

Essays in Systematic Theology 2: Revisiting ‘Consciousness and Grace’¹

1 The Issue

In this short paper I wish to revisit briefly some of the issues that I raised in an earlier article, ‘Consciousness and Grace.’² In conversation, Joseph Komonchak has pointed out that at times in that article I wrote of experience and consciousness in language that is appropriate rather to knowledge, and I hope to express my position in a way that corrects this. Moreover, an article by Michael Vertin that challenges the central thesis of ‘Consciousness and Grace’ has served as an incentive to try to express myself more clearly.³ But this brief statement emerges as well from an attempt to relate the thesis of ‘Consciousness and Grace’ to the following fascinating passage from Lonergan’s chapter on the divine missions in *De Deo trino: Pars systematica*:

... there are four real divine relations, really identical with the divine substance, and therefore there are four very special modes that ground the external imitation of the divine substance. Next, there are four absolutely supernatural realities, which are never found uninformed, namely, the secondary act of existence of the incarnation, sanctifying grace, the habit of charity, and the light of glory. It would not be inappropriate, therefore, to say that the secondary act of existence of the incarnation

1 This article appeared in *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 13:2 (1995) 151-59.

2 Robert M. Doran, ‘Consciousness and Grace,’ *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 11:1 (1993) 51-75 (above, chapter 1).

3 Michael Vertin, ‘Lonergan on Consciousness: Is There a Fifth Level?’ *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 12:1 (1994) 1-36. 2009 note: I still find Vertin’s arguments against the very possibility of a fifth level unconvincing.

is a created participation of paternity, and so has a special relation to the Son; that sanctifying grace is a participation of active spiration, and so has a special relation to the Holy Spirit; that the habit of charity is a participation of passive spiration, and so has a special relation to the Father and the Son; and that the light of glory is a participation of sonship, and so in a most perfect way brings the children of adoption back to the Father.⁴

In ‘Consciousness and Grace,’ I was concerned with the second and third of these absolutely supernatural realities, with sanctifying grace and charity. I did not there draw on Lonergan’s way of connecting them with two of the divine relations, and in fact explicitly prescind entirely from the trinitarian question. My intent was simply to find a formulation that would express, in terms derived from interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness, the meaning of the first thesis of Lonergan’s earlier work, ‘De ente supernaturali.’ That thesis states: ‘There exists a created communication of the divine nature, that is, a created, proportionate, and remote principle by which there are present in the creature operations by which God is attained as God is in God’s own self.’⁵ I asked whether Lonergan’s talk of the dynamic state of being in love in an unqualified fashion, while surely naming with precision the direction in which we must turn, was sufficiently mindful of the distinction that he draws between sanctifying grace and charity in spelling out this first thesis in ‘De ente supernaturali’ (in harmony with St Thomas Aquinas and against, among others, Duns Scotus). I suggested that we might speak of the

4 Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 470-73.

5 Lonergan, ‘De ente supernaturali: Supplementum schematicum’ (see above, p.xx, note xx) 3.

language of ‘the dynamic state of being in love with God’ as transposing in a methodical theology what a more metaphysical theology called the habit of charity; and I asked whether we can find some distinct formulation that would transpose in a similar manner ‘sanctifying grace.’ In the first thesis in ‘De ente supernaturali,’ charity is the proximate principle of operations by which God is reached, but there is an entitative remote principle of the same operations, a share in the very life of God, called sanctifying grace.⁶ My question was, How might we speak of this remote principle in terms of consciousness, but in such a way as to maintain its distinction from the habit of charity?

Some might wonder about the very significance of the question. After all, Lonergan says in the same first thesis (p. 7) that the disputed question of whether sanctifying grace is really distinct from the habit of charity affects not the substance of his thesis but the way of ordering ideas. Even those who identify sanctifying grace and charity admit a created communication of the divine nature, and that is the point of the thesis.

On the other hand, the task of the systematic theologian is precisely the intelligible ordering of the materials confessed in doctrines, and it was as one attempting systematic theology that I raised my question. I took seriously Lonergan’s prescription in *Method in Theology* that ‘for every term and relation there will exist a corresponding

⁶ The first thesis of ‘De ente supernaturali’ is not concerned only with sanctifying grace. Its thrust is generic, and includes the hypostatic union or grace of union as the principle instance of a created communication of the divine nature. My concern here is limited to the ‘secondary’ instance of such created communication, ‘the sanctifying or habitual grace, by which we are children of God, partakers of the divine nature, justified, friends of God, and so on’ (‘*gratia sanctificans seu habitualis, qua sumus filii Dei, consortes divinae naturae, iusti, amici Dei, etc.*’). Lonergan, ‘De ente supernaturali’ in thesis 1.

element in intentional consciousness,⁷ and I was asking what those elements would be if we were to try to transpose Lonergan's distinction between sanctifying grace and charity from 'De ente supernaturali' to the context established by *Method in Theology*.

A further question arises, however, and I confess that I do not have an answer to it: Did Lonergan himself continue to maintain this distinction after he came to use categories of consciousness in speaking of these realities? I raised this question in 'Consciousness and Grace,' and subsequently I have noticed that in 'Mission and the Spirit' there is no longer a fourfold, but a threefold, communication of divinity to humanity, 'first, when in Christ the Word becomes flesh, secondly, when through Christ men become temples of the Spirit and adoptive sons of the Father, thirdly, when in a final consummation the blessed know the Father as they are known by him.'⁸ But then what becomes of the connections drawn in *De Deo trino* between the four divine relations as special ways of grounding an external imitation of the divine substance and the four imitations of, or created participations in, these relations?⁹

My option remains one of attempting to preserve the distinction and to find appropriate categories for it from interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness. In fact, that option is only confirmed when I begin to glimpse the enormous systematic potential in the short passage that I have quoted from *De Deo trino*. And so I am going to try once again to formulate a thesis that would transpose the affirmation of the first thesis of 'De ente supernaturali' into categories derived from interiorly and religiously

⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 343.

⁸ Bernard Lonergan, 'Mission and the Spirit,' *A Third Collection* (see above, p. xx, note xx) 26.

⁹ 2009: This is at the heart of the discussion between Charles Hefling and myself in *Theological Studies* 68 (2007). My own contribution is at 674-82.

differentiated consciousness. This new statement is in no way a retraction of the position I was beginning to formulate in ‘Consciousness and Grace,’ and so it probably will not satisfy Vertin’s objections, but perhaps it states the issue a bit more clearly. And I hope it meets the criticism that Komonchak offered. Finally, I have deliberately avoided here the issue of the number of levels of consciousness, especially since the discovery and publication of Lonergan’s ‘Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon’ further complicates this (secondary) issue.¹⁰

Given the context established by the passage from *De Deo trino*, we could formulate the question as follows: If the divine missions are the divine notional acts plus an external term, what, *in terms of consciousness*, is the external term of active spiration?¹¹ What, in terms of consciousness, is it to ‘receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20.19)? The question parallels in a theological and trinitarian context the question that Lonergan was attempting to answer in ‘Mission and the Spirit,’ What in terms of human consciousness is the transition from the natural to the supernatural (where by ‘the supernatural’ is meant at its root divine self-communication in love)? But, I think, if one retains the distinction between sanctifying grace and charity, one’s answer will not be exactly the same as that which Lonergan gave in ‘Mission and the Spirit,’ where that distinction is at least not explicit. Moreover, in ‘Mission and the Spirit’ Lonergan is concerned, not with the ‘end,’ the ‘threefold personal self-communication of divinity,’ but with ‘finality to it, with that finality as evolutionary, with that evolutionary finality as

10 Bernard Lonergan, ‘Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon,’ *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 12:2 (1994) 125-46; reprinted in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, vol. 17 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

11 2009: and of passive spiration.

it enters into human consciousness.’¹² With his answer to that question I have no problem whatsoever. My concern is the end, when the personal self-communication of divinity is, not the incarnation or the beatific vision, but the gift of grace to us in this life. How does that gift itself enter into human consciousness? If the distinction between sanctifying grace and charity does follow the pattern of the distinction of active and passive spiration in the Trinity, if in fact it names the respective external terms of active and passive spiration, then for systematic reasons I prefer to retain it, and to try to offer a way of doing so.¹³

2 A Reformulation

In the next paragraph I will give a restatement of the entire thesis. In the next section I will try to spell out the thesis in seventeen distinct points.¹⁴

The gift of God’s love poured forth into our hearts is an uncreated grace (the Holy Spirit) that effects in us, as a consequent condition of its reception and as a relational disposition to receive it, the created grace of a dimension or level of consciousness that is distinct from the intentional levels discussed by Lonergan in his intentionality analysis. At this distinct and non-intentional level – non-intentional because, while it has a content, it has no apprehended object – we experience what can, upon reflection, be objectified as an inchoate and abiding satisfaction of our intentional longings (and their psychic

12 Lonergan, ‘Mission and the Spirit’ 26.

13 My reasons, of course, are not just systematic. That would be a form of conceptualism. I am attempting to name something that I think occurs in religious experience.

14 The seventeenth point is an addition, suggesting a possible line of further development.

correspondences¹⁵) for intelligibility, truth, and goodness. This inchoate and abiding rest from intentional striving, a secure base that sustains and carries us in our intentional operations,¹⁶ can be further objectified, with the help of the revelation manifest in Christ Jesus, as *being loved* in an unqualified fashion, and being invited and empowered to love in return. The being loved, moreover, can be understood in a Christian theology as a created participation of the active spiration of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Word, while the love in return, to which we are invited and empowered, is a created participation of the passive spiration that is the Holy Spirit. The initial and grounding non-intentional experience of rest from intentional striving is the conscious basis of our share in the inner Trinitarian life of God, of our falling in love with God, and of the dynamic state of our being in love in an unqualified fashion. It is what a metaphysical theology called sanctifying grace. The dynamic state of being in love that it releases (with our assent and cooperation, which themselves are enabled by the gift itself) is what the Scholastic tradition called the infused virtue of charity, which is the proximate principle of the operations of charity whereby God is attained as God is in God's own self; but the created, remote, and proportionate principle of these operations – what Scholastic theology called the entitative habit or sanctifying grace of a created communication of the divine nature – is a distinct dimension or level of consciousness: the non-intentional experience that can be objectified in Christian terms as a resting in

15 On the distinction and correspondence of intellectual and sensitive operators, see Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 555.

16 Even 'a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion ... a radical peace, the peace that the world cannot give.' Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 105.

being loved in an unqualified fashion. This experience is a real relation to the indwelling God who is term of the relation, and it is constituted by that indwelling God as a consequent condition of the indwelling itself.¹⁷

3 Specific Points in the Thesis

1 There is a gift of God's love poured forth into our hearts, and this gift is the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit and so an indwelling in us of the inner life of the triune God.

2 This gift is offered to all men and women. It is not particular to any one religious tradition. It is not a function of a tradition, but is constituted by God alone.

3 With Lonergan in *De Deo trino*, we may say that with this gift there is created an external term of this divine mission, a consequent condition of its reception, a created relational disposition to receive it, that is the created grace, the created entitative habit, that the Catholic tradition has called sanctifying grace.

4 This created communication of the divine nature is experienced, is conscious, as a non-intentional dimension or level of consciousness which, precisely as non-intentional, is distinct from the four intentional levels discussed by Lonergan in his intentionality analysis.

5 These intentional levels constitute an obediential potency for the reception of the created grace of this non-intentional experience.

17 See my qualifications in the new notes written for 'Consciousness and Grace,' especially regarding the identification of the dynamic state of being in love with God and the habit of charity. That is a mistake.

6 But this grace, as experienced, is itself a non-intentional state, that is, a conscious state that has a content but no apprehended object.

7 As experienced, what I am speaking of is conscious but not known, in the sense of the full human knowing that consists in experience, understanding, and judging. Perhaps it is best known through the revelation that is manifest in Christ Jesus. We may wager at least that this articulation remains the best starting point for further discussion of just what it is.

8 The experience of which I am speaking is an inchoate and abiding satisfaction of our intentional longings for intelligibility, truth, and goodness, an inchoate and abiding rest from intentional striving and psychic restlessness.

9 It can be objectified in the terms of Christian revelation, and only because of this revelation, as an experience of being loved in an unqualified fashion. But this is not the only appropriate manner of conceiving it. In a sense, there is no really appropriate manner of conceiving and expressing it, and all human attempts to do so limp. More generically, it might be called the experience of an invitation to 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46.10), where the precise manner in which the invitation is experienced depends on the modality of the movements of mind and heart to which the invitation offers an inchoate rest. For some, it might be the assurance that there is an unfailing and absolute guarantee of meaning or intelligibility that will triumph over all absurdity and suffering. For others, it is the joy of exulting in an absolute goodness of existence that is unqualified in every respect. For still others, and in fact for all of us at one level and particularly in certain situations, it is the assurance of a mercy or forgiveness that meets us at the point of our deepest spiritual poverty.

10 In all these different forms, always it is a particular form of St Ignatius Loyola's consolation without a preceding cause, that is, consolation with a content but with no

apprehended object, a consolation that is received without being caused by anything that we have understood, affirmed, or decided.

11 However this experience is best objectified (always imperfectly) in any given instance, it can be affirmed by a Christian theology to be a created participation in the active spiration of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Word.

12 It releases simultaneously a freedom to love in return, and the love to which we are empowered is a created participation in the passive spiration that is the Holy Spirit.

13 The non-intentional resting from intentional striving grounds our participation in the Trinitarian life of God, in the divine relations constitutive of the divine life, and so is appropriately called a created communication of the divine nature. It is also, and for this same reason, appropriately called by a metaphysical theology ‘sanctifying grace.’ And the dynamic state of being in love that it releases (with our assent and cooperation, which themselves are enabled by the gift itself) is the equivalent of what the Scholastic tradition called the habit of charity.

14 The created gift of a distinct, non-intentional level of consciousness is thus the remote principle, and charity the proximate principle, of acts or operations of love elicited in us whereby God is attained in God’s own being.

15 The non-intentional consciousness that is rest from intentional striving and that Christians know as (among other things) being loved in an unqualified sense, being forgiven, being assured an ultimate meaningfulness to our lives, precisely as a distinct level of consciousness and remote principle of acts of love, is a real relation to, and created by, the indwelling God who is term of this relation.

16 The relation is constituted by the indwelling God as a consequent condition of the indwelling itself. It happens because the notional act of active spiration itself is here

joined with a created external term in addition to the uncreated internal term that is the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Word. That created external term is the level of consciousness on which we are given rest in God.

17 Perhaps it is on the basis of our experience of what here is objectified as the created external term that a Trinitarian theology might best provide some analogical understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Word.¹⁸

18 2009 note: On this last point, see below, 'Being in Love with God: A Source of Analogies for Theological Understanding,' *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73 (2008) 227-42.