

# Conversion through revelation: An exploration of the metaphysics, epistemology, and neuroscience of divine revelation

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Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2015

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**CONVERSION THROUGH REVELATION:**  
**An exploration of the metaphysics, epistemology, and neuroscience of divine revelation**

**A Thesis**  
**Submitted in Fulfillment**  
**of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree**  
**Boston College School of Theology and Ministry**

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April 13, 2015

## ***Introduction***

Divine revelation, in the science and study of theology, is often considered an obvious given. For humanity to gain understanding about a reality that is not only transcendent but also supernatural without the self-communication and indwelling of God in human affairs is impossible. Humanity innately seeks to discover meaning and purpose. Each person yearns to grasp guiding instructions for attaining happiness and the fullness of life, which can only happen in a heavenly existence. The human quest for the transcendent world is characterized by progress and decline. The progress comes about when human beings operate in accord with their nature as created in the image and likeness of God. Decline is the deviation from that image, of which Scripture calls “the reign of sin” (i.e. the probability of evil). Because of this dynamic desire for the transcendent, revelation, revealed religion, and the study of God become fundamental aspects to the project of being fully human. And so, as the theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan writes, “Divine revelation is God’s entry and His taking part in man’s making of man. It is God’s claim to have a say in the aims and purposes the direction and development of human lives, human societies, human cultures, human history.”<sup>1</sup>

Such an auspicious claim raises questions about this foundation for all of theology and for where the meaning and purpose of humanity’s existence actually resides. In what sense is divine revelation the foundation of the traditions, writings, teachings, doctrines, and catechism of the universal Church? Christian faith affirms that divine revelation grounds all of these. But, with all of these expressions of religious faith, in what way is the human person directed to God? Lonergan insists “a theology is a product not only of the religion it investigates and expounds but

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Theology in its New Context”, in *A Second Collection, Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.*, William F.J. Ryan, S.J. and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S.J. eds., (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1974), 62.

also of the cultural ideals and norms that set its problems and direct its solutions.”<sup>2</sup> The root of the culture is the people who are living, thinking, questioning, interacting with each other, and among whom are those who have undergone powerful experiences of enlightenment and radical transformation. Thus, theology’s foundation is to be “found in the converted subject, a subject who is ‘concrete, dynamic, personal, communal, and historical.’”<sup>3</sup> Even Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, does not speak of ethics apart from “the ethical reality of good men, of justice apart from men that are just, of temperance apart from men that are temperate, of the nature of virtue apart from the judgment of the man that possesses practical wisdom.”<sup>4</sup> For that which is absolutely unconditioned, and thus transcendent, to intervene in the domain that is contingent and conditioned by space and time in a manner that is understandable and knowable to human beings, it has to become a manifest or incarnate communication of meaning and value, and so able to be experienced, understood, and judged responsibly. Therefore, theology is the science or investigative act of reflecting on the human experience of the mediation of meaning and values by divine revelation, which brings about the integration of the reality of God’s presence and influence into the activity of human affairs. Whenever this divine entry of new meaning and value breaks into the concrete history and activity of human lives, there is enacted for the people involved an inevitable change or conversion by which they are rendered open to this revelation. Theology, then, is a reflection on the life that flows from the act of human conversion. Conversion, in turn, is a process that is ongoing, “concrete and dynamic, personal, communal, and historical.”<sup>5</sup> Divine revelation can only be studied through the effects of this

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>3</sup> Neil Ormerod, *Method, Meaning, and Revelation; The meaning and Function of Revelation in Bernard Lonergan’s Method in Theology*, (New York: University Press of America, 2000), 72.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “The Subject” in *A Second Collection*, 82.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “New Context”, in *A Second Collection*, 67.

powerful manifestation of the divine within human existence on persons and communities who, because they are converted, are more perfectly directed to God.

### ***The Context for this Thesis within the Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum***

Before delving into the deep implications of the effects of divine revelation on the human person, we first analyze the Second Vatican Council's pivotal document focused on the topic of divine revelation, *Dei Verbum*. The goal is to establish how this present project fits in with the other branches of research already done on the topic of divine revelation. The definition of divine revelation as established by the writers of *Dei Verbum* has four key components. The fathers of the Council state, "God *chose* to reveal Himself... in His goodness and wisdom."<sup>6</sup> The act of revelation is a willed movement on the part of the divine. This divine gift is not known *a priori*, asked for by humanity, or required; and it is certainly not deserved. God's willed initiative breaks into the finite, physical created realm. This act from God is a freely willed act of self-giving. Second, God does not give humanity information about the divine God-head or instructions on how to get to God, but divine revelation is God's gift of God's very self. The fathers of the Second Vatican Council quote Paul's letter to the Ephesians to emphasize the fact that through this kenotic act of self-revelation, God "has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he has set forth in (Christ)"(1:9). The third aspect of revelation established in *Dei Verbum* is that this revelation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God's Word made flesh, "who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation."<sup>7</sup> Jesus is the revelation of God, "the image of the unseen God"(Col 1:15), who "speaks to men as friends and lives among them so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself."<sup>8</sup> Which brings

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<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 18 November 1965, (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966), 817-35), (Henceforth, DV) §2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

up the fourth point of revelation in *Dei Verbum*. The purpose of God's act of freely giving Himself as Jesus Christ to humanity in the created world is for the sake of humanity having "access to the Father and to come to share in the divine nature."<sup>9</sup> The desire of God is to bring all of humanity into full and complete union with Him, "a share in the divine nature... (and) escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire"(1Peter 1:4). The intended outcome of the divine act is to bring all into one in God. Having established these four general elements of divine revelation, the fathers of the sacred synod affirm that "God, the beginning and the end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason... by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error."<sup>10</sup>

This four-fold definition of divine revelation as elucidated by *Dei Verbum* is manifested to humanity most evidently through Sacred Scripture and Tradition as interpreted and preserved throughout history by the Magisterium. "In order to keep the Gospel whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place"<sup>11</sup> Starting with the Apostles and continuing through the bishops, the continuous revealing of God through the Church is to extend to the end of time.

This brief document of the Second Vatican Council consists of only six chapters. The first chapter determines what divine revelation is while the last five chapters describe how this revelation is handed down and preserved, especially through the Old and New Testaments of Sacred Scripture. Minimal explanation beyond a brief mention is devoted to the very real and powerful effect of this entry of God's presence in the lives of human beings. However, where the doctrinal statement does hint at these effects is as it discusses the role of Sacred Scripture. Sacred Scriptures are considered "the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> DV, §6.

<sup>11</sup> DV, §7.

committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in words of the prophets and Apostles.”<sup>12</sup> And, in order for Scripture to be heard and the revelation of the Lord to reach the hearts of all people, the fathers of the council acknowledge that many effective ministers of the word are needed to proclaim God’s divine word to all people so as to “enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and set men’s hearts on fire with the Love of God.”<sup>13</sup> This established goal for the effective ministers of the Sacred Scripture is the potential effect of divine revelation on the people who are open to receive God’s self-communication. The fruitful reception will be nothing less than a powerful and life-transformative conversion experience. The scope of this present project on divine revelation is an elaboration of the complexities that arise in this conversion experience from the effective reception of divine revelation.

The deep complexities of God’s indwelling within the human realm consist of metaphysical, epistemological, and even neurological implications. The effects are many but the three listed by *Dei Verbum* point out the powerful transformation within the person who experiences such revelation. Enlightenment of the mind can be aligned with what Lonergan describes as an intellectual conversion. The strengthening of the will is included within the moral conversion. And, the human heart set a-blaze with the Love of God is the essence of a religious conversion. Great transformation of the total person does occur when a human encounters God. The person with a receptive heart goes through self-appropriation so as to become his or her authentic, true, and full self in the face of God’s revealed presence.

There is an intensely debated issue that arises from separating out the source of revelation from the act that brings about the revelation. For example, a key source of revelation is the

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<sup>12</sup> DV, §21.

<sup>13</sup> DV, §23.

Sacred Scriptures. The act of this source could be an effective minister who proclaims this Word at a later moment in history. The minister is a proximate and temporal – yet not crucial and interior - cause of the effect within a person of these transformational conversions. Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., synthesizes the argument in his chapter on his second “model” of revelation as history.

Temple and many salvation-history theologians, while insisting that events are primary in revelation, acknowledge that the events are not self-interpreting, even in context, but must be interpreted by a prophetic word, which is the result of a special divine illumination. If this be true, it is no longer apparent why primacy must be given to the event. Would it not be better to say that revelation is a complex reality consisting of the inspired word as the formal element and of the historical event as material element?<sup>14</sup>

Are both the event of the revelation, the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the actions of the proclamations of the Sacred Scriptures through history, required for the completion of the act of revelation? *Dei Verbum* implies that both the event and the proclamation of this event are required to constitute the full act of revelation. “The deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, without interpretations of the mysteries and proclamations of the powerful break-through moments of the divine into the created realm in past and present events of history, there is no act of revelation and the people of God are not transformed and converted by the divine love of God. Pope Benedict XVI takes this idea even further when he stresses the role of the interior light of faith, and act of belief within an attentive and receptive person:

You can have Scripture without having revelation. For revelation always and only becomes a reality where there is faith. The nonbeliever remains under the veil of which Paul speaks... He can read Scripture and know what is in it, can even understand at a purely intellectual level, what is meant and how what is said hangs together – and yet he has not shared in the revelation. Rather, revelation has only arrived where, in addition to the material assertions witnessing to it, its inner reality has itself become effective after

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<sup>14</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 66.

<sup>15</sup> DV §2.

the manner of faith. Consequently, the person who receives it also is a part of the revelation to a certain degree, for without him it does not exist. You cannot put revelation in your pocket like a book you carry around with you. It is a living reality that requires a living person as the locus of its presence.<sup>16</sup>

This understanding of the necessity of the faithful and receptive receiver is a crucial point that grounds the entirety of this present thesis.

Looking at the institution of the Eucharist as an example of this reception of divine revelation, the surrounding Apostles observed Christ's words and actions and interpreted them as essential actions that must continue until the end of time. The Apostles were transformed upon receiving this revelation of God's very self in the form of the Eucharist. As they interpreted Christ's deeds their hearts went through conversions. The historical deeds and the proclaiming words have an inner unity. The two combine in the heart of the receptive believer to bring about the manifestation of the Lord and a radical change in human life. Even though Judas Iscariot was at the last supper like all of the other Apostles, the supposition is that revelation did not break through his unreceptive heart. Thus, theology is reflection on the act of human conversion in the hearts of persons who hear and act on the divinely inspired Word of God in the complete act of divine revelation. Pope John Paul II powerfully synthesizes this concept in his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* stating, "In the Incarnation...God takes on a human face. The truth communicated in Christ's Revelation is therefore no longer confined to a particular place or culture, but is offered to every man and woman who would welcome it as the word which is the absolutely valid source of meaning for human life."<sup>17</sup> The reception on the part of the person and the divine act of self-giving must both take place for the act of revelation to be complete.

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *God's Word; Scripture – Tradition – Office*, Peter Hünermann and Thomas Söding, eds., Henry Taylor, trans., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 52.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, Pope, *Fides Et Ratio*, Encyclical, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 14 September 1998, §12.

A metaphor of a mirror is used in *Dei Verbum* to help illustrate this powerful and necessary connection between the interpretation by effective teachers and ministers of the Church and the original acts of God breaking into human reality. “This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face.”<sup>18</sup> Un-packing this metaphor, if the Church is looking into a mirror, the Church sees herself. And yet, by looking deeply into the elements of the Church, namely the Magisterium, the successors of the Apostles, the Tradition held by the Magisterium, and the Sacred Scriptures handed down and preserved through the ages by the Church, the Church sees Christ within the reflection. Christ, the visible image of the invisible God, is the fullness of the revelation of the Father. The life of Christ is recorded through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the evangelists who established the Sacred Scripture and the sacred tradition, “both of them flowing from the same divine well-spring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end.”<sup>19</sup> The Church looks into the mirror and sees this well-spring, which in turn *is* the Church. Therefore, both the break-through as well as the interpretation and the proclamation of this divine act establish divine revelation, which then bring about powerful and authentic transformations in the minds, hearts, and souls of the receptive faithful who comprise the Church. This thesis emphasizes what Ratzinger underlined above. First there is the original Word of God in Jesus Christ, the Word of God as normatively expressed in Sacred Scripture. Then, there are the interpretations and proclamations of these meanings and values in the Church’s tradition. Third, the faith-filled and open reception of these proclamations brings about life-altering conversions through God’s gift of grace. Through the

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<sup>18</sup> DV§7.

<sup>19</sup> DV§9.

conversions the person is lead back to God to complete this great circle of intentionality. This transformative set of conversions and self-appropriated growth has metaphysical, epistemological, and neurological implications. These implications are the focus of this thesis.

### ***The Structure of This Thesis***

The purpose of this thesis is to probe the outward complexities and internal dimensions involved in the theology of revelation that has its foundation in the converted heart of the faithful Christian person. I start by unpacking the work of St. Thomas Aquinas's metaphysical analysis of the implications of the Holy Trinity's act of existence and self-outpouring into the created world through divine creative action and communication. Lonergan's work also helps to explain this divinely created world understood by human, intellectual, and moral living as mediated by meaning and motivated by value. Revelation is defined as God's entry into this world of human history by bringing new divine meaning and a higher order of values than human reason can ever have developed, let alone grasped adequately. God's entry is, as *Dei Verbum* established, the freely given self-outpouring of God's very self as a being in action. The metaphysical terminology of meaning, being, value, and person is broken open in the first chapter of this thesis. Without adequately understanding the deeper implications of these foundational terms of divine revelation, through the lenses of Aquinas, Norris Clarke, and Lonergan, the rest of the discussion on revelation will be meaning-less.

Lonergan outlines two ways God becomes known to us. First, God is "the ground and end of the material universe". Second, God is "the one who speaks to us through Scripture and Tradition. The first manner might found a natural religion. The second adds revealed religion."<sup>20</sup> The first way is affirmed as a possibility by Vatican I's *Dei Filius*; the second is affirmed by Christian belief. Either of the two ways conveys to humanity a new sense of

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<sup>20</sup> Bernard Lonergan "New Context", in *A Second Collection*, 61.

meaning and value and a greater sense of self and purpose, since “meaning is the stuff of man’s making of man.”<sup>21</sup> The metaphysical implications that are involved in divine revelation point to the fact that there are both general and special realms of transcendence. General transcendence is coordinate with a universe intrinsically and extrinsically conditioned by space and time, allowing humanity to conceive and affirm the existence of God. The special realm of transcendence is coordinate with God’s self-communication to humanity. Lonergan explains how the person can come to appreciate the intelligibility of both general and special transcendent reality that ground these two ways of God’s revelation. “So inquiry, insight, and formulation do not merely reproduce the content of sensible experience but go beyond it. So reflection, grasp of the unconditioned, and judgment are not content with mere objects of supposing, defining, considering, but go beyond them to the universe of facts, of being, of what is truly affirmed and really is...to transcendent being.”<sup>22</sup> The explanation of this “going beyond” points to the importance of our capability of expressing in metaphysical terms and relations our human grasp of both ways God comes to us – by divine revelation or *in principle*, by understanding nature.

Because the true conception and affirmation of divine transcendence as affirmed by the teachings of the Church is only possible through faith, they only occur as a *matter of fact* with the aid of God’s grace. Nevertheless, what is intelligible from the standpoint of natural reason alone becomes integral to our understanding the reality of supernatural revelation in the light of divine faith. The established metaphysical argument is that God, as the only absolutely unconditional being, is pure actuality by reason of the identity of the divine essence with its act of existence. As such, God freely creates (brings into existence) all contingent, created being. God communicates God’s self through this created universe. And, Aquinas’s metaphysical

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight; A Study into Human Knowing*, Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, eds., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 658.

claim—*agere sequitur esse*—grounds God’s way of self-communicative action in and through existence as a matter of fact. God *is*. Clarke’s contemporary appropriations of Aquinas’s metaphysics develop the personal reality of God’s existence as well as the importance of the receptive person in the relational nature of divine revelation.

The second chapter, then, explores how Bernard Lonergan’s understanding in *Insight* explains how the human person comes into union with the God who is completely other than the created spacio-temporal material universe. Metaphysics does provide a solid explanation for being as the object of our knowing. However, a further dimension arises as the human subject with transcendent knowledge enters the realm of special transcendence at play in the divine self-communication. Lonergan uses the “general empirical method” to account for the process through which the transcendent God can be conceived and affirmed by the human mind. The mind extends the experience of data perceived by the senses to the data of human intentional consciousness and then into rational self-appropriation. We will regard this account of the process of self-appropriation through a phenomenologically accessible transposition of Aquinas’s epistemology of the human reception of divine revelation complementary to Clarke’s interpretation of Aquinas’s metaphysical account.

Lonergan’s epistemology identifies four distinct levels of the human mental, conscious, intentional operations. “On all four levels, we are aware of ourselves but, as we mount from level to level, it is a fuller self of which we are aware and the awareness itself is different.”<sup>23</sup> The progress of verifiable human performance from one stage to another becomes consciously habitual by means of religious, moral, intellectual, and even psychic conversion; and these, according to Lonergan “affect all of man’s conscious and intentional operations. It directs his gaze, pervades his imagination, releases the symbols that penetrate to the depths of the psyche.

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<sup>23</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 9.

(Conversion) enriches his understanding, guides his judgments, reinforces his decisions.”<sup>24</sup> This movement is the process of self-appropriation. Grounding these changes, religious conversion, brought about through the entry of God’s grace into human consciousness, entails powerful implications for human deciding and knowing. As divine revelation is received and interpreted, these transformational conversions become increasingly probable. Because of the entry of new divine meaning and value, the human knowing process of living and knowing is radically altered by the heightened sense of self, the interconnection with all people, and the infusion of the gift of divine love imparted to human life. The religious, moral, intellectual, and psychic conversions become the measure of the authenticity of the human subject’s response to revelation. These conversions enable the explorations of the effects of the fundamental theological topic of divine revelation. To help illustrate these conversions, this second chapter will use three sets of Biblical characters who go through particularly powerful conversion experiences.

Then, in the third chapter, epistemological repercussions due to the conversions provide our context for investigating recent neurological discoveries. Parallels will be drawn between the long-established epistemological understandings of the transformed person to those of the new findings of the human brain pulled from mindless wandering to focused mindful engagement. Sebastian Seung’s research formulates an understanding of the human brain that he is labeling the “connectome”. This theory of the interconnections of the brain brings into play the biological grounding for the action of the human mind in the constitution of human identity, personality, memory, and meaning. Seung and other neuroscientists are finding that every experience re-shapes or re-wires the neural networking patterns of connection within the brain in both small and quite dramatic ways. The radical conversion experiences taking place within a person’s levels of consciousness and horizon of awareness, along with their retinue of the new

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 131.

insights, heightened awareness, transformed perspectives, and converted psyche, are found to correspond with physiological changes within the brain. This recent neurological research is only just beginning, but the preliminary findings point to the fact that the neural pathways and connections within the mind are re-wired through moments of growth and throughout a person's progressive development into a state neuroscientists are calling "mindfulness". Whether a person is pulled out of a long-established detrimental habit, a military personnel is able to recover quickly after a traumatic event, or a searching faithful has a powerful new insight into the divine, Neuroscience research is confirming through physiological evidence that radical changes are happening within the person through memorable and conversion experiences.

Far from reducing the powerful reality of divine revelation and the converted human person down to these adjusted synapses and re-worked nerve cells within the human skull, an exploration of this modern research suggests the comprehensive impact –physically, mentally, and metaphysically– of divine revelation on the whole of the human person. To highlight the radically transformative entry of the new divine meaning and value into the human mind and heart, a case study of military personnel going through intensive mindfulness training will be used to show how the total person is profoundly affected when becoming mindful and receptive to one's self and the world. To forestall the reductionist tendencies of modern neurological instigation when discussing the transformational effects of this fundamental theological category of divine revelation, we will make a concluding attempt to reread the neurological implications considered in the light of St. Augustine's fourth century quest to explain aspects of the human mind. We will concentrate on how he did so in relation to the development of his doctrine of the Trinity in his reflections on memory as a created analogy for the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Avery Dulles says, "theology cannot maintain its identity and vigor if it overlooks this

foundational category (of divine revelation).”<sup>25</sup> The aim of this thesis is to explore the metaphysical, epistemological, and neurological implications of revelation as this primary dimension of theology. This project will bring to the fore how theology is rooted and grounded in the attentive, receptive, and converted heart of the believing Christian person.

### ***Chapter One: Metaphysics***

The general definition of divine revelation established in the introduction is the imparting of new meaning and value by God into and throughout the created world that is received and interpreted by a receptive human person. This definition, however, has several undefined terms and massively vague implications that must be developed. This first chapter on the metaphysics of divine revelation will clarify, define, and enhance these terms so as to establish a solid basis from which to explore the full effect of the presence of the divine in the lives of human persons. This chapter will use heavily the wisdom of St. Thomas to help unpack the depth of meaning in the terms of meaning itself, being, value, the self-revealing God, and person.

#### ***1.1: Meaning and Being***

The notion of meaning, especially the possibility of a radical new *meaning* brought about by God requires careful identification and defining. Metaphysics is the field of study that takes on the challenge of defining fundamental yet deeply relevant terms, which point to the primary principle and purpose in all of existence. The Aquinas scholar and modern metaphysician Norris Clarke says “the whole quest of metaphysics has been a search for the ultimate principles of intelligibility, the ultimate necessary conditions of possibility, of all the beings of our world of experience – and, by extension of the same principles, of all finite and changing beings, whether

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<sup>25</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), ix.

known to us or not.”<sup>26</sup> And, when metaphysical exploration can be focused on divine revelation, insight into the very meaning and nature of God becomes possible.

Divine revelation is that act of God that opens the human person to the existence of God who is self-revealing the divine nature, knowledge, and being. In chapter 19 of *Insight*, Lonergan discusses transcendent knowledge and eventually comes to his proof for the existence of God in the form of a syllogism. “If the real is completely intelligible, God exists. But the real is completely intelligible. Therefore, God exists.”<sup>27</sup> Unpacking the complexities of this proof will assist with establishing an understanding of meaning as found in this universe infused with God’s presence. Lonergan’s notion of the real is synonymous with being. All that is meant by the real “is both an object of thought and an object of affirmation... and similarly being is all that is to be known by intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation.”<sup>28</sup> Basically, being is that which is opposite of nothing. Being is that which exists. A pure desire to know is the driving force behind the human ability to make intelligent grasps and reasonable affirmations about what exists. All awake, coherent, thinking humans have this innate, unrestricted, insatiably curious drive for total understanding about existence, the complete knowledge of everything about everything. Therefore, being is all that exists. “The horizon of inquiry is nothing less than the totality of being, of what truly is.”<sup>29</sup> And yet, the drive to know being on the human part must be matched by being that is knowable and intelligible. Otherwise, “the drive to know becomes a monstrous living absurdity, a cruel illusion, a deep natural longing that is part of our being, defines us as human, yet is in principle unfulfillable, a radical frustration built into the very

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<sup>26</sup> W. Norris Clark, *The One and the Many; A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 212.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight*, 695.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 696.

<sup>29</sup> W. Norris Clark, *The One and the Many*, 2001, 15.

nature of things.”<sup>30</sup> This deep frustration, however, does not exist. Problems are solvable. Science does rely on principles to make discoveries. Challenges are overcome through technologies because being is intelligible and existence is understandable. The Truth is otherwise known as that which is completely intelligible. “For being is the objective of the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know; this desire consists in intelligent inquiry and critical reflection; it results in partial knowledge inasmuch as intelligent inquiry yields understanding and critical reflection grasps understanding to be correct.”<sup>31</sup> The intelligibility of being and the grounding in the Truth and correctness of being itself is meaning. Being has meaning because it exists. Being is real. And, most importantly of all, being is intelligible. The human intellect obtains its objective through its experiencing, questioning, probing, understanding, grasping, judging, deciphering. The intellect comes to the conclusion that being has intelligible meaning, and when being is known, it is true and real.

It is important to emphasize that meaning only has relevance when one who has intelligence can perceive existing objects, and is able to apprehend the intelligibility and meaning in them. As has already been suggested about revelation, what is meant by revelation is the divine act of communication as well as the reception of this communication in the heart and mind of an alert person. This is the same with meaning. To help clarify this point on meaning, according to Lonergan meaning can be thought of in three ways: namely, formal, full, and instrumental meaning. The *formal* act of meaning is “the act of conceiving, thinking, considering, defining, supposing, formulating.”<sup>32</sup> This is the act done by an intelligent person who is taking in the data of experiences in the reality of what exists. The meaning only becomes *full* when there is an act of judgment that establishes whether the understandings and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>31</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 695.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 381.

formulations made about existing being are indeed the case and so true or not the case, and so denied. As *instrumental* meaning takes place when the intelligent person is able to both express and to use the meaning learned from the experience of the data gained from existence, the understanding of the experiences, and the judgment verifying the truth of this existence. The instrumental meaning understood and affirmed by the alert person probing into the deeper aspects of the universe is useful as he or she speaks, writes, or imagines deeper aspects of the existing being through insights, teaching, making more discoveries, and applying the meaning. Thus, meaning regards the very being of the created universe in so far as the attentive, receptive, and inquiring human mind is able to understand and affirm it.

### **1.2: Value**

Why do human persons have such a hunger to know about being, this insatiable drive to gain meaning from existence? This longing for a knowledge of all that exists has to be motivated by that which has value or attraction. Aquinas explains that underpinning the impulse of the mind towards complete knowledge is the hunger of the human heart for union with the fullness of being as a fundamental good, “as to be appreciated, loved, enjoyed, as bringing (humanity) happiness.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, human persons are not only knowers, they are also deciders and doers actively seeking out that which is good. The dynamic movement for both knowing being and flourishing is driven by what Aristotle indicated as what would have to be some highest or ultimate Good. Following the wisdom of Aristotle, Aquinas explains that “a will’s passive power extends to the good in general (*ad bonum in universali*); for its object is the universal good just as the intellect’s object is universal being. But every created good is a certain particular good, whereas God alone is the universal good. Hence, God alone fulfills a will

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 15.

(*implet voluntatem*) and sufficiently moves it as an object.<sup>34</sup> This rational willing for that which is good brings into play a moral dimension. As Lonergan reformulates these insights, “the empirically, intelligently, rationally conscious subject of self-affirmation becomes a morally self-conscious subject.”<sup>35</sup> This person must reflect on whether his or her own thoughts, words, deeds, and actions are directed toward that which is truly good or rather impelled toward a lesser good. In any case, the good that the will is innately drawn toward is what is generally meant by *value*.

Again, Lonergan gives four characteristics of values. Values can be true or false depending on whether the will is attracted to them rationally and consciously or irrationally and unconsciously. Values are terminal “inasmuch as they are objects for possible choices, but they are originating inasmuch as directly and explicitly or indirectly and implicitly the fact that they are chosen modifies our habitual willingness, our effective orientation in the universe and so our contribution to the dialectical process of progress and decline.”<sup>36</sup> Values are also either actual or in process depending on whether they have been grasped and fully realized by the moral agent. Lastly, since values can be given greater or less priority, they can be categorized in accord with a hierarchically ordered scale. The person’s ability to choose between two objects of seemingly equal value becomes a matter of discernment to decide on that value which brings about the greatest good.

Divine revelation brings about new meaning and value. In this powerful and transformative moment when a human person encounters the divine, God brings to the person’s awareness, the value of the fullness of truth as the ultimate Good. This powerful experience bestows on the person a new scale of value. The person is able to grasp the greater horizon of being, meaning, truth, and value of greatest good in light of God’s presence. The person orders

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 105, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 622.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 624.

those aspects of lower value in light of those of higher values inasmuch as this person becomes more fervently drawn to that which is the fullness of all truth and goodness. The call of Levi the tax collector in Luke 5:27-32, is a classic example of this revelatory moment that transformed the scale of values of this man who had spent all of his time and energy counting the required amount of money expected from the peasants. Upon receiving the call of Jesus Christ in his life, Levi generously hosted a great banquet for Jesus and a large crowd of other tax collectors. Levi left a job of lesser value—his post of collecting tax moneys—and followed Jesus, making the choice of the greatest value. This act of choosing that object of greater value is made possible by a radically transformational experience that will be described in more detail in the next chapter as a moral conversion. Suffice it to say here that divine revelation is the entry of new meaning and value into the attentive and receptive human mind and heart. This entry brings about a transformational re-ordering of what the person values and holds to be true in the light of that which is ultimately Good and the fullness of Truth.

### ***1.3: The Self-Revealing God***

In order to be known by a human agent who is experiencing, understanding, judging, and knowing the material world, that which exists either contingently or absolutely must amount to some activity of expression that communicates that being's existence and essence. Without the outward activity of expression, the existing object has no other means of making manifest that it does exist. This next section describes first how created beings are in the act of existence and then how that act of existence manifests the very act and existence of God.

Actuality is in act instead of being in potency to act. In order to show forth its existing, being must make its being manifest. Otherwise, we have no way of knowing that there is being, or existence, rather than nothing. By the same token, for this manifestation to be complete, a

receptive agent is required to acknowledge the being in action by registering the outwardly expressed data of existence. This is why Clarke makes the bold claim that “the whole of Thomistic epistemology, in its large lines, can be summed up as follows: all human knowledge of the real is an interpretation of action.”<sup>37</sup> Properly, each being has to *act* according to its nature. And, by its activity, that existing being can be known and understood as real, true, and actual. Being can be understood as an achievement because it is a great performance or activity. Rather than a static state or a brute existence, we need to consider being as actuality, namely, as acting, expressing, being and ‘giving off’ its very presence.

Aquinas identifies several components to the “acts” of all existing beings. The first act of existence is that of existence itself. According to Aquinas’s reinterpretation of Aristotle, in order for a being to separate itself from nothingness and to be present, real, true, it has to have a form by which it can receive its fundamental act of existence. Being of any kind has a “to be” or *esse*, its abiding inner act. Secondly, what flows from the first act of existence is that all existing objects act for the sake of some purpose, for the final cause of its existence. Aquinas explains, “just as matter exists for the sake of form, so form, i.e., first act, exists for the sake of its own operation, i.e., second act. And so a created thing’s end is its operation.”<sup>38</sup> Thus the first act of being points ahead to the second act, that is, its natural self-expression. And, vice-versa, the second act of being stems from the first act of being as the ground and source—in the sense of specifying—its existence and its action, which can be further divided into immanent and transient action. An immanent action’s end is within the agent itself. Examples of this type of action is the subject moving from the potency to sing to the act of singing; or again, of the occurrence of the insightful self-revelation: “I can sing.” Either the performance or the self-

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<sup>37</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics; Being, God, Person*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 46.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 105, 5.

knowledge is an action that terminates within the person. An action is transient when it has an effect on another being. An opera singer's act of singing affects the whole audience. Without such manifesting or expressive actions, beings could not know of any other being in the universe except itself. This property of action "somehow belongs to the very nature of existential being as such and could not be intelligible otherwise, in that any being without it would remain beyond the pale of intelligibility, inaccessible to the rest of the real universe in the darkness of its total isolation from all others."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the active operation of everything inasmuch as it is expressing its characteristic nature is the purpose of its existence. All existing aspects share in the one intrinsic property of being. Thus, there is the fundamental ontological unity of being and this being is expressive because being is in action.

Aquinas has devised a proof for saying "to be is to be one": all of existence shares in the one act of being, and so there is unity. Aquinas defines 'one' as whatever "is undivided in itself and divided from every other. It coheres together within itself as a single undivided whole, but is distinct in its being from every other being: it is in itself, but is not any other being."<sup>40</sup> This intrinsic one-ness or unity of all that is real is its participating or sharing in being. However, the unity is seemingly contradicted by the fact that there is infinite diversity within the universe. Every existing object that does have being is both a specific kind and a particular instance of an object that is distinct from any other being. If this vast diversity is in fact the case, how can it be said that all being is united and actually one? The outward, active expression of each real object varies significantly. What Aquinas affirms is that being is one because being is the absolute, the most basic possible component of anything that exists. There is no other constitutive element more basic than its "to be" or its being. The fact of presence is *the* foundation. Integrations of

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<sup>39</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 61.

many aspects of any given being occur so as to form greater and greater wholes, such as a human body made up of distinct appendages and organs, each of which are made up of different types of muscles, and these muscles are constituted by different types of muscular tissue, which are composed of different types of cells, which are formed by the differing inner chemical activities of the components of the cells, which then can be broken down to atomic elements that are the building blocks of all material existence. As the human body grows and strengthens, there is integration and higher levels of unities and connections and stronger muscles. On the other hand, the aging process causes disintegration, the breaking apart of the tissues, the weakening of the whole, and eventually the total independence of all of the parts beginning at the point of death and decomposition. However, at each stage of the life of the body, each component of the human body expresses itself and performs its existential function, and expresses its being through its purposeful action. In the integration and symphony of each component of the body spontaneously expressing the unique and individual purposes of being, a total harmony comes about so as to lead to life, unity, one being. Not simply the sum of all its parts, the body is a unified whole.

A being in act brings about consequential effects of actions done by the being. Therefore, according to Aristotelian terminology, every being is an efficient cause, the real and present principle that produces naturally or desired and intelligibly dependent effects. The activity of every aspect of existence is the self-revelation of being. Revelation has already been defined as the entry of new meaning and value into the existing world, so that, in general, revelation takes place through every present aspect of existence. Because of the act of being, when an intelligent receiver receives the action of being, the fullness of being's meaning and value gradually comes about. As each aspect of being reveals itself through this self-expressive

activity and the effects of these expressions are received and recognized by another intelligent being, new meanings and values come about and instrumentally contribute to a new and greater integration of existence. All being expresses the perfection of its existence and the goodness of its reality. And “receptivity, as participated in by the created world, laced with imperfection as it is, must still be a positive perfection and necessary attribute of reality as a whole.”<sup>41</sup> As simple aspects of reality give and express their essences, like plants going through the process of photosynthesis, growth, and the production of flowers and fruit for reproduction; and other aspects of being receive these different kinds (or essences) of being (such as animals who eat the fruits, receive nourishment, and also transport the seeds), relationships form and simple aspects join together to form complex unified wholes. Through this unification, a new level of expressive being, “which now has new properties proper to the whole as such, so that this new whole now exercises its own specific causal influence on its parts, organizing them and controlling them to produce new effects not possible to them by themselves or as a mere sum of simpler properties.”<sup>42</sup>

This unity of being is described with the terms of either intrinsic or extrinsic unity. Extrinsic unity is that which is gathered together through some kind of external relation. From a football team comprised of many individual players who desire to win the game, to an army composed of many personnel all working as a single unit seeking to conquer or defend land, to a collection of branches that form a nest which will hold young birds, or a collection of sand-grains forming an anthill which provides safety to the colony, or the gears, tubes, oil, and wires that form a machine to produce power and motion, there is an extrinsic, relational unity. The

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<sup>41</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2004), 20.

<sup>42</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 69.

individual parts of this being that are diffusing themselves outwardly according to the good of their natures, are gathered together to form a unified whole sharing one desired goal.

A higher level of unity or a greater efficient cause to produce a bigger or more impactful effect entails intrinsic relation. This kind of unity cannot simply be broken down into individually expressive units of being because there is a greater integration of the relations causing the unity, such that bodily loss of intrinsic unity means complete destruction of the whole. Loss of the intrinsic unity of living bodies causes the life of each and every component of a unified, living body to break apart the relationships and disassemble the components of the body and so to kill the body. Obviously, to break a human body into its individual components, each of which expresses itself in its own unique ways, would forever destroy the intrinsic wholeness of the human body, because there is no way to put all of the parts back together again to attain what had existed originally. Intrinsic relations, therefore, differ from the external relationships formed as illustrated by parts of an engine that could be completely disassembled and then put back together again to form a functioning engine. From the components of an atom, to molecules, to plants and animals as living creatures, to the human person, these are all examples of unified beings revealing themselves within an intrinsic unity of simpler components of being. Aquinas understands the universe as that of a hierarchical ordering from the simple to the most complex. The intrinsically united, living, rational beings are the highest for Aquinas. The total wholeness of intrinsic unity is greater than the sum of the individual parts. Moreover, universal perfection is the totality of the relationships of all the parts within the whole.

Now that we have discussed the levels and forms of self-expressive created being, we are ready to use this understanding of being for an analogical understanding of the realm of uncreated, divine being. However, if the idea of intrinsic unity were to be simply expanded to

the entirety of the universe so that all of existence is in fact united through greater intrinsic unity, likening the universe to one body, several problems arise. When Aquinas considers the notion of intrinsic unity, he acknowledges that this unified being, like a body, has a central governing control to its expressive action. As a brain is able to control the movement of the human body's toes as well as rationally to plan a person's future career, there is a single controlling center of action for the intrinsically unified whole of the human body. If the universe were one massive body, what would hold the place of this single governing agent of the action of the universe? God is considered the controlling agent. Yet, if God were to control the entire universe like the brain controls the body, God would violate many established aspects of God's own existence because if God were the mind of the universal body, then God would be a composite entity. God would be conditioned by bodily components that are potentially dissoluble. As Aquinas says about composite beings, "their parts, likewise, are brought together as being in potency with respect to the union, since they are united in act after being potentially uniteable. But in God there is no potency. Therefore, there is no composition in Him."<sup>43</sup> Since all bodies are composites, God is not a body. Furthermore, the implications for human beings would be destructive as well. No human would have the ability to make conscious, rational, free decisions if God were the controlling center of the universal body. Humans would act as components of this massive machine of the universe and so would God, which is the monistic fallacy. Moreover, this would raise questions about the moral responsibility of humans. Since God would be the control of the total movement of the entire universe through the manipulation of each bodily component and so of every person's actions, persons would be unable to make value judgments and decisions. Again, the idea of God's acting as the brain of the universal body

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 18, 2.

would mean that all parts of the universe would be aspects of God, which would constitute the fallacy of pantheism.

Despite the defects of misunderstanding God's control of the universe as over a body united to him as its mind by an intrinsic relationship, this section began by stressing the idea that being means unity and oneness. If humans do have moral responsibility and can make free and rational decisions, would then the unity of being within the universe only involve extrinsic relations? It seems that only extrinsic relations cannot unite the universe. This would imply that, like every human body, the universe can be broken down into its individual, basic, atomic, building blocks so that everything would be merely a large composite of atoms that come together for a time and then dissolve away again. This stance is known as materialistic reductionism; all physical bodies of the universe could be reduced into its smallest and individual components. This extreme view of involving an ultimate lack of unity cannot be the case either, because intrinsic relations and living bodies do exist. Living bodies from plants and animals to humans are united by intrinsic relations among parts that comprise a living whole that is more than the sum of the individual components. How are we to understand the unity of being? All of the varied and amazingly diverse aspects of the universe are unified by a common cause, namely, of being as expressive, in so far as every real object has presence and this presence is shown forth to all other bodies through action. According to Clarke's interpretation of Aquinas, then, action is the shared connection between all aspects of existence. And yet, each body's action is unique, distinct, and radically different from any other object. "Characteristic action is the self-manifestation of a real being, manifesting both its actual existence and its nature as a real being. Thus, the intrinsically immaterial activities of the human intellect and will transcend the powers

of any nature whose parts are materially extended in space and tied down to it.”<sup>44</sup> The expressing and receiving actions of being constitute relations that form a unity. Despite the many questions and complex details pertaining to these relations, it remains that being is relational. “To be, it turns out, means *to-be-together*. Being and community are inseparable.”<sup>45</sup> Amidst the diversity of characteristic action, the combination of expressive actions and the receptions of these expressions of being, there is relational unity, both intrinsic and extrinsic.

What then is the role of God in the reality of this self-expressive universe, if not that of a centrally controlling agent? To respond to this question, Clarke asks even more radically, “What does the world of my experience demand as its adequate sufficient reason, to render it adequately intelligible?”<sup>46</sup> The intelligible universe that humanity has come to know through experience, understanding, and judgment is one of action. Furthermore, there is unity within the diversity of this active being. A man, John, shares in the one essence of humanity that consists of billions of men and women who express themselves through the action of living as human beings. Still, both of these observations about the universe point to the fact that there must be a source or origin of the action of existence, as well as a being whose essence is existence itself. As Aquinas states explicitly, “God is a being in act... therefore, it is proper to Him to enact some being in act, to which He is the cause of being.”<sup>47</sup> The only possible solution to the question regarding the intelligible unity of existence is that all that is real has an absolutely transcendent source. There is an uncaused efficient cause, as opposed to an infinite regress of causal agents, which brings its effects into being. All of the intelligible being expressing its existence through action points to a primal source of being, within which the rest of the universe both exists and imitates

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<sup>44</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 69.

<sup>45</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 213.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 6, 4.

in its existing. For there to be existence at all, an ultimate act of all of existence, the pure subsistent act of existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*) is necessary as the source of intelligibility, meaning, goodness, and value. This ultimate act of existence is the perfectly known and willed act that “does not lack the power of communicating His being to a thing by way of likeness. And thus He will be the cause of its being.”<sup>48</sup> God is this pure and unrestricted act of intelligence and source of all existence through the self-outpouring creative act.

Aquinas’s understanding of the perfect God who is self-communicating expands upon the Neoplatonic notion of “the self-diffusiveness of the Good” (*bonum est diffusivum sui*). Plato’s *Timaeus* considered the image of the *daimon* an intelligent, intentional, and beneficent source of the order and beauty of the universe. And, with the help of Aristotle’s notion of efficient causality, Aquinas reinterprets this notion of the all-good God as the source of created being of the universe in the Neoplatonic tradition as the ultimate ground of reality. Clarke elaborates on this point saying “for St. Thomas the good is a derivative property of existential being itself, expressing more explicitly the primal dynamism of self-expansiveness and self-giving inherent in the very nature of being as act of existence. The primacy always lies with existence for St. Thomas.”<sup>49</sup> For Aquinas, the act of existing is the expressiveness of the Good, but rather than God outwardly expressing divine Goodness necessarily, God freely and graciously pours out God’s own existence. To exist is good. Each being expressing its real presence is truly good because each being pours forth its characteristic nature to the rest of the universe. Existence entails the act of complete self-expression. The primary act of existence and source of the universe of existence is God. God is without potency because God is pure act, which for Aristotle constitutes the nature of Goodness. We can say that every aspect of created existence

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., II, 6, 6.

<sup>49</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 49.

desires to be in the act of living out its unique existence perfectly, which for Aquinas reflects the desire to imitate God who is truly good. “Hence, if natural things, in so far as they are perfect, communicate their good to others, much more does it appertain to the divine will to communicate by likeness its own good to others as much as possible. Thus, then, He wills both Himself to be, and other things to be; but Himself as the end, and other things as ordained to that end.”<sup>50</sup> God is the source of all being, as the self-expressive existence who is His essence and draws all being toward Himself.

The self-expressiveness of God *is* divine revelation. And, what Christians have come to understand through divine revelation about this all-good God as self-diffusive and self-communicating, is that God’s very nature is to be self-emptying. The two eternal processions grounding the Holy Trinity are not only consistent with but also the perfect model for this self-communicative and ever self-revealing dynamic act of creating the existence of the entirety of the universe. The relations arising from the procession of God the Son from God the Father, and then from the second procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son together constitute the expressive missions of the Son as the eternal Word of God entering into the created universe as well as of the Spirit as breathed forth love of God flooding the universe. God’s nature is that of free outpouring, self-emptying, self-communicating knowledge and love; and these two eternal processions are a primordial reflection of the manner in which God freely and generously communicates, reveals, and empties God’s very self as the divine act of existence. And, in response to God’s self-communication, the universe exists by imitating God’s self-revealing action through the self-communication by each unique essence. This dynamic relationship between God and the universe has come to be known as the “great circle of intentionality” by contemporary scholars of Aquinas’s work.

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 19, 2.

God by his creative action first projects his own divine ideas by ontological intentionality into created things, where they become the substantial forms of active natures; then the latter project themselves by self-communicative, self-imaging action into apt conscious receivers such as (human persons), again by ontological intentionality; (human persons) then recognizing the projected intentional similitudes without our consciousness as *signs* and intentional similitudes, retrace by cognitive intentionality the incoming ontological intentionality of things back to their original sources in the active natures of the beings themselves, and then further trace these by causal inference back to their own original Creative Source, recognizing and paying homage to it as such.<sup>51</sup>

God (the first intelligent being) causes all other beings in their intelligibility. Aquinas makes clear that God works directly in every agent in three specific ways; as an end, since all things seek the greatest Good; as a cause, since agents always act in virtue of a first cause; and finally as the creator and preserver of all forms of existence, since every agent is an act of creation.<sup>52</sup> Human beings, living agents directly endowed by God, so possess the gift and light of a rational intelligence that they can receive and understand the intelligibility of reality. This understanding leads a human being, who desires to know everything about everything, to ask more questions and seek out the answers to those questions. The ultimate question of the source of this intelligibility is finally sought and the desire of humanity is directed to the all-good God, who is the unrestricted act of understanding and loving. God is the desire of all peoples. This great dynamic circle flowing from the intentional, free, and abundantly generous act of God is the original revelation of God. God is the giver of intelligibility and humans are the receivers. This relationship of self-emptying, self-communicating action into the experiences and understanding of attentive receivers and benefactors of the self-gift, completes the act of revelation.

#### ***1.4: The Person***

The fundamental claim of this paper so far has been that revelation involves not only the intervention of God in the world, but also the attentive and open reception of this natural and

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<sup>51</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 105, 5.

supernatural created meaning and value by conscious and intelligent human persons. The present chapter has shown, by understanding this notion of revelation in the metaphysical terms of being, that being is action that characteristically occurs as self-expression. This expression is fully realized or enacted when experienced, understood, and judged to be so by a receptive agent. Thus, existence as relational involves a reality of communion, as all beings strive to *be* together. This first chapter now moves on from analyzing the metaphysics of revelation to the metaphysical understanding of person, only to show how a true person is the type of being who freely and willingly gives the self completely to another, and whose presence may be chosen and passionately received by another. The giving and reception of personal self-gift is a mutual and relational act that is nothing else but love.

If all of being is striving through action to obtain the greatest meaning and value—truth and goodness—this desired goal is perfection and fullness. To the question, what is the fullness of being? Aquinas’s answer is, “Person signifies what is most perfect in all nature – that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature.”<sup>53</sup> This definition needs to be carefully explained, but this present chapter on the metaphysical understanding of being has been leading up to and pointing toward the person, which is the ultimate climax and total perfection of existence. Person implies the act of being, and like beings, implies the self-expression of essence. Person implies intrinsic unity and complex relation. But most of all, person *is* a rational nature able to receive the intelligibility of reality as well as to be aware of and to control the actions of expression and relation that he or she performs. To be a person is to *be* fully because a person has complete control of the act of being. This control allows for unrestricted action, or as much action as the person chooses. Having control of the act or self-expression of being means that persons possess responsibility and are the owners or sources of their own actions. When a dog

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., I, 29,4.

performs actions, it does so because of its nature. If a dog is hungry, it eats, and when tired, it sleeps, and when angry, it barks. Unlike persons, dogs do not possess their own expression or have the responsibility of their own actions. Dogs simply follow their instinctual nature so as to express their characteristic kind of existence. Human persons, on the other hand, are self-conscious, self-possessing masters of themselves. Through the use of their intellects and wills, they can determine the actions performed by rationally choosing the acts of self-expression that best allow them to thrive most fully. Lonergan illustrates this personal self-reflection by saying, “when an animal has nothing to do it goes to sleep. When a man has nothing to do he may ask questions. The first moment is an awakening to one’s intelligence...it is the effective emergence of wonder, of the desire to understand.”<sup>54</sup> Persons receive the intelligibility of reality through experiencing, understanding, and judging. They question their experiences in the process of seeking understanding, and then judge whether the understandings are correct in the quest for truth. This general empirically verifiable process of knowing enables the making of man through the discovery of meaning and value.

Aquinas makes the point that persons, as intellectual creatures, require providential and personal care. Again, because animals do not have mastery and control over their acts, they are indeed cared for, but are not cared for personally, or for their own sake in the same way that persons are. Non-intellectual creatures are subordinated to other created schemes of recurrence, through instinct, and by the probabilities proper to created nature. Aquinas compares non-intellectual creatures to instruments: “an instrument is not valued for its own sake, but as useful to a principal agent. Hence it must be that all the careful work that is devoted to instruments is actually done for the sake of the agent, as for an end, but what is done for the principal agent,

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<sup>54</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight*, 34.

either by himself or by another, is for his own sake, because he is the principal agent.”<sup>55</sup> Persons are cared for individually, uniquely, personally, and for their own sake because they are ordered to the perfection of the whole of the universe. Developing this notion of being ordered to the perfection of the whole, Aquinas says that persons, “have a closer relationship to a whole than do other natures; indeed, each intellectual substance is, in a way, all things. For it may comprehend the entirety of being through its intellect; on the other hand, every other substance has only a particular share in being.”<sup>56</sup> Much of Aquinas’s understanding of the superiority of human persons within creation is based on the passage in Genesis where God tells the newly created human persons that they “have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth”(Genesis 1,28). Moreover, Aquinas sees that the intellectual person is made for and directed to God more fully than any other creature: “Reasonable creatures, however, have in some special and higher manner God as their end, since they can attain to Him by their own operations, by knowing and loving Him.”<sup>57</sup> Human persons have the desire to know and are drawn to the source of all intelligibility, which is God. And beyond finding intellectual satisfaction in God, human persons are made for the purpose of knowing God and entering into loving union with God besides contributing to the order of creation in *this* world in accord with their *created* nature. This bliss of union with God is described powerfully by Jacques Maritain as the ‘light of glory’, which is “the very Being whose intelligibility in pure act is *per se* proportionate only to the intellect in pure act...The beatific vision is therefore the supremely personal act by which the soul, transcending absolutely every sort of created common

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 112, 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 112, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 65, 2.

good, enters into the very bliss of God and draws its life from the uncreated Good.”<sup>58</sup> The love of God for the person is so personal that, as Aquinas says, even if there were only one person enjoying the love of God in the beatific vision, this soul would still be supremely happy. And, if another person were to join that person, the two souls would love each other only for the sake of the perfect love of God.<sup>59</sup> This God is a God who cares, personally, intimately, dearly for human persons, even to the point of completely disposing of God’s self for the sake of the individual person.

That a person is subsistent means that he or she is one, particular, individual substance. In other words, compared to the whole order of existence, the person has its own existence and its own perfection. In relation to all of humanity or all of divinity that this person is differentiated from any other person by reason of its specific, individual particular substance. As human, this absolutely unique person consists of a soul and a material body. Maritain contradicts Descartes’ notion of person as a *res cogitans* or thinking-thought-existing separate from a body. Rather, “soul and matter are two substantial co-principles of the same being, of one and the same reality, called man...each soul has or is a substantial relation to a particular body, it has within its very substance the individual characteristics which differentiate it from every other human soul.”<sup>60</sup> As opposed to an abstract understanding of humanity, the person is a concrete reality that possesses potency, form, and act because of the body and soul connection. Lonergan helps our understanding of this definition when he says that ‘person’ implies that “there is *someone* who senses, imagines inquires, understands, formulates his understanding, asks whether it is so, grasps the sufficiency of the evidence, and makes the judgment... there is the person *who*

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<sup>58</sup> Jacques Maritan, *The Person and the Common Good*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 21.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 4,8, ad 3.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Maritan, *The Person and the Common Good*, 36.

understands, and there is the intellect *by which*, the act *by which* he understands.”<sup>61</sup> The person is this particular rational subject in the act of thinking and also loving. The true love for another person, beyond being an attraction for the other person’s qualities, desires the deep, central, existing unity of the other person. “This is a metaphysical center,” explains Maritain, “deeper than all the qualities and essences which we can find and enumerate in the beloved. The expressions of lovers are unending because their object is ineffable.”<sup>62</sup> This love is for the very essence of the person, which is communicated by the person, or is what the full person reveals. Thus, the person has subsistence in that he or she has personality, which involves the internal communication that flows from the union between the spiritual soul and the material human body. “Personality testifies to the generosity or expansiveness in being which an incarnate spirit derives from its spiritual nature and which constitutes, within the secret depths of our ontological structure, a source of dynamic unity, of unification from within.”<sup>63</sup> Personality allows for the person’s ultimate uniqueness and differentiation from any other person, not to mention from any other animal, plant, or existing object. Personality is correlative to the communication of the person’s knowledge and love and truly enacts the revelation of the person’s self both to the person in self-reflection and to all other beings.

God is the most personal existence. Augustine came to the most basic concept of person when he was wrestling with an understanding of the divine Trinity. God is not three Gods or three spirits, but three *personae*, which is a heuristic notion for what there are three of in the divine *substantia*. The term has only become less ambiguous through the ages because of the development of doctrine and the greater realization of the relational nature of God of three

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<sup>61</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli, eds., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 113.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 39.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

persons. Lonergan gives a basic definition of the Trinity, stating, “the three Persons are the perfect community, not two in one flesh, but three subjects of a single, dynamic existential consciousness.”<sup>64</sup> Providing a deeper insight into the origin of persons in the Trinity, Aquinas uses the psychological analogy of two processions in God—the procession of the Son from the Father (known as filiation), and the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, (known as spiration). These two processions ground four real relations; the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father, the Father and Son to the Spirit, and the Spirit to the Father and the Son. Of the four relations, three are opposed to the others and so are distinct. Then it becomes possible to acknowledge that “these three are not just relations as relations, and so modes of being, but also subsistent, and so not just paternity and filiation but also Father and Son.”<sup>65</sup> As three unique, distinct, conscious, self-expressive, infinitely perfect acts of being, which are also subsistent, these persons have personality. These divine persons still share one essence and so are one God with no accidental qualities. The Holy Trinity consists of three persons that are persons that are so as subsistent relations to each other. Although there are three persons, there is no composition in God because the persons do not involve matter or the property of quantity. In God there are three *hypostaseis* but the three persons exist as unified divine substance and have no need of a fourth essence to unify them. Essence and relation are identical in God and yet real distinction exists in the divine persons based on the opposition of relations. As they freely and consciously express their presences through their personhood, they are self-giving, self-communicative, self-expansive, and self-emptying as regards to each other in a triune community.

When the Triune existence of God created being in its own image and likeness, the human person exists. In no other creature or any part other part of existence is this image of God

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<sup>64</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “The Dehellenization of Dogma” in *A Second Collection*, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections” in *A Third Collection*, Frederick E. Crow, S.J. ed., (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1985), 93.

more evident than in intellectual human persons. As a human person reflects on him or herself honestly, this person realizes what Clarke brings out in his reflections on the person. “Who I am at my deepest level can only be understood in irreducibly relational terms: I am an *image* of God, brought into being by love, and called to transformation and final union with my Source.”<sup>66</sup> As the image of this personal God, a human person is also caught up into the intrinsic dynamism of self-expression, self-giving, and self-communication. Because of the deep-rooted desire to freely give the personal self to other persons and to receive the gift of another person, human persons, like the divine Trinity, are also communal by nature. Maritain explains how the desire for community develops. “First, because of its very perfections, as person, and its inner urge to the communications of knowledge and love which require relationship with other persons... in its radical generosity, the human person tends to overflow into social communications in response to the law of superabundance inscribed in the depths of being, life, intelligence, and love.”<sup>67</sup> Human persons thus need each other to flourish, to fulfill and satisfy each other’s deficiencies. Thus the authentic human person has the humble need and ability to receive from others. This self-giving and openness to receive is the basis of all relational human love. Clarke synthesizes this idea of person by saying “To be an actualized human person, then, is to be a lover, to live a life of interpersonal self-giving and receiving. Person is essentially a ‘we’ term.”<sup>68</sup>

Self-giving, is an imitation of the divine and Trinitarian giving of the divine persons. Human persons are beings who act by revealing their unique and characteristic inner selves to other persons through the self-expression of their personalities. Created human persons only engage in this act of self-revelation because that is what it means to be a person. Imitating the divine persons of the Holy Trinity, who are freely and eternally revealing, expressing, and giving

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<sup>66</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being*, 68.

<sup>67</sup> Jacques Maritan, *The Person and the Common Good*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being*, 76.

themselves to each other and even to the created world through the divine processions in the sending of the Word/Son and the Holy Spirit, human persons are also revelatory beings, which to be complete needs the reception of the self-gift. As the second person receives both the being and the love of the first person, there is the relationship of the Father to the Son. In response to the Father's love, the Son is "the eternally true expression of the value that God as *agape* is, so the Word as man by obedience unto death again expressed that value by revealing how much God loved the world."<sup>69</sup> When the human person is disposed, ready, and willing to receive this divine self-gift of God as *agape*, the relationship between persons, human and divine, becomes a reality, as the act of revelation is made present, and the human person is brought ever closer to its perfection. Through the new meaning and value that is brought into created existence by revelation of the divine self-gift, the human person is transformed by this relationship from a creature, who because of sin tends to be centered on the self, to a person in communion with God and all other persons as he or she is drawn toward the total fulfillment of union with the Infinite Good.

The next chapter will explore the dynamism behind this radical decentering of the self through the transformation of the human person in the experience of conversion as divine revelation powerfully elevates everything the human person believes, values, and knows.

## ***Chapter Two: Epistemology***

When a human person is opened to the presence of God who pours out the ever-new meaning and value of the divine self into the created person's heart and mind, powerful and radical transformations take place in virtue of a cyclical relationship between God and man. God is the outpouring source of transcendent meaning and value flowing out in the mission of the

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<sup>69</sup> Bernard Lonergan, "Christology Today: Methodological Reflections" in *A Third Collection*, 94.

outer Word of expression and revelation. By the mission of the Holy Spirit, human persons become the attentive receivers influenced, affected by, and transformed through this powerful, freely given, divine meaning and value so that they seek to become united with God in the beatific vision. In a posthumously published paper entitled ‘The Mediation of Christ in Prayer,’ Lonergan uses the notion of mediation to help define and clarify this relationship. “Any factor, quality property, feature, aspect that has, on the one hand a source, origin, ground, basis, and on the other hand, consequences, effects, derivatives, a field of influence, of radiation, of expansion, or that has an expression, manifestation, revelation, outcome...” entails a dynamic mediation or mutually self-giving relationship of unity. In the case of divine revelation, this factor is the outwardly expressed “Word” of God. God, the Father, is the divine origin, ground and basis of all of existence. “...we can say that this factor... is immediate in the source...and on the other hand is mediated in the consequences, effects, derivatives, outcome in the field of influence... revelation.”<sup>70</sup> The Word of God, Jesus Christ, is immediate in God who mediates God’s unconditional love through his Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, which then is mediated through the variety of sources of revelation such as scripture, tradition, the Church and her teachings.

In his *Models of Revelation*, Avery Cardinal Dulles developed five different models of revelation (not an exclusive list), namely, doctrine, history, inner experience, dialectic presence, new awareness, and revelation as symbolically mediated. In all of these, in light of the mission of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God is mediated through an aspect of creation so as to make human persons aware of absolutely transcendent and supernatural meaning and value. There are four different kinds of mediation developed by Lonergan. He distinguished simple mediation,

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<sup>70</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “The Mediation of Christ in Prayer” in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran, eds., (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988), 162.

self-mediation, mutual mediation, and mutual self-mediation. This last one, mutual self-mediation, is that which is most pertinent to divine revelation. Lonergan illustrates this type of mediation by using the example of “The Greek (who) was a pagan following the idols, adoring the idols, and leading a very unsatisfactory moral life; his meeting with Christ resulted in the transformation of a member of the *goyim* into a member of the body of Christ.”<sup>71</sup> Because of the mediation of the divine Word through the person of Jesus Christ encountering this Greek person in a very personal way, through the divine encounter mediated through created acts, this pagan undergoes the powerful transformation of a conversion experience. Such is the topic of this chapter’s exploration. The previous chapter delved into the metaphysics of the God who is being and who, as the source of all intelligibility, meaning, and value freely communicates his divine personal self through acts of revelation. Now, the focus shifts to the effects of this divine revelation in the hearts and minds of the intelligent and attentive human persons who receive this mediated divine revelation.

### ***2.1: Insight into the divine***

The person who experiences the entry of the divine into his or her consciousness has what Lonergan terms in *Method in Theology* a “religious experience”. This section explores and elaborates what Lonergan means by the religious experience and connects this experience with the divine self-expression mediated by revelation.

Religious experience occurs in the moment when a person’s interiority is so transformed by the gift of God’s love that it can link this experience of the transcendent God with the created world that is mediated by meaning. This happens through knowledge born of religious love, as Lonergan defines the theological virtue of “faith.” In virtue of a person’s being in love with God, faith disposes the person’s openness and attentive receptivity to the eternal transcendent being to

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 175.

fully respond to the divine revelation while living here in this material and mortal world. The process of gaining new meaning and value through imparted divine love is at the core of religious experience as a personal encounter with God. Lonergan uses Pascal's "the heart has reason which reason does not know" to express what is happening in this most powerful and intimate moment.

By reason I would understand the compound of activities on the first three levels of cognitional activity, namely, of experiencing, of understanding, and of judging. By the heart's reasons I would understand the feelings that are intentional responses to values; and I would recall the two aspects of such responses, the absolute aspect that is a recognition of value, and the relative aspect that is a preference of one value over another. Finally, by the heart I understand the subject on the fourth, existential level of intentional consciousness and in the dynamic state of being in love... besides the factual knowledge reached by experiencing, understanding, and verifying, there is another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgments of value of a person in love.<sup>72</sup>

This religious experience is initiated by the divine flooding of the human person's heart with love through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). At that moment the person cannot help but fall on his or her knees in awe because of the overwhelming mystery of the love of God and the movement from the created earthly realm into that of divine transcendence. Now, as Charles Hefling says in his essay "Revelation and/as Insight", divine mysteries are "mysterious not because of a defect in intelligibility but for the opposite reason: they are excessively intelligible... [T]o understand (Christ's) being united to and by the eternal Word who is God, an understanding of what it is to be God and of what it is, in God, to be 'spoken' is required."<sup>73</sup> Entering into this excessive intelligibility, and opening up a window on the divine and transcendent intelligibility, cause a certain shock to the human person, especially when this gift of transforming love also encounters God's own outer Word that has entered into "the division of labor by which men come to know, (and) that his contribution was one that could not be replaced

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<sup>72</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 115.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Hefling, "Revelation and/as Insight" in *The Importance of Insight; Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin*, John J. Liptay Jr. and David S. Liptay, eds., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 105.

by human effort, that in accepting the truths of faith we are believing not just man but ultimately God.”<sup>74</sup> This religious experience mediates a human capacity to identifying with God, by moving consciously into relational, interpersonal, intersubjectivity.

To further describe this religious experience, Lonergan turns to the work of Friedrich Heiler, who identified the human dimensions of religious experience throughout the main religious traditions. Heiler lists seven common aspects of the divine that human religious experiences include:

Transcendent reality; that he is immanent in human hearts; that he is supreme beauty, truth, righteousness, goodness; that he is love, mercy, compassion; that the way to him is repentance, self-denial, prayer; that the way is love of one’s neighbor, even of one’s enemies; that the way of is love of God, so that bliss is conceived as knowledge of God, union with him, or dissolution into him.<sup>75</sup>

Heiler points out that entrance into the realm of divine transcendence involves a conversion to the unrestricted act of ultimate consciousness. The only human experience comparable to this radical conversion is the act of falling in love. And, as Lonergan wrote in “Theology and Man’s Future”: “[T]he fulfillment that is the love of God is not the fulfillment of any appetite or desire or wish or dream impulse, but the fulfillment of getting beyond one’s appetites and desires and wishes and impulses, the fulfillment of self-transcendence, the fulfillment of human authenticity, the fulfillment that overflows into a love of one’s neighbor as oneself.”<sup>76</sup> Religious experience is one of transformation, of insight, of conversion from former ways to a radically new life full of meaning and value.

## **2.2: Conversions**

The mystical German theologian of the twentieth century, Hans Urs von Balthasar, stresses that the conversion experience involves a free decision. No matter how much divine

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<sup>74</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Belief: Today’s Issue” in *A Second Collection*, 97.

<sup>75</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 109.

<sup>76</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Theology and Man’s Future,” in *A Second Collection*, 147.

power and might is used to break into the human consciousness, if persons do not open themselves to receiving this influential calling and act upon it, there will be no conversion. As we have seen above, conversion requires both the imparting of the divine self to the human reality as well as a receptivity and openness on the part of the person. For Balthasar the response to conversion is comparable to swimming against the strong current of a river. It is tough, “particularly at the outset. But soon it becomes evident that this return to the source answers a deep need and that renunciation of self-seeking brings peace to the soul.”<sup>77</sup> What the conversion fundamentally means for the person is a period of substantial, concentrated growth. This growth will have its pains and discomforts because it demands a change of personal orientation. The person undergoing a conversion awakes as if from sleep, or a lower form of consciousness by coming to a heightened sense of awareness, meaning, and purpose in life. Balthasar describes the experience as a person being aroused “from his anonymity and self-absorption into self-awareness...those asleep spiritually are awakened, the ones scattered are gathered, the alienated are given back their identity. The person must rise to faith, to wakeful readiness for God, mediated and accomplished through Jesus in the encounter.”<sup>78</sup> While no one, not even God, can force a person to respond to the event of conversion, when a person does choose to take this leap of faith and go through the challenges that inevitably arise, substantial growth becomes possible.

Lonergan describes this growth powerfully as

Not merely a change or even a development; rather, it is a radical transformation on which follows, on all levels of living, an interlocked series of changes and developments. What hitherto was unnoticed becomes vivid and present. What had been of no concern becomes a matter of high import. So great a change in one’s apprehensions and one’s values accompanies no less a change in oneself, in one’s relations to other persons, and one’s relations to God.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Conversion in the New Testament” *Communio International Catholic Review* 01.1 (Spring 1974): 47.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>79</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Theology in Its New Context,” in *A Second Collection*, 69.

This growth in self-awareness and responsiveness to the infusion of divine love can be categorized more formally and precisely. Lonergan discusses three specific moments of growth and conversion in terms of a person's development in self-appropriation; religious, moral, and intellectual conversions.

Ordinarily, the first conversion moment is neither natural nor expected. Lonergan calls the great awakening to a sense of ultimate concern, the act of falling in love, the grasping of the impassioned conviction of making a difference in the world, the full understanding of one's vocation, or simply having one's heart flooded with the love and power of the Holy Spirit, the religious conversion. "It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations. But it is such a surrender, not as an act, but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts. It is revealed in retrospect as an under-tow of existential consciousness..."<sup>80</sup> This conversion constitutes what Augustine would call operative grace, and is what Ezekiel speaks about as the replacement of the heart of stone with one of flesh. The more freely responsive a person is to this grace, the more cooperative grace can become effective in a person's living, acting, and doing. "Religious conversion is to a total being-in-love as the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence, whether in the pursuit of truth or in the realization of human values, or in the orientation man adopts to the universe, its ground, and its goal."<sup>81</sup> No matter how much one can learn knowledge and carefully discern to make proper value judgments, it is religious conversion that brings about a sense of absolute and fulfilling joy. This conversion transforms "the existential subject into a subject in love, a subject held, grasped, possessed, owned through a total and so an other-worldly love. Then there is a new basis for all valuing and

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 241.

all doing good.”<sup>82</sup> Through this conversion, a person is moved into innumerable acts of holiness that sometimes make no logical sense. The challenge that comes through this conversion is the acceptance of the reality that comes with embracing the suffering and pain of the whole world. “Religious loving is without conditions, qualifications, reservations; it is with all one’s heart and all one’s soul and all one’s mind and all one’s strength. This lack of limitation, though it corresponds to the unrestricted character of human questioning, does not pertain to this world.”<sup>83</sup> The self-transcendence that comes about through the religious conversion is what moves and strengthens the person within a state of unbounded love and outpouring joy even in the face of severe persecution, defeat, and hardship.

This conversion is an act of transcending the human limitations and entering into the special transcendent life of an imitation of the self-giving act of the Trinity God. Religious conversion *is* the reception of sanctifying grace which “is a created participation in the active spiration of the Spirit by the Father and the Son, and the habit of charity breathed forth from sanctifying grace is a created participation in the passive spiration that *is* the Holy Spirit.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, participating in the Holy Spirit means imitating this God who is the infinite act of love. The religious conversion, allows for “the higher synthesis of intellectual, rational, and moral consciousness that is the dynamic synthesis of being in love,” and yields “judgments of value based on evidence perceived by a lover, and the acts of loving grounded on judgments of value.”<sup>85</sup> Intellectual and moral conversions are based on the achievement and growth of the person, which Lonergan depicts as the achievement of “development from below upwards, from experience to growing understanding, from growing understanding to balanced judgment, from

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Doran, *What is Systematic Theology?*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 109.

<sup>85</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections,” *A Third Collection*, 93.

balanced judgment to fruitful courses of action, and from fruitful courses of action to the new situations that call forth further understanding, profounder judgment, richer courses of action.”<sup>86</sup> But the process of falling in love and the transformation that comes about through this religious conversion is from above downwards: “There is the transformation of falling in love: the domestic love of the family; the human love of one’s tribe, one’s city, one’s country, mankind; the divine love that orientates man in his cosmos and expresses itself in his worship... love breaks the bonds of psychological and social determinisms with the conviction of faith and the power of hope.”<sup>87</sup> Coming from above downward implies the transcendence of the self, the total broadening of one’s horizons to include all of humanity and of reality, as well as the outward thrust to give one’s self for the benefit of uniting all in the relationship and community of love. While the religious experience and conversion moment can be intensely personal and intimate, an authentic conversion is never solitary and exclusionary. “It can happen to many and they can form a community to sustain one another in their self-transformation, and to help one another in working out the implications, and in fulfilling the promise of their new life.”<sup>88</sup>

A second crucial moment of growth, which is usually made possible by religious conversion, and may enable and give rise to an intellectual conversion, is moral conversion. What Lonergan calls moral conversion occurs when a receptive and questioning person “changes the criterion of one’s decisions and choices from satisfactions to values.”<sup>89</sup> As discussed in chapter one, Lonergan means by value what is truly good or beneficial for both the self and others, and in general whatever advances the person towards the authenticity, that allows one to make more grounded and virtuous decisions in one’s life. This moral conversion “is the time for

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<sup>86</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Healing and Creating in History,” *A Third Collection*, 106.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Theology in its New Context,” in *A Second Collection*, 66.

<sup>89</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240.

the exercise of vertical freedom and then moral conversion consists in opting for the truly good, even for value against satisfaction when value and satisfaction conflict.”<sup>90</sup> The goodness of reality has become manifest to this person. Because of this realization, rather than doing whatever is desired, or immediately seeking to quench nagging desires, a person who undergoes a moral conversion has developed a sense of self-discipline and has become aware of greater goals and more important needs than one’s own individual, selfish satisfactions. The awareness and desire for the acquirement of higher values and virtues gives the person the strength and perseverance to endure the challenges and set-backs, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune for the sake of a greater good, a higher purpose, a more valuable cause. The causes of this conversion can involve many factors and influences, but Lonergan explains that children by nature are encouraged to do what is right because of the influence of parents or mentors. As one’s knowledge increases and desires strengthen, the guardians back off and allow the person to make personally directed decisions. “So we move to the existential moment when we discover for ourselves no less than the chosen or rejected objects, and that it is up to each of us to decide for himself what he is to make of himself.”<sup>91</sup> Moral conversion is the growing and challenging process of coming of age and learning a sense of responsibility, discipline, motivation, and a prioritized set of values for oneself. It gradually eliminates one’s own bias and reaches out beyond what is true and real and meaningful for that which has true, good, and lasting value. Even though this moral conversion empowers and energizes responsibility and the undertaking of the challenges of discipline for the sake of greater and more authentic goals, this is the laborious process of the making of a person.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

The third kind of conversion or transformational movement a person may undergo is what Lonergan considers to be intellectual conversion. The world of the infant is the world of immediacy, that of sensation. The young human person gathers data that he or she can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell and is overwhelmed with the constant inflow of these new and amazing sensations. To the person living in this world of immediacy, objectivity is simply a matter of what is seen when one looks and what is heard when one listens (and so on for all the senses). Through intellectual conversion, a person does not simply take the objectivity of these sensations for granted but calls what is sensed or imagined into question in order to grasp the intelligibility and deeper meaning of the surrounding world. Through this transformation, the person enters the world mediated by meaning, which is “a world known not by the sense experience of an individual but by the external and internal experience of a cultural community, and by the continuously checked and rechecked judgments of the community.”<sup>92</sup> Rather than taking a good look at what is supposed to be real, for Lonergan knowing consists in applying what he calls empirical method. This process starts with having experiences grasped by sensations, moving on to seek understanding of these experiences, and then to arriving at judgments that affirm or deny the accuracy of those understandings. Using this method, one forms firm convictions that are verified and reasonably believes the sound judgments of others. One who has undergone intellectual conversion will be a critical realist. As Lonergan says, “Only the critical realist can acknowledge the facts of human knowing and pronounce the world mediated by meaning to be the real world; and he can do so only inasmuch as he shows that the process of experiencing, understanding and judging is a process of self-transcendence.”<sup>93</sup> Prior to an intellectual conversion, a person living only by senses is stuck in deeply ingrained habits involving naïve

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<sup>92</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

realism. This regards as reality whatever can be attained by something like taking a good look at and recognize as “already-out-there-now”. The intellectual conversion acknowledges the significance of coming to know through questions for understanding. Understanding leads to the apprehension of possible relevant intelligibilities and questions for critical reflection. The questions lead to the grasp of the evidence that is sufficient for realizing that conditions for the possibly relevant intelligibility grasped by understanding to be actually relevant have been fulfilled.

Thus, intellectual conversion gives the quest for truth a fresh start, especially as regards the meaning and purpose of reality. However, this transformative process unleashes the challenges of letting go of the mode of operating with which one had become so familiar and comfortable. Most significantly intellectual conversion helps a person begin to see the world as a complex mystery open for exploration, questioning, authentic knowing, and deciding. Finally, in a world so saturated with the denial of the possibility and reality of both moral and intellectual self-transcendence as well as divine transcendence, religious conversion may find it necessary to become intellectually converted. “This conversion grounds the relationships between knowing, being, and reality, which are pivotal to (Lonergan’s) argument in *Insight* for the existence of God, and for understanding the relationship between God and creation.”<sup>94</sup> Once one is moved authentically to question the experiences of created existence, a person will come inevitably to wonder about the source of being and meaning as well as the purpose behind the present reality.

Although Lonergan only distinguished those three conversions, Robert Doran, a student and close colleague of Lonergan, explored a fourth conversion that takes place in human self-transcendence. Besides acquiring true meanings in the world, and besides developing a sense of values beyond one’s own biases and in relation to living a life of love in the world, one often

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<sup>94</sup> Neil Ormerod, *Method, Meaning, and Revelation*, 137.

needs to go through a process of becoming attuned to unconscious repressions and suppressions that affect one's own inner consciousness and the inner movements of the heart. "Since the drive and momentum of existential consciousness derive from the apprehending feelings, the affective development of sensitive consciousness becomes central in the account of the flourishing of existential authenticity."<sup>95</sup> This greater awareness of one's inner feelings also affects the pursuit of truth, the search for value, and the outpouring of concern for the world because these quests are grounding in what Lonergan called "the passionateness of being." This affective or psychic conversion moment is related to the psyche's unconscious censorship of one's images and feelings; because it "is both a scientific notion and a key to appropriating the dramatic and practical patterns of experience, or better, the story of cognitive and existential experience, the implementation in this case is a reorientation *simultaneously* both of science and common sense."<sup>96</sup> Psychic conversion is intimately related to one's sense of peace regarding the quest for knowledge and discernment of one's vocation. For Lonergan, the self-appropriation of the structure of conscious intentionality in relation to human knowing and deciding identifies different phases, namely, acts of attentive experiencing, intelligent understanding, reasonable judgment, and responsible decision. He uses this structure to work out the three basic stages of human meaning as based respectively upon common sense, theory, and interiority. Doran remarks that the third stage of meaning has to do with "the cultural drama of our time" in such a way that "without psychic conversion, intellectual conversion itself risks causing in incipient third-stage subjectivity an alienation of intelligence and rationality from sensitivity, an inflation of the human spirit, a schizoid split, a failure to come home."<sup>97</sup> Doran makes explicit the fact

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<sup>95</sup> Robert Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006), 174.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

that psychic conversion is essential to integrating all three conversions as religious, moral and intellectual. Through a psychic conversion a person transforms the psychic censorship in such a way that, rather than repressing and doubting what is experienced and understood, one so affectively desires “insight, rational judgment, and responsible decision,” that it “admits into consciousness the sensitive and imaginal materials and the received meanings and values that will provide the data for insight.”<sup>98</sup> The psychically converted person becomes more fully alive, more fully aware, and more fully in love.

In the free engagement in the process of self-transcendence and self-appropriation according to both Balthasar’s and Lonergan’s accounts of the conversion experience, the human person becomes authentic. Because of these distinct transformational conversions, a person grows from existing in a world chiefly dominated by the flow of sensory stimuli to becoming committed to life in the world mediated and constituted by meaning and motivated by values. Each conversion transforms persons from selfish absorption in their own egoistic interests and pursuits to becoming capable of pouring out newly abundant energy, concern, and love for the world. These transformations happen because the state of being in love with God is really assented to as the basis of their existence as unfolding in a life of self-sacrificial love for every other created person. The conversion experience promotes the process of self-transcendence in coming to know, love, and respond to the love of God in Christ Jesus. About this experience Lonergan is careful to point out that

Conversion has many dimensions. A changed relation to God brings or follows changes that are personal, social, moral, and intellectual. But, there is no fixed rule of antecedence and consequence, no necessity of simultaneity, no prescribed magnitudes of change...It may be extended over the slow maturing process of a lifetime. It may satisfy an intermediate measure...The convert apprehends differently, values differently, relates differently because he has become different. The new apprehension is not so much a new

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<sup>98</sup> Robert Doran, *What is Systematic Theology?*, 111-112.

statement or 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.<sup>99</sup>

We now focus upon select characters in the biblical narratives, who illustrate and make these theoretically discussed conversions more accessible. Encounters with the God who pours out and reveals God's own self as described in the biblical accounts aid human persons to progress in one or more of these self-transcendent conversion-transformations. Furthermore, these biblical accounts of conversion illustrate how, as Lonergan confirms, the effects of the transformational revelatory encounters with God "can pass from generation to generation. (They) can spread from one cultural milieu to another. (They) can adapt to changing circumstances, confront new situations, survive into a different age, flourish in another period or epoch."<sup>100</sup> These biblical examples of conversion through God's self-revelation in the world continue to reveal to human beings the powerful and loving presence of God whose healing and creating presence is constantly inspiring new meaning and value in creation.

### ***2.3: Conversions Through Revelation in Scripture***

Even though the biblical narratives rarely if ever deal with the inner psychological or philosophical aspects of the characters in the stories, the inner transformations will be inferred based on the described changes of attitudes, actions, and words of each of the characters. I analyze three sets of biblical characters. The patriarch Abraham is compared to the Apostle Peter. Second, Job will be contrasted with his visiting friends who challenge Job's response to the trials he undergoes, especially regarding the reaction each friend has to the dramatic working of the divine imposition within human events. Lastly, Mary, the mother of Jesus, will be paired with Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, as depicted in the Gospel of Luke. God has and

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<sup>99</sup> Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context," in *A Second Collection*, 66.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

continues to act on and within all of humanity. Conversions constitute the powerful ways humanity is transformed initiated by divine action so that created human persons enter into the eternal mystery of the One, True, Good, divine God.

### Abraham and Peter

To Abraham, the leader of a simple household in the ancient Near East, the first patriarch, and the eventual father of the many nations, the Lord God revealed himself by calling him forth and transforming him through a series of conversion moments. As occurs in each of the conversions—religious, moral, and intellectual--Abram (as Abraham was named before God transformed him to be his chosen patriarch) had to leave behind everything he had come to know and with which he was familiar and comfortable. “The Lord said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you”(Gn 12,1). The divine revelation of this call transforms Abram from a person who exists in a world he experiences sensibly and had dwelt in all his life into a man specifically chosen by God and commanded to perform a specifically meaningful role. Abram freely and willingly gathers up all his possessions and persons and departs from his father’s comfortably familiar house. After first trusting in the Lord’s call, Abram is directed to go to the sacred place at Shechem. Here by the oak of Moreh “The Lord appeared to Abram and said: To your descendants I will give this land. So Abram built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him”(Gn 12,7). No longer is Abram concerned simply about his own survival and self-absorbed pursuits but because of God’s revelation, Abraham realizes that he must consider his future descendants. All of a sudden, his life’s purpose takes on greater meaning and value. Abram’s journey and growth continues as “from there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel, pitching his tent with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there to the Lord and invoked the Lord by name”(Gn 12,

8). Abram is realizing more and more that he has been blessed, chosen, and guided by God who is bigger than his own needs, fears, and desires. While his heart has not responded completely to having been flooded with the love of God, his religious conversion is well underway as Abram's understanding of the higher value and world order of the Lord increases. Abram still manifests a lack of complete trust when he twice pretends his wife Sarai is his sister in order to protect his own safety(12, 11-13 & 20, 2). Thus fraud puts the divine promise of progeny at risk. Not until God puts Abraham to the ultimate test does he the fully respond to his religious conversion. "God said: Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you"(Gn 22, 2). Without pause or question, Abraham follows the Lord's command to sacrifice his own son Isaac. Abraham proceeds to carry out this apparently illogical, irrational, and senseless act with utter faith and trust in the Lord who had already fulfilled the seemingly impossible promise of providing a son to Abraham and Sarah after Sarah had been barren for 100 years. Why would Abraham not let himself doubt the Lord's reasons for demanding the sacrifice of Isaac? Yet, faith born of the transformational experience of conversion enables Abraham to freely obey the Lord's command. At the point of raising the knife in Abraham's slaughter of his own beloved son, an angel of the Lord calls to him from heaven saying "Do not lay your hand on the boy... Do not do the least thing to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you did not withhold from me your son, your only one"(Gn 22,12). In the course this terrible trial put to Abraham by the Lord, Abraham discovers his true identity in the Lord. The *raison d'etre* for Abraham's very existence is to be the beloved, chosen, and blessed father to the many nations. God will bless this family as his very own. God promises to Abraham "I will bless you and make your

descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants will take possession of the gates of their enemies”(Gn 22,17).

There is evidence of Abraham’s having undergone a psychic conversion at the end of his life. As he prepares to die, he desires to make sure that the promise of the Lord is carried out and that his son, Isaac, would have a wife so as to continue the lineage. Abraham reflects back on his life and says, “The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and the land of my relatives, and who confirmed by oath the promise he made to me, “I will give this land to your descendants” – he will send his angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son there” (Gn 24,7). Now knowing who he is and having the confidence in the plan and purpose of his life attained through the long process of calls, trials, commands, doubts, fears, and challenges, Abraham has become an authentic human person. Through intellectual, moral, religious, and psychic conversions he is fully in love with the divine Lord and his will. St. Peter Chrysologus summarizes the growth Abraham underwent through the many encounters with the Lord:

God called Abraham out of the heathen world, symbolically lengthened his name, and made him the father of all believers. God walked with him on his journeys, protected him in foreign lands, enriched him with earthly possessions, and honored him with victories. He made a covenant with him, saved him from harm, accepted his hospitality, and astonished him by giving him the offspring he had despaired of. Favored with so many graces and drawn by such great sweetness of divine love, Abraham was to learn to love God rather than fear him, and love rather than fear was to inspire his worship.<sup>101</sup>

This amazing transformation of Abraham through God’s self-revelatory personal encounters and calling, led this Chaldean man from faithlessness to be the father of all nations. Abraham’s story is powerfully emblematic of the conversions explained by Lonergan. Abraham’s conversion experiences compare closely to those of Simon Peter, the disciple whom Jesus called and named his rock. Like Abraham, Simon was busy as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus first encountered him. He was caught up in the sensible world and engrossed

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<sup>101</sup> Peter Chrysologus, Sermo 147: Pl52, 594.

in the strenuous task of fishing. However, as Jesus “passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men”(Mk 1,16-17). The first divine encounter is a call, and much like God’s summons of Abraham, this call is life-transformative for Simon. Simon was asked to leave behind his entire livelihood and all that he was familiar with and accustomed to for the sake of a mysterious new divine mission. Mark’s Gospel says only, “Then they abandoned their nets and followed him”(Mk 1,18). The presence of Jesus impelled him in virtue of elements comparable to intellectual, moral, and religious conversions. With the other disciples, Simon follows Jesus, and sees him cure a demoniac, which prompts him to begin realizing that the power of God is at work in the world through Jesus. Wishing to take advantage of this power, Simon gets Jesus to visit his mother-in-law, who was ill with fever. “On leaving the synagogue (Jesus) entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon’s mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them”(Mk 1,29-31). Jesus encounters Simon in a very personal place, his own home and there cures the sickness of this close family member. Noticing how God, through Jesus, cares for him intimately, personally, and deeply is clearly a life-changing experience for Simon. This conversion shifts his whole value system in the realization that his own mission does not consist in self-promotion, but is for the good of others. From this moment, Simon opens himself and continues to grow through more encounters with the Lord.

Jesus attracts the crowds because of the healings he performs. “Rising very early before dawn, (Jesus) left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Simon and those who were with him pursued him and finding him said, “Everyone is looking for you”(Mk 1,35-36). Simon

is becoming aware of the needs, hopes, and desires of all of the people of Galilee. He sympathizes with their pains and perceives how desperately they long for the Lord. It dawns on him that his mission is to bring people to the Lord.

The full response to Simon's religious conversion takes time. He and the other disciples see Jesus walking on the sea while they are rowing and caught in a rough storm. "(Jesus) got into the boat with them and the wind died down. They were completely astounded....their hearts were hardened"(Mk 6,52). Is this Jesus who is able to do these incredible acts, and not some ghost or demon? Not until Simon witnesses Jesus perform the healing of the many sick of Gennesaret, the feeding of the four-thousand, the healing of the deaf man in the Decapolis and the blind man of Bethsaida does Simon come to understand who Jesus is. Simon, doubting the authenticity of his encounters with the Son of God, replies to Jesus's question, "Who do you say I am?" by stating, "You are the Messiah"(Mk 8,29). Immediately upon being told that not flesh and blood but Jesus' Father in heaven reveals this to him by reason of his conversion, Simon is renamed Peter. But then Peter hears the conditions of the discipleship of the Messiah from Jesus: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"(Mk 8,34-37). The implications of his having given up all of his past livelihood to follow this Jesus whom he acknowledges in faith to be the true Messiah are difficult for Peter to swallow, even though he thinks he is committed to following Jesus without knowing the full implications of the mission ahead. In the Transfiguration, Peter is given a vision of the fullness of the heavenly glory that belongs to Jesus as the Lord, the Son of God. Peter is awe-struck by the appearance of Jesus in dazzling clothes with Elijah and Moses. He "hardly knew what to say,

they were so terrified. “Rabbi,” he proclaims, “it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah””(Mk 9,5-6). It would seem that Peter cannot be more convinced of the reality of Christ’s divine nature, yet his faith and understanding is tested when Jesus again predicts his passion, death and resurrection. After the Transfiguration, Peter “kept the matter to (himself), questioning what rising from the dead meant”(Mk 9,10). At the last supper, Jesus prophesies that Peter will deny him. Peter insists that he will not. But, after the arrest of Jesus, when Peter is in the courtyard of the high priests during Jesus’ trial, people associate Peter with Jesus. Peter replies, “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about”(Mk 14,68). The fragility of his knowledge of the Lord reveals that Peter is not firm in his response to the experience of conversion. After denying Jesus three more times Peter hears the cock crow. Then he “broke down and wept”(Mk 14,72) in the realization that the Lord knows Peter better than Peter knows himself, and that his life is completely in the Lord’s hands. This may have been Peter’s psychic conversion, as he comes to a real assent to his true existence as chosen, blessed, and loved by the Lord.

It also takes time for Peter to believe and accept the resurrection of Christ from the dead because of lingering “unbelief and hardness of heart”(Mk 15,14). Nevertheless, after he and the other disciples are commissioned by the risen Lord to go out to the whole world, the gospel of Mark says that they “went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs”(Mk 15,20). Just as Abraham, who did not question what God ordered him to do with his own beloved son Isaac, so Peter is moved by the mystery of love and awe encountered in the risen Jesus to embrace his mission without question or doubt. As John’s gospel depicts the encounter of the risen Jesus with Peter, “When you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will

stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go”(Jn 21,18). Jesus tells Peter where he came from, the simple, pre-converted fisherman concerned with his own pursuits; and how Peter has become a person who fully loves and trusts in the Lord, through intellectual, moral, religious, and psychic conversions elicited by Jesus’ revelation of Himself. In response to the gift of conversion, Peter now knows himself, his mission, his Lord, and how he must live through self-less acts of charity.

### Job and his friends

The Old Testament’s iconic figure of Job encounters God through incredibly grueling trials of suffering. He is transformed through the suffering and the drastic reversals of fortune. In the end, having experienced divine revelations, Job realizes that he is a blessed, just, and fully alive man. Job is contrasted with foils who do not grow in faith and perhaps had not even experienced the conversions that Job undergoes and so do not come to know the depths of God’s divine love. This contrast precisely depicts how authentic encounters with God elicit life-altering conversion experiences. Without being a transcript of historical events and recorded conversations, the Book of Job is a masterfully crafted story of divine interactions with humanity and of the ways people are tested. The prologue’s conversations between God and Satan, the accuser in the heavenly court, and then those between Job and his interlocutors on the one hand, and between Job and God inside a whirlwind on the other, may not fully portray the feelings and psychological movements in Job’s mind and heart. However some careful, though interpreted, inferences can be made about the conversion experiences of Job.

Job is introduced as a “blameless and upright man... who feared God and avoided evil”(Job 1,1). His is a wealthy landowner with many animals, ten children, and a man who is faithful in his sacrifices and worship of God. He is content, and has no need to worry about

anything or to question his life or existence, which reminds us of Abram's early life in a familiar and comfortable home. Job says that he "wore (his) righteousness like a garment; justice was (his) robe and (his) turban"(Job 29,14). Satan and God make a bet about the authenticity of Job's innocence and blamelessness that if all of Job's blessings and joys are taken away from him, Job will curse God to God's face. God allows this wager to play out by having Job undergo a great trial so as to see the authenticity of his faith. The trials come in intense and rapid succession. All of his work animals, oxen and donkeys, and his slaves working in the field are lost because of the raid of the Sabeans. All of his sheep are consumed in a fire pouring down from heaven. After the Chaldeans take his camels, his sons and daughters are crushed in the collapse of the eldest son's house. Incredibly, as if he has not been affected and his faith is not shaken, Job says in response to all of these tragedies, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"(Job 1,21). Job does not even know about the wager between God and Satan while as he keeps such steady faith. Perhaps Job's loss of everything he owned can be likened to Simon's experience of being called by Jesus away from his livelihood to take on the new mission of discipleship: a dying to self and loving trust in the Lord.

Still not satisfied with the severity of the tests, Satan asks God for permission to bring illness to Job's body. With permission granted, Satan hammers Job with severe boils. Job again, even to the chagrin of his wife, responds, "We accept good things from God; should we not accept evil?"(Job 2,10). As three of his friends sit with him as he lies in the dirt during his severe physical suffering, Job finally breaks down to complain and to curse the very day he was born. Job's rants go back to that day when he lived in contented immediacy without having to deal with these trials and deeper struggles in life. Such ability to self-reflect on past times of blissful unawareness strongly indicates Job's altered intellectual awareness. Even so, Job never

questions God and is confident that he never committed a wicked sin deserving of this apparent punishment. After one of his friends, Eliphaz, challenges Job's seemingly foolish faith, Job asks further questions about his human weakness. "What strength have I that I should endure, and what is my limit that I should be patient?"(Job 6,11) Job sees his life as a drudgery and full of misery in the midst of this great suffering, but he is sure that he is innocent of any sin. The conviction of his fidelity to his values is a sign that he has undergone a moral conversion. "My hands are free from violence and my prayer sincere...my witness is in heaven"(Job 16:17&19). The suffering that he is enduring is not God's chastisement for sin because "both the innocent and the wicked (God) destroys... how can anyone be in the right before God?"(Job 9,22 &2). Afflicted in every way, Job comes to realize more than ever that God is the wise one who is in control of all the movements of the universe. He understands that through this suffering, he is coming to know God more deeply and maturely. "I know that my vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust. This will happen when my skin has been stripped off, and from my flesh I will see God...my inmost being is consumed with longing" (Job 19,25-27). This revelation that suffering bestows on Job shows him that the wicked in the earth are not always punished for their evil deeds as many "grow old, become mighty in power"(Job 21,7). However, the true lesson for Job is that through these awful trials of suffering he "should come forth like gold"(Job 23,10). His sufferings, while a test of his faith, purify him just as they did for Abraham. In spite all of these great trials, Job, in his deep trust in the Lord, still proclaims, "As God lives who takes away my right, the Almighty, who has made my life bitter, so long as I still have life breath in me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak falsehood nor my tongue utter deceit!"(Job 27,2-4) His fear of the Lord is true wisdom, and the ultimate Good is his priority now, indicating the completeness of his moral, religious, and psychic conversions.

The attitudes—their severely limited perspective on the work, justice, and love of God in the world with His people—on the part of his supposed friends who come to visit him in his suffering stand in stark contrast to the growth and insight of Job. The first friend, Eliphaz, questions how a good and upright man can be punished as Job clearly is, saying, “As I see it, those who plow mischief and sow trouble will reap them. By the breath of God they perish and by the blast of his wrath they are consumed... they die without knowing wisdom”(Job 4: 8-9, 21). To Eliphaz, suffering should come only to those who have done evil, and only the wicked have no wisdom. The wisdom of Eliphaz contends that only “the wicked is in torment all his days and limited years are in store for the ruthless”(Job 15,20). Bildad’s tone is even stronger: “Should you be blameless and upright, surely now he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful home...Behold God will not cast away the upright; neither will he take the hand of the wicked”(Job 8:6&20). For Bildad, people only get what they deserve—the wicked are punished and the just are blessed. Zophar’s advice for Job is the same as that of the other two. “If you set your heart aright and stretch out your hands toward him, if iniquity is in your hand remove it and do not let injustice dwell in your tent...then your life shall be brighter than the noonday; its gloom shall become like the morning”(Job 11:13-14). These friends manifestly have not gone through the intellectual conversion that pulls one out of the world of immediacy and into a state in which they might understand the meaning of suffering in God’s light. Of these supposed friends Job says that they “destroy the hope of mortals”(Job 14,19) by viewing divine justice as wrath and retribution. Against all of the wicked “the heavens shall reveal (their) guilt, and the earth rise up against (them)”(Job 20, 27). The friends lack the moral conversion, which would bring with it a grasp of goodness and evil. They cannot grasp the true depth and significance of religious love.

Elihu “was angry with Job for considering himself rather than God to be in the right”(Job 32, 2). He comes to Job and argues with him, claiming to be full of the spirit. “Surely, God cannot act wickedly, the Almighty cannot pervert justice”(Job 34,12). If Job thinks he is still innocent despite all of these punishments, is not Job accusing God of being in the wrong? Because he thinks of suffering as divine retribution, Elihu accuses Job of making his own value system and of being his own judge of right and wrong rather than submitting to God. How can Job be wiser than God? “God is great, not disdainful; his strength of purpose is great. He does not preserve the life of the wicked”(Job 36,5). But, holding on to his judgment regarding goodness and wickedness, Elihu uses the marvels of nature to back him up. “See, God is great beyond our knowledge, the number of his years past searching out. He holds in check the water drops that filter in rain from his flood”(Job 36,26-27). Despite the validity of some of Elihu’s points, he still is not ready to comply with the Lord’s ways and trust the Lord in both the blessings and the sufferings. Finally, the Lord reprimands these accusers of Job. “My anger blazes against you and your two friends! You have not spoken rightly concerning me, as has my servant Job”(Job 42,7). God orders them to make amends with Job by offering burnt sacrifices.

Despite all of the challenges by those who come to him in his suffering, Job remains steadfast in his innocence and trusts in the Lord. God himself enters at last into the debate and reveals himself to Job, addressing him in a whirlwind. This direct encounter with God transforms Job. God asks Job to consider all of the power shown throughout all of creation in comparison to the weakness and ignorance of humanity. In this encounter with the mighty Lord, Job is speechless. “I put my hand over my mouth. I have spoken once, I will not reply; twice, but I will do so no more.”(Job 40,4-5). In response to the God-given glimpse of his mighty power over all of the universe Job repents of all he has said about God and for all of his

complaints in his suffering. Throughout the whole story, Job had been longing to see God and to know God's will. Once God is finally revealed, Job is also psychically converted, in full awareness of his place in the universe in relation to God, and of how much God loves Job, despite the suffering Job endures. "Now my eye has seen you. Therefore I disown what I have said and repent in dust and ashes"(Job 42,5-6). In God's revelation, Job is radically transformed to a humble and repentant servant. In light of Job's act of humility and total submissive trust in the Lord, "The Lord blessed the later days of Job more than his earlier ones"(Job 42,12). Only through Job's suffering as well as in the direct encounters with the Lord is Job freely able to come to know more accurately the nature of God's power, justice, and love and humbly submit himself to them in total loving trust.

#### Mary and Zechariah

This last biblical example of conversion highlights two characters who have brief and conversational encounters with the divine that lead to two drastically different results. The Gospel of Luke is the only Gospel to include the detail on how the birth of Jesus Christ came about by way of divine interventions in the lives of two significant people. In order to underscore growth-filled conversions that take place as a result of the encounters of Zechariah and Mary with the angel Gabriel, this section compares and contrasts these encounters by admittedly taking the liberty of interpreting the characters' inner feelings and psychological movements that are not indicated in the biblical text.

Zechariah, then, was a priest "of the priestly division of Abijah,"(Lk 1,5) serving his term in the temple of Jerusalem after being chosen by lot to be the one priest, of all the others, to enter into the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense at the proper time and in the proper way in accord with Jewish custom. When Zechariah enters the temple, crowds of Jewish people are waiting

outside, singing and praising God. Amidst the smoke rising up during the burning of the incense, “the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense”(Lk 1,12). At this divine encounter Zechariah was overcome with great fear. Nonetheless, the angel of the Lord—the Archangel Gabriel—begins to speak with Zechariah and tries to calm him saying, “Do not be afraid...because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you shall name him John”(Lk 1,13). Elizabeth and Zechariah, like Abraham and Sarah, were both “righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. They had no child, because Elizabeth [like Sarah] was barren and both were advanced in years”(Lk 1,6-7). Such barrenness might also have been regarded as indicating the same sort of divine retribution (just as occurred with Job’s friends) as God’s punishment for some wicked sin. Affirming Zechariah’s faithfulness in prayer and service as a priest, the angel dispels this notion. Gabriel describes the child to be born to Zechariah and Elizabeth, who is to be named John, and all the great deeds he will do. “Then Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years”(Lk 1,18). This doubt stemmed perhaps from a deep resentment for having longed for a child to no avail for many years as well as from a lack of trust in God. Gabriel reprimands Zechariah for asking this by rendering him speechless and accuses him of doubting these words of hope “which will be fulfilled at their proper time”(Lk 1,20). Zechariah is mute for three months until the baby John is to be circumcised. In obedience to what Gabriel had told him in the Temple, Zechariah declares through writing that the child should be named “John”. Zechariah’s tongue is loosed because of this act of faithful self-submission to the will of God, and he immediately breaks forth in a traditional Jewish Berakhah prayer of thanksgiving and awe. Clearly, this flow of events discloses a powerful transformation in Zechariah. At the beginning of the story he is an old man

desperate for children who seems to have given up hope that his pleas to God are to be heard as he and Elizabeth grow older. The divine encounter, being struck mute as punishment, and the birth of his son, John, lead Zechariah to appreciate how God is ever “mindful of his holy covenant and the oath that he swore to Abraham our father”(Lk 1,72). This transformation motivates Zechariah to proclaim that “because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace”(Lk 1,78-79). Zechariah’s heart is flooded with religious love. Abundant joy and absolute trust in the Lord God Almighty dispels and replaces the doubt, despair, bitterness, and resentment that had affected Zechariah until the divine encounter and before his child was born. What occurred here was a religious conversion, but it may also have involved an intellectual and moral conversion since he is considered “righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly”(Lk 1,6). Through the proclamation of the canticle and the recounting of the great deeds and fulfilled promises of the Lord throughout salvation history, Zechariah may reveal the results of a psychic conversion as well. He comes to be at peace with his place in the hands of a merciful God and with his role in God’s greater plans of salvation.

The infancy narrative in the Gospel of Luke also depicts the divine encounter of a peasant girl from Nazareth, Mary. She is a virgin and is betrothed to a man named Joseph. The angel Gabriel is sent to this small town of Nazareth to proclaim to this shocked girl, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you”(Lk 1,28). As occurred with Zechariah, the angel calms the initial fear in response to this divine encounter. Gabriel tells Mary, “you have found favor with God”(Lk 1,30), that a miraculous conception is about to take place in her and that “The Son of the Most High” will be born to her. Mary’s question to the angel is similar to Zechariah’s, but

made in a different tone. “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?”(Lk 1,34)

Unlike Zechariah, Mary is not preoccupied with expectations regarding her role or her status in the town or long unfulfilled desires for children. This favor in God’s eyes is seemingly grounded in her simplicity, devout faith, trust, and ultimately her submissiveness to the divine will in her life. Rather than being reprimanded or punished by Gabriel for asking about the angel’s prophecy of this child, Mary receives a further explanation about how this amazing divine act will take place through the power of the Holy Spirit and the working of God. Still amazed, but utterly open to what she is told, Mary responds, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word”(Lk 1,38). Even in the midst of this overwhelming divine encounter, Mary is able to respond with dedication and self-surrender to the message of the angel of God. Her self-giving disposition is seemingly habitual in Mary. She is one in whom God found favor prior to her divine encounter. Was this divine encounter still a conversion? Mary may already have been religiously converted in her complete openness and receptivity to the will of God in her life. However, Gabriel’s revelation brought about her psychic conversion. Mary came to the profound realization that her true mission and purpose in life is to be the mother of “the Son of God”(Lk 1,35). Accepting this role as the handmaid of the Lord, she immediately travels “in haste” to the house of Zechariah to be of assistance to Elizabeth who is now pregnant. Mary accepts her role as the servant of the Lord and acts upon it immediately because of the powerfully transformative moment that has motivated all generations to call her blessed. She acts in behalf of her mission and lives out her identity as the Lord’s handmaid.

The indwelling and interaction of the divine creator God within humanity brings about a powerfully transformative conversion in the person who experiences this revelation. That, in

Lonergan's words, "is God's entry and his taking part in man's making of man."<sup>102</sup> The biblical examples of Abraham, Peter, Job, Zechariah, and Mary, bring out how, when God makes His presence and desire known to His people, there are life-changing consequences and expectations. Such experiences of conversion can be classified as religious, moral, intellectual, and psychic, which ultimately unfold in the movement from ignorance to knowledge, from immediacy to a world mediated by meaning, from individual satisfactions to communal values and virtues, from self-absorption to self-giving and loving actions, and from purposelessness to becoming rooted and grounded in love. These conversions entail one comprehensive movement of self-transcendence that may happen quickly or throughout an entire lifetime. Authentic divine revelation is that which draws a person from a self-centered and individualistic life into the universal enterprise of salvation. This conversion experience requires a receptive disposition and the difficult act of leaving behind the familiar, comfortable, and selfishly desirable aspects for a life of suffering, humility, challenge, obedience, and submission to a higher authority. However, in the end, through these conversion experiences of growth and awakening, a person comes to understand and live his or her true identity as a beloved, favored, and blessed servant of God. There is no greater happiness than this fulfillment in the eyes of the Lord as this is true knowledge of God, life to the full, and pure joy.

### ***Chapter Three: Neuroscience***

This paper tries to explain the effects of the entry of God into the realm of human conscious experience and action. Examining the metaphysical and then epistemological conditions for this divine entry into created humanity, results in some understanding of the revelation found both in the movement freely initiated by God's self-communication and in the transformation of human self-transcendence due to the reception of this divine self-

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<sup>102</sup>Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context," in *A Second Collection*, 62.

communication by human persons who are increasingly drawn to communion with the source of all being. Through the lens of Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology this thesis has identified and explored some details and kinds of the transformations of personal orientation by conversions as concretely exemplified in biblical narratives.

This account focused on dynamic and relational aspects of divine revelation. It began by explaining God as the one, true, good source of all intelligibility whose perfect act of existence is ever self-expressive, eternally in the Trinitarian processions of the Son/Word from the Father and of the Holy Spirit through the Son, and contingently in the revelation wrought by the divine missions of Son and Spirit. Then, human recipients of this revelation are drawn out of derailed individualistic tendencies by the gift of God's outgoing love, which gives rise to faith as the eyes of being in love with God. This movement leads to insights, judgments, and decisions regarding the revealed meanings and values that become the basis for self-transcendent, selfless acts of love that build communities of strong personal relationships.

There remains a third issue for exploration, namely, that of the effects of divine revelation upon the physical human body. As has already been indicated, religiously, morally, intellectually, and psychically converted persons will grow in their appropriation of both themselves and of their participation in the gift of God's love and charity. But we have now to inquire into the observable physical effects of these conversions within the human body generally, and specifically in the brain, as a result of these life-altering transcendent shifts of being. Such an inquiry demands entry into the careful procedures and methods of the natural sciences, especially the neuroscience studies of the human brain. In doing so, however, the all too frequent reduction of metaphysical aspects into merely physical ones—for instance, when a scientist performs an fMRI brain scan on a human person to offer a complete account of what a

person considers a significant religious conversion—must be avoided. To be sure, the scientist may observe a measureable shift in the quiescent parts of the autonomic nervous system that simultaneously activates the hypothalamus, which is the primary pleasure center in the brain. Furthermore, it may be observed that the parietal lobe, associated with forming the person’s sense of self and the sense of space and time, is either significantly less active or consumes less oxygen than a previous scan of the person’s brain has indicated. But it would be a mistake for the scientist to draw the inference that the person’s supposed religious conversion is simply a matter of the activation of the hypothalamus, which allows the person to experience euphoric feelings of bliss; or that the supposed sense of “self-transcendence” is due to the deactivation of the parietal lobe. It would be very easy to reduce all experiences of divine revelation to shifts of activation in the different lobes and regions of the human brain, causing the release of various hormones through the body that make the person feel “transformed.” This example, however simplistic, illustrates the danger of equating metaphysical transformational conversion experiences with the findings of neuroscience. To insist on such a reduction would destructively limit the full and true sense of person down to mechanistic properties and intermingling chemicals. This reduction would also cause a massive misunderstanding of any theological understanding of divine transcendence, which is absolutely unconditioned by space and time. Reductionism would dissolve theology into a congeries of illusions concerning the utterly fabulous meaning of what are no more than altered states of the human brain.

As was discussed in the introduction to this paper, theology seeks an explanatory understanding born of reflection on the human experience of the mediation of meaning and values by the divine revelation that is constitutive of the integration of the reality of God’s presence and influence into human affairs. Of course, fully appreciating the human experience

of everyday human interaction requires some knowledge of the interconnections and functioning of the human brain that receives these experiences. Furthermore, the point of this thesis is precisely to study divine revelation through its effects within the human existence of receptive persons and communities. There follows a need to examine these effects as manifested within the human body, especially in the brain. Thanks to the advancement of neuroscience research, such effects are more identifiable and quantifiable, yet it is not the intention of this thesis to reduce divine revelation to the activation or deactivation of different lobes in the brain. Nor is this thesis trying to argue the presence (or lack) of the soul based on some neuroscientific finding or brain-scan image. Rather, this thesis proposes that an examination of the effects of divine revelation manifested through changes in the brain will yield greater insight into the dignity and value of the human person as a person, as well as open up clues about how these effects can shed light on the Church's fundamental traditions and doctrines regarding divine revelation.

Thus, this third chapter is structured as follows. The first section surveys developments in the understanding of the emergence of interconnected neural networks (called a "Connectome") shaped by every experience and interaction a person undergoes. The question regards how the total structure of the brain is affected by a shocking new revelation that may be analogous to mind-altering experiences stemming from traumatic incidents such as war, loss, illness, or powerful "religious" experiences. Because of such experiences, skill-development, or learning, each neuron makes connections within the brain, developing an interwoven and unique web of memories and meaning. The neuroscience research also indicates how habits are formed in the brain and points out how routinized activity differs greatly from the mental state of focused questioning and curious exploration. Thus, two general mental modes are distinguished: mindless wandering and mindful focused engagement.

This section discusses how different components of the brain are activated for each mode, and the evidence that focused engagement is found to be the most rational, productive, stress-releasing, and happy. ‘Mindfulness’ is the term used in neuroscience for the “mental mode characterized by full attention to present-moment experience without judgment, elaboration, or emotional reactivity.”<sup>103</sup> Neuroscience’s understanding of the development of the optimal state of human functioning is analogous to the epistemological processes of self-appropriation and conversion discussed in chapter two.

The second section explores how training programs help individuals strengthen and cultivate mindful-attentiveness. The resulting and lasting effects on persons going through this training may be suggestively compared to the four conversions discussed in chapter two. To demonstrate the transformational effects of an individual who intentionally develops enhanced states of attentiveness to the self and the surroundings as well as a receptive and un-resistant attitude to the inflow of meaning and value found in the experiences of everyday life, reference is made to a case study of military personnel prior to their deployment to war situations of high trauma. It is probable that only through intentional mindfulness exercises and focus-training can a person gain heightened awareness that breaks through distracting memories and random thought-processes. The last part of this section focuses on the case of a person who has suffered a traumatic brain injury and the effects of this experience on the total person in order to show how new training called Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training seeks to help persons with such trauma to recover and to be more resilient to it.

Lastly, the third section will conclude by comparing the recent findings of neuroscience to the reflections of Saint Augustine of the fourth century who was exploring the components of

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<sup>103</sup> Amishi P. Jha et al., “Examining the Protective Effects of Mindfulness Training on Working Memory Capacity and Affective Experience” *Emotion* 10, 1 (2010): 54.

the human mind in relationship to the Holy Trinity. The neuroscientists call the brain “nature’s most complex machine”. The theologians consider the human mind as that which most reflects the image of the God in the created world. Either way, the neural networks woven through the human mind are an intersection of the physical and the metaphysical, the created and the transcendent, the human and the divine.

### ***3.1: The Connectome***

Many experiments are performed to measure how the physical structure of the brain changes when the action or intelligence of the person changes. Going back to the mid-nineteenth century, Georges Vacher de Lapouge and Franz Boaz used a method of brain measurement called “craniometry”. They attempted to clarify evidence that would verify the direct correlation of brain size and intelligence by using lead shot to measure the inner volume within the skulls of deceased people. This research presupposed the fallacy of biological determinism, according to which, for instance, social and economic status can be determined from one’s race, sex, or background as if a person’s worth could be boiled down to one isolated quality such as intelligence. Thus, using craniometry, the researchers tried to establish that if the skulls of white-skinned persons held the most lead shot, so that the volume of their skulls would appear to be the greatest, their brains would be largest, with the highest corresponding intelligence. This quality would then make their status superior to that of other races.<sup>104</sup> This drastically erroneous method of measurement was based on radically mistaken assumptions and falsified data due to the biased and discriminatory beliefs of that time. Nevertheless, in spite of the most sophisticated technology in modern medicine, the link between brain size and intelligence has not been completely discounted.

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<sup>104</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 257.

Does the brain undergo physical changes either when learning takes place or a new skill is developed, or when one undergoes a transformational experience? Recent advanced research continues to explore brain changes. Neuroscientists find that instead of the whole brain's being expanded by learning and skill development, the brain reveals "plasticity" by which it is able to 'rewire' itself by repetition of behaviors, actions, and overall skill training. Studies have succeeded in narrowing the focus upon whether individual components of the brain that control the specific functions being tested undergo physical changes when that region of the brain is tested through the learning and growing processes. By a series of careful tests, "researchers found that learning to juggle balls thickened the cortex in the parietal and temporal lobes. And intensive study for exams caused the parietal cortex and the hippocampus to enlarge in medical students."<sup>105</sup> While this research does not confirm that the change in the brain is the cause of the improved performance in such things as juggling or medical school examinations, it seems clear that the thickening of the brain is an effect of the constant operations of the particular area of the brain during the practice of the external skills. Such an effect is like the bulging of bicep muscles by the persistent exercise of this particular muscle. However, the person's acquiring of a thick or well-developed parietal cortex does not necessarily correlate with, say, excelling in test-taking. But, cortical thickening is still an undeniable effect of the discipline, work, and activity of the person developing skills. Thus, neuroplasticity in the brain has been confirmed.

Studies of the brain have also been done as regards the formation and continuation of habits, whether good or bad. The neuroscientists observe which parts are engaged once the activity has become a well-ingrained routine. Neuroscience almost confirms the common-sense knowledge that "the more routine a behavior becomes, the less we are aware of it. We lose the

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<sup>105</sup> Sebastian Seung, *Connectome: How the Brain's Wiring Makes Us Who We Are*, (Boston: Mariner Books, 2012), 24.

fully alert surveillance of that behavior.”<sup>106</sup> For example, we can sometimes completely forget that we brushed our teeth after having done so, simply because the act of brushing our teeth has become such a habitual behavior that we do not have to focus on doing it. By using brain-scans, neuroscientists are finding out why this lack of focal awareness occurs in persons deeply set in their ways. When one is exploring a new environment or trying out some new behavior, the central core part of the brain (known as the striatum) becomes highly active and works in conjunction with the prefrontal cortex, which is the brain’s cognitive controlling function, “orchestrating thought and action with internal goals.”<sup>107</sup> When certain goals are achieved in the learning and exploration process, or certain aspects of the behavior are found to be pleasing, the midbrain expels the chemical dopamine, the internal brain code that assigns value and pleasure to any activity. When the person is exploring new areas and forming new habits, these three portions of the brain are constantly active and communicate with each other through feed-back loops. Thus, the brain attentively assimilates the arrival of data from the external experiences. This is the brain intelligently understanding the experiences and making reasonable judgments about what does and does not work. Whenever a behavior is found to work and desired results are achieved, the person consciously and responsibly decides to repeat that enacted behavior in the foreseeable future. At this point, the sensorimotor portion of the cortex becomes involved in developing whole sequences of small movements or behaviors into one confined “unit” or bundle of brain activity. This is how a habit is formed. After continuous repetition, the habit becomes ingrained. The behavior causes a simple, efficient neural process that is stored in a third, infralimbic region of the cortex that works in conjunction with the striatum.

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<sup>106</sup> Ann M. Graybiel and Kyle S. Smith, “Good Habits, Bad Habits,” *Scientific American*, 310, 6 (June 2014), 40.

<sup>107</sup> E.K. Miller and J.D. Cohen, “An Integrative theory of prefrontal cortex function,” *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 24 (2001): 167.

When monitoring brain activity during the activation of a highly ingrained habit, the striatum and prefrontal cortex, both of which are engaged in attentive awareness and reasoning, are remarkably quiet. This indicates that the single unit of brain activity has become routinized. Once the learning and reasoning processes are accomplished and the habitual pattern has been established, then whenever the desired result is achieved by the habitual activity, dopamine is released. Very little mental energy is needed to carry out this routine action. Interconnection and intercommunication between the many components of the brain have been verified to reveal the amazing neural networks that proficiently pass along information and action.

A drawback of this natural habit-forming tendency is that much of a person's life can become routinized, stuck in ruts of thought and action, so that very little brain activity is required in the person's everyday life. William James, a late nineteenth century psychologist, noticed this phenomenon without having access to the modern brain-scanning technology. "Most people live, whether physically, intellectually or morally, in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness. We all have reservoirs of life to draw upon, of which we do not dream."<sup>108</sup> Activities like brushing one's teeth, riding a bike, driving the same route two to three times every day, opening and closing doors, or the habitual labor as found in factories can all become so habitual that a person does not need to be focally conscious of the actions the body is doing. When a person's life becomes overly habituated and repetitive, there is no longer any reason for the brain to investigate new behaviors, test out alternative options, creatively design more beneficial actions, or most importantly, to be open and receptive to the entry of transcendent meaning and value. The mind wandering is not engaged, not attentive, and oblivious to the surrounding meaning and value of existence.

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<sup>108</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Walsh, "An Analysis of Recent Meditation Research and Suggestions for Future Directions," *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 31 (2003): 86.

On the other hand, acquiring what psychologists and neurologists have begun to call “mindfulness” will result in fuller attentiveness, inquisitiveness, deeper insight into the nature of one’s own being and one’s presence in the world, as well as optimal states of psychological well-being and consciousness. Mindfulness is more formally defined as “open-monitoring meditation, (which) requires the meditator to take note of every sight or sound and track internal bodily sensations and inner self-talk.”<sup>109</sup> There are two general assumptions associated with the understanding of mindfulness. The first is what William James referred to as potential mental states and human developmental stages that go beyond a person’s seemingly “mindless” habitual mental patterns. The second is that discipline and training using the practices of psychological, focused-based, and even spiritual methods are normally needed to attain these higher stages. Yet, higher states of consciousness and full-brain activity may also be precipitated when one is confronted with moments of extreme stress or exuberant joy, either of which may jolt a person out of automatic and habitual motions into a state of heightened awareness, action, and reasoning. The following section treats mental state transformations or one’s state of mindful attentiveness.

### ***3.2: Memory and Meaning in the Mystical Mind***

#### *3.2.a: Mindfulness training*

The broad goal of mindfulness training is to “help people to become free of a limited egocentric perspective and to develop greater empathy, compassion, awareness, and insight.”<sup>110</sup> Sadly, most people are so taken up with their own habitual patterns and self-absorbed thought processes that they end up going through life without attending to the fullness of inner or external reality. It may be that previous experiences of trauma repressed by the unconscious

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<sup>109</sup> Matthieu Ricard, Antoine Lutz, and Richard J. Davidson, “Mind of the Meditator” *Scientific American* 111, 5 (November 2014): 42.

<sup>110</sup> Shauna. L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson, *The Art and Science of Mindfulness; integrating mindfulness into psychology and the helping professions*, (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2009), 120.

mind still are present within the body. As unawares, they weigh down the total personality. Whenever an activity of the present moment is not comprehended, it is a case of missed recognition known as “attentional blinks”. Carefully practiced methods similar in thrust to Lonergan’s general empirical method have been developed to overcome such lack of awareness. These mindfulness training programs based on multiple spiritual and secular traditions help persons become more attentive, intentional, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and ultimately more compassionate and loving once they achieve more advanced levels of mindfulness. For example, the Buddhist tradition has three general forms of meditation to increase mindfulness. First, there is the focused-attention meditation, which has as its goal to gain control of the constantly distracted and pre-occupied mind by focusing on the present moment or the rhythm of the breath in each moment while still acknowledging the many distractions that occur. There is a second, the mindfulness meditation, that focuses on calming emotions and strong impulses while at the same time maintaining a heightened attentiveness of each event and each moment of the eternal present. Lastly, there is the Buddhist tradition’s compassion and loving-kindness meditation, which compels one to altruistic acts of self-transcendence and care for other persons.<sup>111</sup> To achieve results through these varying forms of mindfulness training requires discipline, commitment to the training program, and an ever-greater access to and knowledge of the activity and thoughts in one’s own mind.

Neuroscientists have studied both novice and expert meditators by using brain-scanning technology to watch the brains during meditation to see what happens to the brain as it becomes more mindful. They have discovered that the brain’s functioning has two general modes within four working phases. The first mode is the mind-wandering when the brain is considered to be in “the default mode” as it sifts through many random thoughts - mostly negative fears, concerns,

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<sup>111</sup> Matthieu Ricard, Antoine Lutz, and Richard J. Davidson, “Mind of the Meditator”, 42.

worries, and anxieties. Examples of mind wandering would include such things as a person who seems to be reading a book--the eyes are seeing the words and going down the page--but the brain is not absorbing any of the contents conveyed by the words. Or, one person could be saying something to another person but the presumed listener is clearly “lost in thought” and not listening at all because they are in the default mode. Research has found that the more time a person spends in this “default mode” of negative, unfocused, and random thinking, the greater the possibility of anxiety, stress, depression, attention-deficit disorder, and even dementia. Persons in this default mode are inattentive to the world of activities around them, unaware of the needs of others, least receptive to new ideas, and certainly more closed to the possibility of divine revelation. This is the way neuroscience might understand people who do not have minds and hearts receptive to external stimuli or revelatory insights as discussed in the first chapter.

Thus, neuroscience research shows that those stuck for long periods of time in this default mode are much less happy, dissatisfied with life, and more likely to fall into depression and desolation. The default mode actually produces stress inasmuch as the wandering mind, usually tends to fall into patterns of thinking that dwell on worries and ruminate on fears, suffering, and challenging situations. The human mind in default shifts to the irrational limbic system that devises worst-case scenarios so as to be prepared for either fight or flight.<sup>112</sup>

In the second phase, the mind becomes actively aware of its tendency to wander. This happens when another person jolts it out of unfocused thinking by a shocking action, or by a loud noise, a surprising movement, or a revelation of some sort. Awareness of the distractions in which the mind had been submerged arises. This phase occurs in the “anterior insula and the

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<sup>112</sup> Amit Sood, Video of lecture for online course, <http://stressfree.org/programs/#onlineCourse> (accessed March 18, 2015).

anterior cingulate cortex--regions of what is called the salience network, which regulates subjectively perceived feelings and might, for instance, lead to being distracted during a task.”<sup>113</sup>

Perhaps this is the moment described in *Genesis* when Abraham is called forth by God to depart the land of his father and to become the father of many nations. This may have made Abraham aware of the unfocused, meaninglessness of his prior life, and actively become more focused and intentional in living meaningfully as one called by God. The same breakthrough may have occurred when Peter was encountered by Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, as well as when Zechariah and Mary experienced the appearance of Gabriel. It appears that these biblical figures (as was shown in chapter two) have been drawn out of their default mode of thinking and existing by a shocking or unexpected revelatory moment causing them to drop everything and move into a more intentional, unrestricted, thoughtful, and mindful life in the service of God.

The third phase of the mind identified by the neuroscientists has to do with the mind’s working at reorienting its attention. This process engages “the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the lateral interior parietal lobe – that ‘takes back’ one’s attention by detaching it from any distracting stimulus.”<sup>114</sup> This occurs whenever an object worthy of attention, in so far as it contains meaning or value to a person, engages the person’s focus and undivided active attentiveness. When thus engaged, the visual, auditory, muscular, as well as many of the brain’s modes and operations are in synch, coordinated, focused. The person is able to take in specific data from the surrounding environment, suppress the distractions of doubt, fear, and worry, and become more open to receive any important information or data about a meaningful object. This is a focused, mindful, and healthy person. “The ability to quickly anticipate, respond to, and

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

recover from recurrent stressors is fundamental to a healthy homeostatic system and essential for long-term behavioral and psychological health.”<sup>115</sup> As it did for Job who was trying to make sense of the trauma and tragedy that was happening to him and before he came to a complete focus on the will of God in his life, it may take time to attain this third phase.

This third phase leads to the fourth phase, the second mode of the brain, namely, focused attention. “In the fourth and last phase”—when the person is fully alive, focused, and yet still aware of thoughts, the surrounding environment, the needs of others, inner emotions, and desires, and the intelligibility of all of existence —“the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex continues to retain a high level of activity.”<sup>116</sup> When people are engaged in the focused mode, as opposed to the internal limbic, action-oriented part of the brain engaged in inattentive and irrational activity, many aspects of the cortex are found to be activated, which induces careful, rational, intentional, and discerning actions and movements. Moreover, in those able to maintain this focused mode of mindfulness, their “brain activity diminished in anxiety-related regions —the insular cortex and the amygdala.”<sup>117</sup> Similarly, those who habitually practice this focused mode naturally develop more empathy and feelings of unconditional benevolence, compassion, and love for others. Neuroscience research has found that with engagement in this form of self-less concern for the well-being of others, “the secondary somatosensory and insular cortices, known to participate in empathetic and other emotional responses, were more activated... suggesting an enhanced ability to share the feelings of others without reporting any sign of becoming emotionally overwhelmed.”<sup>118</sup> In addition, they have discovered that these acts of compassion have been

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<sup>115</sup>Douglas C. Johnson, et al. “Modifying Resilience Mechanisms in at-risk individuals: A controlled study of mindfulness training in marines preparing for deployment”, in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 171, 8 (August 2014): 844.

<sup>116</sup>Matthieu Ricard, Antoine Lutz, and Richard J. Davidson, “Mind of the Meditator”, 42.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 44.

found to cause “more activity in areas such as the temporoparietal junction, the medial prefrontal cortex and the superior temporal sulcus, all typically activated when we put ourselves in the place of another.”<sup>119</sup> Even more remarkable, long-term studies have discovered that maintaining this focus mode and sense of intentional loving compassion for others actually alter the structure of the brain tissues. “The volume of the brain’s darker tissue, its gray matter, differed in the insula and prefrontal cortices...(and) decreased volume of the amygdala, a region involved in fear processing, for those participants who showed the most noticeable reductions in stress over the course of training.”<sup>120</sup> In those who practice mindfulness training, are focused in the activities of life, and show compassion to others, axons, or the fibers that connect multiple regions of the brain, are found to be stronger and more pronounced. Thus, the intentional practice of heightened awareness, focused attentiveness, and selfless concern for other people enhances the connections within the brain and alters the very structure of the brain.

This neuroscience research confirms what we might expect from metaphysical and epistemological accounts of the effects of revelation. Real physiological effects occur whenever people receive a transformational insight and go through conversions, religiously, morally, intellectually, or psychically (as discussed above). The brain material changes itself with the broadening of the person’s awareness of reality, the extension of care for others, the deepening of yearning for the transcendence, and the strengthened understanding of the self’s meaning and purpose. Conversion moments do happen. If these transformational experiences pull people out of the default mode of mind-wandering, anxiety-producing, fearful, self-doubting, closed, lifeless existence; and activate attentive, focused, mind-full, engaged, intentional, selfless, intellectual,

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 45.

moral, religious, and happy living, it makes sense that such moments have concomitant changes in the brain matter, in personal mindfulness, as well as affiliated actions and way of life.

### *3.2.b: Traumatic Brain Injury and Conversion*

The human response to psychological trauma is one of the most important public health problems in the world. Traumatic events such as family and social violence, rapes and assaults, disasters, wars, accidents, and predatory violence confront people with such horror and threat that it may temporarily or permanently alter their capacity to cope, their perception of biological threat, and their self-concepts.<sup>121</sup>

Violence can wrench people out of the mental “default mode” of existence and jolt them into a mindful state of extreme focused attention. People are affected deeply after experiencing a severely shocking and traumatic event, such as a gruesome accident or an intense battle in a war-torn city. The mind, brain, and body immediately begin their usual processes for recovery. The mind gathers the experienced data to understand what just happened. The data, however, are so incredibly shocking that understanding cannot always occur insofar as disbelief, denial, and suppression prevent the general empirical process from running its course so that adequate judgments are blocked. Furthermore, whereas memories are usually shaped by a person’s experience to aid recall and to record the moments of a person’s life, a traumatic event can dramatically alter or stop the memory-forming process. Briefly, the neuroscience research on memory formation has shown that memories form both through neuron patterning and the increased interconnections among neurons. Each new experience forms a pattern of certain activated neurons that can be recalled when needed or evoked. This pattern of activated neurons is the somatic/cerebral basis of memory. When a similar but still different experience occurs, the patterns of activated neurons need to be differentiated from each other to keep the two events distinct. Thus, new neurons are created in a small bundle of cells close to the hippocampus

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<sup>121</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Nature of Trauma,” in *Healing Trauma; Attachment, Mind, Body, and Brain*, Marion F. Solomon and Daniel J. Siegel, eds., (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 168.

within the area of the inner brain known as the dentate gyrus. Recent research has found that “after input from the outside world activates both young and mature brain cells, the young cells induce inhibitory neurons to quell much of the dentate gyrus’s activity. This effect throws into sharp relief the distinctive details of both a new experience and a recollection of a similar experience that might be more sinister.”<sup>122</sup> However, a severe traumatic experience can cause the production of new neurons to shut down altogether. These young neurons would bring about the needed inhibitory reaction in relation to the neurons firing due to external stimuli. As a result, there is “an overgeneralization of memory (that) contributes to anxiety disorders, which are marked by an exaggerated, sometimes crippling fear response, even when the environment holds no immediate threat.”<sup>123</sup> The excessive overlapping of patterning of neurons in the memory of people who have experienced severe trauma affects their perception of any new events immediately associated with the traumatic experience. These misplaced associations trigger inappropriate responses. Due to misplaced memories traumatized people do not know what is real or what is merely perceived. Since the ability to sort out memories accurately is lost, people lose their felt sense of identity, meaning, purpose, as well as the motivation to learn and grow more.

Another aspect of recovery from a traumatic experience is “an individual’s awareness of his or her internal physiological state, also known as interoception... (which is) a process through which the brain monitors and updates the body about its overall physical state, including its ability to recognize bodily sensations, awareness of emotional states, and maintenance of

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<sup>122</sup> Mazen A. Kheirbek and René Hen, “Add Neurons Subtract Anxiety” *Scientific American* 311, 1, (July 2014): 66.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

physiologic homeostasis.”<sup>124</sup> Introspective processing resides in the part of the brain known as the insular cortex. A traumatic experience can throw off this interoceptive function causing confusion disorientation. If the proper functioning of this interior, self-awareness monitoring system is undermined, the body unconsciously retains the wounds of deep psychological trauma without the mind’s consciously remembering or recognizing the wounds. Such a person tends to develop high levels of overall anxiety and anxiety disorders.<sup>125</sup> The loss of the ability to self-reflect and self-monitor, throws off the person’s self-reflective sense of identity, meaning, and purpose. When the trauma weighs so heavily on the mind, the person’s ability to remain focused is put out of commission so that the mind shifts into default mode and cannot be easily drawn away from the inattentive thought-wandering. Due to the loss any kind of mindfulness and receptivity to new stimuli, the person becomes disengaged from life. And so people who experience a severely traumatic situation are deeply affected and need time and help to heal.

The healing process of extremely traumatic experiences has been the object of much research in recent years. By strengthening the interoception function of the brain –in other words, by enhancing one’s mindfulness – raises the probability of “treating anxiety disorders, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic pain, and irritable bowel syndrome...(as well as) distinguishing those who perform well under high-magnitude stress from those who do not.”<sup>126</sup> A mindfulness training program known as Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT) has been developed that is based on the empirical evidence in these studies on the overall benefits of having mindfulness and body-based self-regulation skills. The program is

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<sup>124</sup> Douglas C. Johnson, et al. “Modifying Resilience Mechanisms in at-risk individuals: A controlled study of mindfulness training in marines preparing for deployment”, 844.

<sup>125</sup> K. Domschke, S. Stevens, B. Pfleiderer, A.L. Gerlach, “Interoceptive sensitivity in anxiety and anxiety disorders: an overview and integration of neurobiological findings”, *Clinical Psychological Review* 30 (2010): 11.

<sup>126</sup> Douglas C. Johnson, et al. “Modifying Resilience Mechanisms in at-risk individuals: A controlled study of mindfulness training in marines preparing for deployment”, 845.

“designed for individuals operating in high-stress environments, with prior exposure to significant stress or trauma,” and “it cultivates mindfulness with exercises to train attention and awareness of sensations in the body. It also cultivates stress resilience with specific exercises to support the self-regulation of the autonomic nervous system, by extending concepts from sensorimotor psychotherapy and Somatic Experiencing.”<sup>127</sup> As a result of this training, “Marines who received MMFT showed greater reactivity and enhanced recovery after stressful training...(and) mechanisms related to stress recovery can be modified in healthy individuals prior to stress exposure, with important implications for evidence-based mental health research and treatment.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, neuroscience research has verified that through the enhancement of the interoceptive function done by training a person’s attentive, focused, and mindful mental functioning, the person is able to handle heavy and traumatic stress easier, recover from traumatic experiences quicker, be more attentive to external stimuli, have a more grounded and healthy perspective on life, and even have more empathetic and compassionate motivations towards others.

The discoveries made by neuroscience research through physical evidence and by observations of resulting human actions are what the philosophers and theologians have been teaching and promoting for thousands of years. As the fundamental claim of this paper states; revelation is not only the indwelling of God in the world, but the conscious human person’s attentive and open reception of new divine meaning and value. And so this summary of the recent findings in the realm of neuroscience has shown the effects of conversions: that the receptive, focused, attentive, or mindful person is indeed more fully alive, more fully engaged with life, more self-aware, more capable of handling stressful and traumatic situations, and more

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<sup>127</sup> Elizabeth Stanley, “Cultivating the Mind of a Warrior,” *Inquiring Mind* 30, 2,16, (Spring, 2014): 31.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 844.

inclined to altruistic and compassionate actions. Religious, moral, intellectual, and psychic conversions promote people who have undergone them to move *from* the default mode of mindless thought-wandering, cause-absorption in senseless selfishness, fear, and self-doubt, *into* mindful, attentive, engaged, self-appropriated, self-transcendent fullness of human life.

### **3.3: St. Augustine's Neuroscience**

St. Augustine placed a unique emphasis on the fact that, when redeemed, the human person can know and love his own rational nature and desires to live according to this nature. He did this by his need to ask the question, “How can the love of self be present, if the mind (*mens*) does not know itself?” Thus, when Augustine stated his desire “to know thee [God], and to know *myself*, he placed within a Christian context the famous Delphic command to “Know thyself” as a task that Augustine invites each person to take on. *The Confessions* is motivated by the realization that coming to know oneself as a spiritual creature is coeval with coming to know God. This is the presupposition for becoming more aware of the self and arriving at a rightly ordered love of self that by nature desires to know, and then to acquire knowledge of other things *sub specie aeternitatis*. That is the background for *De Trinitate's* question, “What is it then that the mind loves when it ardently seeks to know itself while still unknown to itself?”<sup>129</sup> Augustine develops the argument that the mind is most present to itself and it knows that to which it is present. In a move that will be repeated in a different way in Descartes' *Meditations*, Augustine says, “Nobody surely doubts, however, that he lives and remembers and understands and wills and thinks and knows and judges. At least, even if he doubts, he lives... remembers... understands... wills... thinks...judges.”<sup>130</sup> Man cannot coherently deny his own existence or acts of the mind. The mind knows these acts within itself that constitute the very substance of

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<sup>129</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. ed., Edmund Hill, O.P., trans., (New York: New City Press, 1991), X, 2, 5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, X, 2, 14.

the mind. These acts, Augustine says, *are* mind. He explains that by nature the mind is aware of the self (*nosce*<sup>131</sup> *teipsum*). Even if the mind thinks about other things, or even as the mind of an *infans* (a non-speaker) is attentive to every new sensation, or even when the mind intends to understand itself more, it is still aware of itself (i.e. has internal awareness of itself on the level of experience, but not yet of understanding and judgment) because it is present to its self immediately and in an experienced but non-thematic or objectified manner. Lonergan adds that arriving at objective knowledge of oneself takes time. “Man’s coming to know is a process, that the earlier stages of the process pertain to knowing without constituting it completely... (and that is why only) maturity is comprehensive.”<sup>132</sup>

This thesis is focused on making the point that the implicit self-awareness that occurs whenever one is conscious is itself a profound reality within one’s self, which the modern mindfulness training program is now helping people to take seriously. Augustine’s psychological astuteness and genius led him in both his *Confessions* and in his later work *The Trinity*, to trace the itinerary of his own self-awareness. In *The Trinity* he makes an extended comparison with Virgil’s *Aeneid*. This comparison illuminates the self-awareness of Aeneas who is modeled after Ulysses making his arduous way back to Ithaca after the Trojan War as he undergoes great trials and tribulations in his journey from the ruins of Troy to the founding of Rome. Self-awareness is often depicted as conversations with the gods in this literature. “Nor did the man of Ithaca forget himself in that momentous hazard,” where the metaphorical meaning of remembering indicates that Ulysses was truly aware of himself in the midst of personal struggles and hardships. This is not unlike the mindful military personnel after the mind-fitness training programs as discussed above. Like Ulysses, Aeneas was ever present to

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<sup>131</sup> For Augustine, the Latin *nosci*, *noscitur*, refers to implicit awareness of something, rather than explicit knowledge.

<sup>132</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “The Dehellenization of Dogma,” in *A Second Collection*, 28-29.

himself, as was Augustine, who portrays himself as the Christian Aeneas, in various stages of unfolding self-awareness during his dramatic journey to knowledge of God and knowledge of himself.

Augustine often referred in the *Confessions* to this *conscientia sui* or self-awareness as *memoria sui*. In doing so he demonstrates the importance of memory with regard to the thinking mind. He makes clear that by intentional actions of introspection, self-reflection, meditation, or disciplined exercises of mindfulness, the several transformations of his self-awareness allow the person to grow in self-knowledge simultaneously with knowledge of God. In the midst of undergoing his own conversion, Augustine noted how for good or for ill this self-presence is inescapable. “I remained to myself a place of unhappiness, in which I could not abide, yet from which I could not depart. From where was my heart to flee for refuge from my heart?”<sup>133</sup> This awareness of one’s self enacted in one’s memory may not always be palatable or easy to accept. The memory –like the body/brain –gathers and stores these aspects of the self, whether good or bad, making them available to consciousness when the self is tested. “So as regards something present, which is what the mind is to itself, one may talk without absurdity of memory as that by which the mind is available to itself, ready to be understood by its thought about itself, and for both to be conjoined by its love of itself.”<sup>134</sup> Thus, authentic self-awareness, often attained after much training and many personal trials, enables persons to know themselves in the sense of remembering themselves. In this way, then, Augustine’s work is consistent with the modern findings of mindfulness-based training programs.

Augustine’s insight about the human mind that may have to struggle to search for deeper self-awareness and self-knowledge eventually comes to his aid when he asks the question

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<sup>133</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Michael P. Foley, ed., F.J. Sheed, trans., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), IV, 7, 13.

<sup>134</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, XIV, 3,14.

whether there is a created analogy provided by a trinity of mental powers that reveal some understanding of the image of God already imprinted unto human beings. Hence, to become aware of one's self, for Augustine, is to become ever more aware of God who is more truly within us than we are to ourselves. In Book X of his treatise, *The Trinity*, Augustine names the memory, understanding, and will as the three most relevant aspects of the mind involved in the knowing process. He explains that these three components of the human mind best indicate the image of God. These three stand out in human character as, for instance, how the intelligence of children is measured and as the standards by which skills and capacities of a person are assessed. More deeply, according to Augustine, these three mental components are equal in importance and work in perfect conjunction with each other. "In fact though they are not only each contained by each, they are all contained by each as well."<sup>135</sup> The fact that I can remember that I have a memory, understanding, and will, understand that I understand, will, and remember, will that I remember, understand, and will is evidence of a seamless integrity among these three components. Augustine's point with regard to this triune relationship among memory, understanding, and will is that "they are each and all and wholly contained by each, they are each and all equal to each and all, and each and all equal to all of them together, and these three are one, one life, one mind, one being."<sup>136</sup> This total equality and reciprocal interrelationships among the three components of the mind is exactly what Augustine believes about the Holy Trinity: three persons, but one, undivided God, a seamless tri-unity.

Elaborating on the memory specifically, Augustine says the memory is like a treasury of images. The images of the outer world are absorbed through the senses of the body or the experiences of others that are shared or taught. Once retained in the memory, the inner knowing

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

process can proceed. The description of the memory Augustine uses in *Confessions* is powerful. “The things themselves are not brought into the memory; it is only their images which are seized with such marvelous speed, and stored away marvelously as if in cabinets, and as marvelously brought fourth again when we remember.”<sup>137</sup> Augustine says that as soon as the images enter the memory, a judgment or rational preference about the image can be made. “Thus when I call to mind the ramparts of Carthage which I have seen, and also form a picture of those of Alexandria which I have not seen, and prefer some of these forms in my imagination to others, I make a rational preference.”<sup>138</sup> Similarly, when an image of a person or object is not complete, then impressions about a person or object can be formed by the mind and judgments can still be formed. Augustine gives an example of hearing about another person who was tortured. Forming an image immediately within the mind of this tortured person, a thought is formed based on incomplete evidence. Based on this image, one might judge the person as repulsive, which then keeps the two people from ever meeting. So, along with experiences or teachings, there are also stored in the memory impressions about the knowledge or feelings that this knowledge has provoked. Both images and impressions may help us to attain more universal and abstract truths when inquiry focuses conscious attention on the recalled memories in order to understand their intelligibility. “Our shaping the images of bodies in our consciousness or our seeing bodies through the body is one thing; quite another is our grasping simple intelligence and proportions (ratios), the inexpressibly beautiful art of such shapes existing above the apex of the mind.”<sup>139</sup> While the practice of mindfulness involves rescinding from all past judgments or biases by using a focused and attentive mental mode, the mind is still able to investigate these impressions along with the images stored in the memory.

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<sup>137</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 9, 16.

<sup>138</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, IX, 2, 10.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 2, 11.

For Augustine, the memory is more than a storage tank of all of the bodily sensations that have been experienced. Rather, it negotiates thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes. “In my memory too I meet myself- I recall myself, what I have done, when and where and in what state of mind I was when I did it...From the same store I can weave into the past endless new likenesses of things either experienced by me or believed on the strength of things experienced.”<sup>140</sup> Tastes, smells, sounds, sights, feelings, the reactions from all of these sensations, as well as joyous pleasures and immense pains are all contained within the memory, but when they are called forth, they are only remembered, not actually experienced. The memory is truly a great and fascinating power of the mind.

Besides memory’s vast and immense performativity to attain intelligibility, in an implicit mode rather than thematically, a spiritual dimension also brings about both forgetfulness and recollection. By remembrance, the memory brings to one’s focal attention some reality from the past that no longer exists, which can cause great pain, sadness, and want. For instance, recalling a loved one who has died evokes emptiness and aching longing to be with this person again, leaving the heart unsatisfied. On the other hand, when one is far away from home or at war the memories of home can evoke not only abundant joy in the midst of hardship, but also great strength to persevere or survive so one can eventually regain what has been lost physically but always retained in memory. Augustine is most fascinated that the memory can remember even moments of forgetting despite the fact that forgetting is constituted by an absence of memory, memories of forgetting still occur. Just as Augustine understands evil as the negation of the good, so too he understands forgetfulness (*oblivio*) as the effacement of what the mind remembers. Thus, the memory is characterized as a power of the mind which comprises one of three essential capacities involved in the process of thinking, along with the will and attentive

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<sup>140</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 8, 13.

consciousness. Memory absorbs uncritically and without bias the form-filled data received by the bodily sensations and approved by the will. It stores them in a diverse array in its chambers, making it able to recall the forms when prompted by the active intellect and driven by the will. Augustine understands the recollection of these memories as the process of making the implicit explicit, the unarticulated into something identifiable by language, and renders the latent fully present. Of this human cognitional process Augustine boldly claims to offer a glimpse into the eternal origin of the Triune God as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If the will is rightly ordered through conversion from selfishness to a self-transcendent desire for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful and is committed to this pursuit despite the many temptations and distractions, then the active intellect of the converted person can be oriented to see and adore God himself when memory offers experiences, images, thoughts, laws, and lessons, that reveal Truth, Goodness, and Beauty to one's gaze.

In the fourth century, St. Augustine may have anticipated a wisdom that would come into view centuries after him. His quest to carefully understand the working of the mind leaped forward only in the modern day through the use of brain-scanning technologies as we have seen. Be that as it may, it is significant that Augustine was ultimately engaged in the quest to seek, find, and love God. His restless heart ultimately sought rest only in perfect union with the God who constantly pours his divine life out in the act of pure existence. As this thesis started out with an exploration of the metaphysical implications of the act of divine revelation, so the life and work of Augustine embodied the great circle of intentionality that starts and ends with the self-giving, self-revealing God. Augustine, who dramatically became religiously, morally, and intellectually converted, sought to return to the One, True, and Good source of all that exists. He epitomizes the quest for greater knowledge and love of the Trinity God that should become the motivation

of all faith-directed research and questioning.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this thesis has been to probe the outward complexities and internal dimensions involved in the theology of revelation that has its foundation in the converted heart of the attentive and faithful Christian person. As was stated in the introduction's account of divine revelation in *Dei Verbum*, God's desire is to bring all of humanity into full and complete union with Him, "a share in the divine nature..."(1Peter 1:4). This paper showed that humanity is drawn into this divine nature as a constant act of self-revelation that communicates in creation and redemption inexhaustible meaning and value to humankind. Central to this thesis is that response to this divine communication engages human openness and receptivity to the revelation of God's self in this created world of space and time. Revelation is a relational phenomenon. To the Council's teaching, God's divine word comes to these receptive persons in order to "enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and set men's hearts on fire with the Love of God."<sup>141</sup> Throughout the realm of creation and through human conscious intentionality, God reveals God's self. The attentive person may receive this revelation, gain insight, and seek the source of Goodness and Truth through the totality of natural and supernatural meanings and values. At the heart of this response are the conversion experiences as religious, moral, intellectual, and psychic in which people are enabled to both undergo and undertake a process of authentic self-appropriation. This activates the full human receptivity and openness to falling in love with God and all other persons. As illustrated by the biblical examples of Abraham, Peter, Job, Mary, and Zechariah such conversion experiences are the fruitful effects of God's divine act of self-expression in this created world by which people are changed profoundly. Authentic divine revelation draws a person from a life of self-centered and individualistic concerns into the

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<sup>141</sup> DV§23.

universal scope of salvation. Experiences of conversion initiate and sustain a receptive disposition which is not always easy to be faithful to due to the inevitable need to let go of the familiar, comfortable, and selfishly desired satisfactions as well as to endure suffering, humiliation, constant challenge, and required by obedient submission to a higher authority. However, through these conversion experiences of growth and awakening, people can ultimately understand and live out their true identity as beloved, favored, and blessed servants of God. In a remarkably analogous manner, neuroscience researchers have found how the connections within the brain are increasingly enhanced and the very structure of the brain is altered whenever a person intentionally practices focused attentiveness and heightened awareness, both of which promote selfless concern for other people. This neuroscience research seems to fulfill what might be expected from the perspective of the metaphysical and epistemological dimensions setting forth the conditions of the possibility of revelation. When a person receives a transformational experience or insight both affective and cognitive in undergoing religious, moral, intellectual, and psychic conversions, there follow real physiological effects. The point of this thesis is not to reduce the transformative effects of divine revelation to these altered regions of the physical brain, but to suggest that such effects may verify that through conversion experiences the total person is radically affected physically, mentally, and metaphysically.

Military personnel are going through the Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training program in order to perform their duties in high-stress environments more attentively and develop a higher resiliency to traumatic experiences. At the same time, Buddhist monks, Franciscan nuns, and religious people of all kinds dedicate their lives to cultivating a similar state of attentiveness, intelligence, receptivity, and ultimately, happiness. There remains much research to be done, yet it seems that for the first time in human history the age-old practices and

goals of religion are overlapped by the mindful human state and being verified by the most advanced neuroscience research. At its core, mindful awareness sets the conditions for receiving divine communication known as revelation. With practice, people can practice disciplines that enable more attunement with God by overcoming any resistances or separation from God's will.

To be sure, this thesis has done no more than scratch the surface in examining the correspondence between Catholic philosophical and theological traditions regarding revelation and the flood of information made known by the latest neuroscience technologies. Humanity longs for ultimate meanings and values. Theology and metaphysics help us understand that God, the source of all intelligibility and all that is Good, is effectively bringing about divine-self communication in this created world in order to bring every human person into perfect relational unity with God's outgoing and unconditional love. Theology reflects on the effects of conversion brought about by divine revelation. Today, neuroscientists are providing empirical evidence confirming that optimal levels of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility, and joy are enormously enhanced when the brain is engaged in building relationships, showing compassion, and seeking goals irreducible to selfish pursuits. As William James declared in a citation above, "We all have reservoirs of life to draw upon, of which we do not dream."<sup>142</sup> This merging of the ancient wisdom revealed by God and preserved within the traditions of the religions of the world and advanced research done by current neuroscience may provide an impetus that allows humanity to draw upon these reservoirs of heightened human attentiveness, understanding, knowing, discerning, and ultimately loving. God *is* acting in this world. Let us be attentive and receptive to this divine indwelling as we seek growth in the fullness of life.

*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*

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<sup>142</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Walsh, "An Analysis of Recent Meditation Research and Suggestions for Future Directions," *The Humanistic Psychologist* 31 (2003): 86.

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