HERITAGE AND DISCOVERY: A FRAMEWORK FOR MORAL THEOLOGY

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[In an effort to clarify foundational categories for moral theology, the author explores several polarities that have often been woven into discussions of moral formation. The first issue she addresses concerns the roles of socialization and autonomy, tradition and innovation, "heritage" and "discovery" in moral development. These principles of change are seen to be complementary rather than contradictory. She then engages the question of the distortion of development through sin, exploring the dialectic of authenticity and inauthenticity. Finally, she applies these categories and relations to the unfolding of moral theology with the Christian tradition, elucidating implications for Christian ethics today.]

T HE ENTERPRISE OF CONTEMPORARY Christian ethics is heir to multiple intellectual trends of the 20th century.[1] The "turn to the subject" has brought the human person as moral agent to center stage. In developmental psychology this has involved several generations of "stage development" theories, based on the structures of emerging cognitive, moral, and religious reasoning.[2] Reactions to these theories by some Christians have revolved around the radical reversal of conversion that lies at the heart of

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[1] This article emerges from a presentation made to the moral theology section of the *Catholic Theological Society of America,* June 9, 2000, in San Jose, California. It develops ideas I explored in an earlier article: "Development, Conversion, and Religious Education," *Horizons* 17 (1990) 30–46.

[2] See Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child,* trans. Marjorie Gabain (New York: Penguin, 1977; orig. ed. 1932); Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); and James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981). There are many approaches to moral and religious behavior and reasoning besides the structural development view. Nevertheless, these theories, and types of theories, have become commonly accepted. For

the gospel, in contrast to the organic models of growth inherent in the developmental approach.[3] Others have criticized the overly rational and male-oriented perspective of these theories.[4]

Within theology, the discipline of Christian ethics has followed its own alternating set of emphases—from H.R. Niebuhr's retrieval of the "responsible self"[5] to Barth's insistence on the priority of revelation and the importance of divine commands.[6] In the Roman Catholic world the work of Bernhard Häring in the 1950s signaled a shift from the manualist tradition, focused on an analysis of moral acts, to a consideration of the human person "adequately considered." This shift toward "personalism" has had its own further variations, while debates over deontology—moral action based on principles—and consequentialism, with its proportionalist variations, has engaged scholars in both Protestant and Roman Catholic circles.[7] Most recently, all of these conversations have benefited from a rediscovery of moral formation—a focus on "character" in Protestant discussions and a retrieval of "virtue" (especially in relation to the work of Aquinas) in the work of Roman Catholics.[8]

Throughout this modern evolution of thought—complete with its debates and dissonances—at least two ongoing dialectical polarities can be discerned in relation to the human person as a developing moral agent. First, there is the question of the individual and his or her conscience over

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a recent discussion of these matters in relation to moral theology, see William C. Spohn, "Conscience and Moral Development," *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 122–38.

[3] See, for example, Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character* (New York: Paulist, 1981) and Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education Development* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1983) and *No Ladder to the Sky* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

[4] See, for example, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1982). See also Spohn, "Conscience" 131–35.

[5] See R. H. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

[6] On Barth's ethics, see Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University, 1993). For an approach that tries to retrieve ethics from a divine command perspective, see Richard Mouw, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990).

[7] See, for example, Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993; orig. ed. 1950), and his *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (New York: Scribners, 1967); Richard McCormick, *The Critical Calling* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1989).

[8] See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981); and Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990). See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981) and Nancey Murphy, Brad Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation, ed., *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity International, 1997).

against the influence of a community of faith. Which takes priority: autonomy and the personal discovery of right and wrong, or adaptation to the inherited, revealed, moral wisdom of the past?

Second, there is the question of the organic unfolding of moral skills and reasoning in relation to the radical about-face—the *metanoia*—that reverses all we thought was good in light of the encounter with the risen Christ. While the Christian community has the task of directing native development toward Christian values, the heart of the gospel involves a confrontation with the *failure* of our moral efforts in order to be transformed into an entirely new, Spirit-filled, horizon.

The purpose of my article is to address these concerns by presenting a set of terms and relations that will clarify some of the issues involved. I aim to put forth a model of moral formation that incorporates both socialization and personal quest, naturalistic development, and a theology of sin and conversion. I then present what I perceive to be some important implications for further work in Christian ethics.

THE TWO-PRONGED NATURE OF "DEVELOPMENT"

Discovery

One of the key elements in the modern understanding of the human person is the notion of a dynamism inherent to human flourishing. In contrast to earlier views of the human child as merely a smaller version of an adult, or of a human person as a blank slate upon which elder and wiser generations can write, the common Western culture of this century has emphasized the self-agency of each and every person. From Montessori schools to Dr. Benjamin Spock, presumptions that each child is on a quest to enact her or his own potential powers of reason and choice have carried the day.

This "upward mobility" is foundational to theories of human development. Early in the 20th-century research into moral behavior revealed the failure of moral and religious education to inculcate lasting character traits, such as honesty, self-control, and service.[9] At the same time, the Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, introduced "genetic epistemology" and a whole new approach to cognitive and moral development emerged. Rather than testing behavior, or presuming that didactic teaching would inculcate values, Piaget set out to think like a child—to observe and consult with chil-

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[9] See Hugh Hartshorne and Mark Arthur May, *Studies in the Nature of Character.* vol. 1: *Studies in Deceit;* vol. 2: *Studies in Self-Control;* vol. 3: *Studies in the Organization of Character* (New York: Macmillan, 1928–1930). See also Kohlberg's discussion of this work, what he calls the "bag of virtues" approach, in *Philosophy of Moral Development* 31–35; 183–84.

dren to see how they themselves understood reality and goodness. He discovered, through careful and painstaking study, that children have radically different ways of construing their worlds at different ages and stages of life.

A few examples will serve to illustrate this. Between the ages of four and seven, children discover what Piaget called "conservation." He would show children a beaker filled with colored liquid. He would then pour this liquid into a container of a different shape or size, for example, into a petri dish. When he questioned children as to whether the beaker held the same amount of liquid as the petri dish, younger children were adamant about the answer: absolutely not! The beaker, which showed a higher level of liquid, held more than the petri dish, with its low-lying profile. Over time children would move through a transitional phase in which they were unsure of the answer, until, around the age of six, children finally grasped the conservation of volume—that volume remains the same over a variety of different-looking situations.[10]

With regard to moral development, Piaget presented children with various moral dilemmas. In one case he told two stories, one about a child who, when called for dinner, rushed into the dining room without knowing that a tray of crystal glass sat on a table behind the door. The glasses came crashing down, making a huge mess. In the second story, a child tries to get some jam out of the kitchen cupboard while his mother is away. In the process, he knocks over a cup and it falls to the floor and breaks. When asked who is naughtier and why, younger children will claim that the first child has committed a worse crime, based on the volume of mess that he made. It is not until around the age of eight that children begin assigning blame based on intention and objective responsibility rather than quantitative damage.[11]

Piaget's work in this latter area was later refined and developed by Lawrence Kohlberg.[12] While these theories have been criticized and further revised, my objective here is not to present such theories but to point to the foundational anthropology that underlies them. What these theories initiated was a whole field of human developmental psychology, in which the following assumptions are now taken for granted:

[10] See Nathan Isaacs, *A Brief Introduction to Piaget* (New York: Schocken Books, 1960) chap. 3. The primary text on this is Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of Number,* trans. G. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson (New York: Humanities, 1952).

[11] Piaget, *Moral Judgment* 115–33. See also Ronald Duska and Mariellen Whelan, *Moral Development: A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg,* chap. 1 and app. 1.

[12] See Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development,* and Duska and Whelan, *Moral Development,* chap. 2 and app. 2.

1. Learning is the fruit of an *innate capacity* and exigency to interact with one's world in order to understand it and act upon it.
2. The actualization of such a capacity comes through *interaction* between a child/adult and his world. It is not merely a matter of automatic organic development nor is it a matter of imposing a set of given truths on an empty mind.
3. Learning involves different and *discrete stages* of reasoning. Each stage involves a distinct way of structuring reality and processing information. The stages form a hierarchy in which later stages depend on the skills and structures of earlier stages.
4. Although developmental theory first focused on stages of reasoning, the field has expanded to recognize the development of affectivity, symbol making, social role-taking, and a sense of self and agency.

Let me add to this fundamental dynamism captured in developmental theory, work from another venue entirely. This is the epistemological work of the Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard J.F. Lonergan. His work exhibits the modern turn to the subject in contemporary theology by focusing on theology as an ongoing process rather than as a permanent achievement. Piaget marks the move from moral education as the inculcation of rules onto a passive agent to moral development as the interactive unfolding of capacities of human reason. Likewise, Lonergan shifts the focus in theology from a set of doctrines and principles to a process of questioning and discovery. This process yields cumulative and progressive results and involves a method that, rather than being a set of rules to be followed blindly, is a framework for creativity.[13]

Lonergan claims that human consciousness is divided into distinct types of operations, which occur spontaneously to yield cumulative and progressive results. At a primary level, there is *experience,* which is the mere data of our fives senses or that arises from our consciousness itself (memories, images, previous insights, knowledge gained through trusting others). This

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[13] See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1972), Introduction. What counts here is not just what Lonergan says about theology and theologians, but that his work on theological method presents a basic anthropology of human discovery. He does not rely on observation and experiment in the way of Piaget, but uses a generalized empirical method to show that human persons are dynamically oriented toward interacting with, understanding, and changing their worlds. All persons, he claims, use the same pattern of recurrent and related operations to interact with their worlds. This pattern can be verified, not by observing "every Tom, Dick, and Harry," but through each person being attentive to what they are doing while they are doing it—what Lonergan calls "self-appropriation." For the reference to "Tom, Dick, and Harry," see Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957) xviii. On "self-appropriation," see Lonergan, *Method* 6–7, 13–16, 83–85.

experience is the matter with which two further types of operations are engaged. First, through questions for *understanding,* an individual comes to discern some intelligible, coherent pattern in the evidence at hand. If, while listening to a lecture, one hears a beeping sound, one spontaneously tries to make sense out of the experience—it could be a cell phone, a pager, a fire alarm, a garbage truck backing up, a french fry machine whose timer has gone off. All of these lend coherence to what is otherwise a merely coincidental set of sounds.

Still, even a quick read of the options above reveals that not all of these possibilities can be correct. Beyond questions for understanding, there is the innate quest to understand *accurately.* So, in addition to experience and understanding, human persons seek to make *judgments* among the array of possible explanations discovered in the data. Based on the empirical grounds of the experience at hand (or held in memory), we come to the point where some explanations are ruled out of court while others become more and more likely. If enough evidence is available, so that any further questions we have on the matter dry up, we can determine clearly—yes, there is a fire alarm sounding in the building.

Beyond questions of fact, we routinely are involved in another set of questions, having to do with value and *deliberating* on how we should act. Sometimes these questions come first, leading us to seek out the facts. Other times a judgment of fact sets the question for deliberation: having determined that there is, indeed, a fire alarm sounding in the building, I question what action I should take: jump out the window? run down the hallway toward the nearest stairwell? do nothing, assuming that I am safest where I am? Regardless of the concrete situation, the fact remains that, distinct from yet related to determinations of fact, we spontaneously engage in questions of evaluation: what should I do?

While much more could be said to refine and expand on this position on human consciousness, a few salient points can be noted here. First, there is the spontaneity of human consciousness in noticing the world around (and within) us and in seeking to understand it and act upon it. The key word is spontaneity—though older generations may teach us the tools of inquiry and train us in the refinement of our queries, no one needs to tell us to ask questions about, to wonder at, to try to make sense of our worlds. Second, these operations are progressive and cumulative in their effects. The answer to one set of questions leads to a new set of questions. These questions in turn can affect the kinds of evidence we seek or pay attention to. The isolation of a gene related to breast cancer will provide hints as to the proteins that inhibit or promote cancer growth. Understanding how these proteins function in living cells will further narrow the range of possible genes involved in certain cancers. So, the dynamism of human conscious-

ness is energized by a native wonder which, when satisfied, spurs on and contributes to further investigation.[14]

Heritage

I have used both developmental theory and the work of Lonergan to illustrate the dynamism of discovery—the fact that all persons are oriented toward interacting with, understanding, valuing, and creating their worlds of meaning. This is an utterly fundamental point—that the human person is an agent of discovery: she both knows and creates her world. It is fundamental to any modern notion of moral formation, and, hence, to the work of contemporary moral theology, since it grounds both in the concrete operating of the human person.

Nevertheless, this dynamism and discovery is only a portion of the story. Lonergan gives an important hint in this regard in several of his later articles. In "Healing and Creating in History" he refers to two different kinds of development—that "from below upwards" and that "from above downwards":

For human development is of two quite different kinds. There is development from below upwards, from experience to growing understanding, from growing understanding to balanced judgment, from balanced judgment to fruitful courses of action, and from fruitful courses of action to the new situations that call forth further understanding, profounder judgment, richer courses of action.

But there is also development from above downwards. There is the transformation of falling in love: the domestic love of the family; the human love of one's tribe, one's city, one's country, mankind; the divine love that orientates man in his cosmos and expresses itself in his worship.[15]

This hint points toward the fact that, in addition to discovery and the innate unfolding of the human capacity to know and create, there is the pre-existing family, tribe, city, state, religion into which every person is born. We are born into a set of cultural meanings that are given to us long before we act upon or create our own meanings. This "givenness" needs to

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[14] Note that Lonergan's "levels" of operations, here described, are not the same as Piaget's or Kohlberg's "stages." The operations that Lonergan outlines function myriad times in a single day, are cumulative, progressive, and repetitive. "Stages" as outlined by developmental theory serve as benchmarks over a much longer time span. A person moves through the stages only once, and cannot go back and repeat stages of thought whereas the operations Lonergan elucidates are necessarily repetitive—the operations occur over and over again, while the content (what one is asking about or seeking to understand) changes depending on the situation.

[15] Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History," in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J.,* ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985), 106.

be taken into any account of "development" lest our understanding of moral agency be lopsided.

In another article Lonergan speaks of both development and the handing on of development:

Development may be described, if a spatial metaphor is permitted, as "from below upwards": it begins from experience, is enriched by full understanding, is accepted by sound judgment, is directed not to satisfaction but to values. . . .[T]he handing on of development . . . works from above downwards: it begins in the affectivity of the infant, the child, the son, the pupil, the follower. On affectivity rests the apprehension of values. On the apprehension of values rests belief. On belief follows the growth in understanding of one who has found a genuine teacher and has been initiated into the study of the masters of the past. Then to confirm one's growth in understanding comes experience made mature and perceptive by one's developed understanding.[16]

This recognition of development "from above downwards" has its counterpart in the research of the human sciences. In addition to the cognitive-structural theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, and others, psychologists such as Norma Haan and Albert Bandura began in the 1960s to study the role of social interaction in moral formation. Heirs to both behaviorist and Freudian theory, the "social learning school" created experimental situations in which the role of social interaction in creating moral behavior could be observed. Haan concluded that social dissonance was as formative as cognitive dissonance.[17] Bandura developed the notion of "modeling" and showed that, even at a preconscious level, we learn moral behaviors through observing and imitating authority figures and/or significant others.[18]

In sociology this work has its counterpart in theories of socialization. Symbolic interactions not only pass on knowledge but create identity as children become social agents in a given context. Perhaps none has captured this important aspect of socialization as well as Berger and Luckmann in their classic work *The Social Construction of Reality:*

The primary knowledge about the institutional order is knowledge on the pre-

[16] Lonergan, "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," *Third Collection* 180–81.

[17] See Norma Haan, Eliane Aerts, Bruce A. B. Cooper, *On Moral Grounds: The Search for Practical Morality* (New York: New York University, 1985).

[18] See Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1986). See also Joan E. Grusec, "Social Learning Theory and Developmental Psychology: The Legacies of Robert Sears and Albert Bandura," *Developmental Psychology* 28 (1992) 776–89. Both Haan and Bandura are discussed in Timothy E. O'Connell, *Making Disciples: A Handbook of Christian Moral Formation* (New York, Crossroad, 1998) 79–82, 91–94.

theoretical level. It is the sum total of "what everybody knows" about a social world, an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths, and so forth. . . .[19] Knowledge, in this sense, is at the heart of the fundamental dialectic of society. It "programs" the channels in which externalization produces an objective world. It objectifies this world through language and the cognitive apparatus based on language, that is, it orders it into objects to be apprehended as reality. . . .[20] Again, the same body of knowledge is transmitted to the next generation. It is learned as objective truth in the course of socialization and thus internalized as subjective reality.[21]

Note the parallels here with Lonergan's "development from above." In this case development works from the social group to the individual. Rather than beginning with some experience that initiates a set of questions, the person is drawn, through affectivity, to the acceptance of certain values. The infant, the son, the pupil, the follower, is attracted to someone (or group) at the affective and pre-theoretical level. Through this attraction, the person ascribes to his mentor, teacher, parent, friend, or social institution, a great deal of value. On this positive evaluation rests belief. Out of trust the child or pupil accepts as true whatever his parent/mentor or social world tells him. Truths are handed down and accepted out of love, affection, and loyalty. Explanations of truths are equally accepted as given, not because of the logic of the explanation but due to fidelity to the one doing the explaining.

An important point is at stake here. Though much of what we know and value we have discovered for ourselves, Lonergan and others are here pointing out that a good deal, if not most, of what we know and value, we receive from others. In addition to "immanently generated knowledge" there is the "knowledge born of belief."[22] The genesis of this knowledge

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[19] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) 65.
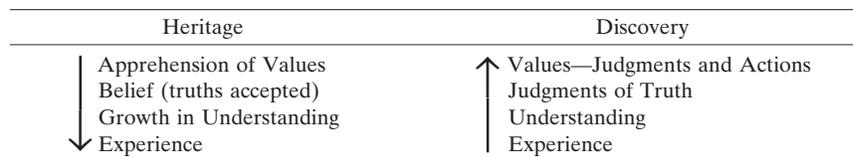
[20] Ibid. 66.

[21] Ibid. 67. Of course, in citing these various sources in sociology or psychology I am giving a merely cursory nod to questions and issues that are very complex. Various schools of thought in both psychology and sociology differ greatly on their views of the human person, on questions about the possibility of objective knowledge, on their understandings of morality, etc. My point here, as it was in citing Piaget and others earlier, is that these theories mark a trend in 20th-century thought. I use them only to set up a framework of categories that one can then use to understand both moral formation and the tasks of moral theology.

[22] See Lonergan, *Method* 41–47. This section, entitled "Beliefs" begins with the following sentence: "To appropriate one's social, cultural, religious heritage is largely a matter of belief." Many scholarly fans of Lonergan's work have been so taken with his epistemology (of "discovery") that this aspect of Lonergan's thought has been often overlooked. One exception would be Frederick E. Crowe, *Old Things and New: A Strategy for Education* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985). It is Crowe from whom I have borrowed the term "heritage" to designate one aspect of de-

and these values lies not in the innate questioning of the human person but in the primordial intersubjectivity of persons. We "fall in love" and thus accept as true and valuable what our loved ones tell us (or model for us).

Thus, in order to understand adequately moral formation or development, one has to recognize two aspects of the unfolding of human character. On the one hand, the upward dynamism of innate curiosity is operative. On the other hand, and at the same time, there are the dynamics of culture as given—the transmission of meaning and value through an equally innate intersubjectivity. These two phenomena operate under the same schema of distinct types of consciousness—valuing, judging truth, understanding, and experiencing—only in different "directions." One movement is driven by love, loyalty, and commitment while the other finds its impetus in curiosity and the "pure desire to know."[23] "Development" it turns out works in two directions at once. Let us term these two trajectories "heritage" and "discovery." These two aspects of development can be diagramed thus:

Heritage	Discovery
Apprehension of Values	↑ Values—Judgments and Actions
Belief (truths accepted)	Judgments of Truth
Growth in Understanding	Understanding
↓ Experience	Experience

One can note a few things about the relationship between these two principles of development. First, although both factors are at work throughout the life cycle, there is a certain chronology here. The way of heritage is our socialization into culture and is most operative in infancy and childhood. An infant, while curious, even prior to language development, is most dependent on the world around her to provide not only sustenance but affection. This affection becomes the ground of trust from which the child, through symbols, fantasy, play, and questioning, learns to exercise her tools of discovery.[24] But while these tools of discovery are emerging the child depends on the knowledge gained by being told. Developmental theory bears this out—for young children truth and goodness lie in authorities external to themselves. Until the child reaches the "age of

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velopment and to whom I am indebted for inspiring many of the salient ideas in this article.

[23] Note that, in either direction, the whole thing is driven by affectivity. While Lonergan's work has often been portrayed as overly cognitive, to the neglect of the affective dimensions of consciousness, the entire process of discovery and learning is grounded in the pure *desire* to know.

[24] The work of Erik Erikson explores this process. See, for example, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963; orig. ed. 1950) esp. chap. 7.

reason" and learns to think for himself, meaning and value, reality and morality, are defined by the powers that be in his world.

As childhood progresses, all other things being equal, the child learns the tools of discovery and learns how to use them to discover truth and value for herself.[25] So the primary focus of development moves gradually from the way of heritage to the way of discovery. Still, the "age of reason" is elusive and a strict chronology does not adequately define the relationship involved here. While at young ages heritage and socialization are more operative, and while the pendulum gradually swings toward the greater autonomy of discovery and achievement, the two processes are never separate, nor does one replace the other. Rather, the two movements fall into a dialectical relationship, which Lonergan describes as involving "linked but opposed principles of change."[26]

Second, then, not only are there are two principles of change in development, and not only do they have a general chronology to them, they are linked in a complementary tension of opposition. The opposition is apparent when, particularly at certain ages and stages, the two trajectories come into conflict. Piaget and Kohlberg call this "disequilibrium" while Erikson centers his stages around "crises." Surely the most obvious of such conflicts is exemplified by adolescence and the need to separate from one's family of origin. Similar crises of dissonance with the "givenness" of cultural expectations can occur later in mid-life, while all growth toward autonomy—from the terrible twos on up—involves some "discovery of discovery" which will necessarily challenge received beliefs and values. Still, such major or minor moments of disequilibrium do not detract from the overall complementary relationship between these two trajectories. Heritage and discovery, socialization and achievement, conscience and community are not, ultimately, in conflict.

THE NEED FOR CONVERSION

Yet another element needs to be incorporated into this model. While I have described development as the work of two complementary actions "from above" and "from below," the harmony between the two depends on the caveat "all other things being equal." And we know that in most, if not

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[25] Though more will be said on this in due course, note that the "all things being equal" is not trivial here. The "all things" include adequate housing, nourishment, safety and security. In communities that lack these resources, children are not afforded the "luxury" of education and discovery. Thus "learning the tools of discovery" has a concrete material basis. It is not simply a matter of pedagogy and educational philosophy.

[26] See Lonergan, *Insight* 217 ff.

all, cases, all other things are not equal. Both heritage and human aspirations can become distorted.

Lonergan alludes to this in the same passage that we quoted above about development and the handing on of development. Both, he says, can be incomplete:

> But development is incomplete when it does not go the whole way upwards: it accepts some values but its evaluations are partial; or it is not concerned with values at all but only with satisfactions; or its understanding may be adequate but its factual judgments faulty; or finally its understanding may be more a compromise than a sound contribution. . . .

> It remains that the process of handing on can be incomplete. There occur socialization, acculturation, education, but education fails to come to life. Or the teacher may at least be a believer. He can transmit enthusiasm. He can teach the accepted formulations. He can persuade. But he never really understood and he is not capable of giving others the understanding that he himself lacks. Then it will be only by accident that his pupils come to appropriate what was sound in their tradition, and it is only by such accidents, or divine graces, that a tradition that has decayed can be renewed.[27]

While Lonergan uses the somewhat benign term "incomplete," what he is alluding to is more properly called "sin" in theological terms. The most important thing to note about this element of sin is that it is operative in both of the trajectories. Surely we understand sin as the hubris of human aspiration and achievement. It is the subject of the primordial story of the Garden of Eden and has been at the heart of the Judeo-Christian story ever since. Still, as I have been at pains to show, human persons are embedded from the beginning in communities of meaning, in intersubjective relations whose influence long precedes the development and exercise of discovery and choice. Thus Lonergan elaborates on the incompleteness of the "handing on of development" to elucidate what others have designated "social sin."

A cyclical process unfolds. The agents of culture—parents, teachers, leaders, and mentors—while exercising their powers of discovery, can cut off the process so that it is incomplete. Another term Lonergan uses elsewhere is "biased," meaning that one questions and pursues truth and values only up to the point at which one's own interests are likely to be threatened. Once it becomes apparent that curiosity and longing may demand the sacrifice of satisfaction in favor of true value, one draws back. This "incompletelness," "bias," or "sin" then has an impact on the next generation. Because infants and children grant such loyalty and trust to their caregivers, errors, distortions, biases, fears, will be passed on easily. Without

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[27] Lonergan, "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," in *Third Collection* 180–81.

the tools to think for themselves, children will be particularly vulnerable to such distortions and will learn to defend lies as ultimate truths, to feel passionately about their prejudices, to devote themselves to causes that are self-destructive. Such distortions become embedded in the structures that govern the economy, and orient political and educational systems, until the distortion is unrecognizable.[28]

Thus, while human development involves both heritage and discovery, human flourishing is not just a matter of organic unfolding but requires conversion. The cyclical pattern of distortion turns a complementary relationship into a destructive one with ever diminishing returns. Since the insights and choices needed to correct such distorted cycles depend on a heritage which itself is flawed and on tools of discovery and discernment that are skewed, efforts to fix the system just make it worse. The Christian answer to this dilemma is, of course, grace—the grace of God as always available yet especially manifest in Jesus of Nazareth who was raised from the dead. Nothing less than the radical reversal of death and new life—of failure and renewal—can allow human development to go forward toward its goal.

While much could be said about this process of reversal and its role in moral formation, let me highlight a few important points that are often misunderstood. First, as I have already explained, the relationship between heritage and discovery is fundamentally a complementary one. While these form a "dialectical" relationship, in which "linked but opposed principles of change" are involved, the opposition is not one of contradiction. That is, the tension between the two is one that requires balance and integration rather than battle and victory. Authentic development is not a matter of "discovery" somehow overtaking or "conquering" heritage. Nor is the reverse true—that one's life of faith or growth in morals will be valid to the degree that one reins in rampant inquiry and hearkens in loyalty to the tradition. Both the influence of culture, tradition, and family and the innate

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[28] Note that one of the most devastating cycles of distortion occurs when what gets passed on are distorted beliefs about knowledge and discovery themselves. Since the tools of discovery need to be acquired (though curiosity is innate) it is the role of socializing agents to teach learning skills and a sense of competence. If such persons convey the message that children—or persons of certain races or genders or social classes—are incapable of learning, or deny learners access to the resources of education, the development of these persons will be skewed at its very core. For this reason education and literacy are vital to true democracy, while dictators do everything in their power to deny these to the masses. For more on the importance of "the discovery of discovery," see Crysdale, "Women and the Social Construction of Self-Appropriation," in *Lonergan and Feminism,* ed. Cynthia Crysdale (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1994) 88–113. See also my volume: *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum, 1999) chap. 4.

curiosity that propels inquiry will remain operative in one's human development until death.

Second, conversion is, thus, not simply a matter of moving from one pole to the other. It is not the case that, in conversion, one moves from a distorted heritage to an enlightened, newly found agency. It is true that most radical shifts in horizon reveal the errors, distortions, and dysfunctional relations of one's culture/family/religion of origin. It is also true that conversional moments—whether gradual or episodic—usually yield a new power of choice and creativity. On the other hand, to those who rediscover the richness of their heritage in adult life it can seem that pride is the culprit and that submission of understanding and will to authority is the solution to the problem of evil. Nevertheless, to locate authenticity or, if you like, orthodoxy, as the exclusive domain of either "heritage" or "discovery" is to misconstrue the complementary nature of the relationship between the two as if it were adversarial.

Third, the distinctions I am proposing seek to correct this erroneously conceived conflict. It is true that in addition to the organic but two-pronged unfolding of human development—affective, cognitive, and spiritual— there is, due to sin, the need for conversion and renewal. However, *both* our worlds of inherited meaning *and* our independent creativity can be and are distorted, in an irretrievably complex way. These are both so confused, in fact, as to require nothing less than the action of God—the work of grace—to realign them.

Thus, conversion is not *from* heritage *to* discovery, nor its opposite. Rather, conversion and grace are operative in healing and reorienting both sides of the developmental equation. And, like alienation and sin, healing will have a cyclical and cumulative effect. New insights, reoriented affectivity, a new apprehension of the transcendent, will lead to choices and actions that will restructure institutions, devise new liturgies, halt paths of destruction, open up new possibilities for others. These new religio-cultural options will, in turn, heighten the probability that others will encounter the transcendent, be attracted to authentic living, have the insights necessary for healing. The point is that conversion, grace, and healing must be operative in reorienting, or rediscovering the best of the tradition as well as in reorienting the aspirations of the human spirit.

Note, then, that there are two different types of relationship going on when both development and conversion/grace are taken into account. Operative in development, of individuals and communities, is the complementary dialectic between heritage and discovery. These two principles of change are not contradictory and the resolution of the tension between them requires integration and realignment rather than a suppression of one by the other.

In addition to this dialectic, yet distinct from it, there is the dialectic

between authenticity and inauthenticity. In theological language, this is the relation between righteousness and sin, between good and evil. Just as in the heritage/discovery relation, these two are in tension with one another. But the tension, the dialectic involved, is of a very different sort. When it comes to good and evil, there is an excluded middle, and the resolution of any tension is not a matter of integration and balance but of the overcoming of one by the other.[29] Either something is true or it is false, either something is good or it is not. This is a dialectic of contradictories that involves a radical shift in horizon in order for change to occur. Within this kind of dialectic, change occurs only through the dramatic about-face of conversion.[30]

In sum, I have been presenting a model in which moral formation (human development generally) needs to account for both the influence of culture as well as the role of the individual in discovering truth and cultivating value. I have added to this a theology of sin and grace, noting that the distortion of sin affects both heritage and discovery. Likewise, conversion and renewal involve both the realignment of the powers of creativity as well as a discernment of the authentic and inauthentic aspects of a tradition. Finally, I have pointed out that the relationship between heritage and discovery is, at root, a complementary one (though it may need realignment) while the relation between sin and grace, authenticity and inauthenticity is a contradictory one. Most important is the point that the shift of horizon needed in conversion is not a matter of rejecting heritage in favor of discovery nor its opposite. Revision, retrieval, and renewal are all absolutely necessary but the point is to create an integrated and authentic interaction between tradition and autonomy rather than to conquer one with the other. Such realignment will heighten the probability that authentic personal and communal development can go forward and that the needed conversions will occur.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MORAL THEOLOGY

If theology is faith seeking understanding then moral theology is faith seeking authentic living. Which is to say that Christian ethics begins in an encounter with the divine and moves to reflection on the implications of

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[29] Note that this is a distinct philosophical point in itself. Other perspectives insist that good and evil are, in fact, caught in a complementary relationship. One of the distinctive aspects of the Christian tradition is its view that good and evil are in radical opposition.

[30] Robert M. Doran has made explicit these two distinct meanings of "dialectic" within Lonergan's work. For more on the dialectic of "contraries" and "contradictories" see Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990) 9–10, and chap. 3.

this new horizon for living. So moral theology must surely take account of conversion as absolutely foundational to its enterprise.

Still, when it comes to reflection on conversion, on faith and its implications, both heritage and discovery are necessarily operative. Whatever shift from inauthenticity to authenticity is involved (primarily moral, explicitly religious, small steps or dramatic reversals), it takes place within a concrete place and time, within a specific, materially operative, communal set of meanings and values. So working out the implications of faith for concrete living involves using the powers of discovery to interact with the heritage of culture.

Primary to the Christian tradition is the historical fact of Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection. To be more precise, the foundations of Christianity lie in the experience and conviction of early Christians that Jesus, though he had died on a Roman cross as a common criminal, was alive and present in their midst. That God had indeed done something quite extraordinary, that this miraculous event had changed their lives forever, that God was continuing to alter their lives, they did not doubt. Just what this meant in terms of their understanding of God, of Jesus, and of themselves had to be worked out. Likewise, they had to undertake the task of determining just how this new stance of faith in Jesus was to be manifested in their lives.

Because there was no "Christian moral theology," no body of accumulated wisdom over how to act authentically as a Christian, the first generation of Christians had to think on their feet. In this way, early Christian moral theology relied more heavily on the autonomy and discovery aspect of development than on the heritage of tradition.

Still, the early Christians, individually and in different geographical and cultural groups, all had some heritage within which their conversions had taken place. So the New Testament gives us snapshots of moral theology as the interaction between tradition and creativity. With regard to the Jewish tradition, one of the first aspects of heritage that had to be incorporated, revised, or rejected was the practice of circumcision. Though we tend to hear only one side of the conversation (St. Paul's) it is clear that some Christians felt that authentic application of faith meant adopting the Jewish laws and their ritual practices. In contrast, Paul came to the conclusion that, while such laws and their practices had had their place at an earlier stage of God's plan, incorporating them now into Christian practice would stifle the freedom that new converts had discovered in Christ. Paul thus opts for a radical revision of the Jewish heritage—making baptism rather than circumcision the mark of entrance into the new horizon of Christian faith.[31]

We get another snapshot of such heritage/discovery interaction in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Here, the tradition to be dealt with involves

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[31] On this topic, see Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

cultic practices in the mystery religions. The new Corinthian Christians are wondering whether, by eating meat sacrificed to idols, they are in some way paying homage to false gods. Apparently, it is clear to them that participating in such sacrifices is definitely contradictory to their newfound faith in Christ. But they remain confused about whether going to market and buying a roast of lamb that has been butchered after such a sacrifice, and serving it at dinner, is contrary to authentic Christian practice.

In this case we, literally, have just one side of the conversation. Nevertheless, Paul's answer illustrates the creative aspect of moral theology. We see Paul trying to accommodate the cultural context (heritage) of these new Christians while allowing them freedom to discern their own authenticity. His answer goes something like this: *If you recognize that these idols are not gods at all (since Christ is the only God), then of course the meat sacrificed to these gods has no sacral significance and you can eat it in good conscience.* Paul leaves the decision up to the autonomous conscience of the believer. He does add this caveat, however: *There are some who are still unsure about the meaning of these sacrifices and grant them more significance than they deserve. Since these believers have weak consciences you ought to accommodate them out of love and refrain from eating such meat when in their presence.* Paul's finesse is obvious here—he clearly rejects the pagan rituals as inauthentic, yet asserts and affirms the newly discovered freedom of these Christians, while remaining sensitive to the power of older traditions in the lives of other new Christians (1 Corinthians 8:1–13).

In another fascinating example, Paul responds to a different query over pagan rituals in Christian's lives. In this case, it appears that some of the Corinthian Christians have been participating in fertility rites, involving sexual relations with temple prostitutes. Their rationale, in line with their Hellenistic heritage, is that their freedom in Christ is a spiritual freedom, leaving their bodies untouched and making anything they do with their bodies incidental to their faith. Here, Paul is adamant—such practices are absolutely outside the realm of acceptability. Though speaking to a Greek constituency he hearkens back to a fundamental Jewish principle—the wholistic integration of spirit and matter. To be a Christian is to be a Christian whole—spirit and body both belong to Christ. To make one's body part of a prostitute is to violate this utterly complete participation in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:12–20).

These examples serve to illustrate the following. Religious experience is fundamental to moral theology, which is a reflection on how faith applies to concrete living. The early Christian experience of resurrection and conversion meant that the Christian church had to do a lot of creative discovery in discerning the nature of authentic Christian living. Though there was not a "Christian" heritage to rely on, this nascent moral theology nevertheless emerged as a dialectic between tradition and innovation.

A further point is that it was just such an interaction that then *became* the Christian tradition. The insights of new Christians, the testing of these insights in a variety of circumstances, the ongoing new challenges arising with missionary success or failure, came gradually to be recorded, preserved, and handed on as resources of wisdom for future generations of Christians. This emerging tradition was eventually collected in the written texts of Christian Scripture, while at the same time the Christian community developed leadership structures and pedagogical and pastoral practices that passed wisdom on to the young.

So in our present situation we have quite a collection of resources to inform our own attempts to live authentically in light of our Christian faith. Many of us, in contrast to those of the early Church, have discovered Christian faith through socialization (heritage) rather than through conversion. But this social heritage of our faith does not obviate the need to appropriate it for ourselves through choice and discovery, nor does it eliminate sin and the need for grace. Nor does it change the task of moral theology. Our challenge today is to apply faith to living, and this application will necessarily involve engaging self-consciously in the interaction between heritage and discovery and in the discernment of authenticity or inauthenticity in both.

Several important points are involved here. First, the "tradition" is the collective record of the insights and discoveries of Christians of the past. The tradition, including Scripture, has not fallen from the sky as whole cloth. We have designated certain texts and certain offices and certain practices as particularly significant, even sacred. We do believe that God, through the Spirit, has continued to reveal God's self in these artifacts and so we consider them, in addition to Jesus himself, as the loci of God's revelation. Nevertheless, the vehicle of such revelation lies in the concrete insights and codified discoveries of real people in particular and peculiar places, times, and cultures.

This simply means that if we are to undertake the task of applying the wisdom of the tradition to our current situation, then we must do it by understanding the questions that were being asked by those who initially had the insights. Though we might believe that the wisdom of the past is applicable to today, we cannot treat the tradition—whether doctrinal statements, conciliar creeds, scriptural texts, or traditional practices—as merely a set of truths independent of the circumstances in which they were discovered. We must examine narratives and propositions and comprehend just what the concerns of the original Christians, the challenges of the original cultures, were. We must get behind the answers that are given to the questions that were asked. The validity of the answers and their usefulness to us today will depend on our discovering the common ground between previous Christians' lives and our own queries.

A second and related point is that moral principles are useful only to the degree that one can determine correctly whether and how such principles meet the exigencies of the moment. Principles, often encountered in the form of proverbs, are generalizations about a concrete set of similar circumstances. After experiencing the ill consequences of making a series of rash decisions, someone coined the advice: "Look before you leap." As useful as this advice may be, as an abstract generalization it tells us little about what to do in the here and now. This application requires further insights: does the current situation match the kinds of situations out of which this advice arose? Perhaps the current situation fits more adequately another set of circumstances, out of which some other wise woman announced, "She who hesitates is lost."

The point is that no matter how rich, nor even how authentic a tradition is, its usefulness depends on the ability of current individuals correctly to apply the proverbs, laws, and principles of the past to concrete situations in the present. Thus the task of moral theology is not only to preserve, retrieve, and announce the wisdom of heritage but it is, perhaps more importantly, adequately to apply this wisdom, through the operations of discovery, to current situations. Since we are increasingly faced with situations that have little or no counterpart in the experience of past Christians, this task of application is becoming more and more complex. Nevertheless, it is better to undertake the difficult but creative dialectic between heritage and discovery than to limit the field to either the anachronistic exercise of trying to fit current experience into the mold of previous cultures or the utterly relativistic stance that rejects any wisdom from the past.

CONCLUSION

I have presented here several key points about human development, sin, and conversion. First, there is the phenomenological point that human moral development involves both receiving beliefs and values from others as well as a creative quest for truth and value. Secondly, I maintained that the relationship between these processes of heritage and discovery is, at base, a complementary one. Nevertheless, thirdly, there is the fact of sin, distortion, and bias, which has created and continues to create inauthenticity in both communities of meaning and in individual aspirations. Thus, authentic moral development necessarily requires conversion, and this in two guises—the reformation of individual horizons of meaning and choice as well as the reexamination and reorientation of inherited sets of meaning and value and the structures that embody them.

Finally, having set out these basic categories and distinctions, I developed briefly some of the implications of such a view of human development for moral theology. Not only does moral formation, as the basis of good

catechesis, need to be understood in this complex and dialectical fashion, the entire Christian moral tradition can be seen as the ongoing interaction between heritage and discovery, authenticity and inauthenticity. The task of moral theology today is to negotiate new situations, new questions, new dilemmas in light of both the insights of current, new revelations of grace as well as the wisdom, discoveries, and practices that emerged from earlier generations. This dialectical task of moral theology is neither easy nor simple and individual moral theologians will privilege different aspects of the tradition as well as different types of contemporary religious experience. Nevertheless, to engage in moral theology *without* acknowledging the interaction between heritage and discovery, for both individuals and communities, will lead to a much too narrow view of human value. Likewise, to overlook the issues of sin, distortion, and bias, as operative in *both* heritage and discovery, can only lead to a confused designation of the root of human evil. Moral theologians need to understand themselves as engaged in the process of discerning authenticity and inauthenticity in both their own lives as "discoverers" and in their inherited traditions of meaning.