

The Christian songwriter as theologian

giving voice to the converted heart and mind

by

James Maher

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of the requirements for the degree of*

Master of Theology

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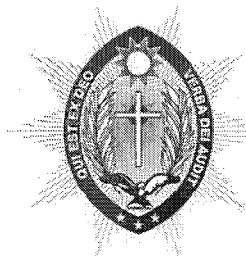
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Abstract

Christian songs are commonly understood to *have* a theology, but not necessarily to *serve* a theological function. This thesis explores the theological function of Christian song within the framework of Bernard Lonergan's theological method. An understanding of the method of theology developed by Lonergan, in particular the functional specialty *foundations*, combined with an understanding of how song functions as a symbolic art-form in relation to religious experience, makes it possible to judge more accurately the place of song in theology. This thesis argues that Christian song, as a theological action, makes its most important contribution within the functional specialty of *foundations*.

The theological task of foundations is the objectification of conversion, the radical religious, moral and intellectual transformation which is the foundation of human authenticity. Song, as a symbolic art-form, is well suited to the objectification of *religious conversion*: an experience of grace, a falling in love in an unrestricted way, a being drawn into the mystery of love and awe. It seems that music and poetry, and other symbolic art-forms, are best able to express the 'otherwise inexpressible', and to do so in a way that is accessible to people of all classes and cultures. In foundations, the centrality of religious experience within theology is reasserted. This religious experience, expressed in song, re-presented in its transforming immediacy, provides the horizon within which religious doctrines might be affirmed and clarified, their meanings understood, and communication of these meanings undertaken. More than being simply a 'carrier' of doctrines, a good Christian song evokes the religious experience which alone makes it possible to recognise, and to seek the meaning of, such doctrines.

This study yields a more dynamic and a more fundamental understanding of the theological function of religious songs and songwriting than is evident in current literature. It makes clear the primary importance of the authentic conversion of the songwriter, and proposes the secondary importance of the study of the tradition (scripture and theology). It should help Christian songwriters better understand what they are doing in their art, what is foundational to it as a religious and a theological activity, and perhaps how they might compose better songs.



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‘God willing, and the creek don’t rise!’

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INTRODUCTION

In the beginning was the Sound ...

*'Without music, religion doesn't stand a chance'.
(Tim Winton)¹*

The vast majority of cosmogonic stories originating from the most diverse cultures, call upon acoustic images to explain the origin of things, of animals, of man. Everything happens as if the most intimate relationship which exists between a human being and his creator-parent was first perceived by man as being a resonant one: noise, sound, voice, music.²

Thus writes the French Jesuit composer and music scholar, Joseph Gelineau. A Hindu creation story offers a powerful example: '... all was dark and quiet in the womb of the universe until the first movement, which created the sound, "OM."'³ Christians might be able to hear the opening of John's gospel, with its reference to the Hebrew creation story, in a fresh way: 'In the beginning was the Sound, and the Sound was with God, and the Sound was God ...' (cf. Jn 1:1)⁴ All things came into being through this primordial **sound** (Jn 1:3), just as we are told in the beginning of Genesis: God **spoke** (perhaps it sounded like a big bang!) and creation dawned. (Gen 1:1 – 2:4a)

Gelineau proposes that 'the fundamental symbolic power of sound' arises from the fact that our first external perceptions *in utero* are aural, whereby a 'message from another person enters me by the sense of hearing and invades me completely without my awareness of its arrival and its source.'⁵ Irish singer and theologian, Nóirín Ní Riain, makes a persuasive argument for hearing being the most 'spiritual' of the senses, citing the first line of the prologue of the Rule of St Benedict, in which he echoes the constant exhortation of the Hebrew scriptures: 'Listen ... and incline the ear of your heart.'⁶

¹ Tim Winton, "Words and Music," *Sydney Morning Herald (Good Weekend)* 10th November(2001).

² Joseph Gelineau, "The Path of Music," *Concilium* 202, no. 2 (1989): 136.

³ Don Campbell, cited by Janet K. Ruffing, "Music as an Opening to Religious Experience," *Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation* 1, no. 1 (January) (2010): 71.

⁴ This is my own insight, arising from reflection on the fact that music is prior to language, both in human evolution and in a child's development.

⁵ Gelineau, "The Path of Music," 136.

⁶ Nóirín Ní Riain, *Theosony: Towards a Theology of Listening* (Blackrock, Co Dublin: The Columba Press, 2011), 17-23. Nóirín Ní Riain, *Listen with the Ear of the Heart: An Autobiography* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2009), 11. St Benedict refers here to Proverbs 4:20. See Prologue to the Rule of St Benedict, accessed online <http://www.osb.org/rb/text/rbejms1.html#pro>, 29Jun2012

Sound communicates meaning before it becomes language. This is because sound functions in human life as an aural *symbol*. Symbolic communication develops prior to language,⁷ and is effective thereafter in realms where language fails. An aural symbol can express what is before, and *beyond*, words. In music and in song, this expressive power of sound is harnessed, focussed, heightened and developed. It is thus not surprising that music is universally recognised as central to religion. Specifically, within the context of religious ritual, music is commonly acknowledged to *mediate religious experience*. Not all traditions would use the term ‘religious experience’, and in some forms of worship there is more emphasis on such ‘experience’ than in others, but as liturgical theologian Mary Collins comments: ‘... ritual music is widely understood to have the power to mediate the meeting of the human with the divine ...’⁸ Religious ritual functions in various psychological and sociological ways, but its ultimate meaningfulness rests on the belief that it facilitates an encounter with the Transcendent. In ancient cultures, it is within such religious rituals that one finds the most important and frequent use of music.⁹

This thesis began as most do, with a question. As a Christian songwriter, I have been moved on occasions by people’s appreciative comments about what they call the ‘theology’ of my songs. Sometimes this has been by way of contrast with other Christian songs, which express particular Christian beliefs in a way that seems to reject or discount actual human experience. On other occasions, family or friends whom I know to have an ambivalent connection with their religious tradition, and who would certainly not use a word like ‘theology’, have expressed thoughts along the lines of: ‘Your songs help make sense of faith.’ Since both theology and music matter enormously to me, the question began to form in my mind: ‘In what sense do my songs, or any Christian songs, function theologically?’ The clue to the answer was in music’s acknowledged power to mediate religious experience, and Bernard Lonergan’s method in theology provided the framework within which this clue could be followed.

Accordingly, this thesis is a reflection on an activity which for me has become a vocation, and which I have come to consider is theological: Christian songwriting. I have sought to

⁷ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1971), 86-90.

⁸ Mary Collins, David Power, and Melonee Burnum eds., *Music and the Experience of God*, vol. 202-2, *Concilium* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 7.

⁹ Bruno Nettl, *Music in Primitive Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 6.

understand how, and in what sense, Christian songwriting is a theological activity, and I have used Bernard Lonergan's method in theology to do so. I propose that Christian songwriting has its most important theological role within the functional specialty *foundations*, and I explore this thesis in four movements: Chapter One takes a general approach to the question of the relationship between music and theology, and examines some of the current literature in this area; Chapter Two introduces Lonergan's method of human consciousness, and his method in theology, and explores in some detail the question of the foundations of a renewed theology; Chapter Three seeks to understand how song functions in human consciousness and human culture, by examining the way it embodies meaning; and finally, Chapter Four considers what is involved in doing theology within the functional specialty *foundations* as a Christian songwriter.

There is perhaps less attention given to music and song in this thesis than I had anticipated. As my research progressed, it became clearer that the role of song in theology was dependent upon what one included as sources of theology, and how one understood its foundations. To some extent, therefore, methodological considerations necessarily took over. However, I think the clarity gained has made the sacrifice worthwhile. Religion obviously can't do without music, but theology too is richer for allowing music to make its unique contribution to the theological enterprise.

It is to be hoped that knowing more precisely **how** song and songwriting are theological, I and others might be able to compose better songs, to express more fully, more fruitfully, and more authentically, the mysterious experience of grace and the unfolding reality of conversion, so that those who hear or sing such songs might be confirmed and encouraged in their life of faith, enticed into understanding it in deeper and richer ways, or, simply, be drawn to respond to the gift of God's love.

CHAPTER 1

Music and theology

In a recent conversation with a friendly stranger, I was asked what I was studying. I said that I was studying the way hymns and songs work theologically. I expected this to be a conversation stopper, but to my surprise, the response came: “That sounds fascinating. What do you mean by ‘theologically’? Do you mean the doctrinal content in the hymns?”

Conversations often gift us with surprises. It turned out that this friendly stranger was a musician at her local Anglican church. Her question gives us a good place to begin. It is the ‘doctrinal content’ and the particular understanding of this doctrine expressed in a Christian song¹, especially in the lyrics, which most people would refer to as the song’s ‘theology’. The hymns of St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788) readily come to mind as powerful and enduring articulations of theological doctrine. The doctrine in a song may be explicit or implicit, but it is always present to some degree. Consider the first two verses of a well known ancient Latin hymn, ascribed to St Ambrose (340-397), *Veni, Redemptor gentium*:

VENI, redemptor gentium,
ostende partum Virginis;
miretur omne saeculum:
talis decet partus Deum.

Non ex virili semine,
sed mystico spiramine
Verbum Dei factum est caro
fructusque ventris floruit.

O COME, Redeemer of the earth,
and manifest thy virgin-birth.
Let every age in wonder fall:
such birth befits the God of all.

Begotten of no human will
but of the Spirit, Thou art still
the Word of God in flesh arrayed,
the promised fruit to man displayed.²

The whole of this hymn is a poetic exposition, in metrical verse, of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, expressed and signified especially by his virgin birth. In its doctrinal content, this hymn is understood to be a refutation of the Arian heresy that still troubled the

¹ For the purpose of this thesis, I will not differentiate ‘song’ from ‘hymn’. I will take ‘song’ simply to be the broader term. A ‘hymn’ is normally defined as a song of praise or honour, usually to the Deity. The term first appears in reference to ancient Greek pagan religious song. In early Christian use, the terms ‘hymn’ and ‘psalm’ were somewhat interchangeable, but gradually ‘hymn’ came to mean an original, non-scriptural poetic composition, ‘written in metrical verse in lines of regular length’. Peter Wilton, “Hymn,” in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham (Oxford Music Online).

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e3366> (accessed September 27, 2012)). The composition process did not normally include music. The musical setting was usually adapted from an existing melody, or was composed by another person to fit the new text.

² Latin from the *Liturgia Horarum*. English translation by J. M. Neale (1818-1866). <http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Hymni/VeniRedemptorG.html> Accessed 11Oct12

church in Ambrose' time.³ We do not know what melodies were used in the fourth century, only that they were monophonic and most likely in modal scales.⁴ The 'Ambrosian' melody which has since become associated with this hymn is quite beautiful, and evokes a sense of gentle mystery. Clearly, the musical setting of a song also contributes to the expression of doctrine and its interpretation; the musical elements of pitch, rhythm, timbre, melody and harmony can be used to stress certain words or phrases, and to set them in any of a wide variety of emotional contexts: joy, sorrow, triumph, confidence, ambivalence, vulnerability, peace, agitation, pride, humility. The same text, set to different melodies and rhythms, will convey different meanings.⁵ The music itself may even make implicit doctrinal claims, since it can be adapted as a kind of language through establishing conventions within a particular cultural milieu. Thus, Bach's *Wachet Auf!* (*Sleepers Awake!*) is considered by many to express, through the movement and tone of the orchestra and choir, the Lutheran doctrine of death as the long awaited meeting with the Lord.⁶ Highly rhythmic Pentecostal music is, for many, expressive of the doctrine of the manifest presence of the Spirit in the believer.

There is no doubt that doctrine is a central theological feature of Christian song, but there is something deeper and more direct in our songs. Even the highly doctrinal Latin hymn discussed above is firstly a *prayer* addressing the Redeemer: each line is not simply an impersonal statement of doctrine, but is rather a profession of faith (especially on the part of the hymn writer), and a personal urging to those who sing or hear the song to wonder at 'the Word of God in flesh arrayed'. Behind and before doctrine is faith, and therefore a person or persons in whom this faith resides and by whom it is professed. Another example which demonstrates this even more clearly is 'Amazing Grace', arguably the most popular Christian song of all time, both inside and outside of the church.

³ Vincent A. Lenti, "Saint Ambrose, the Father of Western Hymnody," *The Hymn* 48, no. 4 (October) (1997): 47.

⁴ Warren Anderson and et al, "Hymn," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford Music Online. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/13648> (accessed September 27, 2012)).

⁵ Victoria Sirota gives the example of 'O Little Town of Bethlehem', demonstrating how the two different musical settings commonly used alter the overall meaning of the song. Victoria R. Sirota, "An Exploration of Music as Theology," *Theological Education* XXXI, no. 1 (1994).

⁶ Patrick Kavanaugh, *The Music of the Angels: A Listener's Guide to Sacred Music from Chant to Christian Rock* (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 1999), 83. For a detailed analysis of Bach's musico-theological portrayal of death, see Richard J. Plantinga, "The Integration of Music and Theology in J. S. Bach," in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, ed. Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 223ff.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.⁷

This first verse of John Newton's (1725-1807) famous hymn articulates, in poetic language, the Christian doctrine of grace and original sin. Subsequent verses give further expression to this doctrine. There is perhaps no Christian song that more powerfully communicates this central doctrine, yet we don't even get past the first verse without realising that the power of Newton's hymn is not in its articulation of the doctrine of grace *per se*, but rather in its articulation of **his experience** of grace.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!⁸

Even without prior knowledge of Newton's life story, the listener and the singer can relate, at some level, to the experience being verbalised. The lyric is so *personal*, and thus, so universal, heart is speaking to heart: "This is what has happened to me, and this is who I've become because of it." Newton is giving witness to his own religious experience, his own conversion, and professing the faith that has thus been born in his heart. Not all hymn texts are as personal as this, and not all hymns succeed in moving people as does 'Amazing Grace', but this enormously popular and enduring hymn demonstrates clearly that something more foundational than doctrine is being expressed in such a song.⁹ A religious experience is being articulated, which is somehow connected to doctrine, but is more elemental than doctrine, and in fact provides the context within which doctrine may be apprehended.

Christian songs move our hearts and lift our spirits, and they do so especially through the emotional 'power' of the poetry and the music. Thus they are central to worship. Few Christians, it seems, doubt the power of song to express the mysterious experience of God's presence and action in our lives. Many perhaps would not describe it in these terms, but may speak rather of how song engages their emotions, makes the 'message' personal, or expresses their faith. Significantly however, most would probably not see this as having anything to do

⁷ John Newton, 'Amazing Grace', Text from Kevin Bates and all, eds., *As One Voice*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Dee Why, NSW: Willow Connection Pty Ltd, 1992), no.29. See also article 'Amazing Grace' in Tim Dowley, ed. *Christian Music: A Global History* (Oxford, England: Lion Hudson, 2011), 124-25.

⁸ Kevin Bates and all, eds., *As One Voice*, no.29.

⁹ Significantly also, this hymn is popular across all Christian churches. At the pre-doctrinal level of religious experience, at the level of the mystical, there is often much easier agreement in religion.

with theology. Herein lies the task of this thesis: to examine the function of Christian song, and thus the role of the Christian songwriter, in expressing religious experience (conversion) and faith, and to determine whether and how this is a theological activity. Amongst other things, this will involve seeking a clearer understanding of the ‘power’ (the *meaning*) of song.

Is there a way in which music¹⁰ is integral to theology?

Any attempt to determine whether and how music is integral to theology very quickly reveals the need to define what theology is and does, or more precisely, to come to a judgement about the method of theology, including theology’s foundations or sources. This immediately presents an ecumenical difficulty. Jeremy Begbie and Steven Guthrie, in their introduction to a recent collection of articles on music and theology, deliberately avoid defining theology too specifically, so as to allow authors from a variety of Christian confessions to contribute freely.¹¹ Nevertheless, they acknowledge Scripture and the church’s ecumenical creeds as the sources of theology, and suggest that theology can be understood as ‘the disciplined thinking and rethinking’ of the gospel, as mediated first and foremost through the Scriptures.¹²

Critically, there is no mention of religious experience and the life of faith. Historically, there has been significant division amongst the churches with regard to the sources of Christian theology. Charles Hefling reflects on the sixteenth century debate in which Luther and the other reformers became embroiled. In so far as it was a debate about theology, it was essentially about the question of the authoritative sources of theology:

A choice had to be made: which was to be the authority for Christian doctrine, the sixteenth century or the first? Whatever the teachers of scholasticism happened to be saying? Or only so much of it as could be grounded in ‘Holy Scripture and the old teachers’?¹³

Hefling goes on to comment that despite these deep divisions, an even greater challenge to the question of theological sources came with the enlightenment and the rise of modern science. This greater challenge is still crucial today, the challenge of coming to terms with an empirical understanding of human culture and history, and therefore of discerning what kind of empirical base theology may be said to have.¹⁴ Human experience is not just another

¹⁰ Unless otherwise stated, we will consider song as part of the broader category of ‘music’.

¹¹ Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, eds., *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ Charles Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, ed. Frederick Lawrence, 2nd ed., Supplementary Issues - Lonergan Workshop (Chesnut Hill, Massachusetts: The Lonergan Institute at Boston College, 2000), 76.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-83.

source for theology, it is a different 'kind' of source, and it has had no easy acceptance. Protestant theologian Paul Tillich observed in 1951, 'the question of experience ... has been central ... whenever the nature and method of theology have been discussed.'¹⁵ It seems to me that the inclusion of religious experience amongst the sources of Christian theology is determinate in judging the theological contribution of Christian song. We will come back to this shortly.

Our reflections above on 'what theology is and does' did not get past the question of theology's sources. Moving forward a step, we come up against our next problem for music. Noted Lutheran church music scholar Paul Westermeyer writes:

Theology is a reflective process that demands words, music a performing process that demands sound. Theology reflects on music (and everything else), and music sounds. Let the two be what they are.'¹⁶

Westermeyer is drawing on a common conception of theology as 'words about God' (*theologos*). He limits theology to 'discursive language', and thereby excludes music from theology. We can only re-admit it by demonstrating music's language-like capacities. To the extent that music can function as a kind of discursive language, a musico-theological exploration of Christian doctrines and their meanings is possible: music, and the other arts, can and do provide creative alternative 'languages' for doing doctrinal and systematic theology, an approach that is discussed by scholars like Jeremy Begbie.¹⁷ However, there are problems with asking art to act as language. The obvious one is its lack of determinate meaning, but a more important problem is that art, if pushed too far towards language, ceases to function as art. Its integrity is compromised. The same is true for symbol. Perhaps this is Westermeyer's concern above? In any case, the popular conception of theology as 'words about God' not only allows no place for other carriers of meaning in theology, but it runs the risk of limiting the scope of the tasks of theology by deciding in advance what tools may be used. The tools should not determine the task. On the contrary, the nature of the task should determine what tools are most appropriate. So again we come back to the need to clarify the method of theology. In the literature on music and theology over the last twenty years,

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, cited in Dermot A. Lane, *The Experience of God: And Invitation to Do Theology* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 3. Lane

¹⁶ Paul Westermeyer, "Reflections on Music and Theology," *Theological Education* XXXI, no. 1 (1994): 189.

¹⁷ See for example Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). And Rachael Kohn, "Instrumental Music Communicating Beliefs" in *The Spirit of Things* (Australia: ABC Radio National, 2010).

perhaps partly for the reason discussed above, there is a marked lack of any reflection on theological method.¹⁸

Towards a renewed understanding of theology

In his small book *Music and Theology*, Don Saliers begins to ask questions about the function of music in regard to 'revelatory' experiences, and the implications of this for theology.

But might there be particular occasions when a piece of music carries with it more than association, and more than the arousal of feeling – music without words as revelatory of transcendence? What do we make of 'revelatory' experiences with the music of Christian worship?

If this is possible, then the notion of theological significance must be broadened to include more than theology as statements about the divine life. Perhaps there is something about the ancient conception of theology as prayer, as liturgy, as poetry and song that we must recover today.¹⁹

Saliers' question about the revelatory power of instrumental music is a new form of an old question. Seventeenth century Lutherans debated the 'proclamatory' power of instrumental (organ) music.²⁰ His question leads him to speculate on the need for a broader and fuller description of theology's tasks. He reasons that if non-verbal music can mediate revelatory experience, theology must be more than 'words about God'. Admitting a non-linguistic carrier of meaning into theology challenges popular assumptions about the scope of theology's activities. Later, Saliers develops these thoughts further:

That there is theology in hymn texts is obvious. What is less obvious is what kind of theology this may be said to be, even less obvious is how musical settings contribute to the theological sense of the text. One way to think of these issues is to regard hymns (text and tune together) as 'lyrical theology'. This means ... that we must give 'theology' a broader definition than is found in most standard text book accounts. I propose that 'lyrical theology' be placed alongside dogmatic, philosophical, and systematic theology. It could even be argued that more formal notions of giving an ordered account of the doctrines of Christian faith depend upon what is prayed and sung and proclaimed. The formal language of reasoned reflection on Christian doctrine requires the primary theological 'language' of sound that both forms and

¹⁸ See for example Jon Michael Spencer, *Theological Music: Introduction to Theomusicology* (London: Greenwood Press, 1991); Edward Foley, "Learning the Song of the Frogs: The Arts and Theology," *Pastoral Music* April-May(1994); Westermeyer, "Reflections on Music and Theology."; Christopher R. Campling, *The Food of Love: Reflections on Music and Faith* (London: SCM, 1997); Edward Foley, "Liturgical Music: A Bibliographic Essay," in *Liturgy and Music: Lifetime Learning*, ed. Robin A. Leaver and Joyce Ann Zimmerman (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 438-42; Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*; Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology*, Horizons in Theology (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007); Begbie and Guthrie, eds., *Resonant Witness*.

¹⁹ Saliers, *Music and Theology*, 29.

²⁰ Joyce Irwin, "'So Faith Comes from What Is Heard': The Relationship between Music and God's Word in the First Two Centuries of German Lutheranism," in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, ed. Jeremy Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 68.

expresses faith in local assemblies. This, I propose, always involves music and related forms of ordered sound.²¹

Acknowledging the power of music to mediate religious (revelatory) experience, Saliers senses the need for theology to recognise and include such foundational experience. Here, he is pressing upon the question of Christian theology's sources and foundations. In proposing a broadening of the conception of theology, and a new specialty of 'lyrical theology', he is convinced that theology needs to be grounded in the 'revelatory' experience of faith, within the believing community, and that music is always involved in forming and expressing this.²² The result is a 'less obvious' theology, involving a foundation extra to Scripture and tradition. Whilst Paul Westermeyer seems to disagree with Saliers on the place of music in theology, he agrees with him on the role of music in expressing faith: 'The faith of a community comes to life in its music-making. In music, the faith and life of a people take flesh.'²³

Lest we find ourselves back where we began, let us clarify that by 'faith' we do not mean beliefs, for beliefs are essentially doctrines, affirmed in the light of faith. Faith, the gift of religious vision, is seeing the world through the eyes of religious love, and this gift is a consequence of the religious experience Christians call conversion.²⁴ Saliers' proposal is for the inclusion of such religious experience, and its unfolding in the life of faith, within the foundations of theology.

²¹ Saliers, *Music and Theology*, 35.

²² In the above quotation, Saliers is edging towards the three functional specialties *foundations*, *doctrines* and *systematics*. A further note re music 'forming and expressing' faith - both Langer and Lonergan make the point that symbolization (objectification) is not just reproductive, but is also productive.

²³ Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music: A Textbook, a Reference, a History, an Essay* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998), 5. For an excellent reflection on the function of music within the assembly, see Nathan D. Mitchell, "The Sung Prayer of the Assembly," *Worship* 82, no. 1 (2008).

²⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 115-16.

CHAPTER 2

Method in theology

Theology is not a system invented by religious people and then applied to existing human concerns. It is simply a reflection, in the light of faith, on what actually happens to people - to individual people, and to groups and nations and cultures. ... In fact, it *begins* with experience, and then, naturally, reflection on experience ... becomes 'tradition' for those who come after ...¹

... there are two sources for theology, common human experience ... and Christian texts.²

At no point in history has it been more important to listen to the tradition ... [but] even the tradition can teach us nothing of ultimate importance if we do not have some real light from our own experience to read it by. It is this experience that saves tradition from ever becoming a mere memory transmitted in print, and that revitalises it for every generation.³

In the recent collection of essays on theology and music mentioned in chapter one, the editors identify the sources of theology variously as the Christian revelation in scripture, or as scripture and tradition, as expressed, say, in the early ecumenical creeds.⁴ This designation of the sources of theology means that music can only ever take a role as 'secondary witness' to the revelation of the gospel text, or the authority of the early creeds.⁵ As valuable a service as such witness is, music remains subordinate to discursive, 'worded' meaning, always instrumentalized to some extent, and never getting to fully 'be itself' in the life of Christians, or in theology. However there is a much more serious problem for theology if the word of scripture and tradition remain its exclusive sources. A theology that is grounded only in the texts of scripture and tradition can only say what was said and what was meant by Christians in the past. To speak to the present and the future, theology needs to recognise an extra foundation, and a different **kind** of foundation: the religious experience of the Christian who **today** loves God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength. (Mk 12:30)

The renewal of theology

The challenge of incorporating religious experience into theology is a major one. As Charles Hefling points out, it amounts to coming to terms with the relatively new *empirical* understanding of culture and history.⁶ With the rise of scholastic theology in the West during the middle ages, the older monastic theology, grounded in the religious experience of worship

¹ Rosemary Haughton, *The Catholic Thing* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate, 1979), 227-28.

² David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 43.

³ John Main, *Silence and Stillness in Every Season: Daily Readings with John Main*, ed. Paul Harris (New York: Continuum, 1997), 32.

⁴ Begbie and Guthrie, eds., *Resonant Witness*, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶ Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 76.

and the prayerful contemplation of scripture, was displaced by a theology grounded in reason and philosophical logic. Theology was moved out of the cloister, and into the urban schools (*scholae*).⁷ The conflict between St Bernard of Clairvaux (d.1153) and Peter Abelard (d.1142) is an early example of the tension between these two different theological approaches.⁸ As scholastic theology rose to prominence over the subsequent centuries, religious devotion, worship, contemplation, and mystical experience became separated from theology. Religious experience however, in its manifold forms, continued to sustain the life of the faithful, as demonstrated by the growth of various devotions (e.g. devotion to the Sacred Heart and to Mary and the cult of the Saints) and the flowering of mysticism, especially amongst the Franciscans, Cistercians and Dominicans. But theology became less and less relevant to the life of faith of the common person.

Abelard famously demonstrated that monastic theology could not stand in the realm of reason. In this realm, it too easily collapsed into logical contradictions.⁹ With the rise of scholasticism, theology moved into a new realm of theory,¹⁰ but as so often happens, the new thing took over. According to Frank Fletcher, the ‘enthronement’ of speculative reason and the Aristotelian philosophical framework in the thirteenth century ultimately gave rise to what Lonergan calls *classicism*.¹¹ Not only did theology lose touch with religious experience, but over the centuries that followed, it gradually lost touch with mainstream Western culture.¹² When the enlightenment dawned in the late 1600s, modern science, which had been gestating for some centuries, finally came to birth, nourished by the ideas of Bacon and Descartes. In the heat of the anti-religious sentiment of the enlightenment, the Church and theology withdrew into dogma, narrowing its theological focus even further. ‘It demoted the quest of faith for understanding to a desirable, but secondary, and indeed, optional goal. It

⁷ Benedict-XVI, "Monastic and Scholastic Theology," in *General Audience 28 October 2009* (Vatican . http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20091028_en.html (accessed July 03, 2012)); Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

⁸ Yves Congar, *A History of Theology*, trans. Hunter Guthrie (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 69-75.

⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 279.

¹⁰ Lonergan refers frequently to the different realms of meaning. There are four basic realms: commonsense, theory, interiority and transcendence. Prior to the development of the theoretical realm within a culture, the commonsense realm and the transcendent realm interpenetrate. The rise of scholasticism marked the entry of theology into the theoretical realm, whereas prior to this it was grounded in the realms of commonsense (symbolic expression) and transcendence. See *ibid.*, 81-85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xi,29,124,338.

¹² Frank Fletcher, "Exploring Christian Theology's Foundations in Religious Experience: A Methodological Exploration of the Transcendental, Ecclesial, and Psychic Aspects of Christian Theological Foundations as Envisaged within the Theological Meta-Method of Bernard Lonergan and the Development of the Meta-Method by Robert Doran" (Doctoral Thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity, 1982), 14.

gave basic and central significance to the certitudes of faith, their presuppositions, and their consequences.¹³ With the rise of scholasticism, religious **experience** (and thus conversion) was marginalised in theology. With the post-enlightenment withdrawal into dogma, **understanding** was marginalised as well. Lonergan argues that this state of affairs survived right through until the twentieth century.¹⁴

As empirical science dawned, the separation of philosophy and science began. Gradually, each one was freed to develop independently, but within empiricism were the seeds of a new foundation for **both**. For science it was the scientific method, for philosophy, beginning with Descartes' '*cogito ergo sum*', it ultimately led to the 'turn to the subject' of Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and others.¹⁵ A new realm of meaning was emerging, the realm of human interiority, where the subject attended to their *experience* of consciousness.¹⁶ 'The empirical temper of the [modern] age'¹⁷ was agitating religion and theology, but developing an empirical base for theology was no simple matter, and the atheistic spirit of empiricism kept religion on guard. In the Catholic church, the distrust of experience was deepened in the face of the modernist crisis of the late nineteenth century,¹⁸ and was famously expressed in the quip about mysticism: "It begins in mist, centres on 'I', and ends in schism".¹⁹ However, the empirical genie was not going back into the bottle. By the mid twentieth century, Bernard Lonergan concluded that only a complete renewal of theology could enable it to operate on the level of its time.

If religious experience and the life of faith were to find their place again within theology, a new empirical method was needed, and Lonergan realised that this would first demand a thorough and precise understanding of human consciousness. He saw that the 'secular' empirical methods of the sciences could not simply be transferred to theology. Theology needed its own method, which would incorporate all that was authentic in other empirical

¹³ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Theology in Its New Context," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William Ryan and Bernard Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "The Subject," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William Ryan and Bernard Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968, 1974), 69-70.

¹⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 85.

¹⁷ Fletcher, "Exploring Christian Theology's Foundations in Religious Experience", 63.

¹⁸ In the 1907 encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, Pope Pius X condemned the position that theology was grounded in 'experience' (as it was being defined by scholars at the time). See Pope Pius X, "Pascendi Dominici Gregis," (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis_en.html (accessed 23rd March 2013), 1907). Nos. 14-15

¹⁹ Various attributed to Cardinal John Henry Newman, and the English Catholic apologist Ronald Knox.

methods, but would take serious account of the mysterious experience of God's presence and action in people's lives, in the past and in the present. Lonergan realised that the very foundation of *any* scholarly method was human consciousness itself, and so set about clarifying the 'method' of the human heart and mind, and the means by which grace had its effect in a person, giving rise to living religion. The ancient philosophical questions of cognitive theory, epistemology and metaphysics had to be faced again, and this he did in various works, culminating in the 1957 work *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*.²⁰ His resulting 'transcendental method' sheds clear light on the dynamic functioning of human consciousness, on the central role of religious experience, and on the reality of conversion as the basis of human authenticity.

Transcendental method: the method of human consciousness

A modern scientist begins an investigation with careful attention to the data, moving then to the questions arising and hypotheses emerging. She or he then seeks ways of testing the hypotheses through experiment, and next comes to some conclusions based on the results of the experimentation. At any stage in this sequence, the scientist may move between operations: for example, go back and check the data, or re-examine past conclusions in the light of a new hypothesis. There is an overall movement from data to results, but these operations are very fluid and dynamic, and the overall 'method' is a self-correcting process of learning. They reflect the operations of human consciousness which Bernard Lonergan analysed and clarified. Lonergan concluded there are four distinct kinds (or levels) of conscious and intentional operations: experiencing (*empirical*), understanding (*intellectual*), judging (*rational*) and deciding (*responsible*):

.... different levels of consciousness and intentionality have to be distinguished. ... There is the *empirical* level on which we sense, perceive, imagine, feel, speak, move. There is the *intellectual* level on which we inquire, come to understand, express what we have understood, work out the presuppositions and implications of our expression. There is the *rational* level on which we reflect, marshal the evidence, pass judgment on the truth or falsity, certainty or probability, of a statement. There is the *responsible* level on which we are concerned with ourselves, our own operations, our goals, and so deliberate about possible courses of action, evaluate them, decide, and carry out our decisions.²¹

We have basically two different kinds of experience: the experience of the senses, and the experience of ourselves as conscious. We experience the data of the senses (we see, hear,

²⁰ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5th ed., vol. 3, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, Toronto 1957, 1992).

²¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 9.

touch, taste and smell), and we experience ourselves operating on each of the distinct levels of consciousness. For example, we experience ourselves inquiring, or we experience ourselves coming to a judgement about something. On the level of our senses, we experience the sensory stimulation, and we experience ourselves experiencing this (i.e. we can be aware that we are experiencing sensory stimulation).

The 'way up'

In the 'upward' movement of consciousness, we are driven from one level to the next by our desire for, by the intention of, what the higher level offers. In this sense, our consciousness is 'intentional'. The 'way up' of intentional consciousness follows the pattern of the scientist at work. It begins with attending to the data of sense and of consciousness. From here, the desire to understand the data (the intention of intelligibility) drives us to ask questions: Why? How? An insight is given which seems to answer our questions. We are operating on the intellectual level, where interpretation and understanding are developed. The desire for (the intention of) understanding now becomes the intention of correct understanding, taking us to the next level, the rational level, which is concerned with knowing what is true and real. Here we weigh the evidence for and against the veracity of our insights, and come to a judgment about what is really the case. Once our questions on this level are settled, the intention of the good arises, the desire to know and act in accordance with what is really worthwhile, moving us to the fullest level of conscious intentionality, the level of values, moral deliberation and decision. It is on this level that the *person* emerges, in the specific sense that we make ourselves *who we are* by our choices and decisions, by deciding what really matters to us (making judgments of value) and acting accordingly.²² Our questions on this level are about what is good and worthwhile in the truth that has been affirmed, and therefore what decision and action is concomitant with this judgment of value. This is the level of *personal* consciousness and *personal* experience, and is closely aligned with what we would call the 'heart', the deep centre of a person. Our feelings which arise in response to values²³ are most active on this level. On each of the levels of consciousness, our intending is unrestricted (of the intelligible, the true, the real and the good). Given this unrestrictedness of our conscious intending, the question of God is implicit in all our questioning.²⁴

²² See *ibid.*, Chapter 1. and Lonergan, "The Subject," 81.

²³ Not all feelings arise in response to values. There are also non-intentional feelings which relate to states and trends of being. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 30ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 101ff.

Self-transcendence

Such is a brief outline of Lonergan's profound analysis. It lifts the veil on the method of human consciousness, and reveals that consciousness naturally *intends* something, *some things* in fact: intelligibility, truth, reality, goodness, and love.²⁵ The 'upward' movement of the four levels described is often summarised by the precepts: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible. It is not hard to see how the authentic upward movement of consciousness is one of self-transcendence. On the empirical level of consciousness, we begin to move beyond ourselves in attending to the two kinds of data: the data of the senses and the data of our consciousness. Sounds, touch, smells, tastes and sight, furnish us data from the external world. We will soon ask questions which aim to find out what really is the case 'out there'. We also attend to the data of consciousness. In this attending, we begin to move beyond our subjectivity in the process of coming to know ourselves as a knower. On the intellectual level of consciousness, we ask our questions and receive insights, we '[grasp] intelligible form in the sensible representations'²⁶ and concepts begin to form. On the rational level of consciousness, we take a more radical step of self-transcendence by judging that a certain understanding is accurate and true, independent of my thinking it. Thus we achieve cognitional self-transcendence. On the responsible level of consciousness, we realise the fullest expression of self-transcendence, moral self-transcendence, when we decide and act in accordance with our judgment of what is good or worthwhile, beyond our personal interests and preferences. Human authenticity, Lonergan argues, consists in self-transcendence,²⁷ which is the fruit of following the natural dynamic of our consciousness, transcendental method.

The 'way down'

Not every movement of our consciousness begins on the level of the senses. When we fall in love, the experience is usually firstly on the *personal* level of consciousness, incorporating the apprehension of value (the love and the beloved). Love is first and foremost a personal experience. In this situation, our consciousness moves in the opposite 'downward' direction through the levels, from the personal to the empirical. From the personal experience of love, we desire to clarify and affirm what is true and real in the experience, we want to name and

²⁵ Elsewhere Lonergan writes that the different levels of consciousness are 'united by the unfolding of a single transcendental intending of plural, interchangeable objectives.' Lonergan, "The Subject," 81.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁷ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "The Future of Christianity," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William Ryan and Bernard Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969, 1974), 152.

know the one with whom we are in love. This we do on the rational level. We judge what it is we have 'learnt' and believe as a result of our personal experience. These beliefs then demand understanding, explanation and further interpretation, so as to fit them into the rest of our world of meaning. Finally, the application of our new understanding comes in 'new and richer forms of experience'²⁸, in 'experience made mature and perceptive'.²⁹ The 'way down' of human consciousness is no less a movement of self-transcendence, since it is the working out of the implications of a personal experience which constitutes a new and expanded horizon. Personal religious experience unfolds in this way; we are, as it were, 'born from above'. God first loves us. (1 Jn 4:19)

At the risk of confusion, we might call the upward movement of intentional consciousness the 'way of the head', and the downward movement, beginning with 'the subject on the fourth, existential level ... and in the dynamic state of being in love'³⁰, the 'way of the heart'.

'... besides the factual knowledge that is 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.'³¹

The head and the heart work together. The ascending and descending movements of consciousness operate simultaneously in a bi-directional dynamic flow.³² Whilst we more commonly notice and celebrate our growing facility with the 'way up' in our education and formation, it is the 'way down' which leads and supports us long before we have developed competence in the 'way up'.³³ This begins with the transforming experience of parental love when we are infants, and continues as we grow to become 'the child, the son, the pupil, the follower.'³⁴ The 'way down' is not a simple linear process any more than is the 'way up'. The different levels of consciousness are interdependent and operate as a dynamic unity. An inconsistency revealed in understanding a particular belief might result in the need to clarify

²⁸ Frederick E. Crowe, *The Lonergan Enterprise* (Michigan: Cowley Publications, 1980), 72.

²⁹ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985), 181. Note, the 'way down' is not a deductive process, but rather 'a succession of transpositions to ever more determinate contexts.' See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 142.

³⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 115.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

³² Patrick McNerney offers some helpful insights into the 'way down' of intentional consciousness. See Patrick J. McNerney, "Method in Reconciling Differences between Religions: An Application of Bernard Lonergan's Analysis of the Dynamics of Intentional Consciousness" (Major Thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2002), 64-75.

³³ Crowe, *The Lonergan Enterprise*, 72. There may be a cultural and a gender bias in this emphasis on the way of 'achievement', and not the way of 'gift'.

³⁴ Lonergan, "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," 181.

again the belief, or to reflect again on the personal experience which gave rise to the belief in the first place. To use a physical metaphor, each of the four levels of consciousness is a dancer, responding to and interacting with each of the other dancers, together performing a dance which constitutes the dynamic flow of intentional consciousness.

Conversion: the foundation of human authenticity

Clarifying the method of human consciousness allows us to come to a judgment about the basis of human authenticity. Despite the natural dynamic of intentional consciousness heading us towards self-transcendence, our progress is not automatic. Human development is dialectical: we grow in authenticity by choosing between being attentive and inattentive, intelligent and unintelligent, reasonable and unreasonable, responsible and irresponsible. Lonergan concluded that to progress in authenticity, we need to make the radical choices which constitute **conversion**, in its three kinds: intellectual, moral and religious. Intellectual conversion is to truth and reality, and consists in affirming and knowing (in practice) transcendental method. This involves rejecting the various philosophic distortions which ultimately deny the possibility of cognitive self-transcendence (e.g. empiricism, idealism, realism).³⁵ Conversion is not a passive process, but a 'fully conscious decision about one's horizon, one's outlook, one's world-view.'³⁶ Moral conversion consists in a radical re-orientation to values over personal satisfaction. As Lonergan points out, 'deciding is one thing, doing is another.'³⁷ Moral failure is all too common, and like all the three conversions, moral conversion constitutes a radical new beginning, not an end point. Living out this conversion involves a constant turning away from selfishness, an ongoing discernment of bias in its various kinds, and a growing sensitivity and responsiveness to values.³⁸ Ultimately, it demands a love that does not shrink from suffering, even giving one's life for another. Religious conversion, which usually occurs first in people, is to unrestricted love as the basis of all goodness and truth. It is 'total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations.'³⁹ Religious conversion is both a gift and a radical choice. It is not the product of our knowing and choosing, though it demands our response. Unless we

³⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 239. For a detailed discussion of some of the philosophic issues, see Lonergan, "The Subject." A helpful exploration of self-transcendence and authenticity is found in Anne Henderson, "Reclaiming the Question of God in a Contemporary Context: Bernard Lonergan's Transcendental Method and the Transforming Power of the Poetic Word" (Minor thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2002).

³⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 268.

³⁷ Ibid., 240.

³⁸ Ibid., 51-55.

³⁹ Ibid., 240.

participate freely and consciously, its fruits will not be borne in our life. Religious conversion originates as an experience on the fourth, personal level of consciousness, and unfolds through the downward movement described. It is, in Christian terms, the experience of the love of God flooding one's heart through the gift of the Holy Spirit, drawing one to respond, and to continue responding.

The question of Jesus' disciples' comes to mind: 'Who then can be saved?' (Lk 18:26) What is the energy that drives the authentic dynamism of the human spirit and sustains us in making the radical choices involved in conversion? We have a hint already in our discussion of the 'way down' of human consciousness. Commonly religious conversion occurs first, followed by moral conversion and then intellectual.⁴⁰ Religious conversion is to love, to unrestricted love, and love constitutes a relationship which both challenges us and supports us. Human authenticity cannot be achieved or sustained in isolation. None of us grows without another or others (usually close family and friends) to push and pull us out of ourselves, and to support and affirm us in the risk and vulnerability involved in self-transcendence. There is nothing more fundamental to human authenticity, nothing more common as a cause, nothing more noticeable in its absence, than **love**. Lonergan comments:

Our self-transcendence is not solitary. We fall in love. The love into which we fall is ... a dynamic state that prompts and moulds all our thoughts and feelings, all our judgments and decisions. ... once it occurs and as long as it lasts, it is a first principle in our living, the origin and source of the loving-ness that colours every thought, word, deed, and omission.⁴¹

When this love is God's love, the result is religious conversion, a conversion 'to a total being-in-love as the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence ...'⁴² 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.' (Lk 18:27) When the three conversions occur in one consciousness, religious conversion sublates moral and intellectual, thus facilitating their more complete realisation. It thereby becomes the 'efficacious ground of all self-transcendence'. We can then simply speak of conversion, understanding that all three are operative in the authentically functioning subject.

Transcendental method: implications for a renewed theology

Lonergan's analysis of human consciousness yields new foundations and a new framework for a renewed theology. In contrast to the doctrinal foundations of the old fundamental

⁴⁰ Ibid., 243. See also 122-3.

⁴¹ Lonergan, "The Future of Christianity," 153.

⁴² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241.

theology,⁴³ Lonergan discerned in the human heart and mind foundations that lay ‘not in a set of verbal propositions named as first principles, but in a particular, concrete, dynamic reality generating knowledge of particular, concrete, dynamic realities.’⁴⁴ Transcendental method reveals to us the way in which religious experience occurs, the kind of experience it is, and the means by which it unfolds in human consciousness, constituting a radically new horizon within which religious doctrines can be affirmed, and an understanding of their meaning, for our time and our place, sought. It provides a model for understanding the momentous change that conversion brings to the human heart and mind, and establishes conversion as the foundation of cognitive and moral self-transcendence. On this basis, we can judge the authenticity of religious experience, and the authenticity of a religious tradition, and we can trust ourselves to speak truthfully and meaningfully about God and God’s dealings with us. The cognitive and moral objectivity of a renewed theology is thus found in the conversion of the theologian.

The method of theology: functional specialties

[Theology] *begins* with experience, and then, naturally, reflection on experience - commented on, discussed, handed on - becomes 'tradition' for those who come after, and becomes part of their own experience, part of their inherited way of understanding and responding to God. Those who renew this tradition must integrate it with their own new, direct and probably differing experience, and so enrich, and modify, the tradition which they have renewed and must, in turn, hand on.⁴⁵

When the only admissible sources of theology are scripture and tradition, theology can only hand on what has been said in the past. But theology must do more than this, it must also renew itself, and the only way it can do so is to draw on the extra, dynamic foundation of the converted hearts and minds of theologians. As Rosemary Haughton observes above, there is a ‘receiving’ and a ‘passing on’ in theology, and the critical extra in passing on a living tradition is integrating one’s own experience into the theology. Firstly, theology **listens** to the tradition of the past, secondly it must **speak** to the present, to the new contexts. Thus the functions of theology identified by Bernard Lonergan operate in two movements or phases, and further, they abstract directly from the ways in which human consciousness functions.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁴ Lonergan, "Theology in Its New Context," 65.

⁴⁵ Haughton, *The Catholic Thing*, 227-28.

⁴⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 125-45.

Phase one

The first phase of theology mediates an encounter with the inherited religious tradition, by means of research, interpretation, historical analysis and critical evaluation. If the foundations of theology are its texts only, then phase one is the whole of theology. The extensive work in biblical studies in the last 150 years is an excellent example of first phase theology. Lonergan named the first four functional specialties which constitute this phase *research*, *interpretation*, *history* and *dialectic*. As ‘functional’ specialties, their focus is not on any particular kinds of materials (as in field or subject specialization), but rather on the **aims** of the operations of the particular level of intentional consciousness with which they are associated. The first phase specialties follow the ‘way up’ of intentional consciousness, with *research* specialising on the empirical level, *interpretation* on the level of understanding, *history* the rational level, and *dialectic* on the personal level. The theologian working in one of these specialties uses all levels of her/his consciousness to experience, understand, judge and make decisions about the functioning of the particular level of consciousness relevant to the matter being studied. Again, to use the example of biblical studies, someone working in *interpretation* has the task of deciding what was meant by ancient texts, and this is only possible by knowing about the way human understanding works and the factors affecting meaning: ‘historical context, ... mode and level of thought and expression, ... the circumstances and the intention of the writer.’⁴⁷ So again, the focus and the scope of each specialty is determined by its corresponding level of intentional consciousness – empirical, intellectual, rational, personal.

The encounter with the past mediated through the first phase specialties is an encounter with the ‘outer word’ of God spoken through the tradition, spoken through persons witnessing to Christ. It introduces us to knowledge of (or about) the body of Christ.⁴⁸ Since it is grounded in the data of the tradition, a non-believer can in fact be a first phase theologian. Charles Hefling rightly points out that Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud were theologians, reflecting as they did on the significance of religion in Western culture.⁴⁹ Scripture and tradition contain all the data that is needed for these first four specialties, though collecting it, interpreting it, judging what happened and what was going forward, and then determining the personal roots (where they exist) of the conflicting views and movements, all demand the best methods of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁹ Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 64.

the human sciences. Obviously, the more attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible the theologian, the more valuable will be their work. But a theology that is oriented only to receiving the outer word as expressed in the past has no constitutional need for its theologians to ‘love the Lord with all their heart and soul and mind and strength’ (Mk 12:30).

Phase two

In the second phase however, where theology’s task is to speak to the present and in so doing renew the tradition, a personal religious stance on the part of the theologian is critical, for this phase has as its foundational reality the conversion of the theologian. In the first functional specialty of this phase, *foundations*, the task is to **objectify** conversion by expressing the ‘internal’ resonance between the outer word of the tradition and the ‘inner word’ of religious experience. This experience is expressed and interpreted in the light of the tradition (examined, purified and made available by the first phase of theology), but in such a way that it engages with the questions of a contemporary church and world. In summary, the second phase of theology is done by giving voice to the utterly life-changing reality of conversion, then and only then, within this context, affirming and clarifying religious beliefs, seeking an understanding of their meaning in a contemporary world, and communicating these meanings through dialogue with contemporary believers and the wider culture. Here is the second set of four functional specialties: *foundations*, *doctrines*, *systematics* and *communications*. Once again, each specialty focuses on the aims of the operations of a particular level of intentional consciousness: the responsible (or responsive⁵⁰), the rational, the intellectual and the empirical respectively. The order is reversed in the second phase of theology, reflecting the ‘way down’ of intentional consciousness.⁵¹

The second phase of theology is still dependent upon the first phase, since in phase two the theologian must ‘integrate [the tradition] with their own new, direct and probably differing experience.’⁵² But the extra foundations of the second phase are radically different: they are the authentic religious, moral and intellectual conversion of the theologian. Second phase

⁵⁰ There is a different feel to conscious operations on the fourth level on the ‘way down’, being, so to speak, ‘born from above’ rather than ‘built from below’. The term ‘responsive’ seems to express this, with its more relational connotation, in contrast to ‘responsible’.

⁵¹ There are links with the traditional specializations of theology in phase two: *foundations* with fundamental theology, *doctrines* with dogmatic theology, *systematics* with systematic theology, *communications* with pastoral theology, but functional specialization is not the same as field or subject specialization, so there are crucial differences.

⁵² Haughton, *The Catholic Thing*, 228.

theology can only be done by a believer. Its object, in Christian theology, is the clarification, the understanding and the concrete living of God's message in Christ. We desire, through faith, to know and understand the one whose love has flooded our hearts (Rom 5:5). As is perhaps already clear, it is the fifth functional specialty *foundations*, which opens the way for religious experience to take its place within a renewed theology. Lonergan's work asserts that threefold conversion is the foundation of human authenticity, which alone yields cognitive and moral objectivity. On such a foundation, human consciousness can be trusted to know what is true and real, and to embody what is good and loving. The religious experience of such a person is surely not merely admissible to theology, but indispensable.

Singing a new song

In the functional specialty foundations, we acknowledge that the authentic, self-transcending human being, one who is religiously, morally and intellectually converted, is the result of a wondrous Divine-human creative collaboration,⁵³ so significant that she or he constitutes the extra foundations which make it possible to speak directly about God, and to even 'sing a new song' (Ps 144:9). Thus theology may speak to the present and to the future. The theological task in foundations is to objectify conversion, to 'spell out' this wondrous Divine-human collaboration, symbolically, artistically, or linguistically. We will consider more closely what this entails in chapter four.

In our previous chapter, we cited Don Saliers' proposal for a new specialty of 'lyrical theology', which he urged could provide the 'primary theological 'language'' upon which formal reflection on Christian doctrine would depend. The 'primary theological 'language'', he suggests, would arise from what is 'prayed and sung and proclaimed' as expressions of the faith of local assemblies, and would always involve music! The functional specialty foundations provides just such a 'primary theological 'language'' through the objectification of conversion, the religious component of which indeed gives rise to the lived faith of local assemblies. Further, the functional specialties which follow on from foundations do depend upon the objectification of conversion achieved in foundations, which provides 'the horizon within which the meaning of doctrines can be apprehended.'⁵⁴ Only within the horizon of the experience of grace and the gift of faith, can religious doctrine be apprehended and affirmed,

⁵³ Lonergan describes his theological method as 'a framework for collaborative creativity.' Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 131.

and an understanding of its meaning sought and communicated.⁵⁵ Thus, the functional specialties in the second phase of theology, as described by Lonergan, can be shown to respond directly to the need discerned by Saliers.

New foundations in a new realm

The foundations of second phase theology have religious experience at their heart, but it is religious experience understood within the new realm of meaning mentioned early in this chapter – the realm of human interiority. This realm is entered by discovering in oneself the operations of one's intentional consciousness, by coming to know clearly how one's heart and mind work.⁵⁶ The conflict between the symbolic theological method of the monastics and the theoretical method of the scholastics is only resolved through the emergence of this further realm of meaning.⁵⁷ Within the realm of interiority, where our own conscious and intentional operations are recognised and understood, the realms of transcendence, commonsense and theory (with their different kinds of meaning) can coexist. Religious experience can thus be re-admitted to theology and play a complementary role alongside theoretical analysis, and non-discursive modes of religious expression may find a place alongside discursive language. The realm of interiority is the new realm of theology, and within this realm theology's method and the tools appropriate to its tasks can become clearer.

It follows that religious expression will move through the stages of meaning and speak in its different realms. When the realms of common sense, of theory, or interiority, and of transcendence are distinguished and related, one easily understands the diversity of religious utterance. For its source and core is in the experience of the mystery of love and awe, and that pertains to the realm of transcendence. Its foundations, its basic terms and relationships, its methods are derived from the realms of interiority. Its technical unfolding is in the realm of theory. Its preaching and teaching are in the realms of common sense.⁵⁸

It is significant that at the same time as religious experience was finding a way back into theology, so too was scripture. The biblical theology movement of the twentieth century brought with it the new awareness of history, and of the empirical nature of culture, allowing scripture to be understood as an expression of the foundational religious experience of early Christians, and the horizon within which early doctrines emerged.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 114-15. And *ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁹ John R. Donahue, "Biblical Theology," in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. Richard P. McBrien (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 175.

The relatively recent emergence of the interior realm not only allows theology to be understood in a new framework, but also perhaps explains why music has until recently remained such a mystery.⁶⁰ Without access to the interior realm of meaning, only commonsense or theoretical meanings are admitted. The commonsense approach wants to make music, not try to understand it, and the theoretical analysis of music yields nothing but mathematics!⁶¹ Once we enter upon the interior realm, the essential role of symbolic and artistic forms in expressing human experience can be recognised, and a more meaningful understanding of music results.⁶² Within the realm of interiority, both music and theology have their new foundations, and music can make its contribution to theology. We turn then to the question of the meaning of music, and specifically, the meaning of song. By ‘language’, Saliers clearly intends something like ‘expression of meaning’. He is precisely interested in non-discursive musical expressions, but there is some work to do yet in understanding music within the interior realm, and establishing the kind of meaning it carries.

⁶⁰ See Appendix 1 ‘‘Word’ and music in Christianity: the subjugation of non-discursive meaning’, for a discussion of the history of ambivalence towards music in the Christian church.

⁶¹ The influence of the Pythagorean understanding of music was dominant right up until the time of the scientific revolution. Music was studied as part of mathematics, and included in the scientific programme of higher education, the *quadrivium* of related studies: astronomy, geometry, arithmetic and music. See Diana Deutsch and et al, "Psychology of Music," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford Music Online. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/42574> (accessed May 25, 2012)).

⁶² Susanne Langer breaks new ground in her analysis of music in Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (New York: Mentor Books / Harvard University Press, 1951, 1942).

CHAPTER 3

The meaning of a song

*There is no truer truth obtainable
By Man than comes of music.
(Robert Browning)¹*

*Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.
(Victor Hugo)²*

*Music is the universal language of mankind.
(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)³*

*Music is the shorthand of emotion.
(Leo Tolstoy)⁴*

*Without music life would be a mistake.
(Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche)⁵*

*Music is the wine which inspires one to new generative processes, and I am Bacchus who presses out
this glorious wine for mankind and makes them spiritually drunken.
(Ludwig van Beethoven)⁶*

Very early in our explorations of the possible theological function of Christian song, we noted that theology, understood as ‘discursive language about God’⁷, has no place for music. Music, song included, is not discursive language. To put this another way, music does not carry meaning in the way language does. Language represents our most fully articulated and determinate expression of meaning; music is, well, music! But this simply raises the question: “If music doesn’t function as language, how does it function?” What are the poets and philosophers talking about when they so full-heartedly praise music as the carrier of the ‘truest truth’ (Browning), or the expression of ‘that which cannot be said’ (Hugo), or ‘the shorthand of emotion’ (Tolstoy), or indeed, that without which ‘life would be a mistake’ (Nietzsche)? Does music carry and communicate meaning, and if so, what kind of meaning is it?

¹ Cited in Herb Galewitz, ed. *Music: A Book of Quotations* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Thrift, 2001), 7.

² Cited in Christine Jax, *The Seven Stages of an Enlightened Teacher*, 2nd ed. (Plymouth, U.K.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 4.

³ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea*, 1835

⁴ Cited in Philip Ball, *The Music Instinct: How Music Works and Why We Can't Do without It* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 255.

⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Anthony Mario Ludovici, Wordsworth Classics (London: Wordsworth, 1889, 2007), 9.

⁶ Cited in Joscelyn Godwin, *Music, Mysticism and Magic: A Source Book* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1986), 199.

⁷ ... and its concomitant, discursive reasoning about God.

Does music have meaning?

As indicated by the selection of quotations above, music is almost universally regarded as ‘meaningful’. However this is more a conviction of the heart, than a claim of logic. In her classic study *Philosophy in a new key*, published in 1942, Susanne Langer comments:

In short, we are dealing with a *philosophical* problem, requiring logical study, and involving music: for to be able to define “musical meaning” adequately, precisely, but *for an artistic, not a positivistic context and purpose*, is the touchstone of a really powerful philosophy of symbolism.⁸

Langer makes a significant contribution to such a philosophy in the study cited, but in her later publication *Feeling and form*, she writes:

Just as music is only loosely and inexactly called a language, so its symbolic function is only loosely called meaning, because the factor of conventional reference is missing from it. ... Meaning, in the usual sense recognized by semantics, includes the condition of conventional reference ...⁹

Langer ultimately concludes that music, and other modes of art, such as poetry, have ‘significant form’ and even ‘implicit meaning’, but accepts the objections of the logicians and positivistic philosophers, and holds back from allowing them ‘meaning’.¹⁰ Bernard Lonergan builds on Langer’s work, but his original and powerful analysis of meaning breaks through the impasse of ‘conventional reference’ by concluding that ‘all conscious acts and all intended contents, whether in the dream state or on any of the four levels of waking consciousness’ are sources of meaning.¹¹ Lonergan comes, in his own words, to a judgment about meaning,¹² and in this judgment, music, as a creation of human consciousness, can properly be said to have meaning. On the basis of his analysis of intentional consciousness, he is able to distinguish sources, acts and terms of meaning, and link the different acts of meaning to the different levels of intentional consciousness.¹³ In short, the acts of meaning and their corresponding levels of consciousness are: elemental meaning (experience), formal meaning (understanding), full meaning (judging), and active meaning (deciding). Further,

⁸ Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 186.

⁹ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from 'Philosophy in a New Key'* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 31.

¹⁰ Ibid., 24ff. Charles Hefling points to a bewildering range of equivalent words for ‘meaning’, demonstrating that there are many meanings of ‘meaning’. Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 35. Lonergan’s existential and functional approach to meaning allows these differences to be accounted for.

¹¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 73.

¹² Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “Dimensions of Meaning,” in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Volume 4. Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1993), 244.

¹³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 73-76.

there are instrumental acts of meaning, which are expressions objectifying any of these acts of meaning for interpretation by others.¹⁴

Lonerger analyses and defines meaning functionally, and each of the above kinds of meaning can be shown to fulfil the four functions of meaning which he identifies: cognitive, effective, constitutive and communicative.¹⁵ The conviction of the heart about the meaningfulness of music is vindicated within the framework of Lonergan's analysis. In the light of his analysis, we can properly speak of non-discursive (non-linguistic) communications of meaning such as Saliers' 'lyrical theology' involves. We can go even further and realise that the 'Word' of Christian religion must encompass 'any expression of religious meaning or religious value',¹⁶ whether linguistic, musical, artistic, symbolic or incarnate.¹⁷

The carriers of meaning

In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan begins his discussion of meaning by identifying five distinct carriers of meaning: human intersubjectivity, art, symbol, language and incarnate meaning (the lives and deeds of individuals, groups and movements. e.g. religious traditions).¹⁸ We have just alluded to some of these above. Though the carriers of meaning are distinct, two or more are often operating simultaneously in a given expression of meaning. Incarnate meaning, for example, combines all, or most, of the other carriers. A conversation with a friend will involve intersubjective, linguistic and incarnate meaning. Artistic meaning makes use of symbolic meaning; an artist uses symbols to construct artistic elements, which in turn are used to construct the form of the artwork. The meaning of literary language, including poetry, is artistic, symbolic, and linguistic. When art is performed, intersubjective meaning will be functioning too.

¹⁴ Ibid., 74-75.

¹⁵ Ibid., 76-79.

¹⁶ Ibid., 112.

¹⁷ I have formed the judgement that the function of song in human culture is best understood using the category of meaning. However, to justify this, I can only refer to Lonergan's extensive reflection on the fact that most of what we refer to as the real world is mediated to us by meaning. See for example, Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning." A song **is** and **does** what it means. Song is a product of human creativity, a delightful part of the world mediated to us by meaning. It does what meaningful things do, functioning in four ways: it serves (for good or ill) a cognitive, effective, constitutive and communicative function in human life. Christian song serves these functions within the community of the Church, and sometimes in wider society. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 356ff.

¹⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 57-73.

A song is a combination of poetry (literary language) and music. The main carriers of meaning therefore are symbol and art, though also included are linguistic meaning, in the song lyrics, and intersubjective meaning, especially when the song is performed live. To explore the meaning of a song, we will examine the two main carriers of meaning which combine in various ways to make the words and music of a song: symbol and art.¹⁹ To consider the function of a Christian song, we will then consider the effect of placing statements of Christian belief within the symbolic and artistic framework of a song.

Symbolic meaning

‘It is through symbols that mind and body, mind and heart, heart and body communicate.’²⁰

‘... far more than language, music taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward, and emotion.’²¹

Susanne Langer identifies symbolization (symbol making and symbol use) as one of the primary activities of human beings, and describes the human mind as constantly processing our experiences through ‘symbolic transformation’.²² This symbol making is not merely representative, but creative. It is integral to our feeling and thinking, and enables intentional consciousness to function effectively:

Symbolization is the essential act of mind; and mind takes in more than what is commonly called thought. Only certain products of the symbol making brain can be used according to the canons of discursive reasoning. In every mind *there is an enormous store of other symbolic material* ...²³

Not all aspects of human experience can be expressed in words. Language (discursive symbol) is the outcome of only one kind of symbolic process. Other symbolic transformations are needed to express a fuller range of human experience. The result is *non-discursive* symbols, of which music is one kind. Such are the symbols which function, for example, in human ritual. Langer judges that music is pre-eminent amongst these non-

¹⁹ Up to this point, we have been using the term ‘music’ as a general category, within which song was included. It will be helpful in this chapter to sometimes treat the strictly linguistic and musical elements of song separately. For an excellent overview of the history of song in the West, see John Milsom, Leslie Orrey, and John Warrack, “Song,” in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham (Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e6322> (accessed November 20, 2011)).

²⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 67.

²¹ Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession*. (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), 191.

²² Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 47.

²³ *Ibid.*, 45. My emphasis.

discursive human symbols.²⁴ Edward Foley, in his investigation of music's role within ritual, also comes to the conclusion that the category of symbol is 'the most appropriate designation for defining and understanding music's powerful capacity for mediating any message.'²⁵ In Bernard Lonergan's analysis of meaning, the term 'symbol' is used to refer exclusively to these non-discursive symbols. We will follow this designation here.

Feelings

Symbolic meaning is 'felt' meaning. To again risk confusing our terms, symbol is the 'language of the heart'. A symbol gives expression to something not by description but by *image*, and by the strange mixture of feelings, thoughts and sensations that it evokes. It is only by means of symbols that we can express those things which matter most to us, usually the most 'personal' things. e.g. expressing a life commitment through the exchange of wedding rings. Even in language, we often name or express the most important or personal things in symbolic terms; a phrase such as 'with all my heart' is not referring to a bodily organ. The use of symbols can be highly effective in enabling the exploration of deep inner experiences. Symbols especially express our feelings, and in fact facilitate their internal communication. Lonergan combines the discoveries of psychoanalysis with the insights of semantics to fashion his definition of symbol: 'A symbol is an image of a real or imaginary object that evokes a feeling or is evoked by a feeling.'²⁶ We note here that an 'image' can be an aural image, such as a melody.

Songs are powerful, and this power is most directly manifested in their effect on our feelings. A song can soothe us when we are anxious, or excite us when we are tired, or evoke sadness, desire, anticipation, or any of a whole range of other feelings. Alan P. Merriam's classic 1964 study lists 'emotional expression' as the first of ten functions of music.²⁷ In his study, Foley reflects on the emotional impact of music under his first heading, 'music as powerful'.²⁸ In neuroscientific research, strong links are emerging between music, emotion and movement. There is evidence, for example, that babies learn to feel emotions by means of sound and

²⁴ Ibid., 49, 93.

²⁵ Edward Foley, *Music in Ritual: A Pre-Theological Investigation*, American Essays in Liturgy (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1984), 23.

²⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 64. Psychoanalysis reveals that our emotional development can be mapped in terms of changes in the symbols that are operative in our psyche, and changes in our responses to such symbols.

²⁷ Alan P. Merriam, *Anthropology of Music* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 219-27.

²⁸ Foley, *Music in Ritual*, 2-6.

rhythm.²⁹ Daniel Levitin, researcher in music and neuroscience, concludes that music is 'primarily an emotional medium'.³⁰ To explore this further, we need to make another connection; between feelings and values, and between both of these and personal experience.

Values – the heart's reasons

We have different kinds of feelings, and music as symbol can affect them all. But of particular relevance to personal meaning are the feelings which are intentional responses to that which we value, desire, and recognise as worthwhile.³¹ Perhaps the feelings evoked by a love song are the simplest example here. The poetic phrases and the music can trigger a stirring in one's heart which apprehends, all over again (or perhaps for the first time), the value of a beloved, of love itself, or of a particular experience of love held in a memory that is triggered by the song. Songs, like all symbolic communication, collect to themselves many associations and resonances over time. The values to which feelings respond, can be vital values such as food, shelter or sexual satisfaction, or the highest of personal or religious values. It is on the fourth level of our intentional consciousness that values come into focus (apprehensions of value and judgments of value) and the person emerges; we make ourselves who we are by the values we choose to enact.³² This casts light on the ancient conviction, expressed by Plato, that music influences the formation of moral character.³³

Personal meaning and value

Our feelings then are responses to our values, and our values lived, constitute us as persons. Feelings therefore powerfully express personal meaning.³⁴ Consider the example of spoken language. Much of the meaning of ordinary spoken language is musico-symbolic. Every spoken language has its own 'music'. Historically and developmentally, language is firstly an aural event, and before language comes the non-discursive symbol of sound.³⁵ Acclaimed

²⁹ Christina Pochmursky, "The Musical Brain " (Canada: National Geographic Channel (2009) (worldwide) (all media), 2009).

³⁰ Levitin makes this statement in Elena Mannes, "The Music Instinct: Science and Song " (USA: Mannes Productions, Inc., and WNET.org, 2009).

³¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31. And Tom Ryan, "In God's Image: Towards a Theology of Our Emotions," *Compass: a review of topical theology* 37, no. 4 (2003): 1.

³² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31, 66-67. And Ryan, "In God's Image: Towards a Theology of Our Emotions," 1.

³³ 'Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws.' Plato, cited in Kavanaugh, *The Music of the Angels*.

³⁴ This kind of meaning is for some people the most significant, or even the only, kind. In popular Australian culture, 'meaning' often signifies 'personal meaning', which is strongly associated with the engagement of the emotions

³⁵ Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 49.

Irish singer and writer Nóirín Ní Riain recalls being ‘captivated by the mystical, magical sound of the Irish language’ during her university music studies, and hearing the musical connections.³⁶ The ‘sing-song’ tones of the Irish language, and the Irish accent, are loved the world over, but every language and every accent has its own tone, pitch, pulse, rhythm, flow, articulation. Much of the meaning of spoken language is carried in these symbolic dimensions, in ‘... the endlessly nuanced and elusive and intricate meanings of everyday speech.’³⁷ The art of storytelling highlights this well. Anyone who has tried to engage the attention of young children with storytelling finds out very quickly that one has to put music and drama into one’s voice. Telling the bald facts does not do it! The facts tell the ‘story’, but the way the words are *sounded* communicates the experience: the vocal intonation, accent, speed, volume, pitch, rhythm and rhyme, evoke the emotion of the experience (which is closely connected to the *motion* of the experience) and hence the fuller meaning of the story. The expression of feeling makes the ‘facts’ personal. It communicates to the listeners that ‘this matters to someone’, ‘this makes a difference’ to me, ‘this has value.’ It communicates personal meaning.

Communicating with and within our inner world

In contrast to the *external* communicative function of language, symbol enables *internal* communication, connecting ‘mind and body, mind and heart, heart and body.’³⁸ It is specifically through the flow of feelings that this communication occurs. Symbols express and guide our inner life, draw our attention to our inner world, and help to integrate conflicting elements of our consciousness. It is these movements of the heart which music and poetry, as forms of symbolic expression, are able to objectify. In so doing, the internal communication which the symbolization enables, works to integrate the personal experience within our whole consciousness. Thus a Christian song can help facilitate the integration of faith (the apprehension of transcendent value) with the rest of our intentional and conscious living.

The objectification of personal experience that symbol achieves is not like that of language. The meaning of a symbol is elemental – immediate, organic, and vital. There is not yet any distinction between ‘meaning’ and ‘meant’. The meaning occurs **within** the subject. The song

³⁶ Riain, *Listen with the Ear of the Heart: An Autobiography*, 78.

³⁷ Bernard Lonergan, "The Absence of God in Modern Culture," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William Ryan and Bernard Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968, 1974), 102.

³⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 67.

must be heard and sung, not explained, if the meaning is to be experienced. To explain or interpret it is to go beyond the symbol. Music almost certainly predates language. It is possible that modern music and modern language evolved from a common ancestor, a kind of *protomusic*.³⁹ Perhaps the pre-linguistic origins of music explain why it is ‘peculiarly adapted to the explication of ‘unspeakable’ things ...’.⁴⁰ It is music, acting as symbol, which re-connects us to the pre-verbal, primeval state of being which David Hay writes about,⁴¹ or the world of immediate experience which Lonergan describes.⁴² Here, music as symbol mediates a ‘return to immediacy’ in a way similar to psychotherapy, sexual encounter, or meditation.⁴³

Symbol is vital and central to the expression of elemental personal experience, and the expression of the values and associated feelings that make us the persons we are and are becoming. Only through symbol can heart speak to heart. It is no accident that most religious expression, including language, is symbolic and metaphorical.⁴⁴ One of the main concerns of the hymn writers Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley was to express and engender ‘religious feeling’ through their hymns.⁴⁵ At its most authentic, such feeling is an objectification of religious conversion, a symbolic communication of the personal transformation brought about by the love of God poured into our hearts. (Rom 5:5)

Artistic meaning

‘... it’s the rush we do it for, the moment of transcendence where nothing else matters.
Or, more accurately, where everything matters.’
(Paul Kelly, *on performing music live*)⁴⁶

Some people will say that art is an illusion, others that art reveals a fuller, profounder reality.
... What we can say is that it is opening a new horizon, it is presenting something that is other,

³⁹ Music predates language – see Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music*, 256. And Daniel J. Levitin, *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature* (London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2008), 259. Feeling is older than thought since our *limbic* system in the brain, the centre of our emotional processes, is older than the *neocortex*, which controls our higher cognitive functions like language. Developmentally too, feeling is prior to reasoning and language.

⁴⁰ Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 93.

⁴¹ David Hay, "Music as Revelation," *RE Today* 25, no. 1 (2007).

⁴² Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning," 232-33.

⁴³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 76-77.

⁴⁴ Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 63.

⁴⁵ On Watts, see Dowley, ed. *Christian Music*, 115-17. On Charles Wesley, see Nicholas Temperley, "Methodist Church Music," (Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Web. 26 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/47533>>.).

⁴⁶ Paul Kelly, *How to Make Gravy* (Camberwell, Victoria: Hamish Hamilton, 2010), 515.

different, novel, strange, new, remote, intimate ... It is a withdrawal from practical living to explore possibilities of fuller living in a richer world.⁴⁷

In a short article entitled 'Music as revelation', David Hay echoes this understanding of art in his reflections on a religious experience which unfolded for him through listening to Sibelius' Violin Concerto:

One hot afternoon – I suppose I would have been fourteen or fifteen – I was lying sprawled face down on my bed with the radio on. It happened to be tuned to a performance of Sibelius' Violin Concerto. At first hardly bothering to attend because I had teenage miseries on my mind, gradually I was drawn by the music into a dimension of experience of which I had previously not been aware. Eventually Sibelius swept me clean away into the world of his musical imagination, filled with the passionate intensity of his love for the vast forests and tundra of Finland. When the concerto came to an end I opened my eyes to a world astonishingly transformed. Every dimension of my awareness was alert. Colour, sound, the three-dimensionality of the furniture in the room, the perfumed air, and through the window the sky above the distant greenery, overwhelmed my senses. I felt I was being blessed.⁴⁸

Art draws us into an experience beyond our everyday experience, beyond ourselves, so that we might come back to our everyday life and to ourselves, to live more fully, more richly.

David Hay goes on to describe his experience of Sibelius' violin concerto, as one of becoming 'in tune', of being drawn into a transcendent 'flow'. He reflects that music's remarkable power to mediate such an experience 'is surely connected with its preverbal, primeval ability to *be* the more that is beyond words.'⁴⁹ Here, Hay is touching on both symbolic and artistic meaning: meaning connected to *being*, and prior to *knowledge*. Another writer reflects similarly on the effect of music: '[We] feel our very existence expand and realise that we can be more than we normally are, and the world is more than it seems. That is cause enough for ecstasy.'⁵⁰ Art enables us, for a short period of time, to transcend the limitations of routine experience, and experience life and the world as it 'could' be.⁵¹ 'We are transported from the space in which we move to the space within the picture, from the time of sleeping and waking, working and resting, to the time of the music ...'⁵²

⁴⁷ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Art," in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Topics in Education*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1993), 216-17.

⁴⁸ Hay, "Music as Revelation," 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ Robert Jordain, cited in Ruffing, "Music as an Opening to Religious Experience," 82.

⁵¹ There are some similarities between the experience of art and the altered consciousness induced by certain drugs.

⁵² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 63.

Bernard Lonergan again builds on the work of Susanne Langer in developing his definition of art: '[Art] is the objectification of a purely experiential pattern.'⁵³ It is a short definition, but it captures what many would consider to be the essence of art: that it is not the instrument of any ideology, not even a Christian one. The 'purely experiential' pattern is one which excludes the interference of such ideology.⁵⁴ Art is a free and spontaneous exploration and expression of **experience**, involving insight into the experience, perceiving a pattern in the experience, a 'form', which then guides the creation of the artwork.⁵⁵ The artist makes a 'virtual' experience in which the observer or listener can participate. The pattern (the form within of the artwork) is the pattern of the experiencing inherent in the perceiving of the data (we perceive in a patterned manner).⁵⁶ Again, to quote Lonergan, art aims to 'let experiencing find its full complement of feeling. It lets experiencing fall into its own proper patterns and take its own line of expansion, development, organisation, fulfilment.'⁵⁷ In the creation of the painting, the sculpture, the symphony, the artist enters upon a new horizon and in the process, she or he is transformed. They become just themselves, 'emergent, ecstatic, originating freedom.'⁵⁸

The meaning of an artwork, like the personal 'felt' meaning of a symbol, is elemental. It cannot be *explained* but must be *experienced* through the artwork itself. The story is told of one of the great composers playing a new piano composition for some wealthy patron. The patron listened and watched attentively, and afterwards commented: "That's wonderful, but what does it mean?" The composer replied by simply sitting back down and playing the composition again!⁵⁹ The story may be apocryphal, but the point is well made. As Gustav Mahler famously wrote: 'If a composer could say what he had to say in words he would not bother trying to say it in music.'⁶⁰ Even though language embodies meaning in its most precise and determinate form, it cannot communicate what art communicates, nor what symbol communicates. When poetry is set to music, the linguistic, symbolic and artistic meaning of the text can be amplified, extended, or modified by being set in different musical

⁵³ Ibid., 61-64. See also Richard M. Liddy, "What Bernard Lonergan Learned from Susanne K. Langer," *Lonergan Workshop* 11(1995).

⁵⁴ Lonergan, "Art," 216.

⁵⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 61-64. and Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 24ff.

⁵⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 61., Lonergan, "Art," 211.

⁵⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 62.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁹ The composer in the story is variously identified as Mozart, Beethoven or Schumann!

⁶⁰ 'Ich weiß für mich, daß ich, so lang ich mein Erlebnis in Worten zusammenfassen kann, gewiß keine Musik hierüber machen würde'. Letter to Max Marschall (1896-03-26). Original German text cited from Herta and Paul Amirson Collection, ed. *Gustav Mahler. Briefe*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Zsolnay, 1996), 171.

contexts. If the setting is poorly done, it can obfuscate the poetic meaning. If it is well done, it can enhance it wonderfully, and even realise meanings that the text can only point towards. Leonard Bernstein comments on Beethoven's setting of Friedrich Schiller's poem 'Ode to Joy', in the finale of his Ninth Symphony: 'The music goes far beyond the poem. It gives a far greater dimension and vital energy and artistic spark to the quaint old lines of Schiller.'⁶¹

Literary language: symbol and art

The artist deals in what cannot be said in words.
The artist whose medium is [a literary one] does this in words.⁶²

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!

Literary language functions both as symbol and art, and always partly as discursive language. In her chapter on poetry in *Feeling and Form*, Susanne Langer proposes that 'all forms of literary art, including so-called "non-fiction" that has artistic value, may be understood by the specialization and extension of poetic devices.'⁶³ This includes narrative, which is the basic form of scripture and the basis of many contemporary song lyrics. A poet uses ordinary words, but does not use them discursively. Langer describes it this way:

The poet uses discourse to create an illusion, a pure appearance, which is a non-discursive symbolic form. ... He (*sic*) has made an illusion by means of words – words having sound and sense, pronunciations and spellings, dialect forms, related words ("cognates"); words having derivations and derivatives, i.e. histories and influences; words with archaic and modern meanings, slang meanings, metaphorical meanings.⁶⁴

The meaning of a song's lyrics⁶⁵ is of course always partly linguistic. The words *mean* what they mean. Each of the words in the opening lines of 'Amazing Grace' above can be looked up in a dictionary and its meaning found. The rules of grammar, even in poetry, still tell us how these assembled words relate and refer to each other, and thus we can interpret the phrase. But in literary language, there is more, and the meaning depends on this 'more'.

⁶¹ Leonard Bernstein, "Leonard Bernstein Performs Beethoven's Ode to Joy," (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZJ1Tgf4JL8> (accessed 15th July, 2012), 1979).

⁶² Ursula K. Le-Guin, "The Left Hand of Darkness," <http://theliterarylink.com/leguinintro.html> (accessed November 06, 2012).

⁶³ Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 213. Lonergan points out that the words 'poetry' and 'fiction' have the same meaning ('to make'), one with a Greek root and the other a Latin root. See Lonergan, "Art," 229.

⁶⁴ Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 211.

⁶⁵ A lyric is 'strictly speaking, a vocal performance accompanied by the lyre, but in fact broadened in meaning to denote any kind of accompanied vocal music'. "Lyric," in *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford Music Online: Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e41118>. (accessed November 5, 2012)).

‘Sweetness’ is normally used in reference to the sense of taste, not of hearing, but in searching for a way of describing or evoking the experience of grace, the writer uses an ordinary word, in a non-ordinary way.⁶⁶ Such uses are called poetic devices, and there are many and varied such devices (e.g. simile, metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, ellipse), common even in ordinary speech. In a poetic lyric, the words and their arrangement are functioning symbolically. ‘Images’ are being presented which allow insight into what is being described and which evoke an emotional response. The ‘image’ might be an aural one, such as the alliteration of ‘sweet’ and ‘sound’. This alliteration doesn’t have a fixed meaning, but it connects the words and makes them easier to say or sing together, thus giving the impression that they do belong together, and that the grace which ‘saved a wretch like me’ is indeed a ‘sound’ to be tasted and savoured.

It is in and through language that our consciousness develops, and along the way words gather to themselves innumerable ‘resonances’, meanings and values extra to their literal meaning. These resonances may be ‘visual, vocal, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, affective or evocative of attitudes and tendencies, and evaluations.’⁶⁷ Literary language makes use of these resonances, and of the careful arrangement of words, to communicate its meaning, to create its ‘illusion’, its ‘virtual experience’.⁶⁸ It tells a ‘story’ in some form, it objectifies ‘a purely experiential pattern’ and invites the reader or hearer into the story. Consider this stanza of the beautiful poem by Judith Wright, where she reflects on the experience of ‘grace’:

Living is dailiness, a simple bread
that's worth the eating. But I have known a wine,
a drunkenness that can't be spoken or sung
without betraying it. Far past Yours or Mine,
even past Ours, it has nothing at all to say;
it slants a sudden laser through common day.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Interestingly, many of the technical musical descriptors of sound are symbolic, because the qualities of sound cannot really be described otherwise. For example, the kind of sound made by a particular instrument or voice is called the tone-colour (timbre) evoking a visual ‘image’. Particular descriptions of timbre may evoke light and colour (brightness, dullness, blueness), or the sense of touch (smoothness, roughness, sharpness). Even once described, the particular quality has to be heard and identified before one can understand the description. See Murray Campbell, “Timbre (I)” (Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/27973>> (accessed 20th March 2013)).

⁶⁷ Lonergan, “Art,” 229.

⁶⁸ Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 215.

⁶⁹ Judith Wright, ‘Grace’ in *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry*, selected by Les A. Murray (Blackburn, Victoria: Collins Dove, 1986), 283.

Wright takes us into the ordinariness of life, with word image and word rhythm, and then contrasts this with an experience which she describes by expressing its inexpressibility, by saying that nothing can be said directly about the experience. She then gives us the striking image of a 'sudden laser' cutting through the ordinariness of life. The reader is taken into the realm of the ordinary, to be told that there is nothing 'here' that can hold this experience. We are disoriented by what she writes, and thus enabled to somehow participate in the mysterious and disorienting experience of the transcendent of which she is writing.

Australian poet Les Murray says that he composes a poem in a 'kind of trance', where he experiences a profound integration of his 'daylight mind', his 'dreaming mind', and his body.⁷⁰ The poem written during this experience will 'contain the experience', and those who hear or read the poem and *tune in* to it, will resonate with the reality of the experience in the poem. Murray goes on to say:

What I create, really, is a new body made of words and the potent arrangement of words, in which my soul as it was at a particular moment will go on existing. Others attuned to the poetic or we may prefer to call it the artistic experience will resonate with its reality in my poem, and if I've written particularly well, they and others after them may do the same for as long as my language survives or can be translated.⁷¹

The 'new body made of words and the potent arrangement of words' communicates not just the altered state of consciousness (the experience of integration), but insight into this experience too, expressed in the purified form of the poem.

The creation of a song: combining words and music

A song is a combination of poetry and music. Its meaning arises from the interplay between the linguistic, symbolic and artistic meanings in the words and their musical setting.

Something new is created in the composition of a song. Not all poetry is enhanced by being set to music, and not all music is enhanced by having lyrics written for it. Often, pure word or pure melody achieves something on its own which is best not tampered with. However, when words and music are wedded together happily, the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts. As Jean Calvin found, after initially resisting singing the psalms, worded religious

⁷⁰ Levels of consciousness perhaps akin to mind, spirit and body.

⁷¹ Les Murray, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Poetry International Festival* (Rotterdam: <http://www.lesmurray.org/defence.htm> (accessed September 03, 2011), 1998), 3.

meaning can be more fully and movingly expressed when the words are set to music and sung.⁷²

Christian beliefs set in an experiential context

The elements of a song are potent indeed. Poetic lyrics will function symbolically, often powerfully objectifying personal experience through engaging feelings and values. To the extent that the lyrics of a song have the 'significant form' of an artwork,⁷³ even more is possible in terms of communicating an experience, such as religious experience, which is beyond ordinary words, something 'other, different, novel, strange, new, remote, intimate.'⁷⁴ Within the context of the possible symbolic and artistic meanings described above, the linguistic meaning of the song lyrics is embedded. If it is a Christian song, the lyrics will include ascriptions and affirmations which are statements of belief, or doctrines.⁷⁵ The overall effect is to situate Christian beliefs within a symbolic horizon, one of heart-felt personal meaning, and possibly an artistic horizon of transcendence: 'fuller living in a richer world.'⁷⁶

If we add to this the second element of a song, music, then a whole new level of symbolic and perhaps artistic meaning will come into play. If the creation of a song begins with the lyrics, the musical setting will be most effective when it supports, or complements, or augments the meaning of the lyrics; through melody, harmony, rhythm, tone, form, tempo or dynamics. Crucially, the musical setting will bring its own meaning, and it will communicate further experiential or interpretative contexts for any statements of Christian belief.⁷⁷ The example of plainchant is interesting here. The single melody line, unaccompanied and with no imposed rhythm, is intended to merely frame or elevate the lyrics (the 'Word') and to add an absolute minimum of extra meaning.⁷⁸ In contrast, if the musical setting of a lyric has the

⁷² Jeremy Begbie, in Kohn, "Instrumental Music Communicating Beliefs", Kavanaugh, *The Music of the Angels*, 131., Dowley, ed. *Christian Music*, 112-14.

⁷³ Not all poetry and not all music would be considered art. Langer argues that it needs to have what she terms 'significant form' to qualify as art. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 32, 40.

⁷⁴ Lonergan, "Art," 216-17.

⁷⁵ See Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 26.

⁷⁶ Lonergan, "Art," 216-17.

⁷⁷ See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the relationship between the 'Word' and music in Christian history.

⁷⁸ Early Jewish synagogue chant was really just elevated speech, often on a single pitch with a simple cadence at the end of a phrase, or verse. Hanoah Avenary and Jeffery Dean, "Jewish Music," (The Oxford Companion to Music. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e3564> (accessed March 20, 2013)). Despite the intention that chant would add a minimal extra meaning, over centuries, the *sound* of chant gathered resonances and associations to itself, hence developing a very distinct and strong symbolic meaning of its own.

‘significant form’ to qualify it as art, then it may well transcend the meaning of the lyric, as Bernstein remarked of ‘Ode to Joy’.⁷⁹

Some comments regarding Christian hymn composition are in order here. Traditionally, most Christian hymn writers composed only the words, and either matched them to existing melodies in the public repertoire, or had them set to music by someone else. For example, ‘Amazing Grace’ was sung to a number of different tunes in the decades following its composition, as were most hymns of this period (early nineteenth century).⁸⁰ One only needed to match the meter of the poetic text with a known tune of the same meter. There were very practical reasons for this system of hymn composition and hymn singing, and occasionally a chance combination of words and melody complemented one another synergistically. In general, however, the results were mixed, and the meaning of the lyrics lived in some tension with the meaning of the musical setting. The most powerful and enduring hymns have been those where the composition process allowed for dialogue between the words and the music, as eventually happened for ‘Amazing Grace’, so as to ensure that the lyrical meanings and the musical meanings functioned in a complementary way.⁸¹

Meaning embodied

Someone commented to me recently: ‘I don’t listen to a song’s lyrics much. I hear the melody, and if it appeals to me, it sticks in my mind, and then I associate it with my own feelings or experiences. I think that I often don’t get the meaning that the songwriter intended!’ My immediate response was to assure them that the meaning of song is not an ‘intended’ meaning in the same way that a public announcement has an intended meaning. A song is not like a parcel packaged up by the songwriter and sent out to the listeners, which merely needs to be ‘unpacked’ in the correct way and the meaning will appear. Its fundamental meaning is in the experience it evokes, through its embodiment of symbolic, artistic and perhaps intersubjective meaning. Such meaning is **elemental**, and is experienced in the response that occurs in the listening, singing, playing and dancing subject. Songs also

⁷⁹ Bernstein, "Leonard Bernstein Performs Beethoven's Ode to Joy."

⁸⁰ The melody most commonly used today for ‘Amazing Grace’ is called ‘New Britain’, and this tune passed through several composers’ hands during the 19th century before settling into the melodic shape we know today. Certainly, the tune ‘New Britain’ was unknown to John Newton. Dowley, ed. *Christian Music*, 124.

⁸¹ Sometimes writers compose the words first (or use existing texts), and then the music. At other times, the music (or part of it at least) will come first, and the words later. A third way is what one might call an ongoing dialogue between words and music. A few lines of text might suggest a melody. The melody is then developed, and it in turn suggests other text. Or, a rhythm pattern is established, which suggests melodic ideas, or lyrics.

carry some level of discursive meaning, some kind of logical ‘message’. Christian songs clearly express Christian beliefs (doctrines). But critically, a song sets these beliefs in an experiential context, and herein lies the power and the theological function of Christian song. A song’s meaning is ‘felt before it is figured out.’⁸² As symbolic communication, it expresses and engages the heart, and thus is powerfully adapted to evoke personal experience, such as religious conversion. It comes from the heart, and it sings to the heart.

To the extent that a song succeeds as an artwork, it gives expression to experience in a purified and intensified form, ‘truer ... leaner, more effective.’⁸³ It offers the singer, player or listener a ‘virtual’ experience of another dimension of reality, another horizon. If the ‘experiential pattern’ being objectified is Christian conversion, then this horizon is the transformed reality of the songwriter, and such a song is a work of theology within the functional specialty foundations. Art is the expression of experience, not ideas, so a Christian song, as theological art, is pre-doctrinal. Yet it can powerfully communicate experiential contexts pregnant with truth and values of the highest calibre. Leonard Bernstein remarks that Beethoven manages to communicate transcendent values and a sense of the Divine in an utterly non-doctrinaire way, thus succeeding in touching those for whom organised religion fails.⁸⁴ A song can allow the listener, singer, or player to experience briefly the transformed world of the transformed songwriter, who ‘has become just [themselves]: emergent, ecstatic, originating freedom’.⁸⁵ This may trigger, in those who experience the song in this way, a desire to share the same blessing.

⁸² Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 59.

⁸³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 64.

⁸⁴ Bernstein, "Leonard Bernstein Performs Beethoven's Ode to Joy."

⁸⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 63.

CHAPTER 4

Foundations: giving voice to the converted heart and mind

‘... music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. ...’
(T.S. Eliot)¹

The functional specialty *foundations* gives priority and full attention to the human experience of God, to the wonders God is doing and has done in the lives of God’s people. The theological task in foundations is to objectify conversion: to tell the story of conversion in its concrete, personal, communal and historical manifestations. Foundations is so named both because it is concerned with conversion as the foundations of authentic human living, and because it establishes the foundations for the second phase of theology. The task of the theologian in foundations is simple, yet enormously challenging. It is essentially the task of self-appropriation, of heightening one’s consciousness of one’s own conversion – religious, moral and intellectual. The objectification of conversion has to begin at home. In foundations, theology becomes personal. Conversion brings about in us a ‘new creation’, and in terms of the enterprise of theology, this new creation must be expressed and described because it constitutes the only horizon within which religious belief can be apprehended and affirmed, and thus theology proceed.

Preliminary remarks on theological categories

... the functional specialty, foundations, will be largely concerned with the origins, the genesis, the present state, the possible developments and adaptation of the categories in which Christians understand themselves, communicate with one another, and preach the gospel to all nations.²

In foundations, conversion is to be objectified through the development of theological categories. Such categories have been developed by Lonergan in his objectification of intellectual conversion in transcendental method.³ Karl Rahner has objectified Christian religious conversion in his work *Foundations of Christian Faith*,⁴ developing categories from

¹ T. S. Eliot, ‘The Dry Salvages’, from *Four Quartets*. Accessed online <http://allspirit.co.uk/salvages.html> 27th Nov, 2012

² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 293.

³ Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*.

⁴ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978, 1997).

the transcendental philosophy of Kant.⁵ Rosemary Haughton develops contemporary categories to express religious conversion, such as *the breakdown of formation through conflict and its resolution, self-discovery, the release of power, creating community*.⁶ The categories are developed by the theologian 'effecting self-appropriation', and the validity of the categories will depend upon the authenticity of her/his religious, moral and intellectual conversion.

The derivation of categories is a matter of the human and the Christian subject [the theologian] effecting self-appropriation and employing this heightened consciousness both as a basis for methodological control in doing theology and, as well, as an *a priori* whence [she/he] can understand other [people], their social relations, their history, their religion, their rituals, their destiny.⁷

Lonergan identifies five sources for the special theological categories directly pertaining to religious conversion, which are directly relevant to the work of a Christian songwriter. The sources identified make it clear that a contemporary theology must attend to people's religious experience, and must engage with the actual data of our life in the world, and the church's part in this. The first source he lists is religious experience, one's own and that of others. Secondly, we can look to the history of the witness of the community of the faithful, and the 'fruits' of the church through history; 'they'll know we are Christians by our love'. Third on the list are the traditional sources of theology; the revelation, contained within the Christian tradition, of the Trinitarian God and the destiny of humankind.⁸ Fourthly, Lonergan refers us to the reality and the root of divisions, oppositions, violence and hatred in the world, and fifthly, he entreats us to examine the reality of progress, decline and redemption within the church for new categories of Christian self-understanding.⁹

Elemental 'suggestion' of categories

In their fullest development, categories will be systematic, discursive expressions. Clearly a Christian songwriter working in the symbolic and artistic modes of poetry and music cannot attempt anything so systematic. A song, as an action of theology, has to be mainly content to bear witness to religious experience in its immediate, elemental meaning. However, a

⁵ Neil Ormerod, *Introducing Contemporary Theologies: The What and Who of Theology Today*, Enlarged and revised ed. (Alexandria, NSW: E.J.Dwyer, 1997), 103-13.

⁶ Rosemary Haughton, *The Transformation of Man: A Study of Conversion and Community* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate, 1967, 1980), 15ff, 41ff, 85ff, 116ff, 53ff. See also Kathleen M. Williams, "Objectified Conversion as Foundational in Theology: A Conversation between Rosemary Haughton and Bernard Lonergan, S.J.," *Lonergan Workshop* 23(2009, 2012).

⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 292.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 290-91.

theologian-songwriter will still draw upon the sources Lonergan identifies, and will imply or suggest categories. The 1970s' American Christian songwriter Keith Green famously objectified his conversion in the song 'Your love broke through':

Like waking up from the longest dream, how real it seemed,
Until your love broke through.
I've been lost in a fantasy, that blinded me,
Until your love broke through.¹⁰

The musical setting of Green's lyrics draws on the style of the 1970s popular love anthems, conveying the passion and total self-outpouring triggered by the in-breaking of Divine love. Green, and many evangelical Christian songwriters like him, began to evoke the category of relational intimacy to objectify conversion in the style of their songs. In this context, the personal transformation of conversion 'made sense', as did the need to respond and cooperate consciously in this 'new life of grace'.

In a song composed as an expression of authentic conversion, a poetic lyric, a melodic shape, a particular rhythm pattern may evoke new categories, though it must be left to other theologians to develop these categories systematically. Christian song, and other art forms, can thus serve as a theological resource for other theologians working in foundations. It is often the artists who have the self-appropriation and creativity to discover new ways of self-understanding.

Objectifying conversion in Christian song

Conversion is threefold, and the value of a theologian's work in foundations is dependent upon all three conversions, which together form the foundations of human authenticity. However, when all three are present within one consciousness, intellectual and moral conversion are sublated, and thus brought to a fuller realisation, within religious conversion. Thus, the objectification of religious conversion by such a theologian will *implicitly* include the other two. Christian song is powerfully adapted to expressing the mysterious experience of religious conversion: symbolically, communicating the personal context in its vital immediacy, and artistically, offering a 'virtual' experience to the listener or singer of the transformed world of a transformed songwriter.

¹⁰ Keith Green, 'Your love broke through', *The ministry years: 1977-1979*, Double CD collection, Brentwood, TN: Sparrow Records, 1999. See **APPENDIX 2 for AUDIO CD (track 1) and song text.**

Noticing conversion – the need for a song

By conversion is understood a transformation of the subject and his (*sic*) world. Normally it is a prolonged process though its explicit acknowledgment may be concentrated in a few momentous judgments or decisions. Still it is not just a development or even a series of developments. Rather it is a resultant change of course and direction. It is as if one's eyes were opened and one's former world faded and fell away. There emerges something new that fructifies in inter-locking, cumulative sequences of developments on all levels and in all departments of human living.¹¹

Conversion is a radical change, not simply a process of inevitable development. It is as if we are 'born again'. If conversion is lived out, its effects are profound and ongoing on every level of human consciousness. It constitutes what we might call today a 'paradigm shift'. To emphasise this, the stories of conversion in Christian art and literature are often dramatic.¹² Strangely however, we often don't advert to the change as it is happening. It is often a subtle and slow transformation, a quiet turning of a corner, a 'strange warming of the heart',¹³ which attracts little immediate notice, but which is recognised only in retrospect. As Lonergan says, it is not a matter of looking for something 'with a label on it', but rather noticing what has been happening to us and how we have changed and developed.¹⁴ Because conversion happens within our ordinary day-to-day experiences, it is easily overlooked; the forest is obscured by the trees. To heighten our consciousness of the power working within us, and to advert to its long term effects,¹⁵ we normally need external help: we need a spiritual director, a preacher, a teacher, a retreat, a symbolic ritual, a song. Earth is indeed crammed with heaven,¹⁶ but usually some form of objectification is necessary to aid us in bringing to consciousness our own conversion, to identify it that we might more fully **realise** it. A Christian songwriter gives expression to her or his transforming experience of God, that others might (as T.S. Eliot observes) hear the music deeply, and recognise themselves in it.

a) Writing from my own experience

Successful songwriters of any kind easily identify with the observation that the more personal you make a song, the more universal its appeal and the more powerful its effect. In a sense, a songwriter is always narrating the inner movements of their own life journey. The Australian

¹¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 130.

¹² St Paul's dramatic conversion is something of an archetype for conversion stories (Acts 9: 1-19; 22: 3-21; 26: 4-23).

¹³ Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 11ff.

¹⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 289-90.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: J. Miller, 1864).

poet Les Murray once said that we are all given a ‘life-poem’, and that his writing is an ever new expression of the one life-poem that is his.¹⁷ Contemporary Christian songwriter Bebo Norman comments similarly: ‘I don’t know how to write songs unless I’m writing them out of my own personal experience.’¹⁸ A Christian songwriter who would write theologically *must* write from their own religious experience. It is the eternally *here and now* action of God, loving us and transforming our lives, that provides the data upon which a songwriter-theologian in foundations must reflect. This reality must be found by the theologian within her or himself, and then and only then can it be recognised in others. Conversion is a momentous change in the person, a radical shift in one’s horizon, and it cannot be apprehended or understood apart from adverting to one’s own experience of it. Christian songwriting is a personal calling to give voice, in words and music, to my experience of ‘amazing grace’, to the radical choice I have made, to the stand I have taken, to the religious truths that I have come to believe and understand in some limited measure. What has been experienced must be expressed, and others may thereby be encouraged or confirmed in their own experience of God, their own faith, their own search for love, truth and meaning.

b) Writing from more than my own experience

‘The faith of a community comes to life in its music-making. In music, the faith and life of a people take flesh.’¹⁹

At its core, religious conversion is an experience of ‘other worldly’ love, a ‘love Divine, all loves excelling’.²⁰ There is an essential part of it which is immediate and direct, not dependent on any religious tradition for its meaningfulness. It is a silent inner word of love which we ‘hear’, and to which we respond. But what is experienced must be expressed,²¹ and this happens within ‘some context, some meaningful world, structured by language, tradition, and community.’²² Conversion involves appropriating and understanding more than just my own experience. Though intensely personal, it is not purely private. Religious experience is only completed when it finds its expression and confirmation within a tradition. One enters upon a radically new horizon, and all horizons (which normally develop over centuries) have

¹⁷ Murray said this during a seminar I attended at St Clare’s High School, Taree NSW in 1988.

¹⁸ Interview by Hannah Goodwyn of CBN.com, accessed online

<http://www.cbn.com/cbnmusic/interviews/bebo-norman-ocean-goodwyn.aspx> Accessed 28th Feb 2013

¹⁹ Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music: A Textbook, a Reference, a History, an Essay*, 5.

²⁰ Charles Wesley (1707-1788), ‘Love Divine, all Love’s Excelling’. Jane Wood, ed. *Gather Australia* (Melbourne, Victoria & Chicago, IL: NLMC Publications & GIA Publications, 1995), no.463.

²¹ Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 45. And Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 86,255.

²² Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 12, 52.

social, cultural and historical dimensions. The converted person finds themselves belonging to a new group, or belonging to an existing group in a new way.²³ She or he finds themselves standing within a 'new story', a tradition, a community with its history and accumulated wisdom. Christian conversion thus involves a resonance between the *inner* word of personal religious experience and the *outer* word of the Christian tradition. The ear of faith, attuned to the inner word of God's love, is able to hear the same voice of love speaking in the story of Jesus of Nazareth, and in the teachings and practices of the historical community, the church.

In objectifying conversion, a Christian songwriter-theologian therefore uses the language and images and memories of the tradition. The preacher, the songwriter, must 'announce in signs and symbols what is congruent with the gift of love that God works within us.'²⁴ The way these words or images are used, however, makes all the difference. They must ever be creatively brought to life by being placed in a contemporary experiential context. Only in this way will the inner-outer resonance be felt, and thus the transformation that love intends be able to be embraced and co-operated with.²⁵ This outer word of the Christian tradition is also personal (heart speaks to heart), social (it gathers the believers into community), and historical (it has to be situated in the cultural contexts of the times).²⁶ In revealed religion, this word is, in a privileged way, the word of God, mediated to us by the tradition. Whether in language, or ritual, or art, or the lives of holy women and men, the essence of any effective proclamation of the gospel consists in the objectification of this inner-outer resonance. Religious experience needs expression within a bigger story. The inner word is especially powerfully articulated in song, since the symbolic and artistic dimensions of song are able to embody the elemental meaning of the experience. But lest a song be merely about 'me and God', the better one understands the outer word of the Christian tradition, the better one will be able to give expression to the inner-outer resonance in ways that will 'speak' to people, and have broad appeal in the present.

Helping people 'make sense' of belief

Conversion is first and foremost a personal existential process, the meaning of which is *elemental*. There is an energy released in the immediacy of love which is central to this elemental meaning. In the Christian tradition, the best known symbolic objectification of

²³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 269.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁵ On this dynamic, see Haughton, *The Transformation of Man*, 85-115.

²⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 113-14.

religious conversion is the ritual of baptism, with its imagery of dying to the 'old self' and rising, with Christ, to a 'new life of grace'. The ritual of the eucharist keeps this transforming paschal mystery at the centre of our consciousness, enticing us towards an ever greater recognition of our new life of grace and an ever fuller living of it.²⁷ But times change, and so does the meaning of symbols and words. This is especially likely when the common everyday experience of people is no longer recognisably embodied in these carriers of meaning. What once was a powerful and luminous expression of the inner event of religious conversion may become a quaint or confusing naming ceremony for babies! There is therefore a need in every age and every place to re-express the transforming experience of God's love in a way that is relevant to people, in other words, recognisably connected to their actual experience.²⁸ This may involve refreshing old symbols, or even abandoning some, as well as finding new ones. A new song is forever needed. (Ps 96:1)

Theology is reflection on religion. It mediates between a culture and the role and significance of a religion within that culture.²⁹ Its task may be described as helping to 'make sense' of religion. This doesn't mean that theology explains away the mystery at the heart of religion, but we need some 'sense' of the value and meaning of religious beliefs, for us and for our world. The understanding that systematic theology works towards is a 'making sense' of religious beliefs within the context of all else we hold to be true. But there is another kind of theological 'making sense' which is of primary concern for the ordinary Christian. This 'making sense' is about grounding religious beliefs in human experience. The deeper, more basic need for religious beliefs to 'make sense' is not satisfied by the reconciling of Christian doctrine with other human scholarship, as important as this is. Is it only satisfied by a personal religious experience, even a 'virtual' one, such as is provided by a story, or a song. When a poet has 'a way with words', or a songwriter 'the gift of song', they put words or melodies on experiences that otherwise remain unexpressed. Thus they help us 'make sense' of life. For the ordinary person, it is personal experience which makes things 'real'. Such personal experience provides a context, a horizon, within which the *value* of a belief might be apprehended, or felt. This is the 'making sense' for which most Christians hunger, and it is the work of theology in foundations. This is why people love stories, and the good preachers

²⁷ It is in the sense that liturgy objectifies conversion that it can be validly called 'theologica prima', in relation to the second phase of theology.

²⁸ Haughton, *The Transformation of Man*, 11. And Williams, "Objectified Conversion as Foundational in Theology: A Conversation between Rosemary Haughton and Bernard Lonergan, S.J.," 514.

²⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.

tell them often. Stories situate religious beliefs in a ‘real’ context, and assist people to reflect upon such beliefs in the light of their own experience. As Charles Hefling eloquently puts it:

As our lived experience has a narrative quality, so too it is concrete narrative rather than abstract argument that affects our living most deeply and lastingly. Stories are the most persuasive carriers of personal meaning. They give us our world.³⁰

Christian songs are like musical stories. As is clear from John Newton’s ‘Amazing Grace’, they are powerful when they are personal. Christian songs invite us into a ‘virtual’ experience for a short time, from which we may return to our ordinary lives changed, or inspired to want to change and to live in a transformed way in a transformed world. The experience of the song somehow leaves us more sensitive to the religious dimension in life’s ordinariness. Whilst the original meaningfulness of doctrine arises within religious experience, most of us believe many things (however vaguely) before we’ve had the religious experience which provides a horizon within which the belief can ‘make sense’. This interplay between personal religious experience in its vital immediacy and religious doctrine is central to Christian song, constituting its most important theological function. Again, it is a matter of the songwriter effecting self-appropriation; of prayerful, honest and humble reflection on one’s own struggles and blessings. In so doing, the songwriter must give expression to their own transformation and their life of faith, with all its ups and downs. They must bare their soul, yet without making the song *about* them.

c) ‘Let me know your love’

It is appropriate for me to offer here an example of all that we have been reflecting upon, taken from my own compositions, a song called ‘Let me know your love.’ The journey of transformation which the song objectifies began when I was thirty nine years old, and fell ill with serious depression. I’d never had anything like it before. The initial critical stage lasted for three months, but it was to be another three years before I felt confident that I was well again. The suffering of depression is a dreadful thing; at times searing in its acuteness, otherwise manifesting as a chronic undertow in the psyche, draining one’s life force. At times, I seriously doubted that I would make it to my fortieth birthday. This collapse of life as I knew it ultimately became the catalyst for a deepening of my religious conversion. The song ‘Let me know your love’ was written five years after I fell ill. Only now, another five years

³⁰ Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 47.

on, can I recognise more clearly the spiritual transformation I underwent in my journey with depression, and its objectification in this song.

In 2007, I was commissioned to write the song for the first Sunday of Lent in the following year (2008, Year A), for which the gospel is the account of Jesus' temptations in the desert (Mt 4:1-11). I was also asked to incorporate the theme of faith, and to explore the struggle we can experience in believing in God's presence and nearness. I began simply by praying with the gospel text, and then imaginatively placing myself in Jesus' sandals! For some reason, a line from one of the psalms from the morning Office popped into my head: 'In the morning, let me know your love.' (Ps 90:14) It seemed to capture a longing in my heart (which now, five years on, I can remember was acute during the dark months of depression), the need for some assurance or some hope that God was real and present.

I can see now that as soon as I began to pray with the scripture text and allow images to arise, I was beginning to explore my own experience. I could not do otherwise. The line from the morning psalm was inscribed in my memory; it had obviously become part of me, as had my daily prayer. The context of my reflection on Jesus' temptations in the wilderness was *my life of faith*. I knew, from my experience of prayer, of hearing homilies, of singing songs like Gregory Norbet's beautiful 'Hosea'³¹, and from my study of scripture, the meaning of the wilderness in my religious tradition. I had been moved by the famous declaration of St Augustine, which I probably first read on a simple prayer card, 'You made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you.'³² The reflections of spiritual writers on the theme of mystery, and one particular description of our lives as a 'walk within mystery', had, I recall, made a strong impression on me around the time I was writing this song. Since my childhood, I had believed that faith was a gift, from the preaching of our parish priest, and I was given the opportunity to deepen my appreciation of this truth later in life through theology studies.

Thus my heart and mind were awash with experiences, memories, religious beliefs, statements from scripture and the tradition, and most profoundly at the time, the effects of a conversion through the depression, that I had hardly noticed. I had experienced the terrifying

³¹ Gregory Norbet, 'Hosea' ©1972, 1980, The Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc. Wood, ed. *Gather Australia*, no.213. **See APPENDIX 2 for song text.**

³² Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. Betty Radice, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Classics (London, England: Penguin Books, 1961), Book I(i).

emptiness, the darkness and desperate aloneness of mental illness. Through this I had, unknowingly at the time, encountered the silent, hidden God, who didn't fix everything straight away, and yet stayed with me. In the terrifying silence and darkness, I had been confronted with the illusory nature of a life driven by the desire to be well-thought-of. Through it all, I was being held by a love that had found me long before I sought or recognised it,³³ and I was changed, forever changed.

'Let me know your love' ³⁴

In the darkness of the desert,
In the hollow of my soul,
Tempted by life's grand illusions
And empty promises well known;

In the silence of the wilderness,
In this sacred, empty space;
Standing on the edge of mystery,
And on the edge of faith ...

Refrain R/:

*Let me know your love,
Let me see your face.
Let me find within my heart your Spirit's touch,
The gift of faith.
Oh hidden God, help me believe.
Speak to my heart, Silent One:
Let me hear, in this hunger,
Your voice.*

Lost and weary, without water,
Stumbling over endless sands;
Cast adrift from all security
And the power to understand.

But held within this womb of darkness
There are silent words to hear.
Words of wonder, words of courage,
Words of freedom beyond fear ... **R/**

Bridge:
Long in exile from the garden,
Lured to the wilderness.
Speak to me that I might live anew! ... **R/**

In retrospect, I can see that the song objectifies a transformative journey into a new level of faith, and a purified apprehension of the present, yet hidden God, for whom darkness is not

³³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 278.

³⁴ 'Let me know your love', from the album *Gospel of Love* © 2010, James Maher msc. Administered by Willow Publishing Pty Ltd . **See APPENDIX 2 for AUDIO CD (track 2) and song text.**

dark, and whose love is unimpeded by our life's circumstances. It expresses clearly the Christian doctrine of faith as a gift of the Spirit. Yet my lyrics don't have the tone of 'theological confidence', but rather express vulnerability, fragility, and the need for greater faith: 'Lord I believe, help my unbelief.' (Mk 9:25) This vulnerability objectifies the real, actual experience which was the context of my conversion, and thus helps others to relate to the experience. Conversion is not usually something we feel in control of, quite the opposite! The musical setting of the song reflects, expands upon, complements, and supports the meaning embodied in the lyrics. The song is in the rock ballad genre, with a contemporary lead vocal style and tone. The intensity of the song builds to a crescendo in the bridge where an electric guitar comes in, and the song explodes in the rawness of our need to know God's love, the love which has in fact already found us.

In just a few minutes, the poetry and music of a Christian song can communicate an experiential context in which the value and truth of religious belief may seep, if not stream into our hearts. We can find no better witness to this than St Augustine (354-430):

I wept at the beauty of your hymns and canticles, and was powerfully moved at the sweet sound of your Church's singing. These sounds flowed into my ears, and the truth streamed into my heart, so that my feeling and devotion overflowed, and the tears ran from my eyes, and I was happy in them.³⁵

d) Intensifying, purifying and clarifying the objectifications of conversion

To objectify religious conversion one firstly needs to have experienced it; to be religiously converted, and to have cultivated one's religious heart through spiritual practices. Conversion must be lived out if its fruit is to be borne. Religious conversion itself brings about a religiously differentiated consciousness;³⁶ a development of heart and mind which tunes one in to the transcendent realm. But the continued emergence of this realm occurs through 'a life of prayer and self-denial',³⁷ and through acts of compassion and service. One develops a religious awareness and sensitivity which refine one's objectifications of the transcendent realm. Lonergan comments that our cultivation of the emergence of the transcendent realm in this way has a twofold effect:

³⁵ St Augustine, *Confessions* IX.vi.14

³⁶ A differentiation of consciousness is a development of consciousness within a particular realm of meaning, such as the interior realm, the theoretical realm, or the scholarly realm. A realm becomes differentiated when it develops its own language and distinct mode of apprehension. Undifferentiated consciousness operates only in the realm of common sense, although religious conversion itself adds its own differentiated realm, the transcendent (religious) realm. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 84-85, 266, 71-76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.

... first, of withdrawing the subject from the realm of common sense, theory, and other interiority into a 'cloud of unknowing' and then of intensifying, purifying, clarifying, the objectifications referring to the transcendent whether in the realm of common sense, or theory, or of other interiority.³⁸

When a Christian songwriter gives themselves to regular prayer and contemplation, their songs come alive in depth, simplicity and humility.³⁹ Religious conversion might be described as tuning one's ear to the inner music of the transforming Spirit. This experience is '... something exceedingly simple and ... exceedingly simplifying ...'.⁴⁰ Such cultivation of one's religious heart also leads to one becoming more aware of being in communion with all of creation, deepening one's commitment to the shared responsibility for the healing and transformation of our world. One's moral conversion finds its fuller realization within the transcendent realm, and will hence be expressed in one's religious songs. A vivid example is found in the music of Bernadette Farrell, who writes movingly in 'Bread for the world':

*Bread for the world: a world of hunger.
Wine for all peoples: people who thirst.
May we who eat be bread for others.
May we who drink pour out our love.*

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the bread of life,
broken to reach and heal the wounds of human pain.
Where we divide your people, you are waiting there
on bended knee, to wash our feet with endless care.⁴¹

The consequences and the challenges of conversion are expressed more intensely and more clearly because of the writer's attentive 'tuning in' to the Spirit. Even intellectual conversion will find implicit expression in religious song, in any acknowledgment of our capacity to know truth and reality. Such is a religiously differentiated consciousness, 'in tune' with the transcendent realm.

The study of the outer word of religion (scripture and lived tradition) complements this development of consciousness. This does not have to be formal study. A religious tradition is 'mainly caught, not taught'. Many songwriters, like many artists, have not formally studied theology, yet they can still create works which function theologically. As should be clear by

³⁸ Ibid., 266.

³⁹ I can notice a change in the lyrical expression of my songs since beginning the daily practice of meditation whilst recovering from depression.

⁴⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 290.

⁴¹ Bernadette Farrell, 'Bread for the world', on *God beyond all names* Portland, OR: OCP Publications, 1991. See APPENDIX 2 for AUDIO CD (track 3) and song text.

now, what matters primarily is the authenticity of the songwriter's conversion, and her/his prayerful and active attending to this reality, and then effectively expressing it for others. However it is up to us to cultivate the development of our religious heart as described, and this will have a significant effect on our objectification of conversion in song.

All of the above implies an 'at-home-ness' in one's interior realm. This is itself a development of mind and heart, an *interiorly* differentiated consciousness. Such a differentiation of consciousness consists in knowing how one's consciousness actually operates, and thus being able to objectify its inner processes. The combination of the religious and interior differentiations of consciousness is essential for the songwriter-theologian in foundations. Other differentiations of consciousness will also have their effect on one's songs, in particular, an artistic differentiation of consciousness. As Lonergan notes:

... artistically differentiated consciousness, especially if joined to religious sensibility, heightens religious expression. It makes rituals solemn, liturgies stately, music celestial, hymns moving, oratory effective, teaching ennobling.⁴²

Ultimately, the purification of the songwriter's objectifications of conversion (the elimination of the unauthentic) depends on their own authenticity, and occurs in interaction with the 'data': the data of religious experience, the data of the actual life, service and witness of the faith community, the data of the revelation of the Christian tradition.⁴³ The test is in the fruit of the songs, within the lives of individuals and communities.

e) Undifferentiated and differentiated consciousness: questions of style

Significantly, the vast majority of the faithful of any religion will be of undifferentiated consciousness. Their lives are lived in the realm of commonsense. Rosemary Haughton, writing about the massively popular Catholic piety that flowered in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries around the Lourdes apparitions, reminds us of God's 'special option' for those of undifferentiated consciousness:

All over Europe and America the banal little plaster statues, the bottles of Lourdes water, the hymns and the replica Grottoes proliferated, spreading the message that God had hidden

⁴² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 278.

⁴³ Ibid., 292. This may involve 'workshopping' the song with a community, or asking a theologically and poetically attuned friend to cast their eye over the song lyrics. A song can also be written for a community by interviewing a cross-section of people, using questions which help them articulate their religious experience, personal and communal, or the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Such questions could be developed from the five sources Lonergan outlines.

certain things from the wise and learned and aesthetically sensitive, and revealed them to little ones.⁴⁴

Authentic religious conversion and the faith it brings is, for most people, expressed in simple and unsophisticated ways. The expression of religious meaning for undifferentiated consciousness requires ‘rituals, narrative forms, titles, parables, metaphors’⁴⁵ that are effective within a particular context. However, these symbolic communications can embody many levels of meaning, from simple to sophisticated. Song, as symbolic expression, belongs to everybody. So does song as art.⁴⁶ The meaning of both is elemental, and is accessible to undifferentiated consciousness. This raises the controversial issue of musical and lyrical style in Christian songs. The basic divisions are between the classical or traditional style and the popular style. Some people want Gregorian chant, some people want contemporary ‘praise and worship’ songs. Without going into the details of the so-called music wars,⁴⁷ what is clear is that only to the extent that we are religiously, morally and intellectually converted, can we make a sound judgement of the theological quality of a Christian song. As regards the musical or artistic quality, Rosemary Haughton’s reminder is salutary. A song that I may find banal, may be an objectification of authentic conversion, and thus bear rich fruit in many lives. Equally, the needs of those of artistically differentiated consciousness must not be denied. The good news is that even the meaning of high quality music is still *elemental*, and thus in principal, may be equally appreciated by the simple and the sophisticated.

Lonergan notes that ‘there are as many brands of commonsense as there are languages, social and cultural differences, almost differences of place and time.’⁴⁸ Here religious song has another advantage in that its musical component in particular (as both art and symbol) can to some extent transcend language and culture. The lyrics of a song will be less transcultural. Even within groups of English speaking Christians, the same word or phrase will have different resonances.⁴⁹ However, many hymn tunes have successfully travelled the world, and many hymn lyrics have been translated in multiple languages.

⁴⁴ Rosemary Haughton, *The Catholic Thing* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate, 1979), 40. Cf. Luke 10:21

⁴⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 276.

⁴⁶ In practice, this is not always the case. In certain cultures or classes, the appreciation of music in its various forms is supported and encouraged, in others, not so. But in itself, the elemental meaning of music as symbol or art is accessible to anybody.

⁴⁷ See for example Kenneth Hull, "Music Wars, Neuroscience, and Self Psychology," *Liturgy* 24, no. 4 (2009). And Don Quartz, "Canons in Collision: Hymns and Contemporary Christian Music," *Liturgy* 24, no. 4 (2009).

⁴⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 276.

⁴⁹ For example, royal imagery (God or Jesus described as ‘King’, or reference to God’s ‘throne’) jars with people of Irish Catholic origins, but is more readily accepted by Anglican or English Protestant folk for whom royalty has more benign associations.

f) Incomplete and unauthentic conversion

As a final consideration, we need to acknowledge that conversion may be partial or incomplete, or what is thought to be conversion may in fact be unauthentic. To the extent that a song objectifies authentic conversion in the songwriter, the song will have theological value, and has a good chance of bearing fruit in people's lives. Where a songwriter's conversion is partial, her/his songs will only be able to take people 'just so far'. Where the songwriter's conversion is unauthentic, their songs will jar with people's authentic religious experience, and very likely only be used by those whose conversion is similarly unauthentic.

Conversion manifests in many different ways. Even though the 'roots' of conversion are common and identifiable, the 'plant' appears in a wide variety of styles of thinking (the various differentiations of human consciousness), ways of life (the almost endless kinds of commonsense), and in the varied religious language which arises from these. It is thus easy to misjudge the authenticity of the conversion of another individual, or another group. Despite this risk, such a judgment must be made. Sometimes that which is called conversion is not in fact a total surrender to the demands of intelligence, reason, responsibility and love.⁵⁰ There are many Christian songs, and not all of them are objectifying complete or authentic conversion. A Christian songwriter who never gives expression to the call to reach out to those in need and to work to relieve suffering might be suspected of lacking moral conversion. Equally, one might be suspicious of the writer who never objectifies the communal dimension of religious conversion. Or again, a songwriter might have a profound knowledge of theology and be blessed with poetic and musical gifts beyond compare, but without conversion, they are just a 'noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.' (1Cor13:1) The differences between the horizon of authentic conversion and the horizon of unauthentic conversion will be dialectical, though the dramatic opposition in these horizons will often not be obvious. One may just experience an un-ease with certain songs, or songwriters, without being able to pinpoint the root of this. Here, the work of the fourth functional specialty *dialectic* can be drawn upon. Again, one must allow for the differences arising from the various differentiations of consciousness and the innumerable local variations of commonsense. But to the extent that one's conversion is authentic, it will be possible to discern authentic conversion at the root of a song, and one will be less likely to misjudge

⁵⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 268.

simplicity, or sophistication, or differences of musical style or linguistic phrasing, for unauthenticity.

The songwriter-theologian in foundations must accept that they will not be able to appeal to everyone's religious experience, since apart from the diversity of religious expression, some people's (apparent) religious experience is unauthentic. A song about God's unrestricted love may jar with someone who is convinced that we earn our salvation through moral righteousness. Discernment is needed: firstly of course, of the authenticity of one's own conversion, then of the conversion of others whose experience the theologian may draw upon, and thirdly, of the conversion embodied in one's religious community and its history.⁵¹

Finally, conversion is a necessary and radical new beginning, not an end point. The fact of religious conversion does not guarantee that the conversion will be lived out. Human religious development, as we have noted, is dialectical: each twist in the road, each fall into unfaithfulness, each forgetting of the Divine embrace, can lead to further alienation from one's 'true self', or become an opportunity for a new awakening and a deeper faithfulness.⁵² The fruits of conversion come only through living it, and so Christian songwriting and the doing of theology are ultimately *vocations*, calls to a life of holiness and wholeness.

⁵¹ Whilst the Catholic tradition, for example, has been strong on service of the poor, the personal experience of God's transforming love has been (until more recent times) little emphasised amongst the ordinary faithful.

⁵² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 357.

CONCLUSION

The Song made flesh

*'All deep things are song.
It seems somehow the very central essence of us, song;
as if all the rest were but wrappings and hulls!'*
(Thomas Carlyle)¹

You have to envy the songwriter. Straight to the listener's heart in three minutes flat.
(Tim Winton)²

In the explosion of sound in Handel's *Alleluia Chorus*, as the 'Alleluias' cascade, one on top of the other, like fireworks in the night sky, or in the swelling emotion of Bach's chorale *O Sacred Head surrounded*, an experience is being evoked, the meaning of which is beyond words, and *before*, words. To the extent that this experience is one of conversion, the music is functioning theologically, symbolically and artistically giving voice to the 'sweet sound' of grace: an experience of personal transformation, and the entry upon a radically new horizon. The theology has just begun, but in the first, foundational task of a contemporary theology, such Christian song can make a significant theological contribution by manifesting the experience of conversion in its vital immediacy, and expressing the faith which is its fruit, 'the experienced fulfilment of our unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence, in our actuated orientation towards the mystery of love and awe.'³

In the first phase [of theology] one begins from data and moves through meanings and facts towards personal encounter. In the second phase one begins from reflection on authentic conversion, employs it as the horizon within which doctrines are to be apprehended and an understanding of their content sought, and finally moves to a creative exploration of communications differentiated according to media, according to classes of men (*sic*), and according to common cultural interests.⁴

The expression of the reality of conversion provides the foundations and context for religious doctrines. Only within this context can statements of religious belief, such as are contained in the lyrics of Christian song, be apprehended and affirmed. Don Saliers' insight was correct. The formal language of reasoned reflection on Christian doctrines *does* depend upon a primary theological 'language' which expresses the experience of Christian faith, and which integrally involves music.⁵ Christian song has its most important theological function in

¹ Thomas Carlyle, "On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History." (Hazleton, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1840, 2001).

² Winton, "Words and Music."

³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 115.

⁴ Ibid., 135-36.

⁵ Saliers, *Music and Theology*, 35.

foundations, where a primary theological expression of meaning occurs in the objectification of conversion. In the symbolic and artistic modes of poetry and music, this meaning is felt and experienced, perhaps ‘heard so deeply’ that the listener recognises themselves, their own experience, in the song, and even in the silence beyond.

A good Christian song is in fact a kind of model of phase two theology. It demonstrates the interdependence of the four second phase specialties, and the dependence of the three specialties – doctrines, systematics and communications - upon foundations. Whether any of the doctrines (implicit or explicit) contained in a song resonate with people as truthful claims, whether the meanings given to these doctrines make sense (to the heart and to the head), whether the communication of these meanings is effective, all depends on the authenticity of the religious experience expressed in the song, and the effectiveness in expressing it.

The prophet Ezekiel dramatically objectifies conversion in narrating God’s word to us:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezek 36:26)

Not only does this poetic objectification express the radical change inherent in conversion, but it also highlights that conversion is not a repudiation of our humanity, but rather a divine intervention which enables its full and authentic realisation. In love we become our true selves.⁶ Religion has no purpose but to enable human individuals and communities to become fully and authentically human, through religious, moral and intellectual conversion. What matters ultimately is the making of the person, the *becoming* of a person, and the concrete expression of this ‘new creation’ (2 Cor 5:17) in the day-to-day details of living in the world. Conversion is ‘total surrender to the demands of the human spirit: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, be in love’,⁷ and this alone is the extra foundational reality which saves theology from only ever speaking about God’s past wonders. A theologian who wishes to speak or sing about the wonders God is doing now amongst us, begins by giving voice to her or his converted heart and mind, and this, Christian songwriters have done faithfully and beautifully since the days of Jesus of Nazareth, the divine Song made flesh.

⁶ ‘Love is being part of something that is other than myself, but in such a way that I become more fully my own distinct self in being in love ...’. Michael Fallon, *Yielding to Love: Learning to Follow Our Yearning for Deeper Communion with God* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2005), 18.

⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 268.

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APPENDIX 1

‘Word’ and music in Christianity: the subjugation of non-discursive meaning

“The fact that David danced in the presence of God is no excuse for believing Christians to sit in the theatre ... [In those days] harps, cymbals, flutes, tambourines and citharas made music to the honour of God, not to the praise of an idol ... But through the devil’s wiles, holy [instruments] have been changed into forbidden ones.” (Psuedo-Cyprian, *De spectaculis* 3) With these words Psuedo-Cyprian provides the best commentary possible for an understanding of the attitude towards music which prevailed in early Christianity. Despite the rich heritage which the young Church received from Jewish worship, she opposed and held back completely from the elaborate musical embellishment of liturgy which was part of Old Testament tradition. The need for such a stand in early Christianity arose from the fact that the music of the day was very closely associated with pagan worship. Moreover, since the pagan cult of the gods and of the dead influenced and permeated every aspect of private life, the Church forbade even the private practice of this art.¹

Since earliest times, music has been universally recognised as powerful, even magical in its effects. This recognition has often been expressed in an ambivalence or suspicion towards music; we fear what we don’t understand. The early Church embraced Neoplatonic philosophy as an antidote to paganism. Neoplatonism rejected most music as arising from the lower sensuous level of reality, but vocal music, since it expressed reason through language, was associated with the higher intellectual level, and was accepted.² Many religious traditions have judged it necessary to distinguish between sacred and profane music, though interestingly, such distinctions ‘appear to exist most sharply in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, religions of the Word which took shape under the cultural influences of the Mediterranean Basin’ where the flesh (matter) and the spirit were placed in opposition (partly under the influence of Neoplatonism).³ It was Augustine who most famously gave expression to the Christian ambivalence towards music’s power:

So I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses and the benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing. Without committing myself to an irrevocable opinion, I am inclined to approve of the custom of singing in church, in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion. Yet when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin, and at those times I would prefer not to hear the singer.⁴

¹ Johannes Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Washington, DC: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1973, 1983), introduction.

² Lydia Goehr and et al, "Philosophy of Music," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford Music Online <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/52965pg1> (accessed May 25, 2012)), 9.

³ Collins, Power, and Burnum eds., *Music and the Experience of God*, 4. ‘Because ritual music is widely understood to have the power to mediate the meeting of the human with the divine, it is regularly subject to a complex code [regarding timing, form, instrument use, official roles] which channels its power.’ *ibid.*, 6.

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, book X, 33:50. For a summary of her careful analysis of Augustine’s position on music, see Carol Harrison, "Augustine and the Art of Music," in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, ed. Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 42.

The concern for Augustine, and many after him, was that music could be a ‘distraction of the flesh’, taking one’s attention away from God, whose sovereignty in one’s life was best guarded by reason, and by the precise truth that only God’s word as discursive language could express.

The history of music in the Christian churches is one of ebbs and flows, periods of indulgence and periods of abstinence, of movements and counter-movements. In the Reformed traditions of Zwingli and Calvin, the musical excesses of the renaissance Church were rejected, and music in worship was restricted to the singing of metrical psalms.⁵ Zwingli, arguably the most accomplished musician of all the reformers, initially banned music altogether from worship.⁶ Luther stands out as an exception amongst the sixteenth century reformers in his warm and full embrace of music of all kinds in public worship,⁷ yet it is doubtful that Luther saw music as by itself being capable of communicating the ‘Word’.⁸ Amidst all the ebbing and flowing, a constant theme emerges of subordinating music to the Word as *word*. Music was sanctified through serving the word of scripture, (especially the psalms), the word of liturgical texts, or the word of Christian doctrine. It was thus subjugated to discursive language, to the Word as rational truth. Thomas Aquinas, following Augustine, believed that although music was appropriate for praising God, since it reflected the divine order and harmony, it should remain subordinate to the word and to doctrine, which articulated the divine order with greater accuracy.⁹

[Aquinas approved of singing in worship], so long as it was not done merely to provoke pleasure, since ‘vocal praise arouses the interior affection of the one praising and prompts others to praise God’ (*Summa theologica*, II/ii, question xci, article 1 ad 2). However he rejected the use of musical instruments in religious services because these ‘usually move the soul to pleasure rather than create a good disposition in it’ (ibid., article 2 ad 4).¹⁰

It would be fair to say that for most of Christian history, music has been understood to have an affective impact, but not to have meaning. A seventeenth century Lutheran debate on the

⁵ Dowley, ed. *Christian Music*, 112ff.

⁶ Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music: A Textbook, a Reference, a History, an Essay*, 150.

⁷ Dowley, ed. *Christian Music*, 90. Robin A. Leaver, "Luther, Martin," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford Music Online. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/17219> (accessed November 20, 2011)).

⁸ See Joyce Irwin, “‘So faith comes from what is heard’: the relationship between music and God’s Word in the first two centuries of German Lutheranism.” In Begbie and Guthrie, eds., *Resonant Witness*, 68-69, 82.

⁹ Catherine Pickstock, ‘*Quasi Una Sonata*: modernism, postmodernism, religion and music’, in ibid., 190.

¹⁰ Edward Booth and Sean Gallagher. "Aquinas, Thomas." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed October 16, 2012, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.rp.nla.gov.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/01134>.

question of whether instrumental (organ) music could communicate religious meaning was resolved by concluding that if the **kind** of music played was **intended** to give glory to God, then it did have the power (like the Word) to move the soul to devotion and praise.¹¹ The question arises: ‘Why has music been such a mystery to humankind?’ A thorough answer to this question is beyond the scope of this study, but the basis of an explanation is to be found in the stages of meaning through which human cultures move, and specifically in the fact that the emergence of the realm of interiority has only occurred in the last 150 years or so in the West.

¹¹ Irwin, ‘So faith comes from what is heard’, Begbie and Guthrie, eds., *Resonant Witness*, 71-72.

APPENDIX 2

Song texts & Audio CD

(See inside back cover for Audio CD)

Your love broke through

AUDIO CD Track 1

Like a foolish dreamer, trying to build a highway to the sky,
All my hopes would come tumbling down, and I never knew just why,
Until today, when you pulled away the clouds
That hung like curtains on my eyes,
Well I've been blind all these wasted years
and I thought I was so wise.
But then you took me by surprise.

Chorus:

*Like waking up from the longest dream, how real it seemed
Until your love broke through
I've been lost in a fantasy, that blinded me,
Until your love broke through*

All my life I've been searching for that crazy missing part
And with one touch, you just rolled away the stone that held my heart,
And now I see that the answer was as easy, as just asking you in,
And I am so sure I could never doubt your gentle touch again.
It's like the power of the wind.

© 1977, Keith Green

Hosea

Come back to me with all your heart.
Don't let fear keep us apart.
Trees do bend, though straight and tall;
So must we to others call.

Refrain R/:

*Long have I waited for your coming, home to me
And living deeply our new life.*

The wilderness will lead you
To your heart where I will speak.
Integrity and justice
With tenderness you shall know. **R/**

You shall sleep secure with peace;
Faithfulness will be your joy. **R/**

© 1972, Gregory Norbet osb

Let me know your love

AUDIO CD Track 2

‘Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness ...’ (Mt 4:1)

In the darkness of the desert,
In the hollow of my soul,
Tempted by life’s grand illusions
And empty promises well known;

In the silence of the wilderness,
In this sacred, empty space;
Standing on the edge of mystery,
And on the edge of faith ...

Refrain R/:

Let me know your love,
Let me see your face.
Let me find within my heart your Spirit’s touch,
The gift of faith.
Oh hidden God, help me believe.
Speak to my heart, Silent One:
Let me hear, in this hunger,
Your voice.

Lost and weary, without water,
Stumbling over endless sands;
Cast adrift from all security
And the power to understand.

But held within this womb of darkness
There are silent words to hear.
Words of wonder, words of courage,
Words of freedom beyond fear ... **R/**

Bridge:

Long in exile from the garden,
Lured to the wilderness.
Speak to me that I might live anew! ... **R/**

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Bread for the world

AUDIO CD Track 3

Refrain R/:

Bread for the world: a world of hunger.

Wine for all peoples: people who thirst.

May we who eat be bread for others.

May we who drink pour out our love.

1. Lord Jesus Christ, you are the bread of life,
broken to reach and heal the wounds of human pain.
Where we divide your people, you are waiting there
on bended knee, to wash our feet with endless care. **R/**

2. Lord Jesus Christ, you are the wine of peace,
poured into hearts once broken and where dryness sleeps.
Where we are tired and weary, you are waiting there
to be the way which beckons us beyond despair. **R/**

3. Lord Jesus Christ, you call us to your feast,
at which the rich and pow'rful have become the least.
Where we survive on others in our human greed,
you walk among us begging for your ev'ry need. **R/**

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