

THEOLOGY AS INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

In his preface to the third edition of *The Via Media* John Henry Newman speaks of theology in the Church as carrying on the prophetic function of Christ himself. Just as the pastoral and sacramental life of the Church carries on Christ's priestly ministry, and the papal and episcopal offices carry on Christ's governing role, so theology embodies the teaching and prophetic role of Christ. In fact, theology will play its proper role in the Church when, on the one hand, it functions to purify the worship of the Church from unworthy and superstitious elements; and, on the other hand, it purifies the government of the Church from elements of ambition, tyranny and double-dealing. In fact, in this same essay Newman goes so far as to call theology "the fundamental and regulating principle of the whole Church system."¹ In a paean of appreciation for the role of theological vision within the community of the Church Newman states:

Nor is religion ever in greater danger than when, in consequence of national or international troubles, the Schools of theology have been broken up and cease to be.²

Having made these rather extravagant claims for the role of theology, Newman then goes on to point out its limitations. Church government and ordinary piety also have their rightful claims and consequently theology cannot always have its own way.

It is too hard, too intellectual, too exact, to be always equitable, or to be always compassionate; and it sometimes has a conflict or overthrow [sic] or has to consent to a truce or a compromise, in consequence of the rival force of religious sentiment or ecclesiastical interests.³

The remainder of Newman's essay deals with this dialectical interaction between theology, worship and ecclesiastical polity.⁴ My point

¹ John Henry Newman, *The Via Media*, Vol. I (London: Longmans, Green, 1895), p. xlvi. In the same place he goes on to say of theology: "It is commensurate with Revelation, and Revelation is the initial and essential idea of Christianity. It is the subject-matter, the formal cause, the expression, of the Prophetic Office, and, as being such, has created both the Regal Office and the Sacerdotal. And it has in a certain sense a power of jurisdiction over those offices, as being its own creations, theologians being ever in request and employment in keeping within bounds both the political and popular elements in the Church's constitution,—elements which are far more congenial than itself to corruption, and are ever struggling to liberate themselves from those restraints which are in truth necessary for their well-being."

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, pp. xlvi—xlix.

⁴ This from a man whom John Tracy Ellis calls "the greatest Catholic thinker of modern times, a seminal mind the equal of which one cannot find in the Catholic tradition until you reach back to Saint Thomas Aquinas six centuries before." From an unpublished talk given at commencement exercises at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Mahwah, N.J., on June 3, 1978.

in quoting both Newman's extravagant claims for theology's critical function on the one hand and pointing to the limitations of theology on the other is to introduce a notion whereby theology or, concretely, the theologian can both better understand his own activity and at the same time attain some grasp of his own limitations. Such a notion is intellectual conversion.

As many of you know, this is a term coined by Bernard Lonergan and found in his work *Method in Theology*.⁵ A systematic understanding of intellectual conversion in Lonergan's sense would grasp it in its relations to religious and moral conversion. These two dimensions roughly parallel Newman's world of piety and religious feeling on the one hand and the human institutional and organizational world on the other. But our point in this essay would be merely to give some description of intellectual conversion as it functions (or fails to function) in theology's reflection on moral and religious conversion. It would seem, in fact, that Christian faith and Christian living demand such intellectual conversion. As Lonergan notes in speaking of faith as the "eye of love" that discerns religious beliefs:

Among the values discerned by the eye of love is the value of believing the truths taught by the religious tradition, and in such tradition and belief are the seeds of intellectual conversion.⁶

Our aim then is simple: first, to present some understanding of what is meant by intellectual conversion by taking an example from natural science. Secondly, to draw out some conclusions regarding the practice of theology taken from this understanding. Our point primarily is not to speak of theology in its external relationships, in its relations to institutional elements or to popular piety and religious feeling. Our aim is to go inward into the inner dynamics of the theologian's own intellectual processes and to reflect on one aspect, indeed a central aspect, of theologizing, and that is intellectual conversion.

I. INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION IN THE SCIENTIST

The physicist, Freeman Dyson, gives the following description of his students' entry into the world of physics:

⁵ B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder - Seabury, 1972), *passim*. Lonergan's major philosophical work, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Philosophical Library, 1957), could be said to be totally dedicated to understanding intellectual conversion or the lack thereof, even though the term itself is found nowhere in that work. Cf. in particular pp. 250-54 on the transformation from thinking about reality in terms of an "already out there now real" to genuine understanding. Other major texts related to intellectual conversion in Lonergan's writings are: *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Notre Dame, 1967), pp. 7, 20-21, 43-44; *Collection* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), pp. 158, 221-39; *The Subject* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), pp. 13-18. The article "The Origins of Christian Realism," reprinted in *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 239-61, analyzes the intellectual conversion implicit in the patristic Church's doctrinal move toward Nicea.

⁶ *Method in Theology*, p. 243.

The student begins by learning the tricks of the trade. He learns how to make calculations in quantum mechanics and get the right answers. To learn the mathematics of the subject and to learn how to use it takes about six months. This is the first stage in learning quantum mechanics, and it is comparatively easy and painless.⁷

At this point the student has a certain understanding of physics. It consists in the ability to manipulate mathematical symbols and to use the language of physics. It could be termed "nominal understanding."⁸ It is a frequent occurrence in human affairs because some of us, at least, have experienced the gap between the ability to use language and a deeper level of understanding in which one knows what the language really means.

But Aristotle said that knowledge makes a bloody entrance; and similarly, Dyson goes on to give a description of the painful moment when his students are no longer satisfied with knowing the tricks of the trade. A drive deep within them demands, not just nominal understanding, but a penetrating knowledge of physical reality itself:

The second stage comes when the student begins to worry because he does not understand what he has been doing. He worries because he has no clear physical picture in his head. He gets confused in trying to arrive at a physical explanation for each of the mathematical tricks he has been taught. He works very hard and gets discouraged because he does not seem able to think clearly. This second stage often lasts six months or longer, and it is strenuous and unpleasant.⁹

The dissatisfaction with nominal understanding and the desire for real understanding results in this painful period of worry, confusion and discouragement. Why? What is the cause of this anxiety? Dyson gives us the clue to his student's discomfort in the words: "He worries because he has no clear physical picture in his head." Indeed, it would seem that the very root of the student's anxiety is his overpowering tendency to "picture" things, to search out the visual images that alone, he assumes, can assure him of real understanding. And yet, it is only when he allows himself the frustration of that tendency that he crosses the Rubicon to real understanding:

Then, quite unexpectedly, the third stage begins. The student suddenly says to himself, "I understand quantum mechanics," or rather he says, "I understand now that there isn't anything to be understood."¹⁰

He understands that there is nothing to be understood in the physical pictures he sought. Indeed, his "conversion" consists in becoming satisfied—perhaps even thrilled—with the merely probable intelligibilities expressed in such paltry technical images as $M = M_0(1 -$

⁷F. Dyson, "Innovation in Physics" in Rapport and Wright eds., *Physics* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965), pp. 259-60.

⁸On nominal versus real understanding, cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 10-11; also *Collection*, pp. 98-102.

⁹Dyson, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

V^2/C^2)-1/2. The technical language itself, which formerly might have seemed "mere words," provides sufficient imagery for his understanding without the need for additional "pictures" of reality. Such imagery is symbolic and heuristic; it is not representational.

This transformation in the mind of Dyson's students in a relatively short period of time reproduces the transformation that took place at the origins of modern science when humanity groped its way out of the world of common sense and mythic imagery to a more accurate apprehension of the world. The Copernican revolution that ushered in modern science took place when persons began to move from common sense reference frames (the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, etc.), to mathematically related reference frames. Galileo refused to be content with the common sense assumption that bodies fall according to their weight and instead disregarded weight in favor of mathematically related correlations between distance and time. In so doing he moved beyond the realm of common sense into another realm quite different from the world of everyday life. Such a move involved, not so much new observations, but a transformation of mind itself. It involved, as Herbert Butterfield notes, putting on a different thinking cap.

It was supremely difficult to escape from the Aristotelian doctrine by merely observing things more closely, especially if you had already started off on the wrong foot and were hampered beforehand with the whole system of interlocking Aristotelian ideas. In fact, the modern law of inertia is not the thing you would discover by mere photographic methods of observation—it required a different kind of thinking cap, a transposition in the mind of the scientist himself.¹¹

Intellectual conversion, then, is present in every student's learning of a science, and in the paradigmatic breakthroughs that constitute that science itself at each level of its development. It involves breaking out of systematically misleading ways of thinking.

Being critical means eliminating the ordinary nonsense, the systematically misleading images and so on; the mythical account. Every scientific or philosophic breakthrough is the elimination of some myth in the pejorative sense; the flat earth, right on.¹²

Before showing the influence of intellectual conversion on our theology, however, let us analyze a little more carefully what is involved in such a transformation.

First and above all, it involves fidelity to the desire deep within the human spirit to know, to get things straight, to find out what is, a desire to enter into the world of genuine meaning, the world of truth, reality.¹³

¹¹ Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 16-17.

¹² Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, pp. 229-30.

¹³ "Deep within us all, emergent when the noise of other appetites is stilled, there is a drive to know, to understand, to see why, to discover the reason, to find the cause, to explain. Just what is wanted has many names. In what precisely it consists, is a matter of dispute. But the fact of inquiry is beyond all doubt. It can absorb a man. It can keep him for hours, day after day, year after year, in the narrow prison of his study or his laboratory. It

This "pure, detached, disinterested desire to know" is the root of all our questioning. It is the wonder that Aristotle noted at the origin of all science and philosophy. This deep desire to get at the root of things is operative in Dyson's students as they "hang in there" with their questions, as they endure the pain of knowing that things don't quite fit, as they realize that there are unanswered, poorly answered, and yet-to-be-answered questions in their minds.

But there is also another desire at work in Dyson's students—and in everyone—and that is the desire for visual or mythical images to mark with pictures each step along that journey. Such pictures tend to emerge from the student's world, what one might term "his own little world," the unconscious horizon that can block from view a greater reality.

To each of us his own private world is very real indeed. Spontaneously it lays claim to being the one real world, the standard, the criterion, the absolute, by which everything is judged, measured, evaluated.¹⁴

It is one's own little world that threatens to crumble in the process of learning any science; for such learning involves the painful conversion from one's own little world, constituted from childhood by many spontaneous attitudes, to *the* world, attained, not by picturing, but by the intellectual acts of understanding and true judgment in fidelity to the pure desire to understand and to know.

Intellectual conversion, then, involves a willingness to change one's mind, to die to one's previous habits of thinking, a real asceticism of the intellect.

In addition, besides fidelity to the pure desire to know and the willingness to change one's spontaneous ways of thinking, intellectual conversion involves a valuing of intellect itself. It involves a coming to value intellect as enriching, as mediating knowledge of the universe. Even though genuine knowledge involves the pruning of images that sedate but do not illuminate, still it aims at accurate expression in technical and theoretical terms and relations that become for the human family mediators of reality.

Technical terms, such as $M = M_0(1 - V^2/C^2)^{-1/2}$, might seem paltry images indeed to most people and certainly they do not warm the heart! Still, for those who are genuinely seeking to know the structures of reality, these are the best available mediators of natural processes. Such words allow the transcendence of the world of immediacy, the world we relate to by touch and sight and feeling, and allow our entry into the properly human world mediated by meaning, a world known not just by experience but by asking questions, by clear understanding and accurate judgment.

can send him on dangerous voyages of exploration. It can withdraw him from other interests, other pursuits, other pleasures, other achievements. It can fill his waking thoughts, hide from him the world of ordinary affairs, invade the very fabric of his dreams. It can demand endless sacrifices that are made without regret though there is only the hope, never a certain promise, of success." Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 4.

¹⁴Lonergan, *Collection*, p. 158.

In order to facilitate and hold such transcendence of common sense frameworks, intellect creates for itself a world of theory, a world of technically defined terms that serve as models or disclosures of dimensions of reality that transcend common sense frameworks. The major characteristics of such theory or systematic thought are: (1) a technical language which serves as a means of communication among theoreticians; (2) the implicit definition of each technical term by its relationships to other terms; (3) the exigent employ of distinctions.

All of this coheres with the present emphasis on "models" in scientific theory.¹⁵ Such models are defined not as pictorial representations of reality, but as sets of relationships according to which numerous observations and descriptions can be brought together in a unified perspective. They are more "disclosures" than visual representations. Thus the work of any first rate theoretician will consist in sets of interlocking terms and relationships that might seem as paltry to some, but which nevertheless are valued as mediators of the intricate and complex contours of reality.

Intellectual conversion, then, involves coming to value the human spirit, our minds, as mediators of reality. It involves coming to appreciate the value of human language, especially as it emerges from the jungles of common non-sense, into the clarity achieved by making distinctions. It involves a recognition of, and a radical turning from, all the senseless, meaningless questions the human spirit tends to ask—questions that plague and obstruct progress in the knowledge of truth and reality.

At this point an adequate analysis of intellectual conversion would involve a philosophy of mind. This goes far beyond our intention here.¹⁶ Suffice it to note Bernard Lonergan's conviction that a dawning awareness of the dynamics of our own spirit is as momentous as the discoveries and break-throughs of science. "Winter twilight cannot be mistaken for the summer noonday sun."¹⁷

Once Dyson's students discover their mistaken questions, their tendency to reification of theoretical models, their tendency to "misplaced concreteness," they are in a position to apply this knowledge, this new awareness, all along the line. Each new question can be critiqued and purified from this perspective.

The attitude arising from such an awareness of the dynamics of intellectual conversion includes humility. Genuine and real understanding includes the understanding that we do not know everything; we do

¹⁵Cf. I. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). Also Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, pp. 284-85, where he notes that models play a role in the human sciences, in philosophy and theology similar to that of mathematics in the natural sciences.

¹⁶Such a philosophy of mind would head toward an intellectual conversion regarding our own self-awareness. Cf. Lonergan's *Insight* where Part One is pedagogically structured to bring about such a self-awareness. The presence or absence of such awareness determines the "weight" we give to the terms of our human sciences, our philosophy and our theology.

¹⁷Lonergan, *Insight*, p. xix.

not even know what we tend to think we know; and there is yet much more to be known.

II. INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION IN THE THEOLOGIAN

It remains to draw some conclusions regarding the presence and absence of intellectual conversion in the theologian. First of all, as we mentioned in the beginning quoting Newman, theology functions in dialectical interaction with the pastoral and institutional elements of the Church. It both contributes to and is limited by these other elements.¹⁸

The first danger for theology, then, is to lose contact with its source in the vital religious and moral experience of the human family. Theology, whether of a scholastic kind or of a contemporary philosophical type, has not always been free of a certain rationalism that betrays little or no awareness that the human intellect is defined in terms of its presuppositions in experience and its completion of experience in enriching models or theoretical constructs. Such rationalism manifests itself in a self-enclosed world of theoretical concepts that bears little or no relation to the wider context of Christian religious and human living.¹⁹

Besides rationalism, however, there is in theology the danger of a lack of exigence—and this brings us squarely to our topic of intellectual conversion in theology. Even if, from the viewpoint of Christian commitment, theological wisdom is seen as a gift of the Holy Spirit, still one function of that Spirit is to release human understanding to be just what God intended it to be in creating it, that is, an exigent understand-

¹⁸A statement by the *International Theological Commission* on the relationship between the ecclesiastical magisterium and theology expressed the relationship this way: "Theologians derive their specifically theological authority from their scientific qualifications; but these cannot be separated from the proper character of this discipline as the science of faith which cannot be carried through without a living experience and practice of faith. For this reason, the authority that belongs to the theology in the Church is not merely profane and scientific, but is a genuinely ecclesial authority, inserted into the order of authorities that derive from the Word of God and are confirmed by canonical mission." *Theses on the Relationship Between the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1977), p. 6.

¹⁹According to Jean-Pierre Jossua, much scholastic theology lost this vital connection to human and religious development. "Now it is common knowledge that since the end of the twelfth century, Catholic theology has progressively lost the sense of this climate. On the one hand it has developed a rationality which has much value to the extent that it reflects a concern for rigorous thought, but on the other hand this rationality is so pervasive that it is destructive of theology, causes it to miss its object, and wind up with a senseless hypothesis of a man-believing theology developing its syllogism unflinchingly. It is well known that the Christian East has been able to preserve this religious background of theology and that Protestantism has sometimes rediscovered it. Truth to tell, there is no conflict with the valid contribution of rigorous argument, unless one shuts oneself up in a narrowly rationalist conception of the life of the spirit. In any event, this primacy of believing experience, in the interpretation of scripture . . . seems to me absolutely fundamental. It alone can do justice to the authentic theological character of the Christian reflection of every believer and of every community however modest it may be. It alone can give full effect to the theological charism, which is far from coinciding with science or university professorships." J.-P. Jossua, "Believing Experience in the Work of Bernard Lonergan," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 40, 2 (April, 1973), 118-19.

ing that is as clear and nuanced as possible. Such is *gratia sanans*, healing grace, that does not destroy nature but brings it to fulfillment. No less than in the natural sciences, such exigent use of the human mind demands intellectual conversion, a turning away from picture-thinking and an appreciation of the theoretical values of intellect itself. Such conversion demands the appreciation of models in theology, both their value as possible disclosures of reality and their limits as comprehensive pictures of reality.

First of all, on the negative demands of this conversion. Intellectual conversion in theology is the painful process whereby we die to our tendency to "picture," "image," "capture," "contain," the structures of theological reality in our own little world. For, not content to let images be symbols of deeper truth and reality, we tend to mistake the image, the name, the picture, for the reality itself. In theology this takes place as we, perhaps unaware, try to "picture" God and "locate" him "out there" or "in here" in an imaginatively conceived framework. An essential attribute of genuine theology is the growing awareness of our crypto-materialism, our tendency to "reify" divine and personal realities. Let us give some examples of this.

Critiquing a work on the relation of the feminine to our image of God, Sister Dorothy Donnelly criticizes its reifying tendencies:

First, is it possible she assumes there will be or now is some capturing of God with complete accuracy that theologians will accomplish or have accomplished already in a theological construct like the Trinity? This would highly affect one's notion of both terms: woman and Spirit.

Second, she seems to treat Jungian terms, like animus and anima as entities and not, again, as the psychological constructs they are. So Schaupp is guilty of misplaced concreteness, thus trapping herself into false conclusions. This leads her to referring to the 'feminine' in God as if we knew what that means.

'Feminine' however is a cultural term now under intense transformation both in interpretation and role-practice. The 'eternal feminine' of Gertrude Von le Fort is another example of just such a trap. It led to obscuring the real humanity and greatness of Mary and has trapped Christian women into passivity and failure to take responsibility for their own growth intellectually and emotionally.²⁰

Centuries before, Augustine discovered this same tendency in himself to "reify" his thoughts about God:

When I desired to think of my God, I could not think of Him save as a bodily magnitude—for it seemed to me that what was not such was nothing at all; this indeed was the principal and practically the sole cause of my inevitable error (*Confessions* 5, 10).

Augustine became liberated from the need to "picture" God through the reading of Platonic philosophy and his own dawning religious conversion.

²⁰D. Donnelly, review of *Woman: Image of the Holy Spirit* by J. Schaupp (Dimension Books, 1975), *National Catholic Reporter*, May 7, 1976, p. 9.

Similarly, in *Man Becoming*, Gregory Baum masterfully critiques the image of the "outsider God" over and against us that seems to have had a pronounced influence on recent Catholic thinking and prevented it from perceiving the hand of the Lord in contemporary experience. To this extreme extrinsicism Baum counterposes an "insider God" working in and through human aspirations and activities.²¹ But one can wonder whether such an "insider God" is not also subject to criticism, a criticism guided by a theoretically articulated doctrine of Spirit as both immanent and transcendent.

In moral theology a similar lack of intellectual conversion seems present in an obsession with casuistry, a need to know "the answer" to imaginatively formulated questions. Such an obsession is based on the vision of reality as imaginary rather than as intelligible. The moral theologian can, at the most, give differentiated principles, norms and values, publicly espoused in dialogue with historical discourse, that may shed helpful light on understanding and guiding human experience and behavior. Beyond that he cannot go. We might add that such awareness might to some degree save him the tension of having to have all the answers.

Such a lack of intellectual conversion can affect even scientific historians of religious experience as they try to reach "the event itself" (for example, the Resurrection) in the sense of an imagined or pictured event and are not content with the intrinsic (yet not picturable) intelligibility of historical evidence.²² Such is Lonergan's complaint with Bultmann's tendency to divide the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith—influenced as that tendency is by a nineteenth-century positivist view of history.²³

Similarly, positivist historians with a "machine-image" of the laws of nature find it impossible to admit wonders and miracles. As Lonergan notes in treating of the historian, Carl Becker:

Can miracles happen? If the historian has constructed his world on the view that miracles are impossible, what is he going to do about witnesses testifying to miracles as matters of fact? Obviously, either he has to go back and reconstruct his world on new lines, or else he has to find these witnesses

²¹G. Baum, *Man Becoming* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). Cf. p. 249 where he asks, "Is it possible to pray to the insider God?" Baum seems to equate extrinsicist images of God with "objectifying" God, but his very writing does just that.

²²A compulsion to want "the things in themselves" as imaginable entities bedeviled Kantian philosophy and one is caught in a transcendental subjectivism if one's notion of objectivity is to get "out there" or "behind the phenomena." The only break with idealism in philosophy and such philosophies implicit in theology is the discovery that the human intellectual processes of questioning, understanding, and judging are intrinsically objective. To the extent that one is faithful to one's genuine subjectivity in these acts, one is already "out there" in the world that is.

²³Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 318. There he notes that both Barth and Bultmann emphasize the need for conversion. Yet, "in both Barth and Bultmann, though in different manners, there is revealed the need for intellectual as well as moral and religious conversion. Only intellectual conversion can remedy Barth's fideism. Only intellectual conversion can remove the secularist notion of scientific exegesis represented by Bultmann."

either incompetent or dishonest or self-deceived. Becker was quite right in saying the latter is the easier course.²⁴

The very possibility that, in our critiques of cultural myths and images, other images could be keeping us from fact and truth is hardly entertained.²⁵ The movement from a nineteenth-century image of the laws of nature to a more contemporary open-ended understanding of natural science can perhaps make room in an historian's understanding for a more adequate understanding of past witnesses to miracles.²⁶

Hume's argument [against miracles] did not really prove that no miracles had ever occurred. Its real thrust was that the historian cannot deal intelligently with the past when the past is permitted to be unintelligible to him. Miracles are excluded because they are contrary to the laws of nature that in his generation are regarded as established; but if scientists come to find a place for them in experience, there will be historians to restore them to history.²⁷

So much for examples of the lack of intellectual conversion—or rather, the need for intellectual conversion in theology. Positively, an appreciation of the exigent nature of theology involves a valuing of models. Examples of such models in theology would be Dulles' *Models of the Church*, Tracy's models of types of theologizing in *Blessed Rage for Order*, indeed Lonergan's model of the levels of consciousness and of basic human process as intellectual, moral and religious conversion. Such models are ideal constructs that help us appreciate sets of relationships within a particular writer's works, within the complexities of historical and cultural movements, in the conflicts of the times, within the human person, in the elements of doctrines or systematic understanding, within the levels of theological communication.²⁸

As you might have noted, the last lines involve an implicit endorsement for Bernard Lonergan's model of theological methodology. For intellectual conversion in theology must involve an awareness of the many levels and specializations involved in the doing of theology.²⁹ Lonergan lists eight such specializations: research, interpretation, his-

²⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 222.

²⁵ As Peter Gay said of the Enlightenment *philosophes*: "They never wholly discarded that final, most stubborn illusion that bedevils realists—the illusion that they were free from illusions. This distorted their perception and gave their judgments a certain shallowness." *The Enlightenment* (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 27; quoted in Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 12.

²⁶ Such a movement, such an intellectual conversion, is not easy. It is indeed, bloody, "Such a world is a matter not merely of details but of basic options. Once such options are taken and built upon, they have to be maintained, or else one must go back, tear down, reconstruct. So radical a procedure is not easily undertaken; it is not comfortably performed; it is not quickly completed. It can be comparable to major surgery, and most of us grasp the knife gingerly and wield it clumsily." *Method in Theology*, p. 221.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁸ The use of various models from the human sciences is becoming more prevalent among theologians. Cf. L. Kohlberg's models of moral development and J. Fowler on religious development. For a bibliography see T. Hennessy, ed., *Values and Moral Development* (New York: Paulist, 1976), pp. 225-28. Also G. Winter's models of social thinking: *Elements for a Social Ethic* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

²⁹ An awareness of such various levels can be seen in Karl Rahner's various works in which, as he introduces each subject, he clearly defines what he is *not* going to talk about.

tory, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics, communications. Each of these specializations involves a specific area of questioning, concern and language. Without such a model of theological methodology and collaboration among theologians, one is in danger of not knowing what one is doing when one is doing it. One is in danger of not knowing how much "weight" to give to one's terms. Most significantly, without such a basic model of theological methodology, the theologian is in danger of not knowing how each of these areas of theological specialization and the construction of models on each of these levels is related to his own personal conversion, not just on the intellectual level—and we are stressing this—but on the moral and religious level as well.

We should note in particular that the demands of intellectual conversion in theology are often only appreciated through conflict. These conflicts, whether within the theologian himself, or with other theologians, or with church leaders, or with the pious believers, eventually brings out into the open the underlying issues. In "The Origins of Christian Realism" Lonergan shows that the dialectic of positions and counter-positions leading up to the Christological definitions of the Council of Nicea were a clarifying of underlying issues and gradual purifying of naive types of thinking.³⁰ Would it be too much to suggest that in current conflicts there is at stake similar clarifications?³¹

Because theology is theory, the mind's free and disinterested performance and its expression in non-representative language, it is a genuine perfection of the human person. As such, it is certainly to be expected in the Christian community. An anti-intellectual fundamentalism inveighs against the importation of systematic vocabulary into the realm of Christian belief. Such attacks against "lifeless ideas" or "meaningless abstractions" can overlook the enriching character of intellect itself. Abstractions can be impoverishing to the extent that significant elements of life are missed. At the same time, the nature of intellect itself unceasingly heads for enriching abstraction that grasps the meaningful as meaningful and leaves aside the insignificant because it is known to be insignificant. The beauty of theoretical physics is its testimony to the human spirit's ability to penetrate to the inwardness of things. Genuine Christian theology ought to do the same in regard to man's relationship to God in Christ.

For this reason the element of humility is particularly significant in the theologian—not thinking he controls the mystery because he con-

³⁰ Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, pp. 239-61.

³¹ For example, in the recent dialectic of positions between David Tracy, Avery Dulles and Peter Berger, occasioned by Tracy's *A Blessed Rage for Order*, there seems to be at stake the underlying validity of a model of human process as including not just intellectual transformation but the autonomy of moral and especially religious transformation as well. One senses that, although Tracy is indebted to Lonergan for his concern for intellectual clarity and exigence, he would be uncomfortable with Lonergan's statement: "But when conversion is the basis of the whole theology, when religious conversion is the event that gives the name, God, its primary and fundamental meaning, when systematic theology does not believe it can exhaust or even do justice to that meaning, not a little has been done to keep systematic theology in harmony with its religious origins and aims." *Method in Theology*, p. 350.

trols theoretical vocabulary. In theology it is particularly important to know that we do not know everything—and that there is always more to know.

Again we are in the area of the need for intellectual conversion: knowing the value of what we know and that this gives us no picture of reality. For we are seeking some understanding of God's ways with persons—*aliqua Deo data intelligentia*, as Vatican I puts it—some God-given intelligibility. Such an understanding only brings us deeper into the abyss that is the mystery of God—and before such a light, the eyes of our minds are, as Aristotle noted, like owls' eyes in the day, virtually blinded by such great light.

Such reflection is filtered through the religious and moral experience of each person. The individual's love of God, his praxis, inevitably destroys myths or images of God and the Christian Church in history inevitably refines her doctrinal and dogmatic expressions of this incomprehensible Lord in love with and incarnately involved with people.

RICHARD M. LIDDY

*Immaculate Conception Seminary
Mahwah, New Jersey*