

Lecture, October 3, 2007

Theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion within that matrix. A cultural matrix is the operative set of meanings and values informing a given way of life. The mediation is in the realm of meaning, and for the sake of the human good. We have discussed meaning and value, and now turn to religion.

1 The Question of God

1.1 *The Transcendent Exigence*

Among the exigences promoting us to realms of meaning there is a transcendent exigence. It is discussed in chapter 3 on pp. 83-84: 'There is to human inquiry an unrestricted demand for intelligibility. There is to human judgment a demand for the unconditioned. There is to human deliberation a criterion that criticizes every finite good. So it is ... that [we] can reach basic fulfilment, peace, joy, only by moving beyond the realms of common sense, theory, and interiority into the realm in which God is known and loved.' There we reach what in *Insight* is called the absolute limit in the process of going beyond.

1.2 *Three Forms of the Question of God*

That statement from 83-84 states three ways in which the very unfolding of our conscious intentionality is a question of God, prior to any formulated question. We can make it a formulated question of God by reflecting on our own questioning in the three dimensions mentioned in the quotation. Then there emerge three explicit forms of the question of God: is there a ground of intelligibility, a ground of existence, and a ground of value? These are philosophic forms of the question of God.

1.2.1 The ground of intelligibility

In raising questions for intelligence we are assuming that the universe is intelligible. This assumption is confirmed every time we reach intellectually satisfying answers. But could the universe be ultimately intelligible if it did not have an intelligent ground?

1.2.2 The ground of existence

Our questions for reflection at times give rise to a grasp of the fulfilment of conditions required to pronounce a rational Yes. But is the fulfilment of conditions possible without an unconditioned reality that has no conditions whatever? Can there be mere matters of fact without explanation?

1.2.3 The ground of value

Our questions for moral deliberation ask is X is worth while. But is it worth while to deliberate at all? If so are we the only instance of moral agency in the universe? 102-103: '... is the universe on our side, or are we just gamblers and, if we are gamblers, are

we not perhaps fools, individually struggling for authenticity and collectively endeavoring to snatch progress from the every mounting welter of decline? ... Are cosmogenesis, biological evolution, historical process basically cognate to us as moral beings or are they indifferent and so alien to us?

There is, then, a question of God implicit in all our questioning, and reflecting on our questioning makes it explicit. So the question of God lies within our horizon. 23: '... the objects of theology do not lie outside the transcendental field. For that field is unrestricted, and so outside it there is nothing at all.' 103: 'There lies within [our] horizon a region for the divine, a shrine for ultimate holiness. It 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.'

2 Self-transcendence

2.1 At each level

These questions for intelligence, reflection, and deliberation manifest our capacity for self-transcendence. It is in self-transcendence that we achieve authenticity, and each successive 'level' of intentional consciousness represents a greater degree of self-transcendence. See 104.

2.1 Fulfilled in being in love

But that capacity is *fulfilled* to the extent we are in love. 105: 'That capacity becomes an actuality when one falls in love. Then one's being becomes being-in-love. Such being-in-love has its antecedents, its causes, its conditions, its occasions. But once it has blossomed forth and as long as it lasts, it takes over. It is the first principle. From it flow one's desires and fears, one's joys and sorrows, one's discernment of values, one's decisions and deeds.'

2.1.2 God's love flooding our hearts

Lonergan consistently speaks of three kinds of being-in-love: the love of intimacy, usually manifest in the family; love in the community; and 'the love of God with one's whole heart and whole soul, with all one's mind and all one's strength ... It is *God's love* flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us' (Romans 5.5), grounding Paul's conviction that 'there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8.38-39). And (105) 'as the question of God is implicit in all our questioning, so being in love with God is the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality. [It] brings a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion. [It] brings a radical peace, the peace that the world cannot give. [It] bears fruit in a love of one's neighbor that strives mightily to bring

about the kingdom of God on this earth. On the other hand, the absence of that fulfilment opens the way to the trivialization of human life in the pursuit of fun, to the harshness of human life arising from the ruthless exercise of power, to despair about human welfare springing from the conviction that the universe is absurd.'

3 Religious Experience

This being in love with God is the basic component in religious experience. As experienced, it is being in love in an unrestricted fashion, without limits, qualifications, conditions, reservations. It is not the product of knowledge and choice, but a gift that dismantles present horizons and sets up a new one that transvalues our values and transforms our knowing. It is a conscious dynamic state of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, self-control (Galatians 5.22). It can be conscious without being known, and so without being called 'being in love with God.' It is an experience of mystery, of the holy. It is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is consolation with a content but without an apprehended object. In *Method* it is the fulfilment of the fourth level of intentional consciousness, (106-107) 'as having undergone a conversion, as possessing a basis that may be broadened and deepened and heightened and enriched but not superseded, as ready to deliberate and judge and decide and act with the easy freedom of those that do all good because they are in love.' It is what is really meant by the term 'sanctifying grace,' but it is here spoken of in the language not of theory but of interiority. Thus here is one significance of the discussion of stages of meaning. 107: 'The gift we have been describing really is sanctifying grace but notionally differs from it. The notional difference arises from different stages of meaning. To speak of sanctifying grace pertains to the stage of meaning when the world of theory and the world of common sense are distinct but, as yet, have not been explicitly distinguished from and grounded in the world of interiority. To speak of the dynamic state of being in love with God pertains to the stage of meaning when the world of interiority has been made the explicit ground of the worlds of theory and of common sense. It follows that in this stage of meaning the gift of God's love first is described as an experience and only consequently is objectified in theoretical categories.'

The last paragraph on 107 is also important.

4 Expressions of Religious Experience

4.1 In general

108: 'Religious experience spontaneously manifests itself in changed attitudes, in that harvest of the Spirit that is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control. But it also is concerned with its base and focus in the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*, and the expression of this concern varies greatly as one moves from earlier to later stages of meaning.' See the next two paragraphs, and recommend Girard's massive reorientation of this material.

4.2 What's the Evidence?

On 108-109 Lonergan says there is no clear-cut evidence that religious experience more or less universally conforms to this model, 'apart from the antecedent probability established by the fact that God is good and gives to all [people] sufficient grace for salvation.' In 'Religious Experience' he calls this question a large and open question. In the least it is what Christians will bring to the dialogue of world religions, to that coming convergence of world religions that Lonergan seemed to affirm. But here and elsewhere he finds some support in the work of Friedrich Heiler, who has found seven areas common to the major world religions: (1) there is a transcendent reality, (2) it is immanent in human hearts, (3) it is supreme beauty, truth, righteousness, goodness, (4) it is love, mercy, compassion, (5) the way to this reality is repentance, self-denial, prayer, (6) the way is love of neighbor, even of enemies, and (7) the way is love of God, and bliss is knowledge of God and union with God. Girard would insist that the link to the transcendence of violence is essential to authentic religion and that this is progressively revealed in the Bible.

On p. 109 he shows how his model fits Heiler's analysis, how these seven common features are implicit in the experience of being in love in an unrestricted manner. 109: 'To be in love is to be in love with someone. To be in love without qualifications or conditions or reservations or limits is to be in love with someone transcendent. When someone transcendent is my beloved, [that someone] is in my heart, real to me from within me. When that love is the fulfilment of my unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence through intelligence and truth and responsibility, the one that fulfils that thrust must be supreme in intelligence, truth, goodness. Since [that one] chooses to come to me by a gift of love for [that one], [that one] must be love. Since loving [that one] is my transcending myself, it also is a denial of the self to be transcended. Since loving [that one] means loving attention to [that one], it is prayer, meditation, contemplation. Since love of [that one] is fruitful, it overflows into love of all those that [that one] loves or might love. Finally, from an experience of love focused on mystery there wells forth a longing for knowledge, while love itself is a longing for union; so for the lover of the unknown beloved the concept of bliss is knowledge of [the beloved] and union with [the beloved], however they may be achieved.'

On p. 290, Lonergan is less hesitant about the evidence for his basic model. '... I do not think the matter is in doubt. In the realm of religious experience Olivier Rabut has asked whether there exists any unassailable fact. He found such a fact in the existence of love. It is as though a room were filled with music though one can have no sure knowledge of its source. There is in the world, as it were, a charged field of love and meaning; here and there it reaches a notable intensity; but it is ever unobtrusive, hidden, inviting each of us to join. And join we must if we are to perceive it, for our perceiving is through our own loving.' This experience will provide foundations with its first set of special categories.

5 Religious Development Dialectical

The integration of a good deal of Girardian material would mean developing the next section, 'Religious Development Dialectical.' We will not be able to go into much detail on the Girardian contribution here. What Lonergan says are the following:

5.1 Spontaneous expression

The spontaneous expression of such experience is the change of our attitudes, the harvest of the Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control. This holds in any stage of meaning.

5.2 Expressions of concern with mystery

Conceptions of and orientations to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* that is the base and focus of religious experience varies greatly with the stages of meaning. In earlier stages outward occasions are what make religious experience something determinate and distinct for human consciousness. There result the gods of the moment, the god of this or that place, the god of this or that person, the god or gods of different groups. Such identifications can perdure in later stages, as when we think of certain places as holy places. Moreover, at any stage there can be more or less authentic manifestations of religious concern. There can be a loss of the personal dimension of ultimate mystery, an overemphasis on transcendence, an overemphasis on immanence, the cult of a God that is terrifying slipping over into demonic destructiveness, an exultant destructiveness of oneself and of others. This is precisely the point of entry for Girard.