

## IS LONERGAN'S METHOD THEOLOGICAL?

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In a 1970 commentary on Bernard Lonergan's "Functional Specialities," Karl Rahner was critical of Lonergan's theological methodology because, in Rahner's estimation, it disregarded the "completely peculiar and unique relatedness to the concrete person of Jesus, which is not only distinct to Christian faith and life but also, for that reason, distinct to Christian theology."<sup>1</sup> While regarding Lonergan's method as appropriate for non-theological sciences, he thought that it treated God as "some arbitrary object within the field of categorical objects" rather than "the incomprehensible mystery which can never be subsumed among the objects of the remaining sciences in a similar method."<sup>2</sup> More recently, Aidan Nichols has criticised Lonergan's theological methodology on the basis that "the distinctiveness of the Christian faith on his view is not a very interesting distinctiveness. It means in effect that Christianity has the key to what is going on

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, "Kritische Bemerkungen zu B.J.F. Lonergan's Aufsatz: 'Functional Specialities in Theology'," *Gregorianum* 51 (1970): 537–40, at 538. Cf. Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 538–39. Cf. Rowland, *Catholic Theology*, 67.

in other religions, and perhaps outside them too. It does not mean that something different is going on in Christianity.”<sup>3</sup>

Lonergeran’s response to these criticisms would be that what makes his method genuinely theological is the place of conversion, specifically, religious, intellectual, and moral conversion, in his methodology.<sup>4</sup> Of these three conversions, religious conversion is foundational.<sup>5</sup> So, the deciding factor in this argument will be whether or not Lonergan’s concept of religious conversion is valid.

### LONERGERAN’S CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

Lonergeran holds that the “dynamism of a knowing subject toward Infinite and Absolute Being (i.e. God) is . . . an a priori condition of knowledge. That is to say, God is in some ways always present as a horizon and necessarily co-affirmed with every act of human knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> For him, “an a priori *desire* for knowledge of the Absolute Being of God is the transcendental condition of all acts of knowledge.”<sup>7</sup> In every act of knowing we are seeking God. Lonergan calls this

the question of God . . . which cannot be ignored. The atheist may pronounce it empty. The agnostic may urge that he finds his investigation has been inconclusive. The contemporary humanist will refuse to allow the question to arise. But their negations presuppose the spark in our clod, our native orientation to the divine.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Aidan Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, vol. 2 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 63. Cf. Rowland, *Catholic Theology*, 67.

<sup>4</sup> For how these conversions enable dialectic and the subsequent functional specialities of his method, see Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), beginning from 235.

<sup>5</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy: The Twentieth Century* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2011), 82. Cf. Rowland, *Catholic Theology*, 61.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 103.

Lonergan states that, "Man achieves authenticity in self-transcendence."<sup>9</sup> According to him, human beings have a capacity for self-transcendence, that is, one beyond the sensitivity that we share with the higher animals, and this capacity is constituted by "our questions for intelligence, for reflection, and for deliberation."<sup>10</sup> This capacity becomes actual when one falls in love, when "one's being becomes being-in-love."<sup>11</sup> From this "flows one's desires and fears, one's joys and sorrows, one's discernment of values, one's decisions and deeds."<sup>12</sup> It is being-in-love with God that is the first principle of Lonergan's theological method. It is what he means by religious conversion. "There is the love of God with one's whole heart and whole soul, with all one's mind and all one's strength (Mk 12:30). It is God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Rom 5:5)."<sup>13</sup> This being in love with God "as experienced, is being in love in an unrestricted fashion . . . [a] being in love without limits or qualifications or conditions or reservations."<sup>14</sup>

However, this being-in-love with God "is not the product of our knowledge and choice" but "a conscious dynamic state of love, joy, peace, that manifests itself in acts of kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22)"—the fruit of the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

[This] dynamic state is conscious without being known, it is an experience of mystery. Because it is being in love, the mystery is not merely attractive but fascinating; to it one belongs; by it one is possessed. Because it is an unmeasured love, the mystery invokes awe. Of itself, then, inasmuch as it is conscious without being known, the gift of God's love is an experience of the holy, of Rudolf Otto's *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*. It is what Paul Tillich named as being grasped by ultimate concern. It corresponds to St. Ignatius Loyola's

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 106.

consolation that has no cause, as expounded by Karl Rahner.<sup>16</sup>

Loneragan holds that this state of being conscious of God without God being known, this experience of God's gift of his love flooding our hearts, is the major exception to the Latin tag: *Nihil amatum nisi praecognoitum*: Knowledge proceeds love.<sup>17</sup>

According to Lonergan, what this religious conversion does is bring to fulfilment what he calls the fourth level of intentional consciousness. This is the consciousness "that deliberates, makes judgements of value, decides, acts responsibly and freely."<sup>18</sup> The gift of God's love "occupies the ground and root of the fourth and highest level of man's intentional consciousness," enabling one to do all good because one is in love with God.<sup>19</sup>

Although he admits that there is no clear-cut evidence for it, Lonergan claims that this religious conversion, which he also calls religious experience, is not limited to Christians, but is common "to such world religions as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrian Mazdaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism."<sup>20</sup> Theorizing beyond his data, he appeals to "the antecedent probability established by the fact that God is good and gives to all men sufficient grace for salvation."<sup>21</sup> Following Friedrich Heiler, he identifies as common features

that there is a transcendent reality; that he is immanent in human hearts; that he is supreme beauty, truth, righteousness, goodness; that he is love, mercy, compassion; that the way to him is repentance, self-denial, prayer; that the way is love of one's neighbour, even of one's enemies; that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 109. See also 108 & 240–41.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the way is love of God, so that bliss is conceived as knowledge of God, union with him, or dissolution into him.<sup>22</sup>

This religious conversion/experience is “interpreted differently in the context of different religious traditions. For Christians, it is God’s love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.”<sup>23</sup> Once a person undergoes a religious conversion, this conversion needs to develop. This development is presented as a movement to authenticity from inauthenticity, as in understanding from misunderstanding, truth from error, moral development from sin through repentance, and genuine religion from religious aberration.<sup>24</sup>

According to Lonergan, it is from religious conversion that faith is born.<sup>25</sup> He sees this as a specific instance of knowledge born of love, claiming that it was of this kind of knowledge that Pascal wrote in saying that the heart has reasons that the reason does not know. Thus Lonergan says that:

By the heart’s reasons I would understand feelings that are intentional responses to values; and I would recall the two aspects of such responses, the absolute aspect that is a recognition of value, and the relative aspect that is a preference of one value for another.<sup>26</sup>

Following his understanding of Pascal’s remark, Lonergan maintained that

besides factual knowledge reached by experiencing, understanding, and verifying, there is another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgments of value of a person in love.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Cf. Friedrich Heiler, “The History of Religions as a Preparation for the Cooperation of Religions,” in *The History of Religions*, ed. Mircea Eliade & Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1959), 132–60, at 142–53.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

When it comes to the nature of the heart, Lonergan says that it is “the subject on the fourth, existential level of intentional consciousness and in the dynamic state of being in love.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, “Faith. . . is such further knowledge when the love is God’s love flooding our hearts.”<sup>29</sup> This faith does not yet have any epistemological content with regard to what God’s existence and nature might be. Rather,

it is an apprehension of transcendent value [which] consists in the experienced fulfilment of our unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence, in our actuated orientation towards the mystery of love and awe. . . . the experienced fulfilment of this thrust may be objectified as a clouded revelation of absolute intelligence and intelligibility, absolute truth and reality, absolute goodness and holiness.<sup>30</sup>

This faith elicits “a question of decision. Will I love him in return, or will I refuse? Will I live out this gift of love, or will I hold back, turn away, withdraw?”<sup>31</sup> A negative answer is possible.

Men are sinners. . . . They have to acknowledge their real guilt and amend their way. They have to learn with humility that religious development is dialectical, that the task of repentance and conversion is life-long.<sup>32</sup>

For Lonergan, faith is generic to religion, while belief is specific to particular religions.<sup>33</sup> Faith comes from “the inner word that is God’s gift of his love” while belief comes from “the outer word of the religious tradition.”<sup>34</sup> The concrete beliefs of particular religions result from the judgments of value made in accordance with

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 115–16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 117–18.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

the faith which is their common patrimony, based as it is on the universal experience of God's love.

Lonergan does not derive his understanding of religious conversion from Sacred Scripture. Rather, he derives it from the claim that the human desire for authenticity in self-transcendence, the human spirit's unrestricted desire for meaning, is actually fulfilled in the religious experience of human beings.<sup>35</sup> Having done so, he appeals to biblical passages such as Mark 12:30, Romans 5:5, and Galatians 5:22 as witnesses to such religious experiences. The question is: Has Lonergan correctly understood what these and other biblical witnesses are testifying to? If not, then he should not call them as witnesses. Moreover, is his understanding of religious conversion commensurate with the way in which the issue is presented in Sacred Scripture? It is to these questions that we now turn. We must analyse how the biblical witnesses testify to the nature of repentance, conversion, and the heart. In particular, we must examine what Paul means when he says that "the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

### THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament the term translated "to repent" is *metanoēō*, the literal meaning of which is "to change one's mind."<sup>36</sup> An analysis of how the terms *metanoia* (repentance) and *metanoēō* are used yields the following data. John the Baptist preaches a "baptism" of repentance (cf. Lk 3:8, Acts 13:24 & 19:4) which is "for the forgiveness of sins" (Lk 3:8) and it requires those hearing "to believe in the one who was to come after him" (Acts 19:4). This repentance requires "fruits"

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 101–09. Cf. Neil Ormerod and Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, *Foundational Theology: A New Approach to Catholic Fundamental Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 52.

<sup>36</sup> See μετάνειά, μετάνοια, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, translated and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. IV: 975–1008 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965).

(Lk 3:8), which are the sharing of possessions and food (cf. Lk 3:11), and the just treatment of others (cf. Lk 3:12–14).

For Jesus, repentance is a “call” to “sinners” (cf. Lk 5:32). It also requires “fruits”—showing mercy to the poor (cf. Lk 16:30), and the exercise of justice, as in the seeking of forgiveness from a person whom one has wronged (cf. Lk 17:3–4). Other fruits of repentance are the putting on of sackcloth and ashes, fasting, begging God’s forgiveness, and turning from evil (cf. Lk 10:13 & 11:32; Jon 3:6–9). Death will be the fate of those who do not repent (cf. Lk 13:3–5), and those sinners who do repent will cause great joy in heaven (cf. Lk 15:7 & 10).

In the case of the apostles of Jesus, in the name of Jesus they are instructed to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Lk 24:47). One repents of, turns from, wickedness in order to be forgiven (cf. Acts 8:22 & 3:26). This repentance, along with baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, is not just a call from the apostles but also a gift from the exalted Jesus to Israel (cf. Acts 2:38 & 5:31). Furthermore, it is not limited to Israel, but is also a command of God to all people everywhere (cf. Acts 17:30). Not only is this repentance a command of God, but it is a blessing from him. It is God who turns people from their wickedness (cf. Acts 3:26). The immediate effect of this repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins is a further result which is variously called “life” (*zoe*), “times of refreshment from the presence of the Lord [God],” and “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 11:18, 3:19–20 & 2:38). This repentance is “toward God” and also “toward faith in [the] Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21). It is also linked with conversion, that is, “turning again” to God “that sins may be wiped away” (Acts 3:19). The ultimate result of this repentance, forgiveness of sins, and times of refreshment from the Lord will be the sending by God of the fore-appointed Christ Jesus (cf. Acts 3:19–20). There is also a phenomenon mentioned that might be called an “anti-repentance,” of which Stephen speaks in his address to the Sanhedrin. After allowing Moses to lead them out of Egypt, and agreeing to obey the “living oracles” which he gave them from God, the Israelites “refused to obey him [Moses], but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods to go before us’” (Acts 7:38–40).

What can be concluded from the foregoing analysis is that “repentance” refers to a particular aspect of a whole process. This aspect is that of accepting a double revelation—the truth about God and his Christ, and how one stands before God. In this process “repentance” is the acceptance that Jesus is the Christ of God who, through his death and resurrection, has reconciled us with God, and the acknowledgement of one’s sinfulness and a turning away from sin.

### THE MEANING OF CONVERSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, the term translated “to convert” is *epistrephō*, the literal meaning of which is “to turn around” or “to turn toward.”<sup>37</sup> As a part of the whole process of turning from sin and turning to God, *epistrephō* and *epistrophē* (conversion), with regard to John the Baptist the angel of the Lord prophesies that “he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God” (Lk 1:16). In doing so, he will also turn them to their neighbours and to justice. John will “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the just” (Lk 1:17). This turning will prepare them for the coming of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:17).

In the Acts of the Apostles, it is initially only Jews who turn to the Lord (Acts 3:19). However, soon many Gentiles are turning to the Lord (cf. Acts 11:20–21, 15:3 & 15:19). Turning to the Lord is presented as part of one movement of re-orientation. “Repentance” emphasises what one is turning from, “conversion” what one is turning to. Paul tells the people of Lystra that the good news that he and Barnabas bring is that “you should turn from these vain things [their gods] to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and sea and all that is in them” (Acts 14:15). Turning to the Lord is a prerequisite for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 3:19). It can only occur if it is preceded by believing in the Lord. In a subtle way, Luke connects believing and turning, showing both their unity and distinction. So, *all* the residents of Lydda and Sharon,

<sup>37</sup> See ἐπιστρεφῶ, ἐπιστροφῆ, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VII: 722–29 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971).

upon *seeing* a paralytic named Aeneas, who had been healed by Peter, *turned* to the Lord (cf. Acts 9:33–35). Then *many* of the people of Joppa, upon *hearing* that Peter had raised Tabitha from the dead, *believed* in the Lord (cf. Acts 9:40–42, and also Acts 4:4 & 5:14). When disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene preach the Lord Jesus to Greeks in Antioch, “a great number that *believed turned* to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). Finally, in words reminiscent of John the Baptist, Paul tells Herod Agrippa that he told both Jews and Gentiles that repenting and turning to God must be followed by the performance of deeds worthy of repentance (cf. Acts 26:20).

Some scholars maintain that there is no need to distinguish between repentance and conversion, that the two can be treated as synonyms.<sup>38</sup> Certainly, it is correct that they can be seen as parts of one movement, or ways of looking at one movement from particular perspectives. Yet, in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus makes a distinction between them, with the command to “repent [*metanoïete*] and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). This raises the possibility that one could try to do one without doing the other. In Acts, the account of Simon the magician shows that it is possible for a person to attempt to turn to the Lord without turning from evil, that is, to turn to God without repenting. When the Samaritans who hear Philip’s proclamation of the good news and see his healings and exorcisms believe in Jesus Christ and are baptised, we are told that Simon also believed and was baptised. Yet when he attempts to buy the apostolic power to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit Peter says to him, “your heart is not straight (*euthia*) with God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of unrighteousness” (Acts 8:21–23). Simon has attempted to turn to the Lord without first turning from wickedness. His heart was still “crooked.” However, his position is not irretrievable. He can still turn to the Lord in prayer and have the wicked intention of his heart forgiven.

What can be concluded from the foregoing analysis is that “conversion,” “turning to” the Lord, refers to a particular aspect of a whole process. This aspect

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<sup>38</sup> For example, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 89.

is in the nature of a re-orientation wherein one comes into the light and does what is right. One now lives for God. It depends on believing in the Lord Jesus and repentance for sins, and results in forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. To be authentic, it must produce deeds worthy of repentance.

### REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION

The most complete, though not comprehensive, statement about repentance and conversion is to be found in Paul's explanation of his apostolic call to Herod Agrippa:

But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. “Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance.” (Acts 26:16–20)

We can see from this passage that Paul is sent to open eyes, to reveal something from God. This purpose of this revelation is to prompt a turning, which is not from anything “neutral,” but from darkness and the power of Satan to light and God. This turning to God includes being set free from an evil power and having faith in Jesus. The result of this turning is the gift of forgiveness of sins, a wiping away of sins, and deeds that are commensurate with this turning. Faith in Jesus makes a person holy, and includes one in the community of the holy ones. From other passages we can see that this incorporation in the sanctified takes place through baptism as well as faith, and that the gift of sanctification, from God, through his Christ, is *zoë*, refreshment, the Holy Spirit, the ultimate fulfilment of which is the return of the Christ.

## THE *KARDIA* IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament we find that the term *kardia* is sometimes used in contradistinction to the mind, to the soul, to the soul and mind, and to the conscience.<sup>39</sup> However, it is more often used in the following senses. As the affective centre of the human person it is the locus of the passions. As the intellectual centre of the human person it is the locus of thought, understanding, doubt and questioning, deception, and belief. As the volitional centre of the human person it is the locus of intention and decision. The heart is also the locus of imagination and memory. As the moral centre of the human person it is the locus of virtue, including theological virtue. It is the locus of conscience. It is the locus of that holiness which is normally called singleness or purity of heart. It is the locus of relation with other human persons.<sup>40</sup>

The heart thinks, chooses, feels, imagines, and remembers. If it does all these things it cannot simply be any one of these things, but must be the interrelatedness of all these things. It is also the locus of relation with God. It is the place which God searches and knows. It is the locus of revelation, as well as that refusal of revelation which is often called “hardness of heart.” It is also the locus of God’s indwelling, in Christ.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> For *kardia* in contradistinction to the mind, cf. 2 Cor 3:14–15; Phil 4:7; Heb 8:10 & 10:16; Rev 2:23. To the soul, cf. 1 Pt 1:22. To the soul and mind, cf. Mt 22:37. To the conscience, cf. 1 Tm 1:5.

<sup>40</sup> For *kardia* as the locus of the passions, cf. Mt 5:28 & 6:21; Jn 14:1, 14:27, 16:6 & 16:22; Acts 2:26, 7:54, 14:17 & 21:13; Rom 1:24, 9:2 & 10:1; 2 Cor 2:4; Jas 3:14; 2 Pt 2:14. For thought, cf. Mt 9:4 & 24:48; Mk 7:21 & 11:23; Lk 2:35 & 9:47; Rom 10:6; Rev 18:7. For understanding, cf. Mt 13:15 & 24:48; Jn 12:40; Acts 28:27; Rom 1:21; 1 Cor 2:9; Heb 4:12. For doubt and questioning, cf. Mk 11:23; Lk 24:38; Rom 10:6. For deception and belief, cf. Lk 24:25; Heb 3:12; Jas 1:26. For intention and decision, cf. Lk 6:45 & 21:14; Acts 5:3–4, 7:39, 8:22, & 11:23; 1 Cor 4:5, 7:37 & 14:25; 2 Cor 9:7. For imagination and memory, cf. Lk 1:51 & 66, 2:19, & 2:51. For virtue, cf. Lk 8:15; Acts 2:46 & 15:9; Rom 6:17 & 10:9; 2 Thes 3:5. For conscience, cf. 1 Jn 3:20. For purity of heart, cf. Mt 5:8; Acts 15:9; Eph 6:5; Col 3:22; 1 Thes 3:13; 2 Tm 2:22; Heb 10:22. For relation with other human persons, cf. Mt 18:35; Acts 16:14; 2 Cor 6:11–13 & 7:2–3; Phil 1:7.

<sup>41</sup> For *kardia* as the locus of which God searches and knows, cf. Lk 16:15; Rom 8:27; 1 Thes 2:4. Of revelation, cf. Lk 24:32; Acts 2:37; Rom 2:15; 2 Cor 3:3 & 4:6; Eph 1:18. Of the refusal

How is God revealed in the heart? The Acts of the Apostles consistently speaks of Christians being “filled with the Holy Spirit,” or being “full of the Spirit.” Christians become the dwelling place of the Spirit. Yet, although the Holy Spirit is presented as enlightening and renewing the minds of Christians, and inspiring peace and joy in Christians, neither the mind nor the passions are presented as the dwelling place of the Spirit.<sup>42</sup> The place which is thus presented is the heart. God, who searches the hearts of Christians when they pray in the Spirit, “knows what is the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27). Furthermore: “[God] has set his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor 1:22). This guarantee is the love of God which “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). This love is an enlightening and empowering love: “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘*Abba!* Father!’” (Gal 4:6).

### CONVERSION OF HEART AND HARDNESS OF HEART

Looking at conversion of heart, after Peter has accused the Jews gathered for Pentecost of crucifying the Messiah, who has now been raised from the dead, rather than stoning him and the other apostles, we are told that they were “cut to the heart,” and say to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). At least, “cut to the heart” is the translation given by the RSV. However, the Greek term which is used here is *katenugesan*. It comes from *nusso*, a verb which means “to pierce,” and *kata*, a prefix which intensifies the meaning of the verb. Thus *katenugesan* means more than “cut.” Rather, “pierced through” or “pierced deeply” would be more accurate translations.

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of revelation, cf. Mk 3:5; 6:52 & 8:17; Mt 13:19; Jn 12:40; Acts 8:21; Rom 2:5; Eph 4:18. Of God's indwelling, in Christ, cf. Gal 4:6; Eph 3:17; 2 Pt 1:19.

<sup>42</sup> For Christians being filled with the Holy Spirit, cf. Acts 2:4, 6:3, 7:55, 9:17, 11:24, 13:9, & 13:52. For Christians as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, cf. Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 3:16 & 6:19; Eph 2:22; 2 Tm 1:14. For the Holy Spirit enlightening and renewing the minds of Christians, cf. Rom 8:5–6; 1 Cor 2:13; Eph 4:23. For the Holy Spirit inspiring peace and joy in Christians, cf. Rom 12:11 & 14:17; 1 Thes 1:6.

The result of this traumatic being “pierced through to the heart” was an acceptance of the truth of the apostolic words, dismay and remorse about what they have done, and the decision to seek the apostles’ counsel. They chose to accept this counsel. They repented, were baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and subsequently continued steadfast in the teaching of the apostles, the *koinonia*, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers (cf. Acts 2:37–42).

In contrast to the hearts that are pierced to the very centre on the day of Pentecost, we have the reaction of the members of the Sanhedrin to the speech of Stephen. In the RSV and ESV their reaction is translated as “they were enraged” (Acts 7:54), while many other versions give a similar translation. Certainly, they were enraged, but the KJV gives a more accurate translation—“they were cut to the heart” (*dieprionto tais kardiais*). This verb *diaprio* means “to divide with a saw” or “saw asunder.” Metaphorically, their hearts were sawn apart by the words of Stephen. “Enraged” or “became furious,” another common translation, are not bad translations. They were passionately “sawn asunder.” However, the metaphor is important for understanding what Luke is trying to tell us.

To grasp Luke’s intent, let us look at Stephen’s speech, and an earlier reaction on the part of the Sanhedrin to a speech by Peter and the other apostles. In his speech, Stephen reminds them how the people of Israel refused to obey Moses, even after he had led them out of Egypt and given them the living oracles of God at Mount Sinai. Rather, they “thrust him aside and in their hearts turned to Egypt” (Acts 7:39). He concludes his speech to them by saying, “Hard-necked and uncircumcised in hearts and ears, you always oppose the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51).

It is here maintained that this contrast of “pierced through” and “sawn asunder” hearts is deliberate. This is shown by an earlier use of the verb *diaprio* in Acts 5:33, one of only two uses of the verb in the New Testament. There we are told that when the high priest, and the Sanhedrin, and all the elders of Israel heard the answer of Peter and the apostles to the questioning of the high priest, an answer wherein they made the same accusation against them as they had made against the crowds at Pentecost, and later was made by Stephen against the Sanhedrin,

that of murdering the Messiah, *de akousantes dieprioto*, the ones hearing were sawn asunder, and intended to kill the apostles (cf. Acts 5:21 & 27–33). However, take note that here it does not say that their *hearts* were sawn asunder.

We know that they did not kill the apostles. Rather, they listened to the words of Gamaliel, who counselled them to leave the apostles alone. They were sawn asunder, but not to the degree that their rage rendered them irrational. They were still able to listen to reason (cf. Acts 5:34–40). However, when their *hearts* are sawn asunder, they gnash their teeth at Stephen, and when he prophesies in the power of the Holy Spirit about the glory of the Messiah, they refuse his prophecy by drowning him out with a loud voice and covering their ears (cf. Acts 7:54–57). Then they rush upon Stephen with one accord. Throwing to the wind almost all pretence of legality, they become a mob. They cast Stephen out of the city and stone him to death (cf. Acts 7:58). What happens in the hearts of the members of the Sanhedrin is an anthropological dis-integration. The affective trauma to their hearts, caused by the Holy Spirit, of the double truth presented to their intellects, that Jesus is the Messiah and that they have murdered him, leads them volitionally to harden their hearts, that is, wrathfully reject this truth, and murder Stephen.

### THE MEANING OF ROMANS 5:5

The key text to which Lonergan appeals for support of his notion of religious conversion is Roman 5:5. So, it will be necessary to analyse this text, in itself and in its general and immediate contexts. Since “heart” is the key term in this text, it will also be necessary to see how Paul uses the term in order to arrive at a definition.

In the Pauline corpus, the term *kardia* is used 48 times, though if one includes the synonym *splagchnon* (bowels) the total would be increased to 54. Paul's use of the term is commensurate with its use in the rest of the New Testament. It is the locus of the passions (cf. Rom 1:24, 9:2 & 10:1, 2 Cor 2:4 & 8:16, Eph 6:22, Col 2:2 & 4:8, 2 Thes 2:17) thought (cf. 1 Cor 14:25), understanding (cf. Rom 2:15 & 10:8, 1 Cor 2:9, 2 Cor 3:2–3), questioning (cf. Rom 10:6), self-deception (cf. Rom

16:18), belief (cf. Rom 10:9–10), intention (cf. 1 Cor 4:5), decision (cf. 1 Cor 7:37), singleness or purity of heart (cf. Rom 2:29, Eph 6:5, Col 3:22, 1 Thes 3:13, 1 Tm 1:5, 2 Tm 2:22), and relations with other human persons (cf. 2 Cor 6:11 & 7:3, Phil 1:7, 2 Thes 2:17). It is also the locus of relation with God—of thankfulness to God (cf. Eph 5:19, Col 3:16), obedience to God (cf. Rom 6:17, Col 3:15), revelation from God (cf. 2 Cor 4:6, Eph 1:18, 2 Thes 3:5), as well as the rejection of revelation (cf. Rom 2:5, Eph 4:18). It is the locus of God’s searching (cf. Rom 8:27), testing (cf. 1 Thes 2:4), and peace (cf. Phil 4:7). It is also the locus of God’s indwelling, in Christ (cf. Eph 3:17), and the place into which he pours his love (cf. Rom 5:5)

While other New Testament writers speak of the Holy Spirit filling or dwelling in us (cf. Lk 1:15 & 41, Jn 14:7, ten places in Acts, 1 Pt 1:11, 1 Jn 3:24 & 4:13), the presentation of the heart as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit is exclusively Pauline (cf. 2 Cor 1:22, Gal 4:6, and, by implication, Rom 5:5) – all in letters on which the general consensus is that they were written by Paul himself. In 2 Corinthians 1:21–22, Paul writes that it is God who makes us firm in Christ, and has anointed us, and sealed us, and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. A guarantee of what? Of what he has just told the Corinthians—that all the promises of God find their “Yes” in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 1:20). In Galatians 4:6–7, Paul writes that, “Because we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’ So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son an heir.” What he says here is further developed in Roman 8:14–16, though without using the term “heart”—“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” What the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into our hearts reveals is that God is our Father, we are his children.

For Paul, the Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of Christ (cf. Rom 8:9–10) dwells in us. If the Holy Spirit dwells in us, Christ also dwells in us. “But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, our spirits are alive

because of righteousness" (Rom 8:9–10). So, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father, is also the Spirit of the Son, and causes the Son to dwell in us. We can see that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts has a Trinitarian character, and that it brings us into a relationship of sonship with God the Father, a relationship of which we are conscious, since we cry out "Abba! Father!"

Looking at the general context of Romans, we find that grace and peace come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 1:7). Furthermore, we have faith in both the Son and the Father (cf. Rom 3:22 & 4:24). Grace and peace come from the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. They come through faith in Christ. This grace is God's love, and it enables us to cry out "Abba! Father!" This grace, which is the first fruits of the Spirit, enables us to hope for its complete fulfilment in sharing the glory of God (cf. Rom 8:23).

Turning to the immediate context of Romans 5:5, we find that:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to the grace [which is peace with God] in which we now stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:1–5).

Here again we find that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into our hearts has a Trinitarian character. The outpouring of the Spirit into our hearts by the Father is not separate from the peace with God which we have through our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, we can see that this relationship involves the theological virtues of faith, hope, and by implication, charity, since charity would be the proper response to the love of God poured into our hearts. We can even rejoice in our sufferings because we know, in Christ, and through the outpouring of the Spirit, that the Father loves us as his children. We can see that the gift of the Holy Spirit means peace with God and rejoicing in hope of sharing the glory of God, and that it comes from God the Father, through faith in the Father (cf. Rom 4:24), faith in

Christ, and through our Lord Jesus Christ. For Paul, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit follows upon faith in the Father and his Christ, and brings us into an epistemologically rich relationship with both. This is the grace of justification. Through faith in Christ, God the Father pours his love into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit. He reveals himself and his love to us, enables us to experience it, and also enables us to love him in return. As St. Augustine says, “*Deus facit nos dilectores suos*”—God makes us his lovers.<sup>43</sup>

### LONERGAN’S PROOF-TEXTING

We can see that Lonergan’s understanding of what he calls religious conversion is radically different from the way that repentance and conversion are presented in the New Testament, where they most definitely involve accepting a revelation of who Jesus is and what he has done, as well as who we are and what we have done. Moreover, Lonergan’s religious experience/conversion is presented as occurring in isolation, directly from God to the human person. However, in the New Testament, conversion is never presented in this way without any other mediator. The conversion of a person is always “provoked” by some other person or persons who are not just divine—John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and the other apostles, Stephen, Philip, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silas, an angel. It always involves some kind of tangible kerygma.

We can also see that Lonergan’s understanding of the heart is substantially different from that presented in the New Testament, since he limits its activity to the affective dimension of the human person, and a particular level of what he calls consciousness, whereas in the New Testament the heart is where every aspect of the human person is interrelated, and where human beings relate to God and other human beings. Finally, we can see that the way in which he uses Romans 5:5 to illustrate his understanding of religious conversion is not commensurate with the meaning of the text. Rather than describing an experience without any concrete

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<sup>43</sup> Augustine, *De spir. et let.* 32, 56.

epistemological content, it is overwhelmingly rich in such content. Lonergan uses Romans 5:5 to indicate the possibility of experiencing God's love in a non-cognitive way, whereas the text will not bear the weight of this interpretation. This does not mean that people who are not Christian and who have never heard the Gospel cannot experience the love of God in some way. However, such an experience will have a concrete epistemological content—the person will know that it is God whom they are experiencing. The Old Testament is replete with such examples. Even before Abraham, we have the examples of Enoch and Noah who both “walked with God” (cf. Gen 5:20–24 & 6:9). Of them, Sirach 44:16–17 says that, “Enoch pleased God and was taken up; he was an example of *repentance* to all generations. Noah was found perfect in *righteousness*.”

Why does Lonergan get texts like Romans 5:5 wrong? He does so because he does not do the necessary exegetical work. He has a thesis, and in support of that thesis he appeals to certain texts in Sacred Scripture. However, these proof-texts do not say what he thinks they say. They are hostile witnesses. This can be seen with particular clarity in his appeal to Romans 5:5. We have seen that being-in-love with God is the foundation of Lonergan's theological method. According to him, this being-in-love with God is the result of God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (cf. Rom 5:5). Lonergan simply assumes that this text supports his thesis when in fact it does not.

This proof-texting goes beyond Sacred Scripture. He also does it in his appeals to Pascal on the nature of the heart, to Otto on the nature of the experience of the “holy,” and to Rahner's exposition of St. Ignatius Loyola's “consolation that has no cause.” To begin with, Lonergan appeals to Pascal as a witness to his understanding of the heart, which is that the heart's reasons are feelings that are intentional responses to values, and that these responses are instances of another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgments of value of a person in love. In fact, when Pascal says that “the heart has reasons that the reason does not know,” by “reason” he means Cartesian “reasoning” by scientific analysis and calculation, what Scholastic-Aristotelian logic called the third act of the mind, the discursive reasoning by which one proves one truth, the

conclusion, from another, the premise.<sup>44</sup> Pascal says that the heart has its *reasons*. These are first principles, self-evident truths. Thus he writes:

We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our heart. It is through the latter that we know first principles, and reason, which has nothing to do with it, tries in vain to refute them. . . . For knowledge of first principles, like space, time, motion, number, is as solid as any derived through reason, and it is on such knowledge, coming from the heart and instinct, that reason has to depend and base all its argument. . . . Principles are felt, propositions proved, and both with certainty by different means.<sup>45</sup>

For Pascal, the first act of the mind, understanding the meaning of an essence, is carried out by the “heart.” Furthermore, it is the heart which perceives God. This is Pascal’s definition of faith. “It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason.”<sup>46</sup> The heart “sees” God, it knows God. God gives faith to people by moving their hearts.<sup>47</sup> It is also the heart which chooses, which wills, to love God or self. “I say that it is natural for the heart to love the universal being or itself, according to its allegiance, and it hardens itself against either as it chooses.”<sup>48</sup> Finally, for Pascal, the heart is “the unified center of inner life.”<sup>49</sup>

In Lonergan’s reading of Otto on the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*, he focuses almost exclusively on *fascinans* (fascinating) and almost entirely neglects *tremendum* (terrifying).<sup>50</sup> In fact, for Otto, *fascinans* is an aspect of *tremendum*.<sup>51</sup> Otto

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, translated by F. E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 27–91. For Pascal’s understanding of “reason” and “heart,” see Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal’s Pensées Edited, Outlined and Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 228–34.

<sup>45</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Léon Brunschvicg (Paris: Hachette, 1897), 110.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>50</sup> For a passing exception to this, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 111.

<sup>51</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31–40.

thought that this mystery was presented most strongly in the Old and New Testaments, and when we look at the Old Testament in particular, the terrifying aspect of the mystery is constantly affirmed.<sup>52</sup> For example, when God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush, Moses was both fascinated—"I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt," and terrified—"And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Ex 2:3 & 6). This revelation was no mere experience without knowledge, but involved an unequivocal revelation of who God was—"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," and what he intended to do—"I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians. . . (Ex 2:6–8)." Moses enters into a relationship with God whereby he knows God by name (cf. Ex 2:14), and God knows Moses by name (cf. Ex 33:17). If we look at another example, that of Isaiah's vision of God in the temple, when he sees the glory of the Lord he laments, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Is 6:5). This experience of God's holiness evokes in Isaiah not an experience of being-in-love, but an acute awareness of and grief over both his own sins and the sins of his people.

When it comes to Rahner's exposition of St. Ignatius' "consolation without cause," Lonergan ignores its context. Rahner is commenting upon the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits in the *Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>53</sup> According to Ignatius, the particular rule upon which Rahner comments is the second rule of those which "will serve for a greater discernment of spirits."<sup>54</sup> In full, this rule states:

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<sup>52</sup> See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, second ed., translated by John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 72–93. It should be noted that, in his investigation of human reactions to the "numinous," Otto devotes his initial and more extensive attention to the *mysterium tremendum* (12–24).

<sup>53</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, translated by W. J. O'Hara (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1964), 129–69.

<sup>54</sup> *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, translated by Anthony Mottola, (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1964), 132.

It belongs to God alone to give consolation to the soul without previous cause, for it belongs to the Creator to enter into the soul, to leave it, and to act upon it, drawing it wholly to the love of His Divine Majesty. I say without previous cause, that is, without any perception or knowledge of any object from which such consolation might come to the soul through its own acts of intellect and will.<sup>55</sup>

This rule is suitable for someone in the second week of the *Exercises* who has already made an examination of conscience, a general confession, and has mediated upon sin and Hell. It is for someone who has turned from sin and is in the process of coming to a deeper, more radical conversion to the Lord.<sup>56</sup> In other words, in the usual understanding of the *Exercises*, the first week is purgative and the second week illuminative.<sup>57</sup> What this rule describes is not some initial experience of God's love without knowledge of God, but a way of discerning which consolations are from a God with whom one is already in relation and which come from "the evil one." In fact, according to Ignatius, both "the good angel" and "the evil one" may console the soul via a previous cause.<sup>58</sup> This is to say, the consolation which comes from a creature comes via perception or knowledge of some "object," that is, something which can be identified as a cause. As Rahner states, "So the object is something from which the understanding and will gradually draw their consolation."<sup>59</sup> But with regard to God, such a consolation can come "spontaneously," that is, without any discernible cause, without any "object," and this is how one knows that it comes from God.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 47–78.

<sup>57</sup> On this point, see Sylvie Robert, "Union with God in the Ignatian Election," *The Way Supplement* 103 (May 2002): 100–12, at 101.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>59</sup> Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, 133.

### WHY DOES LONERGAN GO WRONG?

For someone who places so much importance on the asking of questions it is ironic that Lonergan does not ask enough questions. He does not test his thesis thoroughly enough. Also ironic is that, for someone who recognises the importance of making a distinction between knowledge which is personally verified and knowledge which is second-hand, there is no indication that his method has been personally verified. Lonergan gives no account of his own falling-in-love with God. His accounts of this supposed falling-in-love are all second-hand, and this may be part of the reason why he misinterprets them. However, besides these general problems there are also specific problems with regard to Lonergan's understanding of religious conversion.

#### *The Question of God versus the Problem of Evil*

Lonergan's fundamental anthropological assumption is that human beings are driven by their intellects, by their "drive to know what, why, how, and in [their] ability to reach intellectually satisfying answers."<sup>60</sup> According to him, this necessarily leads to the question of God being asked by everyone. Two questions can be asked of Lonergan's position. First, do all people seek to answer the question of God? Second, are we driven initially by our desire to know or by some other desire?

With regard to the first question, the testimony of Sacred Scripture is that although people can answer the question of God in the affirmative, and although the Logos enlightens every person, many people go to great lengths to avoid the question, and many prefer the darkness to enlightenment which, by the way, implies an experience with epistemological content (cf. Rom 1:18-32, Jn 1:9 & 3:19). Lonergan himself admits this when he says that, "The atheist may pronounce it empty. The agnostic may urge that he finds his investigation has been inconclusive. The contemporary humanist will refuse to allow the question to arise. But their negations presuppose the spark in our clod, our native

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<sup>60</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 101.

orientation to the divine.”<sup>61</sup> On the contrary, one could argue that our fallen orientation is away from the divine, and that we can only be reoriented by the grace of God. For many people in our post-Christian society, it would appear that their thinking about God does not even rise to the level of negation. They do not even “refuse to allow the question to arise.” There is no active refusal, but a passive immersion in temporal pursuits. Many contemporary people fit the description given by T. S. Eliot in “Burnt Norton”—they are “distracted from distraction by distraction.”<sup>62</sup> Or their epitaph could be written by Albert Camus’s Jean-Baptiste Clamence—“A single sentence will suffice for modern man. He fornicated and read the papers.”<sup>63</sup> Although perhaps a more contemporary one would read, “He and she surfed the ’net, posted on facebook, tweeted, and downloaded porn.” It is this reality, which can be traced back to the deception of the Evil One, that should motivate the evangelical zeal of Christians, in order to rescue people from contemporary forms of idolatry or final despair.<sup>64</sup>

With regard to the second question, although many people do not raise the question of God, or are successful in avoiding it, there is a question which no one can avoid—the problem of evil. Every “religion,” “philosophy,” and “ideology” is an attempt to cure the human disease, the disease of suffering. This is our initial desire. Questions come subsequently as to how to escape from suffering. Some of these attempts to overcome suffering raise the question of God.

Continuing the medical metaphor, according to Peter Kreeft, one can analyse each of these attempts in terms of observation of symptoms, diagnosis of disease, prognosis of cure, and prescription for treatment. By way of some examples, for the Buddha, all of life is suffering (*dukkha*), the cause is selfish desire (*tanha*), the way to the extinction (*nirvana*) of suffering is the extinction of selfish desire, through the *yoga* of the noble eightfold path of purification and ego reduction. For

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>62</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), 17.

<sup>63</sup> Albert Camus, *The Fall*, translated by Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 6–7.

<sup>64</sup> See *Lumen Gentium*, §16, in *The Documents of Vatican II with Notes and Index*, Vatican Translation (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2009).

Muhammad, we are at war with others and within ourselves because we follow our own wills, but peace is possible in this life and Paradise in the next through submission (*islam*) to the will of Allah as revealed in the Qu'ran and summarised in the five pillars of Islam. For Plato, we are full of vices, which are caused by ignorance, but attainment of virtue is possible, through knowledge of the good. For the Stoics, we are unhappy, anxious, and full of suffering, because of our passions, but we can attain peace of mind, through cultivating passionlessness (*apatheia*). For Marx, alienation of the worker from his or her work and of class from class is caused by the capitalist system of the bourgeoisie's exploitation of the proletariat, but a classless society of peace, plenty, and prosperity for all can be achieved by a communist revolution in which the bourgeoisie are eliminated. For Freud, neuroses and psychoses are caused by the conflict between the id and the superego, but a reasonable homeostasis can be achieved through psychoanalysis. For the materialistic hedonist, we are all going to die because we are nothing more than carnal, but some temporary relief can be obtained through carnal pleasures. For the Christian, the answer is summed up in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." None of us can escape death. We die because of sin. However, God can give us eternal life, which we receive as a free gift through being "in Christ."<sup>65</sup>

### *Lonergan's Faith versus the Theological Virtue of Faith*

Lonergan holds that it is from the experience of religious love as described in Roman 5:5 that faith is born. This is in keeping with his conviction that, in the experience of God's love flooding one's heart, love proceeds knowledge. However, what this means is that one does not fall in love with God. Rather, one falls in love with an experience. It is loving the gift, not the giver. Furthermore, by "faith" he does not mean the theological virtue, but something which is supposedly possible in any religion. By faith he means a cognitive change in a person which consists

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<sup>65</sup> For the relation of religions, philosophies, and ideologies to theodicy, and many of the examples given above, see Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 37–45.

in “a clouded revelation of absolute intelligence and intelligibility, absolute truth and reality, absolute goodness and holiness.”<sup>66</sup> However, Lonergan gives no concrete examples of this kind of faith.

In their *Foundational Theology*, Neil Ormerod and Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer attempt to remedy this lacuna by relating a religious experience of Thomas Merton. According to them, Merton’s experience of an overwhelming love for the people who surrounded him on the street was an experience of faith, one that enabled him to see “his monastic life [no longer] as a separate or spiritually higher life in relation to the rest of the world.”<sup>67</sup>

However, if one reads Merton’s account of his initial repentance and conversion, his coming to faith some twenty years earlier, one finds a classic, even Augustinian, conversion story, an explicit, not “clouded,” revelation. Merton’s conversion begins with his reading of Etienne Gilson’s *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* which leads him to accept the truth that it is God’s very nature to exist. This in turn leads him to “an immense respect for. . . the Catholic faith” and to a recognition that “faith was something that had a very definite meaning and a most cogent necessity.” He desired to go to church and, upon hearing the Apostles’ Creed in an Episcopalian church, hoped “within myself that God would give me the grace someday to believe it.”<sup>68</sup> From an intellectual acceptance of the truth that God wishes us to be in union with him he moved to desiring this, but was held back by being “so completely chained and fettered by my sins and my attachments.” Eventually, he gives in to a “strong, sweet, gentle, clean urge” to go to Mass. In the homily he hears and believes the truth about Jesus proclaimed—his

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<sup>66</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 115–16.

<sup>67</sup> Ormerod & Jacobs-Vandegeer, *Foundational Theology*, 47–48, where they refer to Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 156–57. Here Ormerod and Jacobs-Vandegeer also refer to a comparison between love for God and love for a human being given by St. Francis de Sales. However, both the experience of Merton and the analogy of Francis refer to what might be called the post-initial conversion situation of a Christian. This is not to say that a person’s turning from sin and turning to Christ need occur in a single event or be especially dramatic.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1948) 171, 172–74, 175 & 176.

humanity and divinity, his incarnation, and his suffering and death for us.<sup>69</sup> Leaving after the Mass of the Catechumens, he recounts how

my eyes looked about me at a new world. I could not understand what it was that had happened to make me so happy, which I was so much at peace, so content with life for I was not yet used to the savor that comes with an actual grace—indeed, there was no impossibility in a person's hearing and believing such a sermon and being justified, that is, receiving sanctifying grace in his soul as a habit, and beginning, from that moment, to live the divine and supernatural life.<sup>70</sup>

Though still “content to stand by and admire,” eventually he has a “*tolle, legge*” moment—“What are you waiting for? it said. ‘Why are you sitting here? Why do you hesitate? You know what you ought to do? Why don’t you do it?’” He goes immediately to see a priest and tells him that he wants to become a Catholic. As his desire for baptism grows he “made a Mission with the men of the parish, listening twice a day to sermons . . . and hearing Mass and kneeling at Benediction before the Christ Who was gradually revealing Himself to me.”<sup>71</sup> One of these sermons is on Hell, and he reacts to it with the “fear of the Lord”:

My reaction to the sermon on hell was . . . what spiritual writers call “confusion”—but it was not the hectic, emotional confusion that comes from passion and from self-love. It was a quiet sorrow and patient grief at the thought of these tremendous and terrible sufferings which I deserved and into which I stood a very good chance of entering, in my present condition: but at the same time, the magnitude of the punishment gave me a special and particular understanding of the greatness of the evil of sin. But the final result was a great deepening and awakening of my soul, a real increase in spiritual profundity and an advance in faith and love and confidence in God, to whom alone I could look to salvation

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 205, 206 & 209–10.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 210–11.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 212, 215 & 217.

from these things. And therefore I all the more earnestly desired Baptism.<sup>72</sup>

*Revelation or Salvation versus Revelation and Salvation*

Loneragan holds that religious faith is generic to religion whereas belief is specific to each religion. Following Lonergan, Ormerod and Jacobs-Vandegeer explain this distinction and its implications thus:

Religious faith has a transcultural base in religious experience (heuristically defined), but religious beliefs of all kinds are tied to the history of the community within which they emerge. Hence, faith and belief are distinct, and this distinction marks a key commitment in our theological foundations. The distinction has a transcultural basis in religious experience and produces consequences for how theologians appropriate and communicate the meaning of a religion in a particular culture. The foundations of theology are presupposed in our systematic attempts at understanding the realities affirmed and described in doctrines. Scriptural references or allusions are not methodologically foundational within our approach. Nor are references to revelation. Rather, Scriptural meanings (interpretation) are appropriated (dialectic) within the life of the community (history) and affirmed as revelatory (doctrines) on the basis of theologians' foundational commitments (implied or explicit) in cognitional theory, epistemology, metaphysics, and religion.<sup>73</sup>

What Ormerod and Jacobs-Vandegeer oppose is a supposed conflation of faith and belief which they see as defining faith in terms of revelation, and presenting theology as a science superior to secular sciences. Thus:

If faith unlocks the door of salvation and always entails belief, then theologians treat the unbelieving world with suspicion. It may make sense for them to resolutely oppose the world in principle. Or perhaps they simply dismiss viewpoints that

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 217–18.

<sup>73</sup> Ormerod & Jacobs-Vandegeer, *Foundational Theology*, 52.

occur outside the margins of salvation. They expunge or domesticate foreign (secular) influence in theology and reframe basic categories in Scriptural or ecclesial terms, which, in their way of thinking, are nearer to revelation. Identifying faith (*fides qua*) with religious belief (*fides quae*) then collapses religious experience into doctrines. Such a move can lead to the denial of the ontological integrity of the created world.<sup>74</sup>

According to Ormerod and Jacobs-Vandegeer, this supposed collapsing of faith into belief causes a conflation of revelation and salvation. For them:

The distinction between faith and belief on the basis of religious experience allows us to maintain the objectivity of revelation without restricting God's offer of salvation to the Christian community. . . . The foundational reality of religious experience as prior to doctrines allows the churches and religions to meet on the (heuristically defined) common ground of reciprocity with the other as love and (potentially) loving. . . . a theology with a foundation in the universality of religious experience contextualises differences in religious beliefs with reference to the experienced gift that meets the inner desire for self-transcendence in each of us.<sup>75</sup>

The assumptions here are that religious experience in various religions is essentially the same kind of experience, albeit interpreted differently, and that failing to make a distinction between faith and belief must lead to a conflation of salvation with revelation. One problem here is that of an incorrect taxonomy – the genus “religion.” First, “religions” are not the only attempts to solve the human dilemma. We could categorise these attempts in at least three comprehensive ways. First, physical (e.g. Materialistic Hedonism, Marxism, Freudism,) and metaphysical (e.g. Platonism, Islam, Shintoism). Second, theistic (e.g. Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and non-theistic (e.g. Hinduism, Taoism, Theosophy). Third, those that claim to be discovered (e.g. Buddhism, Marxism, Fascism) and those that claim to be revealed (e.g. Judaism, Islam, Christianity).

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 52–53.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 54–55.

A second problem is that the supposed commonality of religious experience, as proposed by Lonergan—that there is a transcendent reality; that he is immanent in human hearts; that he is supreme beauty, truth, righteousness, goodness; that he is love, mercy, compassion; that the way to him is repentance, self-denial, prayer; that the way is love of one’s neighbour, even of one’s enemies; that the way is love of God, so that bliss is conceived as knowledge of God, union with him, or dissolution into him—is not borne out by the data. In following Heiler, Lonergan has followed the tendency of Heiler’s time for Christians to engage in a kind of spiritual colonialism, reading specifically Christian beliefs into other religions, and theistic beliefs into non-theistic religions. The seven commonalities named by Heiler and Lonergan cannot be found in all the religions which Lonergan names—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrian Mazdaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Neither Judaism nor Islam teach that one must forgive one’s enemies. Apart from Judaism, no other religion teaches that God is immanent in human hearts. Hinduism and Taoism are pantheistic, they do not teach that God is a “He,” a transcendent reality distinct from all other reality. Buddhism, as taught by the Buddha, is, in fact, entirely agnostic about God or any other transcendent reality. One could go on multiplying differences. The one thing upon which all these religions and many others agree is the natural law, the Tao, love of neighbour, what one finds taught in commandments four to ten.

A third problem is the understanding of *fides*. The assumption is that there is a generic subjective “religious faith” (*fides qua*) of which the Christian act of faith is a species. However, for a Christian, while *fides quae creditur* refers to that which is believed, call it “doctrine” or “content,” this content is Trinitarian, as is the *fides qua creditur*, the act by which one believes. One believes God the Father in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ormerod and Jacobs-Vandegeer present us with an either/or proposition, a choice between what they identify as a Radical Orthodox approach which “critiques secular reason as a way of knowing independently of religious belief,”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 53. Whether or not Ormerod and Jacobs-Vandegeer are correct in their estimation of the Radical Orthodox approach is a question which shall not be addressed here.

as opposed to “a theology with a foundation in the universality of religious experience.”<sup>77</sup> However, *fides qua* and *fides quae* can be integrated without conflation, and without expunging or domesticating foreign (secular) influence in theology or denying the ontological integrity of the created world though following the lead of *Gaudium et Spes* 22, which affirms the intrinsic value of the created order. By his incarnation, human nature and, through this nature, the whole of the created order, has been assumed, not annulled, by Christ. This does not mean that, in Christ, new knowledge is revealed about the human person and the cosmos, and that this can merely be added to the knowledge that we have via philosophy and science, but that our new understanding of the human person and the cosmos which comes through Christ enables us to unify our natural knowledge of the human person and the cosmos into a coherent whole. As Paul O’Callaghan says, Christ “gives a unitary and harmonic intelligibility to everything that exists and that we know, in particular to human nature”.<sup>78</sup>

From a Thomistic perspective, Matthew Levering explains this unitary and harmonic intelligibility thus:

In discussing *sacra doctrina* [theology] as wisdom, Aquinas makes reference to both the intellectual virtue and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He first distinguishes *sacra doctrina* as wisdom from the intellectual virtue of wisdom. It might seem that *sacra doctrina*, which is knowledge (*scientia*) of the things that have been divinely revealed. . . merely complements and extends the ordering achieved by the intellectual virtue of wisdom. On this view, *sacra doctrina* would be limited to adding knowledge inaccessible to natural reason, such as the teaching of the Trinity or of supernatural beatitude as humankind’s ultimate end. In fact, *sacra doctrina* both adds this supernatural knowledge and reorders all that can be known naturally in light of the triune God as our beginning and supernatural end.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>78</sup> Paul O’Callaghan, *Children of God in the World: An Introduction to Christian Anthropology* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 80–81.

<sup>79</sup> Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 31. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, q.1,

Why does Lonergan separate what he calls “faith” and “belief”? Because it enables him to see the work of the Holy Spirit in people before the Incarnation and in those who even now have not heard the Gospel, and thus not conflate salvation with revelation. For him, “Religious experience spontaneously manifests itself in changed attitudes, in the harvest of the Spirit that is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.”<sup>80</sup> The question is: Is this the only way to account for such a work of the Holy Spirit?

According to John Paul II, it was the teaching of the Second Vatican Council “that the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the ‘seeds of the Word,’ to be found in human initiatives—including religious ones—and in mankind’s efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, John Paul held “that Jesus has a unique relationship with every person, which enables us to see in every human face the face of Christ.”<sup>82</sup> How can these two claims be united? In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul states:

The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: “The Spirit of God with marvellous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26). The Risen Christ “is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit, not only in instilling a desire for the world to come but also thereby animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end”

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a.3. See also Brian J. Shanley, O.P., “*Sacra Doctrina* and the Theology of Disclosure,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 163–87.

<sup>80</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 108.

<sup>81</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 28. He refers the reader to *Ad Gentes*, 3, 11, 15; and *Gaudium et Spes*, 10–11, 22, 26, 38, 41, 92–93. See also “It is precisely because he is ‘sent’ that the missionary experiences the consoling presence of Christ, who is with him at every moment of life—‘Do not be afraid . . . for I am with you’ (Acts 18:9–10)—and who awaits him in the heart of every person.” *Redemptoris Missio*, 88.

<sup>82</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 81.

(*Gaudium et Spes*, 38; cf. 93). Again, it is the Spirit who sows the “seeds of the Word” present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ (*Lumen Gentium*, 17; *Ad Gentes* 3, 15). . . . This is the same Spirit who is at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium*, 16) and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit “so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 45; cf. *Dei verbum*, 54).<sup>83</sup>

Although this can account for the relationship between Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit outside the Body of Christ today, and present the work of the Holy Spirit prior to the Incarnation as something to be fulfilled in the Incarnation, how can the work of the Holy Spirit before the Incarnation be one with the saving work of the Word made flesh? In speaking of “our Lord Jesus Christ” (Col 1:3), St. Paul says that, “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible (Col 1:15–16).” As Hans Urs von Balthasar tells us:

The New Testament hymns (John 1, Eph. 1, Col. 1) are agreed that the cosmos as a whole. . . was created by the Logos (together with God), but not by a *Logos asarkos*, but by the Son of God who from eternity was predestined to be made flesh. ‘Without Him was not anything made that was made’ (John 1.3). “In Him all things hold together” (Col 1.17). This One who at the beginning is Creator of all will also be, in the fullness of time, the Redeemer of all. It is God’s plan to guide and lead the course of history to the Incarnation

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<sup>83</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 28 & 29.

in order “to sum up all things under Christ as Head, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1.10).<sup>84</sup>

How can the Incarnation be the beginning of creation and the means of creation? The key term here is “eternity.” John Saward answers this question as follows:

If we are to understand how Christ as man, as Redeemer, can be the One in whom the cosmos was created, we must remember that the Blessed Trinity wills and effects the temporal world’s creation, redemption, and consummation *eternally*. There are no “moments” in the everlasting Now of God. No moment of time is “outside His eternal embrace.” In a single, simple, eternal act, the Triune God creates free creatures, angels and men, with the supernatural destiny of adoptive sonship, permits and sin of Lucifer and Adam, unites human nature to the person of the Son so that He can make satisfaction for human sin and destroy the works of the Devil, raises His human body from the tomb, and in Him, at the end of time, brings the whole universe to its fulfilment.<sup>85</sup>

Our difficulty is that we cannot comprehend this reality. In order to have some understanding of it, we must think of it as God performing a series of chronologically discrete acts, beginning with “Let there be light.”

This eternal perspective enables one to attempt an explanation of the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* that, “For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man.”<sup>86</sup> In his commentary on this teaching, Joseph Ratzinger states that in it, “The idea of the ‘*assumptio hominis*’ is first touched upon in its full ontological depth. The human nature of all men is one; Christ’s taking to himself the one human nature of man is an event which affects every

<sup>84</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Epilog* (Einsiedeln-Trier: Johannes Verlag, 1987), 7. Cf. Saward, *Christ is the Answer*, 62.

<sup>85</sup> Saward, *Christ is the Answer*, 61. The internal quotation is from John Paul II’s catechesis of 9 April 1985 on the eternity of God. Cf. Louis Bouyer, *Cosmos: Le Monde et la gloire de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 305.

<sup>86</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, §22, in *The Documents of Vatican II with Notes and Index, Vatican Translation*.

human being; consequently human nature in every human being is Christologically characterized."<sup>87</sup>

Ontologically, "divinity" and "humanity" are not "present" anywhere. Only persons are "present." Since the one person in Christ is the Son of God, wherever he is present he is present in his divinity and in his humanity. Avoiding the Nestorian tendency to separate the two natures of Christ, this is why Christ can be humanly present not only in heaven, but also in the Eucharist. If every human being has been created through the Incarnation of the Word, then the Incarnate Word is the ground of their being, the one in whom they "live and move and have [their] being" (Acts 17:28).

In concrete terms, how can non-Christians be saved if they have never encountered Christ? A possible solution is raised by the presentation of the last judgment (cf. Mt 25:31–46). With St. Paul, we already know that anything done to a disciple of Christ is done to Christ (cf. Acts 9:4–5). We know that anyone who gives even a cup of cold water to someone because they are a disciple of Christ will not lack their reward (cf. Mt 10:42). Matthew's last judgment, however, seems to introduce another perspective. Just who are the "righteous" of Christ who love their neighbours? Given that, according to Ratzinger and John Paul II, Christ is present in every human person, can we hold, as St. Teresa of Calcutta did, that someone who picks up a dying Hindu baby in the streets of Calcutta is picking up Christ, or agree with John Paul II, that "Jesus has a unique relationship with every person, which enables us to see in every human face the face of Christ"?<sup>88</sup> And just who are "the nations"? Is everyone included in this group, Christian and non-Christian, or are they "the gentiles," those who do not belong to the New Israel? Could someone who is not a Christian, who has not encountered Christ in faith and baptism, encounter Christ in what St. Teresa of Calcutta called "Jesus in a distressing disguise"? Would that account for the surprise in their voices, "Lord,

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<sup>87</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, Part I, "The Church and Man's Calling," Introductory Article and Chapter 1, "The Dignity of the Human Person," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. V, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, translated by W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 115–63, at 160.

<sup>88</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 81.

when did we see you” (Mt 25:37 & 44)? There may not be an anonymous Christianity, but there may be innumerable anonymous Christs, whom non-Christians have encountered without knowing it, and who have unknowingly established a relationship of self-giving love with him; a real encounter, but with Christ “in disguise.”

*Pelagian Confidence versus the Hope of Wounded Human Beings*

Despite his insistence on the gratuity of God’s love, there is something of a Pelagian flavour to Lonergan’s method. It is not the “hard” variety of Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum, with its insistence that, because we are capable of not sinning, we are all the more in danger of damnation if we do sin, but a “soft” Pelagianism which does concern itself with sin very much. There is little effort to account for sin before or contemporary with conversion. Rather than using the terms sin and righteousness he speaks in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity. His treatment of the movement from inauthenticity to authenticity is post-conversional.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, sin and repentance are only one aspect of this movement, along with the movements from misunderstanding to understanding, error to truth, and religious aberration to genuine religion.<sup>90</sup> This is in stark contrast to the relationship between the intellectual and volitional aspects of the human person as portrayed by St. Paul. For him, the fundamental movement is from “authenticity” to “inauthenticity.” Although people know the truth about who God is, their initial sin is their refusal to worship him. This choice leads to futility in their thinking and a darkening of their intellects. This in turn leads to the folly of false worship. Finally, they are handed over by God to moral depravity (cf. Rom 1:18–32). For Paul, sin is not just a particular kind of “inauthenticity,” but the root cause of all “inauthenticity.”

Because of Lonergan’s assumption that one’s initial experience of God is that of a non-cognitive being-in-love, he is unable to account for an experience of God

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<sup>89</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 110.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

which leads to a rejection of God, that is, the sin against the Holy Spirit. If the experience of being-in-love with God means being in love with him with one's whole heart and soul and mind and strength, if in faith one experiences the fulfilment of one's unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence, how could one refuse? Or why is conversion not immediate and universal upon a person's reaching the ability to ask questions?

It is true that the Holy Spirit is at work in every human heart, and every human heart resists that work. It is true that the Word does enlighten every human being, and every human being tries to avoid that light. While subsequent experiences of God can be experiences of his love, and lead to deeper repentance and conversion, one's initial experience of God is not an experience of love, but an experience of light (cf. Jn 1:9), and some reject the light because their deeds are evil (cf. Jn 3:19–21). God's enlightenment is a loving act, but it is not experienced as love. Staying in the light is humiliating, since it involves a double revelation – who God is and who we are, his holiness and our sinfulness. Our hearts are restless because, while avoiding God, we are seeking a fulfilment that finite things cannot give, fulfilment on our own terms. God has made us for himself, but we can reject that destiny, and this is what causes the restlessness of our hearts, our refusal to admit our true destiny, and our constant search for substitutes.

Lonergan tells a comforting story, but not the true traumatic one. A good and surprisingly honest witness to the true story is Jean-Paul Sartre. In his *Les Mots*, he gives an account of his rejection of the light, caused by the humiliation of God seeing him sinning.

Raised in the Catholic faith, I learned that the Almighty had made me for His glory. That was more than I dared dream. But later, I did not recognize in the fashionable God in whom I was taught to believe, the one whom my soul was awaiting. I needed a Creator; I was given a Big Boss. The two were one and the same, but I didn't realize it. . . . I was led to disbelief. . . by my grandparents' indifference. Nevertheless, I believed. In my nightshirt, kneeling on the bed, with my hands together, I said my prayers every day, but I thought of God less and less often. . . . Only once did I have the feeling that He existed. I had been playing with matches and burned a small rug. I was in the process of covering up my crime when

suddenly God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands. I whirled about in the bathroom, horribly visible, a live target. Indignation saved me. I flew into a rage against so crude an indiscretion, I blasphemed. . . . He never looked at me again. I have just related the story of a missed vocation: I needed God, He was given to me, I received Him without realizing that I was seeking Him. Failing to take root in my heart, He vegetated in me for a while, then He died. Whenever anyone speaks to me about Him today, I say, with the easy amusement of an old beau who meets a former belle: “Fifty years ago, had it not been for that misunderstanding, that mistake, the accident that separated us, there might have been something between us.”<sup>91</sup>

### CONCLUSION – A THEISTIC VERSUS A CHRISTIC PREMISE

Referring back to Rahner’s and Nichols’s criticisms, we can see that they were on the right track. Lonergan fails to take into account what is unique to Christian conversion—Jesus Christ. Christian conversion is not a specific instance in a genus labelled “religious conversion” or “religious experience,” but is *sui generis*. In other words, Christians do not undergo a “religious conversion.” They undergo a conversion to Christ and thus enter into him. Perhaps it would be good for us if sometimes we avoided the term “conversion” and simply spoke in terms of “turning from sin” and “turning to God in Christ.” *Pace* Lonergan and his followers, the foundational commitment of a Christian theologian is not to be found in cognitional theory, epistemology, metaphysics, and religion, but in faith in Christ. This faith has a Trinitarian foundation. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God the Father, in his Word made flesh, reveals to us who he is and who we are. The essential reason Lonergan’s method is not valid is because it is theistic rather than Christic. It is not a Trinitarian method. It is not sufficient for a theological method to be “theological.” It must also be “Christological.” Through faith in Christ who, by the gift of the Holy Spirit via his glorified humanity (cf. Jn 7:37–39 & 16:7), is

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<sup>91</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 97 & 100–03.

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renewing our minds in the image of his own human mind (cf. Rom 12:2), the Father enables us to apprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the mystery of the Gospel, the wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:1-16, Eph 1:3-23 & 3:7-19). We have only one Teacher, one Theologian (cf. Mt 23:10). Having been incorporated into Christ, we can say, "I have been crucified with Christ and I theologise no more, but Christ theologises in me, and now I theologise in the flesh by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (cf. Gal 2:20).