

SUBJECT, SCRIPTURE, AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION:
HOW AUTHENTIC (CONVERTED) SUBJECTIVITY AUTHORIZES ALLEGORICAL,
TROPOLOGICAL, AND ANAGOGICAL INTERPRETATION

Joseph Gordon
Lonergan on the Edge
September 21, 2012

Introduction

As New Testament scholar Stephen Fowl notes, the past twenty years have witnessed a veritable explosion of historical and constructive studies on the theological interpretation of Scripture.¹ These efforts stem, in part, from an ecumenical groundswell of interest within both academic and ecclesial contexts in drawing on the riches of the Christian past in order to aid the task of reuniting scriptural exegesis and theology—for too long drawn asunder in modern approaches to the Bible.² While there is undoubtedly a great deal on offer in these new studies, there is one question that lurks in the background of each: What is it precisely that authorizes normative theological interpretations of Scripture? To put it another way, what are the criteria for adjudicating between appropriate, normative, and true theological interpretations of Scripture and illegitimate, aberrant, and false ones? In what follows, I will attempt to move towards an answer to the question by exploring the role of the human subject, the theological interpreter herself, in theological interpretation. The argument will unfold in three main steps: 1.) we will examine Lonergan's account of subjectivity, focusing on his discussions of meaning,

¹ See Stephen E. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, Cascade Companions (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), ix. A comprehensive bibliography for such studies would be enormous. Especially notable recent publishing endeavors include the *Journal of Theological Interpretation* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007-); commentary series such as *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010-), *The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006-), *The Church's Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003-), the *Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005-), the *Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008-); and theological dictionaries including *The Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), and *The Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald McKim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

² For historical overviews of the separation between biblical studies and theological reflection, see Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2008), 17-62; and David Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), *passim*.

epistemology, interpretation, and conversion.³ 2.) we will then trace out the contours of the judgment of the ontological and epistemological priority of Christ, and the relationship between this theological judgment and the role of Scripture.⁴ 3.) Finally, we will explore the significance and implications of the converted subject's Christocentric horizon—and its attendant bibliology—for her interpretation of Scripture.⁵

The Priority of Authentic Subjectivity

The Christian interpreter affirms that Jesus Christ is indeed “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), the one “in whom all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). Christ's existence, as fully God, is that which is absolutely *priora quoad se* within both created and uncreated reality. Nevertheless, creaturely access to that which is *priora quoad se* is always mediated by that which is *priora quoad nos*, namely, changing and imperfect human subjectivity. Prior to discussing the priority of Christ for the interpretation of Scripture, then, we must first discuss the priority of our own subjectivity and the very possibility of human knowing itself. “In the world mediated by meaning and motivated by value,” Bernard Lonergan writes in *Method in Theology*, “objectivity is simply the consequence of authentic subjectivity, of genuine attention, genuine intelligence, genuine reasonableness, genuine responsibility.”⁶ These four attributes constitute

³ Though we cannot escape our finite subjectivity, the possibility of knowledge, even interpretive knowledge, is real. In conversion to Christ, the Holy Spirit effects a change in the subject which reorients the subject's horizon of meaning towards, around, and within the truth of Christ revealed to the subject via the Holy Spirit. Conversion has profound effects on our subjectivity, our knowing, and thus our interpretation.

⁴ The convert receives as truth that Christ is the exegete of God the Father (John 1:18) the one in whom the fullness of God, and thus Truth, was pleased to dwell (Col 2:9). Yet in conversion, we also receive the scriptures themselves as inextricably bound to the Truth of Christ.

⁵ We will examine the fourfold sense of Scripture, with reference to the work of Henri de Lubac, in order to show how allegorical, tropological, and anagogical interpretations are authentic interpretive movements when they inhere in and/or are expressed by an authentic subject, one who is unrestrictedly in love with God, through being conformed to the image and likeness of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

⁶ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 265. For more on meaning, see *ibid.*, 57-100.

the conditions of authentic subjectivity, and as imperatives they summarize Lonergan's transcendental method.⁷ In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan forces his readers to face squarely the fact that all of our knowledge of and expression of theological truth is inescapably filtered through our own subjectivity.⁸

Though this is the case, Lonergan argues that we need not despair. The admission of our inescapable subjectivity does not require the concomitant judgments of epistemological, moral, or religious relativism. We can and do understand and judge correctly on a daily basis, and through advertence to the subjective operations of our experience, intelligence, judgment, and decision, we can come to recognize the standards of authenticity in any field of inquiry.⁹ In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan applies the considerations of his transcendental method to the task of theology. The theologian has the task of attending to specific data, with specific questions, conceptions and judgments, so that she can then mediate the truth of her religion to

⁷ See *ibid.*, 25: Transcendental method "is a heightening of consciousness that brings to light our conscious and intentional operations and thereby leads to the answers to three basic questions. What am I doing when I am knowing? Why is doing that knowing? What do I know when I do it? The first answer is a cognitional theory. The second is an epistemology. The third is a metaphysics where, however, the metaphysics is transcendental, an integration of heuristic structures, and not some categorical speculation that reveals that all is water, or matter, or spirit, or process, or what have you." Though Lonergan's transcendental method has been reproached for being everything from fideist to rationalist (See Neil Ormerod, *Meaning, Method, and Revelation* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 2000), 211-241) it serves a fundamentally important purpose, functioning "to advert to the fact that theologies are produced by theologians, that theologians have minds and use them, that their doing so should not be ignored or passed over but explicitly acknowledged in itself and in its implications" (Lonergan, *Method*, 25).

⁸ Modern hermeneutic theory and its postmodern progeny have likewise drawn attention to the perspectival nature of interpretation. As Merold Westphal puts it, "we are always somewhere (socially, culturally, historically, linguistically) and never nowhere when we interpret." Merold Westphal, *Whose Community, Which Interpretation: Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 35. Unlike Westphal, and the hermeneuticians upon whom he draws, Lonergan is prepared to accept a sort of chastened metaphysics. Lonergan would argue that because we can make true judgments about proportionate being we can have some sort of metaphysics. See chs. 14 and 15 of Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding*, vol. 3 in *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

⁹ If one thoroughly grasps what it is to understand, Lonergan argues in *Insight*, then she will possess a firm foundation for coming to understand all truths. "Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding." Lonergan, *Insight*, 22.

her cultural context.¹⁰ For Lonergan, “interpretation” involves three basic exegetical operations: 1) understanding the text, 2) judging the correctness of one’s interpretation, and 3) stating one’s interpretation.¹¹ For our purposes, it is only necessary to treat the components of the first two operations—understanding the text and judging the correctness of one’s understanding.

Understanding the text involves four main aspects: 1) understanding the object to which the text refers, 2) understanding the words employed in the text, 3) understanding the author, and 4) understanding one’s self.¹² The first aspect explores answers to the following questions: What is the reality to which the text refers? What are the objects, real or imagined, which the author is describing, explaining, expressing, etc.? The interpreter can only come to understand the object(s) of a text through analogy. Her understanding of analogous objects will make possible her understanding of the object of the text in question.¹³ The second aspect involves the interpreter in the quest to understand the circumstances of the author’s communication and the linguistic, grammatical, and stylistic means through which the object is communicated.¹⁴ The third aspect, understanding the author, involves the interpreter in the process of seeking to understand the author’s own context and development as evidenced in the work under

¹⁰ “A Theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix.” *Ibid.*, xi. For Lonergan, theology has both a mediated and mediating phase. In the mediated phase, the theologian considers the past, exploring Scripture and Tradition and seeking to understand each within its own historical contexts. Lonergan treats this phase with reference to the functional specialties of research, interpretation, history, and dialectics. See *Method*, 149-266. In the mediating phase of theology the theologian brings her theological judgments about what has been the case, and what is the case, to bear upon her contemporary situation. See his discussion of the functional specialties of foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications in *ibid.*, 267-368.

¹¹ *Method*, 155.

¹² *Ibid.* These aspects are not to be understood as a step-by-step checklist of successive operations the interpreter undergoes; they are connected organically and reciprocally as all knowledge is. The interpreter performs each of these intentionally in order to develop them as habits, and then they become second nature. They fold into one another as the interpreter cycles through countless hermeneutical circles of part and whole.

¹³ The more the theologian understands, the better, and not vice versa. Note Lonergan’s comments on the “Principle of the Empty Head” in *Method*, 157.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 158-159.

consideration.¹⁵ Finally, the interpreter must understand herself as a knower and interpreter, decider, and lover.¹⁶ Through attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility regarding the objects, contexts, and authors of texts, and ultimately through attentiveness to her own experience, understanding, reasonableness, and responsibility, the interpreter can “come within understanding distance” of the text.

The interpreter cycles through each of these four aspects over and over again, testing her judgments against her continued examination of the data of the text, against previous understandings of the data of the text, and against previous judgments concerning the text’s meaning.¹⁷ Interpretation is thus an ongoing task, one upon which the interpreter could spend multiple lifetimes, and its fruits are the probable, highly probable, and in some respects certain judgments which concern the objects, contexts, and authors of specific texts.¹⁸ For Lonergan, the possibility of objectivity in any interpretation of Scripture—whether historical or theological—will depend upon the subjective authenticity of the interpreter. Even if the reader remains untroubled by this assumption, however, we still face a significant problem: authentic human subjectivity only exists in fits and starts, hampered as it is by our own finitude and biases. We are not always attentive, are frequently unintelligent, are often unreasonable, and fail in our responsibility. But change and growth are possible, and Lonergan discusses these possibilities

¹⁵ Ibid., 160-161.

¹⁶ He stresses that the author “has to be critical not merely of her author but also of the tradition that has formed her own mind.” Ibid., 162.

¹⁷ As Lonergan summarizes, “As one learns, one discovers more and more the questions that concerned the author, the issues that confronted him, the problems he was trying to solve, the material and methodical resources at his disposal for solving them. So one comes to set aside one’s own initial interests and concerns, to share those of the author, to reconstruct the context of his thought and speech.” Ibid., 163. From this process, the interpreter seeks to discern whether or not her interpretations are “invulnerable, whether or not they meet all relevant questions so that there are no further questions that can lead to further insights and so complement, qualify, correct the insights already possessed.” See *ibid.*, 162.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 165.

under the notions of conversion and orientation.¹⁹ Lonergan describes three types of conversion: 1) Intellectual, in which the subject comes to recognize and take responsibility for his or her own attentiveness, intelligence, reason, and responsibility; 2) Moral, in which the subject begins to love and value the other as other; and finally 3) Religious, in which the subject, having received “God’s love poured into [her] heart through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5), falls unrestrictedly in love with God.²⁰

Religious Conversion and God’s Self-Revelation in Christ

The conversion of the subject depends wholly upon divine initiative.²¹ Lonergan has been reproached for giving insufficient attention to the particularity of Christ’s revelatory work, especially due to his emphasis on the importance of religious conversion and the universal mission of the Holy Spirit. This reproach, however, is unwarranted.²² The obscure universal work of the Holy Spirit in individuals and in the Church depends historically on the clear

¹⁹ Conversion is “a change of direction and, indeed, a change for the better. One frees oneself from the unauthentic. One grows in authenticity. Harmful, dangerous, misleading satisfactions are dropped. Fears of discomfort, pain, privation have less power to deflect one from one’s course. Values are apprehended where before they were overlooked. Scales of preference shift. Errors, rationalizations, ideologies fall and shatter to leave one open to things as they are and to man as he should be.” *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁰ See “Reality, Myth, Symbol,” in *Philosophical and Theological Papers: 1965-1980*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 389-390, for a concise summary of these conversions. He also discusses and approves of Robert Doran’s proposed addition of a fourth conversion. The threefold conversion is “ontic,” reconstituting the human subject in terms of her orientation to that which is true, good, and beautiful. Bernard Lonergan, “Theology in its New Context,” *A Second Collection*, eds. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 66. It is “not a set of propositions that a theologian utters, *but a fundamental and momentous change in the human reality that a theologian is*. It operates, not by the simple process of drawing inferences from premises, but by changing the reality (his [or her] own) that the interpreter has to understand if he is going to understand others . . .” *Method*, 270-271. The convert is uprooted from illusion and re-rooted in reality.

²¹ “So far from resulting from our knowledge and choice,” Lonergan emphasizes, “it dismantles and abolishes the horizon within which our knowing and choosing went on, and it sets up a new horizon within which the love of God transvalues our values and the eyes of that love transform our knowing.” Bernard Lonergan, “The Response of the Jesuit as Priest and Apostle in the Modern World,” *A Second Collection*, eds. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 172.

²² As Lonergan notes in *Method*, “God’s gift of his love has its *proper counterpart in the revelation events in which God discloses to a particular people or to all mankind the completeness of his love for them*.” *Method*, 283, italics mine. Elsewhere in *Method* he writes that “there is a personal entrance of God himself into history, a communication of God to his people, the advent of God’s word into the world of religious expression.” *Ibid.*, 110.

entrance of God's self-revelation into history in the coming of Christ.²³ In "Theology in its New Context" Lonergan paraphrases 1 Corinthians 5:17 to draw attention to this fact: "When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has begun."²⁴ The absolute priority of God's self-revelation in Christ, which historically makes possible and undergirds the reception of the Holy Spirit by the converted subject, has profound ramifications for her understanding of and use of Scripture.

Henri de Lubac's *ressourcement* of the fundamental presuppositions of patristic and medieval hermeneutics offers a helpful complement to Lonergan's more terse treatment of revelation. According to Henri de Lubac, the coming of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, is the utterly transformative and inescapable hinge point of all history; it "offers the spectacle of a discontinuity that has no equal."²⁵ In his article "The Development of Dogma," de Lubac describes the revelation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ as absolutely comprehensive: "All truth has been given us by Christ and in Christ . . . in [him] all has been both given and revealed to us in one stroke."²⁶ As we discovered in our discussion of Lonergan's work, we never have unmediated access to the meaning of God's self-revelation in Christ apart from our all too

²³ He writes that "there is a notable anonymity to [the] gift of [the Holy] Spirit. . . . What removes this obscurity and anonymity is the fact that the Father has spoken to us of old through the prophets and in this final age through the Son (Heb. 1:1-2). . . . "The Response of the Jesuit," 175. Authentic religious conversion is authentic conversion to the truth of God revealed and constituted in Christ. On this point, see especially Ormerod, *Meaning, Method, and Revelation*, passim.

²⁴ "The convert apprehends differently, values differently, relates differently because he has become different. The new apprehension is not so much a new statement of a new set of statements, but rather new meanings that attach to almost any statement. It is not new values so much as a transvaluation of values." "Theology in its New Context," 66.

²⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Fourfold Sense of Scripture*, vol. 1, trans. Marc Sebanc (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 234-35. Hereafter referenced as *Medieval Exegesis*, 1: page number.

²⁶ Henri de Lubac, "The Development of Dogma," in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1996), 267, 275. "Tel est l'Acte décisif, le Fait unique, — non pas seulement de cette unicité propre à tout fait, mais d'une unicité par rapport à tout autre fait, — dont le chrétien lit l'annonce dans l'ancienne Écriture." Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'écriture* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1964), 2:2:111.

human understanding in the terms of our all too human meanings. We can nevertheless participate in the truth, goodness, and beauty of God's self-revelation in a mediated way because all things hold together in Christ and because he is the intelligibility upon which everything depends. The truth of Scripture is itself not separable from the all-encompassing truth of Christ; it participates in the truth of God's self-revelation in Christ.²⁷ The post-apostolic Christians recognized, as any reader of the New Testament can today, that the authors of the New Testament referred to both Jesus Christ and the Old Testament as the Word of God. Within their participatory understanding of reality, they supposed that this fact was no coincidence; for them it indicated that the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, dwelt within the text of Scripture in a sacramental way.²⁸ The Spirit inspired judgment of the absolute ontological

²⁷ John O'Keefe and R. R. Reno corroborate this judgment their study of the exegesis of the early Church fathers; the earliest Christians affirmed that "Scripture is woven into the fabric of truth." John O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 12. Apart from the truth of Christ, Scripture remains a dead letter. Apart from the mediation of human subjectivity and the quickening of the Holy Spirit, Scripture is completely inert.

²⁸ De Lubac explicates the sacramental quality of Scripture in his discussion of Origen's understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Jesus Christ: "Now, there are not two Words. . . . Just as the spirit of the Scriptures is none other than the Holy Spirit, so the Word of God that is Scripture, or that Scripture contains, is none other, in his essence, than the Logos, the One 'who was in the beginning with God', the One who is 'living Wisdom and Son of God'. On both sides, it is still the same word, the same biblical word, and there is no play on words in that." Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2007), 385. The quotations are from the prologue of John's Gospel and Origen's *Contra Celsum*.

The judgment of the sacramentality of Scripture is an admittedly contested claim. John Webster rightly argues that "the Word made flesh and the scriptural word are in no way equivalent realities," but his further suggestion that "no divine nature or properties are [therefore] to be predicated of Scripture" is perhaps alarmist (see John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 23. Though Webster would disagree with de Lubac's formulations of the sacramentality and inspiration of Scripture, he rightly affirms its unique particularity and purpose in the economic work of the Triune God, see his helpful discussion of Scripture's sanctification and inspiration in *ibid.*, 17-41. His Barthian insistence on the absolute uniqueness of the Incarnate Word of God over against the written word is also understandable and even laudable, lest we mistake our limited understandings of the Triune God for the entirety of God's being. Nevertheless, his refusal to discuss the subject's role in interpreting Scripture (see *ibid.*, 86ff.), and his assertion of the impossibility of Scripture participating in divinity (*ibid.*, 22-23), open up his account of Scripture's ontology to the critique of obscurantism. How can Scripture be true, how can it be sanctified for its unique role in the economy of salvation, if its truth is not a participation in the Truth of the living Word of God? Does not the special truth of Scripture itself, as Θεόπνευστος, participate ontologically, even if only in a very limited way, in the reality of the Triune God? As de Lubac indicates, the Fathers

and epistemological priority of Christ became for them, and arguably becomes for us as well, the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of not only God and the world, but of Scripture itself.

Converted Interpretation and the Fourfold Sense

One frequent criticism of Lonergan's work is that he fails to allow the object of the theologian's inquiry, namely God as revealed, to sufficiently impact his theological method. While we have noted above that this criticism is not entirely fair,²⁹ it invites us to ask a legitimate question of Lonergan's extremely helpful work in *Method in Theology*: How should doctrinal and theological judgments impact the theologian's methodological praxis? For our purposes, how do the explicit theological judgments of the converted subject impact her interpretive experience, understanding, and judgment concerning Scripture? My tentative answer is as follows: with a horizon radically transposed by conversion, the Christian is

of the Church affirmed the perpetuity of Scripture's inspiration. "It is not only the sacred writers who were inspired one fine day," de Lubac argues, "The sacred books themselves are and remain inspired." The inspiration of Scripture is thus a perpetual reality; it is "a permanent inspiration, which transcends all time." *History and Spirit*, 314. De Lubac argues, following Origen, that "the Spirit immured himself in [Scripture], as it were, He lives in it. His breath has always animated it. . . . It is full of the Spirit." *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:82. For the convert to Christ, Scripture is "living . . . always animated by the Spirit . . . speaking through it." *Ibid.*, 1:81. The Holy Spirit enlivens Scripture and communicates the Word of God, who is Christ, through it throughout the history of the Church into the present. On this point, it is also interesting to note that De Lubac relates the opinion of the earliest Christians that Scripture itself undergoes conversion. This sacramental account of Scripture's ontology evinced by de Lubac undoubtedly contains significant risks. We must keep in mind that Scripture itself is not an agent, and it remains soteriologically inert apart from the Holy Spirit's quickening work within its readers, hearers, and interpreters. Its sufficiency and perspicuity can only be understood in terms of the work of the Triune God in history, God's self-manifestation in the work of Christ, in the production of the Scriptures themselves, and in the reception of the Word of God through Scripture in subsequent history. Whether Scripture is a sacramental reality or merely a specific created instrument of the Triune God, its truthfulness, and thus the subject's interpretation of its truth, is suspended within and depends upon the one who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

²⁹ As Lonergan clarifies, he never set out to deal with specific theological questions such as this one in *Method*: "If I hope many readers will find in themselves the dynamic structure of what I write, others perhaps will not. Let me beg them not to be scandalized because I quote scripture, the ecumenical councils, papal encyclicals, other theologians so rarely and sparingly. I am writing not theology but method in theology." *Method*, xii. There are, however, other articles and essays where Lonergan addresses the issue in a tangential fashion. See for instance "Theology in its New Context," and "The Response of the Jesuit as Priest," and "The Mediation of Christ in Prayer."

attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible in her interpretation of Scripture in a new and distinctively Christocentric way. She affirms the priority and normativity of the datum of God's self-revelation in Christ,³⁰ relating all she understands and experiences—the pluriform details of the very text of Scripture—to her all-encompassing experience and understanding of Jesus Christ. Simultaneously she exhibits growth in attentiveness to every detail of the Scriptures—whether lexical, historical, social, cultural, or rhetorical.³¹ Everything experienced in Scripture, the entirety of the written Word, finds its rightful and orienting context as it is situated both with reference to and within the living and efficacious Word, the Incarnate Son of God. The Holy Spirit interprets for us, unveiling the presence of the truth of Christ in the text of Scripture, and unveiling the truth of Christ as the truth of our own being. The subject, transformed into the image and likeness of Christ, finds Christ everywhere on the sacred page, and as she grows in attentiveness, intelligence, reasonability, responsibility, and love, comes to recognize the presence of God's grace elevating and perfecting these human capabilities.³² In order to illustrate the relevance of this truth for our contemporary context, we will conclude by examining what de Lubac says about the three spiritual senses of the fourfold sense of Scripture—allegory, tropology, and anagogy—with reference to Lonergan's work on

³⁰ "The Christian datum," de Lubac writes, "taken in its prophetic announcement or in its realization 'in the fullness of time,' is always normative." Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Fourfold Sense of Scripture*, trans. E. C. Macierowski (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 103. Hereafter cited as *Medieval Exegesis*, 2: page number.

³¹ As O'Keefe and Reno note, "a faith that Jesus Christ fulfills the Scriptures did not supersede or make unnecessary the difficult task of struggling with the literal details of the Bible." *Sanctified Vision*, 45.

³² Historically, it is easy to see how something like my proposal has worked itself out within the interpretive praxis of premodern Christians. As de Lubac indicates in his conclusion to *History and Spirit*, "... the whole process of spiritual understanding is identical, in principle, to the process of conversion. It is its luminous aspect. ... The Word of God, a living and efficacious word, reaches its real fulfillment and its full meaning only by the transformation that it works in the one who receives it. Whence the expression: "to pass on to the spiritual understanding", the equivalent of "to be converted to Christ" —with a conversion that one can never say is fully achieved. There is thus a reciprocal causality between that conversion to Christ and the understanding of the Scriptures." *History and Spirit*, 447.

interpretation and conversion. Strictly speaking, it would be inaccurate to assume that the fourfold sense of Scripture has ever been or could today be a uniform and static set of hermeneutical presuppositions for Scriptural interpretation. Nevertheless, a summary of de Lubac's explication of the fourfold sense will allow us to consider how the theological judgments which attend converted subjectivity have impacted and could, or even should, impact the contemporary theologically converted subject in her interpretation of Scripture.³³

Allegory

Though reference to allegorical exegesis conjures up thoughts of arbitrary, subjective, and decadent abuses of Scripture for many exegetes, theologians and historians, de Lubac has persuasively argued that it is an exegetical doctrine directly linked — at least historically if not normatively — with the very essence of Christian faith.³⁴ Allegorical exegesis represents the “mode of explication” of the Fathers; the whole tapestry of Patristic Christian thought was woven through allegorical exegesis. The earliest Christians came to discern the “Fact of Christ,” which had transformed history, everywhere in Israel's history.³⁵ In faith, the believer comes to

³³ De Lubac uses the famous couplet attributed to the 12th century theologian Augustine of Dacia as an entry point for discussing spiritual interpretation: “The letter teaches events, allegory what you should believe, Morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for.” The Latin reads as follows:

*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*

See *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:1; and Henri de Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1989), 117.

³⁴ “Today it almost inevitably evokes a lack of realism contrary to the Faith combined with a disdain for historical science that is shocking to our minds.” Henri de Lubac, “Allegory and Typology,” in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 158. In this article de Lubac argues that the detractors of allegory exhibit a seemingly invincible ignorance of the true significance and importance of their object of scorn. See also *ibid.*, 173-174. We cannot elude allegorical exegesis, de Lubac suggests, if we want to produce an authentically Christian exegesis. See *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:84.

³⁵ “The Christian novelty,” de Lubac writes, “whose reaction Paul experienced so violently, was radical in a different way than human novelties that let themselves be translated a bit later by an ingenious combination of ancient words and prefabricated concepts!” *Ibid.*, 2:90. “Assuredly, whoever should not recognize for himself the

recognize through the Holy Spirit, and with the earliest Christian interpreters, that the Old Testament everywhere testifies to Christ and reaches its completion and fulfillment through his incarnation, death, resurrection, and establishment of the Church. He is mysteriously hidden within the events and facts of Israel's history. To deny this would be to reject the testimony of the authors of the New Testament.

In our earlier discussion of Lonergan's understanding of interpretation, we noted that interpretation involves four aspects: 1) understanding the object, 2) understanding the words, 3) understanding the author, and 4) understanding one's self. In the first sense of spiritual interpretation, allegory, the converted subject, operating with the twofold judgment of the inspiration of Scripture and the absolute priority of Christ, comes to recognize that the object of the text of Scripture cannot be restricted to the original object intended by its human author. The priority of understanding the divine author takes precedence over the task of understanding the human author. Additionally, the interpreter recognizes that a full understanding of herself in relationship to Scripture requires a full understanding of authentic subjectivity. Christ reveals the contours of authentic divine subjectivity in the linguistic meaning of his teaching and in the incarnate meaning of his birth, life, death, resurrection, and

Fact of Christ, in all its singularity, or should feel some pain at recognizing historically all its causal force, would never succeed at thoroughly comprehending the reverberation of this great Fact in the consciousness of those who were the first to perceive it and to interpret the old Bible accordingly. But every historian can perceive at least something of the extraordinary backwash that it produced; every historian can also see, in the biblical allegorism of the first Christian centuries, the essential role placed by this major datum which is called the —New Testament. He can now ask himself this question: where would one find, in the facts of history, or only in the thought or imagination of the Greek allegorists, the irruption of some 'new testament' analogous to that of the Christians, an irruption which one day would have turned the ancient exegesis of the Homeric poems upside down by overturning the very being of their exegete? Where would one find, in Cornutus and the rest, anything even remotely resembling the opposition between the oldness of the letter and the newness of the Spirit?" *Ibid.*, 2:104.

ascension.³⁶ The converted subject is thus freed from the letter of Scripture to recognize the objective truth of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ.

Tropology³⁷

Tropology teaches us "what to do."³⁸ It is the ethical sense of Scripture.³⁹ In his discussion of the spiritual senses of Scripture, de Lubac stresses that the believer's conversion cannot stop at the level of intellectual understanding.⁴⁰ Tropology facilitates the process of our deification. It is one of the means through which the Holy Spirit makes present the life of Christ in the world after the Incarnation.⁴¹ The mystery of Christ has both interior and moral/social implications. Tropological interpretation is thus, as de Lubac explains, "first and foremost . . . [an] interior drama. The entire Bible thus appears as a 'mirror', where man learns to know himself with his misery and his sin while getting to know the perfection for which God destines

³⁶ "In the fullness of time God sent his Son, made under the law, made of woman, that he may redeem those under the law. And because we are made sons of God, he sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts crying, 'Abba, Father!'" Christ appears to us in terms of the love of Christ: 'Greater love than this no man hath, that he should lay down his life for his friends;' in terms of the precept of Christ: 'A new commandment I give unto you: Love one another as I have loved you.' The precept of charity was given not only by Christ, but was only Christ that could give the precept, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' The example of Christ in his life, in his suffering and death, is set before us through all our religious teaching; and the work of Christ - in his redemption, in his sacrifice, in his satisfaction, and in the church that carries on his work - is all before us." Lonergan, "The mediation of Christ in Prayer," 177.

³⁷ While the passage from "history to allegory" is a converted leap from one sense of Scripture, the literal/literary, to the other, the spiritual, the remaining two senses of Scripture, tropology and anagogy, require no further leaps; they "belong to one and the same spiritual sense." *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:127.

³⁸ "History and allegory procure 'the edification of the faith';" de Lubac explains, "'the edification of morals' comes down to tropology." *Ibid.*

³⁹ "The word *tropology* comes from the Greek *tropos*, which indicates a 'turn of phrase' through which some expression is turned in order to make it designate something new. The 'turning' characteristic of *tropos* is captured by the Latin translation, *conversio*, which obviously means conversion. The tropological sense thus concerns the way that Scripture is 'turned . . . toward us, i.e. toward our ways of behaving,' leading to our conversion." Bryan Hollon, *Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac*, Theopolitical Visions (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 173.

⁴⁰ "The mystery of Christ," he writes in *Paradoxes*, "is ours also." Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, trans. Pauli Simon and Sadie Kreilkamp (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 66. It "is not to be contemplated with curiosity as a pure object of science; rather it must be interiorized and lived." *History and Spirit*, 446.

⁴¹ De Lubac argues that "Christian existence must reproduce—not only in its interior rhythm but in the realms of moral activity and social relations as well—this mystery of Christ, which was foretold in the law of Israel and is reproduced primarily in the sacraments of the Church." "Typology and Allegory," 161.

and calls him. The facts that the Bible relates are also interior events, the *processus animae*.”⁴² This

interior drama does not remain interior, however, for “there is no authentic spirituality that does not put dogma into action.”⁴³ Tropological interpretation “deepens” the sense of allegory and brings it to its “summit.”⁴⁴ Through tropological interpretation, the “turning” of Scripture to the individual subject, the theological interpreter reads the history of Scripture as the narrative of her own conversion, both in its internal and external dimensions.⁴⁵

Tropology issues forth from the converted subject’s transformative realization that the truth of God’s love in Christ is the truth of her own being. The fullness of God’s love in Christ, mediated to the subject by the Holy Spirit in conversion, allows her to recognize the truth of God’s own love as the truth towards which her own graced subjectivity tends. Again, as in allegorical interpretation, the words of Scripture remain the same. By revealing to her the priority of the objectivity and subjectivity of Christ, however, the Holy Spirit elevates her understanding so that she can recognize herself within the pages of Scripture.⁴⁶ The object of the text thus becomes the subject herself, as its dynamic drive towards intellectual, moral, and religious self-transcendence is suffused with and elevated by the Holy Spirit, the one who will lead her “into all truth” (John 16:13).

⁴² “On an Old Distich,” 114-115.

⁴³ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁴ “Far from constituting a negligible appendix,” de Lubac intuits, “its procedure is essential to the full understanding of Scripture.” *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:133.

⁴⁵ Tropological interpretation does not add to the mystery of Christ but deepens it through “unfold[ing] its own internal logic” and “mak[ing] the most of its depth and fruitfulness.” Ibid., 2:134.

⁴⁶ The Holy Spirit leads her by the hand along the path of experiential, intellectual, and moral ascent into the mind of Christ through her attentiveness to the divine authorial intent of the written Word of the Triune God. For more on this leading-by-the-hand, or *manuductio*, see Peter Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Manuduction, or Reading Scripture Together on the Path to God*, Radical Traditions (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

Anagogy

While attentiveness to the allegorical sense of Scripture edifies the faith and understanding of the subject, and the tropological sense edifies her morality, anagogy directs the subject's gaze heavenward toward the consummation of all things in the beatific vision. Anagogy "teaches what mark [we] should be aiming for." While allegory treats the first historical coming of Christ, and tropology treats the spiritual coming of Christ into the individual's heart, anagogy treats the final coming of Christ at the end of history.⁴⁷ Anagogy is thus the eschatological sense of Scripture, the sense which "stirs up the desire of eternity in us."⁴⁸ The subject, though able to ascend to the heights of divine contemplation through anagogy, does not attempt to escape materiality.⁴⁹ True anagogy is rooted in traditional Christian eschatology, thus directing the exegete towards engagement in temporal reality for the sake of and on the way towards the renewal of all things in the new heavens and the new earth. While God has revealed to us the fullness of divine love and meaning in Christ, and though this truth is the truth of our very existence as adopted sons and daughters, the truth of this revelation, the very Truth of the Triune God, cannot be domesticated. As we noted above in our discussion of allegorical exegesis, the divine object of Scripture is the love of God revealed in Christ and mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. The love of the Triune God is fathomlessly

⁴⁷ *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:186.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:197. As de Lubac summarizes, "In its most general and most abstract conception . . . the anagogical sense is that which leads the thought of the exegete 'upwards.' . . . More concretely, this will be the sense that lets one see in the realities of the earthly Jerusalem those of the heavenly Jerusalem. . . . Although these things no longer belong to time, nevertheless, for us who trudge and toil through time, they are things yet to come, objects of desire and hope. *Ibid.*, 2:180-181. Here "we are concerned with final ends, heavenly and divine realities, mysteria future saeculi, that are ultimate and no longer symbolize anything else." "On and Old Distich," 115.

⁴⁹ Though anagogy leads the spiritual reader "upwards," in greater and greater contemplation, it does not lead her beyond the boundaries of faith into pure mysticism: ". . . the fully concrete anagogy, total anagogy, is reserved for the 'fatherland.' Mystical contemplation is not yet vision." *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:192.

deep, and because it is the divine object of Scripture, Scripture itself possesses limitless depths. Anagogical interpretation issues from the subject's judgment, received in faith through the work of the Holy Spirit, of the uncircumscribable definitiveness of the Triune God of Love. As Augustine put it, "*Si finisti, Deus non est.*"⁵⁰

Conclusion

For Lonergan, in the functional specialty of interpretation the subject attends primarily to the original meaning of texts. It is our contention, however, that the converted Christian interpreter cannot limit her interpretation of Scripture to questions concerning past meanings. In authentic religious conversion, the Holy Spirit guides her gaze beyond questions of past history to questions concerning ultimate Truth, the Truth of God's historical revelation in Jesus Christ—for in the end, as Lonergan notes, "everything turns back to Christ in one way or another."⁵¹ The Truth of Scripture itself is a participation in the Truth of Jesus Christ, the fullness of God's self-revelation in history. Insofar as Scripture is a wholly human text its object, words, and author remain wholly human. The coming of Christ, however, effects a transformation of Scripture itself. What once was unclear has been illuminated in Christ. In the dynamics of authentic religious conversion, the Holy Spirit allows the subject to recognize the fullness of God's love in Christ everywhere in Scripture. The fullness of Truth which she observes, understands, and judges truthful is not seen, affirmed and professed in a purely disinterested manner; it is the Truth of her own existence as an adopted child of God. Accordingly, the Truth of the object of Scripture cannot be exhaustively described or explained by the finite subject. As there are infinite depths in God, so there are in Scripture.

⁵⁰ *Sermo* 53, no. 12. Quoted in *History and Spirit*, 449.

⁵¹ Lonergan, "The Mediation of Christ in Prayer," 180.

