

**Essays in Systematic Theology 40:
What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by ‘Conversion’?¹**

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My understanding is that a course is being launched with this lecture that some of you will be involved in, a course that is meant to be an introduction to the work of Bernard Lonergan. The introduction is specifically oriented to people who are relative beginners in Lonergan’s work. I am happy to be invited to present this opening lecture to an audience that includes but also extends beyond those who will be taking the course. I hope the lecture will be helpful in getting the course off to a good start.

My presentation is divided into the following points: (1) Authenticity, Self-transcendence, and Conversion; (2) General Points on Conversion; (3) Conversion as Religious, Moral, Intellectual, and Psychic; (4) Conversion *from* and Conversion *to*; (5) Religious Conversion *from* and *to*; (6) Moral Conversion *from* and *to*; (7) Intellectual Conversion *from* and *to*; and (8) A Word about Psychic Conversion.

1 Authenticity, Self-transcendence, and Conversion

The organizers of the course chose the topic of this opening lecture wisely, since the answer to the question, What does Lonergan mean by conversion? touches on the most important elements in his work. In particular, there are three closely interrelated notions that are basic to Lonergan’s thought: authenticity, self-transcendence, and conversion. It was with this in mind that I suggested to the organizers that they distribute to you Lonergan’s lecture ‘Self-transcendence:

¹ This lecture was delivered on July 15, 2011, at University of St. Michael’s College School of Theology, Toronto, to open a week-long course on the work of Bernard Lonergan. An audio recording of the lecture is available on this website under Events/Lectures.

Intellectual, Moral, Religious.’² That lecture has become for me the first item in Lonergan’s work that I recommend to people who ask, Where should I begin? What should I read first?

Now, while what is meant by these words ‘authenticity,’ ‘self-transcendence,’ and ‘conversion’ is central to all of Lonergan’s work from beginning to end, it was only gradually that he came to *concentrate* his thought around the realities named by these words and to use these words on a regular basis. But in retrospect we can see that they organize even the earlier themes in his work, themes such as the basic positions on knowing, being, and objectivity, which we will see when we discuss intellectual conversion.

The relations between authenticity, self-transcendence, and conversion may be briefly stated in the following terms, which we can perhaps take as a sort of guiding orientation for this presentation: *Authenticity is achieved in self-transcendence, and consistent self-transcendence is reached only by conversion.*

In other words, what makes a person an authentic human being is that he or she is consistently self-transcending, and consistent self-transcendence requires that one undergo a multiple and ongoing process of conversion. The process moves causally, if you wish, from conversion to self-transcendence, and from self-transcendence to authenticity. In that sense, then, the choice of conversion as the topic for the opening lecture gets to the heart of things quickly.

2 General Points on Conversion

We should start with a few general remarks about conversion before delving into the various kinds of conversion acknowledged by Lonergan. For the source of these remarks, I refer you to the first two sections of chapter 10 of *Method in Theology*, ‘Horizons’ and ‘Conversions and

² Bernard Lonergan, ‘Self-transcendence: Intellectual, Moral, Religious,’ in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Robert C. Croken (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 313-31.

Breakdowns.’ I will soft-pedal the material on ‘breakdowns’ and stress the part about ‘conversions.’

Frequently, when we hear the word ‘conversion’ we think of a person moving from one religious group to another. We speak of someone being converted to Catholicism, for example. This is not Lonergan’s primary meaning. Obviously, he has no objection to people converting to Catholicism, if what is really meant by conversion at a deeper level is involved in their becoming Catholics. And what is really meant by conversion has to do with authenticity and self-transcendence.

To understand conversion as Lonergan understands it requires some discussion of the notion of horizon. In the literal sense of the word, a horizon is the limit of one’s field of vision. What lies beyond the horizon cannot be seen. But as one moves about, the limit of one’s field of vision changes, and so perhaps what one cannot see from one standpoint can be seen from another. And so the key to your horizon is your standpoint. A horizon has a subjective pole and an objective pole, and as the subjective pole changes so too does the horizon.

There is a metaphorical use of the term ‘horizon’ that has occurred in phenomenological and existential philosophy, and Lonergan has adopted this use of the term from these thinkers. In this metaphorical sense, a horizon is the limit of what one *knows* and *is interested in*. What lies beyond the horizon is not only what one does not know but what one has no desire to know and what you don’t even know exists to be known. There can be much within your horizon that you don’t know but want to know. I may have no knowledge of differential calculus but I may want to learn it, and if that is the case it is within my horizon, within my field of interest. But beyond my horizon is the great realm of what I don’t even care about knowing, of what I pay no attention to, of what if it is called to my attention I simply disregard.

Horizons can be related in different ways. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, musicians, artists, teachers, ministers of religion have different horizons, but they may be complementary horizons. Each recognizes the others, and acknowledges that different complementary horizons are essential for the well-being of the social order. Again, I may not know anything about calculus,

but if I get interested and take a course, I am expanding my horizon, and in this case my horizon before I learned calculus and my horizon after I learned calculus are related genetically. But conversion entails a radical shift in horizon. Conversion is not learning, like learning calculus. Conversion is the kind of movement into a new horizon that entails an about-face. It comes out of the old by repudiating characteristic features of the old. It begins a new sequence of events in one's life that set one's life on a radically different course. This type of relation between horizons Lonergan calls dialectical.

The genetic relation involved, for instance, in learning calculus is a development, but it usually does not entail a conversion. Conversion is also a development, but it entails the contradictory relations of moving from the false to the true, from the evil to the good. It is an about-face.

Now it is possible, of course, that an opposite kind of about-face can take place in one's living, a shift to a new sequence of events that cannot be called a conversion but rather a breakdown. The new sequence limits rather than expands one's horizon, closes one's mind or heart to dimensions of reality, blinds one to the relevance of certain further questions. What makes the difference?

Basically, conversion is a shift of one's fundamental orientation, an about-face, from self-absorption or self-enclosure to self-transcendence in a particular domain of one's operations as a human being. For the most part and usually the shift, the about-face that we are talking about, is in fact a process. It usually takes place not all at once but in steps. It has some notably dramatic moments for some, but for most of us it is a continual, slow, and unobtrusive movement beyond the isolation of the subject, beyond a constantly self-referential horizon, to self-transcendence. And for almost all of us it has to be continually renewed.

3 Conversion as Religious, Moral, Intellectual, and Psychic

Conversion for Lonergan takes three forms, the same three forms as are mentioned in the title of the lecture on self-transcendence: intellectual, moral, and religious. From a causal point of view, he says, the first and most basic form is what he calls religious conversion, the second is moral conversion, and the third is intellectual conversion. Usually, though not always, they will occur in one's life in this order. I have suggested that we may add to these three what I have called a psychic dimension of conversion that I think can occur at any point in one's life, and I'm happy to say that Lonergan indicated his own fundamental agreement with this suggestion. So I will be talking for the remainder of this lecture about religious conversion, moral conversion, intellectual conversion, and psychic conversion.

Again, conversion is a process. Almost always it occurs in incremental steps. Thus, what Lonergan calls religious conversion is not mystical prayer. It is a process of ever deepening withdrawal from ignoring the realm of transcendence in which God is known and loved, and of ever deeper entrance into that realm. It may lead one to mystical prayer, but again it may not.

Again, moral conversion is not moral perfection, but it is a process of withdrawal from self-enclosure and of movement to self-transcendence in one's decisions. Slowly and over time, it may approach consistent moral integrity; but on the other hand it may be a continual matter of picking oneself up and starting over. Consistent moral integrity entails an ever greater humility regarding one's potential or actual moral shortcomings.

The term 'intellectual conversion' has several meanings. Lonergan's usual meaning has to do with an explicit philosophical position, but there are also a couple of forms of intellectual conversion that are realized when I judge and decide that I cannot continue to run away from asking questions, because it is only by raising and answering questions that I will arrive at truth. Even in its philosophic form, intellectual conversion is not the firm and quiet possession of a correct philosophy, but the effort to reach cognitive integrity in one's intellectual positions.

Psychic conversion, finally, does not mean affective self-fulfillment. It is a matter of establishing the connections in consciousness between one's waking orientation as a cognitive, moral, and religious being and the underlying movement of life with its affective and imaginal components. The psyche is the flow of sensations, memories, images, affects, conations, spontaneous intersubjective responses, and so on, that accompany our intellectual and moral activities. If you are asking a question, there is an affective dimension to that experience, not just an intellectual component. If you arrive at a satisfactory answer to your question, there is a change in you that is not only intellectual but also affective; you feel differently from the way you felt while you were confused and asking questions. There are factors, however, in our modern cultures that can easily lead us to lose touch with this psychic flow, with the pulsing flow of life, the movement of life. Psychic conversion re-establishes that connection. And the reason for establishing or re-establishing that connection, in terms of authenticity, is that affective self-transcendence is frequently required if we are going to be self-transcendent in the intellectual, moral, and religious dimensions of our living.

So if we are going to understand what Lonergan means by conversion, we are going to have to ask several questions: What is religious self-transcendence? What characterizes moral self-transcendence? What is the meaning of cognitional or intellectual self-transcendence? And what is affective self-transcendence?

4 Conversion *From* and Conversion *To*

The basis of distinguishing the varieties of conversion lies in what Lonergan calls the different levels of consciousness: experience, understanding, judgment, decision, love. Intellectual conversion has something to do with understanding and judgment, moral conversion with decision, religious conversion with love, and psychic conversion with the empirical consciousness that penetrates all these other dimensions and that is changed as we move from one level to another.

One of the best ways of answering these questions is to begin by asking what one is converted *from* in each of these dimensions. That is, if self-transcendence is the goal, the end point, the point *to* which one moves through conversion, there must be a starting point, a point *from* which one starts. In general, if self-transcendence is the goal of the process, then the starting point, that *from* which one is converted so as to move toward self-transcendence, must be some form or degree of 'self-absorption' or 'self-enclosure.'

Let's start with religious conversion. For many people today, and with good reason, the word 'religion' has a negative connotation. One of the great students of the world's religions in the past century, a person whose work Lonergan respected and who respected Lonergan's work, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, argued that the centrality of the word 'religion' is a nineteenth-century introduction, and he has made a fervent plea that we replace the term 'religion' with the term 'faith' in a great deal of our language. That suggestion is helpful for understanding what Lonergan is really getting at when he speaks of religious conversion. For Lonergan, faith is the eye of religious love. It is the knowledge that is born of being in love in an unrestricted fashion, and that being in love in an unrestricted fashion is the genuine meaning, the only genuine meaning, of the term 'religion.' What Lonergan calls religious conversion, then, is a process that frees one from the self-enclosure that Lonergan calls radical lovelessness. God is love, our scriptures tell us, and whoever abides in love abides in God, whether one acknowledges this or not. This process, more often than not, is mediated by participation in some religious community. But profound religious inauthenticity can also be mediated by participation in a religious community. And so religious conversion or religious authenticity is not guaranteed by belonging to a religious community. Religious authenticity is rather the self-transcendence of unqualified loving, and that self-transcendence is possible only because one has been consciously on the receiving end of God's unqualified love, whether one acknowledges this as coming from God or not. Religious conversion is the twofold process of being loved unconditionally and responding to that radical gift by cooperating in the process whereby one's own loving becomes unconditional.

I'm going to suggest that this relationship between being loved and loving in return that is the heart of the process of what Lonergan calls religious conversion is also the key to understanding the other dimensions of conversion. That's why I'm beginning with religious conversion.

Religious conversion, Lonergan says, leads to moral conversion, and he defines moral conversion as the transformation of the criteria of one's decisions from satisfactions to values. He places the differential between satisfactions and values in self-transcendence. But what propels one beyond taking satisfaction as the criterion of one's decisions to accepting value as the criterion, if it is not that one is being freed from self-absorption, radical lovelessness or self-enclosure, into self-transcendence?

Radical lovelessness also distorts one's cognitional performance, in that it closes or narrows the horizon, the range of one's interests and concerns, the range of what one will even ask questions about in the first place. Intellectual conversion in its basic form will open that horizon of questions. It will transform one's cognitional life so that questions regarding meaning and truth are pursued for their own sake, and not for utilitarian and narrowly pragmatic purposes. Lonergan uses terms such as 'detached' and 'unrestricted' to refer to this attitude. But what moves one beyond a utilitarian and purely pragmatic intellectual life, which after all is self-absorbed, self-enclosed, self-referential, except the freedom from self-absorption that comes from a radical and unconditional falling in love, genuine religious conversion?

In its philosophical form, intellectual conversion will effect a shift in the criterion of truth, just as moral conversion has effected a shift in the criterion of decisions. The shift in the criterion of truth will be from regarding knowledge along the analogy of taking a really good look at what is already out there now to regarding knowledge as a matter of raising and answering questions. In the order of knowledge of fact, there are two kinds of questions: questions such as 'What is it?' addressed to the data of experience, and questions such as 'Is that really so?' addressed to the formulation of one's answer to the first question. And what is the difference? The 'what is it' questions cannot be answered 'yes' or 'no,' while the 'is that really

so' questions can. In the latter case, the answer 'yes' or 'no' is the judgment in which the real is known.

Finally, with affective self-transcendence we are back to the issue of radical lovelessness, but now with a further purpose, namely, to gain familiarity with the twists and turns of our psychic, affective life, so that we may become ever more familiar with the inclinations of affectivity that lead to self-transcendence and those that, however genuine they may appear, propel us back into self-absorption in one way or another. It is in this sense of opening communication between our conscious orientation and the underlying neural and psychic manifolds that I have spoken of a psychic conversion. And let me add that many years after I first suggested the notion of psychic conversion as a way of talking about gaining this familiarity, I have become convinced that many of the twists and turns that lead away from self-transcendence are matters of the infected mimesis that is spoken of in the work of René Girard, and so I would connect my thinking about psychic conversion very closely with Girard's work.

Let me expand a bit on each of the starting points, the points *from* which, and the end points, the points *to* which, in the different forms of conversion.

5 Religious Conversion *From* and *To*

I indicated that, in general terms, the point *from* which religious conversion moves us, converts us, Lonergan calls a radical lovelessness. God is love, and so being without God is being without love, and conversely being without love is being without God. Love takes the three forms of the love of intimacy that tends to become love in the family, love in the human community, and the love of God. These three, while distinct, are not separate, and in fact the strength and solidity of the first two forms of love (love in the family and love in the community) are in direct proportion to the extent to which what Lonergan calls being in love with God is operative in one's living. But one can be in love with God without knowing that one is in love with God, and conversely one can belong to a religious community and use all kinds of God language without being in love

with God. Being in love with God is being in love without qualifications, reservations, hesitations, limitations. One who is in this state may or may not realize that he or she is in such a state, and even more one may not realize that being in this state is in fact being in love with God. In this sense, there are many people who are very close to God who don't know it. Being in love is a conscious dynamic state that governs everything in their lives, but that state can be conscious without being known.

It may become known in a couple of ways, but for our purposes it is probably enough to say that for most people the conscious dynamic state of being in love with God becomes known as such because of a word that comes from God. There has been the revelation of God's love that occurs in Israel and especially in the mission of the divine Son in the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth. Genuine Christian conversion is conversion to the Word made flesh as the revelation of divine love. But the gift of divine love is prior to the word about the gift. For Christians it is understood as the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the gift of the Holy Spirit is offered to all men and women at every time and place and is responded to positively by many of the same people, independently of whether the word of revelation has ever been available to them. Moreover, the faith that is the knowledge born of religious love has flowed from the gift and has become stronger as the gift has been accepted. That faith is not the same thing as explicit belief in the doctrines of the Christian community. It is prior to those beliefs, and it is present in the lives of many who have never been educated in those beliefs. Lonergan would express that universalist faith in something like the following terms (and this is not a direct quotation, but is based on the section 'Faith' in his chapter on religion in *Method in Theology* at 116-18). As I read this set of statements, I invite you to sense what a difference they make in the human world as they come to be shared by many. They express the movement *from* lovelessness *to* being in love.

All other values are placed in the light and the shadow of transcendent value, which is supreme and incomparable and which links itself to all other values to transform, magnify,

and glorify them. Thus the originating value is not human intelligence and responsibility but divine light and love, and the terminal value is not the human good we can bring about but the whole universe. Human development is not limited to skills and virtues but extends to holiness. The power of God's love brings forth a new energy and efficacy in all goodness. The limit of human expectation ceases to be the grave. The world is the fruit of God's self-transcendence, the expression and manifestation of God's benevolence and beneficence, God's glory. God made us in the divine image, and so our authenticity consists in being like God, origins of value in true love. In particular, God calls us to the higher authenticity that overcomes evil with good. We can do this only because faith, the knowledge born of religious love, places human efforts in a friendly universe, revealing an ultimate significance in human achievement and strengthening new undertakings with confidence. That higher authenticity that overcomes evil with good enters with religious faith, unwavering hope, and self-sacrificing charity into a world that inflicts on individuals the social, economic, and psychological pressures that for human frailty amount to determinism; a world that multiplies and heaps up the abuses and absurdities that breed resentment, hatred, anger, violence; a world that houses people in ideological prisons; a world that dooms people to the vast pressures of social decay. The gift of God's love awakens a knowledge of our sinfulness and of our real guilt, a firm purpose of amendment of our ways, and a confidence that the one who bestowed the gift of love is, despite our sinfulness and unworthiness, everlasting mercy and forgiveness.

It is only to the extent that the gift of God's love has been received and accepted into one's living, whether simply consciously or also knowingly, that the radical lovelessness to which we are consigned without the gift of love is definitively removed or broken. And it is precisely a *gift*. It is given to us without any previous cause, that is, independently of anything we have known, or decided, or done. 'It is,' writes Lonergan, 'as if a room were filled with music though one can have no sure knowledge of its source. There is in the world, as it were, a charged field of love

and meaning; here and there it reaches a notable intensity; but it is ever unobtrusive, hidden, inviting each of us to join. And join we must if we are to perceive it, for our perceiving is through our own loving.³

Lovelessness in general Lonergan in one place calls, quite simply, ‘the isolation of the individual.’⁴ Love establishes human consciousness, the consciousness of the individual, precisely as interpersonal. Those whom you love are constitutive of your self-presence. Your very conscious being is a being in love. You are no longer alone. What breaks the isolation of the individual is falling in love and being in love. If you are really in love, the one with whom you are in love enters into the very constitution of your consciousness, even if you are not physically together with that person. Your very self-presence is a ‘being-with.’ And if you are in love in an unqualified fashion, you are, whether you know it or not, in love with God, who dwells in you through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is religious conversion that establishes us precisely as being in love without reservations, qualifications, conditions, hesitations. And that particular form and intensity of being in love Lonergan sets over against, not just any lack of love, but a *radical* lovelessness, a state in which one is persuaded that, in the last analysis and even if one has human companionship, one is finally alone in this universe, with no ultimate connection. *Radical* lovelessness is probably a constant temptation even for the greatest saints, who are tempted especially through the trials and sufferings that they must endure to surrender the desire to live in union with God. But surrendering that desire is surrendering, in the last analysis, to radical lovelessness.

Before I move on to the other dimensions of self-transcendence, let me make a few observations on what Lonergan says about religious self-transcendence in the paper ‘Self-transcendence: Intellectual, Moral, Religious.’ As is obvious from the title of the paper, he

3 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 290.

4 Ibid. 289.

discusses religious self-transcendence and religious conversion not before but after the discussions of intellectual and moral self-transcendence. Those discussions make obvious, if you want, our *capacity* for self-transcendence, which is reflected in our questions: questions for intelligence (What is it?), for reflection (Is it so?) and for deliberation (What is to be done? Is this truly or only apparently good?). But being in love is what provides the *reality* of self-transcendence. It is what enables us to be consistent even in the actualization of our capacity for self-transcendence in the process of raising and answering questions. Religious self-transcendence is the most complete instance of being in love. And Lonergan indicates that while he is using Christian language to talk about this religious self-transcendence, it has its parallels in Islam, Zoroastrian Mazdaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and more likely in other religious traditions as well. ‘... religious love,’ he writes there, ‘is the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality, of our questions for intelligence, for reflection, for deliberation. It is a fulfilment that brings a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion. That fulfilment brings a radical peace, the peace that the world cannot give. That fulfilment bears fruit in a love of one’s neighbor that strives mightily to bring about the kingdom of God on this earth. On the other hand, the absence of that fulfilment opens the way to the trivialization of human life stemming from the ruthless exercise of power, to despair about human welfare springing from the conviction that the universe is absurd.’ Nor, he wisely adds there, are we to give way to a relentless process of introspection in order to ascertain whether we really love God. It is by their fruits that you will know them, our scriptures tell us.

From a theological point of view, the gift itself of such love is what Christian theology calls the gift, the mission, of the Holy Spirit. In Lonergan’s theology, as Frederick Crowe has made very clear, the mission of the Holy Spirit is universal. It precedes the mission of the Son in the Incarnation of the divine Word in Jesus. The outer word that announces the gift is a function radically of divine revelation, and especially of the revelation that occurs in the very unfolding of the human knowledge of Jesus. Many people, perhaps most, would never *know* the gift that has

been given them were it not for the outer word of divine revelation in the incarnation of the divine *Logos*.

6 Moral Conversion *From and To*

Next, the point *from* which moral conversion moves us, converts us, is described by Lonergan in some notes he wrote in 1963 in the following terms, as he was working these things out more precisely: ‘The *terminus a quo* [the point from which] of moral conversion is myself as I am living, thinking, and judging, where my intended end is the very subject of the actuation, namely, myself. I am that for the sake of which I myself am perfected. My perfection is for the sake of me. My food is for the sake of me. My delight in eating is for the sake of me. My studies are for the sake of me. My good works are for the sake of merit, and merit is for the sake of rewards, and rewards are for the sake of me. If it is for the sake of me, there is no need to inquire further. I have a sufficient and efficacious motive for acting. Perhaps it may be added that an ulterior end for the operator cannot be given. The good is the desirable; for it to be able to be desired, it has to conform to appetite; where it conforms to my appetite, it conforms to me. To assign any other end is hypocrisy, delusion, vain speculation. The ultimate end is *my* happiness. Other things are chosen as means to attain this end.’ Again, we are speaking of a dimension of self-enclosure, self-absorption: me, me, me. This can be subtle, and often is, but it can also be quite obvious.

In the terms of the book *Insight*, the point *from* which one is moved in moral conversion is the bias of the egoist (called by Lonergan ‘individual bias’) and the bias of one’s own group or social class (called ‘group bias’ or, elsewhere, ‘group egoism’). In the terms of the book *Method in Theology* the point *from* which one is moved in moral conversion is a state in which my own satisfaction is the criterion of my decisions and choices.

In the 1963 notes, the term *to* which moral conversion moves one is conformity with our ‘natural appetite’ or *natural desire*. This is a very important theme. We are by nature oriented to being reasonable and responsible human beings. That is the meaning of natural law. The demand

is innate. The criteria are innate. We know when our questions are answered, and when they are not, including our moral questions: Is this worthwhile? What am I to do? and so on. There is a built-in criterion for answering those questions. And so there is such a thing as ‘good in an absolute fashion, what is good by reason of itself, *value*,’ and this is the natural objective of human deliberation. The moral problem, then, is that we allow other desires, many of them elicited rather than natural, to interfere with the natural desire of the human being for what is truly good. That natural desire manifests itself when we are confronted with a possible course of action and ask the question, ‘Is this really good or only apparently good?’ There is built into our own conscious dynamism the criterion that enables us to answer that question. Thus the movement involved in moral conversion is a movement away from self-referential criteria for one’s actions (where ‘self-referential’ may refer simply to oneself or to one’s group) to the question, ‘Is this really good or is it only apparently good?’

In his later writing about moral conversion, for example in *Method in Theology* (1972), Lonergan will propose a shorthand way of speaking about moral conversion, namely, the shift in the criterion of one’s decisions and actions *from satisfactions to values*. But that definition can be ambiguous. The fulfilment of the natural desire to know, for instance, or of the natural desire for what is truly good, can also be very satisfying. These and a number of other satisfactions are also genuine values. The issue is the orientation, the criterion, the basic and total horizon within which one makes one’s decisions, the self-constituting option to be a certain type of person. Is it all just for *me*? Is it all for my social class, my political party, my race, my gender? Or is it all for a set of goals that transcend *me* and all narrow group interests, even if these goals are attained only *by me*, that is to say, only by my being faithful to the demands of my own natural desire for meaning, for truth, and for what is genuinely good.

‘Value,’ then, in this later expression of what is meant by moral conversion, means what is truly good, where ‘what is truly good’ is measured by the degree of self-transcendence to which it carries one. The basic difference is put as follows in ‘Self-transcendence’: ‘There are questions for deliberation, and they are of two kinds. There are the self-regarding questions that

merely ask what is in it for me or for this or that group of which I am a part. There are the moral questions that ask what is worthwhile, what is truly and not merely apparently good.'

That is the basic point about moral conversion. But if you read the section in 'Self-transcendence' on moral self-transcendence, you will find things becoming more complicated than this. It is not that the basic criterion of self-transcendence is called into question. It is that our choices are more often than not made in contexts that themselves transcend us, that our personal responsibility also somehow belongs in a context of collective responsibility. There is a political ideology of selfishness represented, for instance, in the works of Ayn Rand that exhibit the social complexity of the issue. Margaret Thatcher is reported to have said on at least one occasion, 'There is no such thing as society. There are only individuals.' By implication she is saying that the only responsibility one need worry about is one's own moral responsibility for one's own life. Lonergan's section in 'Self-transcendence' begins with the description of a photograph in a book by Roger Poole entitled *Toward Deep Subjectivity*. The photograph 'is of two benches set at right angles in a park in the Czech city of Prague. On one of the benches are seated three Russian soldiers, and they are looking straight ahead. One surmises that they are avoiding the eyes of the two Czech civilians, a young man and a young woman, seated on the bench at right angles to theirs, and looking right at them.' The Russian soldiers, of course, are part of an occupying army, and the photograph 'sets forth in the objective world the subjective reality of two moral judgments: the moral judgment of the Czechs whose gaze amounts to the question, What right have you to be here? and the moral acquiescence of the Russians who do not care to look the Czechs in the eye.' There is an ethical space that is social, and the basic meaning of 'society,' *pace* Lady Thatcher, is precisely that ethical space. Lonergan's analysis of the photograph is quite instructive, and its point is that the criterion of value over satisfaction is more often than not a criterion that functions in a world where others will be profoundly affected by the decisions we make and where we are all responsible together for the world we are making.

How do we get at this issue of collective responsibility for the ethical space in which we live? I have a suggestion at least for beginning to answer this question.

In line with the criterion of self-transcendence as what makes the difference between satisfaction and value, Lonergan proposes in *Method in Theology* a scale of values, and that scale, I have argued, provides the basis for working out a notion of collective responsibility, a notion that I think must be included in any account of moral conversion. Lonergan never tells us where he gets the scale, nor does he tell us what the criterion of the scale is. But I am convinced that the basis or ground of the scale is the levels of consciousness, which we will see in more detail in a moment, and that the criterion of the scale is precisely the self-transcendence that we are talking about. At any rate, what he says about the scale of values is the following:

Not only do feelings respond to values. They do so in accord with some scale of preference. So we may distinguish vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious values in an ascending order. Vital values, such as health and strength, grace and vigor, normally are preferred to avoiding the work, privations, pains involved in acquiring, maintaining, restoring them. Social values, such as the good of order which conditions the vital values of the whole community, have to be preferred to the vital values of individual members of the community. Cultural values do not exist without the underpinning of vital and social values, but none the less they rank higher. Not on bread alone doth man live. Over and above mere living and operating, men have to find a meaning and value in their living and operating. It is the function of culture to discover, express, validate, criticize, correct, develop, improve such meaning and value. Personal value is the person in his self-transcendence, as loving and being loved, as originator of values in himself and in his milieu, as an inspiration and invitation to others to do likewise. Religious values, finally, are at the heart of the meaning and value of man's living and man's world ...

Ultimately, in my view, moral conversion leads one to an ever deeper fidelity to the full dimensions of the scale of values, to aligning one's own scale of values to this normative scale. This can be argued, I believe, in terms of the relations among the various levels in the scale.

Thus, from below, the more basic levels are essential for the functioning of the more complex levels. People cannot contribute to the social good if they are themselves without the basic necessities of life, vital values. A smoothly functioning social order is essential for the pursuit of the cultural values, the refinement of the meanings and values that constitute a society's self-understanding. Persons emerge into their own authenticity within the framework of cultural values. And persons are open to the fulfilment of their conscious intentionality that comes from the gift of God's love.

Also from below, problems that emerge at the more basic levels can often be met only by changes at the higher or more complex levels. Thus, the global maldistribution of vital goods can be offset only by massive technological, economic, and political restructurings at the level of social values. But these are impossible without a transformed set of meanings and values at the level of culture. And only persons of integrity will be willing to pursue these meanings and values and accept their implications for social structures. But personal integrity depends for its consistency on the gift of God's grace.

From above, then, the gift of God's grace is required for sustained personal authenticity. Persons of integrity are required for the cosmopolitan collaboration that takes responsibility for cultural values. Genuine cultural values, measured by the transcendental intentions of the intelligible, the true, the good, the beautiful, are required for a just social order, and a just social order is required for the equitable distribution of vital goods.

I'm proposing, then, that Lonergan's category of moral conversion includes conversion to collective responsibility and that the scale of values enables us to get some idea of what that might require.

7 Intellectual Conversion *From and To*

I think the term 'intellectual conversion' has at least three meanings, and I will move from the simplest meaning to the most complex. The first and simplest meaning is conversion from what

Lonergan calls the general bias of common sense against the intellectual integrity that raises and pursues all further relevant questions. The second is the awareness in practice but not yet thematized that the true is what is known in true judgments and that knowledge of the true is knowledge of being, of what is. When Lonergan says, ‘The church reached intellectual conversion at the Council of Nicea,’ this is what he meant. When Athanasius, in the wake of the Council of Nicea, stated that ‘homoousion,’ ‘consubstantial,’ means ‘the same things are said of the Son as are said of the Father, except that the Father is the Father and the Son is the Son,’ he was making a statement about true judgments as the carriers of a knowledge of what is. But this form of intellectual conversion did not require an explicit philosophical shift from other criteria, and the philosophical shift is what Lonergan usually, in fact almost always, means by ‘intellectual conversion.’ Our spontaneous inclination is to think that the real is what is already out there now and that it is known by taking a really good look. Intellectual conversion in its philosophic form is a shift *from* that sort of inclination *to* the position that knowing is a matter of raising and answering questions for intelligence (what is it?) and for reflection (is that so?) and that the real is known only in the true judgments that issue from the second question, the question, is it so?

Another way of stating the full, philosophic meaning of intellectual conversion is to put it in the form: Intellectual conversion in its philosophic form is achieving the secure knowledge that human knowledge is the correct understanding of experienced data, and so that it involves three levels of consciousness: experience or presentations, understanding, and judgment. These three levels are linked together by questions. Questions for intelligence move consciousness from the presentation of data to understanding, conceptualization, and formulation, from level 1 to level 2. Questions for reflection raise consciousness from understanding to judgment, from level 2 to level 3. The usual meaning of ‘intellectual conversion’ for Lonergan is this philosophic meaning, where one says ‘I am a knower,’ where by knowing one means the composite structure of experience, understanding, and judgment, where what is known is being, and where objectivity is a matter, not of taking a good look at the already out there now, but of raising and

answering the relevant questions. In this sense, as Lonergan states in *Method in Theology*, objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.

8 A Word about Psychic Conversion

I wish to conclude with a word about what I have called psychic conversion. It is not really part of Lonergan's own position on conversion, except to the extent that he did indicate that he was in basic agreement with me about the point. But I think a comment should be made about it to round out the position on conversion.

We may get at what psychic conversion is all about rather quickly if we consider the following statement from *The Triune God: Systematics*: 'we are conscious in two ways: in one way, through our sensibility, we undergo rather passively what we sense and imagine, our desires and fears, our delights and sorrows, our joys and sadness; in another way, through our intellectuality, we are more active when we consciously inquire in order to understand, understand in order to utter a word, weigh evidence in order to judge, deliberate in order to choose, and exercise our will in order to act.' The second way of being conscious is what Lonergan's work is all about, including his work on conversion, authenticity, and self-transcendence: we consciously inquire about the data of experience in order to understand; when we understand we utter a word that expresses our understanding; we weigh evidence in order to judge whether we have understood correctly; on the basis of our grasp of evidence we judge; we raise questions for deliberation; we make decisions on the basis of our grasp of evidence for values; our decisions lead to our actions. Now the point to psychic conversion may be grasped if we reflect that the first way of being conscious, the sensitive stream of our consciousness, is being changed by the very performance of these intentional operations. Moreover, obstacles to performing the intentional operations can arise from the sensitive stream of consciousness itself, from a psychic resistance to raising relevant questions: from our sensations, images, emotions, desires, fears, joys, sadness, as well as from the individual, group, and general biases that are

addressed by moral and intellectual conversion. Lonergan himself also speaks of a dramatic bias that is directly connected to this sensitive stream. Psychic conversion is establishing the connection between the two ways of being conscious, a connection that is easily lost and difficult to recover once it has been lost. Over the years I have become convinced that the mimetic theory of René Girard is the most helpful guide to the distortions that occur in sensitive consciousness itself and the subsequent distortions that occur at the levels of understanding, judgment, and decision. But that is the topic for another lecture, and so I will close at this point.