

THE ROOTS OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL CATEGORIES

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Abstract

Interfaith dialogue remains an imperative and, indeed, a wonderful experience and ideal. Differences are inevitable, but precious clarifications can be gained by employing some of the categories developed in Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*. Accordingly, in the interests of clarifying dialogical communication, the parties involved might reflect on the kind of meaning they seek to express (theory, practice, existential, etc.). Further, on what level is the dialogue being conducted, e.g., empirical, imaginative, intellectual, moral, etc.)? What carriers of meaning are being used, e.g., mood, symbols, art, texts, living witness...? By drawing attention to a number of terms and categories that occur in the interface between theology, philosophy and diverse religious traditions, dialogue can be both clarified and promoted.

Dialogue with the other is institutionally structured into Christian faith as is clear from Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* — and even more explicitly in *Gaudium et Spes*. What appeared nearly fifty years ago as a rather formal pastoral and ecclesial overture to other faiths has become a practical imperative these decades later in most parts of the world, bearing fruit in such documents as *Dialogue and Proclamation*. The mission of the Church *Ad Gentes* is now a mission to be

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conducted *inter gentes*. Many Christians in their home towns live with neighbours and fellow citizens who are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and so on — with a growing proportion in some countries of those admitting to no religion, even if professing that they are still “spiritual”. The Catholic Church’s secretariats for dialogue at least have the advantage of keeping the ideal formalized and institutionalised in a rapidly expanding situation, given the demographic developments caused by mass migrations, and refugees fleeing from inhospitable regions of political, religious, economic or environmental threat.

The occurrence of authentic interfaith dialogue is a remarkable event — and contributes to a deeper experience of God. But there are times when religious differences are differences. The clarification of one’s religious stance in dialogue with others can find a helpful resource in a number of technical categories originally developed in the context of a Christian theological method,¹ and its associated intentionality-analysis. These categories help explain religious diversity within and between religious traditions, and suggest the possibility of developing a more discerning philosophical discourse. Of special importance are the following:

- the different realms of meaning (e.g., interiority in contrast to theory or common sense);
- the notion of self-transcendence and its four levels (empirical, intellectual, rational and responsible/ moral);
- dimensions of meaning (cognitive, constitutive, communicative and affective);
- the carriers of meaning (e.g., intersubjectivity, mood, symbols, art, word, embodiment)

This paper, by indicating some roots of religious diversity and a range of philosophical and phenomenological considerations, aims to enable and even enrich the possibilities of communication within, and between, differing religious traditions.

Given the immense pluralism of religious and philosophical positions, I must leave many particular questions to specialists in the various fields, and concentrate on the more general categories and considerations that may prove helpful in discussing types of religious diversity. In this regard, the most convenient and compendious reference is Bernard Lonergan’s *Method in Theology*.² My own

¹Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972.

²Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 1972.

standpoint is within the Judaeo-Christian tradition and especially in its current openness to interfaith concerns, and dialogue with philosophy on many points.

Differentiated Consciousness

Lonergan's whole approach is intent on commending a renewed sense of interiority, i.e., a methodological attention to the data of consciousness and its operations.³ In contrast — but not in opposition to — the austere objective world of theory, the interiority in question is based in the fundamental datum of self-transcending consciousness, for this is the creative source of meaning as it is objectified in science, scholarship, philosophy and theology. This notion of interiority differs also from — but again, not in opposition to — the “common sense” of a culture, which is typically an amalgam of religious and cultural tradition, available technologies, educational structures, and the laws and customs inherent in any given way of life. The focus is on not the socialized ego or the cultural self, but on the source of renewal for any culture and society, namely the dynamics of self-transcendence. Given the differing and often conflicting worlds of common sense, the multiplicity of sciences and the seemingly insoluble problems of philosophy — and the educational theories they give rise to — interiority has emerged as a realm of meaning distinct from common sense or theory, be it scientific or philosophical.

Interiority understood in this way by no means signals a retreat into a form of private inwardness, as though it were moving away from cultural communication or scientific method into uncritical subjectivity. Rather, the interiority as a differentiation of consciousness enables the critical movement from one mode of consciousness to another: when you are driving your car you are not at your most contemplative. When you are listening to Beethoven, you are not writing an essay; when you are celebrating with colleagues, you are not saying your prayers — and so forth. To name the experience of the conscious self and its operations is to touch on the creative root of culture. It opens the way to a collaboration across all disciplines and human aspirations by identifying and promoting the dynamics of self-transcendence. The more that is named and recognized, the more one has a basis for discerning the progress and decline in one's culture, and for collaborating in an interdisciplinary manner with other self-transcending subjects who go about the world's work.

³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 83-99.

The self that is disclosed through the development of interiority in its methodological attentiveness to consciousness is not the diseased self that is the proper study of psychotherapy, not the truncated self reduced to the “nothing but” of empiricist dogmatism, nor the unemployed self that can find nothing in the consumer society of today to occupy it fully. The self revealed is the self-transcending self, dynamically intending the meaning, truth and value – even to anticipate the ultimate fulfilment which is the proper domain of religion.

The current cultural situation demands an exploration of interiority if there is to be some field of common discourse between various sciences, disciplines and ethical positions. The more we can critically appropriate the phenomenon of personal consciousness and the intentionality it manifests, the more we can have a point of entry into the religious, moral, intellectual and concretely psychological dimensions of human experience.

In this respect, the formative power of tradition, religious or otherwise, is often interpreted negatively. It is portrayed as extrinsic and necessarily distorting the singular experience of the individual. However, by employing and refining the language of interiority, we can discern a personal voice and a singular experience, not distorted by the forces of tradition — an imposition “from the outside in,” so to speak — but manifesting itself as the expression of consciousness “from the inside out.” This realm of meaning seeks to bring to expression the individual experience of self-transcending consciousness as an experiential criterion for the critical and even creative assimilation of the religious tradition and the world of belief it shapes.

In short, the roots of religious diversity are inevitably exaggerated when this realm of interiority is neglected and left unexamined. It is more than personal conscience in the moral sense, and more attunement to the whole of conscious experience, in its search for truth, its intimations of beauty, and its sense of the truly good, and even a psychological self-presence and commitment that can be spoken of only in terms of vocation and calling. To that degree, this realm of meaning contrasts with that of the common sense of a culture/society which cannot speak of the individual except in terms of his/her social profile or image. Likewise, interiority is more deeply personal than theory which necessarily generalizes and extrapolates from conscious experience while, all the time, the concrete individual is beyond adequate description *individuum est ineffabile*. It is even

different from the realm of religion which deals with the ultimate Other, not the human self. But when the question arises as to how the objectifications proper to religion, science, cultural common sense might find some unifying integrity in the concrete, human individual, then interiority is a foundational consideration. The members of any particular religious tradition, or those taking part in any interfaith dialogue, will inevitably talk past one another if this issue is not clear, and communication is compromised when some are confined to the realm of theory, others are concerned only with practical common sense, and others see no point in it at all except to adore the Supreme Other and to remain in silence, or if to speak, to call others to conversion!

Discussion Points

- In any given discussion, what “differentiations of consciousness” / “mentalities” are in evidence? What are the possibilities, e.g., common sense, theoretic, mystical, psychological, aesthetic...other?
- What kind of conflicts result from approaching a discussion with differently differentiated consciousness?
- How is it possible to move from one differentiation of consciousness to another?

Self-Transcendence

What kind of self, then, is disclosed in every aspect of experience, especially in its religious dimension? Any possible answer needs to have a working model, sufficiently flexible in its applicability to a wide variety of data, reaching from the most common routine experiences to those of a more religious character. Here, I suggest, “self-transcendence” is a basic and workable model. The movement of self-transcendence is disclosed performatively and manifested “in action”.⁴ It does not rely on an idealized notion of “spirituality” or metaphysical notions of, say, “soul” or “person” or “God”. Admittedly, no one descriptive phrase hits the nail on the head: self-transcendence tends to give the impression that the “self” is left behind — but, by way of contrast — “self-realisation,” say, implies that the true self is already in possession and involved in realizing its project. There is also that ethical rhetoric of self-renunciation, self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, self-forgetfulness and self-giving to the point of self-less-ness. In such a variety of rhetorics, we can distinguish between the inauthentic self to be transcended and the

⁴Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 6-25; 104-105.

authentic self that is being realized. The implications of the phrase “self-transcendence” could occasion endless philosophical and psychological discussions if it were taken as a precise definition of the human subject and its relations with others. But leaving it in its openness of connotation can be an advantage: the self is indefinable.

But there are two further points that deserve mention in regard to the meaning of “self-transcendence”. First, it has the advantage of referring to a dynamic state of consciousness — the self-in-transcendence — rather than a metaphysically objectivised soul philosophically understood as the essential core of personal being. I am not against a metaphysical account of soul and its objective definition. But objectivity in this context can mute the need for authentic subjectivity, i.e, the self in its conscious operations.⁵ Hence, self-transcendence is the most broadly useful term. It designates, not a soul abstracted from history, but the self immersed in historical experience.

Secondly, the notion of self-transcendence and the experience behind it counteracts reductive versions of the self. At the crudest extreme, there is the reduction of the self to what can be accessed only in the data of sensation. It may talk about the brain, for example, but without any advertence to the consciousness of the researchers involved in their experience of sensing, imagining, questioning, understanding, reflecting and so forth, that has made the brain a formal object of scientific investigation and theory. On the other hand, there a less empirical and a more immanentist version of a self that is radically separated from the objective world. When the conscious self is lacking any criteria for self-transcendence, it is locked in a closed world, at the mercy of its own self-regarding projections. Another possibility is that the self absorbs all reality into its own thinking in an idealistic manner. Clearly religious experience cannot be explored or respected in any way that would give the impression that the self is a subjective fabrication on the level of either thought or emotion. Nor is religious development much helped when the self is interpreted in autistic or psychopathic terms. I might note, too, that the model of self-transcendence puts the more general term, “spirituality” in a healthy context. Spirituality is not an exotic form of soul culture, but a refined self-appropriation for the sake of the higher levels of self-transcendence.

Self-transcendence serves as a comprehensive model for human development and self-realisation. It appeals to four inter-related

⁵Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 265, 292.

levels of conscious operations, as the self expands to new registers of consciousness.⁶ For example, reading or listening to this paper provides a concrete experience of what is being suggested here for their at least four components in what is involved — the empirical, the intellectual, the rational and the responsible.

Empirical Level

First, the empirical level. One must look at the page and see the print as a necessary preliminary to understanding and reacting to it. The primal experience of sensation and image forming activities has a corresponding precept, “Be attentive!” — for the data of the senses are the immediate world from which all understanding begins. Self-transcendence here means little more than remaining alert, staying awake, positioning one’s head and eye in order to pay attention to what is written. The commanding otherness of meaning and truth demands attention to what is immediately experienced.

Intellectual Level

Secondly, as the reader puzzles over what this piece of writing means, that leads to an often unnoticed series of insights as we catch on to what is being presented, even if it stimulates the excitement of more questions. Corresponding to this intellectual level of conscious activity is the precept, “Be intelligent!” Self-transcendence on this level means transcending the purely animal extraversion of sensory awareness limited to a habitat, to enter the world of meaning and intelligibility. The reader’s intelligent activity is at a higher level than an act of ocular vision. On this level, self-transcendence offers an expansion of consciousness into the realm of meaning, as questions seek answers which can never be satisfied by simply having a good look! There is a limitlessly intelligible otherness disclosed in the world of meaning. The self is here involved in a lively trajectory of searching, expressed in the question, What is the meaning of all this meaningfulness?

Rational Level

But now readers find themselves reflecting on what is written, and asking themselves the question: is it true? Is it a step in the right direction? On this level of conscious activity we ponder the evidence that sense, imagination and intelligence have presented, and come to some kind of judgment, such as “This is a good book or article; it deals with reality,” and so forth — or the opposite. Corresponding to

⁶Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 9-10.

this level of activity is the imperative, "Be reasonable!", i.e., sift the evidence and make up your mind. There may be no need to do this when it is more a matter of letting the flow of words and ideas work their magic, to divert, entertain and possibly inspire. But the rational level of self-transcendence is in evidence when it demands a passage from the world of mere bright ideas or even fascinating insights, into the world of truth and reality and personal assent. We may answer Yes or No (with any degree of probability in between). Self-transcendence in the act of judgment makes a more personal claim than sensing, imagining or even generating bright ideas. Performatively, it acknowledges the commanding otherness of reality that cannot be found on the level of sensation or bright ideas, but only in terms of what is affirmed in the considered judgment of the person involved. We may complain of poor eyesight or bad memory or even slowness in getting the point, but we tend not to complain about any weakness in judgment. The integrity of the self is at stake in the presence of the commanding otherness of what is the case, whether we like it or not. The self-transcendence of truth takes us, beyond what we might feel or think or want to be, to face what is objectively the case. Here the self is experienced as caught up in a trajectory that cannot rest except in the evidence grounding true judgment.

Responsible/ Moral Level

On this level of conscious activity, while it remains based in what is experienced, while it is bound to the reality of what can be understood and affirmed, self-transcendence moves to decision. It can be expressed in the question: Given this is what I understand and judge to be true, what am I to do? The words I have read, the ideas that have come to mind, the judgments I have made, lead to a further demand on the self. The imperative here is "be responsible!" At this point, consciousness becomes conscience. It is affected by prior feelings for value, and the priority we have set on some values in preference to others. But by awakening to consciousness on this level we become capable of collaborating in a moral universe. Here the self transcends itself according to the demands of the otherness of objective good. It embarks on a trajectory of searching for the worth of all values, and leads to the possibility of any ultimate self-surrender to an unconditional and ultimate good.

No doubt, the dynamic structure of conscious self-transcendence can be objectified in other terms and instanced in any number of ways. Here, I have drawn attention to the experience of reading. The

experience of conversation involving communication with an actually present other would be similarly instructive. For in any conversation worthy of the name, we are being summoned, out of a solipsistic self-enclosure, to recognize the presence of the other, to attend to what he or she saying, to what is being meant and communicated in word, gesture, tone and facial expression. It might mean asking, What do you mean? What are you suggesting? The response might point to things forgotten, overlooked or formerly dismissed out of hand. The conversation can lead to agreement or disagreement; it may well result in a new sense of responsibility and moral solidarity with the interlocutor or with those individuals and groups and communities of culture, ethnicity or religion that the conversation partner represents. Whatever the context, we cannot imagine either writers or readers or conversation partners admitting that they do not need to read or listen to get to the meaning; that what is read or listened to poses no questions; that the truth of the matter, in any case, does not matter; or that the communication does not need to be honest and trustworthy, and that it makes no claims on conscience or responsibility. We either meet as self-transcending conscious personal beings, or we remain enclosed in a world limited by an inability to pay attention, by a dullness or silliness that does not seek to understand, by a levity that is unconcerned with the truth of things, and by an irresponsibility that does not care about what is worthwhile. Since it is not likely that anyone would admit that such was one's desirable and habitual stance, the reality of self-transcendence is the only option — however one chooses to express it.⁷

Clearly, the structure of self-transcendence is applicable to any phase or stage of religious development. Shaping any religious position are empirical, intellectual, rational and moral inter-related components. If any of these is dismissed, distorted or hurried over, mutual incomprehension or even disaffection is the result. But if each is given its due, a meeting of minds and hearts becomes a possibility, and the roots of diversity, difference and conflict can be quite precisely located.

This model of self-transcendence could be taken to imply that it is exclusively a movement "from below," as though it were only a gradual expansion and enrichment of consciousness from within the natural capacities of the subject concerned. But there is also the

⁷Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 17.

influence of a movement “from above”.⁸ There is room for grace, beyond the data, the *given*, the surprise of the *gift*, the vertical breaking into the horizontal, not only demanding a further levels of self-transcendence, but provoking a self-surrender to infinite goodness and self-dedication to the service of the other. Such events have a downward influence: they enrich one’s capacity to experience and attend to previously unnoticed data. Again, the more I awaken to moral responsibility in regard, say, to ecology or social justice, the more I will notice the deterioration of the environment or the presence of “invisible” poor in my society. This will make my questions more keen and searching as to the causes, conditions, the structures and effects of the situation, and suggest new evidence for practical judgments and realistic policies in these areas. As a general rule, then, developments at a higher level of consciousness have a downward effect in suggesting new kinds of evidence, sharpening our questions and in focusing on the crucial data. Lonergan speaks rather poetically of this gift as that of “being in love” in an unqualified and unconditional manner, as this love subsumes and penetrates all forms of loving, be they understood in interpersonal, social and even global terms.⁹

Discussion Points

- What happens in religious/philosophical dialogue if the dynamics of self-transcendence are not operative?
- What is the result of bypassing any level of self-transcendence (the empirical, intellectual, rational or moral dimensions)?
- Is the notion of self-transcendence adequate?

Allied to this generalized notion of self-transcendence is the more specific notion of conversion.

Conversion

Religious Conversion

Self-transcendence is most specifically dynamic and far reaching when religious conversion occurs.¹⁰ On this point, Lonergan is quite lyrical in his description of religious conversion on the analogy of falling in love. In that blissful instance, the potential for self-transcendence is actualized in a remarkable way. Love for the Other

⁸Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 104-107.

⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 106-107.

¹⁰Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105-107; 241-244.

becomes the central concern of one's existence, the integrating factor shaping one's interests and care. As mentioned above, it can take the form of interpersonal, social or even global self-dedication. The specifically religious reach of this conversion occurs as a kind of being in love in an unconditional and unqualified manner with what could remain unnamed and unobjectified. It is the Yes of one's whole being to the ultimately significant Other, in a manner which resonates in every level of consciousness. It may be dramatic, a "Damascus experience" as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, or it may result from a gradually growing but persistent undertow pulling the self out of its existential self-enclosure to encounter the supremely attractive Other who is like nothing in the world. If words can be spoken, it is in the language of praise, adoration, thanksgiving and self-surrender in life and in death, a "state of grace" to use traditional theological language.

Moral Conversion

While this religious dimension of conversion is what usually attracts the attention of the theologian, there are other modalities of conversion that are implicit in this "state of grace" as it affects other levels of consciousness — moral and intellectual, and psychological — and gives them a new basis.¹¹ Most clearly, religious conversion profoundly affects the experience of moral responsibility, inspiring and extending our orientation to the good and to a variety of values, invigorating and expanding moral sensibilities. A new hierarchy of values can result in contrast to former routine commitments: self-sacrifice, care for others, reconciliation and the love of enemies, solidarity with the hopeless, and the patient acceptance of the suffering involved in serving one's neighbour, peace-making and working for justice.

Intellectual Conversion

In the wake of Lonergan's analysis, it is customary to allow for another event in dynamics of conversion. He terms it "intellectual conversion"¹² — in the present context, why not call it "philosophical". Any deeply religious orientation affects one's sense of the objective character of reality. There is an implicit objectivity inherent in, say, thanking and praising God. The infinite other is acknowledged as the really real in contrast to the idolatrous unreality of human projections. Likewise, serving the neighbour or working for the

¹¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105-107; 240.

¹² Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105-107; 238-239.

common good is not helped by lies, illusions or stupidity. Ultimate concern plants the seeds of an “intellectual conversion” — a readiness to go beyond the limits of empiricism or sense appearances, to deal, not just lofty ideas or ideals or any number of human projections, but to engage in a critical manner with what is the case. The realism of faith and morality sustains the objective thrust of human intelligence toward critical realism in a refined ability to judge truly, to affirm the objectively real.

Psychological Conversion

Inherent in the three dimensions of conversion I have mentioned is another, though it is not so explicitly treated by Lonergan, namely, “psychological conversion.” Although this could be treated in a highly technical manner, as in the writings of Robert Doran,¹³ for our present purposes, a comparatively simple point can be made. It is this: with the occurrence of religious conversion, and with its resonances in moral and intellectual consciousness, a transformed self emerges. Allied to the replacement of “heart of stone” with “the heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26) is Paul’s appeal to leave behind “your old self” and clothe oneself with “the new self, created according to the likeness of God...” (Eph 4:22-24). There is no question of a new ontic identity, but of a new experience of self. There is a feeling of moving from the consciousness of disoriented rootlessness and meaningless characteristic of the “lost self”. Positively, it leads to an experience of one’s self as actualized, “found”, moving toward fulfilment, in a radical “state of grace,” the gift that comes from beyond the limits of the world. Conversion in this mode offers a new opportunity for self-appropriation. It contrasts with past experiences of meaningless and social conformity, and accords with individuation experienced as a personal vocation or calling. One ceases to be “religious in general,” or a passive participant in a conventionally-understood tradition. The religious subject is not simply living *off* the religious community, but living *for* it, as a responsible creative agent within it. This can lead to the discovery of the self-transcending self in a new intensity, to become the self-in-service, the self conformed to the compassionate will of God. The psychological conversion involved here places the religiously converted person in a world in which the problem of evil remains immense. Still, the emergent self, in its renewed sense of calling, can become an agent of redemption in desperate situations. Through self-sacrificing love, the converted person, as the phrase has

¹³ Robert Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1990, 59-63; 139-176.

it, can become part of the solution to a desperate situation rather than remain part of the problem.¹⁴

Is all this placing the bar too high for spiritual agility of normal human beings? Perhaps, but nonetheless, such considerations can well figure in the mind of religious communicators in the effort to promote a critical appropriation of particular religious traditions — or of less structured searchings. A lack of advertence to the multi-dimensional event of conversion can make religious discourse, and the phenomenology of which it is based, somewhat monodimensional and devoid of philosophical interest.

Discussion Points

- The differences that result from a lack of conversion? Religious?
- Intellectual, moral and Psychological?
- The problem of naming conversion events.

Dimensions of Meaning

The meaning of what the self-transcending self has experienced, understood, reflected on and responded to can be expressed in different dimensions. It will be sufficient for our purposes to note these four dimensions or functions of meaning (Lonergan, 1972, 76-81; Lonergan, 1988, 232-246) since this fourfold division has considerable clarifying potential in any religious-philosophical discussion.

Cognitive Meaning

The most familiar dimension of meaning is the cognitive, intent on objective truth and meaning. I mean something; not *this*, but *that*. To the question, "Is it so?," one answers Yes or No. The Christian tradition has been particularly productive of cognitive meaning of its faith, strongly influenced as it was by classic Greek philosophical developments. Today this cognitive emphasis continues in dialogue with philosophy, the sciences and the humanities. The meaning and truth affirmed in Christian doctrine is a thrust toward the objectively real. This has been the special domain of theology, above all in its systematic forms. Faith is understood to include an intellectual quest, in dialogue with science, philosophy and scholarship, the better to give a coherently cognitive and objective account of its beliefs.

¹⁴Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 55.

Constitutive Meaning

But meaning is also constitutive. It informs consciousness, to give the subject a new or increased sense of identity. The constitution of a country informs and shapes the consciousness of its citizens, to give them special rights and obligations. In religious terms, whilst God may be praised and thanked as an objective reality, there is a constitutive meaning in so relating to God: the believer is constituted in a sense of being loved, chosen, healed and forgiven by the Most High. To that degree, any truth objectively affirmed of God “indwells” and informs the mind and heart of the believer, to shape a new and radical sense of God-ward identity. The area of constitutive meaning has been the special domain of what is commonly called today, “spirituality”, as faith seeks a more experiential self-appropriation.

Communicative Meaning

Thirdly, meaning is communicative. It tends toward community and inspires modes of belonging. It may express a field of shared experience and common understanding and responsibilities. Religiously, the communicative dimension of faith expresses itself in the community that is gathered in the synagogue, church, mosque or temple. More deeply, it inspires not only a relationship to God, but also to everyone and everything in God. This dimension comes to expression, especially in the presence of conflicts, when the community's capacity for shared experience and common meanings and values diminishes. In Christian experience, ecumenism and interfaith dialogue most represent the communicative dimension of meaning in action.

Effective Meaning

Finally, meaning is effective. It builds cities, roads and bridges. It tends to the transformation of one's world, to make it serve human concerns more adequately. On the religious level, this world-forming dimension of meaning is the particular concern of Liberation and Political theologies. Here faith seeks its adequate political or social structure to express the love of one's neighbour as well as contesting evils of oppression and their supporting structures.

We can expect, then, that philosophy could be of great service in the clarification of religious differences and conflicts by refining the implications of these dimensions of meaning in the living reality of religious lives. It must seem that no one of these dimensions can be downplayed in a phenomenology of religious living — and indeed in all other ways of life: objective truth, personal identity, community

relationships and world transformation. There is no implication of a temporal sequence of these four dimensions, though, of course, they are interrelated and interwoven. To concentrate exclusively say, on objective truth to the detriment of existential or social relevance, would lead to a soulless form of religious thinking. On the other hand, to be so intent on spirituality or community or even liberation as to remove any or all of these concerns from the realm of objective truth, cannot but prove disastrous in the end. On the other hand, if philosophers are critically alert to the distinction and inter-relatedness of these dimensions of meaning, the capacity for a lucid identification of questions and problems is increased.

Discussion Points

- Typical problems resulting from monodimensional meaning.
- Developing dialogue through multidimensional meaning.
- The tendency of a religious context to confuse dimensions of meaning.

Carriers of Meaning

Finally, there is what is termed the “carriers” of meaning.¹⁵ Now, meaning is carried or communicated in a number of ways. The identification of these carriers and their respective importance in a given religious tradition makes for a greater clarity in addressing religious diversity. They can be listed in the following manner, though, again, there is no implication of any temporal sequence.

Word

The word communicates. We live in a “worded world”. The word remains the most precise and flexible mode of communication. In the religious sphere, the word is expressed in instruction, formal doctrines, ethical commandments, and in all the theories that seek to clarify the world of religious discourse. This is especially the case in the Judaeo-Christian tradition when the Word of God has such an eminent role.

Community/ Intersubjectivity/ Mood

The religious word is spoken in an intersubjective community setting. A community shares moods and motivations. Ideally, this interpersonal communication is based on shared prayer, worship, hope and compassion. These encompassing moods and motivations give affective weight and momentum to the community’s verbal

¹⁵Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 57-73.

expressions. In short, the word resonates with a fuller meaning in mood of the community, be it thanksgiving, assurance, repentance or hope.

Symbol

A further depth and compactness to the communication of any given community is found in its basic symbols. Religious symbols of light, life and growth, of wind and water, of flame and fire, of healing and relationship and transformation give affective and imaginative concreteness to religious meaning. Such symbols enter into the gestures and rituals that the community employs in the celebration of its deepest meanings and values.

Art

Allied to the communication actualized in symbols and gestures is art. To speak most generally, art refreshes routine awareness. It brings out some arresting pattern of experience related to the colours, shapes, movements, space and sounds inherent in the way we indwell the world, and thus takes the form of painting, dance, music, sculpture, architecture and so on.¹⁶ Art in this respect has the capacity to re-animate traditional symbols, to make them glow with new life. Religion in all traditions has made long alliances with various forms of artistic expression; and it is these that continue in the secular consciousness even if any appreciation of the religious tradition that inspired them has waned.

Witness/ Incarnate Meaning

Finally, there is witness or incarnate meaning. Meaning can be so expressed in particular persons or groups that the history of a religious tradition has been radically directed, enriched or even transformed. Hence, there is the Christ (“the Word Incarnate”), the prophet, the martyr, the reformer, the mystic and the saint. Witness is perhaps the most vivid carrier of meaning — and a humbling one for those of us who would seek to communicate the deep meanings of a particular religious tradition. Each of us incarnates a sense of the world and the beyond, and so may contribute significantly to the expansiveness of the religious tradition in which we operate.

The field of communication, then, is manifold. It is instanced in the words, moods, symbols, art and witness that are invoked in order to “make sense” of the complex meaning of a religious experience, or of a

¹⁶Bernard Lonergan, *Topics in Education. The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the Philosophy of Education. Collected Works 10*, Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe, ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, 208-232.

particular tradition and its associated discourse. The simple listing of these carriers of meaning can suggest ways of initiating conversation on religious differences within and between different religious traditions.

Discussion Points

- Carriers of meaning intensify mentalities/ differentiations of consciousness
- The potential/ limitations of the various carriers of meaning
- Typical conflicts?

Conclusion

Our purpose has been simply to draw attention to a number of helpful terms and categories that occur in the interface between theology, philosophy and diverse religious traditions. To that end, I have adapted some elements drawn from Lonergan's theological method in the hope that conversations on the connections between philosophy and religious diversity can be stimulated, clarified and enriched.

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