

DOING THEOLOGY BY HEART: JOHN S. DUNNE'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD

JON NILSON

Loyola University of Chicago

MY METHOD is my journey," says John S. Dunne.¹ Stress the adjectives in his statement and his method will seem resolutely idiosyncratic and hardly likely to assist or advance contemporary theological inquiry. Stress the nouns, however, and a different sense of his statement emerges. Then Dunne is saying that life can be construed as a journey and that this journey itself can be a method.

But a method in what sense? Is it just a habitual way of working? Or is his a method in a stricter sense? Bernard Lonergan, a major influence on Dunne, calls method "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results."² If Dunne's method matches Lonergan's definition, then his theology deserves more serious attention and a more prominent place in the contemporary theological conversation than it has been given so far.³

¹ John S. Dunne, *The Reasons of the Heart* (New York: Macmillan, 1978) 151; hereinafter referred to as *RH*. His other books and articles, together with the abbreviations to be used for them here, are: *The City of the Gods* (New York: Macmillan, 1965): *CG*; *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (New York: Macmillan, 1969): *SG*; *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972): *WAE*; *Time and Myth* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1973): *TM*; *The Church of the Poor Devil* (New York: Macmillan, 1982): *CPD*; *The House of Wisdom* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985): *HW*; "St. Thomas' Theology of Participation," *TS* 18 (1957) 487-512; "Realpolitik in the Decline of the West," *Review of Politics* 21 (1959) 131-50; "Two Contemporary Approaches to Theology," *TS* 21 (1960) 45-61; "The Myth of God's Death," in Bernard Murchland, ed., *The Meaning of the Death of God* (New York: Random House, 1967) 165-69; "The Metamorphoses of Faith," *Review of Politics* 20 (1967) 291-302: *MF*; "The Metamorphoses of Faith," *American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings* 41 (1967) 230-38; "The Human God: Jesus," *Commonweal* 85 (1967) 508-11; "Waiting for Insight," *Anglican Theological Review*, Supplementary Series, no. 5, 1975, 51-67: *WI*; "Insight and Waiting on God," in Matthew L. Lamb, ed., *Creativity and Method* (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ., 1981) 3-9; "The Passionate Presence," *Commonweal* 112 (1985) 206-7.

² Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (2nd ed.; New York: Herder, 1973) 4, 14.

³ Not counting book reviews, the secondary literature is limited to five articles; a brief discussion in Jozef Meyer zu Schlochtern, *Glaube-Sprache-Erfahrung: Zur Begründungsfähigkeit der religiösen Überzeugung* (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1978); one dissertation: M. E. Williams, *Passing Over: A Model for the Use of Storytelling with Adults in Religious Education Based upon the Hermeneutic Approach of John S. Dunne* (Northwestern, 1983); and one M.A. thesis, Thomas L. Long, *Passing Over: John Dunne's Affective Hermeneutic of the Life Narrative* (Catholic Univ. of America, 1980).

This is not to say that Dunne's writing has gone unnoticed and unappreciated. Book reviews praise its style, remark upon its uniqueness, and suggest that it is important. Precisely why it is important remains, however, a largely unanswered question. Moreover, spirituality, not systematic theology, is the genre to which it is most often assigned.

Woodward pinpoints the main reason why Dunne is not sufficiently recognized and discussed as a theologian: "... his books, for all their philosophic rigor, are subtly orchestrated around themes and counter-themes rather than plotted like an argument."⁴ While the musical analogy is appropriate, comparing his work to the novel may be more instructive. A novel does not present a hypothesis and then seek to establish its truth. Rather, the novel expresses and develops its interpretation of human life in its narratives and descriptions. Milan Kundera reminds us that a good novel is neither vague nor ambiguous, since its unity derives "from several basic words which gradually take on the force of philosophical categories." These are what we find in Dunne's writing: interpretation emerging from the narratives and descriptions as well as some basic words which, in each book and across the several books, take on the clarity and rigor of technical terminology.

Dunne's style, so unusual in contemporary theological writing, is not meant to be ornamentation for ideas he might have communicated just as well in a more conventional way. For him, all human standpoints are relative and a person changes standpoints as life goes on.⁵ So the quest for understanding is not like exploring unknown terrain from one fixed perspective. Instead, it is a journey in time from standpoint to standpoint, each of which illumines more of the unknown. So the discoveries cannot be communicated from a fixed or absolute standpoint. Dunne needs a style akin to music and fiction, in which the insights can be presented in their supple, concrete, originating context, i.e., his journey itself.

As an attempt to explain Dunne's method, then, this essay must necessarily dissect his work, thus robbing it of its evocative and persuasive power. The numerous quotations represent an effort to minimize this impoverishment by letting Dunne speak for himself as much as possible.⁶ They are no substitute for reading Dunne's words in their

⁴ Kenneth L. Woodward, "What Is God? John Dunne's Life of Discovery," *Notre Dame Magazine* 9, no. 3 (July 1980) 10. This article also has biographical information.

⁵ "Spiritual Adventure: The Emergence of a New Theology," John Dunne, interviewed by K. Woodward, *Psychology Today* 11, no. 8 (January 1978) 48; hereinafter cited as *PT*.

⁶ Since his major themes are considered from various standpoints in each and all of his books, practically every main idea could be given at least two citations. Instead of littering these pages with even more footnotes than there are, I have given only the main reference for each major point.

original context. This analysis of his method is justified only to the extent that it sends readers to Dunne's own work to discover how he does what every theologian worthy of the title's traditional meaning must finally do: dare to speak of God.

GENESIS OF DUNNE'S METHOD

Before he discovered the method he uses in writing his books, Dunne published three articles. They are not negligible. Some of their content reappears in the books (e.g., the Thomistic "anima est quodammodo omnia" is seen again in *RH*) and he cites them explicitly eight times. Yet their style and approach are rather conventional; they are clearly the work of a young scholar at the beginning of a career. The first article summarizes the dissertation he wrote under Lonergan. The second and third are less conventional, but their topics, terminology, and method lie within the patterns of Roman Catholic theology as it was then conceived.

Not surprisingly, then, Dunne locates the beginning of his writing career after he had completed these studies.⁷ He had then begun work on a book dealing with "the political theology of the Greek city-states. It was to be part of a larger work tracing political theology from ancient times to the present."⁸ He had evidently planned a massive undertaking whose accomplishment would have consumed years. Yet, in a way, the project was already finished. Its basic thesis had already been conceived, for he "wanted to show how, beginning with the Greek city-states, in every age, the city of man has had its own gods."⁹ The viewpoint from which the work was to be written was fixed. The topics were clear and the method ready to hand. All that remained was to nuance and buttress the thesis with presentations and analyses of historical data. What remained to do, however, was never done.

The work turned onerous. "As I compiled material for it . . . I had the feeling I was piling up lumber."¹⁰ This is not surprising, since the creative portion of the project was almost complete. Assembling the materials and putting them together properly was all that was left to do. But tedium was not the reason he abandoned the task he had set for himself.

My heart was elsewhere, and it was drawing my mind along after it. I was becoming very concerned at that time about the fact that I must someday die. I was thirty years old and was becoming very conscious that my youth was passing. That was upon my heart, and it came to be upon my mind as well. I became very

⁷ *PT* 48.

⁸ *RH* 147.

⁹ *PT* 48.

¹⁰ *RH* 147.

excited reading the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It is the story of a man whose best friend died and who went then in search of unending life, who traveled to the ends of the earth but found wisdom rather than life. I saw myself in a position very like that of Gilgamesh, and I began to see a quest like his running through all history.¹¹

The epic affected him because the problem that openly troubles Gilgamesh was secretly troubling him. The figure of Gilgamesh made the deeper undertow of his own feelings and reflections apparent to him. This story of a man who had been so troubled by death that he had embarked on a quest for unending life could be his own story too. He found himself reading the epic not to find data to support a thesis but to gain insight on an issue engaging his whole existence.

Having "found that my real gut problem was death, not political theology,"¹² Dunne was now at a crossroads. He could continue his work on political theology and relegate his real issue, death, to the private realm of meditation or evade it altogether. Or he could, like Gilgamesh, set out on his own quest by letting his "gut problem" occupy his mind as well as his heart. He could go on his own journey in search of insight into this problem which he had come to see occupying the hearts and minds of humankind across all ages and cultures.

"So I changed the subject of my book. I began to write on man's quest of life through the ages. I came in the end to formulate the question 'If I must someday die, what can I do to fulfill my desire to live?'"¹³

This laconic statement should be understood in light of what he says in *WAE*: "The thought of seriously giving up one's ambitions is terrifying."¹⁴ To abandon a project that could have brought him security and esteem in favor of a personal quest that had no certain direction and result was daunting. It was a kind of death, since it entailed something of the "letting go of everyone and everything that is called for in death."¹⁵ He had to let go of everyone. "When my life opened up before me all the way to death, I became very lonely."¹⁶ He had to be willing to let go of everything, the benefits and securities of his career, community, and faith, for he had come to experience the "tremendous chasm between the answers you have already from a religious tradition and the real questions that come up in your life."¹⁷ He had no guarantees that the journey which

¹¹ *RH* 147-48.

¹² *PT* 48.

¹³ *RH* 148.

¹⁴ *WAE* 167.

¹⁵ *PT* 90.

¹⁶ *RH* 149.

¹⁷ *PT* 50.

lay ahead of him could ever bridge it. Nonetheless, he set out on a way which he was eventually "to imagine . . . as a walking with God, a companionship with God on a journey from insight to insight."¹⁸

Dunne soon realized that something like a journey was not only his private and personal necessity; it is an exigency in the modern West. In his study of the human quest for life across the ages, he came to see the Black Death of the 14th and 15th centuries as "the great historical turning point between medieval and modern culture."¹⁹ The plague shattered the credibility of the medieval hierarchical order. Prince and pauper, priest and peasant were all equally vulnerable to the overmastering power of death. The "lords temporal" and the "lords spiritual" were no longer the unquestioned and unchallenged mediators between God and humankind.²⁰ The plague engendered the peculiarly modern experience of "unmediated existence . . . a situation in which there is nothing human between man and God to put a man in touch with God or to shield him from God."²¹ Thus Dunne agrees with Jung that "The spiritual adventure of our time is the exposure of human consciousness to the undefined and the indefinable."²²

DUNNE'S METHOD

There are three referents for the term "method" when Dunne uses it to indicate his own procedure. Actually, each is a component of his unique method. (1) "My own method, which I've never set out in great detail, is a process of eliciting images from feelings, attaining insight into those images, and converting insights into a guide for life."²³ (2) "I have developed . . . a method of 'passing over,' as I call it, to other lives. It is a method of entering sympathetically into another person's autobiographical standpoint, seeing the whole world anew as that person sees it, and then coming back enriched to one's own standpoint and to a new

¹⁸ *PT* 90.

¹⁹ *PT* 50.

²⁰ *CG* 192; *SG* 76-78.

²¹ *SG* 112.

²² True, Dunne also says that "Passing over and coming back . . . is the spiritual adventure of our time" (*WAE* ix). The terminological inconsistency is only apparent. "Exposure to the undefined," which stems from the modern loss of mediation, is indeed the adventure of our time. It leads to the search for mediation, for someone who can help to illumine the darkness of God and God's ways. Since passing over is a way of seeking mediation (*SG* xi), as we shall see, and coming back is living with the resultant new insight, passing over and coming back also constitute a spiritual adventure.

²³ *PT* 50.

understanding of one's own life."²⁴ (3) "My method is my journey."²⁵

Taken separately, these are not unique. Dunne himself sees the first as "the way in which the human mind works across all the stages of life."²⁶ He characterizes the second as "essentially a matter of sympathetic understanding."²⁷ Construing life as a journey and then as a method has Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* as at least one precedent. Dunne uses each of these three methods independently of the others at times. But his method becomes unique when he meshes the first and the second so that the result becomes a step in the third. Sometimes he will use "passing over and coming back" to refer to this conjunction of all three components: "What one does in passing over is try to enter sympathetically into the feelings of another person, become receptive to the images which give expression to his feelings, attain insight into those images, and then come back enriched by this insight to an understanding of one's own life which can guide one into the future."²⁸

From Feeling to a Guide for Life

One way to go about this, Dunne suggests, is to keep a journal in which not simply events of life but also personal reactions to the events are recorded. Gradually this process enhances an awareness of feelings, which allows them to be put into images into which insights can be gained.²⁹

Dunne acknowledges Jung as a resource for understanding the feeling-image relationship.³⁰ Yet Dunne's "feeling" is not equivalent to Jung's "emotion"; it is less transitory and more holistic.³¹ It is "a sense of life as one might speak of a 'tragic sense of life' or a 'comic sense of life' or an 'ironic sense of life.'"³²

Dunne acknowledges Lonergan as a resource for understanding knowledge as "a process of gaining insight from images."³³ The image orders the data, that which is to be understood, in a certain pattern. Insight is a grasp, a "catching on" to the intelligibility of the pattern and so of the data which it orders. For Lonergan, insight is incomplete without judg-

²⁴ WAE 53; see also HW, chap. 1, section entitled "An Understanding in the Discoveries."

²⁵ RH 151.

²⁶ PT 50.

²⁷ WAE xi.

²⁸ WAE 53.

²⁹ PT 50.

³⁰ Ibid. In the Preface to *SG*, Dunne acknowledges Jung's *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* as a strong influence.

³¹ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* (New York: Vintage, 1961) 177.

³² *SG* 218.

³³ PT 50. In the Preface to *SG*, Dunne acknowledges Lonergan's *Insight* as a strong influence.

ment, the act of affirming or negating the correctness of an insight. Only with judgment do the issues of truth and falsehood, certitude and probability arise.³⁴ The requisite skill in making judgments is attained within the dynamic self-correcting process of learning.

Dunne knows that this process driven by the pure desire to know is the gateway to truth and certitude for Lonergan. But he considers the quest for certitude on life questions to be finally self-defeating.³⁵ Perhaps certitude is attainable with very narrow ranges of data, but no full and final certitudes about God and persons are possible.³⁶ So Dunne calls for a quest of understanding, instead of a quest for certitude, and for "openness or orientation toward mystery"³⁷ as the posture of one who embarks on such a quest.

Is nothing certain for Dunne? In fact, he sees his method as based upon "a twofold certainty, 'I am' and 'I will die.'" ³⁸ Yet these two certainties are fraught with uncertainties which no method can ever fully and finally resolve. But his method enacts that openness to mystery which leads to understanding.³⁹

Passing Over and Coming Back: I

"How are we to come to understanding? By passing over to the standpoint of other lives and times and coming back to that of our own lives and times."⁴⁰

Passing over means entering into the standpoint of another person, age, or culture and thereby gaining new understanding. Passing over means temporarily adopting another and different perspective on common concerns and thus discovering truths about oneself, others, and God which could not have been found solely within the confines of one's own standpoint. It is followed by "coming back" or returning to the standpoint of one's own life and times. Yet this standpoint is now different, because it has been expanded and enriched by the truths discovered in passing

³⁴ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight* (rev. ed.; New York: Philosophical Library, 1958) 273.

³⁵ *PT* 48; *SG* 217.

³⁶ *PT* 48.

³⁷ *SG* 7. Dunne's definition of mystery is "an inexhaustible source of soluble problems" (*CG* 4).

³⁸ *RH* 147.

³⁹ While this method can and should be enacted consciously, Dunne also suggests that it occurs unconsciously as a factor in personal development. Thus, feelings are largely determined in childhood, their corresponding images tend to emerge in youth, and insight into the images takes place in adulthood. If this happens unconsciously, however, one is being "dragged through the stages of his journey instead of walking through them upright" (*SG* 218–19).

⁴⁰ *RH* 149.

over.

Each of Dunne's books sets out this process and its results in such a rich and differentiated fashion that a typical example would be too lengthy to recount here. A briefer but clear and very striking example of passing over and coming back is the experience of Peter Phillips recounted in his *The Tragedy of Nazi Germany*. It reveals the power of passing over to unlock not only what is unusual and strange but even what seems beyond understanding.

Phillips was a prisoner of war in a German camp during World War II. So horrible were his experiences and so disturbing were his memories that he finally decided "to face up to the whole horrifying subject of concentration camps, Naziism, Hitler and the rest. If I could understand, perhaps I could exorcize the horror of the memories."⁴¹ But how could he understand such monstrous crimes, such overwhelming evils? His own experiences shouted that "explanations" were simply superficial.⁴²

At last he realized that sympathetic understanding (or passing over) was the only way to the understanding he sought. Until he could see the Germans as "human beings caught in human situations,"⁴³ he would be left with only his incomprehension and hatred. Only an experience of humanity shared could shed some light on that terrible darkness. The effort to understand the Nazis, then, meant also the effort to understand himself. He came to see that "If we recognize, in part, our own self, when we study other times and other places, we may understand the realities and sadness of German human beings yesterday."⁴⁴

Phillips' initial standpoint of incomprehension and hatred was transformed by his willingness to seek an answer to his question and to enter into the German standpoint, wherein the unthinkable becomes sadly thinkable. He realized that the answers to the questions posed by the Holocaust lay not in fate, the devil, or the "German national character" but in himself: "Even with Nazis, we have to say 'There but for the grace of God go I.'"⁴⁵

"Passing over is essentially a matter of sympathetic understanding; a man must have within him somehow what he finds in another."⁴⁶ Entering into the standpoint of another person, age, or culture yields insights unavailable within one's own limited standpoint. They become possible only when one sees the world through other eyes. Just as Phillips found

⁴¹ Peter Phillips, *The Tragedy of Nazi Germany* (New York: Pegasus, 1969) 3.

⁴² *Ibid.* 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 231.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 7-8.

⁴⁶ *WAE* xi.

the horrors of Naziism utterly incomprehensible till he had passed over to the Germans of the Hitler era, so too, Dunne suggests, there is much we will not understand till we see "with the eyes of the other."⁴⁷

Passing over engenders self-discovery as well. It reveals "that there is something within oneself corresponding to whatever one finds in other men. It is actually feeling and acknowledging the resonance within oneself to whatever one meets in others. It is thus a very vivid realization of one's own humanity and theirs."⁴⁸

Passing over is followed by another shift in standpoint, "coming back" to the inescapable starting point and ending point, the homeland of one's own life and times. Yet this standpoint is new, because it has been extended and enriched by the vision of self, others, life, and God from the standpoint to which one had passed over. A person who passes over and comes back can see beyond the limits of the first standpoint and "gains, in fact, a new and fuller relationship to the things of life."⁴⁹

Passing over and coming back verify the three principles on which this method rests. The first principle (or "premise") is that "what is true or false is so from some standpoint or other."⁵⁰ From Phillips' initial standpoint, the Nazi phenomenon was a stunning, monstrous enormity; from the standpoint of sympathetic understanding, it became "a tragedy of humanity ensnared." "From one standpoint, life may be the story of a voyage of discovery; from another, it may be simply the story of a child playing by the sea."⁵¹ Truth and falsehood are relative to the standpoint of the individual.

The second principle is that "no standpoint, whether it be the standpoint of the man himself or that of other men in regard to him, is true or false in itself."⁵² For Dunne, the relativity of every human standpoint means that only God's standpoint is absolute. Being human means changing standpoints as we pass from childhood to youth to adulthood to old age and as we pass over and come back. Every standpoint is one from which something true can be discovered.

The third principle is that "it is possible to pass over from one standpoint to another."⁵³ The movement through the stages of life shows this, as well as any instance of sympathetic understanding. What makes

⁴⁷ *TM* 49.

⁴⁸ *WAE* 230; see also 219–20 and *PT* 90.

⁴⁹ *TM* 48–49.

⁵⁰ *SG* 5.

⁵¹ *TM* 1.

⁵² *SG* 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

passing over desirable is the “personal knowledge of personal ignorance”⁵⁴ that comes from self-appropriation and the awareness of the relativity and limits of the individual standpoint. The putatively absolute self has to be dethroned before new insight can come. “As long as I assume that my ignorance is man’s ignorance . . . I am assuming that the standpoint of my self is the true standpoint.”⁵⁵ Then “we know, or think we know, not merely that we do not know, but that ‘man’ does not know. So it is useless for us to seek further.”⁵⁶ Passing over reveals that another may see where I am blind and thus motivates a search for the insights and wisdom available through the eyes of another.

Passing Over and Coming Back: II

As we have seen, “passing over and coming back” also refer to the method whereby Dunne combines sympathetic understanding with the move from feeling through image and insight to guidance for life. Here is his very compressed articulation of this subtle, dynamic process:

The technique of passing over is based on the process of eliciting images from one’s feelings, attaining insight into the images, and turning insight into a guide of life. What one does in passing over is try to enter sympathetically into the feelings of another person, become receptive to the images which give expression to his feelings, attain insight into those images, and then come back enriched by this insight to an understanding of one’s own life which can guide one into the future.⁵⁷

Dunne has actually made a conscious, explicit method of the experience he underwent in reading and reacting to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. He was receptive to the images of Gilgamesh and his quest because these were expressions of the same feelings of anxiety at the prospect of death that he had. It was, then, easy for him “to enter sympathetically into the feelings of another person,” easy to grasp what was behind the cry of Gilgamesh, “How can I rest, how can I be at peace? Despair is in my heart. What my brother is now, that shall I be when I am dead. Because I am afraid of death I will go as best I can to find Utnapishtim . . . for he has entered the assembly of the gods.”⁵⁸

Dunne says that he “happened to read” the epic. It contained the images in which were the insights that Dunne needed and discovered at that time. When he turned this “happening” into a conscious and explicit

⁵⁴ SG 212.

⁵⁵ SG 200.

⁵⁶ SG 198.

⁵⁷ WAE 53.

⁵⁸ N. K. Sanders, tr., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (rev. ed.; New York: Penguin, 1972) 97.

method, he began to use images as clues indicating figures to whom he ought to pass over in order to attain the needed insight and guide to life. A first reading of one of Dunne's books can easily give the impression of a wide-ranging but haphazard and arbitrary choice of resources. Chapter 2 of *Time and Myth*, for example, discusses Ahab and Ishmael in *Moby Dick*; the autobiographies of Sergei Aksakoff, Geronimo, and Augustine; Hesiod's *Theogony*, the *Enuma Elish*, and the Genesis account of creation. Yet the images are chosen because they express the feelings which, in turn, bespeak the heart's question, "What kind of story are we in?"⁵⁹ Not in the *ordo disciplinae* but in the *ordo inventionis* does it make sense in *WAE* to pass over to Gandhi struggling with sexuality and violence, because the phase of the journey which the previous book, *SG*, articulates ends with the problem of the "dark forces" still unresolved.

"Attaining insight into the images" can be seen in the aftermath of Dunne's encounter with Gilgamesh. *CG* is the record of his quest for understanding focused on the question: If I must some day die, what can I do to satisfy my desire to live? After tracing the human quest for everlasting life throughout history, he came to realize that all human effort to secure it must fail. Life can only be received as a gift from "the God who reveals himself in the risen Christ."⁶⁰

This is certainly an insight "which can guide one into the future." The following book, *SG*, shows how it helps to define two fundamental and opposed options in life: either trusting in God or attempting to define, construct, and actualize one's self all by one's self. In fact, each of Dunne's books circles around the basic option of trust or control, even though the terminology for this issue may be slightly different in each.⁶¹

"Passing over and coming back: II" as a method, then, comprises the following moments. First, "it is essential to wait for the question to arise personally before you begin to theologize—otherwise, you have answers but no pressing questions."⁶² Initially, Dunne himself did not have to wait; death was his question before he realized that it was. Yet "waiting" indicates that the emergence of the question is not predictable or controllable. It might be if the term "question" in Dunne's usage meant only a formulation of an intellectual inquiry. Instead, it means the formulation of a feeling which is a particular sense of life resulting from unfulfilled desire. For example, "Does becoming end in being or does it end in

⁵⁹ *TM* 1.

⁶⁰ *CG* 230.

⁶¹ *CG*, relying on God; *SG*, trust in God; *TM*, consent; *RH*, willingness.

⁶² *PT* 50.

nothingness?"⁶³ "Is there a road in life I can follow with all my heart?"⁶⁴ The question articulates the desire which must be filled if there is to be any authentic happiness or meaning. It orients the search for insight upon which one's whole life depends.

The question as desire can be hidden. So Dunne recommends keeping a "spiritual diary," composing an autobiography, or writing a creed as a means of enhancing self-awareness and bringing the latent question to consciousness. It may be disguised in persistent fantasies or in the prevalent patterns of one's relationships with others.⁶⁵ It may be concealed in "limit situations" such as suffering, guilt, and loneliness⁶⁶ or in the issues belonging to each stage of human development.⁶⁷

The desire can also be stifled. Fear of the unknown or apprehension of a void yawning beneath the obvious in human life can cripple the desire. Instead of desire, there can be only an "ineffectual longing",⁶⁸ instead of a spiritual adventure, there may be only "quiet desperation."⁶⁹ For the desire to become strong enough to generate a personal quest, the heart must be "kindled." Dunne's metaphor expresses the effect of a glimpse of fulfilment in which "things that seemed impossible begin to seem possible."⁷⁰ A realization of the possibility of fulfilment gives birth to the hope of fulfilment. Thus one sets out upon the quest.

The second moment is the seeking and finding of images that express the feelings. As we have seen, the images explored in Dunne's books are not chosen by arbitrary criteria. Feeling as a determinate sense of life guides the choice of images wherein the needed insights may be found. For example, an anxiety over death is well imaged in the figure of Gilgamesh and his journey. Not surprisingly, Orpheus and Eurydice do not appear in *CG*, *SC*, *WAE*, or *TM*. They do appear in *RH*, however, where the issues of loneliness and integration play a major role. The choice and placing of each image Dunne explores can be understood in terms of the question he is treating and the point where it appears on his journey.

The third moment is the effort to "become receptive to the images which give expression to . . . feelings." This is passing over as sympathetic

⁶³ *SG* 1.

⁶⁴ *RH* ix.

⁶⁵ *SG* 151-52.

⁶⁶ *RH* 25.

⁶⁷ *TM* 47-83.

⁶⁸ *RH* 15.

⁶⁹ *RH* 120.

⁷⁰ *RH* 133. Initially, it seems, Dunne's Christian tradition and the good news of the Resurrection provided him with the glimpse of the life that could overcome death.

understanding, the temporary adoption of another perspective on one's own concerns. Dunne proposes a simple test to determine whether or not the needed sympathetic understanding has been reached:

I found in writing my first book, *The City of the Gods*, that as long as I thought what the Egyptians were doing with mummies and what they were writing in *The Book of the Dead* were merely odd or bizarre, I knew I hadn't truly passed over. It was only when I could see myself believing those things, living them, having them make complete sense to me, that I knew that I had passed over into their culture.⁷¹

The fourth moment is waiting for insight. In Lonergan's *Insight*, the image is a particular constellation of the data to be understood. For Dunne, the image expresses the "sense of life." Thus, it comprises data but more importantly it concretizes the person's relationship to the "things of life." The image of Ahab in *TM* expresses the futile struggle to eradicate evil from the world. Hemingway's old man, whose eyes are the same color as the sea, represents one's struggle with the unknown throughout life which gradually reveals one's hidden kinship with it.⁷²

Consequently, "insight" for Dunne is not used in an "intellectual context (. . . science and common sense and philosophy and theology)" but "more in an existential context (that of making choices and finding one's way in life)."⁷³ In both contexts insight has to be awaited. It is more difficult to wait in the existential context, because the question expresses a desire that must somehow be fulfilled if one's life is to have hope, happiness, and meaning. Till light dawns and insight comes, life can seem to dangle by a thread over a pit of absurdity and despair. Yet, seen in retrospect, such waiting is "a purification of his heart that has enabled him to pass from his initial fears and calculation of risks to the matter of his heart's desire."⁷⁴ This way of "discovery not merely invention"⁷⁵ is at once a stilling and a centering, a purgative way⁷⁶ which gradually discloses "the human essence . . . a capacity for a relationship with God."⁷⁷

The insight which comes "can guide one into the future." Making the insight a guide for life is essential and the fifth moment of the method in this fuller sense. It seems unlikely that this would not occur, since the

⁷¹ *PT* 49.

⁷² *TM* 85-86.

⁷³ *WI* 45.

⁷⁴ *WI* 49.

⁷⁵ *SG* 223.

⁷⁶ *SG* 173-74.

⁷⁷ *CPD* 23.

insight is experienced as light in darkness,⁷⁸ revelation, grace,⁷⁹ a response to the prayer "Show me the way!"⁸⁰ Living by the insights is already sharing them with others.⁸¹ They can be communicated in something made as a "labor of love,"⁸² in writing,⁸³ and in purposefully illumining the minds and moving the hearts of others.⁸⁴ This sharing not only completes one stage in the journey and initiates the next, but it also shows the public character of this kind of understanding. It is certainly personal and relative, but not privatistic and idiosyncratic. Truth is relative to a particular standpoint, but passing over from one standpoint to another is possible. Thus it is "a way of acknowledging . . . relativity without at the same time concluding that nothing is true."⁸⁵

"My Method Is My Journey"

Each cycle of passing over and coming back is a "step of the journey [which] begins as a kindling of the heart and ends as an illumining of the mind."⁸⁶ "Journey," is, of course, an image. It suggests a pattern of meaning which links each step, each instance of "passing over and coming back." It also suggests that the insight discovered at each step is intelligibly and existentially related to all the previous insights and to the "feelings" behind them. It expresses that coalescence of mind, heart, work, and life that so forcefully characterizes Dunne's theology.

The direction of this journey can be traced through his seven books. *CG's* question, as we have seen, is "If I must someday die, what can I do to satisfy my desire to live?"⁸⁷ and studies the human quest for eternal life from ancient times to the present. At first, *SG* was to consider biographies and autobiographies in relationship to the issue of death, but a new question emerged as Dunne was working on it: "the problem of the self in modern Western culture."⁸⁸ Its central question became "Does becoming end in being or does it end in nothingness?"⁸⁹ *SG* ends with the issue of the "dark forces" and the possibility of transforming them

⁷⁸ *WI* 44.

⁷⁹ *SG* 219.

⁸⁰ *WI* 50.

⁸¹ *SG* 219.

⁸² *CPD* 37.

⁸³ *CPD* 75-80.

⁸⁴ *WAE* 49.

⁸⁵ *PT* 48.

⁸⁶ *RH* 152.

⁸⁷ *CG* v.

⁸⁸ *PT* 50.

⁸⁹ *SG* 1.

through compassion learned from other religious traditions.⁹⁰ In *WAE*, Dunne passes over to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam “to see what is really possible in love and action,” whether “sexuality and violence can be transformed.”⁹¹

WAE ends with a vision of God at work in human lives, human history, and “the world at large.” Yet it does not reveal “where the creative power is leading.”⁹² Thus, *TM* asks, “What kind of story are we in? Is it the story of an adventure, a journey, a voyage of discovery? Or is it something simpler like the story of a child playing by the sea?”⁹³ As he tells it, it becomes “a story of man, the story of a man who goes through a crisis of flesh and spirit, then withdraws into solitude to come to grips with himself, and then returns among men to receive and to give wholeness.”⁹⁴

This is a sketch of the next book, *RH*. The crisis of flesh and spirit is the experience of loss and brokenness. Must there always be loss, always a divided heart, since taking one road in life means losing what lies along the road not taken? Or “is there a road in life I can follow with all my heart?”⁹⁵ *RH* asks this question as it follows the way “into solitude and back again into the human circle” which “may itself be the path leading to fulfillment.”⁹⁶

Dunne’s way into the human circle continued with a riverboat voyage up the Amazon during a visit to his order’s missions in South America. He began to pass over to his fellow passengers, but especially to the poor among them. *CPD* re-enacts and deepens this experience, “hoping to learn from the poor, to let them change our minds and hearts, to join them on their voyage in time.”⁹⁷ The conjunction of human misery and the heart’s longing in the religion of the poor yields a wisdom, which is a “seeing with God’s eyes and feeling with God’s heart.”⁹⁸

In coming to this discovery, he says, “I found I needed two eyes, as it were, to see the human way, an eye for the heart’s longing and an eye for human misery.”⁹⁹ *HW*, his seventh book, relates his struggle “to find the point of unity beyond my binocular vision . . . to conjoin my eyes and my heart.”¹⁰⁰ The house of Wisdom is the place of which God says “my eyes

⁹⁰ *SG* 201–5.

⁹¹ *WAE* 13.

⁹² *WAE* 231.

⁹³ *TM* 1.

⁹⁴ *TM* 113.

⁹⁶ *RH* ix.

⁹⁶ *RH* xii.

⁹⁷ *CPD* viii.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 154.

⁹⁹ *HW* x.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

and my heart will be there for all time"¹⁰¹ and thus the goal of his pilgrimage recounted in the book.¹⁰²

The journey as a method, then, is a continual repetition of "passing over and coming back: II." This journey takes the form of a spiral unfolding in a certain direction, as can be seen by retracing its course through the seven books and by observing how basic notions are expanded and differentiated therein. In taking his journey as his method, Dunne is fully recognizing and exploiting the fact that our standpoints change, consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, throughout our lives. Our standpoints also change whenever we sympathetically understand another. In the realm of living, then, the choice is to walk upright through these changes or to be dragged through them.¹⁰³ In the realm of theory, the choice is to think and write in the awareness of the changes and relativity of standpoints or to assume and work within the abstraction of a fixed standpoint, leaving the return to concreteness unaccomplished—and, perhaps, its necessity unrecognized.

David Tracy provides an illuminating context for this point. He argues that theology's task is now what it has always been: to articulate and respond to "existentially vital and logically odd questions" such as "Has existence any ultimate meaning?"¹⁰⁴ Yet neither the theologian nor the addressee of theology can be adequately understood today as a self in the classical existentialist mold. Today's theological self is complex, because this self is at once a citizen, a learner, and a church member. The theologian in teaching and writing and the addressee in reading and listening must negotiate and adjudicate the varying methods, terminologies, and warrants which are appropriate to the presently internalized realities of the wider society, the academy, and the church.

Tracy recognizes that "the concept of the 'single one' is the . . . ultimate ground for the complex reality of the contemporary self of the theologian."¹⁰⁵ Existentialism did not fulfil its promise to clarify that "single one." Instead, it obscured the self's complexity by the individualistic bent of its approach. Yet each theologian remains an inescapably "single one" who reflects and decides. Thus Tracy argues for promoting "the

¹⁰¹ 1 Kgs 9:3, quoted in *CPD* 155, and the epigraph of *HW*.

¹⁰² I realize that Dunne knits the books together differently than I do here (in *RH* 147–51). His journey is so rich and complex, however, that his account and mine are complementary. His indicates how "each begins as a kindling of the heart and ends as an illumining of the mind" (*RH* 152). My account shows the links between each book or stage of the journey.

¹⁰³ *SG* 218–19.

¹⁰⁴ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

drive to authentically public discourse on the part of all theologians" lest theological insight be marginalized.¹⁰⁶

Dunne's method meets this exigency. It is publicly articulated and replicable. It is a method of pursuing issues "fundamental for any authentically human existence"¹⁰⁷ by a wide-ranging and intensive sympathetic understanding of other perspectives and solutions to the issues. Insofar as its discoveries are expressed in living, teaching, and writing, they have "the communicability of public knowledge."¹⁰⁸ If they did not, Dunne's books would be unintelligible. Granted, Dunne invites and asks his readers to pass over with him, but every speaker and writer implicitly or explicitly asks the audience to adopt, at least provisionally, the standpoint from which the presentation was developed.

Tracy also helps to show the importance of Dunne's method in his account of Catholic theology and the particular self-understanding that is foundational to it. Responding to Thomas Sheehan's analysis of contemporary Catholic theology and its implications for theology itself, Tracy states briefly and bluntly that the theologians cited by Sheehan (and, by unmistakable implication, all genuine Catholics) believe in "the Resurrection of Jesus on the basis of some personal religious experience of Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen one."¹⁰⁹ Sheehan had argued that the impact of contemporary Catholic biblical scholarship rendered Catholicism unable to make viable, unique, religious claims any longer. Seen under the harsh light of contemporary historical research and exegesis, the Gospels no longer support the apostolic preaching of Jesus as the Risen One, much less the Church's Christological traditions and dogmas. The bridge between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith has collapsed.

The Sheehan-Tracy discussion is a contemporary version of the Loisy-Blondel discussion of the same issue.¹¹⁰ If the foundation of faith and theology is an experience of Jesus as crucified and risen, we can expect still more replays of this debate unless and until theologians begin to articulate that experience in a publicly accessible and credible way. Now Dunne's method allows him to do precisely that. Passing over is a way by which one "makes contact with Jesus, becomes contemporary with

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 31.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 4.

¹⁰⁸ SG 9.

¹⁰⁹ David Tracy, "To Trust or Suspect," *Commonweal* 111 (1984) 533.

¹¹⁰ See Richard Resch, "The New Apologetics and Modernist Thought: The Case of A. Loisy and M. Blondel," privately printed for 1979 Annual Meeting, AAR. See also his *Christology As a Methodological Problem: A Study of the Correspondence between Maurice Blondel and Alfred Loisy, 1902-1903* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1975).

Jesus, and it is by coming back to himself that Jesus in turn becomes contemporary with him."¹¹¹ Passing over presumes and preserves Jesus' individuality. It avoids making Christianity an idea, a teaching, or an ethic, which sidesteps the scandal of Jesus' uniqueness. "And when it appears that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, as is said in the Gospel of John, . . . this will be because in the person of Jesus one somehow finds a light on the mystery of oneself and others, which one can find in no other person."¹¹²

Dunne's journey as method is also an experience of the Resurrection. He alludes to Paul's dictum "If Christ is not risen, our faith is vain." But the voyage of discovery, being led from insight to insight and from death in its many forms to life, shows that our faith is not vain. It is vindicated over and over again. Therefore, says Dunne, reversing Paul, Christ is risen.¹¹³ The way of faith is not the vicious circle of authority constituting revelation and revelation constituting authority, as Sheehan had claimed.¹¹⁴ The believer becomes contemporary with Jesus and the apostles by passing over, entering into his and, later, their trust in God as Abba. Like the apostles, the believer can live as Jesus did, fully trusting in God, and so come to accept that God raised him from the dead, that he is alive and with us and in us. "Jesus is alive. If we walk in his intimacy with God, if we follow him through loss and death, he is alive in us, we are alive in an eternal 'I and Thou.'"¹¹⁵

A journey in time with God can be the experience which constitutes the personal ground of faith. Dunne's method shows why and how one can hold both to the Jesus of history and to the Christ of faith, while fully maintaining the integrity of one's critical reason and of Jesus' individuality. It yields an awareness that is indispensable if theology is to be truly *logos* about *theos*¹¹⁶ and not simply hermeneutics. "In being known and being loved he sees himself entering into the intimacy of 'No one knows the Father except the Son.'"¹¹⁷

RESULTS

Passing over as sympathetic understanding appropriates the wisdom of the past for the present. Historical methods of inquiry treat the past

¹¹¹ *SG* xi.

¹¹² *SG* 7-8.

¹¹³ Review of W. Pannenberg's *Jesus, God and Man*, in *Commonweal* 94 (1968) 473.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Sheehan, "Revolution in the Church," *New York Review of Books* 31, no. 10 (June 14, 1984) 38.

¹¹⁵ *RH* 145.

¹¹⁶ Tracy, *Analogical Imagination* 51.

¹¹⁷ *RH* 66.

as a museum full of statues. But passing over brings the statues to life and makes the past contemporary.¹¹⁸ For example, it reveals how much the *Iliad* has to say on the issue of modern warfare, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* on the modern problem of death. Sympathetic understanding can even disclose the insights in notions that seemed at first strange or absurd. In Dunne's hands the Buddhist *anatta* or "no-self,"¹¹⁹ memory of previous existences, and the like lose their mystifying aura.

"Coming back," that inevitable return to one's own standpoint, puts not only one's self but also one's culture in a new light. Passing over to other ages engenders a different perspective on one's own; it reveals "the form of the forms of thought" and "the form of the forms of life"¹²⁰ and thus the particular problems and possibilities of understanding and relating to God characteristic of one's own time and standpoint. The results are seen most clearly in *SG*, where the contemporary form of the forms of life is the story of appropriation, and the stress on the self (the conscious, rational, controlling principle) is the chief obstacle to a relationship with God.

Yet a method is properly theological only insofar as it yields *logos* about *theos*, understanding of God. Dunne focuses on the standpoint, since every insight into God is always an insight from a determinate and relative standpoint. God is known only in a particular relationship to God.¹²¹ The particular questions one raises about God are always correlative to one's particular standpoint. Before the journey begins, when the heart's desire is weak and ineffectual, the question is "Is there a God?" When the spiritual adventure begins, the question changes to "What is God?" As the adventure gradually comes to be seen as a relationship with God, the question becomes "Who is God?" Through it all, however, God remains finally incomprehensible.¹²²

In an age characterized by the loss of spiritual mediation, passing over is seeking and finding mediators made conscious and explicit. Consequently, the "sources" of Dunne's theology are not often the typical ones of Scripture, dogma, Fathers, councils, and great figures of the theological traditions. Taken apart from the radical, pressing questions that come up in life, the "answers" found in these sources yield little genuine insight, in Dunne's sense, and thus are functionally little different from "common notions" about God. Now "we have a choice, if we wish to

¹¹⁸ *PT* 49.

¹¹⁹ *WAE* 56.

¹²⁰ *SG* 33.

¹²¹ *RH* 135; see also *MF* 301.

¹²² *RH* 134-36.

know God, between learning from the friends of God and learning from the common notion. I would choose to learn from the friends of God."¹²³

Given the moving standpoint from which Dunne works and the friends of God from whom he seeks insight, it is not surprising that the understandings of God in Dunne's theology should be very rich and complex. For example, God is "the creative power at work in man's life";¹²⁴ the unknown in the story of man;¹²⁵ the heart's desire;¹²⁶ Father, Son, and Spirit;¹²⁷ unknown and uncontrollable and dark;¹²⁸ the well-being of things.¹²⁹ Each of these and all his other understandings of God are coherently related to one another as discoveries on the journey that began with the issue of death.

CG ends with the realization that the only hope for satisfying the desire to live is the God who raised Jesus from the dead. *SG* elucidates that appropriation of Jesus' God which is passing over to Jesus and thus coming to relate to the dark God of the modern era as Abba. One enacts a relationship of trust in God not only for death but also for life. This leads to a confrontation with the "dark forces" in oneself and the issue of what can be done about them. *WAE* ends with the hope of transforming them and seeing them as ways by which God leads through life. Thus, God appears as "the creative power at work in man's life," who is, at first, simply the unknown in every stage of life until the task and transformation of that stage is complete.¹³⁰ Meditating upon that creative power and how it leads into a solitude and into relationships with others, one sees how one is led by desire in trust into an intimacy with God. The desire is really for God; God is the heart's desire.¹³¹

This is a moment of deepening insight as well as intimacy. Dunne quotes Kierkegaard to characterize this knowledge: "The simple man knows the essential, while the wise man little by little learns to know that he knows it, or learns to know that he does not know it."¹³² It is the knowledge of the heart which has become a guide for life. Being led from insight to insight, from stage to stage, from impasse to possibility is an experience of knowing and being known by God, of loving and being

¹²³ *RH* 2.

¹²⁴ *WAE* 228.

¹²⁵ *TM* 113.

¹²⁶ *CPD* 58.

¹²⁷ *RH* 48-49.

¹²⁸ *SG* 169-209.

¹²⁹ *HW* 75.

¹³⁰ *TM* 124-25.

¹³¹ *CPD* 58.

¹³² *CPD* 116.

loved by God. Passing over to Jesus and enacting his relationship of trust in Abba leads to standing in the place of the Son, caught up in the intimacy of "No one knows the Father except the Son." Passing over leads into and realizes the standpoint of the Son, which alone can yield genuine knowledge of God. It is a knowledge that stems from learning how God works and leads in life. Passing over engenders Christian theology as it discovers and articulates in a contemporary idiom the experience and vision that is the root of Christianity.

This essay began with a question: Is Dunne's a method in that strict sense described by Lonergan as "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results"? As we have seen, the operations (in drastically abbreviated form) are: waiting for the existential question to arise in feelings, seeking the images that express the feelings, sympathetic understanding, waiting for insight, living according to the new insight, sharing and communicating it. Dunne's seven books display the repetitions of this sequence. Each recurrence constitutes a step which "begins as a kindling of the heart and ends as an illumining of the mind."¹³³ Each step is intelligible as founded upon the previous one and leading to the next, that is, as stages on a journey or as moments in a story whose meaning is not fully clear till the end.

Like Lonergan's, the case for the normativity of the operations which comprise Dunne's method must rest finally on the extent to which the individual brings its elements to awareness and recognizes them as one's own. So normativity will be granted to Dunne's method insofar as the radically historical, individual character of one's standpoint is recognized; as passing from the standpoint of childhood to those of youth, adulthood, and perhaps age is recalled; as one appropriates "personal knowledge of personal ignorance" and recalls and enacts experiences of sympathetic understanding. Like Lonergan's, the most important test for ascertaining the method's normativity is private. It depends on the reader's willingness to accept Dunne's invitation to pass over with him.

"Results are progressive only if there is a sustained succession of discoveries; they are cumulative only if there is effected a synthesis of each new insight with all previous, valid insights."¹³⁴ Dunne's books, taken singly and together, express a succession of discoveries and each interlocks with what precedes and follows. This may not be apparent if the distinction between results in the natural sciences and results in the human sciences is overlooked. Rahner notes that results in the human

¹³³ RH 152.

¹³⁴ Lonergan, *Method* 6.

sciences can be understood and evaluated only if one personally participates in the discovery.¹³⁵ If there is no passing over with Dunne, the discovery of God as the heart's desire cannot be understood in its essential connection to God as the creative power at work in one's life, connected in turn to Abba, the God whom Jesus trusted and who raised him from the dead.

Theology in its perennial meaning is reasoned speech about God. Yet the contemporary period has imposed such stringent criteria upon this reasoned speech that theology in its traditional sense is a daunting task, to say the least. Theologians can be easily tempted to leave speech about God to the preachers, pastors, and spiritual writers and to redefine their task as exclusively that of interpreting sacred, doctrinal, and classical texts. Dunne has resisted that temptation. He has discovered a method by which experiences of the heart yield their light to the mind. Thus, he has become a genuine theologian, one who dares to speak of God.

¹³⁵ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 7.