

## **The World at Heart -**

Self-appropriation through transcendent meaning:  
Outline of a concept of spiritual transformation  
beyond religion

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Module 750/1

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June 2004

Submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirement for the MA Degree  
in Theology, University of Leicester

## *Abstract*

In this dissertation I try to show that a process of spiritual transformation can go beyond the effects on the personality of what is commonly called conversion. At the same time the concept developed is intended to contribute to the discussion of an emerging type of consciousness in an increasingly globalised world and its multiple challenges for the individual in a secular context.

### *Acknowledgements*

I am grateful for the accreditation of prior studies towards the MA in Contemporary Theology by Newman College. This study has academically been supported by Prof. Mark Morelli's kind invitation to present at the 2003 Lonergan Conference at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, and the feedback delegates provided. My thanks and deep appreciation go to him and Peter Monette, who after peer review, accepted the paper presented for the web site of Lonergan Studies. Finally, I am grateful for the personal encouragement Catherine King, Ohio, provides as she believes in the value and meaning of my work as an applied contribution to Lonergan Studies. I am only too aware that it cannot be more than a very small contribution.

## Contents

## **0. Introduction**

## 0.1 Development of the Research Question

The subject chosen for this study has been part of my personal reflection for many years.

While the process of reflection and response, a narrative inquiry in its own right, would be difficult to report *a posteriori*, I now present elements of a paradigm deduced from my personal reflection from 1985 onwards.

Like Lionel Blue (1998, 15) I gave up on religion while still in primary school. But in my case this was not because a loving human symbol for the world's being a benign and safe place (like Lionel's grandmother) died, but because I became rationally convinced that there simply was no 'Father in Heaven'. And I still believe that to have been a special grace for a lonely child.

However, in my early 30s, I sensed that some of my deepest intentions might find an adequate expression through an aspect of sacramental theology. This realisation became an impelling force to develop my understanding of theology to a level that would enable me to share the view that had presented itself to me. This study is one step towards that goal, hopefully in the sense Okumura (1994) speaks of the matter: According to Okumura (1994, 58) "many conversions resemble *satori*", i.e. they are more an awakening to reality in a deeper way and beyond common sense bias, rather than merely an adopting of religious ideas and concepts - and they go on until "nothing remains but prayer".

If, as I argue in a similar vein, the condition of the possibility of an initiation into – as it turned out – the contemplative Christian tradition can be regarded as being met, this may have implications for several fields, e.g.:

- The meaning, value and mental location of religious education,

- an understanding of the possibilities lying in difficult childhood experiences (as I have come to understand that those I went through prepared a sensitive personality for development), possibly relevant for therapists' concepts of intervention,
- the basis for inter-religious dialogue,
- reflection upon and understanding of what Bernard Lonergan (1985, 117) calls the infrastructure of faith, i.e. the core of personal attitudes and responses, as opposed to the suprastructure, i.e. concepts, myths, images, archetypes, prototypes and dogmas,
- the changes regarding cognition, values, aptitude, traditionally associated with 'conversion', here occurring as preceding religious orientation (in the suprastructural sense at least),
- a new way of understanding religious consciousness as not only Lonergan (1985, 65) sees it emerging historically,
- a possible concept of personal transformation in the context of a secular world in the process of globalisation, and its new challenges to individuals.

Dealing with the first two points would be a matter of a separate dissertations respectively. I will be concerned here with the latter points only, and even these I can merely touch on the surface:

I would like to show that personal transformation outside religion is possible, that it may or may not lead to subsequent religious orientation (understood as acceptance of concepts of any one religious tradition). If it does, however, the understanding of religious concepts will remain somewhat different from that of most people brought up within one tradition from an early age.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This hypothesis will be the subject of a further study I am planning. There is no room here to explore the

The kind of transformation dealt with here, may have structural features similar to those characteristic of the development through Buddhist Zen meditation. As a case in point, that may be of interest to the discussion whether Zen meditation is transferable away from the Buddhist context. Here, however, the process is relevant as bearing its own specific features, i.e. those of exposure to challenging life circumstances. (*Some* of those features will be shaped by the individual temperament, but the point to be made here is, that the epistemological and existential movement is a common feature.<sup>2</sup>) The transformation will affect all aspects of the personality, although, as traditionally understood to be the case in 'conversion', it may take a long time for previously acquired personality traits to be levelled out. While I hope to make a significant contribution to the topic and push out the boundaries of knowledge eventually, the personal aspect is not told for any supposed claim of uniqueness of the experience.

Circumstances and temperament merely introduced a level of reflectivity, 'coming free at a high price' (Tuckerhoof 2002), which I never found written up anywhere. So I began to be motivated to provide an account. The argument *is* put together in the hope to stimulate engagement with some paradoxes, that might otherwise have been put to one side.

I do *not* advocate a potpourri of religions. On one hand, I feel the richness of the wisdom and truth preserved in them requires respect for their uniqueness, on the other, from the background of my own essentially non-religious experience, I argue that a concept of multiple religious identity, as it may offer itself at a level of social phenomena, misses the epistemological point that individually one tradition is transcended by employing concepts of another, not merely extended.

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epistemological reasons for this as I see them.

<sup>2</sup> A further hypothesis which I will not be able to pursue here, might be that of personalised approaches to universal meaning according to temperament, disposition, character, interests and experience.



In my personal theological inquiry 15 years ago I came across several notions of Karl Rahner's (see 1984), which I still see as corner stones of a modern understanding of sacramental theology, and of 'demythologised'<sup>3</sup> religious views in general:

First, the sacramentality of the Church can only be understood as a sign set against Mystery. (Rahner 1984, 54ff.) Among other things that means a quasi-mythological language of authorisation will either not make sense to people today or fixate a limited understanding of God, incompatible with an enquiring mind as required in today's society.

Secondly, and even more relevant for the context of this study: Ultimately the realisation of a Christian life is "to throw oneself into the arms of Mystery." (Rahner 1984, 413):

(He, who) accepts his life as the mystery embedded in the Mystery of Eternal Love, which carries Life, even in the heart of death, is one who says 'yes' to Christ, even if unknowingly. (Rahner 1984, 226)

While an investigation of Rahner's Christology implied in the statement above is beyond the scope of the present work, his existential approach to the Mystery of Life as unfolding itself, accompanied and highlighted by the sacramental function as the Church represents it, is important in the present context.<sup>4</sup>

The philosophical approach shows a profound sense of freedom in a deep theological thinker, as affecting cognition: He is free to name Mystery as unknown, rather than having to close the debate warding off questions that cannot be answered through reference to dogma:

It is not satisfactory for a dogmatic ecclesiology... to emphasise that God simply has issued a formal authority of a principal kind for the Church. While that may be correct, it does not shed light on the core of the reason for this authority and therefor will be at risk of being interpreted in a formalistic way, as people today find such a deliberate and formal authorisation unlikely. (Rahner 1984, 366)

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<sup>3</sup> Mark F. Fischer in personal communication; see his synopsis of Karl Rahner, Foundations:

<http://users.adelphia.net/~markfischer/Rahner000.htm>, as on June 22, 2004

<sup>4</sup> When I speak of the Church, I am referring to the RC tradition.

Again, I hope to make a contribution to theology that aims for de-mythologisation and re-introducing existential categories as the corner stones for the beauty and richness of a tradition, as it aspires to remain meaningful for people on the way into the Mystery that Life is. Dogma will be understood as a corner stone of Freedom (see Rahner 1984, 139ff.). This understanding I see as one of the elements of Rahner's prophetic word, "The future Christian will be a mystic - or won't be at all." (Biser 1994, 13)

Essentially, I see my findings exemplifying the self-appropriation Bernard Lonergan conceptualises and proposes: Coming to a deeper understanding of the world and self, necessary as authoritative accounts of meaning do no longer fulfil the needs of critical minds (see Lonergan 1985, 169 – 182).

In this study, I will, in several movements, look at aspects of the transformational approach for which I would like to make the case, first on a practical level of first reflection, then considering concepts and theories:

- The transformative Dark Night, as an existential and essentially secular experience,
- bodily sense of being,
- insight through paradox,
- transformation as self-transcendence,
- performative apophasis.

These aspects are interdependent, and each concept presents questions for the others. Again, I cannot expect to do the complexity justice.

However, I do hope even this initial piece of work may be read as tackling one central paradox, namely that of "relentless critique of religious tradition" whilst at the same time presenting a "realisation of the deeper wisdom within such tradition" (Sells 1994, 13).

## 0.2 Hypothesis

Together with, among others, Roberts (1993) and Marion (2000) I argue that the existential transformation, shaped through trials and paradoxes, provides a framework for an historically emerging type of consciousness.

Apart from the aspects mentioned above, features of this type of consciousness will be

- a developing ground for empathy in a deeper and wider way than previously,
- a (growing) sense of detachment (from one's personal preferences),
- the basis for transcendental systemic understanding.

With Eugen Biser, Professor emeritus of Philosophy of Religion, I argue that the Christian tradition misses its chance of contributing to this development, as long as it does not understand itself with regard to the deepest anthropological and existential aspects that are its inheritance. (Biser 1994, 14). So the question arises how the appropriate understanding can be achieved. One answer comes from Bernard Lonergan late in his life, contributing to a vision of emerging religious consciousness:

There occur experiences commonly named religious. Their emergence into consciousness may be anything from slight and unnoticed to absorbing, fascinating, dominating. Of themselves they pertain to an infrastructure, i.e. religious experience does not occur with a label attached; of itself it is not formulated. ... Any formulation is in the context of some tradition and milieu; ... at the present time specific discussions of emerging religious consciousness have to proceed on the basis of some convention. (1985, 70)

Lonergan clearly sees as a possibility the development of a basis for shared theological thinking (of different traditions), based on Raimon Panikkar's diacritical theology (see e.g. 1996). Through the work of William Johnston SJ (see 1997, 2000), he also refers to what is my main interest here: The essential components of 'expanding consciousness with a cosmic orientation' (Lonergan 1985, 69) can be described on the basis of anthropological and

philosophical insights as there is possible a first level of formulation that is not yet embedded in any one tradition. This is not a merely academic exercise, but might help to explore and explain in a Christian theological context an existential and anthropologically based understanding of the dialogical relationship with Christ, traditionally known as discipleship. In a secular context it might help to understand similarities of spiritual approaches, in a practically relevant way.

### 0.3 *Methodology*

Apart from using literature review and evaluation to support my argument, I also speak on occasion in the voice of a narrator, sharing my own reflection.

After considering various methodological approaches to deal with this fact, I have decided to simply present the process and outcome of my inquiry in this way. There are several aspects to the reason for my decision:

- To take hold of (the moment of) insight is much more difficult than to elaborate its result. Ultimately, the former is impossible to convey, just as it is not possible to have an insight into scientific matters for somebody else – one can only guide them toward it and, at best, tell them, ‘and then Archimedes suddenly got it’. (Lonergan 1992, quoted from Morelli 1997, 47).
- As I move towards narrative research, I do hope that that the notion of narrative knowing may help to understand the intention here also:  
  
"The purpose of descriptive narrative research is to produce an accurate description of the interpretative narrative accounts individuals... use to make sequences of events in their lives... meaningful". (Polkinghorne 1988, 161)

In this context the categories of

- Validity (well-grounded conclusion and strength of the analysis of the data,  
(Polkinghorne 1988, 175f.),
- significance (meaningfulness, importance, Polkinghorne 1988, 176) and
- reliability (dependability of the data, Polkinghorne 1988, 176)

need to be applied in accordance with narrative meaning, which is not always reducible to less complex scientific statements.

However, detailed description and analysis of the epistemological background of the events referred to would go beyond the scope of this work. I hope to tackle some of the complexity of

conceptualising that which can only be understood *actively*, i.e. by undergoing a similar process, *not* passively, i.e. by receiving an explanation, in further research. There I hope to demonstrate the effect of paradoxes and apophatic performance (see Sells 1994).

## **1. Real-Life Transformation**

If I am not found in the common places  
Some will say I am lost -  
And indeed, in getting lost  
I was found.<sup>5</sup>

I understand this verse to speak of two essential elements of true transformation:

1. A real life conflict - be it of inner drives or outer circumstances - leading to a transformation of self image and understanding, and one that is
2. experienced as received at that, and which cannot be conveyed by the usual means of communication, which is why St. John speaks of it in passive voice.

While the verse is also an example of an entry into apophatic theology, I would like to look at the structural transformation John talks about in his poetic work. It is one that affects the whole person. St. John of the Cross deducted principles and stages of spiritual development from his personal experience. These are widely accepted within the Carmelite Order and beyond. (See e.g. Johannes vom Kreuz 2000, 2003). However, I would argue that the transformative darkness of a person suffering from immature concepts of religion and God under the umbrella of religious ideology<sup>6</sup> is not necessarily already an entry into the existential transformation, although it will take the mind and the personality some of the way. That fine line aside, it seems important to reintroduce the full existential and anthropological character of the principles St. John found. This may be valid and helpful beyond the

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<sup>5</sup> St. John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle, verse 20. Freely translated by BS, following Dobhan 1997, 151

<sup>6</sup> My definition of this is: Images and principles are 'frozen' and accepted as (absolute) truths as they stand rather

than used to help as hermeneutic tools to explore the existential truth that is at their heart.



immediate religious context. When Norbert Cummins says, the darkness of life circumstances can become the transformative Dark Night (1994, 154), I take this to mean the conflict of our very existence, in whatever shape or form it meets us, *is* the very substance or structure of our (potential) transformation. Dark Night and its transformative outcome are not primarily the result of following a certain religious practice (e.g. enclosure etc.), although it *may* occur under these circumstances.

Hiltner (in Conn 1978, 181) argues that true conversions in our time occur among Alcoholics Anonymous, i.e. people, who had to give up all their securities. In other words:

As long as *something*, even an acquired religious practice, provides unquestioned security - be it in a predominantly material, psychological or epistemological sense - that complete transformation cannot happen in the profoundest sense. So obviously a crisis of existential character for religious people *will* include a crisis of their religious understanding or adherence.<sup>7</sup>

Even more importantly though, the existential crisis *is* made of, as it were, the structures and patterns of a person's life's paradoxes, including the possible irreconcilability of a person's own inner drives: In St. John's personal background themes of paradox drives and tensions seem to be: The intense love beyond convention that brought his parents together, the social deprivation suffered as a consequence of this marriage, and the early death of his father that left his mother in hardship.

Could here be one source for a longing for a great transcendent love: Present, yet not present? MacGowan (1993, 17) describes St. John of the Cross as 'the child of Romeo and Juliet' - by all human standards an impossible existence! Apart from this aspect of his family background, St. John of the Cross' own journey through the transformative Dark Night includes imprisonment over several months - as captive of his brethren, who do not understand his

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<sup>7</sup>

And this does *not* mean: adherence to the *idea* of 'Dark Night'!

ideas of reform of the Order. Here, religious conformity and respectability are stripped of all social acceptance. And still - St. John does not go for idealisation of the suffering: He escapes eventually. There is no praise of suffering for the love of God, as piety might put it - but one prisoner glad to get out! I do not deny the transforming quality of suffering, but aim to acknowledge the necessary authenticity - i.e. minus superimposed pious ideology. Again, personal character and life circumstances *are* what makes structural transformation.

## **2. Features of Transformation**

## 2.1 *Attentiveness*

One of the key features of both the process of 'conversion' and its results, seems to be to arrive at a changed understanding of presence, both in the sense of what is present (to me) and as being present, ultimately attending - as I would argue - to one's conditioned existence from the freedom of an unconditioned context. Lonergan analyses: "by consciousness is meant awareness immanent in cognitional acts," (1992, 343 - 360). I would go further and argue that attending to the attentiveness itself is an important step towards a more differentiated awareness.

In a narrative way, Lonergan too, points towards this aspect of consciousness, in his report of the story about Archimedes, running naked from the bath, with the cry of joy, 'I have got it!' .

But is Lonergan fully attentive to the quality of attentiveness?

I can be present to myself, not merely as experiencing, but also as trying to understand, as actually understanding, as reflecting and about to judge and as judging. (1990, 33 - 35)

The level of being present to being present, as attending to being present, seems to be missing in Lonergan's description. I would argue that the aspect of attention to the present moment, as in J-P. de Caussade (1996) or as in Gendlin(1981) is of importance, if the self-appropriated basis to develop is to be a stable one. J.K. Kadowaki (2002) refers to this in his description of changes in understanding through purification of the body.

This sense of attentiveness resembles the mode of children's curiosity and playfulness, which deserves full investigation regarding its part in the meaning of life. For now, the thought to pursue is this: The constant and qualifying feature in the act or process of self-transcendence seems to be 'being present to myself' as attending.

To demonstrate this with a non-religious example: Could not the joy, in Archimedes' case, about the insight, the problem solving *and* the problem solved, overflowing, as it were, into a

physical response (running naked from the bath), possibly be the first indicator of being present to being present to insight about to develop?

The 'I' who has 'got it', is present as transcending both self and insight. This is, of course, not to say that had Archimedes not run naked from the bath, his insight was proven to be of less significance! (It might even be said that in *reacting* to his joy, he will probably not be fully attentive to it, rather be caught up in it, to some extent.)

In other words: The existential shift towards a sense of the 'bigger picture', e.g. through art and/or a sense of awe, or through science, can occur without the person being aware of it, without paying attention to it. Taking being as being given, may however not be integrated until the person has become aware of the subtle process, begun to pay attention to it and to take it for what it is - and even this may again have to be transcended too. To put it poignantly: If I am being present, as part of being as present, -'who dies?'(Levine 1988)

Attention to awareness indicates a new, more differentiated level of what Lonergan calls self-appropriation.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, in itself it creates to some extent the characteristic I want to look at: detachment.

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<sup>8</sup> Tentatively I add: It may also be experienced and approached by different people differently, e.g. depending on

their psychologically dominant mode of perception: visual, auditory, tactile or kinesthetic. There is not room

here to investigate the aspect of different senses fully. (For this see Biser 1994, 98 - 110)

## 2.2 *Detachment*

Above we touched briefly on the ability to distance oneself from one's own perspective.

Considering this as an habitual feature, not just the occasional occurrence of good will, it implies an epistemological aspect and practical application in one's thinking. Detachment as a habitual feature, or as I prefer to call it 'dis-identification', means personal preferences and judgements remain, while the both generalising and limiting quality seems to fade. In a seminal way, this is momentarily experienced when I begin to open up to reconciliation with another after an argument: Suddenly my view changes, and I am, if for a moment only, able to see 'from the inside' that the other may have a point.

E.g.: The need for this ability as a more permanent feature on a grand scale became clear to me when listening to Tony Giddens' Reith Lectures 1999. He mentions the difference in meaning of social structures in different societies<sup>9</sup>: What may be the statistical, social and moral norm for some can be dysfunctional in a different context.

This is not a purely academic matter in a world, where inter-relatedness and exchange increase on all levels, where many people act and interact with and in societies other than that of their own personal and family background on a regular basis.<sup>10</sup> The ability to 'think complexity' can be helpful. To be "attentive, understanding, reasonable and responsible" (Morelli 1997, 22)<sup>11</sup> in this new and developing world context, I need to move beyond my own horizon,

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<sup>9</sup> BBC World Service, April 1999, Lecture 1, as on [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), May 1999

<sup>10</sup> I suppose, Tony Giddens would rightly say, that in a passive and 'runaway' mode, this is already happening,

with - mostly US - TV programmes being broadcast overseas, forcing or enabling people to engage with a culture alien to their own.

<sup>11</sup> [Mark Morelli refers here to Bernard Lonergan's transcendental precepts, see Lonergan 1999, 13ff.](#)

acknowledge judgements of value and of social facts which are contrary to those of my own environment. In other words, attentiveness and detachment are closely linked<sup>12</sup>.

Beyond this, I want to suggest an approach to detachment that may sound surprising at first to the religious mind, namely that of playfulness.

In my own professional development a sense of very precious detached presence came back to the fore, in adulthood - after I had lost it or rather left it behind consciously in puberty \_ through the practice of and reflection on using drama techniques in adult education -

Psychodrama, in my case, as following Moreno and his students. They are supported by Blatner, American psychiatrist and experienced psychodramatist (1997, 184):

Moreno's emphasis on creativity is particularly relevant in addressing the challenges of our postmodern world. But, further, his deeper philosophical ideas lend a measure of depth and suggest the possibility of operationalizing methods to a number of other contemporary trends... one of the most prominent (ones being) a return to a more spiritual sensibility...the synthesis of a spiritual, social and individual perspective with a praxis, a complex of techniques and principles...

Having worked with the technique in the context of pastoral care and adult RE<sup>13</sup>, I refer to it here, because on one hand it exemplifies in an applied fashion the abstract concepts drawn on

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<sup>12</sup> Speaking of a deeply transformative journey, Roberts (1993) describes a first and initial incident of moving into the new level of awareness - 'the 'experience of no-self', as she names it: A sudden, quick and short event, yet to be fully appropriated. I.e. she does not simply learn to display the features of detachment in her behaviour, but a structural change occurs that forces and enables her to develop the characteristics to be true to herself and her experience - ultimately she can't help but respond by developing these characteristics.

<sup>13</sup> Meeting clinical standards; the German term '*Angewandte Pastoralpsychologie*' seems not translatable. I have not found any comparable praxis in the UK. Retreat centres with a high quality programme come closest.

here and on the other because I believe the young child's ability of playfulness, dormant still in many adults, may be key to an authentic spiritual attentiveness.<sup>14</sup>

I argue that such moments of 'freedom from time'<sup>15</sup> as they are characteristic for children's play, can be experienced in dramatic play, and eventually be integrated in the personality.

I believe this to be specifically true for the practice of Psychodrama, where the playfulness is from the start applied to real life scenes.

Dr. Grete Leutz, one of Moreno's students in the 1950s, writes as an experienced psychiatrist using Psychodrama (1986, 72, 74). She explains in poetic language how the players through playing come to see that

- the place of an action is set as present through the imagination,
- while the neurotic mind holds on to the past, creativity encouraged leads to a new beginning,
- "the tree does not live of the branch, but the branch lives of the tree, and in a characteristic way, constituting the tree at that".

Leutz, in metaphorical language also refers to the subtle and practical induction into a way of systemic thinking in the process of its practice.<sup>16</sup>

For Leutz, the three aspects of the experience of group-play following just a few simple rules, represent space, time and cosmos as three dimensions of awareness, in a practical and grounded way. In addition, I would argue that the setting as present under 'open sky', as it

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<sup>14</sup> See acknowledgements, p.2. I have presented my evaluation and epistemological foundation also in several

other unpublished research papers at academic conferences.

<sup>15</sup> Translation of the only appropriate term I have so far found for this: Hugo Lassalle SJ (1988b) speaks of  
  
'Zeitfreiheit'.

<sup>16</sup> The latter point, I believe, is epistemologically related to what Bernard Lonergan calls the 'Universal Viewpoint'. (1992, 587ff.)



were, i.e. in the absence of a *deus-ex-machina*, is at least a trial-run for consciousness in a super-complex reality.

Furthermore, I think that in setting the conditions in play, their setness (as opposed to unchangeable givenness) is implicitly acknowledged and can become conscious. At the same time the givenness of that which is beyond the conditioned in our existence can be experienced (and may even become thematic). This means consciousness as free from the restrictions of the set conditions (as believed to be unchangeable) can be experienced at the same time as the givenness of the player's very existence in its vast potential, within the mystery that Life is, or simply within that which is yet unknown.

In the process, players may develop a lively, embodied understanding that the resistance we meet is nothing other than – life's playing field of opportunity to develop beyond our previous mental horizon.

For our context here, some of Hans Georg Gadamer's thoughts on play (1990, 107) may further support the thoughts presented:<sup>17</sup>

- In play the usual orientation towards purposes does not disappear, but appears to float somewhat. (*Referring to an altered mode of consciousness in playing?*)
- The players are not the subjects of the play, rather the play comes to be enacted by the players. (*Indicating the sense of freedom to which I refer?*)
- The movement of playing is strangely without substance. Play is the very performance of the act. (*Being over individual partial understanding, as contrary to our everyday awareness - ?*)
- Performance is per se for someone, even if there is no one there, who merely listens or watches. (*Not unrelated to, but going beyond Martin Buber's concept of I-Thou relationship? See section on 'Begegnung' below*).

I argue that the awareness referred to by Gadamer can be described as already mentioned above: If I am present to myself as judging, while being present to being as being present<sup>18</sup>,

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<sup>17</sup> My tentative interpretation added in italics.

<sup>18</sup> The latter as 'virtually unconditioned' to use Lonergan's terminology (1992, 305). As a native speaker of

I stop identifying with the judgement and with the I that is judging<sup>19</sup>. I assume detachment does not come ingrained more deeply in any other way.

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German I find it difficult to comprehend that in the English literature I have encountered so far there seems to

be no linguistic distinction between being - *Sein* as the 'abstract idea' beyond which nothing is (see Lonergan

1992, 375) and being - *sein*, *Sein* used both as verb and noun for the being of concrete beings, philosophically differentiated explained as *Dasein*.

<sup>19</sup> These remarks are not meant to be a report of personal experience. Stylistically I prefer a personal example to

the formal construct with the generic 'one'.

### 2.3 *Begegnung*<sup>20</sup>

Detachment does not apply only to objects of thinking, but to our relationship with the world around us and our interaction with it in general. So the link to the issue of encounter is already given. An element of encounter - *Begegnung* - does generally play a part in the conceptualisation of the transcendent and our dealings with it; however, it will be conceptualised differently in different traditions.<sup>21</sup>

Even for the realisation of the Zen-Buddhist student's experience, his or her encounter with the Master is central - not just because he or she gives his/her authoritative approval of the realisation, but because the meeting of minds and spirits creates insight into the shift of consciousness, which would otherwise not be understood fully. The latter aspect can come to life through an encounter other than with an authorised teacher.

To give an example from the Christian tradition, I think that the conversion experience recorded in the New Testament as St. Paul's can be understood in this vein. Paul saw the Light - and therein Jesus. There are two aspects to his encounter with the Ultimate Reality.

A further example from scientific research, non-theistically conceptualised: Schultz (1950), a MD who developed a clinical method of relaxation, in self-observation recognises the quality of 'das Ankommende'<sup>22</sup>, i.e. insights and images seemingly arriving from beyond the person's

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<sup>20</sup> I use the German term for engl. 'encounter' not least because of the reference to Martin

Buber's writing on the theme. The German notion may have a connotations of transcendence in encounter, not

least due to Buber's writing being part of the culture and tradition.

<sup>21</sup> Shalom Ben Chorin (in Schultz 1986, 165ff.) sees dialogical thinking as specific to Jewish philosophy.

<sup>22</sup> Engl.: That which is arriving.

mind. The person will experience something that 'got through' to him or her, something transcendent, and himself/herself as encountering it.

This matter has been explored further by William Johnston SJ. He argues that insights may come through to the person's consciousness (from other parts of the mind) as phrases or sentences - as if spoken to the person, e.g. as imperatives ( see Johnston 2000, 99).

To summarise: The described change in the personality can be supported by the event of 'encounter' with the transcendent. Its conceptualisation, however, is not necessarily theistic, maybe not even *necessary*.

And still, I would go further: Is it not possible, that a sense of 'responsibility to awe' (Elson, 2001) may even be more comprehensive in terms of effect on the personality if such an event is entered into independently (as in the case of the non-believer), than if built into authoritatively acquired concepts of God? In epistemological terms, this could be explained by the fact that the religious concept in the latter case 'frames' the mind, whereas in the former case, the mind (by definition) remains open to that which is ultimately beyond rational comprehension<sup>23</sup>. However, this is not to be understood as an argument for neglecting of the rational aspect in one's appropriation of an experience of the transcendent. Karl Rahner states that all theological reflection begins with experience (see 1984, 33ff.). For most Christians of his generation this may still have meant primarily the experience of a guiding authoritative report of religious stories from an early age. I would argue that the decline of this may be a disadvantage for the transmission of those religious stories. But it is potentially an advantage for an existential transformation. (I am of course not denying the crisis in a transitory loss of ethical orientation.)

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<sup>23</sup> The argument is valid only insofar as cognitive structures are indeed unaffected by the event. In the case of a

major event, the religious conceptualisation will be reorganised in the person's mind.



## 2.4 *Felt Sense*

How complex this process of transformation is - even working against the common understanding of gradual development through time, is clear from Ruth Burrows' autobiographical writing. The Carmelite and writer speaks of her image/ and wordless sense of meaning throughout her childhood - painful in its solitariness, but strong and sustaining. Having rediscovered it as a mature nun, it is at the root of her wisdom later in life: "All we can ever lose, are our projections of God and this loss, painful though it may be at the time, is a blessing." (Burrows 1996, 17).

It seems urgent, that fundamental experiences such as these, conceptualised by Dürckheim (1976) and others, are integrated into an understanding of faith based on insights of anthropology and ontology.<sup>24</sup> This leads us to the Bernard Lonergan's contribution which features in the next chapter.

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<sup>24</sup> Dürckheim developed a whole system of exercises to initiate people into and guide them through *Seinserfahrungen* (1970). Theologically he is close in his reflection to Meister Eckhart's teaching of God within. (see Mieth 1986). At the same time as the German Jesuit Hugo Lassalle SJ, but without knowing the priest at the time, he gained insights during his stay in Japan, supported through his encounter with Zen Buddhism.

### **3. Self-Appropriation and Beyond**

3.1. *The Argument: Development of Interiority Faith*<sup>31</sup>

When already reflecting on the issues at hand, my attention was drawn to the work on Insight by Bernard Lonergan. (1992).<sup>25</sup> One of the key themes of this is his intention to serve a historical situation in which authoritative accounts of meaning are no longer helpful.

While his work on methodology deals with understanding oneself and the world - his concept of self-appropriation could be described as a link between philosophy and theology.

He names four transcendental precepts:

- be attentive,
- be intelligent,
- be reasonable,
- be responsible.

Consequently he distinguishes emotional, moral, intellectual and religious aspects of conversion. While Lonergan acknowledges the occurrence of the former three aspects of self-transcendence outside a religious context, he describes the 'highest stage' in religious terms only, as being grasped by God, falling in love with God (Lonergan 1999, 81 - 85).

Again, I argue that the experience of being grasped and pulled out of oneself (terms Lonergan also uses for the process) does not necessarily have to be conceptualised in a theistic way to be or become fully integrated.

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<sup>3</sup> <sup>1</sup> See last paragraph of this section.

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Prof. Maryanne RSC, Melbourne, then Visiting Professor at Boston College, US, for her encouraging interest in my reflection in general and for pointing me towards Lonergan Studies in particular, during the summer school of 1996.



Depending on the urge or perceived necessity to describe what has been experienced, the person may or may not even use religious concepts or ideas. (However, he or she will in the process of appropriation of the shift in understanding he/she has undergone come to some realisation of a deeper meaning of such concepts!)

What I refer to as 'existential conversion' may occur not only as the major cathartic event described, but also as a gradually growing sense of equilibrium, detachment or wisdom.

It can develop in different ways:

- Out of emotional conversion, e.g. the experience of healing of personal trauma, or a deeply felt wish to help other creatures,
- out of intellectual conversion, stimulated through scientific questions that point beyond answers (e.g. see von Weizsäcker 1995),
- beginning with a moral 'change of heart', triggered through a specific event or a change in one's inner dynamics through psychological development/maturity,
- triggered by a deep and existential experience of being struck by insight (to be integrated into the other realms of the personality). This may come with an inner imperative to be made thematic in the person's life. This then may only be possible through religious language.<sup>26</sup>
- It may, finally, be growing without the subject being aware of it.

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<sup>26</sup> In my view, this will be in the context of a 'converted understanding of religion', where concepts and symbols

etc. no longer head towards, but now illustrate the given immediacy of what in apophatic terms might be

called 'nothing special' (see Beck 1993 or reference to Ruth Burrows in the section on 'felt sense')

- It may occur based on a disposition of special affinity to *Grenzerfahrung*<sup>27</sup>, with or without a personal inclination or disposition to thematically engage with matters such as death, the absolute, meaning of life etc. (see e.g. Guardini 1983)

A possible experience of being temporarily and, as it were, subject-specifically grasped, as occurring with the arts, confrontations with death or sexual experiences, may *motivate* a development of integration - or *hinder* it, as the interest in the respective theme may or may not be generally appropriated.<sup>28</sup> However, if the person's character allows for the generalisation of the theme, a sense of awe through art may be a profound motivation for transcending one's ego-horizon, morally, emotionally, existentially or intellectually.<sup>29</sup> As William Johnston (1996) points out, in this process the transcendental precepts are being applied again, on a new level - a development Lonergan had not yet conceptualised, just as he may not have fully developed the role of attention within his concept and within the process of self-appropriation. The role of attention in the appropriation of self-transcendence can (e.g. through Zen) be explained in metaphysical, i.e. non-religious terms, as purification of the body and/or exposure to 'simply being'. This *may* eventually lead to the (again sudden or gradual) realisation, that only the present is present and the present is given.

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<sup>27</sup> Engl.: Experience of limits, e.g. near-death, grief, suicidal thoughts and similar, as taking what the individual

can endure to his/her limits (and beyond).

<sup>28</sup> In the latter case, the transcendental longing may express itself through use of alcohol or drugs. In the wisdom

to be found among them, one Alcoholics Anonymous member said, their addiction was 'fear of being godly'.

<sup>29</sup> E.g.: In an interview, the pianist John Lill spoke about how he came to acknowledge the validity of certain

telepathic experiences despite himself or rather despite his own rationality, (BBC Radio4, May 2001)

Incidentally, it is interesting that Lonergan speaks of the Eros of understanding (1992, 343 - 360), the 'rapture of insight', and of rationality being his 'very dignity'. In other words, he uses notions that are essentially outside the rational realm. 'Eros' as a notion points towards a sensuous component. 'Rationality as dignity' is a judgement of value. Incidentally, I think it is an important one to have been developed in a person brought up early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century within a tradition which largely considered thinking for oneself (about matters of faith) as doubting its very roots.

The world... comes to me as a puzzle to be pieced together.  
I want to understand, to grasp intelligible unities and relations.'  
(ditto, quoted from Morelli 1997, 184)

With this background, Lonergan prepares the way for our concept by introducing the notion of a universal viewpoint, as a way to take a stand in a most complex world.<sup>30</sup> The consideration of his profound and complex concepts will remain sketchy here.

Hopefully, though, I will be able to show the essential point. If the outcome of an existential conversion is to be a new ability to be aware of one's making sense of and understanding how the world hangs together, then by definition it will be necessary to integrate the habit of *understanding* beyond one's own *evaluating* horizon of values.

Eugen Biser names this development "a transition from 'object faith' to 'interiority faith'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lonergan may have developed some other elements towards the concept as presented here in his understanding

of art and consciousness (see Lonergan 1993, 211-222). For restrictions of time and volume, I am not able to take those into consideration here.

<sup>31</sup> Translated by present author. Eugen Biser in the German original speaks of *Innerlichkeitsglaube* as against

(quoted from Rosien 1999, 2).

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*Objektglaube*. The choice of wording where an alternative 'verinnerlichter Glaube' would have been linguistically more straightforward seems to indicate that Biser sees a difference between *verinnerlichter*

*Glaube* und *Innerlichkeitsglaube*; the latter concept being aware of the subject's own 'access' to the transcendent on several levels. This is my deduction of a linguistic subtlety, based on personal communication I

had with Eugen Biser on these levels and other issues of transcendental anthropology.

### 3.2 *Existential Conversion*

So where does this orientation from transcendence happen?

Following Lonergan (1999, 81-85), "different exigencies give rise to different modes of conscious and intentional operation". I argue that transcendent exigence, understood as the pressing need to attend to and to understand self and others from and within a transcendent realm as well as to respond accordingly, occurs, as Pasquier (in Conn 1978, 198f) points out, when we abandon all our securities – including familiar learned anxieties and self-restrictions (as they occur by definition in the traumatised, neurotic or complex introvert and sensitive character) - and turn to becoming authentic.

With some justification therefore Hiltner (in Conn 1978, 181) refers to the most celebrated turnings-around as occurring in Alcoholics Anonymous. (A.A. offer an orientation towards God in the programme, but add 'as we understood Him', thus leaving the path to the individual's experience.) The case of Alcoholics Anonymous shows the ongoing reorientation through their 12 Steps. Praxis tells us that here as elsewhere the problem occurs that some take the concept for the insight and gain a limited reorientation through holding on to a repetitive structure rather than a more comprehensive one through an inner appropriation of gradually developing self-reflection.

That problem aside, I argue that AA can be given as an example here, as the members are not under any obligation to adhere to any religion. Any reference to 'God...' (such as there may be) follows experience; inner freedom from addiction and other compulsive behaviours through help of a 'Higher Power' as experienced in the process of critical self-reflection having overall priority, aided by contact with more experienced fellow members.

Secondly, a comparably pressing life situation seems to be that of facing other life threatening or even terminal illness.

Thirdly, the passionate orientation in the pioneering scientist seems to have the potential to create a similarly existential urgency as frame of mind, as when in need to turn around in one's mind a life-threatening situation. At least, the temperament of orientation towards the mystery of life at first sight seems to sit surprisingly well with the enquiring scientist's mind. Not unrelated, I believe, Albert Einstein describes a 'cosmic feeling', creating a type of religion of its own. (See Wilber 2001, 103ff. also Weizsäcker 1995, Schweitzer 1988).

Incidentally, I suspect that, fourthly, the comprehensive philosophical and theological studies of a Jesuit (not just of Lonergan's generation and intelligence) can lead to a somewhat Faustian state of mind – especially in combination with pre-Vatican II rules of life – and that again might bring about a similarly pressing need. I will come back to this thought later. I suggest a possibility of appropriating 'insight into being' - not necessarily as conceptualised. That means that, fifthly, there may be cases of anonymous transcendent orientation. I see this state of mind represented in theological reflection by Karl Rahner when he says:

To speak of a Personal God makes sense only when set against the background of Absolute Mystery.<sup>32</sup> (Rahner 1984, 82)

Furthermore, I propose a concept of a 'grand (existential) insight' that may be elaborated in religious terms, if the individual sees the need for it.

How are such existential conversions conveyed? I can only afford to mention a few cases:

- 1) Kennedy (2001), as a Jesuit, theologian and psychotherapist, uses Buddhist narratives in combination with the Ignatian philosophy to convey his meaning beyond meaning.
- 2) Albert Schweitzer developed his whole philosophical concept of *'Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben'*<sup>33</sup> (Schweitzer 1988) from a deep insight,

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<sup>32</sup> In the German original literally 'released into'!

<sup>33</sup> Engl.: Reverence for Life

- 3) David Michael Levin (1985) in another theoretical study, describes a primordial sense of being, using Heidegger, Gendlin's approach of Focusing, and Buddhist concepts as his sources,
- 4) Robert Forman (1999) helps to conceptualise how the re-structuring of conscious and intentional operations can be described without borrowing concepts of belief, in terms of consciousness studies. Further he explores that our intentional experiences will be shaped by our beliefs, but that attentiveness can lead to a level beyond intentionality: As our self, our intention is transcended.
- 5) Bernadette Roberts explores similar experiences leading 'beyond self'. (2001)  
She describes them in a reflective way, going back and forth between felt-sense, reflection and conceptual thinking, her inner journey having taken her from a deep and non-theistic sense for stillness of her mind during her childhood, via time as a Carmelite nun, to what she calls a 'loss of self'. (Roberts 1993)
- 6) Rabbi Lionel Blue turns to narrative methods when he says: "Our basic text is our life experience and all holy books are commentary on that" (Blue 1999, 63).  
In other words, even if concepts of religion are used to conceptualise what I provisionally name non-religious conversion, different people will necessarily relate differently to the contents of faith. Lionel Blue feels left with a great sense of freedom, and for the reader's benefit adds a little paradox: 'I wish I knew how to use it'. (1999, 164)

These examples present people who also happen to have a charisma of reaching the public domain. I follow Roberts (1993, 199f.) in her suggestion that these developments of an inner freedom are much more common in growing maturity from mid-life, if not always fully conscious. In the next section I will try to make the point that Lonergan's concept of self-transcendence helps to explain the 'sense of freedom' reported in the case studies above. At the same time, by applying it in this way, Lonergan's concept will be developed further regarding

one point: Attentiveness can create a shift in understanding understanding and in understanding oneself.



### 3.3 *Moving Into The Unknown*

If due to our personalities and/or specific life circumstances we find ourselves relying on 'nothing-less-will-do', how do we understand our experience of transcendence, including what I call 'a sense of being'? Lonergan explains and develops the transcendental precepts as tools of self-reflection, -understanding and transcendence. These lead him to the development of stages of self-transcendence. Interesting for our context are the third and higher stages:

"The third is inquiry, which enables us to move ... into our human world of ... projects, accomplishments, ambitions, fears.

The fourth is the discovery of a truth ...

The fifth is the successive negotiation of the stages of morality... (until) we reach the point where we discover that it is up to ourselves to decide for ourselves what we are to make of ourselves ...

But this fifth stage becomes a successful way of life only when we really are pulled out of ourselves, as when we fall in love, whether our love be the domestic one... or the love of God... (Lonergan 1985, 208)

To investigate how the 'being pulled out of ourselves' comes about and what constitutes it in terms of development of the mind, I suggest another look at Archimedes' discovery, an instance of third-level self-transcendence: The joy about his insight makes him run naked from the bath, shouting "I've got it!" Lonergan himself calls this instance of joy a glimpse of "eternal rapture"(1992, 706). Can we explain the joy further? We cannot in an immediate sense attend to Archimedes' experience, but it seems clear that there is at least an element of the childlike joy of just-being, of being present, of playfulness, of creativity in it. For the purpose of my argument I would like to name Archimedes' joy, less poetically, a glimpse of being.

Lonergan refers to its process-character when he explains that at the core of insight is a fresh ordering of data, something 'falling into place', thereby creating a "new beginning". (1992, 29) And this breakthrough is further qualified by the fact that it is happening while the intentional attempt at solving the problem has been suspended, "suddenly and unexpected" (ibid.), and by

its consequence: The insight "passes into the habitual texture of one's mind". (ibid, 30)<sup>34</sup> The joy coincides with attending to the processing of insight 'coming through', in an "instant of inspiration" (ibid.). This seems a characteristic feature.<sup>35</sup>

If this process of attending to, of simply being, is a glimpse of eternal rapture or even simply of being, then our next question is: How may the glimpse turn into - insight, i.e. a major transformative event that remained embedded in the mind?

From the clarification established so far, we might conclude that the process-aspect of finding-out, being creative and curious and attentive is a first glimpse of the major transformative event.. Therefore, I propose to define this major event of us being pulled out of ourselves as 'insight into being'.

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Following Levin (1985) and considering Archimedes' example of the experience at least initially overflowing

into a reaction of the body, one might want to investigate how in certain cases it remains embedded in the

body's memory. There is no room here to pursue this line of enquiry.

<sup>35</sup> In a different but not unrelated context, the German MD Schulz (1950) who developed a clinical method of

self-hypnosis (Autogenic Training; applied in pain and stress management) not least through self observation,

spoke of '*das Ankommende*', (engl.: That which is arriving.) He may have been aware of another author, Carl

Albrecht (1951) who uses the same term.

In addition, I would argue that, the admittedly rare occasion of a *grand insight* set aside<sup>36</sup>, every step of self-transcendence when attended to, offers a spark of this 'grand insight', and in terms of personal development eventually may lead to ultimately the same level of independence, maturity and acceptance<sup>37</sup>, as Roberts (1993) points out.<sup>38</sup> Having introduced the 'glimpse of eternal rapture' in ordinary insight, Lonergan nevertheless makes a curious distinction - that between the mere desire to know and the pure desire to know. (1992, 373)

As mere desire, it is for the satisfaction of acts of knowing, for the satisfaction of

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<sup>36</sup> As e.g. reported by alcoholics who came close to a fatal condition through excessive drinking - being released

through a deep spiritual experience, embedding a new frame of mind, a new structure.

<sup>37</sup> Ogilvie (2001) *seems* to consider this when he speaks of our experience of self-transcendence as he talks

about the process of coming to moral decisions according to a 'higher moral goal' (e.g. personally otherwise

disadvantageous), but at a closer look I find that he in fact submits this experience to the rational critical

consciousness.

<sup>38</sup> Roberts' (1993) reflection that an acquaintance of hers thought the internal development 'beyond self' a natural

process of old age, may lead to the conclusion that - as many more people approach death consciously, e.g.

through being given a fatal diagnosis, this internal movement is of more relevance than it used to be even a

century ago when people in general also died much younger.

understanding...

As pure desire, ... detached, it is not for cognitional acts and the satisfaction they give their subjects, but for cognitional contents for what is to be known.

This distinction rests on his definition that starts the relevant chapter (1992, 372): "Being... is the objective of the pure desire to know."

As I have argued elsewhere (see Schaefer 2003), having conceded even the 'glimpse of eternal rapture' in ordinary insight, here Lonergan in fact disregards the consequences: Just as even the childlike joy in the *process* of figuring things out goes with curiosity to find out about *things*, every cognitional act, while being a process (joyful or otherwise) at the same time has content and objective and vice versa. In other words, allowing him to prove himself to the king, *do* something with it and benefit materially as well, even the fact of knowing itself, in Archimedes' case, - is not all there is to the joy in insight!

If the distinction between mere and pure desire to know is to make sense, it seems to me it does so by distinguishing the *mere* desire to know a that which tends to be satisfied with outcomes and contents of individual cognitional acts, while the *pure* desire is driving us on. Thus, I disagree with Lonergan's assertion (1992, 373), that the objective of the pure desire is the content of knowing rather than the act.

That which pushes us forward in our desire to know, the pushing, the 'forwarding', the movement itself - (and not just as running naked from the bath!) - is what points beyond a mere desire to know. Consequently, I argue that the pure desire with being as its objective is oriented towards the process. Insofar as the pure desire (woven in with the mere desire as it occurs) understands itself as having an objective that is 'content' it is in for a grand inverse insight. The idea of being is, as Lonergan says, "absolutely transcendent." (1992, 666)

However, tentatively, I would argue, that while it can therefore not be arrived at by cognition, being can be attended to, where attending reaches a level beyond intentionality. A glimpse of this does occur in different stages of the human self-appropriation, and can be brought to

consciousness. To be more precise, I would like to introduce a distinction between mere attentiveness and pure attentiveness: The former that of our everyday consciousness, assisting us to be aware of our surroundings and responding more or less adequately, as we can; the latter, parallel to Lonergan's pure desire - detached and surpassing the level of evaluation and judgement, observing; possibly introduced or first entered into through what Lonergan calls 'rapture', i.e. an event of 'being pulled out' of the common mode in its own right.<sup>39</sup>

As every insight, the ultimate self-transcending event, being pulled out of self, depends on two factors: The question (here of being, i.e. asking the very core of one's existence as being part of it) put correctly, and secondly, with appropriate (in this case: all-pervading) urgency of attention (here e.g. a matter of life and death). As Morelli paraphrases Lonergan:

"Different requirements give rise... to different modes of meaning." (Morelli, 466)

In other words: Lonergan's own notion of self-transcendence as transcending the rational consciousness points the way for a more differentiated philosophically reflective understanding of what may be happening here.<sup>40</sup>

"God is the unrestricted act (sic! BS) of understanding, the eternal rapture glimpsed in every act of Archimedean cry of 'Eureka'. (1992, 706).

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<sup>39</sup> Joy, even if not acted upon by running naked from the bath, is obviously not detached, so a further differentiation of the notion will be necessary in further research. Provisionally, I expect the quality of joy/rapture to be related to what Lonergan names 'primary being' - loving and ordering.

<sup>40</sup> The question that might arise at this point - am I suggesting a Buddhist model, would be missing the point entirely. Rather I am tapping into an anthropological and existential model of cognition and self-transcendence in general that could find conceptualisation either in theistic or non-theistic terms.

Lonergan late in his life recognized similar thoughts. For further clarification I point towards a diagram in Massa (1986, 9), which shows personal/theistic conceptualisation of *das Ankommen*, parallel to a non-theistic one.

I am not able to tie together possible 'loose ends' in Lonergan's concept.

Tentatively, however, I would argue that his understanding of cognitional acts points beyond a theistic interpretation of conversion as necessary.

## *Excursus*

*To avoid the impression of a superficial reading of Lonergan, I need to explain how I arrived at my argument and locate my position with regard to Lonergan's work. Firstly, Lonergan in Insight does not develop a concept of self-transcendence. This is left to his second major work, Method in Theology (1999), first published 1972, when Lonergan was 68. There is, of course, in the former work reference to elements pointing beyond the rational in Insight, e.g. in the chapters on transcendent knowledge (1992, 657). There Lonergan develops his argument on the basis of his definition of 'The Notion of Being'. (1992, 372ff.)*

*I was introduced to Lonergan's transcendental precepts before I knew anything else of his work, at a time when I was first looking to begin to develop a concept of spiritual transformation in anthropological and existential terms, i.e. outside the context of religious tradition. These precepts immediately seemed an important tool for my project. Following my line of inquiry, to my own surprise then, I found the philosopher (whose work as a whole I can only begin to appreciate!), wanting in differentiation in one aspect that seemed important to my work. So my own development of a concept, beginning from experience using reflectivity and the little philosophical understanding I bring to it, soon came to be a critical argument with Lonergan regarding this one aspect, - possibly even an original contribution to further the appropriation of Lonergan's work (see Schaefer 2004). I am delighted that international Lonergan scholars have recognised my point as a valid one. However, I am under no illusion about the fact that deeper knowledge of Lonergan's work would be a prerequisite to an in-depth discussion of detailed aspects. My position happens to be primarily that of a practitioner interested in reflection and meta-reflection, taking what Karl Rahner probably would have called 'first-level' reflection back to the practitioner's arena. So I may not have enough time in my life to pursue the philosophical in-depth study outlined.*

*That said, I am quite clear that Lonergan's achievements and contribution in the area discussed are, firstly, the description of the process of appropriation as complete only through understanding, critical reflection and response and, secondly, the vision of the role of these features in mediating meaning where authoritative ways are no longer helpful, (i.e. in a society where people face accountability and adaptation to changing societal circumstances increasingly as an individual (i.e. without being supported through their communities)).*



### 3.4 *Background: Insight into Being - Practical?*

I see Lonergan's approach of understanding as leading to being - via various steps of self-transcendence and the final being-pulled-out-of-self as an especially appropriate description for the wrestling with an understanding of God and the rightly claimed legitimacy of questioning.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, on the level of value judgements, Lonergan's self-appropriation through understanding one's desiring, including evaluating and responding, is very important indeed.

What is going on in the process of self-transcendence, I argue, will, through a complex process of self-appropriation set the individual free to love and be loved, just as Lonergan describes it. I understand this as appropriation of the 'insight into being' and the fullest possible response.

How will this insight be remembered though? If regular insight stays embedded in the mind (Lonergan 1992, 30), following Levin (1985) I think one might say the 'grand insight' remains especially present to the body's memory. In other words: The primordial sense of being (Levin 1985) comes into play here. It can only be attended to, not reached through rational or evaluative understanding (the latter is what Lonergan, 1992, 666, claims for the 'idea of being'.) The attending - beyond intentional pursuit of an answer to a question of understanding<sup>42</sup> - facilitates insight, i.e data - here of existential urgency - are being re-organised and the result remains re-presentable in attendance. I can tune in to it again later.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In fact, personally I wonder whether this may not have been part of his motive for getting into wrestling with

understanding in the first place: To open some pre-Vatican II theological thinking and its transmission.

<sup>42</sup> In Archimedes' example the breakthrough happens in the bath!

<sup>43</sup> One might say, the door to the 7<sup>th</sup> mansion of the Interior Castle (Teresa of Avila), the most interior mansion,

In any case it leaves an inner imperative - the person will not rest until he or she has responded as fully as possible (by way of working through repeated errors and transcending provisional concepts!). In terms of consciousness development, Lonergan's conceptualisation as being-in-love (Lonergan 1985, 208), however, although appealing and poetically dense, does not appear to be precise enough. On one hand, Lonergan does not differentiate between falling-in-love and being-in-love, which even in psychosocial terms are two different processes, and on the other hand, the latter involves a process of self-appropriation in self-transcendence: All the faculties of self-appropriation and their understanding need to be surrendered to the new order, hopefully and ultimately leading to what I would call attending-in-love.

The process of appropriation following a insight into being differs in one significant feature at least from that of the person converted through a process of religious adherence, which may otherwise result in a similar breakthrough: The grand insight *if* to be conceptualised theistically will have the character of "God born from Nothing" (Smith 1987).

To put it differently, the approach is not mediated through religion, 'up the mountain' figuratively speaking, but from beyond intentions, 'climbing down'.

It is for this reason that I argue that the conventional religious conceptualisation of the experience of God leaves room for clarification: Firstly, the religious believer may approach the ground of being with a bias towards authoritatively transmitted theistic conceptualisation. The dialogical character of his or her quest, including possible extra-sensory 'answers', may confirm the personal quality of God as communicating. However, Augustine already explained that the answering 'voice' *could* be described as a (higher) part of himself. (see Biser 1994, 84; also Johnson 2000, 112).

Secondly, a religiously motivated 'entering into God's Presence' is in my view only dealing with the unconditioned, if able to take into account complementary viewpoints. I agree in this with D'Aquili/Newberg (1999, 92) who describe the 'union of opposites' as a characteristic feature of mature spiritual experience:

... during certain meditation or ritual states logical paradoxes or the awareness of polar opposites may appear simultaneously, both as antinomies and as unified wholes.

I have come to understand the ability to do so as one indicator for mature spirituality.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, I expect, research at the interface of modern physics, cognition theory and anthropology, will be able to understand some communication between human minds - as transcendent, but not necessarily involving a primary being (see e.g. von Weizsäcker 1995).

To put it differently, the non-theistically conceptualised experience of 'being pulled out of self', i.e. the experience of having one's data about being and meaning and the search and longing for ultimate answers rearranged in one's mind, *may* even lead to a theistically conceptualised response - attending and responding to the understanding, that this *is one* valid way of transcribing the reality of the experience. The diagram in Massa (1986, 9) referred to above, supports this together with d'Aquili/Newberg (1999, 210):

Neurotheology<sup>45</sup>... provides the basic theological content that we maintain is conceptually compatible with all the world's great religions. We hope that such an approach will eventually result in increased ecumenical dialogue ... and ultimately, in an increase in compassion and love in a world that is desperate for them.

Lonergan's findings on insight help beyond his own religious conceptualisation.

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<sup>44</sup> I thank Prof. Marianne Confoy's presentation on adult developmental psychology, in the summer school

mentioned above.

<sup>45</sup> The authors' concept of investigating the neuropsychological mechanisms underlying transformative experiences

of transcendental character.

Lonergan's achievements and contribution in this area are, firstly, the description of the process of appropriation as complete only through understanding, critical reflection and response and, secondly, the vision of the role of these features in mediating meaning where authoritative ways are no longer accepted nor helpful, (i.e. in a society where the individual faces accountability and adaptation to changing societal circumstances increasingly as an *individual* (i.e. without being supported through stable communities).

I argue, even without an episode of 'grand insight' is it possible that the development towards and into maturity may *gradually* lead to the inner freedom as it can be initiated by the 'grand insight', even in cases without acceptance of the virtually unconditioned brought to consciousness and understood.

Robert Forman (1999, 151) describes the basis for this process and its result:

"An unchanging interior silence is maintained concurrently with intentional experience in a long-term or permanent way."

Tentatively, again, I would argue, that attending to and pressing ahead with the existential urgency is partly facilitated by suspense of the dominance of rational faculties, thus preparing for the process which involves and leads to attentiveness on a higher, more differentiated level. This description emphasises implicitly again the importance of self-appropriation, i.e. the process and result of understanding what one is going through - to enable fully accountable response.

Lonergan (1992, 29) defines insight as "a new beginning", as a creative re-ordering of data. Consequently, the effect of grand insight occurring under the circumstance of the described urgency, could be compared to the freedom experienced in the reality of play (see Gadamer 1990, 107ff). The rules are taken seriously and the player (usually) will try to do his/her best to understand, follow and use them, even to gain virtuosity in playing. Play is serious, but it does not rule the way one views the world; it does not, figuratively speaking, create an

authoritative roof over one's mental horizon, it does not take over one's consciousness completely. One remains free to put it to one side and turn the attention to something else. Figuratively speaking, again, playing is attending, understanding, judging and responding under open sky. The givenness of reality in play does not restrict the horizon, nor does it necessarily inhibit the creative intention to change it.

The process of insight into being is not *realised* without attention to certain contents of one's consciousness, but it is initiated through the process of insight, i.e. the reorganisation of data. This is not denying the relevance of unrestricted intelligibility for a mature understanding of "the primary being" as which Lonergan defines God (1992, 706). However, I think it is taking seriously Lonergan's own assertion about the role of insight in self-transcendence. The fact that Lonergan himself expressively denies the possibility of 'insight into being' (1992, 384) seems rooted in his shift from the process to the contents. Also the admitted contradiction between the unrestricted intelligibility and the fact that it can never be met by unrestricted understanding seems unresolved as long as he works with understanding as the highest form of the movements of the human mind in dealing with ultimate meaning.

I argue, the givenness of being as the feature prior to matters of cause and effect will be anchored in the mind through one or more essential insights into a specific, existentially important set of questions, circumstances or aspects of the issue of ones' existence as part of being, gradually to be appropriated by reshaping the faculties through the transcendental precepts. Gradually, for example, the person's vital desire will shift towards being a part of being, i.e. doing the one thing with one's life 'only I can do' as cancer patients have described the 'wake-up call' as which they have experienced the illness.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This can be expected to be a very slow and subtle process, not to be confused with a reordering of one's personality in accordance to internalised authorities, and even, at least in nuances, different from realisation of

I argue we open our mind to attentiveness and self-appropriation as we move beyond theistic conceptualisation (*not beyond awe!* -) as our authoritative horizon. Transcendent meaning will sustain us only if and insofar as it remains transcendent, i.e. beyond one's rational conceptualisation. Thus it enables us to give being attending priority over being responsible.<sup>47</sup> It is easy to see how this capacity might be linked to even necessary condition for another ability central to Lonergan's concepts:

The universal viewpoint is concerned with the interpreter's capacity to grasp meanings; it would open his mind to ideas that do not lie on the surface and to views that diverge enormously from our own, enable him to find clues where otherwise one might look but would fail to see; it would equip him to transport his thinking into the level and texture of another culture in another epoch. (Lonergan 1992, 588)

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one's self, in accordance with Jungian concepts.

<sup>47</sup> In psychological terms this might be described as Robert Kennedy (2001, 112) defines purity of heart: the "the ability not to project the self onto the other." Thus, in hermeneutic fashion, we return to Lonergan's self-appropriation as "the ultimate basis of reference in terms of which one can proceed to deal satisfactorily with other questions." (Lonergan 1990, 35)

### 3.4.1 *How to Tackle Being*

I have so far already implied that understanding and self-appropriation in general - both as a process and its result - have a process side and a contents-related side. This is eminently practical: If I am interested in dinosaurs and the way they became extinct, then my interest is not just in the knowing, but also in the finding out, and in the finding out how to go about finding out. If I dislike looking up sources of different kinds, I will soon turn away from my interest in dinosaurs.<sup>48</sup> Apart from the complex motivational side of any such interest, the process component is an aspect beyond the contents: In the case of a hobby the enjoyment of finding out, which can be caught in the act, and maybe in the act only. While interested in dinosaurs, I may find philately boring. In listening to a philatelist talking about his hobby, I may however discover the common ground - the excitement and curiosity both fed and fired by going about finding out about things, and finding out *per se* and the enjoyment again, in *knowing* how it works - the finding out and the matter at hand.

In the process aspect, in the finding out, there is 'something' that goes beyond, is not fully covered by describing the contents of my subject but transcends it. I take this to be key for our further investigation. It could be argued, that it is the moment or aspect of just doing, just being aware of doing, just being doing - sometimes called 'getting lost in the moment'.

It is this aspect of just being doing (whatever one is doing), I would like to draw attention to.

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<sup>48</sup> I gratefully acknowledge the stimulating discussion with Prof. Robert S. Sharpe, University of Wales, Lampeter, who has helped to clarify this in my mind, as he gave advice generously in 1999 and 2000.

Errors

remaining are due to lack of understanding on my part.

I have named the moment 'being doing', rather than just 'doing', as it is the simple attentiveness or presence common in all doings we are after here.<sup>49</sup>

It may culminate in a state of consciousness that may be described 'just being aware of being aware'. In this moment or capacity of just being doing one simply meets that which one is engaged with, as just that which one is engaged with. There is no judgement or attachment. It just is.

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<sup>49</sup> Incidentally, if conceptualised in this way the 'light-on' and light-off' states of awareness Ruth Burrows (1996) talks about, can be explained as due to differences in personality, temperament and character and an interest (or otherwise) in making religion thematic.



Taking up and going beyond Lonergan's distinction between a mere desire to know and a pure desire to know, and as a consequence of what is said above, I would argue that if the mere desire (to know) is oriented towards the satisfaction of the acts (Lonergan 1992, 373) then the pure desire can be characterised as being *oriented* towards attending to the potential of the totality of true judgements of facts and value - towards the being of things. The related insight then consists of a leap into a new arrangement of data just as ordinary insight does. One might say, the ordinary insight brings about seeing *things* in a new light, the insight into being brings about *seeing* in a new light.<sup>50</sup> At first sight, this seems to be Lonergan's understanding, too, when he says (1992, 372): "Being is the objective of the pure desire to know."

However, he makes a curious distinction: "The objective of the pure desire is the content of knowing rather than the act." (1992, 373) The reason for this might be the realisation: "Being (then) is all that is known, and all that remains to be known." (1992, 374).

I would of course not dispute the fact that there always remain things yet to be known.

What does seem to be happening in the proposed 'insight into being', is the completion of the *process* by transcending it. The unconditioned, is grasped not as content, but essentially through a *grand inverse insight*: There is no further finding-out or understanding, being is just *being*.

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<sup>50</sup> Such an insight may culminate in incidents of a state of consciousness as described by Robert Forman (1999,

11ff.) as simply being aware of being aware or 'pure consciousness event.'

### 3.4.3 *Understanding Being*

As in reported case studies (e.g. Davies, 1996, or Jäger, 1987), the element of surprise, the 'seeing things in a new light' could be described as a glimpse of what I name 'insight into being'. In case of a 'grand' event, it could also, closer to Lonergan's own terminology, be described as 'being grasped by being'. As such it is the realisation of the transcendental quality in a single event (that which is moving Archimedes to run...), whereby its process quality overtakes the content, i.e. the intention, of the event.

As with single insight, it is not going to be a linear upward development to 'get it'. Also, the grand insight may have a component of 'grand inverse insight', inverse insight being the realisation 'that there is no point' (Lonergan 1992, 45): Orientation is responded to by itself, as it were, or, as the orientation towards something finite is transcended: There is no answer to the question of existential anguish (by definition directed to Ultimate Reality), it just so happens that the realisation of being fully present to it, turns it round or taps into a new sphere of perception. Due to its character some may come to interpret the turning point theistically. As I argue above, the process-aspect of the insight leaves its mark on the mind (and body); it remains peculiarly and uniquely present, as a new 'frame of mind', a structure transformed.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Due to the constraints of this study I am not able to fully investigate the differences and similarities of 'insight

into being' and a religiously shaped 'experience of God'. It is my impression that this question is not even fully

answered by d'Aquili/Newberg (1999) who emphasise the need of the human mind for myths to conceptualise

transcendence (ibid, p.79 ff.), yet progress themselves to conceptualise a cognitive context for the reflection

Just as the steps of self-appropriation help to understand it and to respond, Lonergan's conceptualisation of the irreversible basis which we gain in self-appropriation, helps to explore it. Without disputing the unity of consciousness, I would argue that there are two parts to this realisation: The first one being the turning or shaking-up - the structure being transformed. par. There is, however, a second part to this initial realisation, if it is to be called 'insight': In terms of the personal imperative and impact on the mind, it may occur in different degrees.<sup>52</sup> It is that which initiates the restructuring of one's knowledge. And therefore it is that which qualifies it as different from a (possibly regressive) 'oceanic feeling',<sup>53</sup> or from

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of Ultimate Reality (ibid, p.163 ff.) which questions any exclusivity of the spiritual function of such parables

etc. theologians might want to propose. I offer a provisional hypothesis in terms of appropriation of the two

different processes: The quality of spiritual love (response) may be developed easier through a religious path,

while the opening of the mind to the complexity of reality seems to be rather hindered by religious concepts.

However, the breakthrough itself does occur independent of beliefs in a deep crisis, i.e. when previous life

concepts fail.

<sup>52</sup> Dürckheim (1976, subtitle) distinguishes between *Seinserfahrung* und *Seinsföhlung* (experience and sensation

of being respectively). The latter being a minor event, literally a 'touch' of the former.

<sup>53</sup> Term used by Sigmund Freud in correspondence with Romain Rolland; see e.g. [www.psychomedia.it](http://www.psychomedia.it), (Jan.

2004). Surprisingly Freud concedes this kind of experience without necessarily disqualifying it as regressive.

However, in the cases of both men, the experience may have been drug-induced. While this may not put the

'intuition of being' (Arraj 1988): If the first part of this insight is a 'gut feeling', a sense of how things *are*, the second one is the aspect of the data that are re-organised, i.e. contents and its understanding, or even just the original spark of what will have to be elaborated later (just as Archimedes still had to develop the formula for his insight to be useful and transmitted), maybe even over a lifetime, - not aiming to get to know 'everything about everything', but getting to know deeper and *in context*. The following examples come to mind:

- Albert Schweitzer, struggling to elaborate his ethical concept, tired out, in the African forest, suddenly felt at one with the surrounding - and then realised this unity-with was the basis for his concept! (Schweitzer 1988, 20)<sup>54</sup>
- The woman facing death in Jostein Gaarder's story 'Diagnosis', finds herself rather cleansed by than absorbed in the experience of being part of being earth - and she is struck by the realisation this is the fulfilment and meaning of her life. (Gaarder 1986)

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validity of their experience into doubt, its allows doubts regarding its integration in and through personal development. My scepticism is not least based on the phrase 'oceanic feeling' they use. This may have been chosen for the literary quality of imagery. However, I have my reservations that it may in fact describe a regressive immature sense of oneness (as opposed to mature self-transcendence).

<sup>54</sup> "Ich bin Leben inmitten von Leben, das leben will." ("... being living in the midst of living being....")

- The Buddhist monk, who is ready for a breakthrough, finds himself pushed off a little balcony by his Teacher (presumably partly to avoid attachment to the elation and partly to shake up mental processes), and - 'gets it' in the process, despite a broken ankle. I.e. the insight to be realised got 'rooted' in his being through the unexpected little shock.<sup>55</sup>

Again, there are important and qualifying differences between these cases. They seem all to be talking about exposure to 'just being' and about an insight 'arriving' through that: As Robert Forman points out, in all our intentional activities our culturally shaped preconceptions will be mirrored in the experience, and in the way it is understood and referred to. But there is a level beyond the intentional, where we are simply present (Forman 1999, 9ff.).

I argue, in addition to Forman's assertion, that this includes exposure to a possible event of 'being grasped by insight', a shift in understanding being. The non-intentional character

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<sup>55</sup> Zen-Story, quoted from memory. I am not sharing the story because I condone a principle of pastoral practice

that puts students' health at risk. And there are certainly phenomena in the Buddhist practice as it introduces

itself into the West that for our cultural understanding rather belong to Feudalism than to a modern democratic

culture. However, our Western pastoral practice suffers its own contradictions. And I see the context of the

above episode rather in the quite unique spontaneity of the Buddhist Masters who are not only able to laugh at

themselves but transcend their own value judgements without breaking codes of ethics, as an episode is fully

understood when present in a certain situation.

(beyond the individual's conceptual horizon and universal in its effect) introduces a cognitive component.

Depending on the degree of impact, the experience may range from a reorientation of a sense of trust or introduction of a sense of well-being, to a major insight that initiates rearrangement of the person's way of experiencing, understanding, evaluating and responding.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> I agree with William Johnston (2000, 211ff.) that Bernard Lonergan 'probably subconsciously' began to

develop a 'model of transformed humanity' .

At the same time I think that Lonergan's emphasis on the rational aspect of the process of appropriation is

shaped by a RC culture, pre-Vatican II, that did not encourage critical approach in reflectivity. That is not to

say that such attitude died out after Vatican II. In 1997, I was told in a graduate seminar in a renowned RC

College in the US, Boston College, by Robert Imbelli, the lecturer, it was permitted to ask all questions

but not 'whether Jesus was the Son of God'. The intellectual damage of such a restriction, of course, lies in the

limited reflectivity of one's religious concepts (here: *How* Jesus is Son of God!), which again is the only way

to arrive at a mature understanding of faith. It has been suggested that the otherwise very kind and caring

person imposing such restriction may himself have been not too sure of the fact behind the dogmatic statement.

But in my view that would not excuse the self-limitation, only prove the complex and subtle consequences of

religious immaturity.

#### 3.4.4 *Emerging Consciousness*

Following my interest in Lonergan's epistemological concept of self-transcendence together with other complementary concepts, there is not enough room here to investigate his *Method in Theology* (1999). At this point I can only hope I would satisfy Lonergan's criteria for beginning to apply what he himself calls 'a framework for creativity'. (1999, xii), using 'inquiry, enlarged interest, discernment, comparison, distinction, identification, naming'. (1999, 15).

However, this study would be inexcusably incomplete without at least briefly touching upon the outlook Lonergan himself offers towards the end of his life. I am referring to two presentations at academic conferences (see Lonergan 1985).

Firstly, then, Lonergan applied the level of philosophical reflection his work represents to his own religious assumptions:

There occur experiences commonly named religious. Their emergence into consciousness may be anything from slight and unnoticed to absorbing, fascinating, and dominating. Of themselves they pertain to an infrastructure, i.e. religious experience does not come with a label attached; of itself it is not formulated. To characterize it as infrastructure, however, regards only its relation to its formulation... any formulation is in the context of some tradition and milieu; diverse formulations reflect different traditions; ...at the present time specific discussion of emerging religious consciousness has to proceed on the basis of some convention. (Lonergan 1985, 70)

In other words, the philosophical or epistemological reflection has to understand that the suprastructure of any tradition is secondary to the infrastructure of human experience it is trying to preserve and guard. Lonergan concedes that at the present time (1975) the discussion starts "from certain conventions." This indicates recognition of the possibility that that may change through the work of representatives of the next generation of researchers, namely Raimon Panikkar and William Johnston SJ:

There is not a great difference between Dr. Johnston's awareness of a religious experience that is incorporated in different interpretations and, on the other hand, what remains when the opposing interpretations are removed. (Lonergan, 1985, p.68) (Dr. Panikkar holds that) there exists that primordial relatedness which occurs when dealing with ultimate problems. (ibid) (William Johnston SJ speaks of) common experience, morally uplifting, cosmic in orientation ...(It is) ... religious in its distinctiveness and, so to speak, its essence but, on the other hand, has not yet become the infrastructure incorporated within an interpretative suprastructure." (Lonergan 1985, p.67)

The latter statement is particularly interesting, as it indicates the understanding that the core of 'religious experience' is even to be found beyond or rather prior to the – itself already conceptualised - infrastructure.<sup>57</sup>

Secondly, closely related, Lonergan states:

A classical formulation of Christian religious experience may be found in St. Paul's statement that God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us. As infrastructure it is the dynamic state of being in love in an unrestricted fashion, a conscious content without an apprehended object. *From this basis one may proceed to a general account of emerging religious consciousness.* (Lonergan 1985, 71, emphasis mine; BS)<sup>58</sup>

Lonergan certainly keeps wrestling with the issues at hand in a differentiated manner, perhaps not always tying together loose ends:

(Abraham Maslow discovered) that peak experiences really were common, that most people had them, but that few were aware of the fact. In other words, like other experiences, peak experiences pertain to the infrastructure. It is one thing to have a peak experience. It is something else again to advert to it, to compare it with other experiences, to note its singularity, to draw up a scale of higher and lower, to assign this type of experience to the topmost rank, and to label it a peak experience. All such adverting, comparing, evaluating, labelling pertain to a suprastructure. Without them

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<sup>57</sup> According to Forman (1999) the 'religious experience' as beyond the intentional can not be named 'experience'.

<sup>58</sup> I wonder whether these insights conveyed towards the end of a long and difficult career within the Roman Church are said *reluctantly* because so much of the biographically formative religious assumptions and inhibitions fall away, or with *relief*, for the same reason.



one can very well have peak experiences but without them one will not be explicitly aware of what was going on. (Lonergan 1985, p.118)

Following Lonergan's own definition of 'suprastructure' given above, I would argue that to evaluate peak experiences as described, an understanding of the range of *infrastructures* available is needed to make sense of, fully understand and evaluate that which has become immediate through the experience. To shape and maintain a *response* (see Lonergan's fourth transcendental precept!), adherence to a suprastructure *may* be helpful. Lonergan again:

We observe that religiously differentiated consciousness can be content with the negations of an apophatic theology. (It) is in love, and on its love there are not any reservations or conditions or qualifications. It is (love) with one's whole heart and whole soul and all one's mind and all one's strength. By such love one is oriented positively to what is transcendent in lovableness. Such a positive orientation and the consequent self-surrender, as long as they are operative, enable one to dispense with any intellectual analogy or concept, and when they cease to be operative, the memory of them enables one to be content with enumerations of what God is not. (Lonergan 1985, p.244)

I see 'operative self-surrender' clearly at the heart of any religion - and of that - possibly anonymous (in terms of denomination or even religion!) commitment Lonergan draws upon above - content with apophatic theology, because it is already - 'being-in-love'. However, Lonergan seems to refer to a less differentiated understanding again, when he states:

The suprastructure (of the Christian religion), however, is already extant in the account of Christian origins: God sending his only Son for our salvation through death and resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. The distinctiveness of Christianity lies in this suprastructure. To it the adherents of non-Christian religions may wish to ascribe the characterization of religious experience as being in love. (Lonergan 1985, 71)

As far as I understand it, Lonergan here confuses two levels of reflection. I would argue, *if* the Christian version of the infrastructure of being-in-love would come more to the foreground in the RC teaching and self-representation, as against adherence to the concepts of suprastructure, perhaps more adherents of non-Christian religions would recognise it as that?

The impression remains, that Lonergan *is* trying to break through to a more differentiated view himself when he concedes, differentiated consciousness, (i.e. integrating responsiveness to peak experiences) can be found in different circumstances,

... whether universalist, or ecumenist, or 'bottled effervescence', or alienated by secular or ecclesiastical bureaucracy, or seeking the integration of religious awakening with a fuller development of the second enlightenment, or distorted by human obtuseness, frailty, wickedness. (Lonergan 1985, p.71)<sup>59</sup>

I understand this statement as a beginning recognition that we live in time of transition and religious transformation, a shift of historic dimension. I think it is likely that the characteristics of the period to develop out of this, will only become clear within the next few centuries. The following sections of this study deal with a few characteristics I think are observable now. Firstly, this is, viewing paradox as spiritual transformation (Smith, 1987, and Tickerhoof, 2001).<sup>60</sup> Secondly, I will deepen the argument slightly through reference to the Buddhist practice of *koan* study. This is done for a dual reason. For one, the intention is to point out, that the study of old Japanese paradoxes (in those *koan* stories) may not be necessary, if we consciously face the paradoxes in our own lives. Also, through the required orientation towards Buddhist teachings this practice may in fact delay the development of the Western mind.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Perhaps it is best left to Lonergan himself to reflect upon his own self-appropriation (1985, p.230):

A lifetime of commitment to a selected style or pattern of thinking, saying, doing is an incarnation of a meaning and makes ones' life meaningful. Again, the greater the commitment, the more meaningful the life; and the less the commitment, the obscurer and the more dubious is the meaning.

<sup>60</sup> Personally, I think this is one of the reasons why religious adherence in the forms as pre-World War II is declining and - should not be revived either but left to the course of history where it is lifeless or even pretentious, a mere appendix to people's lives.

<sup>61</sup> This may or may not be due to the fact that commonly religious identity remains in an adolescent stage.  
(Prof.

Finally, as introduced through the *koan* practice, I want to briefly outline the issue of our 'primordial sense of being' (see Levin 1985) as basis for an understanding of religion as it can be maintained after the revolution historical-critical research introduced. Here is a perspective that may lead us in the end beyond the radical insight that "a large part of what we call religion really is projection." (Smith 1987, 32)

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Bernhard Grom SJ, München, 1988, in personal communication). On the other hand, it seems relevant here,

that William Johnston SJ, as Zen teacher, after a lifetime of Christian-Buddhist dialogue, while willing to learn

from Buddhism, admits to not be at home in the Buddhist concepts, as a Westerner having "different archetypes." (Johnston 1997, 13ff.)

#### **4. Transforming Consciousness**

Introducing both the beauty and richness of the Christian tradition and its obstructive side from the start, I have, of course, already given an example of what is the subject of this chapter:

Every paradox, that is, every graceful reconciliation of life's opposite poles, is an essential action. To recognise this and actively participate in it is to live in transforming consciousness. (Tickerhoof 2002, 207)

How is this action to be performed? And do we not have to uphold truth as it is after all contained in the tradition and the way it has been revealed through history?

Most likely, one learns to trust the process when no alternative seems available, in our case when for example historical critical research conflicts with our concept of faith to date:

The experience of paradox first leads into opposition, but then something happens. This opposition is not met with fear; instead it is embraced by openness and trust. There is surrender to a hidden force, and a kind of breakthrough occurs. This breakthrough manifests itself as some kind of transformation.... not fleeting. It endures in some permanent form. (Tickerhoof 2002, 18)

We are here strongly reminded of Lonergan's description of insight, and even that of inverse insight. We will shortly see where a difference might lie. But first another question to test Tickerhoof's suggestion further: How can transforming consciousness become a lasting phenomenon, or even shape our character?

... as we become accustomed to recognizing paradox in our lives and allowing it to transform us more and more completely, we become aware of ourselves and everything else in a new way. We come to live at a deeper and deeper level of transforming consciousness. To recognize this transforming consciousness, however, requires a fundamental shift in perspective. This shift is so basic that at first it might not even be recognized or appreciated. (Tickerhoof 2002, 18)

Eventually the change can be seen through its effect. As we learn to

... continuously check our presumptions about reality, morality, culture, and the human community, we are free to act in prophetic and compassionate ways to rebuild our communities anew. This is because once we have entered into paradox, we are no longer hampered by fear. We have seen both sides of reality, and so there is nothing further that can threaten us. We can then surrender what is necessary to release

ourselves from the barriers of our own thinking, and we can choose to move with a transforming consciousness that sees reality in a different way. (Tickerhoof 2002, 224)

Again, we are close to Lonergan's thoughts on insight and self-appropriation of the knower (as it will be relevant for him in faith as seeking understanding).

Tickerhoof even develops his own way of describing what Lonergan calls our being 'lifted out of ourselves':

Transformation as an action that is surrender, i.e. passive, for Tickerhoof is "wrapped in mystery. It is ultimately God's process, and not mine. I cannot orchestrate it." (Tickerhoof 2002, 198)

This brings us closer to an answer to the question where the understanding of transformation differs from Lonergan's concept of self-transcendence. Tickerhoof quotes Smith (1987)

Even to say 'God' implies projection and externalisation, and as long as we keep it up, we are not seeing the Reality unmediated...". (Smith 1987, 40)

Smith takes the argument one step further:

It could also be that many people who seem to have rejected religion, who profess scepticism and unbelief, are really treading this same path without knowing it. What they are rejecting is not god, but the limited images of God, which can actually, at a certain stage in life, hinder our perception of reality. (Smith 1987, 41)

This is an aspect of the cognitive development Lonergan did not fully develop. Maybe this is partly due to the fact that he is too close to his own argument around the proof of God?

Smith (1987) is clearly not similarly restricted in this area:

Most of our life consists of a tissue of projections and false identifications, whereby we imagine that we are our thoughts, feelings, actions and roles in the world. We have to let go of all that. We have to learn not to do, not to be anything, but simply to be. (Smith 1987, 49)

If we wish to penetrate this mystery, what must we do? We must first enter the formless Abyss, both in God and the depths of ourselves, in the soul's Ground. (Smith 1987, 56)

And there we learn

... to pour out while remaining inwardly detached, to be at once in movement yet also in repose, is largely what the spiritual life is all about... (Smith 1987, 55)

And in the process our understanding of God is transformed as well:

... we have within us this nameless, transcendent depth which we call the Ground of the soul; the Ground is a kind of hollow chamber, an empty, inner space, in which the Word can be spoken and echoed. (Smith 1987, 63)

Have we now lost the revealed truth after all? Smith does not seem to think so. He remains fully orthodox regarding his Christology, when he continues:

The word echoes and resounds throughout the whole universe. Everything which exists at all vibrates in harmony with it. Therefore, it must also be resounding within us at every moment - especially since we have been created specifically for this purpose, to be a kind of 'echo-chamber' for it. (Smith 1987, 63)

Smith himself answers potential fears to lose the Faith indirectly:

(Eckhart's Way of Transcendence) strips away the projections in such a manner as to unveil the truth behind them. That is life-giving. (Smith 1987, 35)

Smith, as I understand him, from a theological perspective lays the ground for an understanding of transformation outside religion.<sup>62</sup> At the same time he remains a theologian, and one with deep insights at that:

The highest knowledge, the only one capable of touching God, is very rare - (it is) knowledge by communion. ... It refers to a concrete flesh-and-blood relationship, which includes all aspects of life. (Smith 1987, 18ff.)

This is the area I understand Tickerhoof to be aiming at when he speaks of the development of transforming consciousness, i.e. without reference to God as explicit.

Buddhist teachers interested in cross-cultural dialogue and transmission of their tradition may help us here. With considerable irony we may be shown the way:

One doesn't have to be a Buddhist to have 'it' or to get 'it'. In fact, one can't be anything at all to get 'it'! (Kapleau 2001, 38)

So either way - we are not going to be spared a brush with paradox:

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<sup>62</sup> It may be significant that Smith became a Benedictine monk only after a career in teaching and international

travel, as a mature person.

Actually, everything, just as it is, is a koan, the expression of perfection. To realize this perfection is the working out of a living koan. (Kapleau 2001, 3)

It is the study of *koan*, stories that contain deep yet simple truths often in the form of paradox,

I want to briefly look at in the next section.



## **5. Life's Koans**

In the process of transformation outlined so far, we are just a hair's breadth away from that working out of a koan, a short saying or story, that sends the mind racing for an obvious solution, which we will not be able to find.<sup>63</sup>

The truth that transcends affirmation and negation can be neither attained nor lost. It is the birthright of each one of us, and the non-Buddhist (is) simply awakened to what he had always had from the beginning. (Kipleau 2001, 37)

How does the Buddhist understand this process?

"One of the great virtues of koans is they get us to think, not in an analytical way, but with our complete mind. We have to use all our intuitive powers and feel and act as well as think." (Kipleau 2001, 27)

Shibayama (2000, 44) another author on the issue, writes,

"important is the intensity of the inner struggle".

The breakthrough or realisation, if and when it comes, in its contents is not a 'religious' one:

If one's spiritual quest - or Great doubt - is intensified to the ultimate extremity and striving has come to the breaking point, a bird's singing, the sound of a stone hitting bamboo, the Master's slapping, his holding up one finger, or anything will do. (Shibayama 2000, 45)

Yet it is a religious (or spiritual) transformation<sup>64</sup>:

"(One's) religious Great Doubt must have been intensified to the point where the slightest touch might result in an explosion. The opportunity was ripe." (Shibayama

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<sup>63</sup> Some koan can be used to stress Oneness, others to show the working aspects of Oneness in differentiation,

and still others to illustrate that Oneness is differentiation and differentiation is Oneness. (Shibayama 2000, 33)

<sup>64</sup> I think it is significant that the term 'religious' is usually, if semi-consciously, understood to refer to some

version of belief. From the context it is clear, however, that Shibayama means uses the original, radical meaning

of the word: Re-ligere - linking us back to the Oneness with the Ultimate Reality (in complexity).

2000, 54)

It is an experience of death, i.e. of utter powerlessness and surrender; no path of action remains open to the individual:

Unless one faces the inescapable crisis and has once had the experience of dying, one will not have true freedom. (Shibayama 2000, 55)

On the brink of life and death you are utterly free and in the six realms and the four modes of life you live, a genuine life in complete freedom. (Shibayama 2000, 20)

Spiritual seekers in the West today, half consciously seem to assume that Zen Buddhists have what the Christian belief tends to lack - the appropriation of the suprastructure into a live and fruitful infrastructure, and Shibayama seems to confirm this hope (or projection) through his refreshing line of thinking<sup>65</sup>:

A teaching once expounded, however excellent it may be, is already a conceptualised corpse. The experiential fact is the foundation that gives birth to teachings and dogmas. It can never be restricted by teachings and dogmas and is always new, alive, and creative. (Shibayama 2000, 63)

In dialogue with Buddhist practice we will have to own our projections. However, in the process of integrating the respective attitude and insights into secular life, some seem to be able to learn better from a tradition we (in Europe and the US) are not overly familiar with, as far its cultural baggage is concerned. In the end, we have to 'kill the Buddha', as one koan

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<sup>65</sup> While branches of the mystical tradition within the Catholic Church have preserved mystical knowledge,

branches of the Buddhist tradition are in decline, just as some Christian ones are.

demands in any case<sup>66</sup> *and* - be prepared to be misunderstood (if not imprisoned in some way) by our brethren.<sup>67</sup>

No matter how far we think we have gone, we can always go further. Every moment offers a fresh opportunity. (Kapleau 2001, 32)

Only in this way we learn:

Saying *Yes!* With a capital Y - responding wholeheartedly to every situation - affirms one's True Nature and can be deeply transformative. (Kapleau 2001, 49)

The cross-cultural fertilisation enables us to see our own tradition through a different lense, too, rediscover its own wisdom and hopefully bring it to life, i.e. rediscover the existential truth at its heart, rather than turn to a second religion. I therefore agree with William Johnston (1997, 60) who acknowledges that any major experience can turn into a *koan*:

You have to identify with it, live it. Since it is filled with paradox, it is filled with the anguish of life and the contradiction of existence.

This 'living it', is perhaps the deepest 'purification of the body' (Kadowaki 2002, 27). And it is to the part the body plays in transformation that we now turn, if briefly.

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Bachelor (1983), internationally renowned scholar and author, who lived for many years as an ordained Buddhist, has come to the conclusion, that we are ultimately unable to give up our own culture and

move into the Asian one. I consider that to be a resurrection of the Buddha in the West.

<sup>67</sup> I am referring to St. John of the Cross' experience. As I have said elsewhere with irony and figuratively

speaking: Some present time Carmelite authors seem to hope for an experience of transformation likening that

of St. John of the Cross without getting imprisoned by their brethren, even keeping their habits ironed.

(Schaefer, unpublished essay, 2004)



## **6. The Body's Recollection of Being<sup>68</sup>**

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<sup>68</sup> (Levin 1985)

Yet again, there is an implicit assumption to elaborate: So far I have simply implied that there is evident a drive -to get *through* - at least in those of us who do not exit an existential crisis in despair, fatal addiction, mental illness or suicide. Or, as William Johnston might put it, - in those of us who truly enter our life experience.

Ruth Burrows, the English Carmelite mentioned earlier, writes in her autobiography (1975) very clearly about her strong *sense of meaning* as a child - *not* relating to anything she was taught or *experienced* and not backed up by those factors either. While she otherwise refers to herself as a 'light-off' mystic (i.e. without being aware of any so-called mystical experiences), this sense of meaning clearly sustains her - even through difficult experiences and doubt. As I understand it, her 'sense of meaning' is almost tangible to the child and sustains despite feeling lost or missing a reference map for it. Thus it *is* what Gendlin (1981) refers to as *felt sense* and Levin (1985) as 'the body's recollection of being':

Recollection is much more than a process of contacting and retrieving. It is also a process of developing our bodily awareness and cultivating its capacities... so that, in the recollection, we are progressively realizing what we were given to understand all along... the gift is our... primordial attunement, spontaneous participation in the spectacle of light; it is our original openness to Being as a whole experienced in its panoramic wholeness. (Levin 1985, 53)

Levin (1985) formulates an imperative for philosophical and scientific thinking. His words may equally be understood as a description of the process of coming through the existential crisis and the transformation it brings:

Thinking, spellbound by the authority it wields during the rule of metaphysics, is itself part of the problem (of dualism). We must let go, finally of our metaphysical conception of 'thinking'. We must simply give our thought to the body. We must learn to think through the body. We must learn to think with the body... Thinking is a question of integrating awareness, living well-focused 'in the body'. For once, we should listen in silence to our bodily felt experience. Thinking needs to learn by feeling, by just being with our bodily being. Are we ready to let this body of experience tell us how to think its 'essence'? Are we, as thinkers, ready to quiet the conceptualising mind in order to listen to the body's own speech, its own logos? To be sure, our 'thinking' will sound, and be, radically different. (Levin 1985, 61)

In other words, the philosophical premise is:

According to Heidegger, we human beings are 'always already' gifted with a pre-ontological understanding (or, in other words, an ontologically attuned pre-understanding) of the presencing of Being as such. (Levin 1985, 78)

If, in this transformative process we let our understanding turn 'right-side up, we enter...

... a life-world whose 'ground' is a great initial gift, 'the path a great self-authentication, and the goal a great self-freedom'. Levin 1985, 112)

When we are resolved to appropriate our human way of being in relation to Being-as-a-whole, then, ... there reigns the freedom of the spirit moving into a realm of values which alone can give fulfilling meaning to human life. (Levin 1985, 113)

Appropriation seems to be the key in the above description: If this primordial sense of Being is given, if we are as Graf Dürckheim (1976) puts it, creatures of a dual origin, then this partaking in Being won't be lost, even if we do not realise its fullest potential:

We *are* beings-as-part-of-Being.

In summary: The personal crisis as leading to transformation implies a giving up of all securities. It brings with it the surrender of all delusions and illusions of a false grandeur of being-part-of-being.<sup>69</sup> It may seem as if the 'felt sense' has not yet been allocated its proper

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<sup>69</sup> In Jungian terms the transformation is not complete without accepting one's shadow. This relates to my only caveat for the appropriation as presented by Levin: I would like to emphasise the need for critical and rational evaluation as in Lonergan's concept: the biographies of Nietzsche (mental illness at the end of his life) and Heidegger (at least temporarily connecting his sense of meaning with the Nazi ideology) show the dangers of the lack of being grounded in critical understanding of self and context of one's felt sense: It *can* be corrupted.



place in spiritual transformation. Yet I think it has always been at the heart of serious spiritual concepts - such as the sense of consolation referred to in the Ignatian Exercises. So there is a sound tradition on which to build and deepen an existential understanding of faith - true faith beyond faith. (See e.g. Neuner 1988)

## **7. Conclusion and Outlook: Ways Not to Talk About God**

Concluding, I would argue that the findings provide a first tool (to be developed and applied) to further what I provisionally would name consciousness of responsibility - necessary in a secular society where the majority of people now grow up without any religious orientation<sup>70</sup> and helpful for religious people who want to work towards principles close to their hearts in this context. Also, these thoughts might help to understand further personal development as needed for religiously oriented people who genuinely want to preserve what is rich in their tradition. One of their learning curves may be how truth coexists. Insofar, we can return to Lonergan's statement that the converted person can be content with negative theology, because the mind has surrendered to Mystery and taken its place; it has come to understand itself with the help of the concept of self-appropriation and - the person can then set out afresh,<sup>71</sup> to make a contribution to the world coming to understand itself.

On one hand, this may be the inner imperative for the individual to develop what Sells (1994, 6) calls "performative apophasis" – as "one particular intuition into the dilemma of transcendence and response to it." The aim: an "attempt to evoke (in the reader) an event that is - in its movement beyond structures of self and other, ... - analogous to the event of mystical union" - an event where "the extraordinary reveals itself as common" (Sells 1994, 7), while the tendency of the mind to settle for simplifying definitions is "undone and that undoing is reflected within language by a disorienting of standards, rules of reference and antecedence." (Sells 1994, 12)

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<sup>70</sup> Or where in those who grow up with a religious orientation - it does not grow up with them, as indicated above.

<sup>71</sup> This is, of course, not to be understood as a strictly separate sequence of events. Living and self-appropriation go hand in hand.

On the other hand, those pursuing institutional religion need to be educated about the insight into the historical shift away from authoritative accounts of wisdom to self-appropriation, notwithstanding the timeless truth that the religious wisdom can only be transmitted by way of authority and only be lived through self-appropriation. In the Christian sense, that means a much richer (in the sense of more complex at least) understanding of discipleship.

That understood, we can then safely stay with the insights of a great mind such as Karl Rahner's, even ponder how it may be that he came to say people everywhere *are* living in and out of the Mystery that Christ is (1984, 304), because we will do so without any tongue-in-cheek claims to absolute truth. Thus we may be able to go to and live from the heart of our tradition. (See Eugen Biser 1994) This in turn might then help theology to understand itself as application of philosophy<sup>72</sup>.

It is a discourse that inevitably completes itself again in a new silence. The simplest experience of the divine consists in becoming conscious of that which shatters our isolation at the same time as it respects our solitude. (Panikkar 1997)

As an educator, I would also wish to express a vision and mission statement for an education towards love of wisdom: Almost as a synthesis of the two consequences outlined, I see educators as called to teach *through* their personality, and *as* seekers of unknowing. I think teachers teach the kind of authority that is to be found in the gaps between authoritative statements. It is found i.e. where the self-appropriation of the knower brings those statements to life.<sup>73</sup> In the words of Angelus Silesius<sup>74</sup>:

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<sup>72</sup> Thanks to Prof. James O'Connell, University of Bradford., for this phrase.

<sup>73</sup> Again, this is not a radically new thought. People have always spoken of inspiring teachers. And every student

who has ever struggled with a subject because the teacher just was *not*, knows the principle.

<sup>74</sup> German mystic, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who converted to Roman Catholicism

You are not in a place,  
the place is right in you -  
you throw it out and see -  
eternity is here!

Beyond the religious context, we may have to go further yet again, as indicated and become able to recognise and stimulate the transformation at work without the concept of God.

Panikkar (1997) points the way further necessary research might go:

God is not the only symbol to indicate what the word 'God' wishes to transmit. The very word 'God' is not necessary. Every attempt to absolutize the symbol 'God' destroys links with the divine mystery.

I see in this statement the potential to open doors into the heart of religious traditions and at the same time - towards a realisation how life from this centre can be lived - without necessarily be thematic. A straightforward paradox, I hope to have complicated sufficiently in these pages for it to be perfectly simple to the reader now.

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