

1 Expressions of Religious Experience

1.1 In general

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

1.2 What's the Evidence?

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

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

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

2 Religious Development Dialectical

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

2.1 Spontaneous expression

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

2.2 Expressions of concern with mystery

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

2.3 The word

There is a difficulty in expressing religious experience, and it is the difficulty of moving from the ‘withdrawal from objectification’ in the ‘unmediated experience of love and awe’ (or the ‘mediated return to immediacy’ [77]) to the ‘word’ that enables religious experience to enter the world mediated by meaning and regulated and motivated by value. Think of Teresa of Avila. This ‘word,’ strictly speaking, is any expression or embodiment – intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, linguistic, incarnate. Prior to entering the world mediated by meaning, especially by the spoken or written word, religious experience is a ‘prior word’ spoken by God flooding our hearts with love. That prior word pertains to a world of immediacy. It (112) ‘withdraws [us] from the diversity of history by moving out of the world mediated by meaning and towards a world of