized in terms of his experiences of (1) loss, (2) transformation, and (3) discovery. It is my position that these experiences were related to DuBose's theological understanding of (1) the cross, (2) the process of conversion, and (3) the needed openness of the Church. These experiences and understandings were formative for his Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology.²¹

DuBose was fairly explicit in drawing out the relationship between his experiences of transformation and his soteriology, and the relationship between his experiences of discovery and his ecclesiology. The connections between his experiences of loss and his Christology, especially in terms of the cross, were more implicit. This topic reflects my own inferences and conclusions to a greater degree than the other two. However, it is strongly supported by DuBose's autobiographical and theological writings.

DuBose's Experiences of Loss

The Civil War was a time of many hardships for DuBose. He was called away from seminary by the Civil War in his middle or second year in 1861. At first he served as an adjutant. During the Civil War he was wounded three times, including two wounds at the Second Battle of Manassas (Second Bull Run) in Virginia on August 30, 1862.

¹⁹ "Reminiscences," 30.

²⁰ *Turning Points*, 15.

²¹ For further discussion of this position, see Robert B. Slocum, "Living the Truth: An Introduction to the Theological Method and Witness of William Porcher DuBose," *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 34:1 (December, 1990): 28-40.

He was later taken a prisoner of war at Boonesboro Gap in Maryland, after he was almost shot by one of the soldiers who captured him.²² He was held as a prisoner of war at Fort Delaware, where he came to be infested with lice.²³ Some time after being returned to his army in an exchange of prisoners, "influential friends in Church and State" arranged for DuBose to be ordained and commissioned as a chaplain in the Confederate Army.²⁴ DuBose served as a chaplain in the army until the end of the war.

It was toward the end of the Civil War, after the Confederate defeat at the battle of Cedar Creek in Virginia, that DuBose had a moment of shock and realization. His brigade slept behind a line of battle for the first time in the war. At this moment he realized the impossibility of success for the Confederate cause and the world he had known all his life. He "felt as if everything was gone!"²⁵ When he faced the fact that "the Confederacy was beginning to break" after the "disgraceful rout" of his side at Cedar Creek, "the end of the world was upon me as completely as upon the Romans when the barbarians had overrun them."²⁶ With respect to his moment of recognition "under the stars" that the Confederate cause was lost, DuBose recalls,

Such an experience can never be altogether lost, and I go back to it at times for such a sense of the utter extinction of the world, and presence of only the Eternal and the Abiding, as is seldom vouchsafed to one.²⁷

DuBose discovered his dependence on God through his experiences of loss and poverty. He remembered,

The actual issue was all upon me that fateful night in which, under the stars, alone upon the planet, without home or country or any earthly interest or object before me, my very world at an end, I redevoted myself wholly and

²² *Turning Points*, 37–38. Thirty-five years after his capture, DuBose had a friendly reunion with Cronin, the Union soldier who captured him. DuBose had helped Cronin, "a faithful and deserving old soldier from Pennsylvania," prove his entitlement to a veteran's pension. DuBose recalled that Cronin said of their encounter at Boonesboro Gap, "I had come near killing him, and he had come nearer killing me." *Turning Points*, 38.

²³ "Reminiscences," 102–103.

²⁴ *Turning Points*, 39.

²⁵ "Reminiscences," 134.

²⁶ *Turning Points*, 48–49.

²⁷ *Turning Points*, 50.

only to God, and to the work and life of His Kingdom, whatever and wherever that might be.²⁸

This was a moment of rededication to God and God's purposes for DuBose.

The war brought other hardships for DuBose. His mother and father died during the Civil War. His father eventually died from measles, which he caught after ministering to sick soldiers on a train.²⁹ There was also considerable suffering in DuBose's home community during the war. He recalled a close family friend, Mrs. Haskell, who heard on the same day of the death in the war of her brother and two sons. One of the sons was DuBose's roommate at the Citadel, and the other was his roommate at the University of Virginia.³⁰ These were personal losses for DuBose as well. He named his son William Haskell DuBose for his deceased roommate from the University of Virginia, William Haskell. DuBose's home church, St. John's, Winnsboro, "suffered severely in Sherman's raid." The church was "wantonly burned," and its organ, furniture, books, and church bell were destroyed.³¹

After the Civil War was over and lost for the South, DuBose returned home to great desolation. It had "lain in the centre of Sherman's famous march."³² He found that "the country was stript of the barest means of subsistence; our social and political condition was unendurable and hopeless."³³ After the war, "[w]idows and bereaved persons were at every turn, and worst of all, facing us everywhere was the loss of our country."³⁴ Living conditions were "for some years no better than in war." His family had been wealthy before the war, but they were "utterly impoverished" after the war ended.³⁵ South Carolina was a dangerous place after the Civil War. The "carpet-bag

²⁸ *Turning Points*, 49–50.

²⁹ "Reminiscences," 80.

³⁰ "Reminiscences," 149–150.

³¹ Albert Sidney Thomas, *A Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina, 1820–1957, Being a Continuation of Dalcho's Account, 1670–1820* (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Company, 1957), 625.

³² *Turning Points*, 39.

³³ *Turning Points*, 51.

³⁴ "Reminiscences," 139.

³⁵ *Turning Points*, 51.

regime was at its height and its worst."³⁶ DuBose recalled this to be a time of lawlessness, fear, and exploitation by those in power.³⁷

The war destroyed and took away much of DuBose's world as he knew it. His seminary studies were interrupted. He was shot, captured, and almost killed. Many of his friends were killed. The civilization he had known from childhood was literally burned out from under him. The war and its aftermath was a time of significant loss for DuBose.

Other times of great loss for DuBose were the death of his first wife, "Nannie," and his young son, Samuel. After DuBose was elected Chaplain and Professor of Moral Science at the University of the South in 1871, his wife and three children joined him at Sewanee in the early summer of 1872. His fourth child, Samuel, was born that fall. Unfortunately, his wife's health began to fail at that time. DuBose believed she "never did recover from certain hardships endured during the war, for she was so utterly unselfish, and thoughtful of all except herself, that she impaired her health."³⁸ His wife died in April, 1873. Samuel died in the spring of 1874, after lingering for some time following a severe bronchial attack.³⁹ DuBose was grief-stricken. The intense pain of Samuel's death was still present to DuBose years later when he dictated his "Reminiscences" for his son Haskell. He recalled, "I used to carry him in my arms and he loved it. He died. I miss that little boy to this day. I miss him *now*."⁴⁰

DuBose's experiences of loss were formative for his theology. He knew that experiences of loss could provide the occasion for human openness and dependence concerning God. DuBose's experiences of loss were also formative for his understanding of the importance of poverty in the life of faith. He explains in *Turning Points*,

The principle of prayer is rooted in the fact of need, want, poverty. Our Lord makes poverty the first condition of spiritual blessedness, because in it begins all that dependence upon God the end of which is oneness with Him.

³⁶ "Reminiscences," 144.

³⁷ "Reminiscences," 144–146. "Carpet-baggers" ("from abroad") and "scalawags" ("natives") sought to exploit the situation. DuBose recalls that "Barns and sometimes dwellings were burned by night." On one occasion his own home, the church rectory, was entered at night by a robber who was discovered in the bedroom where DuBose's daughter, Susie, and other relatives were sleeping.

³⁸ "Reminiscences," 154.

³⁹ Armentrout, "An Introduction to the Man," xviii.

⁴⁰ "Reminiscences," 154.

Out of that poverty come all godly sorrow, all noble meekness and humility, all hunger and thirst for rightness and fulness of life, all faith in God, all hope in self, all true self-realization and soul satisfaction.⁴¹

The emptiness of poverty can lead to the openness of heart that is filled by the love of God.

It is my position that DuBose's experiences of loss were formative for his understanding of the role of the cross in the life of Jesus, and in the Christian life. He urges in his Transfiguration sermon at the DuBose Reunion:

The fact that even our Lord, in the needful and inevitable infirmity of our present humanity, had moments in which He needed to know anew that He was the Son of God, that He had to learn afresh upon the very cross that there is no such thing as a divine forsaking, though so often there so seems to be, ought to teach us how to have faith in even our darkest hours, and hope when we are faintest and farthest off.⁴²

Through his darkest hours and most painful losses he came to experience that there is no divine forsaking. This was an experience of faith and trust in God for DuBose. It was as true for him in the face of defeat and destruction in war as it was for Jesus on the cross.

DuBose's experiences of loss were also formative for his understanding of the role of poverty and the cross in the Christian life, and in Christology. He asks, rhetorically, in his Transfiguration sermon,

For what is Jesus Christ but God in us and we in God? And what is the Cross but the actual process by which all that is not God dies in us, and all that is lives and grows in us?⁴³

In his address on "The Theology of the Child," DuBose notes, "only he who knows the Cross knows redemption and resurrection and eternal life."⁴⁴ DuBose knew the cross and its benefits through his experiences of loss.

⁴¹ *Turning Points*, 87.

⁴² "Transfiguration Sermon," in *Turning Points*, 120–121.

⁴³ *Turning Points*, 118.

⁴⁴ *Turning Points*, 110. This address was read by DuBose at a Sunday School Conference that took place at Sewanee on the day after the DuBose Reunion. *Turning Points*, 12.

DuBose's Experiences of Transformation

It was during DuBose's time as a cadet at The Citadel that he had his first mystical experience of conversion. It happened in 1854 when he was 18. After a long march, DuBose and two other cadets spent the night in a hotel after attending a "roaring farce" of a play. That night, after the others were asleep, DuBose got up to pray. He later recalled this experience:

Perfectly unconscious and unsuspecting of anything unusual, I knelt to go through the form, when of a sudden there swept over me a feeling of the emptiness and unmeaningness of the act and of my whole life and self. I leapt to my feet trembling, and then that happened which I can only describe by saying that a light shone about me and a Presence filled the room. At the same time an ineffable joy and peace took possession of me which it is impossible either to express or explain.⁴⁵

With respect to his experience of "youthful conversion," DuBose later stated that "[t]here was nothing there, in consciousness, but God and myself; but that was a new light, a new world, a new life, and a new self."⁴⁶

DuBose's experience of conversion as a cadet was transformative for him in the moment of the experience and for the rest of his life. As he knelt to pray while his companions slept, he was overcome by a "Presence" that was "distinct and definite." In his "Reminiscences," DuBose recalls that "a new presence had come into my life and it was so absolute and positive, there was no mistaking it." He was afraid to go to sleep that night, "lest it disappear," but the sense of presence was with him the next day and thereafter.⁴⁷

Rudolf Otto provides a description of the "numinous" in *The Idea of the Holy* that is helpful for understanding DuBose's experience. In Otto's terms, DuBose experienced a "consciousness of a 'wholly other'" that "evades precise formulation in words."⁴⁸ It was an

⁴⁵ *Turning Points*, 18–19.

⁴⁶ "Evangelical and Catholic, Each Needs the Other: Both Need the Church: and the Church Needs Both," in *Unity in the Faith*, 188–205, 199.

⁴⁷ "Reminiscences," 30.

⁴⁸ See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy, An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 59.

experience of the numinous that "mocks at all conceiving but can yet stir the mind to its depths, fascinate and overbrim the heart."⁴⁹

For DuBose, this moment of conversion was an experience of the otherness and presence of God that ultimately defied description. He notes that its "lack of explicitness" was striking, since "so little was there in it of the definite and defined features of Christianity, that it would scarcely seem to have been as yet distinctively Christian."⁵⁰ And yet it was certainly an experience of the numinous that stirred his mind to its depths, fascinating and overbrimming his heart.

DuBose returned to his "natural habits and duties" after this experience, but "the form which the intervening change in me assumed was mainly that of a sensitized and transfigured—not only consciousness, but—conscience."⁵¹ He spent the rest of the year "consolidating" his gains, and determined to study for the ordained ministry.⁵² DuBose mentioned his conversion experience to no one until the Reunion with his students, some fifty years later. Public discussion of such an experience might well have seemed unusual to many in the Episcopal Church of his day, in which order and form were often emphasized to the detriment of "personal religion" and subjective experience. And yet, DuBose says of his conversion experience, "it has been all that time present with me."⁵³ In *Turning Points*, DuBose states that it was for him "a life-long matter of scientific as well as religious interest to analyze and understand that experience."⁵⁴

DuBose's "scientific" interest in the phenomenon of his own conversion experience is quite similar in principle to the method employed by William James (1842–1910) in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James sought to test religion "by practical common sense and the empirical method," drawing on a multitude of personal reports and narratives of religious experiences.⁵⁵ He evaluated religious experiences in terms of "immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness, and moral helpfulness."⁵⁶ James concluded that

⁴⁹ See Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 80.

⁵⁰ *Turning Points*, 21.

⁵¹ *Turning Points*, 22.

⁵² "Reminiscences," 31.

⁵³ "Reminiscences," 30.

⁵⁴ *Turning Points*, 17.

⁵⁵ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience, A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 297.

⁵⁶ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 33.

the science of religions must “depend for its original material on facts of personal experience,” and must square itself with personal experience through all its critical reconstructions.”⁵⁷

However powerful the moment of conversion was for DuBose, the experience was much more than an isolated incident in his life. At the time of his conversion experience,

There was then no conscious sense of sin, nor repentance, nor realization of the meaning of the Cross, or of the Resurrection, or of the Church or the Sacraments, nor indeed of the Incarnation or of Christ Himself. What then was there?—There was simply a New World without me, and a New Self in me—in both which for the first time, visibly, sensibly, really, God was.⁵⁸

It was the beginning—but not in itself the completion—of a new life for him.

DuBose’s conversion was the beginning of a saving process in which sin, repentance, cross, resurrection, Church, sacraments, and incarnation would come to have considerable meaning for him. But DuBose did not grasp all these realities and aspects of the Christian faith in their entirety at the moment of his conversion. His was an “already, but not yet” situation at the moment of his conversion experience. DuBose notes,

The task of materializing or actualizing that as yet only ideal, of embodying the sentiment of it into habit and character and life, I was indeed far enough from realizing. But were not the principle and the potency of the whole already present and operative in me?⁵⁹

The reality of God’s saving presence was already present to him, fully and objectively, but he had not yet appropriated it and made it his own subjectively. That was to be the work of his lifetime.

DuBose’s experience was also the beginning of a saving process that was to continue throughout his life. Its intended end was his fulfillment and unity with God. It was an “already, but not yet” experience that prefigured for him the eternity and fullness of God’s love. DuBose’s experience of conversion reflected the “living kernel” of his life in relationship with God in a “New World.”⁶⁰ In it he had already

⁵⁷ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 356.

⁵⁸ *Turning Points*, 21.

⁵⁹ *Turning Points*, 22–23.

⁶⁰ *Turning Points*, 21.

in himself "in a hidden way" all that he would one day possess and be. The realizing of that "living kernel," and the making explicit, overt and entire of that hidden truth was to be the work of his lifetime of faith.

DuBose's conversion experience informed his theology in many ways, especially his soteriology. It seems to have been the basis for his distinction of objective and subjective in a process by which God's objective reality becomes the subjective and saving reality of our faith. For example, the truth of God's saving presence was objectively present to DuBose and transformative for him at the moment of his conversion experience. It was "present and operative" in him. But the truth of God's saving presence was not yet realized in his life at that moment. DuBose urges,

There is a great deal which we may outwardly confess as *the faith*, which we rightly hold on the reasonable external authority of corporate and historical Christianity, which nevertheless to be compelled to profess, as in its totality our personal subjective actual and attained faith, would simply involve us in either self-deception or hypocrisy.⁶¹

The difference between the *objective truth for a person* and the *realized truth of a person* calls for "the life-time process, as one can, of gradually digesting, assimilating, and converting that faith into one's own, and finding in it the full food and content of one's life."⁶²

For example, DuBose understood Baptism in terms of an objective gift that was to be followed by a lifetime of realization and appropriation. He explains,

Baptism is not an act of man which his faith goes before and accomplishes, it is an act of God which his faith comes after and accepts and appropriates and realizes or actualizes in himself.⁶³

A baptized person receives the full gift of sacramental initiation into the Church, which is Christ's body in the world.⁶⁴ In an objective

⁶¹ *Turning Points*, 23.

⁶² *Turning Points*, 23–24.

⁶³ "The Theology of the Child," in *Turning Points*, 98.

⁶⁴ The rubrics concerning the service of Holy Baptism in the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church note that "Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church." *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 298.

sense, the newly baptized person is a Christian and a full member of the Church. But the claiming, appropriating, and making subjectively real of that identity will involve the rest of the person's life.

This process of converting the faith into one's own involves many experiences and their interpretation—not just one experience at the inception of faith. And the truth of the saving process is to be known experientially. It was known for DuBose in his own awareness of self. He explains,

My proof, I may say my verification, of the fact of God's coming to me, apart from all mystery of the way, may be expressed in this simple truth of experience, that in finding Him I found myself: a man's own self, when he has once truly come to himself, is his best and only experimental proof of God. The act of the Prodigal's "coming to himself" was also that of his arising and returning to his Father.⁶⁵

DuBose stated the same position differently, with a warning, in his paper "Liberty and Authority in Christian Truth." He notes,

A truth and life which are only the Church's and are not in actual and active process of becoming our own and wholly our own, are much worse than nothing to us; a salvation which does not save becomes our condemnation.⁶⁶

The saving process is to be actualized and experienced as a reality in our lives.

In one sense, DuBose viewed himself as a subject in his own "scientific" consideration of religion. He found that in God's coming to him, and in his own coming to himself, he knew a genuine salvation that really saved him. He knew it empirically, experimentally, in his own life. This reflected a pragmatic approach not unlike that of James, who approached religion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* "from the point of view of what it does in the lives of its adherents."⁶⁷ *What it was doing* in DuBose's life was to continue a process that was saving him. That was his experience. The end of this process (as he understood it and believed it) was to be his salvation.

The saving process in DuBose's life was ultimately to be understood in terms of his experience of who he had become and was

⁶⁵ *Turning Points*, 20.

⁶⁶ "Liberty and Authority in Christian Truth," in *Turning Points*, 131.

⁶⁷ Robert J. Vanden Burgt, *The Religious Philosophy of William James* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 82.

becoming. It was also formative for his soteriology. The full meaning of his conversion experience was to be known through the “actual and active process” of its becoming his own. It was a process of salvation that was really saving him. It led him to appreciate how the objective gift of God’s presence may increasingly be appropriated and realized subjectively in the life of the believer. DuBose believes in a transformative and saving fulfillment in Christ that makes the fundamental difference in human life. The reality of this “difference” in Christ can be known experientially.

DuBose’s Experiences of Discovery

DuBose had experiences of discovery during his academic career as a student and a teacher. These experiences were related to his openness to the truth in considering and critically evaluating all kinds of ideas, perspectives, and positions. These experiences were formative for his life and theology, especially the openness to continuing revelation and discernment that characterized his vision for the Church.

In October, 1859, DuBose entered the diocesan seminary in Camden, South Carolina. As a junior (first year) seminarian, he encountered a senior student who had strong Calvinistic and low-churchmanship views. This seminarian had studied at Princeton, and he challenged DuBose in terms of his knowledge of Greek and St. Paul as to “whether the language and argument of St. Paul did not necessitate all the essential principles, the five points, of Calvinism.”⁶⁸ This encounter required DuBose to face and overcome his own prejudices, and commit himself to “follow the truth wherever it may lead me.”⁶⁹ It was a turning point. The “provocation” from this senior student concerning the necessity of the principles of Calvinism in light of St. Paul caused DuBose “difficulties and perplexities” for “several years to come.”⁷⁰

For DuBose, the issue had much to do with openness to the possibility of finding the truth despite his prejudices. With respect to his difficulty in evaluating Calvinism, DuBose notes,

⁶⁸ *Turning Points*, 30–31. The five points of Calvinism, formulated at the Synod of Dort (1618), were the total depravity of humanity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints.

⁶⁹ *Turning Points*, 32.

⁷⁰ *Turning Points*, 30–31.

At the time I encountered and had to overcome this temptation: We are often enough tempted to believe what antecedent prejudice or inclination makes us wish to believe. . . . I asked myself, Am I prepared to make the necessary sacrifice in order to follow the truth wherever it may lead me? And I came near identifying that query with this one, Am I strong enough and selfless enough to accept Calvinism? Whereas it should have been this, Am I open and prepared to accept Calvinism if it is indeed, and I fairly find it to be, the truth?⁷¹

Once he had faced and considered Calvinism with an open mind, he found that he was not obliged to accept it. He “never reverted” to Calvinism. But this experience, prompted by the challenge of a student with views that differed from his own, was for DuBose as a seminary “the first thing that touched and really set going the forward movement of life and thought in me.”⁷² It was a question of committing himself in openness to the truth. It involved his personal, spiritual and academic integrity.

The resolution of DuBose’s “difficulties and perplexities” regarding Calvinism had “results in all my future thinking and teaching.” The “permanent profit of that experience” was that he came away from this challenge as “a life-long student and companion of St. Paul’s faith and life,” which really determined his “whole subsequent character and career.”⁷³

All these benefits experienced by DuBose, including his “discovery” of St. Paul’s importance for him, resulted from his willingness to “follow the truth wherever it would lead him.” He was not bound by the prejudices that he brought to the original question of Calvinism. He experienced the value of openness and a fair testing of ideas relative to Christian belief.

DuBose also experienced openness and discovery in his classroom teaching at Sewanee. There was a spirit of “free enquiry” for discussion in his classes. He explains,

Everything was to be tested and verified, according to our Lord’s prescription, in the light and in the terms of human nature, human life, and human destiny. All that was true for us ought to true to us, and would be if we were

⁷¹ *Turning Points*, 31–32.

⁷² *Turning Points*, 30–31.

⁷³ *Turning Points*, 31–32.

in a state and attitude of correspondence with the truth. To establish this correspondence was our task.⁷⁴

DuBose also notes that his teaching method was to approach “every day and every year anew, without any help from the past through any records of my own.”⁷⁵ He did not use old notes or manuscripts. Theodore Bratton notes that DuBose’s approach was “altogether revolutionary in its departure from the stern, set forms of the time.”⁷⁶ His method was very much open to the discovery of truth through his teaching, including both his class preparation and the give and take with his students that would follow.

It was out of this environment that DuBose’s published theology emerged. He recalled, “Questions that arose within the class began to spread without the class, and the time came when it became necessary to make known my teaching to a larger audience.” He explains that it was his students “who in loving compulsion forced the publication of my first book, and have been behind as well as in all the rest.”⁷⁷ DuBose’s students were “in” his books because the dynamic of his classroom experience was formative for him as well as his students. He notes that in his classes,

I was in fact more one of them than one merely over them. I was finding and making myself in and with and through and by, as well as upon, them.⁷⁸

This process is echoed by Bratton, who stated that “The Doctor’s students of the decade of 1880 to 1890 used to think and say, with no little pride, that the writing of the *Soteriology* was inspired by their inquiring minds, bristling with questions suggested by his lectures.”⁷⁹

The result of DuBose’s theological method of open inquiry was visible in his students as well as in his life and published theology. His former students attending the Reunion in his honor represented “all the sides and aspects of faith and opinion” in the Episcopal Church.⁸⁰ There were no “DuBosians.” But there were many who had been furthered and formed in their own development and thinking through

⁷⁴ *Turning Points*, 7–8.

⁷⁵ *Turning Points*, 5.

⁷⁶ Bratton, *An Apostle of Reality*, 93.

⁷⁷ *Turning Points*, 8.

⁷⁸ *Turning Points*, 4.

⁷⁹ Bratton, *An Apostle of Reality*, 90.

⁸⁰ “Transfiguration Sermon,” in *Turning Points*, 122.

encounter with DuBose as their teacher. With respect to them, DuBose notes,

The gathering is made up, not of those of one way, but of those of all the ways of thinking and believing in the Church. No one thinks of asking which way is most or least in evidence among us, because, with whatever of differences, we have learned here to think and live together without sense or recognition of parties or partisanship. All honest and reasonable difficulties or convictions have been met and treated with equal interest, sympathy, and mutual respect and understanding.⁸¹

DuBose's idealism concerning his gathered former students is understandable. Nevertheless, he clearly saw in them the potential of a Church where members of different perspectives could share in living and discerning the truth. They were the living witness of the open forum that was his vision for the Church.

An example of such "differences" within the Church is "expressed by the two terms *Evangelical* and *Catholic*," which DuBose discusses in his *Constructive Quarterly* essay, "Evangelical and Catholic, Each Needs the Other: Both Need the Church: and the Church Needs Both." He notes that "each of these terms . . . has become the designation of a 'party' in the Church, almost synonymous with Catholic and Protestant in the wider field of Christianity."⁸² In response to an evangelical tendency to emphasize the subjective in religion and a catholic tendency to emphasize the objective in religion, DuBose urges a position of synthesis. The "sincere and religious 'Catholic,' however he may cling to and make much of what we may call the 'externals' of his religion, cannot be assumed to be not as much alive to all the subjective implications of it—faith, conversion, personal piety, etc.,—as the earnest Evangelical is to all the objective presuppositions and grounds of his own subjectivity."⁸³ Instead, "the truly Evangelical as necessarily presupposes all the real Catholic, as the latter necessarily issues in the former."⁸⁴ Indeed, DuBose urges much more than the *tolerance* of "a consent 'to live

⁸¹ *Turning Points*, 8.

⁸² "Evangelical and Catholic, Each Needs the Other: Both Need the Church: and the Church Needs Both," in *Unity in the Faith*, 189. In this context he seems to mean the Episcopal Church or the Anglican Communion when he speaks of "the Church," as distinguished from "the wider field of Christianity."

⁸³ "Evangelical and Catholic," in *Unity in the Faith*, 191.

⁸⁴ "Evangelical and Catholic," in *Unity in the Faith*, 189.

and let live.”⁸⁵ The respective “sides” or perspectives need each other for mutual completion in the Church.⁸⁶

The openness DuBose called for was at the heart of his theological method for discerning truth by individual Christians and by the Church. He believed it could work in the Church because he had seen it work in his classroom through 40 years of teaching. He expresses the spirit of open inquiry in his classroom by noting that “questions naturally arose” and that the “newness” of his presentation “was often an irritant as well as a stimulant.” He held that his “place and part was in the mine, not in the mint, of the truth of Christianity, that free enquiry and investigation, not dogma (which would have its proper place after), was in order with us.”⁸⁷ With respect to his method, DuBose notes,

I believe that I always felt that scepticism and criticism were inevitable instruments of truth and righteousness and life, and that nothing in this world was proved, tested, or verified that had not passed through them to the uttermost end and limit.⁸⁸

The open forum that he called for in the Church was at the heart of his ecclesiology.

It was DuBose’s strong conviction that the Church should not fear the truth, nor should the Church fear a process of free and open inquiry for the sake of truth. On the contrary, the Church would ultimately be aided and strengthened by truth wherever discovered, and by the correcting or unmasking of any falsehood. DuBose was unafraid of the scientific method and the discoveries of science. He perceived no “chasm” between natural and supernatural truth.⁸⁹

DuBose saw that the Church’s quest for truth could be furthered by the rigor of critical thought as used in the scientific method of his day, and in biblical criticism. He urges,

This is an age in which everything must stand or fall by its own internal virtue of reality. Professions and pretensions must go down before the true and wholesome spirit of scepticism, criticism, and verification which will spare nothing as too sacred for it, and which is most needed just in the things

⁸⁵ “Evangelical and Catholic,” in *Unity in the Faith*, 205.

⁸⁶ “Evangelical and Catholic,” in *Unity in the Faith*, 205.

⁸⁷ *Turning Points*, 7.

⁸⁸ *Turning Points*, 80.

⁸⁹ *Turning Points*, 84.

that are the most sacred. The only thing on God's earth that is going to escape or survive the winnowing fan, the refiner's fire, that Christianity above all things ought to be and is, is the thing, whatever it is, that is genuine, that is real.⁹⁰

DuBose was unafraid to question and test the reality of the most sacred assumptions in matters of faith.

It was the open forum in the Church that would be the best means to discern the genuine, the true, and the real. It was likewise the open forum in the Church that would enable members of different perspectives to live together and grow in faith and understanding. The open forum was at the heart of DuBose's ecclesiology. His understanding of the open forum was derived from his experiences of discovery as a student and teacher.

III. EXPERIENCE, FAITH, AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD

George Townshend notes in *The Churchman* that DuBose's autobiographical sketches at the Reunion were "a frank and clear revelation of a striking personality." Townshend explains that "[i]n these last words the doctor, in a series of set papers, lived his life over again for the benefit of his hearers, narrated for them the most vital of his experiences and explained the lessons which he himself had learned from them."⁹¹

Whether he realized it or not, Townshend did much more than provide an appreciative and informative notice for a church publication concerning the Reunion. Townshend's description of the presentations by DuBose offers an important insight into the heart of his theological method: his theology was based in and formed by the experiences of the life he lived. Murray discusses DuBose's method in terms of "the science of spiritual psychology," noting that "[t]he centre of Du Bosc's interest lay always in personality. His appeal was to experience. His attention is fixed on the facts of consciousness."⁹² DuBose's theological method is rooted in his life experience, and

⁹⁰ "The Theology of the Child," in *Turning Points*, 111. This was DuBose's conclusion to his address on "The Theology of the Child" at the Sunday School Conference.

⁹¹ George Townshend, "The DuBose Reunion, An Impression," *The Churchman* (August 19, 1911), 265.

⁹² Murray, *Du Bosc as a Prophet of Unity*, 53-54. [Lecture III]

meant to be tested in light of the experiences of his readers and hearers.

DuBose notes that "essential truths" like the truth of Jesus Christ or the truth of immortality "are their own best if not only proofs," and that "apart from actual and adequate life and experience they can never be logically or speculatively demonstrated."⁹³ He urges that "the final and only convincing proof of religion is the experience of what will perfect and complete human life."⁹⁴ Similarly, DuBose urges that the "things of the life of the spirit" "cannot be known by proofs; they can be proved only by knowing."⁹⁵ We can only verify the truth of religion by "actual experiment or experience of it. We must live it in order to know it."⁹⁶ DuBose thus emphasizes the experiential nature of spiritual knowledge. He explained to his former students at the Reunion:

I think I may say that whatever of inspiration or illumination ever came to you through my life or teaching, came through the fact that I presented Christ and Christianity at first hand, not in the letter but in the spirit, not in traditional or conventional forms of technical language, but in living terms of actual human relation and experience.⁹⁷

Human experience is most relevant for DuBose in terms of both the life of faith and the work of theology. In his theology he seeks to share the spiritual truths of his own human experience, as he seeks to engage and explain the spiritual realities of others' lives.

It is noteworthy that DuBose's spiritual autobiography was not limited to "religious" experiences as such. He drew on the full range of his life experience relative to his "turning points" of conversion and the working out of the saving process in his life. Through varied experiences DuBose came to know God, and verified the reality of God's presence in his life. He also discloses how his earliest, essentially "unthematic" experience of "Presence" came to greater Christian realization in the life he lived.⁹⁸

Experience is at the heart of DuBose's theology. He notes in *The Gospel in the Gospels* that instead of urging the "mere conventional

⁹³ *Gospel in the Gospel*, 207.

⁹⁴ *Reason of Life*, 5-6.

⁹⁵ *Gospel According to St. Paul*, 240.

⁹⁶ "Christian Defense," in *Unity in the Faith*, 219-243, 242.

⁹⁷ *Turning Points*, 44.

⁹⁸ *Turning Points*, 18-19.

language of Christianity," he "would if possible speak in the common language of common experience."⁹⁹ He states that during his four years of military service in the Civil War he "acquired the habit of combining thought with life and experience."¹⁰⁰ DuBose emphasizes that we know as we can in all areas of life, including our knowing God. DuBose explains that "[h]owever God in any way or degree makes himself known to us, we may depend upon it that it is through our own way of knowing him."¹⁰¹ Similarly, "[a]ll knowledge of any sort, human or divine, comes primarily through the reason and experience of individual men."¹⁰² Salvation operates in us "only through the natural and spiritual organs and activities of ourselves, our reason or intelligence, our affections and desires, our will, our acts and habits and character and life." Our "actual environment" provides the opportunity for salvation because our "actual experience is just what we need to become all ourselves in Christ."¹⁰³

Experience likewise has a crucial role in the discernment of divine truth. Truth ("whether of the natural or of the spiritual reason") is believed "because it is truth and not because it is proved." Those "ideas or sentiments of God, of immortality, of religious faith and worship" that are "true in themselves" will persist.¹⁰⁴ But this intrinsic truth must be *perceptible* for us to discern the truth in such "ideas or sentiments of God." Our discernment of divine truth is based in experience. DuBose likewise urges that this discerning of God through experience is ultimately a corporate and not an individual task. The truth of God "must rest upon the true consensus of experience." It "cannot rest upon the variable experience of individuals."¹⁰⁵

Experience also may provide a necessary basis for theological understanding. DuBose warns in *High Priesthood and Sacrifice* that we may need a basis in experience to appreciate and receive the truth of certain theological statements. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews is not primarily "interested even in priesthood or sacrifice," but in "the facts and truths of life and of experience, which he finds these the best figures for expressing." But, DuBose asks, how can the

⁹⁹ *Gospel in the Gospels*, 280–281.

¹⁰⁰ *Turning Points*, 42.

¹⁰¹ *Ecumenical Councils*, 33.

¹⁰² *Ecumenical Councils*, 41.

¹⁰³ *Gospel According to St. Paul*, 285.

¹⁰⁴ *Ecumenical Councils*, 34–35.

¹⁰⁵ *Reason of Life*, 204.

author of the Letter to the Hebrews “translate these mere figures or vehicles into truths of life and experience” for others “if they have no life or experience of their own for the apprehension of them.” Therefore the “completeness or perfection of his exposition can only . . . go step by step with their progress in understanding, which is their growth in life.”¹⁰⁶

DuBose does not exclude or deny religious authority, proofs, or tradition. But he also warns that what is offered to be religious truth must “ring true” to experience, no matter how fully authenticated it might be by proofs or tradition. In this sense, religious knowledge must proceed *a posteriori* from experience rather than taking the form of *a priori* conclusions relative to experience.¹⁰⁷ DuBose urges,

Not God himself nor Jesus Christ nor the Scriptures could sufficiently attest to us the truth of Christianity as our truth and our life if it were not equally attested as such by the spiritual common sense and experience of men always and everywhere.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, DuBose notes that “while the truth of Christ is in one aspect absolute it is also in another sense relative to us and is to find its ultimate verification in the universal testimony of human reason and experience.”¹⁰⁹ For DuBose, it is through human reason and experience that we may know God and discern divine truth.

DuBose’s method and emphasis on experience can be compared to other theologians whose theology was deeply rooted in human experience. For example, the role of experience in natural theology is implicit in the position of Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) that our natural knowledge of God begins from sense experience.¹¹⁰ Aquinas is paralleled by DuBose at this point. With respect to the Prologue of the Gospel of John, DuBose notes, “[t]he Word of Life—God Himself, Himself imparting—speaks to us, according to St. John’s account of it, in the flesh: not through one sense only, but through all, through every natural avenue of human perception, knowledge, or experi-

¹⁰⁶ *High Priesthood and Sacrifice*, 111–112.

¹⁰⁷ *See Gospel in the Gospels*, 270.

¹⁰⁸ *Ecumenical Councils*, 44.

¹⁰⁹ *Ecumenical Councils*, 320.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), I, 58 (Pt. I, Q. 12, Art. 12).

ence.”¹¹¹ DuBose likewise urges that “nothing ever comes from God to man except through man, and except through the organs or faculties and laws of human transmission.”¹¹² In this regard, DuBose is consistent with Aquinas, who states that knowledge of God or any other knowledge must be known “according to the mode of the knower.”¹¹³ Our knowledge of God must be according to the mode of human knowing, which necessarily involves human experience.

Our naming of God is derived from sense experience because we name as we know.¹¹⁴ If we name as we know, our naming God must reflect our current experiencing of God’s reality in our lives. If our naming God will not reflect our experience of God, our naming and our theology will be hollow. Aquinas states that we cannot know the essence of God in this life.¹¹⁵ Instead, our sense experience enables us to name God in a proportional or analogical way, “[f]or we can name God only from creatures.”¹¹⁶ By analogy and through human experience, we may have a “proportional” understanding of God. We cannot comprehend the entirety of God’s love, or God as love. Similarly, DuBose draws out an analogy between the human experience of falling in love and the inspiration and renewal of God’s coming to us:

What we call “falling in love” comes to us just as naturally and just as mysteriously and inexplicably as that other only more spiritual experience of which the Lord says: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”¹¹⁷

Our experiences of human love can provide the basis for statements that truly name and signify the love of God.

DuBose, in an approach similar to Aquinas, recognizes the proportional relationship between the human experience of falling in love and the fulfillment and completion of receiving divine love. With respect to human love, DuBose notes, “the man is made for the woman and the woman for the man, and neither is complete or satis-

¹¹¹ *Reason of Life*, 77.

¹¹² “Constructive Treatment of Christianity,” in *Unity in the Faith*, 35–51, 42.

¹¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 51 (Pt. 1, Q. 12, Art. 4).

¹¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 60 (Pt. 1, Q. 13, Art. 1).

¹¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 62 (Pt. 1, Q. 13, Art. 2).

¹¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 64 (Pt. 1, Q. 13, Art. 5).

¹¹⁷ *Turning Points*, 19–20. DuBose quotes John 3:8, from Jesus’ explanation to Nicodemus about being born anew of the Spirit.

fied without the other.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, in proportional and analogical terms, the person is neither complete nor satisfied until the coming of the “divine love in which God makes Himself one with us.” DuBose draws on the “ever new old words” of Augustine to explain this need: “‘My God Thou hast made me for Thyself, and my soul will find no rest, until it rest in Thee.’”¹¹⁹ DuBose expresses the human need for God that drives the human quest for relationship with God. He uses the experience of human love to understand and explain by analogy the reason, completion, and satisfaction of human relationship with God in divine love.

It is important to note that DuBose drew upon the full range of his life experience in his theological method. He did not restrict himself to religious or supernatural experiences as such. In this regard, DuBose can be distinguished from James, who notes in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that the “essence of religious experiences, the thing by which we finally must judge them, must be that element or quality in them which we can meet nowhere else.”¹²⁰

Nicholas Lash contradicts James’s approach, urging that “it is not the case that all experience of God is necessarily religious in form or content.”¹²¹ Lash notes that religious experience is an isolated phenomenon for James. He criticizes James’s attempt to isolate “pure experience” from contamination by contact with the rest of life, including “the ills of intellectualism and institutional sclerosis.” Lash notes that for James, “those who might most closely approximate to the condition of “pure experience” would seem to be either newborn babes or grown-up people whose adulthood had been in some way deferred or dislocated.” With sharp irony, Lash finds such “infantilism, semiconsciousness, or insanity” to be a peculiar “ideal condition” for communion with God.¹²² Similarly, without direct mention of James, Paul R. Sponheim notes “it is mistaken to claim that the experience of God can be a reality apart from self and world.” Sponheim is close to Lash in his refusal to allow a conceptual split between “pure” religious experience and the rest of life. Sponheim urges,

¹¹⁸ *Turning Points*, 20.

¹¹⁹ *Turning Points*, 20. See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1961), 21 [I, 1].

¹²⁰ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 52–53.

¹²¹ Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary, Reflections in Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 7.

¹²² Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, 68.

“‘[i]n, with and under’ the experience of self and world the Christian experiences God.”¹²³

DuBose did not seek to isolate “pure” religious experience from the rest of his life. He clearly expressed in his autobiography the profound impact of his mystical conversion experience on his life, faith, and theology. But he did not view that supernatural experience as an isolated phenomenon. In his autobiography, and in his life, the mystical and transcendent was an integral part of his entire experience. DuBose’s autobiography chronicled the “turning points” of his life—including his mystical conversion experience, and numerous other experiences that were not distinctive in a mystical or supernatural way.

DuBose’s conversion experience *was* a turning point in his life. But other turning points included, for example, his experiences of loss, adversity, and escape as a soldier; his “escape” from episcopal election in the Diocese of South Carolina; and his appointment at the University of the South and subsequent experiences of teaching and learning at Sewanee. These were also turning points in his life. They were significant for his faith development and theology, even though they were not distinctively mystical or supernatural in the “pure” sense that James sought to identify.

DuBose drew on the full range of his life experience for his theology. Although he certainly recognized the spiritual character of his conversion experience as a cadet, he did not isolate the distinctively mystical or religious from the rest of his life. He did not “compartmentalize” his experience in that way. Indeed, DuBose emphasizes that the entirety of our human experience may serve the purpose of our salvation. We are to be saved *through*, not *from*, the conditions and experiences of human life in the world.¹²⁴ He notes that “life or salvation is not away from the natural to the spiritual, but through and by the natural into the spiritual.”¹²⁵ The “experiences of our life as it is” are “not only to be endured and survived, but recognized and used as divine means and instruments of our making and raising to the full stature of ourselves” in the process of salvation.¹²⁶ Christ “brought God and heaven down into hearts and lives and conditions here—

¹²³ Paul R. Sponheim, “Word & World: The Experience of God, Self and World,” *Word & World, Theology for Christian Ministry* 1:3 (Summer, 1981), 259, 261.

¹²⁴ *Reason of Life*, 114.

¹²⁵ *Reason of Life*, 118.

¹²⁶ *Reason of Life*, 165.

where they are most needed and therefore best acquired.”¹²⁷ It was through the conditions and experiences of his life in the world that DuBose came to know and describe the process of salvation. He shared many of these experiences in his autobiographical reflections.

IV. CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

DuBose’s understandings of the cross, the process of conversion, and the needed openness of the Church were at the heart of his theology. These understandings were formative for his Christology, his soteriology, and his ecclesiology. All were rooted in his personal experiences of loss, transformation, and discovery. For DuBose, this was a matter of theological method. His autobiographical sharing of his life story at the 1911 DuBose Reunion discloses the “turning points” of conversion and the working out of the saving process in his life as he experienced it. DuBose’s work of spiritual autobiography is thus the key to interpreting his theology. He sought to communicate the truths of faith and theology that were rooted in his life experience, so that others could understand and *live* the saving process he had known. His experiences of loss, transformation, and discovery were integral to the Christian life he lived and the theology that he systematically presented.

DuBose’s theology can remedy the disjunction that tends to exist between the pastoral life of the Church and serious theological reflection in an academic context. His emphasis on the role of experience—in salvation and in his theology—draws out in a very dynamic way the pastoral dimension of theological reflection and the theological dimension of pastoral life. DuBose’s spiritual autobiography makes clear that human experience and theological reflection are deeply related. They must not be divorced from each other. There is theological significance in what “rings true” to experience and helps people grow in faith (and what does not). This applies in individual lives and especially in the corporate experience of the Church. Similarly, the fruits of theological reflection have much to say about how we present and share the faith. Pastoral life cut off from theological reflection can quickly become superficial. Theological reflection cut

¹²⁷ *Reason of Life*, 129–130.

off from the realities of living the faith can quickly become abstract and unreal. DuBose presents the relations of theological reflection and pastoral life in a powerful way. He offers a theology of personally experienced salvation that is to become our reality. He shares the saving lessons of his experience.