THEOLOGY AS INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

In his preface to the third edition of *The Via Media* John Henry Newman speaks of theology in the Church as carrying on the prophetic function of Christ himself. Just as the pastoral and sacramental life of the Church carries on Christ's priestly ministry, and the papal and episcopal offices carry on Christ's governing role, so theology embodies the teaching and prophetic role of Christ. In fact, theology will play its proper role in the Church when, on the one hand, it functions to purify the worship of the Church from unworthy and superstitious elements; and, on the other hand, it purifies the government of the Church from elements of ambition, tyranny and double-dealing. In fact, in this same essay Newman goes so far as to call theology "the fundamental and regulating principle of the whole Church system."[1] In a paean of appreciation for the role of theological vision within the community of the Church Newman states:

> Nor is religion ever in greater danger than when, in consequence of national or international troubles, the Schools of theology have been broken up and cease to be.[2]

Having made these rather extravagant claims for the role of theology, Newman then goes on to point out its limitations. Church government and ordinary piety also have their rightful claims and consequently theology cannot always have its own way.

> It is too hard, too intellectual, too exact, to be always equitable, or to be always compassionate; and it sometimes has a conflict or overthrow [sic] or has to consent to a truce or a compromise, in consequence of the rival force of religious sentiment or ecclesiastical interests.[3]

The remainder of Newman's essay deals with this dialectical interaction between theology, worship and ecclesiastical polity.[4] My point

[1] John Henry Newman, *The Via Media*, Vol. I (London: Longmans, Green, 1895), p. xlvii. In the same place he goes on to say of theology: "It is commensurate with Revelation, and Revelation is the initial and essential idea of Christianity. It is the subject-matter, the formal cause, the expression, of the Prophetical Office, and, as being such, has created both the Regal Office and the Sacerdotal. And it has in a certain sense a power of jurisdiction over those offices, as being its own creations, theologians being ever in request and employment in keeping within bounds both the political and popular elements in the Church's constitution,—elements which are far more congenial than itself to corruption, and are ever struggling to liberate themselves from those restraints which are in truth necessary for their well-being."

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. xlviii-xlix.

[4] This from a man whom John Tracy Ellis calls "the greatest Catholic thinker of modern times, a seminal mind the equal of which one cannot find in the Catholic tradition until you reach back to Saint Thomas Aquinas six centuries before." From an unpublished talk given at commencement exercises at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Mahwah, N.J., on June 3, 1978.

in quoting both Newman's extravagant claims for theology's critical function on the one hand and pointing to the limitations of theology on the other is to introduce a notion whereby theology or, concretely, the theologian can both better understand his own activity and at the same time attain some grasp of his own limitations. Such a notion is intellectual conversion.

As many of you know, this is a term coined by Bernard Lonergan and found in his work *Method in Theology*.[5] A systematic understanding of intellectual conversion in Lonergan's sense would grasp it in its relations to religious and moral conversion. These two dimensions roughly parallel Newman's world of piety and religious feeling on the one hand and the human institutional and organizational world on the other. But our point in this essay would be merely to give some description of intellectual conversion as it functions (or fails to function) in theology's reflection on moral and religious conversion. It would seem, in fact, that Christian faith and Christian living demand such intellectual conversion. As Lonergan notes in speaking of faith as the "eye of love" that discerns religious beliefs:

> Among the values discerned by the eye of love is the value of believing the truths taught by the religious tradition, and in such tradition and belief are the seeds of intellectual conversion.[6]

Our aim then is simple: first, to present some understanding of what is meant by intellectual conversion by taking an example from natural science. Secondly, to draw out some conclusions regarding the practice of theology taken from this understanding. Our point primarily is not to speak of theology in its external relationships, in its relations to institutional elements or to popular piety and religious feeling. Our aim is to go inward into the inner dynamics of the theologian's own intellectual processes and to reflect on one aspect, indeed a central aspect, of theologizing, and that is intellectual conversion.

I. INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION IN THE SCIENTIST

The physicist, Freeman Dyson, gives the following description of his students' entry into the world of physics:

[5] B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder – Seabury, 1972), *passim*. Lonergan's major philosophical work, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Philosophical Library, 1957), could be said to be totally dedicated to understanding intellectual conversion or the lack thereof, even though the term itself is found nowhere in that work. Cf. in particular pp. 250-54 on the transformation from thinking about reality in terms of an "already out there now real" to genuine understanding. Other major texts related to intellectual conversion in Lonergan's writings are: *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Notre Dame, 1967), pp. 7, 20-21, 43-44; *Collection* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), pp. 158, 221-39; *The Subject* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), pp. 13-18. The article "The Origins of Christian Realism," reprinted in *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 239-61, analyzes the intellectual conversion implicit in the patristic Church's doctrinal move toward Nicea.

[6] *Method in Theology*, p. 243.

> The student begins by learning the tricks of the trade. He learns how to make calculations in quantum mechanics and get the right answers. To learn the mathematics of the subject and to learn how to use it takes about six months. This is the first stage in learning quantum mechanics, and it is comparatively easy and painless.[7]

At this point the student has a certain understanding of physics. It consists in the ability to manipulate mathematical symbols and to use the language of physics. It could be termed "nominal understanding."[8] It is a frequent occurrence in human affairs because some of us, at least, have experienced the gap between the ability to use language and a deeper level of understanding in which one knows what the language really means.

But Aristotle said that knowledge makes a bloody entrance; and similarly, Dyson goes on to give a description of the painful moment when his students are no longer satisfied with knowing the tricks of the trade. A drive deep within them demands, not just nominal understanding, but a penetrating knowledge of physical reality itself:

> The second stage comes when the student begins to worry because he does not understand what he has been doing. He worries because he has no clear physical picture in his head. He gets confused in trying to arrive at a physical explanation for each of the mathematical tricks he has been taught. He works very hard and gets discouraged because he does not seem able to think clearly. This second stage often lasts six months or longer, and it is strenuous and unpleasant.[9]

The dissatisfaction with nominal understanding and the desire for real understanding results in this painful period of worry, confusion and discouragement. Why? What is the cause of this anxiety? Dyson gives us the clue to his student's discomfort in the words: "He worries because he has no clear physical picture in his head." Indeed, it would seem that the very root of the student's anxiety is his overpowering tendency to "picture" things, to search out the visual images that alone, he assumes, can assure him of real understanding. And yet, it is only when he allows himself the frustration of that tendency that he crosses the Rubicon to real understanding:

> Then, quite unexpectedly, the third stage begins. The student suddenly says to himself, "I understand quantum mechanics," or rather he says, "I understand now that there isn't anything to be understood."[10]

He understands that there is nothing to be understood in the physical pictures he sought. Indeed, his "conversion" consists in becoming satisfied—perhaps even thrilled—with the merely probable intelligibilities expressed in such paltry technical images as $M=M_0(1-$

[7] F. Dyson, "Innovation in Physics" in Rapport and Wright eds., *Physics* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965), pp. 259-60.

[8] On nominal versus real understanding, cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 10-11; also *Collection*, pp. 98-102.

[9] Dyson, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

[10] *Ibid.*

V^2/C^2)-1/2. The technical language itself, which formerly might have seemed "mere words," provides sufficient imagery for his understanding without the need for additional "pictures" of reality. Such imagery is symbolic and heuristic; it is not representational.

This transformation in the mind of Dyson's students in a relatively short period of time reproduces the transformation that took place at the origins of modern science when humanity groped its way out of the world of common sense and mythic imagery to a more accurate apprehension of the world. The Copernican revolution that ushered in modern science took place when persons began to move from common sense reference frames (the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, etc.), to mathematically related reference frames. Galileo refused to be content with the common sense assumption that bodies fall according to their weight and instead disregarded weight in favor of mathematically related correlations between distance and time. In so doing he moved beyond the realm of common sense into another realm quite different from the world of everyday life. Such a move involved, not so much new observations, but a transformation of mind itself. It involved, as Herbert Butterfield notes, putting on a different thinking cap.

> It was supremely difficult to escape from the Aristotelian doctrine by merely observing things more closely, especially if you had already started off on the wrong foot and were hampered beforehand with the whole system of interlocking Aristotelian ideas. In fact, the modern law of inertia is not the thing you would discover by mere photographic methods of observation—it required a different kind of thinking cap, a transposition in the mind of the scientist himself.[11]

Intellectual conversion, then, is present in every student's learning of a science, and in the paradigmatic breakthroughs that constitute that science itself at each level of its development. It involves breaking out of systematically misleading ways of thinking.

> Being critical means eliminating the ordinary nonsense, the systematically misleading images and so on; the mythical account. Every scientific or philosophic breakthrough is the elimination of some myth in the pejorative sense; the flat earth, right on.[12]

Before showing the influence of intellectual conversion on our theology, however, let us analyze a little more carefully what is involved in such a transformation.

First and above all, it involves fidelity to the desire deep within the human spirit to know, to get things straight, to find out what is, a desire to enter into the world of genuine meaning, the world of truth, reality.[13]

[11] Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 16-17.

[12] Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, pp. 229-30.

[13] "Deep within us all, emergent when the noise of other appetites is stilled, there is a drive to know, to understand, to see why, to discover the reason, to find the cause, to explain. Just what is wanted has many names. In what precisely it consists, is a matter of dispute. But the fact of inquiry is beyond all doubt. It can absorb a man. It can keep him for hours, day after day, year after year, in the narrow prison of his study or his laboratory. It

This "pure, detached, disinterested desire to know" is the root of all our questioning. It is the wonder that Aristotle noted at the origin of all science and philosophy. This deep desire to get at the root of things is operative in Dyson's students as they "hang in there" with their questions, as they endure the pain of knowing that things don't quite fit, as they realize that there are unanswered, poorly answered, and yet-to-be-answered questions in their minds.

But there is also another desire at work in Dyson's students—and in everyone—and that is the desire for visual or mythical images to mark with pictures each step along that journey. Such pictures tend to emerge from the student's world, what one might term "his own little world," the unconscious horizon that can block from view a greater reality.

> To each of us his own private world is very real indeed. Spontaneously it lays claim to being the one real world, the standard, the criterion, the absolute, by which everything is judged, measured, evaluated.[14]

It is one's own little world that threatens to crumble in the process of learning any science; for such learning involves the painful conversion from one's own little world, constituted from childhood by many spontaneous attitudes, to *the* world, attained, not by picturing, but by the intellectual acts of understanding and true judgment in fidelity to the pure desire to understand and to know.

Intellectual conversion, then, involves a willingness to change one's mind, to die to one's previous habits of thinking, a real asceticism of the intellect.

In addition, besides fidelity to the pure desire to know and the willingness to change one's spontaneous ways of thinking, intellectual conversion involves a valuing of intellect itself. It involves a coming to value intellect as enriching, as mediating knowledge of the universe. Even though genuine knowledge involves the pruning of images that sedate but do not illuminate, still it aims at accurate expression in technical and theoretical terms and relations that become for the human family mediators of reality.

Technical terms, such as $M=M_o(1-V^2/C^2)-1/2$, might seem paltry images indeed to most people and certainly they do not warm the heart! Still, for those who are genuinely seeking to know the structures of reality, these are the best available mediators of natural processes. Such words allow the transcendence of the world of immediacy, the world we relate to by touch and sight and feeling, and allow our entry into the properly human world mediated by meaning, a world known not just by experience but by asking questions, by clear understanding and accurate judgment.

can send him on dangerous voyages of exploration. It can withdraw him from other interests, other pursuits, other pleasures, other achievements. It can fill his waking thoughts, hide from him the world of ordinary affairs, invade the very fabric of his dreams. It can demand endless sacrifices that are made without regret though there is only the hope, never a certain promise, of success." Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 4.

[14] Lonergan, *Collection*, p. 158.

In order to facilitate and hold such transcendence of common sense frameworks, intellect creates for itself a world of theory, a world of technically defined terms that serve as models or disclosures of dimensions of reality that transcend common sense frameworks. The major characteristics of such theory or systematic thought are: (1) a technical language which serves as a means of communication among theoreticians; (2) the implicit definition of each technical term by its relationships to other terms; (3) the exigent employ of distinctions.

All of this coheres with the present emphasis on "models" in scientific theory.[15] Such models are defined not as pictorial representations of reality, but as sets of relationships according to which numerous observations and descriptions can be brought together in a unified perspective. They are more "disclosures" than visual representations. Thus the work of any first rate theoretician will consist in sets of interlocking terms and relationships that might seem as paltry to some, but which nevertheless are valued as mediators of the intricate and complex contours of reality.

Intellectual conversion, then, involves coming to value the human spirit, our minds, as mediators of reality. It involves coming to appreciate the value of human language, especially as it emerges from the jungles of common non-sense, into the clarity achieved by making distinctions. It involves a recognition of, and a radical turning from, all the senseless, meaningless questions the human spirit tends to ask—questions that plague and obstruct progress in the knowledge of truth and reality.

At this point an adequate analysis of intellectual conversion would involve a philosophy of mind. This goes far beyond our intention here.[16] Suffice it to note Bernard Lonergan's conviction that a dawning awareness of the dynamics of our own spirit is as momentous as the discoveries and break-throughs of science. "Winter twilight cannot be mistaken for the summer noonday sun."[17]

Once Dyson's students discover their mistaken questions, their tendency to reification of theoretical models, their tendency to "misplaced concreteness," they are in a position to apply this knowledge, this new awareness, all along the line. Each new question can be critiqued and purified from this perspective.

The attitude arising from such an awareness of the dynamics of intellectual conversion includes humility. Genuine and real understanding includes the understanding that we do not know everything; we do

[15] Cf. I. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). Also Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, pp. 284-85, where he notes that models play a role in the human sciences, in philosophy and theology similar to that of mathematics in the natural sciences.

[16] Such a philosophy of mind would head toward an intellectual conversion regarding our own self-awareness. Cf. Lonergan's *Insight* where Part One is pedagogically structured to bring about such a self-awareness. The presence or absence of such awareness determines the "weight" we give to the terms of our human sciences, our philosophy and our theology.

[17] Lonergan, *Insight*, p. xix.

not even know what we tend to think we know; and there is yet much more to be known.

II. INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION IN THE THEOLOGIAN

It remains to draw some conclusions regarding the presence and absence of intellectual conversion in the theologian. First of all, as we mentioned in the beginning quoting Newman, theology functions in dialectical interaction with the pastoral and institutional elements of the Church. It both contributes to and is limited by these other elements.[18]

The first danger for theology, then, is to lose contact with its source in the vital religious and moral experience of the human family. Theology, whether of a scholastic kind or of a contemporary philosophical type, has not always been free of a certain rationalism that betrays little or no awareness that the human intellect is defined in terms of its presuppositions in experience and its completion of experience in enriching models or theoretical constructs. Such rationalism manifests itself in a self-enclosed world of theoretical concepts that bears little or no relation to the wider context of Christian religious and human living.[19]

Besides rationalism, however, there is in theology the danger of a lack of exigence—and this brings us squarely to our topic of intellectual conversion in theology. Even if, from the viewpoint of Christian commitment, theological wisdom is seen as a gift of the Holy Spirit, still one function of that Spirit is to release human understanding to be just what God intended it to be in creating it, that is, an exigent understand-

[18] A statement by the *International Theological Commission* on the relationship between the ecclesiastical magisterium and theology expressed the relationship this way: "Theologians derive their specifically theological authority from their scientific qualifications; but these cannot be separated from the proper character of this discipline as the science of faith which cannot be carried through without a living experience and practice of faith. For this reason, the authority that belongs to the theology in the Church is not merely profane and scientific, but is a genuinely ecclesial authority, inserted into the order of authorities that derive from the Word of God and are confirmed by canonical mission." *Theses on the Relationship Between the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1977), p. 6.

[19] According to Jean-Pierre Jossua, much scholastic theology lost this vital connection to human and religious development. "Now it is common knowledge that since the end of the twelfth century, Catholic theology has progressively lost the sense of this climate. On the one hand it has developed a rationality which has much value to the extent that it reflects a concern for rigorous thought, but on the other hand this rationality is so pervasive that it is destructive of theology, causes it to miss its object, and wind up with a senseless hypothesis of a man-believing theology developing its syllogism unfailingly. It is well known that the Christian East has been able to preserve this religious background of theology and that Protestantism has sometimes rediscovered it. Truth to tell, there is no conflict with the valid contribution of rigorous argument, unless one shuts oneself up in a narrowly rationalist conception of the life of the spirit. In any event, this primacy of believing experience, in the interpretation of scripture . . . seems to me absolutely fundamental. It alone can do justice to the authentic theological character of the Christian reflection of every believer and of every community however modest it may be. It alone can give full effect to the theological charism, which is far from coinciding with science or university professorships." J.-P. Jossua, "Believing Experience in the Work of Bernard Lonergan," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 40, 2 (April, 1973), 118-19.

ing that is as clear and nuanced as possible. Such is *gratia sanans*, healing grace, that does not destroy nature but brings it to fulfillment. No less than in the natural sciences, such exigent use of the human mind demands intellectual conversion, a turning away from picture-thinking and an appreciation of the theoretical values of intellect itself. Such conversion demands the appreciation of models in theology, both their value as possible disclosures of reality and their limits as comprehensive pictures of reality.

First of all, on the negative demands of this conversion. Intellectual conversion in theology is the painful process whereby we die to our tendency to "picture," "image," "capture," "contain," the structures of theological reality in our own little world. For, not content to let images be symbols of deeper truth and reality, we tend to mistake the image, the name, the picture, for the reality itself. In theology this takes place as we, perhaps unaware, try to "picture" God and "locate" him "out there" or "in here" in an imaginatively conceived framework. An essential attribute of genuine theology is the growing awareness of our crypto-materialism, our tendency to "reify" divine and personal realities. Let us give some examples of this.

Critiquing a work on the relation of the feminine to our image of God, Sister Dorothy Donnelly criticizes its reifying tendencies:

> First, is it possible she assumes there will be or now is some capturing of God with complete accuracy that theologians will accomplish or have accomplished already in a theological construct like the Trinity? This would highly affect one's notion of both terms: woman and Spirit.
>
> Second, she seems to treat Jungian terms, like animus and anima as entities and not, again, as the psychological constructs they are. So Schaupp is guilty of misplaced concreteness, thus trapping herself into false conclusions. This leads her to referring to the 'feminine' in God as if we knew what that means.
>
> 'Feminine' however is a cultural term now under intense transformation both in interpretation and role-practice. The 'eternal feminine' of Gertrude Von le Fort is another example of just such a trap. It led to obscuring the real humanity and greatness of Mary and has trapped Christian women into passivity and failure to take responsibility for their own growth intellectually and emotionally.[20]

Centuries before, Augustine discovered this same tendency in himself to "reify" his thoughts abut God:

> When I desired to think of my God, I could not think of Him save as a bodily magnitude—for it seemed to me that what was not such was nothing at all; this indeed was the principal and practically the sole cause of my inevitable error (*Confessions* 5, 10).

Augustine became liberated from the need to "picture" God through the reading of Platonic philosophy and his own dawning religious conversion.

[20] D. Donnelly, review of *Woman: Image of the Holy Spirit* by J. Schaupp (Dimension Books, 1975), *National Catholic Reporter*, May 7, 1976, p. 9.

Similarly, in *Man Becoming*, Gregory Baum masterfully critiques the image of the "outsider God" over and against us that seems to have had a pronounced influence on recent Catholic thinking and prevented it from perceiving the hand of the Lord in contemporary experience. To this extreme extrinsicism Baum counterposes an "insider God" working in and through human aspirations and activities.[21] But one can wonder whether such an "insider God" is not also subject to criticism, a criticism guided by a theoretically articulated doctrine of Spirit as both immanent and transcendent.

In moral theology a similar lack of intellectual conversion seems present in an obsession with casuistry, a need to know "the answer" to imaginatively formulated questions. Such an obsession is based on the vision of reality as imaginary rather than as intelligible. The moral theologian can, at the most, give differentiated principles, norms and values, publicly espoused in dialogue with historical discourse, that may shed helpful light on understanding and guiding human experience and behavior. Beyond that he cannot go. We might add that such awareness might to some degree save him the tension of having to have all the answers.

Such a lack of intellectual conversion can affect even scientific historians of religious experience as they try to reach "the event itself" (for example, the Resurrection) in the sense of an imagined or pictured event and are not content with the intrinsic (yet not picturable) intelligibility of historical evidence.[22] Such is Lonergan's complaint with Bultmann's tendency to divide the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith—influenced as that tendency is by a nineteenth-century positivist view of history.[23]

Similarly, positivist historians with a "machine-image" of the laws of nature find it impossible to admit wonders and miracles. As Lonergan notes in treating of the historian, Carl Becker:

> Can miracles happen? If the historian has constructed his world on the view that miracles are impossible, what is he going to do about witnesses testifying to miracles as matters of fact? Obviously, either he has to go back and reconstruct his world on new lines, or else he has to find these witnesses

[21] G. Baum, *Man Becoming* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). Cf. p. 249 where he asks, "Is it possible to pray to the insider God?" Baum seems to equate extrinsicist images of God with "objectifying" God, but his very writing does just that.

[22] A compulsion to want "the things in themselves" as imaginable entities bedeviled Kantian philosophy and one is caught in a transcendental subjectivism if one's notion of objectivity is to get "out there" or "behind the phenomena." The only break with idealism in philosophy and such philosophies implicit in theology is the discovery that the human intellectual processes of questioning, understanding, and judging are intrinsically objective. To the extent that one is faithful to one's genuine subjectivity in these acts, one is already "out there" in the world that is.

[23] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 318. There he notes that both Barth and Bultmann emphasize the need for conversion. Yet, "in both Barth and Bultmann, though in different manners, there is revealed the need for intellectual as well as moral and religious conversion. Only intellectual conversion can remedy Barth's fideism. Only intellectual conversion can remove the secularist notion of scientific exegesis represented by Bultmann."

> either incompetent or dishonest or self-deceived. Becker was quite right in saying the latter is the easier course.[24]

The very possibility that, in our critiques of cultural myths and images, other images could be keeping us from fact and truth is hardly entertained.[25] The movement from a nineteenth-century image of the laws of nature to a more contemporary open-ended understanding of natural science can perhaps make room in an historian's understanding for a more adequate understanding of past witnesses to miracles.[26]

> Hume's argument [against miracles] did not really prove that no miracles had ever occurred. Its real thrust was that the historian cannot deal intelligently with the past when the past is permitted to be unintelligible to him. Miracles are excluded because they are contrary to the laws of nature that in his generation are regarded as established; but if scientists come to find a place for them in experience, there will be historians to restore them to history.[27]

So much for examples of the lack of intellectual conversion—or rather, the need for intellectual conversion in theology. Positively, an appreciation of the exigent nature of theology involves a valuing of models. Examples of such models in theology would be Dulles' *Models of the Church,* Tracy's models of types of theologizing in *Blessed Rage for Order*, indeed Lonergan's model of the levels of consciousness and of basic human process as intellectual, moral and religious conversion. Such models are ideal constructs that help us appreciate sets of relationships within a particular writer's works, within the complexities of historical and cultural movements, in the conflicts of the times, within the human person, in the elements of doctrines or systematic understanding, within the levels of theological communication.[28]

As you might have noted, the last lines involve an implicit endorsement for Bernard Lonergan's model of theological methodology. For intellectual conversion in theology must involve an awareness of the many levels and specializations involved in the doing of theology.[29] Lonergan lists eight such specializations: research, interpretation, his-

[24] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 222.

[25] As Peter Gay said of the Enlightenment *philosophes*: "They never wholly discarded that final, most stubborn illusion that bedevils realists—the illusion that they were free from illusions. This distorted their perception and gave their judgments a certain shallowness." *The Enlightenment* (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 27; quoted in Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 12.

[26] Such a movement, such an intellectual conversion, is not easy. It is indeed, bloody, "Such a world is a matter not merely of details but of basic options. Once such options are taken and built upon, they have to be maintained, or else one must go back, tear down, reconstruct. So radical a procedure is not easily undertaken; it is not comfortably performed; it is not quickly completed. It can be comparable to major surgery, and most of us grasp the knife gingerly and wield it clumsily." *Method in Theology*, p. 221.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

[28] The use of various models from the human sciences is becoming more prevalent among theologians. Cf. L. Kohlberg's models of moral development and J. Fowler on religious development. For a bibliography see T. Hennessy, ed., *Values and Moral Development* (New York: Paulist, 1976), pp. 225-28. Also G. Winter's models of social thinking: *Elements for a Social Ethic* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

[29] An awareness of such various levels can be seen in Karl Rahner's various works in which, as he introduces each subject, he clearly defines what he is *not* going to talk about.

tory, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics, communications. Each of these specializations involves a specific area of questioning, concern and language. Without such a model of theological methodology and collaboration among theologians, one is in danger of not knowing what one is doing when one is doing it. One is in danger of not knowing how much "weight" to give to one's terms. Most significantly, without such a basic model of theological methodology, the theologian is in danger of not knowing how each of these areas of theological specialization and the construction of models on each of these levels is related to his own personal conversion, not just on the intellectual level—and we are stressing this—but on the moral and religious level as well.

We should note in particular that the demands of intellectual conversion in theology are often only appreciated through conflict. These conflicts, whether within the theologian himself, or with other theologians, or with church leaders, or with the pious believers, eventually brings out into the open the underlying issues. In "The Origins of Christian Realism" Lonergan shows that the dialectic of positions and counter-positions leading up to the Christological definitions of the Council of Nicea were a clarifying of underlying issues and gradual purifying of naive types of thinking.[30] Would it be too much to suggest that in current conflicts there is at stake similar clarifications?[31]

Because theology is theory, the mind's free and disinterested performance and its expression in non-representative language, it is a genuine perfection of the human person. As such, it is certainly to be expected in the Christian community. An anti-intellectual fundamentalism inveighs against the importation of systematic vocabulary into the realm of Christian belief. Such attacks against "lifeless ideas" or "meaningless abstractions" can overlook the enriching character of intellect itself. Abstractions can be impoverishing to the extent that significant elements of life are missed. At the same time, the nature of intellect itself unceasingly heads for enriching abstraction that grasps the meaningful as meaningful and leaves aside the insignificant because it is known to be insignificant. The beauty of theoretical physics is its testimony to the human spirit's ability to penetrate to the inwardness of things. Genuine Christian theology ought to do the same in regard to man's relationship to God in Christ.

For this reason the element of humility is particularly significant in the theologian—not thinking he controls the mystery because he con-

[30] Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, pp. 239-61.

[31] For example, in the recent dialectic of positions between David Tracy, Avery Dulles and Peter Berger, occasioned by Tracy's *A Blessed Rage for Order*, there seems to be at stake the underlying validity of a model of human process as including not just intellectual transformation but the autonomy of moral and especially religious transformation as well. One senses that, although Tracy is indebted to Lonergan for his concern for intellectual clarity and exigence, he would be uncomfortable with Lonergan's statement: "But when conversion is the basis of the whole theology, when religious conversion is the event that gives the name, God, its primary and fundamental meaning, when systematic theology does not believe it can exhaust or even do justice to that meaning, not a little has been done to keep systematic theology in harmony with its religious origins and aims." *Method in Theology*, p. 350.

trols theoretical vocabulary. In theology it is particualrly important to know that we do not know everything—and that there is always more to know.

Again we are in the area of the need for intellectual conversion: knowing the value of what we know and that this gives us no picture of reality. For we are seeking some understanding of God's ways with persons—*aliqua Deo data intelligentia*, as Vatican I puts it—some God-given intelligibility. Such an understanding only brings us deeper into the abyss that is the mystery of God—and before such a light, the eyes of our minds are, as Aristotle noted, like owls' eyes in the day, virtually blinded by such great light.

Such reflection is filtered through the religious and moral experience of each person. The individual's love of God, his praxis, inevitably destroys myths or images of God and the Christian Church in history inevitably refines her doctrinal and dogmatic expressions of this incomprehensible Lord in love with and incarnately involved with people.

RICHARD M. LIDDY
Immaculate Conception Seminary
Mahwah, New Jersey

Man's Capacity for Self Transcendence
– On "Conversion" in Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology* –

John Berry

The concept of "conversion", while seldom used in his writings until the late 1960's, constituted the major interest of Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) for more than a generation. For him, the core of conversion itself is the transformation of the "subject". It is man's call to the realisation of ever higher levels of self-transcendence putting into action the cognitive, ethical and affective response to the religious object. Especially in his Method in Theology, *Lonergan explains that only in undergoing a series of conversions – intellectual, moral and religious – culminating in the experience of the love of God (Rom 5,5) by obeying the transcendental precepts that the subject can progressively expand his horizons. In studying the relationship among the different conversions, this essay shows that even if the religious conversion can indeed enjoy a priority over the others, still one is in relation to the other and yet so meaningful on its own. It is a three-dimensional process of self-transcendence taken in whatever order.*

In *Method in Theology* and elsewhere, Lonergan[1] describes conversion as a three-dimensional process of self-transcendence,[2] which is played out, so to speak, on the intellectual, moral and religious levels. Conversion, then, concerns the cognitive, ethical and affective response to the religious object, that is to say, the object of

1. Of Bernard Lonergan, the *Time* magazine remarked that he is "considered by many intellectuals to be the finest philosophic thinker of the 20th century". Cf. *Time* April 20th 1970, as quoted in Bernard J. Tyrrell, "The dynamics of conversion", in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 72 (1972) 57.
2. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London1972, 237-244; "Self-Trascendence", in *A Third Collection*, Paulist Press, New York 1985, 131-134.

'ultimate concern'.[3] It involves, therefore, man's call to the realisation of ever higher levels of self-transcendence.

1. *The term "conversion"*

"Conversion" is given ample treatment in his *Method in Theology*, referred to by some as "the crowning achievement of a thinker of genius".[4] Interestingly enough, however, the word conversion does not even occur in the massive index of *Insight*.[5] In point of fact, it is also true that the whole thrust of *Insight* is toward what Lonergan later spoke of as "intellectual conversion", but in *Insight* he speaks rather of the "self-appropriation of the knower". It was eleven years later, in *The Subject*, that Lonergan decided to discuss and deal with conversion, describing it as "a personal philosophical experience".[6] Thus, the word "conversion" is seldom used in Lonergan's writings up until the late 1960's. Notwithstanding this, the word refers to realities or occurrences that have perhaps constituted *the* major interest of Lonergan for more than a generation. Becoming a favourite term in his latter years,[7] conversion appeared as a major theme in the articles entitled "Revolution in Catholic Theology"[8] and "Theology in its New Context".[9]

Pointing out that Lonergan's discovery of the fact and significance of conversion was not something that occurred between the writing of *Insight* and of *Method*, Donal J. Dorr identifies the articles on *Gratia Operans* as ample evidence of the

3. Cf. Terrence Merrigan, "Imagination and Religious Commitment in the Pluralist Theology of Religions", in *Louvain Studies* 27 (2002) 199.
4. Cf. Hugo Meynell, "Hope, method and genius", in *The Tablet* 226 (1972) 422.
5. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Philosophical Library, New York1957. *Insight*, Lonergan's monumental opus, has been compared in significance to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. This work is a study of human understanding as it is operative in mathematics, scientists and men in their common-sense activities. Bernard Tyrrell clarifies that as such the whole thrust of *Insight* is toward what Lonergan later spoke of as "intellectual conversion"; however in *Insight* he speaks rather of the "self-appropriation of the knower". Cf. Bernard J. Tyrrell, "The dynamics of conversion", 57-58.
6. Bernard Lonergan, *The Subject*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee1968, 18.
7. Cf. B. C. Butler, "Lonergan and Conversion", in *Worship* 49 (1975) 330.
8. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, "Revolution in Catholic Theology", in *A Second Collection*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London1974, 231-238.
9. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context", in *A Second Collection*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1974, 55-67.

Canadian Jesuit's interest in religious conversion over a period of sixty years.[10] It is not, however our object here to point back to the origins of Lonergan's cognitional theory in *Insight* and even the pre-*Insight Verbum* articles.[11] An attempt to trace the development of the notion of conversion over that period is beyond our scope. Our goal is to present Lonergan's understanding of the three conversions and their interrelationship. Thus, there will not be an explanation of the functional specialties and their dynamic interrelationships.

As such, *Method in Theology* has no comprehensive and systematic treatment of conversion but like any other key notions, Lonergan's treatment of the topic must be understood against the background of his earlier writings. Lonergan arrived at his first definition of conversion after conducting an early study on Thomas Aquinas's use of the notion. Lonergan began to understand conversion as a *change* of orientation. He noticed that *conversio*, for Aquinas, did not entail conversion *from*, but simply meant a natural orientation: "the conversion of possible intellect to phantasmata is described ... as a natural orientation of human intellect in this life".[12] This led Lonergan to understand conversion as a change of "intention". Having his interest moved on without discontinuity from philosophy and traditional dogmatics to history and the moral and religious levels of actual human living,[13] Lonergan shifted his attention to the core of conversion itself, that is, the transformation of the subject. The latter, he maintains, constitutes the basic horizon of the individual.[14]

10. The second of these articles (now chapter three of *Grace and Freedom*) present it in Thomistic categories as a *gratia operans* which is a *habitus*. In the final article, he refers to the distinction made by Aquinas between this kind of conversion and how other types – the perfect conversion of the beatific vision and the preparatory conversion which does not involve the infusion of a "habit". Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Theological Studies* 3 (1942) 558; *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London1971, 122. The relationship between Lonergan's analysis of conversion and his earlier work on grace has been treated briefly in Kevin Colleran, "Bernard Lonergan on Conversion", in *Dunwoodie Review* 11 (1971) 3-23. For a different interpretation, confer Charles E. Curran, "Christian Conversion in the Writings of Bernard Lonergan", in *Foundations of Theology*, edited by Philip McShane, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin1971, 41-59; Donal Dorr, "Conversion", in *Looking at Lonergan's Method*, edited by Patrick Corcoran, Talbot, Dublin1975, 175-186.
11. We refer the reader to chapter 5 in *Method* which gives a kind of diagrammatic view of the functional specialties.
12. Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London1967, 160.
13. Cf. Butler, "Lonergan and Conversion", 330.
14. Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context", 66-67.

2. *"The Subject" as a knower*

The turning towards the subject, remarks Michael T. McLaughlin, characterises Lonergan's contribution to the renewal of theology after Vatican II.[15] In *Method in Theology*, therefore, Lonergan wanted to contribute not only a theory of knowledge which would open out to a renewal of metaphysics but also a new method in theology itself. The turn to the subject was a way of beginning theology from below.[16] Thus, Lonergan starts with the human person seeking to know himself or herself as a knower, as a knower located in history, and as one who has inherited from the past not only culture but religious beliefs.[17] But let us refer to what Lonergan has to say about "the subject".

The study of "the subject" – the experience, thinking, judging and deciding subject – is, he says, "the study of oneself inasmuch as one is conscious. It prescinds from the soul, its essence, its potencies, its habits, for none of these are given in consciousness. It attends to operations and to their centre and source which is the self".[18] The subject or self is one who not only experiences, thinks and judges, but also "deliberates, evaluates, chooses and acts".[19] And in so doing, he (the subject) not only changes his environment; he changes, and indeed in some sense "makes" himself: "he makes himself what he is to be, and he does so freely and responsibly".[20] Lonergan explains that the turning-point for the subject comes when he becomes explicitly aware of this freedom and responsibility for "making himself", and responsibly chooses it.

Lonergan explains that human persons are subjects by degrees. He presents a scheme where the existential subject stands in distinct but related levels of consciousness:

1. on the first level, the lowest level, Lonergan places what he calls the *merely potentially subject* whereby the person is unconscious in dreamless sleep,
2. then, due to a minimal degree of consciousness and subjectivity, the person is a *helpless subject* of his or her dreams,

15. Cf. Michael T. Mclaughlin, *Knowledge, Consciousness and Religious Conversion in Lonergan and Aurobindo*, Pontifical Gregorian University Press, Rome 2003, 55.
16. Cf. *Ibid.*, 55.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*
18. Lonergan, *The Subject*, 7.
19. *Ibid.*, 19.
20. *Ibid.*

3. he becomes an *experiential subject* when he awakes. Lonergan explains that at this stage, people become "subjects of lucid perception, imaginative projects, emotional impulses, and bodily action";[21]
4. on the fourth level, Lonergan places *the intelligent subject* who sublates the experiential realm. Lonergan explains that the person in this stage, among other things, grows in understanding and expresses his inventions and discoveries;
5. on the next level, *the rational subject* sublates the intelligent and experiential subject. Lonergan explains that at this stage, a person not only questions, but also checks his own understanding and expression. He can also marshal the evidence *pro* and *con* as well as judge something to be so or not to be so;[22]
6. Finally, there is human consciousness as its fullest. Lonergan argues that when a person deliberates, evaluates, decides and acts, rational consciousness is sublated by rational self-consciousness. Thus, there comes to be *the existential self.*

3. *Changing horizons: the subject in conflict*

Lonergan relates the idea of conversion to that which Joseph de Finance has named "the vertical exercise of freedom".[23] There is a bond between conversion (sometimes also referred to as the nature of human authenticity)[24] and the exercise of freedom by which one's horizon is changed. Avery Dulles explains that in undergoing a series of conversions – intellectual, moral and religious – culminating in the experience of the love of God by obeying the transcendental precepts, the subject progressively expands his horizons.[25] One can speak of a conversion, remarks Lonergan, when the new horizon is not merely a harmonious expansion of the previous horizon, but is in some respects contradictory to the older horizon.[26]

Before coming to terms with the meaning of a "horizon", it should be made clear that Lonergan uses this notion as an image for explaining how conflict can arise. It can be described in terms of conflicting beliefs, differences in horizons, or

21. *Ibid.*, 20.
22. Cf. *Ibid.*, 21.
23. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 237.
24. Conversion is explored in the fifth functional specialty, entitled *Foundations*, however, the most synthetic discussion of the three conversions occurs in the fourth chapter of *Method* dealing with the speciality, *Dialectic*. Cf. Hugo A. Meynell, *The Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, Scholars, Atlanta, Georgia1986, 15.
25. Cf. Avery Dulles, "Review of *Method in Theology*", in *Theological Studies* 33 (1972) 553.

the presence or absence of any of the three conversions. Furthermore, conflict can occur in any one of the eight functional specialties from research onward.

> The conflicts may be overt or latent. They may be in the religious sources, in the religious tradition, in the pronouncements of the authorities, or in the writings of theologians. They may regard contrary orientations of research, contrary interpretations, contrary histories, contrary styles of evaluation, contrary horizons, contrary doctrines, contrary systems, contrary policies.[27]

David Tracy, one of Lonergan's disciples, describes horizon as the "maximum field of vision from a determined viewpoint and embraces both relative horizon which describes one's field of vision relative to one's development, and basic horizon which describes the human subject as related to the three transcendental conversions already mentioned".[28] Moreover, Michael T. McLaughlin notes that though the image "horizon" is a visual one, its content is not.[29]

> As fields of vision vary with one's standpoint, so too the scope of one's knowledge and the range of one's interests vary with the period in which one lives, one's social background and milieu, one's education and personal development. So there has arisen a metaphorical and perhaps analogous meaning to the word horizon. In this sense, what lies beyond one's horizon is simply outside the range of one's knowledge and interests: one neither knows nor cares. But what lies within one's horizon is in some measure, great or small, an object of interest and knowledge.[30]

Lonergan identifies four characteristics concerning horizons. Firstly, many horizons, in some measure, include and complement one another. Secondly, horizons may differ "genetically". In other words, each later stage presupposes earlier stages,

26. Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238.
27. *Ibid.*, 235.
28. For David Tracy, there are four basic conversions: the intellectual, moral, religious and Christian conversion. Cf. David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, Herder & Herder, New York1970, 19-20.
29. Cf. McLaughlin, *Knowledge, Consciousness and Religious Conversion in Lonergan and* Aurobindo, 63.
30. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 235.

partly to include them, and partly to transform them. Thirdly, horizons may be opposed dialectically. For instance, what is true for one person may be false for another. Lastly, horizons are the structured resultant of past achievement and both the condition and the limitation of further development. Lonergan explains that all learning is, not a mere addition to previous learning, but rather "an organic growth out of it".[31]

At this stage, we cannot speak of conversion without having first presented the conscious and intentional operations which are the "rock" on which Lonergan constructs his theological method.[32] The human mind, Lonergan explains, is governed by an unrestricted dynamism toward the fullness of truth, reality and goodness, and that from this dynamism one can distil the transcendental notions of the true, the real and the good. These notions, if taken in reference to Lonergan's four levels of intentionality (experience, insight, judgement, and decision), yield four transcendental precepts: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, and be responsible.[33] Frederick E. Crowe explains that these precepts Lonergan offers are concerned with what it is to be an "incarnate subject". Crowe includes the precept "to be in love".[34] The criteria used in the transcendental method are thus rooted in

31. *Ibid.*, 237.
32. Cf. Lonergan, *Method*, 19-20. Frederick E. Crowe maintains that Lonergan's work is not "a theory, a model, or a system; not even a way". It is an *organon*, which concerns "a developed talent of an incarnate subject, a way of structuring man's conscious activities that has been of immense importance for the ongoing work of the human race". In this context, the Greek word, *organon*, has been used to designate an instrument of mind. Crowe suggests that specific use of the words "incarnate subject" suggests something more integral than the "mind" which may suggest to some a mental faculty in a body. Integral in the sense of people who experience, question, understand, reflect, judge, deliberate, decide and sometimes fall in love. Thus, calling this methodology an *organon*, emphasis is laid on the inseparability between the theological knowing and who is the theologian. Cf. Frederick E. Crowe, *The Lonergan Enterprise*, Cowley, Cambridge, Massachusetts1980, xiii-iv. 7. 15.
33. *Method in Theology* adapts *Insight*'s four levels of intentionality: empirical (gathering data), intellectual (seeking intelligibility), rational (true judgements), and responsible (action and value). However, reflecting the development in his thought since *Insight*, Lonergan was later to give greater emphasis to the fourth level, the *responsible* level, on which human beings deliberate, decide and act. Initially, the cognitive theory which has been described in detail in *Insight* consisted of three levels of consciousness and intentionality: the *empirical* level on which we sense and perceive, the *intellectual* level on which we enquire, understand and express, and the *rational* level on which we reflect and judge. Cf.Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 9; John M. McDermott, "Bernard Lonergan", in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapid, Michigan 2000, 328.
34. Cf. Crowe, *The Lonergan Enterprise*, xiv.

the very nature of the human mind. In other words, Lonergan's method requires the subject to observe the four precepts.

Obeying these precepts, man expands his horizons and experiences a series of conversions culminating in the experience of the love of God. Furthermore, John M. McDermott explains that along the four levels of intentionality, it is the Spirit who spontaneously advances in self-transcendence to intellectual, moral and religious conversions.[35] To quote one of Lonergan's favourite texts, "the gift of God's love flooding our hearts is the gracious gift of a *conversion*".[36]

4. *Conversion as the cognitive, ethical and affective response to the religious object*

Understood in this sense, conversion becomes a new type of foundation with which theology nowadays can "mediate between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix".[37] Lonergan is concerned with a transcendental method that is not confined to any particular field or subject matter. His method is concerned with meeting the exigencies and exploiting the opportunities presented by the human mind itself. Lonergan describes this method as transcultural and normative, based on the structures of human knowing, which are universal and invariant.[38] He argues that since culture has come to be seen as a moving target, theology has to adapt in order to meet its task of mediation.[39] On the same lines, Richard M. Liddy comments that what characterises Lonergan's *Method in Theology* is conversion: "the apprehension of conversion through historical scholarship and the communication of the meaning and value of authentic conversion through a methodical theology".[40]

Attentiveness to experience, intelligence in theorizing, reasonableness in judgement, and responsibility in decision imply "authentic subjectivity". Lonergan explains that rather than putting away one's imaginative capacities and taking a look

35. Cf. McDermott, "Bernard Lonergan", 328.
36. Cf. Romans 5, 5. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105. 278, for the context in which Lonergan uses it.
37. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.
38. Cf.*Ibid.*, 14.
39. Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.
40. Richard M. Liddy, *Transforming Light*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota1993, 198.

at reality, "objectivity" is "the fruit of authentic subjectivity".[41] *Method in Theology*, therefore, is "the fruit of a life-time's patient reflection on what theologians do, can do, and ought to do".[42]

4.1 *Intellectual Conversion*

The first of the three conversions is intellectual. Lonergan describes *intellectual conversion* as the overcoming of all solipsism in and through the realization that the real world is the world mediated by meaning.

> Intellectual conversion is a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there, and that the real is what is out there now to be looked at.[43]

Lonergan distinguishes between the world of immediacy and the world mediated by meaning. Whereas the former is a world known by the sense experience, the latter regards the external and internal experience of a cultural community and the continuously checked and rechecked judgements of the community as foundational. As further explained by Lonergan, the result of intellectual conversion is the position named "critical realism". This is to be distinguished from the naïve realist, the empiricist, and the idealist. All four correspond to totally different horizons with no common identical objects.[44] Hugo A. Meynell argues that intellectual conversion takes place when the critical realist opts for the fully critical theory of knowledge, and applies it to all his opinions, whether common-sense, scientific, philosophical, religious or anti-religious.[45]

Bartholomew M. Kiely explains that the true, objective, and real are attained in judgment, and that a judgment "must meet conditions" before it can be considered

41. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 292.
42. Crowe, *The Lonergan Enterprise*, xiii.
43. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238.
44. Cf. *Ibid.*, 239.
45. Cf. Meynell, *The Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, 10.

a verified judgment.[46] He adds however that these conditions vary with the kind of judgment. Kiely shows that in principle, there are a number of steps which the critical realist is not free to take. For instance, he is not free to disregard questions about the genuineness of his values. Conversely, he must always respect the further question, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. Thus, intellectual conversion is the taking up of a position on the nature of knowledge and truth.

For Terrence Merrigan, central aspects to the understanding of the intellectual conversion are both the community and its tradition: "For religious men and women, that meaning is disclosed in the tradition mediated by the religious community". Merrigan continues that the maintenance of that tradition, in its integrity, is only possible on the basis of the rigorous commitment to truth which is characteristic of the intellectually converted.[47] As has already been stated, the religious community must be prepared to 'continuously check and recheck its judgments' about what it regards as true, good, and worthy of devotion.[48]

4.2 *Moral Conversion*

The second of the three conversions is *moral conversion*. Lonergan describes moral conversion as the radical change in the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values.[49] Thus, on the frontier between intellectual and moral conversion lies the judgement of value. In other words, it involves the thrust of our human freedom toward authenticity. He explains that whereas children have to be "persuaded, cajoled, ordered or compelled to do what is right", an adult can "decide for himself what he is to make of himself".[50]

46. Cf. Bartholomew M. Kiely, *Psychology and Moral Theology*, Gregorian University Press, Rome1987, 214.
47. Cf.Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238, 243. Let us refer to what Lonergan remarks on the intellectual conversion: "Finally, among the values discerned by the eye of love is the value of believing the truths taught by the religious tradition, and in *such tradition* and *belief* are *the seeds* of *intellectual conversion*" (243). On his behalf, Tracy describes intellectual conversion as the "radical reorientation of the authentic subject from some little world of his own... to a world of the intelligently understood and the reasonably affirmed." Cf. Tracy, *The Achievement* of *Bernard Lonergan*, 231.
48. Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238, 114-115.
49. Cf. *Ibid.*, 240.
50. Cf. *Ibid.*, 240.

Kiely argues that moral conversion differs from intellectual conversion in that it involves choice and decision, and not only judgement.[51] This can be best illustrated when Lonergan states that moral conversion "consists in opting for the truly good, even for value against satisfaction when value and satisfaction conflict".[52] It involves the recognition that the world is "regulated by value,"[53] and the willingness to opt for value against satisfaction. Merrigan notes that for religious men and women, the absolute value is the religious object.[54] Merrigan writes that it is worth noting that Lonergan increasingly highlighted the role of feelings as intentional responses to values.[55]

> Feelings reveal values to us. They dispose us to commitment. But they do not bring commitment about. For commitment is a personal act, a free and responsible act, a very open-eyed act in which we would settle what we are to become. It is open-eyed in the sense that it is ... aware that one's present commitment however firm cannot suspend the freedom that will be exercised in its future execution.[56]

In other words, while feelings are vital to religious commitment, such commitment cannot escape the challenge, and the burden, of ongoing critical self-

51. Cf.Kiely, *Psychology and Moral Theology*, 215.
52. Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 240.
53. *Ibid.,* 112.
54. *Ibid.,* 115-124. See pp. 115-116, where Lonergan writes that the apprehension of transcendent value "consists in the experienced fulfilment of our unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence, in our actuated orientation towards the mystery of love and awe. Since that thrust is of intelligence to the intelligible, of reasonableness to the true and the real, of freedom and responsibility to the truly good, the experienced fulfilment of that thrust in its unrestrictedness may be objectified as a clouded revelation of absolute intelligence and intelligibility, absolute truth and reality; absolute goodness and holiness." Lonergan describes the "apprehension of transcendent value" as faith.
55. Bernard J. Tyrrell, "Feelings as Apprehensive-Intentional Responses to Values," in *Lonergan Workshop,* vii, edited by Fred Lawrence, Scholars Press, Atlanta, GA 1988, 331-360; Frederick E. Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC 1989, 344-359; Mark J. Doorley, *The Place of the Heart in Lonergan's Ethics,* University Press of America, Lanham, MD 1996, 111-112. See also Bernard Lonergan, "Religious Commitment," in *The Pilgrim People: A Vision with Hope*, edited by Joseph Papin, Villanova University Press, Villanova1970, 64-65.
56. Lonergan, *A Third Collection,* 173. Cf. Neil Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation: The Meaning and Function of Revelation in Bernard Lonergan's 'Method in Theology'*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD 2000, 124-125.

appropriation.[57] On his part, Meynell highlights the striving for the objective good and the avoidance of any bias. Moral conversion consists in envisaging and striving for the objective good, and in setting oneself against all tendencies to individual and group bias, both in oneself and in one's environment.[58] The subject, therefore, must "root out bias, acquiring morally relevant knowledge, learning about one's values and motives, and acquiring the habits of a good man".[59]

4.3 *Religious Conversion*

The third conversion is *religious conversion*, "a topic little studied in traditional theology".[60] Thus, beyond intellectual and moral conversion, but also on the fourth level of responsible, existential consciousness, there is the possibility of religious conversion. Like the other two conversions, religious conversion is a special modality, a crucial instance of self-transcendence.[61] It concerns the being grasped by an other-worldly love. In Meynell's words, It is "a matter of being touched and directed by a basic and unconditional love and good will".[62] As Paul put it in Romans 5, 5, it concerns God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Religious conversion, then, is "the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence, whether in the pursuit of truth, or in the realization of human values, or in the orientation man adopts to the universe, its ground, and its goal."[63]

> It is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations. But it is such a surrender, not as an act, but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts.[64]

Central to Lonergan's understanding of religious conversion is the reality of love, a total, other-worldly, love of God "with all one's heart and all one's soul and

57. Cf.Merrigan, "Imagination and Religious Commitment in the Pluralist Theology of Religions", 200.
58. Cf. Meynell, *The Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, 10.
59. Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 240.
60. Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context", 65.
61. Cf. Walter Conn, "Bernard Lonergan's Analysis of Conversion", in *Angelicum* 53 (1976) 387.
62. Meynell, *The Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, 10.
63. *Ibid.*, 241.
64. Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 240; (see also 105-106).

all one's mind and all one's strength".[65] In "Faith and Beliefs", Lonergan points out in his introductory remarks on religious involvement that "man's capacity for self-transcendence" becomes "achievement when one falls in love".[66] Such a being-in-love brings about a transformation of one's horizon, one's world, one's very being, and so a transformation of the source of all one's discoveries, decisions, and deeds.[67]

Religious conversion, involving "a changed relation to God", is in its total form, "a radical transformation" of the object, "on all levels of living, an interlocked series of changes and developments", accompanied by "a change in oneself, in one's relations to other persons, and in one's relations to God". It is a gift of God, received and accepted by the converted; and it is capable of growth. It is "transvaluation of values".[68] Thus, it is an existential event, and a gift from God.

There remains however the task of making religious conversion effective in one's life. Lonergan here refers to the distinction between *operative* and *coopérative* grace. The former is religious conversion; the latter is the effectiveness of the conversion. Thus, man is in need of "the gradual movement towards a full and complete transformation of the whole of one's living and feeling, one's thought's, words, deeds, and omissions".[69]

Meynell observes that religious conversion should give us the heart to put forward the effort and endure the hardship involved in undergoing, and fully implementing, the two other kinds of conversion.[70] Kiely suggests that religious conversion is to be conceived as a beginning, in a manner analogous to the other two conversions.[71] At any rate, the nature of the relationship between religious conversion, and moral and intellectual conversion has generated much discussion. I shall shortly be referring to their relationship.

65. *Ibid.*, 242.
66. Bernard Lonergan, "Faith and Beliefs", (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Newton, Mass., October1969), 9.
67. Cf. Walter Conn, "Bernard Lonergan's Analysis of Conversion", 389-390.
68. Cf. B. C. Butler, "Conversion and Theology", in *The Tablet* 224 (1970) 425.
69. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241. On grace as operative and cooperative in St. Thomas, confer *Theological Studies* 2 (1941) 289-324; *Theological Studies* 3 (1941) 69-88; 375-402; 533-578.
70. Meynell, *The Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, 10.
71. Cf. Kiely, *Psychology and Moral Theology*, 216.

Lonergan equates religious conversion with "religious experience" and ascribes it to the action of the Holy Spirit.[72] In *Method in Theology* he identifies its defining feature as the encounter with "a charged field of love, and meaning."[73] Frederick E. Crowe points out that, as "a religious philosopher groping toward a common language for dialogue among the religions," Lonergan sought to go beyond "the Christian terms that [were] his predilection," and develop, as it were, a generic description of the religious differentiation of consciousness.[74]

In any case, Lonergan recognizes that the state of being grasped by ultimate concern is not knowledge as such, by which he means critically reflective consciousness.[75] Properly religious knowledge is the fruit of abstraction from the original experience. It comes to expression in the "word," which Lonergan defines as "any expression of religious meaning or religious value." "Its carrier," he explains, "may be intersubjectivity, or art, or symbol, or language, or the remembered and portrayed lives or deeds or achievements of individuals or classes or groups."[76] Nevertheless, "since language is the vehicle in which meaning is most fully articulated, the spoken and written word are of special importance in the development and the clarification of religion."[77] It is above all by means of the word that the religious person is able to relate himself to the religious object, i.e., to what Lonergan, too, calls "the object of ultimate concern."[78]

72. Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 105-109,290. See also pp. 119, 122-123,266.
73. *Ibid.*, 290. Lonergan appeals, for this characterization, to Olivier Rabut, *L'experience religieuse fundamentale*, Casterman, Tournai1969, 168.
74. Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea,* 338.
75. Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 106: "To say that this dynamic state [of being in love with God] is conscious is not to say that it is known. For consciousness is just experience, but knowledge is a compound of experience, understanding, and judging. Because the dynamic state is conscious without being known, it is an experience of mystery." See also p. 57: "As inner experience, it [religious conversion] is consciousness as distinct from self-knowledge, consciousness as distinct from any introspective process in which one inquires about inquiring, and seeks to understand what happens when one understands, and endeavours to formulate what goes on when one is formulating..." Cf. Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea,* 337, n. 17.
76. Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 112. The fact that religious experience comes to expression in religious traditions says nothing, of course, about the value of such expressions. Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea,* 325-326, insists that Lonergan held that the Son completes the 'prior' mission of the Spirit who is at work in the non-Christian religious traditions and that, according to Lonergan, "the need of the world religions to hear the gospel message is the same need still that the world had when God sent the only Son to be its way, truth and life (Jn 14, 6)."
77. Lonergan, "Religious Commitment," 62-63.
78. *Ibid.*, 63.

5. The *three conversions as a series of "questions"*

Turning to the question of the relationship of the three conversions to each other, they may be considered first of all in an order determined by the degree of self-transcendence involved. All three kinds of conversion are modes of self-transcendence. Kiely argues that considered in this order, the three conversions appear as a series of "questions" or challenges, each of which leads on to the next.[79] The sequence to be followed in this order: intellectual-moral-religious.

Intellectual conversion is a conversion towards truth attained by cognitional, self-transcendence.[80] It implies a willingness to learn, to discover the truth in the light of critical reflection and to accept this truth whether it be pleasant or unpleasant, whether it concerns oneself or anything else. As has been mentioned, moral conversion is a more complete form of self-transcendence than intellectual conversion. On the frontier between intellectual and moral conversion lie judgements of value and the moral challenge that these imply. *Moral conversion* is a conversion towards values apprehended, affirmed, and realised by a real self-transcendence. Moral self-transcendence is more difficult than cognitive self-transcendence. It "goes beyond the value, truth, to values generally".[81] *Religious conversion* is a conversion towards a total being-in-love as the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence, whether in the pursuit of truth, or in the realisation of human values. This grounds the will to live responsibly and to be responsible in the pursuit of truth, however difficult it may be to discover or to accept the truth.

Notwithstanding this, Lonergan proposes to conceive all three forms of self-transcendence in terms of sublation when they occur in a single consciousness.[82] The three conversions are not necessarily separate events. However, it needs to be said that their interrelations can be complex. McLaughlin explains that the relation of sublation between the three conversions is important because Lonergan wants to avoid at all costs a simplistic dichotomy between the heights of speculative theology and the heights of mysticism. Thus, on the one hand, the theologian must have

79. Cf. Kiely, *Psychology and Moral Theology*, 217.
80. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241.
81. *Ibid.*, 241-242.
82. Lonergan explains that the notion "sublation" should be understood in a Rahnerian sense rather than in a Hegelian sense. Thus, what sublates needs the sublated, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context. Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241.

experienced this conversion to be able to evaluate the works of others. On the other hand, no mystic who is at the same time a Catholic can deny the role of reason.[83]

6. *The three conversions in reverse order*

The three conversions can also be considered in reverse order. Thus, the order would be religious-moral-intellectual. In Lonergan's view, it is the religious conversion which is most vital, central, common, and foundational.[84] The basic reality is the encounter with God as revealed in Jesus Christ, an encounter which makes a total claim on the individual. The individual's response to this total claim, his letting himself "be seized" by the person of Christ, corresponds to Lonergan's idea of religious conversion. Hence, without religious conversion, a sustained and enduring moral conversion is a *de facto* impossibility.[85] Likewise without religious and moral conversion a *fully developed* intellectual conversion which enables an individual to arrive at a critically grounded natural knowledge of the existence of God is for all practical purposes an impossible achievement.[86]

At this point, a question may perhaps naturally arise. Why does Lonergan insist on making a sharp and clear-cut distinction between moral and religious conversion? In response to this question, Lonergan distinguishes between moral and religious conversion because he insists on the importance of *distinguishing* between nature and grace.[87] Thus, while man is capable of rising to various levels of self-fulfilment or self-transcendence (it can be both cognitive and moral self-self-transcendence), he is not, however, capable of achieving total self-transcendence or religious conversion. Rather he *receives* this type of ultimate self-transcendence as a gift. Evidently, man is not by nature a participant in the divine nature or in the inner life of God, but only by the free gift of God's love flooding his heart through the Spirit which is given to him.[88]

83. Cf. McLaughlin, *Knowledge, Consciousness and Religious Conversion in Lonergan and* Aurobindo, 74.
84. Cf. Tyrrell, "The dynamics of conversion", 58.
85. Cf. Bernard J. Tyrrell, *Bernard Lonergan's Philosophy of God*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1974, 49, 60, 61. Tyrrell returns to the theme of the religious conversion as the "ultimate and *de facto* existential condition of possibility" of intellectual and moral conversion in "Passages and Conversions", in *Creativity and Method: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan*, edited by Matthew L. Lamb, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, WI 1981, 22-23.
86. Cf. Tyrrell, "The dynamics of conversion", 58.
87. Cf. Tyrrell, "The dynamics of conversion", 58.
88. Cf. 2 Peter 1, 4 and Romans 5, 5.

Tyrrell points out that while in traditional Catholic theology, the gift of God's love flooding our hearts has been spoken of as sanctifying grace, Lonergan prefers to describe it as the dynamic state of being in love with God. It concerns a radical transformation. Thus, maintains Tyrrell, Lonergan "shifts from a metaphysical discussion of religious conversion in terms of sanctifying grace to a psychological analysis of conversion in terms of a state of being in love".[89] Here, we are to see both approaches, the classical and that of Lonergan, as simply different ways of approaching what is basically the same reality. It must be stated, therefore, that they are in no way contradictory or mutually exclusive.

Another important dimension in Lonergan's theology of religious conversion is his articulation of faith as "the eye of love" and of the need to distinguish clearly between faith and religious belief. For Lonergan in the conversion phenomenon, it is love and not knowledge which is the heart of the matter. Thus, in the first place, what is at stake is the gift of God's love. Conversion in its first moment is a matter of God taking out the heart of stone and replacing it with the heart of flesh.[90] Secondly, "the eye of love" or the knowledge which enables individuals to make the value judgement that it is worthwhile to believe, and then to express freely acts of belief, is born of love which is the immediate fruit of the experience of the gift of God's love. This is poured forth into our hearts by the Spirit.

For Lonergan, there exists a major exception to the general rule that knowledge precedes love. This is the gift of God's love flooding into our hearts, the dynamic state of being in love with God. To explain how the love of God, poured forth into our hearts, generates knowledge, Lonergan cites Pascal's famous aphorism: "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know". In this instance, therefore, love does not flow from knowledge, but rather knowledge flows from love. Here, the heart is the subject in love. Tyrrell explains that the reasons known to the heart are the value apprehensions which only the individual who is in love discerns. Only a lover has the experiential knowledge of what it is to be in love. "The individual whose heart is flooded with the gift of God's love *experiences* the fulfilment of the deepest longings of his spirit for absolute truth, goodness and value; and this experience involves a basic shift in value orientation, a transvaluation of values".[91]

89. Cf. Tyrrell, "The dynamics of conversion", 61.
90. Cf. Ezechiel 11, 19.
91. Cf. Tyrrell, "The dynamics of conversion", 63.

Thus far, the question of 'priority' of the religious conversion over the others should be highlighted. Two theologians who make a critical analysis of Lonergan's discussion of the relationship between religious conversion, and moral and intellectual conversion are John H. McDermott and Walter Conn.[92] Both of them seem to have difficulties with Lonergan's ordering of the conversions in terms of sublation (the religious conversion sublating the moral, and the moral sublating the intellectual). Conn explains that difficulty lies in the fact that Lonergan seems to be saying two different things.

> It is not easy to understand how Lonergan can assert an order of occurrence that has religious conversion preceding moral, and moral preceding intellectual, while at the same time claiming that as sublating, religious conversion *needs* the sublated moral and intellectual conversions, and as sublating, moral conversion *needs* the sublated intellectual conversion.[93]

The same tension in Lonergan's theory of conversion is taken into question by John H. McDermott.

> Without doubt there seem to occur intellectual and moral conversions without religious conversion, but in Lonergan's system they are ultimately referred to religious, supernatural conversion... Those who stop short at intellectual or moral conversion have not yet completely realized the full implications of their conversions; but implicitly every authentic lower conversion involves a religious conversion.[94]

Conclusion

I would conclude this paper by saying that if there is any tension at all in the relationship between the different conversions, this could be called a "healthy" tension. One is in relation to the other and yet so meaningful on its own. I think that this issue can be resolved in Lonergan's own words when he points out that these dimensions are "distinct, so that conversion can occur in one dimension

92. Conn, "Bernard Lonergan's Analysis of Conversion", 391-394.
93. *Ibid.*, 392.
94. John H. McDermott, "Tensions in Lonergan's Theory of Conversion", in *Gregorianum* 74 (1993) 131.

without occurring in the other two, or in two dimensions without occurring in the other one. At the same time, the three dimensions are solidary. Conversion in one leads to conversion in the other, and relapse from one prepares for relapse from the others ... The authentic Christian strives for the fullness of intellectual, moral and religious conversion."[95] Perhaps, rather then questioning the order or priority of the different conversions, we should focus our attention, with Lonergan, on the religious commitment with its threefold quest to love, contemplate, and attain to, the religious object.

Bibliography

Works by Bernard Lonergan

Lonergan Bernard, *Doctrinal Pluralism*, The Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, WI 1971.

_____ , *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1971.

_____ , *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Philosophical Library, New York 1957.

_____ , *Method in Theology*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1972.

_____ , "Revolution in Catholic Theology", in *A Second Collection*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1974, 231-238.

_____ , "Self-Trascendence", in *A Third Collection,* Paulist Press, New York 1985, 131-134.

_____ , *The Subject*, The Aquinas Lecture, 1968, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 1968.

_____ , "Theology in its New Context", in *A Second Collection*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1974, 55-67.

_____ , *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1967.

Other Works

Butler B. C., "Conversion and Theology", in *The Tablet* 224 (1970) 424-425.

_____ , "Lonergan and Conversion", in *Worship* 49 (1975) 329-336.

Colleran Kevin, "Bernard Lonergan on Conversion", in *Dunwoodie Review* 11 (1971) 3-23.

Conn Walter, "Bernard Lonergan's Analysis of Conversion", in *Angelicum* 53 (1976) 362-404.

95. Bernard Lonergan, *Doctrinal Pluralism*, The Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, WI 1971, 33-39; see also *A Third Collection*, 32.

Crowe Frederick E., *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC 1989.
_____, *The Lonergan Enterprise*, Cowley, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1980.
Curran Charles E., "Christian Conversion in the Writings of Bernard Lonergan", in *Foundations of Theology*, edited by Philip McShane, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1971, 41-59.
Dorr Donal, "Conversion", in *Looking at Lonergan's Method*, edited by Patrick Corcoran, Talbot, Dublin 1975, 175-186.
Dulles Avery, "Review of *Method in Theology*", in *Theological Studies* 33 (1972) 553-555.
Kiely Bartholomew M., *Psychology and Moral Theology*, Gregorian University Press, Rome 1987.
Liddy Richard M., *Transforming Light*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 1993.
McDermott John M., "Bernard Lonergan", in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapid, Michigan 2000, 327-329.
_____, "Tensions in Lonergan's Theory of Conversion", in *Gregorianum* 74 (1993) 101-140.
Mclaughlin Michael T., *Knowledge, Consciousness and Religious Conversion in Lonergan and Aurobindo*, Pontifical Gregorian University Press, Rome 2003.
Meynell Hugo A., *The Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, Scholars, Atlanta, Georgia 1986.
_____, "Hope, method and genius", in *The Tablet* 226 (1972) 422-423.
Merrigan Terrence, "Imagination and Religious Commitment in the Pluralist Theology of Religions", in *Louvain Studies* 27 (2002) 197-217.
Tracy David, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, Herder & Herder, New York 1970.
Tyrrell Bernard J., "The dynamics of conversion", in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 72 (1972) 56-65.
_____, *Bernard Lonergan's Philosophy of God*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1974.

Venerable English College,
Via di Monserrato, 45
Rome 00186
Italy
frjohnberry@gmail.com